

welcome!

Playwriting for Social Change

Please MUTE your mic when you're not speaking.

This session will be recorded.

Video is preferred, but not required.

Be prepared to write.

Write questions in the chat or "raise your hand".

Playwriting for Social Change

hello!

I am Jorge J. Rodríguez

Born and raised in Puerto Rico.

Attended Haverford College and Yale Drama.

Past 7 years: Theater Teacher at PVPA Charter Public School (South Hadley, MA).

This fall: Dramatic Arts Teacher at High School of Commerce (Springfield, MA).



Entrance ticket

INSTRUCTIONS

1. From the list on the right, select the three social identities that you currently feel most present in your life.
2. Write down the three social identities you selected.
3. If you have time: Write 1-3 sentences explaining why you selected these social identities.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Race
Ethnicity
Sexual orientation
Gender
Religion
Social class
Ability status
... other



Agreements

1. *Intent matters; impact matters more.*
2. *Take the lesson; leave the story.*
3. *Uncomfortable is okay; unsafe is not.*
4. *... others?*

Entrance ticket - IN PERSON

INSTRUCTIONS

1. From the list on the right, select the three social identities that you currently feel most present in your life.
2. These social identities are represented different by colors.
3. On the slip of paper provided to you, fill in each circle with the corresponding color for each of the social identities you selected.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES

- Race / **red**
- Ethnicity / **blue**
- Sexual orientation / **yellow**
- Gender / **green**
- Religion / **orange**
- Social class / **pink**
- Ability status / **grey**
- ... other / **purple**

Play analysis

Trying to Find Chinatown (1996) by David Henry Hwang

Trying to Find Chinatown - characters

“Lights fade up to reveal that the music’s being played over a solid-body electric violin by **Ronnie**, a Chinese American male in his mid-twenties, dressed in retro sixties clothing, with a few requisite nineties body mutilations. He’s playing on a sidewalk for money, his case open before him...”

“Enter **Benjamin**, early twenties, blond, blue-eyed, looking like a midwestern tourist in the big city.”

He grew up in Kansas, and went to college in Wisconsin.

Adopted and raised by Asian-American parents at birth.

Trying to Find Chinatown - plot

1. Benjamin is trying to find an address in Chinatown — the childhood home of his father, who passed away recently.
2. Benjamin assumes that Ronnie will be familiar with addresses in Chinatown and asks him for directions.
3. Ronnie quickly calls out Benjamin for making assumptions about him because of his appearance.
4. Benjamin reveals his upbringing and family history — and that he considers himself to be Asian-American. Ronnie immediately takes issue with this.
5. The two characters engage in a discussion over what determines if Benjamin can claim to be Asian American: his physical appearance or his cultural upbringing — that is, his race or his ethnicity.

Trying to Find Chinatown - dialogue

BENJAMIN: It's just that — in my hometown of Tribune, Kansas, and then at school — see, everyone knows me — so this sort of thing never comes up. (*He offers his hand.*) Benjamin Wong. I forget that a society wedded to racial constructs constantly forces me to explain my very existence.

RONNIE: Ronnie Chang. Otherwise known as “The Bowman.”

BENJAMIN: You see, I was adopted by Chinese-American parents at birth. So clearly, I'm an Asian American —

RONNIE: Even though they could put a picture of you in the dictionary next to the definition of “WASP.”

BENJAMIN: Well, you can't judge my race by my genetic heritage.

RONNIE: If genes don't determine race, what does?

BENJAMIN: Maybe you'd prefer that I continue in denial, masquerading as a white man?

RONNIE: Listen, you can't just wake up and say, “Gee, I *feel* Black today.”

BENJAMIN: Brother, I'm just trying to find what you've already got.

Trying to Find Chinatown - discussion

PROMPT: Create a fictional character that's somehow related to:

- Ronnie (if your first name starts with the letters A - M)
- Benjamin (if your first name starts with the letters N - Z)

Write down:

1. Your character's name.
2. Your character's relationship to either Benjamin or Ronnie (sibling, friend, co-worker, neighbor)
3. A memory of a time when the character was impacted by their race or ethnicity.



Benjamin's allies

Why should Benjamin be allowed to identify himself as Asian-American?



Ronnie's allies

Why should Benjamin stop claiming Asian-American culture as part of his identity?



Both sides

What can Benjamin do to help Ronnie (and possibly others) be more accepting of his identifying as Asian-American?

Playwriting

10-minute play, two hander

Brainstorm activity

Newspaper

1. Take 3 mins to look through a newspaper's home page and identify headlines concerning social issues you are passionate about.
2. You can use the newspaper of your choice. Otherwise, follow one of the following links:
 - a. www.nytimes.com
 - b. www.washingtonpost.com
 - c. www.latimes.com
3. After scrolling through the whole home page, identify one article that resonated with you.

Brainstorm activity

Status

1. Make a list of pairs of characters that could be in conflict with each other, illustrating an aspect of the news article you selected.
2. One of the characters you create should have high status, and the other should have low status.

For example, if the headline you selected is about a climate change protest, a pair of fictional characters for a play could be a teenage daughter who wants to attend a climate change protest (low status), and her father who doesn't allow her to do so (high status).

Brainstorm activity

Characters

1. Select one of the character pairs you developed in the previous step.
2. Develop those characters more fully by responding to the prompts below for each.

Character worksheet

1. Age?
2. Occupation?
3. Something about them that everyone knows.
4. Something about them that no one knows.
5. Why do they have high / low status?
6. What do they want to accomplish in the scene?

Brainstorm activity

Status switch

What is an event that would provoke...

... the high status character to lose their power?

... the low status character to gain power?

Write down an event that would provoke the characters to switch status with each other.

Brainstorm activity

Micro-dialogue

Write 8-10 lines of dialogue between the two characters that you have created in conflict with each other.

- The dialogue should clearly reflect the status of the characters.
- The dialogue can happen at any moment during the encounter between the characters. It can start in the middle of of the action. It does not need a clear beginning or ending.

Play workshop

1. What is the central question of the play?
2. Where does the author stand on the issue?
3. Where did you stand on the issue before the play started?
4. Where do you stand now?

thank you for joining!

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Play analysis

No Such Thing (2008) by Douglas Hill

No Such Thing - characters

Steven

College professor in Utah.

Attending conference.

Wrote an LGBTQ advocacy essay, using a pseudonym.

Alan

Editor for a magazine.

Steven's ex-boyfriend.

Wants to publish the essay, using Steven's real name.

No Such Thing
- conflict

Steven

worries that the publication of the essay under his real name will out him as gay, and that he could lose his job as a result.

Alan

believes that Steven's essay is important for the LGBTQ community, and that Steven should take ownership of it as its author.

No Such Thing - dialogue

ALAN: Come on, Steven. Stop running away from this. If you asked everybody at this conference what they thought about a smart, articulate, gay political science teacher—

STEVEN: —Would you keep your voice down?—

ALAN: —who in this day and age—under this presidential administration!—chooses of his own free will to stay hidden in the closet; most of them would say there's no such thing. But this is what you're doing because someone at a Mormon college is promising you a free lunch.

STEVEN: Well maybe you shouldn't have asked me to write something in the first place. You know? Maybe you should have begged an essay from some other ex-boyfriend [...]. I'll just take my essay and submit it to a magazine that doesn't have your self-righteous mission to out every gay man in America.

No Such Thing - discussion

PROMPT: Create a character that's somehow related to either Steven or Alan.

Write down:

1. Your name.
2. Your relationship to either Alan or Steven (sibling, friend, co-worker, neighbor)
3. Why do you support Steven or Alan in the conflict their facing?



Steven's allies

Why should Alan respect Steven's privacy and not publish the essay using Steven's real name?



Alan's allies

Why should should Steven come out and use his real name in the publication of the essay?



Both sides

*How can Alan and Steven
resolve their conflict?*