

COLLEGE GUILD, DRAMA CLUB UNIT # 1, RUBEN R.

Hi Ruben,

First of all just let me say that you obviously gave this assignment a lot of thought and it shows in your work product. I don't know what other courses you've taken with us but I admire your interest in creative writing. Drama, of course, is different from writing stories, news articles, poetry, etc. because your work may be viewed by a live audience that will react immediately to your words. So you need to make sure every word is fashioned for a direct impact on the viewer. There are no paragraphs of description or background. You have to hit the ground running and never let up. The two scenes you've created have that dramatic potential so you're off to a very good start. Now let's look more closely at what you've created.

1. The four characters you describe certainly have the potential to disagree with each other's points of view. In describing Maggie, however, I think you could have left out "guarded emotions" since you also describe her as being "feisty" and "outspoken." It's unlikely that someone would be outspoken while still guarding her emotions. But this is a very small matter. I can picture her very well and I know that she is going to butt heads with her conservative parents.

Similarly, Adrian's description is very clear. He's The Fonz but with a major slip to a life of crime. No parent is going to want this type of guy for their daughter but you can see her conflict because he's an attractive guy who wants a future with Maggie.

This might be a good time to take a break and discuss the reason behind the characters you have created. In both scenes they are close to black and white. In other words, their thoughts and dialogue will probably be predictable. What will make them even more interesting is if you add some shades of gray. What if Rob slipped as a teenager and served some time for something he (stupidly) did? How would he feel about Adrian? Would he have compassion or would he be even more determined to prevent a relationship? Of course, Hope married Rob so she might have some compassion, too. I think you get the point. By adding different layers to your characters, you make them much more interesting to your audience. You also make them more of a challenge to the actors speaking your words.

The second scene you've set up only has two characters but they are both interesting and believable. I say believable especially because we've all seen childhood friends take different paths, some of which lead up and some of which lead (hopefully temporarily) down. So we know each of these characters well without actually knowing them at all. But once again, making them less black and white will make them even more interesting. As you develop the characters through dialogue you can go in a number of different directions. What if Hank and Bob, as kids, had been accused of something and Hank had admitted to it to save Bob from getting into trouble? What if Bob started a relationship and ultimately married the only girl Hank had ever loved? The potential friction between friends is really boundless. Your two friends are the beginning of a story with almost unlimited potential.

2. Talk about drama!!!! The scene you created is fraught with so many emotions that your audience will be riveted to their seats. I don't think there is anything I can say to improve what you've written. You really delivered a knockout punch. Maybe I'll just ask you if you considered not letting the audience know what happened? In other words, have the stage go dark just before the gunshot is heard and have the curtain come down before the lights go up. But maybe that isn't fair. Or is it.....?

3. In this question I think you could have done a bit better. You were asked to come up with a set and you start by saying "no scenery." Hmmmm. I would have preferred scenery. I understand a sort of minimalist approach because the dialogue is going to be so strong and you don't want your audience distracted. But you can have something austere. Maybe a tree with no leaves. A hazy city skyline in the background. A quarter moon off to one side. The light from one window in an apartment building. I'll bet when you imagined the scene originally you had more than just two guys on a bench. But it's your play so you can visualize it any way you want. But keep the audience in mind, too. They need to be interested in the physical scene as well as the emotions being portrayed.

Similarly, you could have exercised more imagination in the living room scene. Don't be afraid to describe the details of the room. I'll bet there's a small cross hanging on the wall. Maybe a bible on an end table? A basket of knitting? Rob probably has a recliner while Hope sits in a small rocker. Does the couch have a plastic cover on it? Is the TV set new or old? I'll bet old. I'll also bet there's wallpaper on the walls. You have to describe the set in great detail for the stage manager to know what he's supposed to do.

4. I think you described this set very well in what you wanted your characters to be doing. This didn't call for a physical description as much as a placement of the protagonists in order to act out the scene. Well done!

5. This is the question that I think needs a better explanation of what we were looking for from you. A critic does just what you did. He summarizes the play initially so the reader understands what the play is all about. But then he goes on to criticize what he saw. (In this context "criticize" doesn't mean to find fault with what he saw necessarily. It should be constructive in nature.) A critic needs to answer several questions: Were the actors good? How was the set? Was the dialogue well written? Was the story believable? How did the audience react? How could it have been improved? Overall, is it worth seeing?

Well, that ends the first unit in Drama. I hope you continue on to the next one as I think you put a lot into this unit and, hopefully, had some fun putting your creative talents to work. With any luck I'll get to see your future assignments.

Scott