



## Step 2: Planning & Plotting Resources

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This website will give you an insight into the creative challenges faced by Dennis Kelly as writer and Tim Minchin as composer and lyricist when adapting Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* into a musical.

Please change to: The RSC invites students to go on the same creative journey as Dennis and Tim, beginning by creating a new character who is introduced to us on the first day of term at Crunchem Hall and thinking about how to plan a strong plot.

The scene should contain no more than four speaking characters.

We have created a web page for each of the steps that we feel are essential in creating a good scene or song, they are:

- Create a believable *Character*
- Plan a strong *Plot* – including an *Inspiration Gallery*
- Develop *Music and Lyrics*
- Write the *Dialogue*
- *Rewriting* what has been written and then *Rehearsing it*

To maximise this resource we suggest that you work through these pages in this order with your students.

Firstly, they have to create a character that is both memorable and plausible. Following the activities linked to the *Character* page will have helped them to do this.

The next step will be to create a story around that character which considers ways in which other characters might be part of the story for the scene or song. As the scene itself can take no longer than five minutes, the writing will need to be carefully planned, so that in this short time the audience are stimulated, interested and left wanting more. Students writing scenes with songs, which can be up to eight minutes, need to consider at what point their song is to be, when is the moment we need to have an insight into the new characters thoughts and hopes. Students creating songs only need to understand at what point in the scene their songs happens, what is context for their song.

This pack focuses on the development of a plot and has been designed to work alongside the web page and also to support and enrich students' writing experience in school. Through a selection of practical games and activities, students will gradually build up their experience of planning a scene or song. The resources can also act as stand-alone activities that can be adapted to other forms of writing in your school curriculum.

# Using the films in class

The filmed interviews are the inspiration for your students writing. The films are all different lengths and none last more than 10 minutes. Each one been broken down into chapters, and when you click on a tab you will automatically be taken to the specific chapter point.

We suggest you ask your students a series of questions or points to consider before watching the films and again after watching the films.

For example some questions for the plots films could be:

## Before watching

- Ask students to share examples they may have of really good stories they know and also some really bad ones. What do they think the qualities of a good story are?
- Ask students to work in pairs to look at the structure of a joke they know. Ask them to discuss the point of each line in the joke. If you moved the last line into the middle or the beginning would the joke work? Why?

## After watching

- Ask students to think about their character and what problems they might have at different points in the story. Dennis talks about how he created the scene with Bruce using Miss Trunchbull's line 'Who stole my chocolate cake?' as a starting point. Can they think of a line that would help them to introduce one of their character's problems?

The pack is divided into two sections:

## Part A: Identifying & Describing Key Events In A Story

### 1. Movie/Theatre Trailer

***Students will learn how to identify key events in a good plot***

Students will produce movie/theatre trailers in which the final image (the most exciting moment in the plot) is the advertiser's 'hook' that encourages the audience to watch the story. This will help students create a similar hook for their scene in the Writing Challenge.

### 2. Trailer Voice Over

***Students begin to link a story together using words; they learn to identify and describe key parts of a plot without using too much detail.***

Students develop a voice-over for the movie/theatre trailer they have created.

### 3. Trailer Soundtrack

***Exploring the rhythm of language***

Students create a soundtrack using repeated phrases and patterns in the descriptive language they have chosen.

## Part B: Analysing & Creating Good Plots

### 4. The Plot-o-meter

***Identifying good plots and bad plots: How and where do stories go wrong***

Students will consider how to recognise the elements of a plot that do not work well. Using a simple scale (from 'silly' to 'exciting') they can plot each step of a story plan, identifying where particular plans go wrong.

### 5. Plotting your own scene

***Creating the outline of your scene***

Students start to put together the key events that will happen in their story.

# Plotting

Sometimes students' stories go wrong because there are elements in the plot that are unbelievable and stop the narrative from holding together. That is why piecing together and planning a good plot is so important – being able to recognise what works well in a plot, and what doesn't, makes us much better writers.

# Movie/Theatre Trailer Activities

## Part One: Four Stills Trailer

*Picking out key events in a good plot*

### ***Purpose of the activities:***

In their trailers, students' final image (the most exciting moment in the plot) is the advertiser's hook that encourages the audience to watch the story. The students will need a similar hook for their script.

### ***What you will need:***

- A good large space for moving around
- Some examples of movie, theatre or book trailers
- Pens/pencils and paper

### ***How it works:***

Show students a couple of examples of trailers for films, television programmes or musicals. An example of a Matilda trailer for Miss Trunchbull can be found at:

<http://uk.matildathemusical.com/images-video/videos/>

Explain that these pick out just three or four main events from the story that get us wondering about it so much that we just have to make an effort to watch the whole thing.

Ask students: What is the one thing that they will never see in a movie trailer? (Answer: the ending)

Organise students into groups of no more than five. Give each group a title from a well-known fairytale, for example: *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Rumpelstilzkin*

It is important that students know the stories, so make sure you choose appropriately.

Explain to students that they are now going to create a trailer for a movie/musical in four still frames; choosing to end with the most exciting event, and leaving out the ending.

They work in their group to move from one still image to another. Explain that unlike conventional stories, because this is a trailer, the action does not have to be shown in the same order as the actual story.

## Part Two: Trailer Voice Over

*Students begin to link a story together using words; they learn to identify and describe key parts of a plot without using too much detail*

### **Purpose of the activity:**

Students develop a voice-over for the movie/theatre trailer they have created.

### **How it works:**

Once students have thought up their the four still images, one person should be chosen to do the voice over that can be called out as the images move from one to another. At this point students should also consider how they will move effectively from one still image to the next.

Introducing a framework for the voice-over will help give them more confidence to make a start. You could give students the following openers and ask them to complete and incorporate them:

1. 'Coming to a theatre/cinema near you is...'
2. 'It's a tale of...'
3. 'In a world of...'
4. Big words – Ask them to use three big 'describing words' – just call them out. For example: *'drama, mystery, suspense'*
5. A question – End with a question, for example: 'But when Snow White is entrapped in a glass coffin is she lost in her dreams forever?'

Many students will *not* need such a framework and will be able to create something in their own style.

## Extension

Encourage students to play around with media interpretations of the stories. The fairytales could become more sensationalised.

# Part Three: Trailer Soundtrack

*Exploring the rhythm of language*

## ***Purpose of activity:***

Students create a sound-track using repeated phrases and patterns in the descriptive language they have chosen.

## ***How it works:***

Ask students to think of five words to describe their story and to write them in a line. The words can be in whatever order they wish. For example, in the case of Snow White, the words might be:

***Beauty, innocence, happiness, hope, despair***

Then for each word, encourage them to think of an opposite. For example:

***Beauty - Ugliness***

***Innocence - Guilt***

***Happiness - Misery***

***Hope - Hopelessness***

***Despair - Joy***

Tell students that if they wish, they can change the order of these words. They are simply going to softly repeat them over and over during the trailer. In the Music section, there are further ideas about creating rhythms and putting words to music. If they choose to, students could add music to their words and repeat this softly during the trailer.

# Part B: Analysing & Creating Good Plots

## The Plot-o-meter

*Identifying good plots and bad plots*

### **Purpose of activity:**

Students will consider how to recognise the elements of a plot that do not work well. Using a simple scale (from 'silly' to 'exciting') they can plot each step of a story plan, identifying where particular plans go wrong.

### **How it works:**

Roald Dahl, Tim Minchin and Dennis Kelly all enjoy creating larger than life characters that are memorable and stay with us even when we have left the theatre or finished reading the book. Although their characters often do silly things, they never do anything so ridiculous that it stops our enjoyment of the story. We have to believe what is happening. We have to care about it.

Show students the *Plot-o-meter* function on the *Plot* web page which uses a simple scale to assess the different events in a scene.

By practically using the Plot-o-meter in class students will understand a good plot and what makes a scene successful. The scale moves from 'silly' to 'thrilling' and can plot what they think about each moment in the story.

Below is a printable example of the scenes plot with a contrasting plot that doesn't work as well. Students can compare the two and understand what makes a good plot and what doesn't.

*This is a plot that works well as it sustains our interest throughout the scene. However, some story plots are less successful.*

### **Thrilling!**

*Hilarious / Victorious / The Climax*

### **Exciting**

*Introduces suspense*

### **Interesting**

*Makes us ask questions / Curious / Fascinating*

### **Okay**

### **Uninteresting**

### **Boring**

### **Silly / Random information / Cliff Dropper**

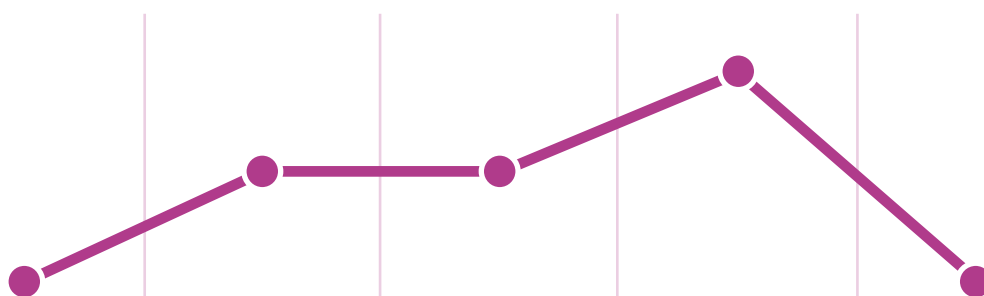
*The Trunchbull accuses Matilda of stealing her cake.*

*Bruce Bogtrotter burps.*

*Bruce is ordered to eat the whole cake.*

*Everyone cheers for Bruce (even Miss Honey) and he finishes the cake.*

*Trunchbull is furious and throws him in The Chokey as a punishment.*





Here is a possible plot for a scene about a new character at Crunchem Hall.

**Thrilling!**

*Hilarious / Victorious / The Climax*

**Exciting**

*Introduces suspense*

**Interesting**

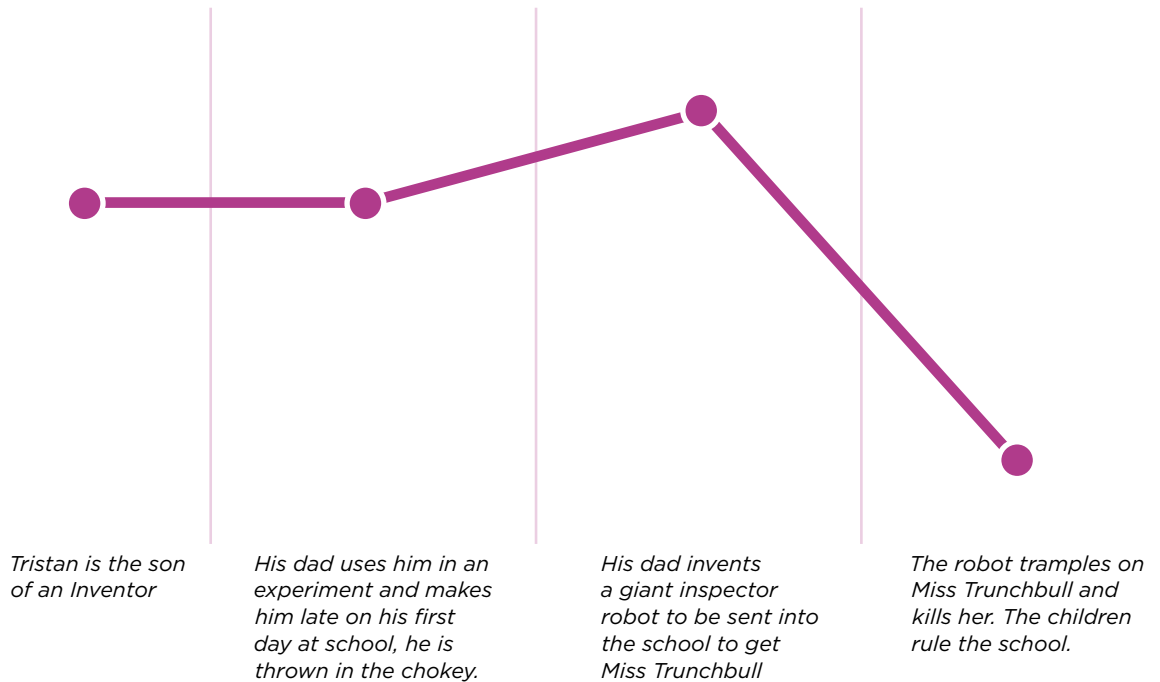
*Makes us ask questions / Curious / Fascinating*

**Okay**

**Uninteresting**

**Boring**

**Silly / Random information / Cliff Dropper**



The last point about the robot trampling on Miss Trunchbull and killing her is ridiculous. Firstly, this action takes place towards the beginning of the play, so to have Miss Trunchbull die so early on would be pointless. Quite apart from the fact that this would not be workable on stage, it is an unsatisfactory and unbelievable ending. As Dennis and Tim both say, even when characters are big and colourful, the story needs to be something we can believe.

There are many examples of plots to look at on the *Plot-o-meter*. You can either look at them as a class, or ask students to work through them on individual computers. However it is certainly worth looking at an example together as a whole group.

## Reflection

***Can we identify the exact reason the plot starts to go wrong?***

***What could we change to make the story more believable?***

***Once we have changed this, are there other points that we need to change to make the plot work?***

***At what point would you add in a song ?***

The structure of the Plot-o-meter can be printed out and used later for students to use once they have planned the key events for their own scene or song. It will help them to assess their ideas and those of their peers.

# Plotting Your Own Scene

## *Creating the outline of your scene*

### ***Purpose of activity:***

Students start to put together the key events that will happen in their story

### ***What you will need:***

Large pieces of paper, pens and pencils

### ***How it works:***

The activities in the resource pack on character will have helped students to formulate an idea about who their character is, their background, what they look like and what their problem is. Dennis explains that it's not a good idea to put too many details into a scene, avoid the '*and then, and then and then*' syndrome. A plan of the events in a story does not need to include a lot of detail, and as this is for just one scene in a play, it will need to be concise with no more than five key moments. Four may well be enough.

One thing you will want students to consider when plotting their scene is how you want your audience to feel at the end. The fact that the scene is going to take place towards the beginning of the play is going to have a big impact on how we want the audience to feel. For example, if the scene was towards the end, we might want the audience to feel triumphant because the character might have done something to overcome Miss Trunchbull, but as it is towards the beginning we might want the audience to feel a sense of anger or frustration because there has been a sense of injustice that makes us want to see revenge.

Ask students to draw a big heart on the top of their paper, then ask them to think about how they want their audience to feel at the **end** of the scene and write this inside the heart (see example below).

Now they have done this, ask them to think about what sort of ending would make their audience feel this way. Sometimes it is a good idea to **begin** by plotting the climax of your scene as sometimes, when creating a story, this is the most difficult thing to write. Yet, in some ways, it is one of the most important, because all the events in your writing will lead to this moment.

They should then work backwards, writing no more than four events for their scene. In the diagram below, the numbers show the order of the events in the scene, the arrows show how the writer worked backwards to create the complete story. If they wish, students can then use different colours to add in other information about the story. For example, they could use red to add more background, green to add in detail about what the characters might say. You will see in the example below that the writer has begun to do this.

When students have completed their plan, they can use the **Plot-o-meter** to check they are happy the events in their scene work well. Encourage them to share ideas with other students.

Now students have created a character and planned interesting and exciting events in a scene that will make the audience want to watch the rest of *Matilda The Musical*. The activities using the Plot-o-meter will have helped them recognise what makes a story work well and how disappointing it is if a story is too silly or unbelievable.

Hopefully, they will now be starting to get excited about creating the dialogue, a song, or both, because they have packed their plan with lots of interesting ideas. Their work on character in the previous section will help them to understand how to bring their character's personality to life in the theatre.

Now they will be ready to start writing the scene with real actors in mind, thinking about how their story will work on a stage.

They will also be ready to consider the possibility of where a song might be placed in the scene.

## Diagram of Scene Plan

*Audience should feel frustrated, angry and on the edge of their seats*

**5.** The Trunchbull is inspired by the idea of a robot and takes the remains round to Tristan's father who she knows is an inventor. She asks him to create a robot that can be programmed to pick children up and throw them in the Chokey.

**3.** The Trunchbull decides to do a uniform inspection because she frequently finds Eric looking untidy and she is sure she will catch him out. As she walks along the line, she has an alarming sneezing fit. She claims that the reason is that there is a child who has completely the wrong smell. She walks along the line, sniffing the air in front of each child (and sneezing) until she can choose the rogue pupil. The sneezes get more frequent as she approaches 'Tristobot'.

**4.** The Trunchbull doesn't like the 'smell' of the boy (robot). He doesn't smell like a child so she hammer-throws him across the playground. The robot comes crashing down onto the ground and is destroyed.

**2.** He unveils the robot to his best friend Eric, who is one of 10 children. Because there are so many children in the house, he knows that the robot will go unnoticed. Eric vows to keep the robot at home and take it to school every day.

**1.** Tristan is the son of an inventor. His dad often used him as a guinea pig for his experiments. Because he comes to school late and all dishevelled, he is thrown in the Chokey. He has planned to defy Miss Trunchbull by creating a robot which looks identical to him that will take his place.