

trinityrep



**WRITE
HERE!**

**WRITE
NOW!**

STUDY GUIDE

CONNECTING PLAYWRITING TO CURRICULUM

DEAR EDUCATOR,

We hope you find the following guide useful as you embark on the journey of exploring the role of playwriting in your classroom. This resource packet includes activities for sparking creativity as well as advice, lesson plans, and ways to include theater as a meaningful part of your curriculum. If you have any questions, or would like to schedule a workshop with your class, please feel free to contact us at education@trinityrep.com.

Please encourage your students to submit their 10-minute plays to *Write Here, Write Now!*, our student playwriting festival. For this year's deadlines and festival dates, visit www.TrinityRep.com/whwn.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

GUIDE OVERVIEW

- **SAMPLE LESSON PLANS** – If you are looking for a structured way to format a week of lessons surrounding playwriting, start here!
- **BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITIES** – “I don’t know what to write about” – If your class has already been introduced to theater/playwriting, here are some activities to get that imagination moving!
- **ORGANIZING/OUTLINING ACTIVITIES** – “This could happen – and then maybe a pig, what about an alien?!” – If your class has no trouble coming up with ideas, here are some activities to help them organize and structure their ideas into a coherent outline.
- **REVISING ACTIVITIES** – “I did it, now what?” – If your class has finished their plays and think they are done, these are some great activities to help them revisit and revise their work. One of the hardest parts of working on an artistic piece is editing, but we offer some helpful tips and tricks to ease the process.
- **COMMON PROBLEMS** – An overview of common issues for young playwrights and advice on how to fix them or safeguard against them.
- **RUBRIC** – The categories that Trinity Rep adjudicators use when reviewing play submissions. Feel free to share this with your class and possibly have students review each other’s work using this as a guide.

RESOURCES

- Basic Theater Terms
- Plot Diagram
- Character Worksheet
- Neutral Scenes/Ambiguous Dialogues
- Script Example
- Previous Winners

SAMPLE

5

**DAY
LESSON
PLAN**

DAY TWO | INTRO TO STORY STRUCTURE

DISCUSSION:

- What stories do you love?
- What makes them good stories?
- Why do/should we care?
- How can you adapt stories into plays?

TERMS | WAYS TO CONVEY A STORY

MONOLOGUE: A large block of lines spoken by a single character. When spoken alone onstage or directly to an audience, a monologue reveals the inner thoughts of a character.

DIALOGUE: Conversation between two or more characters.

STAGE DIRECTIONS: Information from the playwright to the actors, technicians, and others to explain any specifics about the physical space or how the characters should move through it, along with any information that is not conveyed through dialogue but rather through action.

ACTIVITY

PRESENT STUDENTS WITH CLIPS OF DIALOGUE, OR MONOLOGUE, FROM A MOVIE, TV SHOW, OR PLAY

...

WHY WOULD A WRITER USE EACH OF THESE DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR CONVEYING A STORY?

DAY THREE | IDEA GENERATING

DISCUSSION

- What stories need to be told?
- Is there a story that could be reimagined?
- Is there a topic/theme that could/should be further examined through playwriting?

ACTIVITY | BRAINSTORMING IDEAS

Pass around multiple images of settings. Have each student write a three sentence summary of a potential story for each location.

Pass around images of random people – have students create a character description of these people and what their story might be.

5 MINUTE WRITING

Set a timer for five minutes. Have everyone write down as many themes, first lines, ideas, or other brainstorms as possible without self-editing. They don't have to be good, but have them try to fill a page. After writing for five minutes, have them go through and circle five of the ideas.

DAY FOUR | STRUCTURE & OUTLINING

TERMS | *BASIC STORY ELEMENTS & STRUCTURE*

CHARACTER: A human (or animal) represented in a play. Each actor plays a character, even if that character doesn't have a name in the script. An actor may play many characters. Characters want things and have objectives.

CONFLICT: Obstacles that are in the way of what the character wants – things the character struggles against.

SETTING: The location, environment, and time period of a play.

RISING ACTION: Usually the middle point of the plot, consisting of complications and discoveries that create conflict within the play.

CLIMAX: The peak of the dramatic action in a play, usually the turning point in the plot.

RESOLUTION: A solution or compromise has been made to end the main conflict in the plot.

STAKES: Something of value to the character that can be risked or lost, often adding tension to the plot or driving a character to work toward the goal of protecting said stakes over the course of the story. These are often the things a character stands to lose or gain based on their choices through the plot.

BACKSTORY: A narrative providing a history or background context, especially for a character or situation in a story.

HAND OUT THE STORY ARC REFERENCE SHEET (SEE RESOURCE 2)

ACTIVITY

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION WORKSHEET

Create a dynamic character – what do they want?

BULLET POINT/OUTLINE STORY

based on the Story Arc Handout (**RESOURCE 2**)

DAY FIVE | WRITING & EDITING

PAIR & SHARE

- Break off and share your story arc.
- Tell your story in 3 minutes.
- Tell your story in 1 minute.
- Take turns.

FEEDBACK

- One thing I loved and wouldn't change.
- One thing I'm confused about.
- Two questions I have...

**TAKE THE REST OF CLASS TO WRITE A DRAFT AND
GO OVER PITFALLS**

BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITIES

THE OTHER END

Ask the students if they have ever heard someone talking on the telephone and tried to imagine what the other half of the conversation was like? Have them observe a phone conversation taking place and write down what just one person is saying. Then try writing down both sides of the conversation – the side they overheard and the side they imagined. What could be happening? Is there a sense of urgency? What do you notice about how the people speak to each other? Can you guess their relationship?

HOW DO YOU TALK?

As a homework assignment, have students go somewhere in public and **listen** to people talking. The student records/writes down exactly what the people say. Don't edit the ughs and ahs and uh-huhs. You just need a page or two of the dialogue. Make note of the physical responses that people use in their conversation. Students can type these up and share them as a group.

DISCUSSION: Notice how the language can hint at how well people know each other; the language and rhythm can suggest age, backgrounds, and personalities. Notice how the language erupts and interrupts and **repeats**. How listeners help to build the moment, etc.

TV WRITER

Choose a television program, especially one unfamiliar to your students, and watch for 5 to 10 minutes with the sound muted. While they are watching, they should write down what they think the characters are saying to each other. Encourage them to practice first without writing. While they are making up the dialogue, have them consider the following questions:

- Who are these people?
- What do they want from each other (if anything)?
- What are their relationships to one another?
- Do they have a conflict?
- What interesting things will happen to them?
- How will it all end?

CREATING | CHARACTERS FROM IMAGES

Break the class into groups and have them appoint a scribe in each group to record the information generated. Pass out one photograph or magazine picture – containing two to four people in it – to each group. Instruct the students to examine the photographs, looking for “clues” as to what type of characters these people are, and what type of situation they are in.

- 1 GIVE EACH CHARACTER A** Name • Age • Occupation • Short Family Biography • Distinguishing characteristics (physical or personality-based)
- 2** Briefly describe the relationship between the characters.
- 3** Note how each character perceives the situation and what they want out of it – at least one paragraph for each character. (Remind students that each character will have their own point of view about what is happening and will think that they know best. Make each conflict specific to the character.)

BREAK THE GROUPS UP

And make sure each group member has a copy of the character information

- 1** The students should write a story in narrative form, three paragraphs in length and including all the characters in some way.
- 2** Transform the story into three scenes with dialogue.
- 3** It's important for the students to stick to the three paragraphs and three-scene format. It encourages them to have a definite beginning, middle, and end.

VARIATIONS

In the first scene, have the characters reveal what they are thinking, but have one of them lie. Not only must the conflict be solved, but also the lie must be revealed in three scenes.

In the first scene, all the characters are present simultaneously, and we learn the problem. The second scene has one of the characters delivering a monologue in which they relay to the audience a plan to address the problem. The last scene will be the implementation of that plan, and its success or failure.

ROUND ROBIN

Have students sit in a circle. As a group, you will work together to tell a story. Have each student add one sentence at a time. Make sure that the group is sticking to the same plot and building off of what each student contributes. Once you have made it around the circle, invite students to complete the "Plot Diagram" to show the story arc. Encourage students to add on to the story if necessary. Feel free to use some of the first lines below as a way to get started:

- My ride was late.
- I was minding my own business.
- Yeah, the storm really hit us by surprise this time.
- You shouldn't have done that.
- They're from out of town, just passing through.
- Crumbling before my very eyes.
- Get a grip. It's not the end of the world.
- When will I see you again?
- It's not fair.
- Did you hear that?
- I don't understand what you mean.
- It's now or never.
- Won't you say anything at all?
- Go ahead. Be like that.
- Can we talk about this?

NEUTRAL SCENE

Use these neutral scenes/ambiguous dialogue to create character relationships. Explore how the dialogue changes based on the different relationships and circumstances.

ORGANIZING & OUTLINING ACTIVITIES

QUESTIONS FOR THE PLAYWRIGHT TO ASK

- What happened before this?
- What happens next?
- When does the scene take place?
- What can be done in this scene to further the story/plot?
- Why does this action have to happen here?
- What story does the scene tell?
- What information do we get from this scene?
- How do the characters feel in this scene? How might they show it through their actions?
- What is this character doing when...?
- What else could this character have been doing?
- What other things could happen in this scene?

CONFLICT SCHEME

List the characters' names, their goals, and the obstacles in their way.
Be specific and concise.

	<i>CHARACTER</i>	<i>GOAL</i>	<i>OBSTACLES</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

REVISING ACTIVITIES

FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Have students work in pairs or small groups. Each student should read another person's work and answer some of the following questions:

- What did you like about the piece?
- What's the major conflict? How strong is it?
- What's the dramatic action of the play?
- Did anything confuse you about the play?
- What's the most important image or moment you like in the piece?
- Did the characters all sound the same or like different people with distinct voices?
- What did each character want?
- Are they going after something that is critically important to them?
- Were the stakes high enough?
- What sections made you cringe?
- Which ones surprised you?
- Explain what the play is about in one or two sentences.
- Is there anything you'd like to see more of? (A more developed relationship? More specific behavior from a character? Stronger needs?)
- Were there any loose ends? (Is something introduced in the play that drifts away or isn't mentioned again?)

READ ALOUD

Plays are meant to be listened to and seen, not simply read on a page. Have students volunteer to do a reading of each other's play. Have students offer moments that they loved, things they are curious or wonder about, and ask if the playwright would like to hear about any moments of confusion. Remind students that any feedback they are given is theirs to interpret, take or leave.

COMMON PROBLEMS

- 1. NARRATION** — Often the student playwright will make use of a narrator that speaks to the audience as characters do. This should be avoided. The story is best told through the revelation of information by dialogue and action – what the characters say and do – **show**, don't tell.
- 2. TOO LITTLE/TOO MUCH INFORMATION** — The whole story is not shared with the audience or there are details important to the story that are presented or are missing (this can be difficult to judge)
- 3. RECYCLED LINES** — Dialogue consists of recycled lines from movies, books, etc.
- 4. TOO LITTLE DIALOGUE** — Try having students create a scene with no action; where we must learn about a character only through what they or the other characters say.
- 5. CHARACTERS AREN'T UNIQUE** — They do not have an individual way of speaking. This is one of the most common problems for new playwrights – every character sounds the same, uses the same slang, dialect, etc. In this case, the characters' voices are often identical to the playwright's manner of speaking.
- 6. BELIEVABILITY** — The characters do or say unbelievable things, behaving contrary to their nature without causation.
- 7. TOO MANY CHARACTERS** — There are characters present who are unnecessary to the story being told. A surplus of characters can confuse or muddle the story and burden the playwright as well.
- 8. CHARACTERS NOT FULLY DEVELOPED** — Characters are incomplete or not “whole,” which prevents people from connecting with them and caring what happens to them.
- 9. STOCK CHARACTERS** — Students choose to use characters from other stories, but do not add anything new or make a big enough change to warrant that choice.
- 10. NO CONFLICT** — There are no obstacles to characters' wants. The obstacles they are presented with are easily overcome. The problems are minor and the resulting conflict lacks consequence.
- 11. CONFLICT RESOLVED TOO QUICKLY** — The change the characters present is not believable because it occurs too soon or too easily. The conflict does not sufficiently challenge the characters.
- 12. UNFOCUSED CONFLICT** — It is unclear what the conflict is about and/or why the characters are involved in it. Perhaps there are too many characters or not enough dialogue.
- 13. CONFLICT DOES NOT PROGRESS** — The central conflict or dramatic action does not affect change in the scene. Change happens independent of the main conflict of the play.
- 14. MORE SCENES NEEDED** — More scenes are needed to understand how the conflict/plot developed to this point, what happens in the scene, or what happens next.
- 15. UNNECESSARY INFORMATION** — Information provided in the scene does not help us learn about the characters in a meaningful way. Excessive details muddy the story and detract from the plot line.
- 16. SETTINGS CHANGE TOO FAST** — There are too many mini-scenes which might be more effective if combined into a few larger scenes in one or two locations.
- 17. SETTING IS NOT SPECIFIC ENOUGH** — More details are needed to let the audience know the location – character reference, set dressing, etc.
- 18. SPECIAL EFFECTS** — The scenes are more feasible for film or television (i.e. they contain car chases, jumping from one elaborate location to another, large explosions, etc.)

RUBRIC CATEGORIES

- CREATIVITY
- STORYTELLING
- STRUCTURE
- CHARACTERS
- LANGUAGE
- THEME
- PRODUCIBILITY/
THEATRICALITY

LIST OF WHAT A STORY NEEDS BY PIXAR'S EMMA COATS

1. You admire a character for trying more than for their successes.
2. You gotta keep in mind what's interesting to you as an audience, not what's fun to do as a writer. They can be very different.
3. Trying for theme is important, but you won't see what the story is actually about until you're at the end of it. Now rewrite.
4. Once upon a time there was _____. Every day, _____. One day _____. Because of that, _____. Because of that, _____. Until finally _____.
5. Simplify. Focus. Combine characters. Hop over detours. You'll feel like you're losing valuable stuff but it sets you free.
6. What is your character good at, comfortable with? Throw the polar opposite at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?
7. Come up with your ending before you figure out your middle. Seriously. Endings are hard, get yours working up front.
8. Finish your story, let go even if it's not perfect. In an ideal world you have both, but move on. Do better next time.
9. When you're stuck, make a list of what **WOULDN'T** happen next. Lots of times the material to get you unstuck will show up.
10. Pull apart the stories you like. What you like in them is a part of you; you've got to recognize it before you can use it.
11. Putting it on paper lets you start fixing it. If it stays in your head, a perfect idea, you'll never share it with anyone.
12. Discount the first thing that comes to mind. And the second, third, fourth, fifth – get the obvious out of the way. Surprise yourself.
13. Give your characters opinions. Passive/malleable might seem likable to you as you write, but it's poison to the audience.
14. Why must you tell **THIS** story? What's the belief burning within you that your story feeds off of? That's the heart of it.
15. If you were your character, in this situation, how would you feel? Honesty lends credibility to unbelievable situations.
16. What are the stakes? Give us reason to root for the character. What happens if they don't succeed? Stack the odds against them.
17. No work is ever wasted. If it's not working, let go and move on – it'll come back around to be useful later.
18. You have to know yourself: the difference between doing your best & fussing. Story is testing, not refining.
19. Coincidences to get characters into trouble are great; coincidences to get them out of it are cheating.
20. **EXERCISE:** take the building blocks of a movie you dislike. How do you rearrange them into what you **DO** like?
21. You gotta identify with your situation/characters, you can't just write 'cool'. What would make **YOU** act that way?
22. What's the essence of your story? Most economical telling of it? If you know that, you can build out from there.

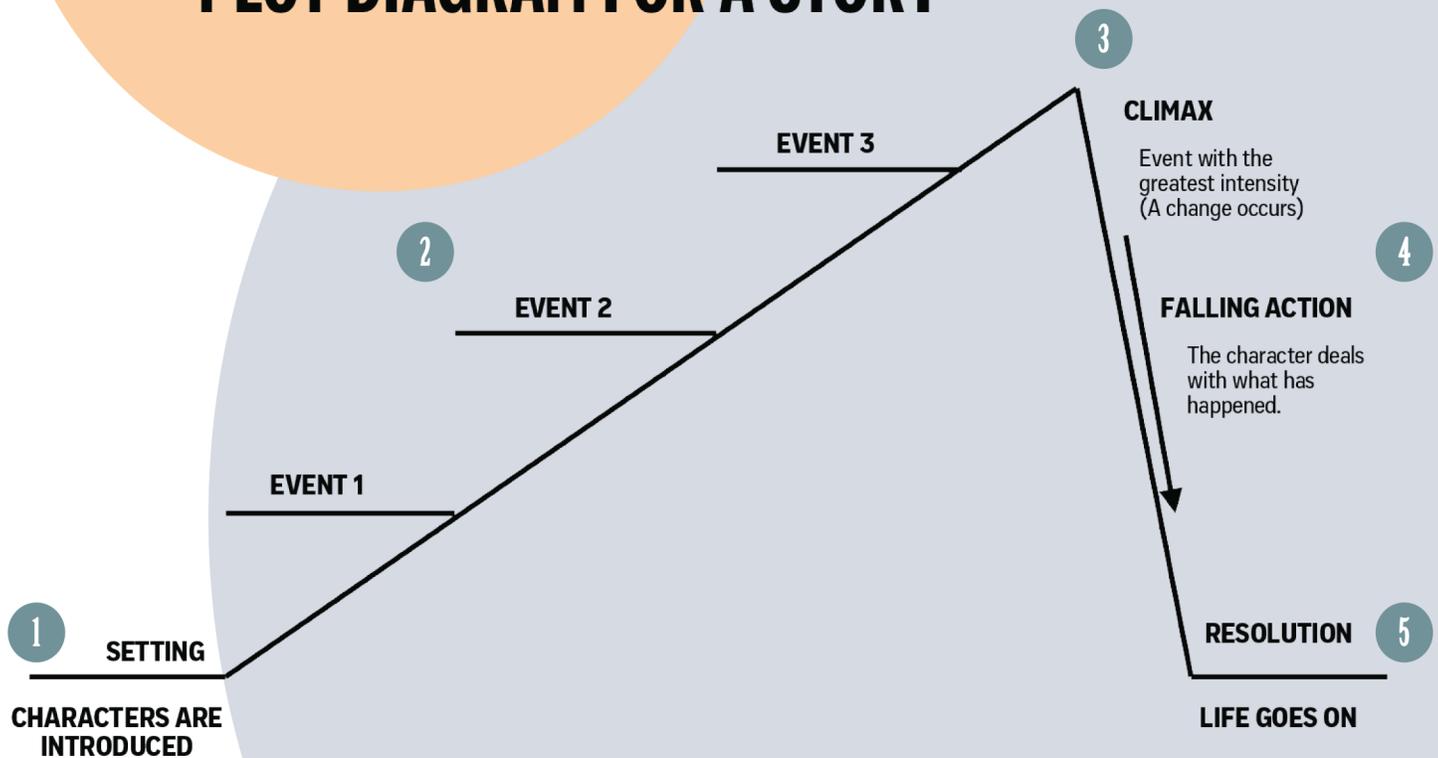
RESOURCE 1 | BASIC THEATER TERMS

- **CHARACTER** — A human (or animal) represented in a play. Each actor plays a character, even if that character doesn't have a name in the script. An actor may play many characters. Characters want things and have objectives.
- **DIALOGUE** — Conversation between two or more characters.
- **CONFLICT** — Obstacles that are in the way of what the character wants – things the characters struggle against.
- **SCENE** — A section of a play in one particular location and time.
- **STAGE DIRECTIONS** — Information from the playwright to the actors, technicians, and others to explain any specifics about the physical space or how the characters should move through it, along with any information that is not conveyed through dialogue but rather through action.
- **SETTING** — The location, environment, and time period of a play.
- **CHARACTER DESCRIPTION** — A character's life story the playwright creates.
- **MONOLOGUE** — A large block of lines spoken by a single character. When spoken alone onstage or directly to an audience, a monologue reveals the inner thoughts of a character.
- **DRAMATIC ACTION** — The action in a scene that presents a clear and significant meaning to the audience. It contains conflict, tension, and character motivation to help drive story.
- **BEAT** — A moment of silence and stillness during which a character reacts to something that has been said or done within a scene.
- **PLOT** — The structure of a play, including exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.
- **EXPOSITION** — Part of the plot that provides important background information on components of the play.
- **RISING ACTION** — Usually the middle part of a plot, consisting of complications and discoveries that create conflict.
- **CLIMAX** — The peak of the dramatic action in a play, usually the turning point in a plot.
- **FALLING ACTION** — The series of events following the climax of a plot.
- **RESOLUTION** — A solution/compromise has been made to end the main conflict in a plot.
- **SOLILOQUY** — A monologue used to reveal the inner most thoughts of a character, spoken aloud to one's self.

RESOURCE 2 | PLOT DIAGRAM

WHAT MAKES A STORY, A STORY?

PLOT DIAGRAM FOR A STORY



- 1 BEGINNING** — We meet the characters of the play and learn a bit about them.
- 2 RISING ACTION** — The series of events that lead to the climax. There can be many scenes that are part of the rising action.
- 3 CLIMAX** — The point in the story where tensions are at their highest.
- 4 FALLING ACTION** — The scene(s) where we see what happens after the climax
- 5 END/RESOLUTION** — Wrap up of the story.

PIXAR'S EMMA COATS RECOMMENDS THIS STRUCTURE:

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS ____. EVERY DAY, ____. ONE DAY ____. BECAUSE OF THAT, ____. BECAUSE OF THAT, ____. UNTIL FINALLY ____.

RESOURCE 3 | CHARACTER SHEET

Character Name

Age

Do you have siblings?

What is your favorite ice cream flavor?

Favorite hobby?

What's your favorite place in the world?

Favorite color?

What's in your pocket right now?

Last thing that made you laugh?

What book are you reading right now/What was the last book you read?

What's your favorite candy?

What's your favorite vegetable?

Where do you see yourself ten years from now?

Describe yourself in three words.

What's the weirdest dream you've ever had?

What do you want more than anything in the world?

RESOURCE 4 | NEUTRAL SCENES

AMBIGUOUS DIALOGUE 1

A: I am going to the store to buy some food.
B: I tell the truth even when I lie.
A: Who's that on the phone?
B: I love being the richest person in New York City.
A: Excuse me, that's my seat.
B: Bye, I'm going to the movies.
A: How about dinner on Friday at 8:00?
B: I've had enough of this.
A: You took my seat.
B: Why did you do this to me?
A: No, you can't have that.
B: So, what's going on here?

AMBIGUOUS DIALOGUE 2

A: Hi.
B: Hello.
A: How's everything?
B: Fine, I guess.
A: Do you know what time it is?
B: No, not exactly.
A: Well?
B: Well what?
A: What did you do last night?
B: What do you mean?
A: What did you do last night?
B: Nothing.
A: Nothing?
B: I said, nothing.
A: Sorry I asked.
B: That's okay.

RESOURCE 4 | NEUTRAL SCENES CONTINUED

AMBIGUOUS DIALOGUE 3

A: Excuse me.

B: What?

A: Excuse me, do you have the time?

B: You mean, like what time it is?

A: Yes, of course. What else would that mean?

B: It could mean that you want to know if I have the time to do something for you?

A: No.

B: Sure it could.

A: I mean, no, I don't mean that.

B: What?

A: What you said.

B: When?

A: Just now...about if you have the time to do something for me.

B: I don't have the time to do anything for you.

A: That's fine. All I wanted to know...Hey!

B: What?

A: Why are you doing that?

B: I just felt like it. I had the time to do it. I did it for myself.

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MORE AND TO SEE
VIDEOS OF THE 2018
WINNERS IN ACTION

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