How to Write and Produce a Play
Lesson One: Choosing a Topic and Type of Play

What Is a Play?

A play is telling a story through characters, the words they speak, and the actions they do. The story can be real or fictional, but it should fun for everyone.

Plays create special memories for the actors and their families and friends. I hope that you and your family will enjoy the special memories that plays create!

There are many types of plays you can choose to do. Here are a few of them:

Living Room Plays

These types of plays are very easy to do. They can be as short as 5 to 15 minutes. They don’t require a lot of planning or time. They can be written and performed in a few days or weeks. For example, one summer at a family reunion in Canada, my nieces and nephews wanted to do a living room play. So . . . we sat down at a table next to the pool in the backyard, and after eating our ice cream, we began to write. My nieces had a topic in mind. We asked everyone what they wanted to do in the play. One of my nieces wanted to be a princess. Another one of my nieces wanted to sing her favorite song. Another one of my nieces wanted to do a dance. My son wanted to do an Irish Jig. My nephew wanted to protect the castle from giants. We had a good time laughing while we wrote in parts for everyone.

We practiced our Candyland skit for a couple of days. We still needed giants, so we recruited Grandma and my sister right before the play began. They came in saying, “We want candy. Give us some candy.” They stomped around the living room and were held back by my nephew with some living room couch pillows. Our audience (and the giants) couldn’t stop laughing.

Living room plays can be silly and funny, or they can be more complicated. You may need to rearrange couches and furniture and bring in some extra chairs for your audience.
Outdoor/Backyard Plays

These types of plays are also very easy to do and can also be short. You don’t need to worry about making sets or having a lot of props. (Props are things that actors use to help them tell the story. We’ll learn more about props in a later lesson.) One summer for our family reunion, I brought along a Reader’s Theater script. I assigned roles to my son, nieces, nephews, and my sister-in-law (who did a very good job and enjoyed it too!). We only had one hour before we were going to perform, so we went around to the front lawn of the farm house to practice. The actors helped decide what actions each of their characters would do. We ended up with a very funny play, and I’ll never forget some of the things the actors did, like the way my niece jumped up and down waving her hands above her head, or the expression in their voices when they said their lines. Oh, how everyone laughed together that day. You may be able to perform plays in the backyard or on the patio.

Full Cast Productions

Full cast productions have sets, props, and costumes. I like to write biographical plays for full cast productions. Biographical plays can require a lot of time for researching information and learning about history. When I write full cast productions for my homeschool group, I spend the summer researching and learning. Then I write the play in the fall, and we perform it in the spring.

Full cast productions are usually between an hour and an-hour-and-a-half long. These types of plays require a LOT of planning, time, and effort. You will need every homeschool family’s help with this type of production as you may have between 14 and 25 actors. You do not want too many actors because it becomes more challenging to manage. Each family should be assigned to be in charge of one of the following areas: Director, Prop Manager, Stage Manager, Set Designer, Set Painting, Costume Designer, Snack Supervision and Clean-up, and Warm-up Theater Games. (We will discuss all of these areas in the second semester.)
Planning Your Play

Use the following planning sheet to help you decide what type of play you want to write. Circle or highlight your choices.

How long do I want my play to be?

5 minutes  10 to 15 minutes  30 to 55 minutes  1 hour or more

Where can I perform my play?

Living Room  Backyard  Park School  Nursing Home  Other

Who is my audience?

Family  Friends  Church members  Elderly  Other

How many actors do I have?

Actors can be brothers, sisters, parents, cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents, friends, and homeschool students. The more actors you have, the more time and effort it will take to practice.

1 to 5  6 to 10  11 to 15  15 to 20  20 to 25

How much time do I have to practice my play with my actors?

Living room plays, backyard plays, and short skits can be done in a few hours or a few weeks. Full cast productions that are an hour or more in length generally take two to three months to practice with the actors.

1 to 3 hours  1 to 6 days  1 to 3 weeks
1 month  2 months  3 months
**Brainstorming For Ideas**

Use the following table to help you brainstorm ideas to find a story for your play. Try to list some ideas under each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List some real people or fictional characters who have good qualities.</th>
<th>Have you read any biographies with good Christian values?</th>
<th>List some funny things that have happened to you or to someone you know.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Look over the list you created and circle or highlight your favorite choices.
Remember, everything we write about must give glory to God.

I chose to write a biographical play about Milton Hershey because he became very wealthy but then gave away all of his wealth to build orphanages and better towns that gave his workers a better quality of life. I also chose to write a biographical play about Johann Sebastian Bach because he gave his life to the service of God through his music. His music was for the glory of God. Pray about your topic and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in choosing a topic that is pleasing to Jesus.

Homework Assignment for Next Lesson:

Think about the play you want to do. Consider the amount of time you can put into writing the play. Some stories can be written quickly like the Candyland story with the giants. If you choose to write about a historical character, you will need time (and your parents’ permission and supervision) to do research. This course will not cover how to do research. Choose a topic for your play that fits your actors, the amount of time you have to practice, and the location you picked. Ask your parents to help you choose the best option. I always ask the Holy Spirit to help me plan my plays. Then I know I will have a play that fits my family or my homeschool group.

The topic for my play is __________________________.

“A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.”
Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV)