

A Teacher Workbook

This Workbook is intended to serve as a practical supplement to my *Find Your Voice*™ book on public sharing. Because I am a firm believer in experiential learning, what follows is the First Draft of a two-character student play for you to work on. Written in response to the trigger on p. 31 of the book, this is the first play that my student Wayne ever wrote. As with Dan (whose play is analyzed in Chapter 4 of the book), the image clearly provoked thoughts about what the future may hold, and how the past, present, and future can come together in a single defining moment.

Although there is the basis for a strong play here, there are also many problems to address in future drafts. You will probably be able to easily identify many grammatical problems; Wayne has some second language interference. There are also some problems with the flow: too much repetition, exposition of facts that are already known, and some long speeches that need to be cut-and-spliced into more responsive single lines of dialogue. However, the plot glitches are a little less obvious. Ideally, questions about the story should be addressed in concert *with* the writer. This ensures that the feedback will best be able to help him realize *his own intentions* for the story. However, for the sake of this exercise, the important thing is to *identify areas that need clarification*. Based on what you've learned about positive wants and flow, see what feedback you might offer this writer. (My responses can be found at the end of this section.)

Untitled

by Wayne Chung

RICHARD

*(There is a knock at the door)*

Come in.

*(Linda enters the room; without looking at her, and still concentrated on his work)*

What is it Linda?

LINDA

Hey Richie...I just wanted to come in and see how you were doing.

RICHARD

I doing fine.

LINDA

So where did you go over the weekend?

RICHARD

*(Looks disturbed)*

Ummm...I went to campus to tutor some kids.

LINDA

I see—you know what's weird? We're both constantly working that we barely see each other anymore and we live under the same roof.

RICHARD

*(Stops writing)*

Listen Linda, can we do this some other time? I can't concentrate on my work like this.

LINDA

No we can't do this some other time because we rarely even talk anymore!

RICHARD

That's not true at all! I took you out to dinner just last week and we had a splendid time!

LINDA

Richie, that was two weeks ago and that was the first time in two years!

RICHARD

Look Linda, I don't have time to argue with you right now. I have to finish grading all these midterms and essays by tomorrow morning. I won't even have time to sleep tonight.

*(Goes back to his work)*

LINDA

*(Looks very upset and disappointed)*

I see. So now your job is more important than me now.

RICHARD

*(Hearing this gets very angry and throws pen down)*

Linda! Why are you saying that! You know that's not true!

LINDA

It's been so different for the past few years. I remember when you use to take me out all the time to different places. We use to cuddle each other and talk all night...we talked about our dreams, our goals, and our love for each other.

RICHARD

Linda...those were just childhood dreams and fantasies. We were going through a phase in teenage life. We're grown up adults now. There are more serious matters that we must confront now. We don't talk about our dreams anymore because we're following them now...we're now trying our best to make them all come true. I hope you understand what I'm saying Linda.

LINDA

*(In the brink of crying)*

You know Richard, we live in two completely different worlds.

RICHARD

That is because you're thinking too much! You're thinking about the past too much. I want you to be more serious about you're work.

LINDA

*(Smiles)*

I've known you for a very long time. We've been going out ever since junior high school. You were great at sweet talking girls...I use to get so jealous when I saw you around with other girls...I remember talking to you about that and you agreed to stop talking to any other girl except for me. It made me so happy because I knew it was a big sacrifice for you and I knew then that you loved me.

RICHARD

*(Speechless and finding a response)*

Linda...you see? I really DO love you.

LINDA

We use to spend all the time in the world together. You were my only friend.

RICHARD

That is not true! What about Sarah and Michelle and all of them?

LINDA

They weren't really my friends...I couldn't connect to them, not even to my parents. You were the only person in the world that I connected to.

*(There is a long pause. Linda is waiting for a response but Richard is speechless)*

Ever since I lost my parents, you were the only love in my life. I feel so lonely nowadays because I have nobody to talk to anymore...not even you. I come back from work to find that either you're not at home, or you're too busy with your work. I spend most of my free time reading alone in the living room, and walking alone in the park at night, thinking to myself, "where is my husband when I need him most?" The only time we have a decent talk is the fifteen minutes that we spend together eating dinner.

RICHARD

Look Linda, I'm doing all this work for our future! You don't think I have my own problems? Do you have any idea the amount of stress that I have to deal with everyday? Look Linda, I'm doing all this work so that we can one day buy a bigger house for our family to live in. I'm doing this for our future children, and for you and me.

LINDA

You know what Richie? I think that's bullshit. You're not doing this for my future. It's certainly not making me happy in any way.

RICHARD

Then what the hell do you want me to do? What do you want from me?

LINDA

*(Desperate, upset, crying)*

I just want you to spend more time with me!

RICHARD

Spend time with you? I'm giving you enough attention already.

LINDA

*(Calms down)*

I was deciding whether to tell you or not...something very important...something that would be regarding both our futures.

RICHARD

What is it?

LINDA

But I get this feeling that you don't love me anymore. I get this feeling that it won't matter to you and it will all be a waste of time.

RICHARD

You know what Linda? This is the last straw. If you seriously do love me, you would tell me. And if it was really that important, you won't have to toy around with me like this. I don't need you to tell me how I feel because you know very well that I love you. You know that I care for you.

*(Linda is looking down)*

Now what were you going to tell me?

LINDA

If you do love me, then you would spend a lot more time with me. Now promise me Richard, that you will spend more time with me. Promise me that you'll spend at least the weekends with me-

RICHARD

Now Linda you know I don't have the time on weekends to-

LINDA

*(Desperate)*

Promise me or I won't tell you!

RICHARD

You know what? I've had it. I've had it with you. I don't need this. You know that I love you. I don't need anybody questioning or testing my love for you. I'm leaving Linda.

*(Starts for his coat and suitcase)*

And I'm not coming back until you shape up your attitude!

*(Leaves the house. Linda is just left standing there looking down on the floor not realizing that he has left)*

LINDA

I have cancer...I'm dying in a few weeks...Richard?

*(Turns around and looks back and sees that he has already left. Lowers her head stares at the floor)*

BLACKOUT

YOU CAN WRITE YOUR OWN QUESTIONS & COMMENTS HERE:

Once you have made your notations on the script itself, and listed your questions above, you will want to make some *choices* about what to address with the student *first* so as not to overwhelm him. I usually start with the plot and “character want” questions, and save the fine-tuning of language and flow for later drafts because the language is going to change anyway. But I do indicate repetitious language that would need to be cut, without actually cutting or re-writing it for them. This demonstrates a problem they can watch for as they write. So much of their learning will take place through trial and error, as they come back having cut too much or too little. That’s why I retain all of their drafts; so that I can reconstruct how their *fix* led to new problems.

The archiving of previous drafts is also essential for ensuring that the writer doesn’t *lose their play*. Their early drafts are actually the building blocks of the final structure of their plays. Some of the ideas and phrases that didn’t work initially may be the perfect choices to be used in another place, in a later draft of the play. These drafts also maintain a record of some of the backstory that doesn’t need to be in the play, but still needs to *inform* the play. Often the writers themselves will forget a crucial piece of history about the character, one that stands in direct opposition to a choice made later on.

Dramaturgy is a highly subjective art because there are *always an infinite number of solutions*. The main problem I identified in Wayne’s play was the competing plots. It was unclear to me whether Linda and Richard have unwittingly grown apart, or if he is cheating on her. In the first pages she is questioning him about his whereabouts and thinking back on his flirtatious nature in the past. (When asked, Wayne insisted that Richard *has* been loyal to her and to their dreams). But there are many lines that

suggest otherwise. These *red herrings*, or misleading plot clues, are pulling the play in a different direction than he consciously intended to go. Personally, I think Wayne wanted to write a play about a guy who's been with one very needy woman for a long time. I think Richard has outgrown Linda, and is either having an affair or thinking about one. However, Wayne's fear that the act of leaving someone needy will *kill them*, translates itself into the diagnosis of terminal cancer. This is a choice that he would not relinquish throughout the re-writing process! Along the same line, it is unclear whether Linda came in to tell Richard her tragic news, or to find out if he's having an affair. If it's *both*, Wayne will have a hard time doing justice to both plots in five pages. In order to help him to sort this out, I ask him if *Richard wants this marriage*.

I also ask Wayne if *Linda is terminal*. The play, particularly the ending, is melodramatic because things are both overstated and underdeveloped. If Linda *just* found out about her cancer, it's implausible that she already has only a few weeks left to live. In terms of the *structure* of the play, I would point out that too much of the story is in the past. It needs more immediacy. It seems like Linda is still unable to function well because of things that occurred in Junior High School. I ask Wayne *why* Richard is the only thing she has in her life. Additionally, the character's *wants are not always clear*. They often seem manipulative and unsympathetic. Right from the top we should see that Linda urgently needs to tell Richard something, no matter how difficult it will be to say it. I ask Wayne if Linda really *wants* Richard's support, or if she's just using her illness to trap him.

When asked to clarify their wants Wayne explained that Linda wants "her husband's attention" and that Richard wants "advancement at his job." I pointed out that

those are only the *means to getting what they want*. Wayne was then able to further articulate that Linda wants “more time together now, because they might not have time together later” and that “Richard’s working less would give her that.” Conversely, “Richard wants tenure so that he can guarantee Linda’s security; he doesn’t have time to spare now.” Although they clearly love each other, their wants are in conflict. The missing piece of information that Linda holds could potentially bring them closer together, if Linda could just get past her fear of an indifferent reaction.

Clearly, Linda is afraid that Richard won’t love her if she’s sick. The “resolution” that Wayne chose indicates that this is a classic case of miscommunication between two people who really want the same thing; a life together. I ask him to consider, even if the audience never finds out, whether or not *Richard will be back and if Linda will eventually tell him*. What follows is the more focused and subtle Final Draft that emerged, about five drafts after Wayne received the feedback on his first one.

Unspoken Silence

by Wayne Chung

*(LINDA knocks on the door of RICHARD'S study. SHE waits, then enters. RICHARD doesn't look up at HER, HE'S concentrating on HIS work. SHE sits, waits, then-)*

LINDA

We need to talk.

RICHARD

*(Stops writing)*

Can it wait until another time?

LINDA

No, it can't.

RICHARD

I need to concentrate on my work.

LINDA

It's important.

RICHARD

*(Shows HER pile)*

I have to finish grading all of these midterms by tomorrow morning. I won't even have the time to sleep tonight.

*(Goes back to HIS work)*

LINDA

*(Disappointed)*

So your job is more important than me.

RICHARD

*(Throwing HIS pen down)*

Why are you saying this?

LINDA

Because you're always so caught up in your work, you don't have time for me anymore.

*(Silence)*

I need you Richie.

RICHARD

I'm just busy right now; I've always had time for you.

LINDA

If you've had time for me, then why did it take us a year to have a decent dinner together?

RICHARD

We can't have a fancy meal every night --- we're on a tight budget.

LINDA

Is money all you care about?

RICHARD

Until I make tenure, that's all I can care about.

LINDA

What about me?

*(Silence)*

What about us, and the life we used to have together?

*(Silence)*

We used to cuddle, and talk all night about our dreams. You used to care.

RICHARD

I still care! That's why I don't just talk about our dreams... I try to make them come true.

LINDA

*(Pause)*

We're living in two different worlds.

RICHARD

That's because you live in the past too much.

LINDA

I can't help it. When my parents died last year, the world became a colder place to be in. You were the warmth that kept me going. You're my best friend.

*(SHE takes HIS arm.)*

RICHARD

You have to give me some space.

LINDA

Space? I'm always alone because you're either not home, or too busy with your work.

*(Silence)*

Where are you when I need you most; when I have a problem that I need to discuss with you?

RICHARD

Do you have any idea about the problems that I have to deal with? Every day at work?

*(Silence)*

Of course you don't; you don't work.

LINDA

*(Pause)*

You told me I didn't have to work for a while! You said, "Linda, I'll work hard for you. I'll look after you, don't worry. I'll make you happy."

RICHARD

Aren't you happy?

LINDA

No---

RICHARD

What more do you want from me?

LINDA

*(Desperate)*

Time.

RICHARD

*(Starting to pack up HIS papers)*

I've spent enough time already.

LINDA

Where are you going?

RICHARD

Some place I can work in peace.

LINDA

Please don't go!

*(SHE grabs HIM)*

RICHARD

Let go of me.

LINDA

Don't I matter to you anymore? Don't you love me?

RICHARD

We've been married for ten years; of course I love you.

LINDA

Then promise you'll spend more time with me...at least on the weekends!

RICHARD

You know I don't have time on the weekends to-

LINDA

*(Gripping HIM)*

Promise me...

RICHARD

Can we talk just about this tomorrow? I need time-

LINDA

Time is not on our side anymore; I need you to promise me now.

RICHARD

I can't stand here and prove my love to you.

*(HE starts to leave)*

LINDA

Richard, I have cancer.

*(HE stops and looks back at HER; HIS expression is blank)*

BLACKOUT

---

I think it's evident that while this play came a long way from its first incarnation, it is nevertheless a first play. Like many new writers, Wayne fell in to the trap of thinking that stakes are only high enough if death is involved! In truth, people grow apart in pursuit of their dreams all the time—and that is tragic enough.

I have encountered this syndrome often during the years that I've worked with teenagers. Separation from their loved ones, through the natural process of growing up and leaving home, is imminent. Therefore, I can always expect at least one *separation* play in any given workshop; it will involve either friends or family members. And because separation is such a frightening idea, these plays often result in the death of one of the parties involved. Since the trigger for this piece was a photograph of frozen time, which *is* death, I did not push Wayne harder to explore other possible outcomes for two people who have grown apart. This is what was in his heart from the get go. However, he grew tremendously as a writer over the weeks that he worked on this play. In the end it was the *process*—not the product—that taught him the most about craft.