Drama Texts
Structure and features of drama texts

PURPOSE
Drama acts as an avenue to narrate events, to entertain, to create, to emotionally move and to explore the human condition. A play will also socialise, persuade and inform by teaching. Plays are part of an oral storytelling tradition. Any event, real or imagined, can become the topic for the playwright’s purpose.

Drama enables students for a period of time to take on another person’s perspective and character as they explore important issues, situations, relationships and beliefs. These roles may be similar or different from their own lives. The overall purpose would be to bring about a change in the level of a student’s understanding, social behaviour, expectation and a greater awareness of the needs of others.

STRUCTURE OF DRAMA TEXTS
In a play, the protagonist, the hero who provides the point of view, usually undertakes a dramatic journey or experience that is played to the audience. The conflict is generally created by an antagonist, or something in the environment which upsets the normal way of life.

In a dramatic script we learn about the actors’ roles from what they do, what they wear and what they look like. Their strengths and weaknesses become apparent through the dialogue when we hear what they say and what others say about them.

In a radio play there are no costumes or scenery to create the time, atmosphere or setting. The script is totally reliant on the narrator’s ability to keep the story together (if there is a narrator), the actors’ dialogue and sound effects.

Non-naturalistic plays, for example Fancy’s Bell, do not have a narrative structure holding them together but consist of a series of acts or images that have different characters and different settings. The emphasis is on the characters and their words, music and sound cues.

Most dramatic scripts have the following structure:

Setting the scene; listing of characters; backdrop; lighting
Prologue (optional)
Orientation
Complication
Series of events
Resolution
Epilogue/
Re-orientation
(Optional)

Setting of the scene
The playwright writes stage directions for the actors to clarify how they should portray their character’s actions and movements and where necessary how they should speak their lines. Details of the costumes and sound effects are specified.

Prologue
This is an optional way of introducing the setting and the characters. Some background information can be given.
about the characters, time, setting or even theme of the play. The narrator often relates this information to the audience.

**Orientation**
This briefly sets the context that can be visualised by the lighting, set, costumes, music and dialogue that creates the atmosphere. The orientation generally comes at the beginning of the play or in the form of a prologue. There must be a character and setting in every story but the conflict is all-important.

**Complication**
Generally a problem occurs in the character’s personal life or in the world in which he interacts. The conflict, which must be dramatic and easily understood by the audience, forms the pivotal point of the play.

**Series of events**
Each act revolves around a complicated series of events that move the dramatic plot along to the point of climax, the most exciting part of the play.

**Resolution**
This solution to the conflict is generally found in the last act.

**Epilogue/Re-orientation**
This sets the scene again and relocates the characters. This generally takes place at the end of the play and may take the form of an epilogue.

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**LANGUAGE FEATURES OF DRAMA TEXTS**

- Characterisation is developed through events and dialogue.
- Action verbs are used effectively e.g. walking.
- Evaluative language is found e.g. sad, happy, a look of death, bossy.
- As the audience is present there is no lengthy narrative description as might be found in a story or novel.
- The language may be emotive, realistic, poetic or whatever is necessary for the author’s purpose.
- Names of the characters are written before their dialogue so no inverted commas are used for speech. Each character’s dialogue begins on a new line.
- Consistent use of first or third person to narrate the script.
- Use of emotive language often speaking directly to you, the audience.
- Atmosphere is developed through the use of noun groups.
- Adverbs and adverbial phrases tell how, when and where.
- May have a narrator who speaks directly to the audience.
- Effective images used in the dialogue so creates vivid pictures.
- Dialogue in present tense, but narration in the past tense.
The little old lady who lived in a vinegar bottle...
in a **Vinegar Bottle**

**TEXT ORGANISATION**

**Chorus (evaluates and comments)**

CHORUS:

'Tis a shame that she should suffer so,
Fairy, can't you make her go?

KIND FAIRY:

Sh!

LITTLE OLD LADY:

I should like to live in a little cottage in the country. I would like to have a maidservant to bring me a cup of tea. I would like a little garden with chickens pecking in the dirt and laying fresh eggs for me. Oh, it just isn't fair that I have to live in this vinegar bottle.

**Series of events**

KIND FAIRY:

I think I can help you, Little Old Lady. Tonight, when you go to bed, turn around three times, and in the morning you'll see what you'll see.

[Old lady turns, and slips behind the closing curtain.]

**Resolution**

CHORUS:

So she turned around three full times
And, much to her surprise,
In the morning when she awoke
What a sight befell her eyes.

NARRATOR:

Yes, the Little Old Lady was no longer in the vinegar bottle.

[ Curtain opens. Two children hold a large picture of a country cottage with flowers, etc. They move aside to reveal the Little Old Lady sitting in a rocking chair. Enter Maidservant carrying a tray with a teapot and a cup and saucer.]

MAIDSERVANT:

Good morning, Ma’am. Here is your cup of tea and some freshly baked scones.

LITTLE OLD LADY:

Aah!

[She smiles, then looks around expectantly. Chickens enter squawking and pecking; they can dance or mime. Maidservant flaps her apron at them, and shoos them off stage. She picks up an egg and brings it to the Little Old Lady.]

LITTLE OLD LADY:

Aah! How happy I am.

**Re-orientation**

NARRATOR:

The Little Old Lady was so happy, but she never thought to say thank you to the Kind Fairy.
Sample Annotated Text

**Fancy's bell**

**Characters:**
- Young boy
- Young girl
- Boy's alter ego
- Bride
- Young man
- Old man
- Old woman
- Groom
- Husband
- Old woman

**SCENE 1**
A school playground. Young Boy and Young Girl make appropriate actions as they speak these lines in the manner of a playground game.

**Young boy:** Mr.

**Young girl:** Miss.

**Young boy:** Meet.

**Young girl:** Kiss . . .

**Short pause**

**Both:** Oranges and lemons, Say the bells of St Clement's.

**Young boy:** You owe me three kisses.

**Young girl:** Say the bells of St Christopher's.

**Young boy:** When will you pay me? Say the bells of Old Bailey.

**Young girl:** Now or never? Say the bells of Westminster.

**SCENE 2**
A public place. Boy and Girl with Alter Egos standing behind each.

**Boy:** Looks at girl. She is not looking. He looks away.

**Boy's alter ego:** I wonder if she...

**Girl:** Looks at boy. He is not looking. She looks away.

**Girl's alter ego:** I wonder if he...

**Boy:** Reaches out hand tentatively without looking at girl.

**Boy's alter ego:** Will she...?

**Girl:** Reaches out hand tentatively without looking at boy.

**Girl's alter ego:** Will he...?

Their hands connect as if by magic.

**Boy:** Moves towards girl.

**Boy's alter ego:** I wonder if...

**Girl:** Moves towards boy.

**Girl's alter ego:** I wonder if...

**Both:** Look at each other.

**Both:** Would you like to...? laugh

**SCENE 3**
Outside a church. A frozen moment depicting a wedding photograph with bride . . .

**Bride:** I do.

**Groom:** Places ring on Bride's finger.

**Bride:** I do.

**Groom:** Places ring on Groom's finger. Wedding bells ring.

**SCENE 4**
Husband and Wife on telephone. Each holds a print of the wedding photograph . . .

**Husband:** I know I promised I would be home...

**Wife:** This was to be our anniversary...

They both hang up. Stand for a moment alone in a freeze position.

**SCENE 5**
Old Man and Old Woman sitting in separate chairs. They speak or sing these words . . .

**Old man:** When I was a little tiny boy, With a hey ho, the wind and the rain;

**Old woman:** A foolish thing was but a toy, For the rain it raineth every day.

**Old man:** Tell me where is fancy bred, In the heart or in the head?

**Old woman:** How begot, how nourished?

**Old man:** A great while ago the world began

**Old woman:** With a hey ho, the wind and the rain;

**Old man:** But that's all one, our play is done,

**Old woman:** And we'll strive to please you every day.

**Old man:** Let us all ring fancy's bell. I'll begin it—ding dong bell.

**Both:** Ding dong bell.

They look at each other, smile gently and reach out their hands towards each other.

**Note:** Extract only. Sections have been omitted from this script
Outcomes Checklist

Drama Texts

At the end of the units on drama texts students will have worked towards achieving the following National Level 4 (NSW Stage 3) outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</th>
<th>BLM</th>
<th>DATE &amp; COMMENTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA 4.1 NSW 3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicates and interacts confidently for a range of purposes and a variety of audiences to express well developed, well organised ideas dealing with more challenging topics.</td>
<td>98, 99</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.2 NSW 3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considers aspects of context, purpose and audience when speaking and listening and discusses ways in which spoken language differs from written.</td>
<td>102, 103, 104</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.3 NSW 3.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Controls and evaluates structures and features of spoken language. Interprets meaning and develops and presents ideas and information in familiar surroundings.</td>
<td>95</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.4 NSW 3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interacts in different sized groups using effective communication skills and strategies and listening attentively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>READING AND VIEWING</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.5 NSW 3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reads an extensive range of texts with fairly complex structures and features, justifying own interpretation of ideas, information and events in the response to themes and issues.</td>
<td>97, 98, 103</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.6 NSW 3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyses and explains techniques to position the reader and to interpret experiences differently in texts.</td>
<td>96, 97, 104</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.7 NSW 3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identifies the structures of different texts and with assistance discusses the grammatical structures and features that shape readers’ and listeners’ understanding of texts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRITING</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.9 NSW 3.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writes well structured literary and factual texts using challenging topics, ideas and issues for a variety of purposes and audiences.</td>
<td>95, 103, 105</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.10 NSW 3.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluates writing in terms of effectiveness of presentation of subject matter and adjusts to focus on context, purpose and audience.</td>
<td>97, 102</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.11 NSW 3.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discusses and evaluates how texts have been constructed to achieve their purpose and shape readers’ and viewers’ understandings using grammatical features and structures.</td>
<td>96, 99, 105</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA 4.12a NSW 3.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses a range of strategies to plan, edit and proofread own writing.</td>
<td>96, 99, 103, 105</td>
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Background Lessons

When dramatising, students improvise and respond using their intuition, imagination and experience of past events. The overall purpose in programming for drama is to bring about change. It may change a level of understanding, change concepts, attitudes, beliefs or bring about an awareness of others and their needs. This text form makes it easier to examine issues like gender, disadvantage or what it means to be living in a country that is war torn. Students can focus on a point of view as narrators, reporters or as an audience.

It is important that a variety of size-balanced groups containing different types of individuals are used when dramatising. The leaders, different levels of creativity, energy and skill, knowledge, attitude and experience should be spread amongst the groups. This enables students to develop their abilities to relate to a variety of personalities with different levels of skill.

It is important to allow a period of reflection following each activity. This allows for focus and makes sense of collective and individual thoughts and experiences.

Session 1

Mime

This first session is aimed at developing students’ ability to mime convincingly in a non-threatening situation. For the first lesson students should be seated in a large circle where they are asked to mime the passing of a hot plate (without dropping it) from one to another around the circle. They need to concentrate on their facial expressions, timing and body movements. This mime should be followed by the imaginary passing of cold, cooked spaghetti from one student to another around the circle. No words should be spoken but children should concentrate on their body movements and facial expressions. It is important to discuss with students how they felt and what assisted their focus and concentration during this activity.

For the second activity, ask students to line up in groups of five with each member of the group except for the first facing the back wall. The teacher or leader should act out a mime. The first member of each group should tap the second who then witnesses the first doing the mime. The mime is passed down the line with all members witnessing the last members performing the mime. The teacher should then repeat the mime for the whole group. Discussion of the changing form and ideas should take place.

After completing two mime activities, the students should attempt an improvisation. Students should be divided into groups of four and each should decide which family members they would like to be. They need to think about and improvise how the family member would walk, talk and behave. Encourage discussion amongst group members. When each student has established a role ask the group to organise themselves for a family portrait but ensure that attention is paid to the way they move, stand and present for the portrait. It is important that they remain in character as they organise themselves for the picture.
Encourage students to reflect in a journal on the activities they have completed today. Are they satisfied with the way they were able to mime and improvise? What skills would they like to develop further?

**Session 2**  
**Frozen characters**

The aim of this lesson is to make students aware that people should not be taken at face value and stereotyped. Ask students to think of the characters of a novel they know well or a familiar folk tale narrative, for example *Little Red Riding Hood*. As a class, explore what the students’ preconceived ideas are about the wolf, grandmother and Red Riding Hood. How much do they know about them? What do they look like? How do they expect them to behave?

Ask students to work in pairs to take turns sculpting each other as the characters. One student pretends to be made of plasticine or clay while the other is the sculptor who places them in the position most appropriate to portray each character’s feelings and mannerisms. Once each student has had the opportunity to portray all three characters ask a few to demonstrate their sculptures before the class. The whole group can then observe different representations.

The next activity is exploring what happens to the character once a complication is introduced. Ask the pairs to present an aspect of the orientation followed by a separate complication from the same story as moments that are frozen in time. For example *Little Red Riding Hood* can freeze as she skips down the path towards her grandmother’s house. An example of a complication from this tale would be the wolf frozen as he hides behind a tree with an evil expression on his face. His eyes are frozen on Little Red Riding Hood. This is followed by an improvisation when action and words are added to explore what happens next.

Have some students role play the characters in the hot seat. All other students prepare three questions that they would like to ask each character. This may be about their motivation or to find out more about their fictional world. The character in the hot seat must respond in character using appropriate facial expressions, movements and mannerisms.

Finally discuss the themes of the story with the students before they reflect on their activities in their journals.

**Session 3**  
**Storytelling**

Three storytellers are chosen by the teacher to move to the front of the class. One begins by telling a detailed story. When this is finished the story must be retold by the second who has to change the resolution or ending of the story. Finally the third storyteller has to tell a different story, but must ensure that elements from the first story are included, for example the story can be about a fisherman sailing in his boat when a storm approaches and he is shipwrecked. His boat washes up on a deserted island. The second storyteller may decide that when the boat is shipwrecked he is rescued by a container ship sailing on the open seas. The third storyteller need include only the elements from the first story. The rest of the class can then be divided into three groups and either mime or improvise the stories using one member of the group as the storyteller. The students can then swap roles so each has a turn to be the storyteller.
Ask students to reflect on the storytelling experience in their journal. As a follow-up, ask students to describe an accident or special event in their lives as if they were watching and not participating. Ask them to relate in the third person telling the event, but not describing any feelings.

Session 4
Setting

Divide students into groups of five and ask students to perform two scenes which, although they have the same content, differ because of their setting, for example a group of friends is sitting in a bedroom talking about their recent holidays. Place this same group of friends in the woods on a cloudless night. The students need to think of the sounds, feelings and possibilities that could be lurking all around.

Once again ask students to reflect in their journals.

Session 5
A verbal collage of emotions

Each student should write a word or phrase on a piece of paper describing how they would feel if they were scared or intimidated. They should not write their names on the paper. Collect and redistribute the papers with each student taking one (this should not be their own). Students stand as a choir and one starts by saying their word or phrase in a tone and with emotion that is appropriate. Others follow with their words, one at a time, when they feel it’s appropriate. It doesn’t matter if a word is said at the same time as some one else. The choir finishes in silence when everyone has spoken. Collages can be created based on set emotions, for example happiness, jealousy, hopelessness.

Ask students which emotions they most closely associate with each of these colours—green, brown, red, black, and white. (Red may be anger, passion, fear and hatred.) Ask students about their favourite or least favourite colours. Choose some lines from a script and ask students to read the lines as if they were a particular colour. How does the meaning change?

Session 6
Writing drama scripts

After reading a number of scripts ask children to write their own. The dramatic script outline (BLM 88) and the drama scaffold (BLM 89) will assist them with ordering their thoughts. If you are not writing a complete story but only an extract some parts of the structure may be incomplete, for example the resolution. It is important that students look carefully at the script of Fancy’s Bell to see how the format of a non-naturalistic script differs.
# Drama Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenery</th>
<th>Main Characters</th>
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### Costumes

### Prologue

### Orientation

### Complication

### Series of Events

### Resolution

### Epilogue (optional)
Drama Scaffold

Characters

Scenery and costume suggestions

Prologue
(This is an optional way of introducing the setting and the characters and giving some background information that is important for the play.)

Orientation
(This is generally shorter than in a narrative.)

Who

When

Where

What situation

Why

Complication
(A problem occurs in the character's personal life or in the world around him or her.)

Series of events

Resolution
(The problem in the complication is resolved by one of the main characters.)

Epilogue
### Improvisation and Storytelling Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the pace of the story varied and does the student use pause effectively to build up tension?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are the emotions of the story conveyed by the pitch of the voice? How does the pitch of the voice and the intonation suit different characters?</td>
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<td>Does the use of movements, facial expressions and eye contact enhance the story?</td>
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<td>Is sufficient attention paid to how the story begins and how it ends?</td>
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<td>Does an expressive voice effectively convey the mood of the story? Can we hear the anger, happiness, moodiness etc. that the character is feeling?</td>
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<td>Is the storyline conveyed in a sequenced, effective and easy to follow manner?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the student able to take on the role of the character and maintain this in a believable way?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the student confident and able to gain the attention of the audience?</td>
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</table>

### FOLLOW-UP SUGGESTIONS

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Drama Writing Interview

Name:

Class:

Date:

**Self-assessment** e.g. What ideas do you enjoy writing about in your scripts? Is there anything you don’t like writing about or find difficult about writing dramatic scripts? How do you rate yourself as a script writer?

**Range and preferences** e.g. What do you like writing about and for what type of audiences? What strategies do you use to make your dialogue and action clear and interesting? Do you enjoy mime, improvisation or working from a script? Do you reflect after you have worked on a script to see how you could improve your interpretation?

**Skills** e.g. How do you plan your stories? How do you edit your work? How do you go about creating interesting and realistic characters? Do you prefer to develop your characters independently or with the support of classmates and your teacher’s cues? Are your ideas more important than accurate spelling and correct sentence structure? How do you check spelling if you are unsure of a word?

**Current projects** e.g. What dramatic scripts are you writing now? Which parts are you happy with and which do you think need more thought? What would you like to write?
# Drama Skills Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Class:</th>
<th>Date/Level</th>
<th>Date/Level</th>
<th>Date/Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PURPOSE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of the purpose of dramatic scripts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STRUCTURE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Writes a prologue where the scene and background are described.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lists characters and costumes, and describes scenery effectively (not for radio scripts).</td>
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<td>Writes a clear but shortened orientation.</td>
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<td>Creates a complication based on an unexpected event.</td>
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<td>Writes a well-developed series of events.</td>
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<td>Able to resolve the situation clearly.</td>
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<td>Able to recognise different types of dramatic scripts.</td>
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<td><strong>TEXT ORGANISATION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops a well-sequenced plan for script writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Able to write a clear sequence of events.</td>
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<td>Writes a resolution connected to the orientation and complication.</td>
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<td>Writes a prologue effectively tying up any incomplete threads.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE FEATURES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Characterisation is developed through dialogue and events.</td>
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<td>Action verbs are used effectively.</td>
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<td>Uses evaluative language.</td>
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<td>Atmosphere is developed through use of noun groups.</td>
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<td>Uses adverbs and adverbial phrases to indicate how, when and where.</td>
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<td>Able to use first or third person consistently.</td>
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<td>Consistently uses correct tense.</td>
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<td>Uses emotive language when speaking to the audience.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LEVEL CODES</strong></td>
<td>1 Consistently evident</td>
<td>2 Sometimes evident</td>
<td>3 Not evident</td>
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Blake Education Fully Reproducible