

‘Stories on Stage’ Drama Competition 2019/20
Overview of Short Story Options

Option 1

Title: “The Person Next Door” from *Shorts 2010 – 2014*

Characters

1. Rachel (main character)
2. Mary (Rachel’s friend)
3. Cherry (Rachel’s friend)
4. The social worker
5. An old woman
6. An old man (the old woman’s neighbor)

Setting

A public housing estate in Hong Kong



<https://rggo.page.link/FxUrh>

Summary

Rachel and her friends participate in an activity with the school social worker which involves visiting the homes of the elderly in a nearby housing estate. When they arrive at the housing estate, Rachel goes in search of a public toilet and is separated from her friends. At the bottom of the stairs, she meets an old woman who has dropped some oranges. Rachel helps the old woman pick up the oranges and carry them to her flat. After using her toilet, Rachel says goodbye to her and promises to come back again soon. When Rachel returns a week later, she knocks on the old woman’s door but there is no answer. Assuming the old woman is out shopping, she turns to leave but then notices an old man watching her from behind his door. She asks him if he knows where the old woman has gone, and he replies that she died of a heart attack over a month ago. Shocked to hear this, Rachel tries giving the old woman’s door a push and to her surprise it swings open! What does she find behind the door? Read this story and find out what happens to poor Rachel.

Points to consider

- The social worker and Rachel’s friends (Mary and Cherry) only appear briefly at the beginning of the story. Consider giving these characters bigger roles to play. Perhaps Rachel finds the social worker and/or her friends after visiting the old woman and tells them about her experience. Perhaps she returns to the old woman’s flat with her friends and they all have tea together. Perhaps her friends come with her when she visits one week later.
- When the old woman invites Rachel to stay for tea, Rachel declines. Imagine if Rachel had chosen to stay for tea. What would they have talked about?
- The ending of the story is intentionally ambiguous. Is the old man a ghost? Is the old woman a ghost? Are they both ghosts? Perhaps neither one is a ghost, and they are working together to play a trick on Rachel. Decide how you think the drama should end.

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Option 2

Title/Author: “Doppelganger – The Double” by Adrian Tilley		
<p>Main Characters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lee (the narrator – a teenage boy) 2. Me2 (the narrator’s double) 3. Mr Chin (Maths teacher, aka Late Teacher) 4. Ali (Lee’s friend) 5. Mizzy (a Year 3 girl) 6. Aden (Lee’s younger brother) 7. Aden’s double <p>Minor characters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Chai (History teacher) 2. Ms Chang (Chemistry teacher) 3. Other students 4. The school principal 5. 2 police officers 6. People in the street 7. The repairman 8. Jin (the girl next door) <p>Setting On the way to Lee’s school; at Lee’s school; in a deserted park; into a busy street; at Lee’s housing estate; and in Lee’s flat.</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>Running late for school one day, Lee meets his doppelganger – a perfect copy of himself. Lee’s double (Me 2) explains to him that he’s one of the lucky ones. He gets to meet himself, which is all part of “the plan”. When Lee arrives at school, he gets in trouble for being late; when his double arrives a few minutes later, the Late Teacher is very confused. Later that day, Lee learns from his schoolmates that he is in great trouble. Apparently he has attacked the History teacher with a chair, thrown acid at the Chemistry teacher, and now the police are looking for him! Lee makes a narrow escape from school and on the way home he stops at a deserted park to gather his thoughts. There, he meets Me 2 again and this time learns that his double not only reads his innermost thoughts, but also acts on them. Shortly after Me 2 leaves, Lee remembers all the bad thoughts he has had recently about his pesky little brother Aden. He races home to protect Aden from harm, but does he arrive in time? Read this story and find out if Lee can save his little brother from himself.</p>	<p>Points to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this story, casting the characters is key. The main character Lee meets his doppelganger 3 times in the story. In a dramatic twist at the end, Lee’s younger brother Aden also meets <i>his</i> doppelganger. Dramatising the story on stage would therefore require 2 sets of actors who look very similar, if not identical. These roles are perfect for twins if there are twins with an interest in drama at the school. Lee and Me2 AND Aden and his double should be cast to look as similar as possible: similar height, weight, build, hair style, facial features, etc. • There are a number of scene changes in the short story, e.g. a dark alley, the school entrance, an empty park, a busy street, a housing estate, Lee’s flat. When dramatising the story, consider how to simplify the scenes as much as possible to reduce the number of scene changes. • There are a number of minor characters in the story. Consider whether some of these characters can be cut from the drama script. If not, some actors will have to play more than one role.

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Option 3

Title/Author: “The Magic Paintbrush” by Julia Donaldson		
<p>Characters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shen (main character) 2. The old man 3. Shen’s mother 4. Shen’s father 5. Shen’s little brother 6. The villagers 7. The Emperor 8. The Emperor’s army <p>Setting: A village in ancient China</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>One day Shen receives a magic paintbrush from a mysterious old man, who sees her at the beach sketching pictures in the sand. He tells her to use the magic paintbrush wisely and to paint only for the poor. With her magic paintbrush, Shen paints steaming pots full of fish and oysters to feed the hungry people in her village and she paints other things that the villagers desperately need. When the greedy emperor hears about Shen’s magic paintbrush, he commands her to paint a tree full of gold. Shen is determined to keep her promise to paint only for the poor, so she refuses and the emperor locks her up. How can Shen match the mighty power of the emperor? Read this story to find out.</p>	<p>Points to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julia Donaldson tells the story in rhyming verse. Consider whether the actors will speak in rhyming verse or in everyday speech. • In the story, Shen uses the magic paintbrush to paint pictures that come to life. Consider how you will stage this. Will you make use of props (e.g. a pre-painted picture of a pot of food that “becomes” a real pot of food) or will you use dramatic techniques, (e.g. miming, acting and reacting)? • This story has many minor characters, e.g. the villagers and the Emperor’s army. Consider how 8 people can work together to portray all of the characters in the story. Some characters may have to be cut from the story and/or some actors will have to play multiple roles.

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Option 4

Title/Author: “What’s Inside” by Avi		
<p>Characters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The narrator (main character) 2. Danny (the narrator’s cousin) 3. The narrator’s father 4. The narrator’s mother 5. Mr Hanks (the shop teacher) 6. Students in the narrator’s shop class <p>Setting A classroom; the narrator’s home</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>The narrator is very proud of a small wooden box that he has made in Mr Hanks’ shop class. He decides to make another one and give the two boxes to his parents for Christmas. His parents are delighted. At the family Christmas party, the narrator’s cousin Danny notices the boxes and seems to be interested in them. A couple days later, the narrator receives a phone call from Danny, who asks if he can come over when his parents are not around. The narrator invites him to come over right away, as his parents are not home. Danny comes over and shows the narrator a gun and some bullets that he got from a guy at school. He proposed to play a game with his life involving the loaded gun and the two boxes. The narrator is at a loss for what to do when he realises Danny’s intention to allow fate to decide whether or not life is worth living.</p>	<p>Points to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This short story has only two main characters: the narrator (a young boy) and his older cousin Danny. The other characters that appear in the story have relatively minor roles, e.g. Mr Hanks (the shop teacher) and the other students in shop class, the narrator’s parents on Christmas morning, the other guests at the family party, the narrator’s father at the end of the story. Consider how to develop these minor roles in the staged drama. • When dramatising the story, consider whether to include scenes that are mentioned briefly in order to create context, e.g. Danny’s mother working at Burger King, Danny’s father driving a truck, Danny at school being bullied. • In this story, there are a few objects that are very important, e.g. the 2 boxes, the gun, the bullets, the bathrobe. When dramatising the story, consider whether to mime these objects or whether to use props. If you choose to use props, try to find props that are believable, e.g. a prop that resembles a real handgun is more effective than a pink-coloured plastic water pistol; two small wooden boxes with hinged tops are better than two Nike shoe boxes. These details can make a difference.

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Option 5

Title/Author: “Punishment Without Crime” by Ray Bradbury		
<p>Main characters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. George Hill 2. Katie Hill / Katie Hill’s marionette (AI) 3. Leonard Phelps 4. CEO of Marionettes Inc. 5. Police officers 6. Prison wards <p>Setting At the offices of Marionettes Inc.; on the street; in a prison cell</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>George Hill hires Marionettes Inc. to create a robot replica of his wife Katie, who has been cheating on him with a man named Leonard. George intends to take out his aggression on Katie by murdering her marionette. At first he finds it difficult to carry out the deed because Katie’s marionette is so lifelike. However, she provokes him by talking about her love for Leonard and in the end he carries out the act. He is subsequently arrested for murdering the marionette, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Katie tries to visit him in prison, but George refuses to see her. He sees her from the window of his prison cell.</p>	<p>Points to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This short story is told from the point of view of George Hill. We hear Katie’s voice through the robot replica, but Katie herself does not make an appearance in the story, nor does Leonard, her lover. It may be interesting to explore the points of view of Katie and Leonard. • Staging the scene at the end in which George sees Katie from the prison cell window may be challenging to stage. Think carefully about how you will do this. • The story explores the theme of crime and punishment. Is murdering a replica robot, however lifelike, the same thing as murdering a human being? Is the crime in the act itself or in the intention to commit the act? Are the new laws protecting marionettes fair and just? Does George’s punishment fit his crime? These are interesting questions about crime, punishment and artificial intelligence (AI) which can be explored through drama.

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Option 6

Title: “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas” by Ursula K. LeGuin		
<p>Main characters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The narrator / the audience 2. The people of Omelas 3. An innocent child who must be punished 4. Those who walk away <p>Setting Omelas (a utopian world); a dark cell on the fringe of Omelas; an unknown place</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>The narrator of this short story tells us about a summer festival in a utopian city called Omelas, a shimmering city of happiness and delight. The citizens of Omelas are limited in advanced technology, but intelligent, sophisticated and cultured. Omelas has no kings, soldiers, priests, or slaves. The narrator claims not to be sure of the particular political or socio-economic structure of the city. Omelas is a nearly perfect utopian world, but it has one dark secret. The constant state of happiness in Omelas requires that a single unfortunate child be kept in perpetual filth, darkness, and misery. When the citizens of Omelas are old enough to learn the truth, most are shocked and disgusted, but they come to accept this one injustice as it secures the happiness of the rest of the city. However, a few citizens choose to silently walk away. No one knows exactly where they go.</p>	<p>Points to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this short story, there are no main characters other than the narrator and his/her imaginary audience and the people of Omelas, including the unfortunate child and those who walk away. The first challenge of dramatizing this story is to create a cast of characters and a basic storyline. It will require creativity to invent a story with a cast of characters from the original story idea. • There are also no lines of dialogue in this story. Once you have created the characters, you will then have to think about how they interact and what they say. How will the dialogue move the action of the story forward? • This is a short philosophical work of fiction about an imaginary society in which the happiness of the majority is dependent on the existence of a single, unfortunate scapegoat. We are asked to imagine how we would feel and what we would do if our own happiness were dependent upon the misery and suffering of a single child. Would we accept the injustice or would we walk away? The moral questions that this story raises can be explored powerfully through drama.

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Option 7

Title/Author: “When Mr Pirzada Came to Dine” by Jhumpa Lahiri		
<p>Main characters</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lilia (a 10-year old bi-cultural girl raised in the US by parents from India) 2. Mr Pirzada (a professor of Botany from Dacca, now the capital of Bangladesh, but then a part of Pakistan) 3. Lilia’s mother 4. Lilia’s father 5. Mrs Kenyon (Lilia’s teacher) 6. Dora (Lilia’s classmate/friend) 7. Mr Pirzada’s wife and seven daughters (living in Dacca) <p>Setting</p> <p>The story takes place in 1971 primarily in the home of Lilia’s family, who live north of Boston, MA in the US. The story is set against the backdrop of the civil war between East and West Pakistan (the Bangladesh Liberation War). There is also a growing threat of war between India and Pakistan as the East Pakistani refugee crisis intensifies (the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971).</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>Lilia remembers Mr Pirzada, a professor from Dacca who used to visit her family’s home in 1971 when she was 10 years old. When Mr Pirzada visits, he always brings her a small gift of candy. Lilia’s father explains to her that Mr Pirzada is not Indian like them, but Bengali (from East Pakistan). He is frustrated that Lilia does not learn about South Asian history at school. One day at school, Lilia gets into trouble for reading a book about Pakistan when she should be reading about the American Revolutionary War. On one of Mr Pirzada’s visits in October, he helps the family carve a jack-o-lantern. While they are carving the pumpkin, they overhear a news report about rising tensions between India and Pakistan. Mr Pirzada makes a gash in the jack-o-lantern’s mouth, ruining its expression. On Halloween night, Mr Pirzada is concerned about Lilia’s safety and offers to accompany her when she goes trick-or-treating with her friend. Lilia’s mother assures him that the girls will be safe. Mr Pirzada returns to Dacca in January, and Lilia, for the sake of his family, begins a ritual of eating one piece of Halloween candy each night before bed. When Lilia’s family finally receives news from Mr Pirzada that he and his family are safe, they celebrate with a special dinner, and that night, Lilia throws away the rest of her Halloween candy.</p>	<p>Points to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This short story is longer than the other options and contains a number of scenes. Writing a 5-8 minute drama may require being selective, i.e. cutting some parts of the story and focusing more on other parts. • The pumpkin carving scene will be a challenge to dramatise on stage. Carving a real 10 lb. pumpkin with a sharp knife in front of a live audience is NOT advisable. A real pumpkin can be used as a prop, but you should carve the jack-o-lantern before the day and keep the face hidden from the audience until Mr Pirzada and Lilia’s father finish carving the mouth. At that point, the surprised face of the jack-o-lantern can be revealed. Alternatively, consider using a papier-mache jack-o-lantern as a prop, or re-writing the scene to make it easier to dramatise on stage, e.g. think of another way to represent Mr Pirzada’s shock at hearing the news about the Indo-Pakistani War. • This story is an example of historical fiction. The historical events unfolding in the background create tension and affect the thoughts, feelings and actions of the characters in the story. This can be powerfully explored through drama.