

West Side Stories Creative Challenge:

Create a New Character

<https://thenationaldcwestsidestory.org>



Activity Overview

Grade Level: High School (9th – 12th)

Subjects: ELA/Literacy, Playwriting

Estimated Time: 20-30 min

Materials Needed: Pen or pencil, paper, *Role-on-The-Wall* worksheet (see below)

Activity Format: Individual

Summary: In this activity, students will take on the role of playwright by creating new characters for *West Side Story*. Then, they will write scenes using their new characters and an existing character in the story.

Activity Guide

Students will use the *Role-On-The-Wall* worksheet to guide them through the process of creating a new character for *West Side Story*. A sample completed *Role-on-The-Wall* worksheet is provided below for reference. An overview of the plot of *West Side Story* can be found here to assist students with this process: <https://thenationaldcwestsidestory.org>.

1. Identify a name for the new character.
2. Think about the relationship this character has with the protagonists (in this case either Tony or Maria).
3. Determine how the character looks, feels, walks, thinks, and dresses themselves.
4. Identify the objective of the character. What does this character WANT or NEED or MUST HAVE? How do these wants and needs contribute to the dramatic tension in *West Side Story*?

Once students have created their new character they will write a short scene that puts their character in conversation with one of the main characters from *West Side Story*. Students may either:

1. Write a 2-3 page scene to submit OR
2. Work with friends to film their short scene using Vimeo or Flipgrid and submit a video file

For an extra challenge, students may consider writing song lyrics for their new character and coming up with a title for the song.

Example Filled Role on The Wall Worksheet

Family:

- Parents
- Lives with his father
- One younger sister
- Seldom sees his sister

Wants:

- To work in the arts in some way
- Saving up for an expensive guitar

Friends:

- Tends to be loyal to his friends
- Three main friends, Simon, Dave, and John
- They went to primary school together

Obstacles:

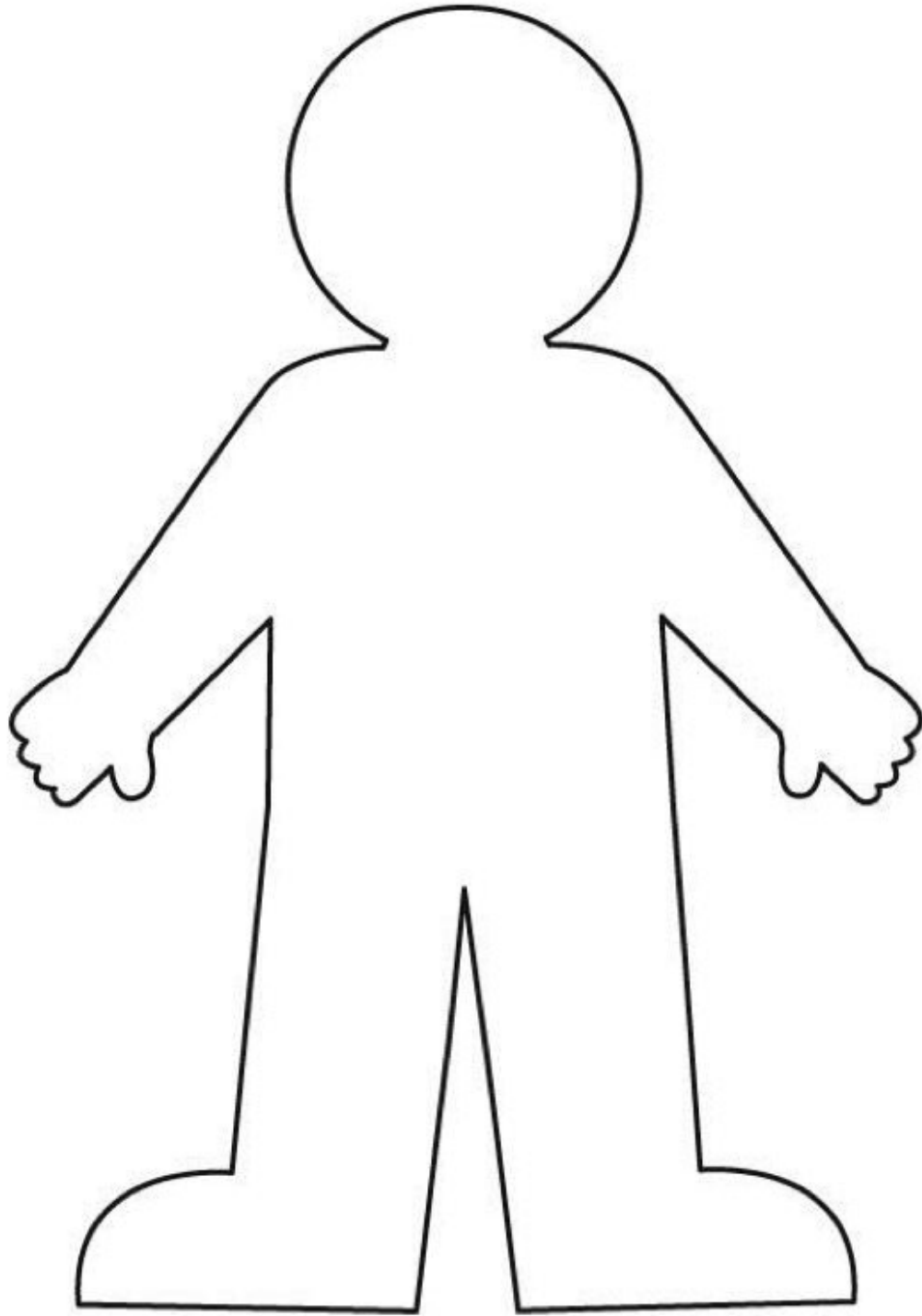
- He has been in love with Danielle for over a year but because he feels she is superior he can't bring himself to ask her out.

Hobbies:

- Trying to learn the guitar
- Part-Time Job
- Dislikes school music lessons
- Enjoys drama and art



Role on The Wall Worksheet



THE NATIONAL THEATRE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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West Side Stories Creative Challenge: Unheard Dialogues

<https://thenationaldcwestsidestory.org>



Activity Overview

Grade Level: High School (9th – 12th)

Subjects: ELA/Literacy, Playwriting

Estimated Time: 20-30 min

Materials Needed: Pen or pencil, paper, [West Side Story script](#)

Activity Format: Pairs

Summary: Through this creative writing assignment, students will have a unique chance to improve the characters in *West Side Story* by developing their inner feelings, thoughts, reactions, doubts, and fears.

Activity Guide

1. For reference, you may have students read through portions of the script of *West Side Story* available to download [here](#).
2. Assign or instruct students to choose a partner to work with for this project.
3. Instruct each pair to select a scene from *West Side Story* that they connect with.
4. Next, have students select one of the "script prompts" from the list below.
5. Students will use their chosen "script prompts" to expand upon the existing scene they chose from *West Side Story*. The selected "script prompt" should be included **at least three times** in the students' written dialogue.
6. For added fun, students may perform their dialogues for the class, or film them to show to classmates later.
7. Examples of how DCPS students have used these "script prompts" to create original scenes can be found [here](#).

List of "script prompts":

Prompt 1: Character 1 *I want this...* Character 2 *You can't have it...*

Prompt 2: Character 1 *I want to love...* Character 2 *You can't handle this...*

Prompt 3: Character 1 *Help me out...* Character 2 *Sorry I can't do that...*

Prompt 4: Character 1 *Give me respect...* Character 2 *Why would I?*

West Side Stories Creative Challenge:

Still Pictures of West Side Story

<https://thenationaldcwestsidestory.org>



Activity Overview

Grade Level: High School (9th – 12th)
Subjects: ELA/Literacy
Estimated Time: 20-30 min

Materials Needed: Flip chart paper, markers or pens
Activity Format: Groups (4-5 students)

Summary: This learning activity will help students understand the essential elements of story writing and gain insights into the central theme of *West Side Story*. Students will embody the experience through image work.

Activity Guide

1. Place students into groups of 4 or 5 and ask them to share with one another specific topics or themes that came up for them after reading "The Story" section of [this site](#).
2. Have each group create a short scene or "tableau" (a frozen image created by students embodying different poses) representing the themes that they determined. Then, have each group present their work to the larger class. Have class members guess the groups' targeted topic or theme.
3. Facilitate a discussion with the class about the creation of *West Side Story*. Explain to students that, in addition to being influenced by William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the show creators also drew upon their personal experiences to determine themes for the show to explore.
4. Give students the opportunity to reflect upon their own personal experiences and instruct them to determine a new theme they would like to explore with a second scene or "tableau". This new scene or "tableau" should represent a theme or idea that students see present in their communities.
5. Give students time to practice and prepare their scene or "tableau" to present in front of the whole class.
6. Create a safe space to hold conversations about the themes presented in the second set of scenes or "tableaus".

If students are stuck, you may encourage them to use the *Role-On-The-Wall* worksheet to develop a character (see below).



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Role on The Wall Worksheet

