

# **Teacher's Place**

**Examining Conflict Management Through Literature**

A Teacher Training Workshop

**A Teacher Resource Guide**

**1999 - 2000**

# Introduction

This resource guide is a project of The American Place Theatre. It has been designed for teachers of grades seven through twelve. Its objective is to introduce drama-in-education strategies, conflict management methodologies, and playwriting activities that can be implemented in the classroom by the classroom teacher.

## Table of Contents

Introduction_____	2
Overview_____	3
Workshop_____	4
Additional Activities_____	9
Resources_____	10

## Additional Information:

Paul Michael Fontana  
Director of Education

Joye Heather Cook  
Education Associate

The American Place Theatre  
111 West 46th Street  
New York, New York 10036  
(212) 840-2960 ext. 16  
Fax (212) 391-4019  
pfontana@americanplacetheatre.org

Find us On-Line: [www.americanplacetheatre.org](http://www.americanplacetheatre.org)

## Overview

**Richard Wright** (author) was a writer, thinker, and social spokesman. His story, as told in *Black Boy*, illuminates his experiences in the African-American community. Born in Mississippi on September 4, 1908, Mr. Wright was one of the earliest published African-American writers to focus on the “universal potential of the person who is socialized to be black and male in an oppressive society.” The themes found in Mr. Wright’s book are as relevant today as they were when *Black Boy* was first published in 1945. In 1941, he was the recipient of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Spingarn Medal for his achievements in the Black community.

Significant works by Mr. Wright include *Black Boy*, *Native Son*, *The Outsider*, and *Black Power*.

**Stephanie Gilbert** (artist/educator) is a storyteller and educator. She performs at South Street Seaport, and evolves stories around the museum’s exhibits. She is the family literacy storytelling coordinator at Henry Street Louis Abrons Art Center. Through the Educational Arts Team in New Jersey, she is a storyteller for the drug prevention through storytelling program. She conducts workshops at various museums through the Leadership Program, as well as facilitating their in-school residencies. If you looked at her calendar, you might wonder how she ever gets to the right place at the right time.

# Workshop

conflict conflict conflict conflict conflict conflict conflict conflict conflict

- ❖ Conflict is a part of life
- ❖ There is more than one way to solve a conflict.
- ❖ Feelings are important. It is difficult to get at the reason for a conflict if feelings are avoided or denied.
- ❖ Conflict involves choices, decisions and consequences.
- ❖ If necessary, seek assistance when making a decision.
- ❖ Sometimes, if a conflict is difficult to resolve, the conflict can be managed. Deal with process – “stepping stones” to the resolution.
- ❖ Conflict can best be dealt with if there is thought before action.
- ❖ There are skills to learn to solve our problems.

## Responses to Conflict

### CONFRONTATION

Aggression  
“I’m right, you’re wrong”  
Verbal and physical threats  
Fighting  
Dealing with a person who only wants his/her own way and nothing else

### AVIODANCE

Ignore the problem  
Deny the conflict exists – “Nothing is wrong.”  
Refuse to examine feelings  
Withdraw from the conflict situation  
Give in  
Change the subject  
Admit that “I am wrong even though I am not.”

## COMMUNICATION

Examine choices, decisions and consequences  
“Step into the other person’s shoes”  
Work towards a common goal  
Emphasize needs not desires  
Admit differences and diversity  
Accept different perceptions on the problem

## Workshop Outline

### *Overall Structure of the Workshop*

**Subject:** *English*

**Grades:** *7 through 12*

**Book:** *Black Boy by Richard Wright*

**Objectives:** *The students will identify with characters in a story and relate to the way they solve a conflict in their lives.*

**Motivation:** *Write the word “conflict” on the board. Ask the students what comes to mind when they hear the word conflict. Write the results of the brainstorming on the board. Record both positive and negative answers.*

### **Activity: Complete the Phrase**

The Group sits in a circle. Each participant responds in turn, completing a given sentence fragment: “A time when I experienced conflict was....” Participants may use a personal experience or an outside event they observed.

### **Objectives:**

- ❖ The students will be brought together through sharing of experiences.
- ❖ The students will explore the definitions of conflict based on experiences.
- ❖ The students will be introduced to the concept of conflict resolution.

### **Discussion:**

- ❖ What made this activity easy or difficult?
- ❖ From the conflict brainstorming web and personal experiences, what might be said about conflict? How do we deal with conflict?
- ❖ How does Richard in *Black Boy* experience conflict? How does he respond? How does Richard deal with conflict?

## **Activity: Tableau (Frozen Picture, Still Image)**

### **Objectives:**

- ❖ The students will examine conflicts that Richard faces in *Black Boy* at a particular moment in his life.
- ❖ The students will reflect on the feelings that Richard experiences.
- ❖ The students will recognize that conflict creates feelings and feelings are important.

### **Quotes from *Black Boy***

“Whenever my brother and I asked my mother why my father had left, she would tell us we were too young to know.” p.18

“One evening my mother told me that thereafter I would have to do the shopping for food.... The next afternoon I looped the basket over my arm and went down the pavement toward the store. When I reached the corner, a gang of boys grabbed me, knocked me down, snatched the basket, took the money, and sent me running home in panic.” pp. 18-19

“That evening, I told my mother what had happened with the gang of boys, but she made no comment; she sat down at once, wrote another note, gave me more money, and sent me out to the grocery again.” p. 19

“I crept down the steps and saw the same gang of boys playing down the street. I ran back into the house.” p. 19

### **Directions:**

- ❖ The teacher defines “tableau” for the students.
- ❖ Divide the students into several small groups (4-5 people). Give each group the quotes above.
- ❖ Each group collectively chooses one quote for which they are going to create a tableau. They decide what characters will be in their tableau.
- ❖ The groups practice their tableaux for 5-7 minutes with a warning given by the teacher for the last 60 seconds. During the preparation time, the teacher should circulate, side-coaching if needed but not intruding on their work. Each student should determine how his character feels and, using his body, present the essence of those feelings.
- ❖ Each group shares their tableau with the class in turn. When the rest of the class yells “1-2-3-Picture,” each group freezes into their tableau.
- ❖ The teacher asks the group presenting their tableau to hold their positions and asks the class to reflect on it. The teacher helps the class to speculate on the possible meaning or meanings that this frozen moment has in the lives of each of the characters. The teacher asks the class to consider the tableaux in a social context, and interpret the motivations of each character, and the consequences of each action.
- ❖ Allow each group to unfreeze after class reflection.

**Discussion Questions:** When all groups have presented their tableaux, the teacher should moderate a discussion of the quotes. The following are suggested questions:

- ❖ What might these characters be feeling at this point in the text? (Mood)
- ❖ What is known about the social status of African-Americans in the South, particularly young black men, during this time in history? (Milieu)
- ❖ What time of day is it? What is the weather like? (Setting)
- ❖ Who are the group of boys? What are they doing together? Do they meet here often? (Character)
- ❖ What problem is in the Mother's mind? What problem is in Richard's mind? (Motivation)
- ❖ Is Richard in trouble whether he stays with his mother or goes to the store and confronts the group? (Consequences)
- ❖ What might have happened just before this? What might happen next? (Plot / Predicting Outcomes)
- ❖ How would you act under this pressure? (Personal Response)
- ❖ Are the characters – the gang of boys – thinking as individuals or as a collective group? (Character)
- ❖ Is this scene relevant today? (Personal Response)

#### **Variation A: Thought-tracking characters in Tableaux**

As students are frozen, the teacher or individual students may gently tap one character at a time and ask him questions which are answered in character. (ex. Of one of the gang of boys: "Why are you hassling Richard?")

#### **Variation B: Theme-related Tableaux**

Follow directions for the tableau exercise above. Instead of giving the groups the list of quotes, give each group a card with one of the following themes on it.

<b>Themes</b>
Frustration
Happiness
Freedom
Humiliation
Friendship
Sadness

#### **Activity: Cooperative Writing**

##### **Objectives:**

- ❖ The students will identify choices in a conflict situation.
- ❖ The students will write dramatic scenes cooperatively in pairs.
- ❖ The students will make decisions based on choices.
- ❖ The students will examine the consequence or outcome of a decision.
- ❖ The students will enhance their use of written expressive language.

**Directions:**

Read the following sample of writing from the novel:

My mother met me at the door. “They b-beat m-me,” I gasped. “They t-t-took the m-money.” I started up the steps, seeking the shelter of the house.

“Don’t you come in here, my mother warned me.  
I froze in my tracks and stared at her.

“But they’re coming after me,” I said.

“You just stay right where you are,” she said in a deadly tone. “I’m going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself.”

She went into the house and I waited, terrified, wondering what she was about. Presently she returned with more money and another note; she also had a long heavy stick.

“Take this money, this note, and this stick,” she said. “Go to the store and buy those groceries. If those boy bother you, then fight.”

I was baffled. My mother was telling me to fight, a thing she had never done before. pp. 19-20

**Discussion Questions:**

- ❖ What was the mother trying to accomplish?
- ❖ What are other choices could Richard’s mother have given him? Why didn’t she?
- ❖ What could Richard decide to do?
- ❖ What are some of the consequences based on the choices and decision that were given?

**Writing Activity:**

Ask students to work in pairs to write a conversation between Richard and his mother that might follow this passage from the book. Allow them 10-15 minutes to work on their scenes and then ask volunteers to read theirs to the class. Discuss the differences and similarities between the scenes.

**👉 Activity: Begin Line****Directions:**

The students form two lines, each facing a partner in the opposite line. Students rehearse the beginning lines of the scene. The teacher will read the lines from the script below. One line of students will repeat what “Character A” says, the other line will repeat the words of “Character B.” Each pair will then improvise several lines of dialogue for their characters.

**Character A: Don’t you come in here.**  
**Character B: But they’re coming after me.**  
**Character A: You just stay right where you are.**

## Additional Activities

### 📌 Activity: Role on the Wall

#### Objectives:

- ❖ The students will build an understanding of a character from literature.
- ❖ The students will gain an empathy with a character by reflecting on his life events,

#### Directions:

The teacher draws a simple outline of a human figure on a large piece of paper and writes the author's title *Black Boy* at the top. As a starting point for exploring the book, the students write statements and comments about Richard made by characters in the book (parents, friends, his grandmother, his uncle, etc.). These are written *outside* the figure on the paper. As the reading of the text continues, what Richard feels about himself are recorded *inside* the figure.

### 📌 Activity: Hot Seating

#### Objectives:

- ❖ The students will see how events effect attitudes.
- ❖ The students will gain a depth of understanding of a character's motivations, personality, and disposition.
- ❖ The students will reflect of their awareness of human behavior.

#### Directions:

A student volunteers to play the role of Richard. He or she may wear a nametag with Richard's name on it (or a hat, jacket or other simple costume piece). "Richard" is placed on a chair facing the group. The group then asks questions of "Richard" while the teacher facilitates the questions and answers. Other students may take the hot seat after the first volunteer either as "Richard" or as other characters from the book.

### 📌 Activity: Community Poem

#### Objectives:

- ❖ The students will bring closure to the experience.
- ❖ The students will voice the thoughts and feelings that have come up during the workshop.
- ❖ The students will gain a sense of group unity through shared thoughts.

#### Directions:

- ❖ The group sits in a circle. Each student speaks in turn. On a single sheet of paper, each student writes one word or phrase to sum up his or her experience with the workshop.
- ❖ When everyone has written a word or phrase, the poem is read aloud.
- ❖ Later, a typed copy of the poem may be distributed to the group.

## Arts-in-Education Resources

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### CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Canfield, Jack and Harold Wells. *100 Ways to Enhance Self-Concept in the Classroom: a handbook for Teachers and Parents*. Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc., 1976.

Kreidler, William J. *Creative Conflict Resolution: more than 200 activities for keeping peace in the classroom*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1984.

Schrumpf, Fred, Donna Crawford and H. Chu Usadel. *Conflict Resolution in Schools: Peer Mediation*. Illinois: Research Press Co., 1991.

Weeks, Dudley. *The Eight Essential Steps to Conflict Resolution*. New York: Putnam, 1992.

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### DRAMA-IN-EDUCATION

Heathcote, Dorothy and Gavin Bolton. *Drama for Learning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd, 1995.

Neelands, Jonathan. *Making Sense of Drama*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd, 1984.

Neelands, Jonathan. *Structuring Drama Work*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

O'Neill, Cecily and Alan Lambert. *Drama Structures*. London: Hutchinson Education, 1987.

O'Neill, Cecily and Alan Lambert. *Drama Guidelines*. London: Heinemann Educational in Association with London Drama, 1977.

Morgan, Norah and Juliana Sexon. *Teaching Drama*. Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd, 1987.

Wagner, Betty Jane and Dorothy Heathcote. *Drama as a Learning Medium*. London: Hutchinson Education, 1988.

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**Teacher's Place** is made possible by a generous grant from  
**Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc.**

## Variation on Begin Line and Cooperative Writing in Pairs

Choose a conflict scene below, and follow the steps outlined in for the Black Boy “Begin Line” exercise.

### ISSUE

#### Parent/Child Communication Breakdown

<b>At Home</b>	
Parent:	It’s three o’clock in the morning.
Daughter/Son:	I know.
Parent:	I told you to be home by eleven.
Daughter/Son:	Impossible.

### ISSUE

#### Friendship

<b>The Rumor</b>	
Friend 1:	I heard what you have been saying about me.
Friend 2:	What are you talking about?
Friend 1:	You’ve been spreading rumors about me and <u>(Lee)</u> .

<b>The Betrayal</b>	
Boyfriend:	Willie says that he saw you at the party last night.
Girlfriend:	So what?
Boyfriend:	You told me you weren’t going.
Girlfriend:	I changed my mind.

### ISSUE

#### Peer Pressure

<b>Cutting School</b>	
Student A:	Let’s go to the park.
Student B:	I’ve cut this class too many times.
Student A:	<u>(Lee)</u> will be there.
Student B:	I’ll get in trouble.

<b>Weapons</b>	
Student A:	Hold this for me.
Student B:	What is it?
Student A:	Don’t worry about it.
Student B:	It’s a weapon...