

Murder Mystery

Write it, build it, light it, perform it

Mr. Guidry • Drama at Ravenswood • Chicago Public Schools

Thirty-nine class days, from an empty stage to a live audience.

The road map

Eight phases. Thirty-nine days. One audience.

PHASE	DAYS	DATES	WHAT HAPPENS
1 • Ensemble and the genre	1-7	Aug 27 to Sep 4	Build the company. Learn how a mystery actually works.
2 • Building our world	8-11	Sep 8 to Sep 11	Pitch it, vote on it, lock it. Then fill the room with people.
3 • Characters, motives, jobs	12-17	Sep 14 to Sep 21	Who are you, what do you want, and what do you do around here?
4 • Plot and research	18-21	Sep 22 to Sep 25	Beginning, middle, end. Clues planted, clues paid off.
5 • Script and design sprint	22-26	Sep 28 to Oct 2	The slow part. Writers write. Every department builds.
6 • Blocking and build	27-31	Oct 5 to Oct 9	On your feet, pencil in hand. Script locks this week.
7 • Runs and tech	32-35	Oct 13 to Oct 16	Off book. Full runs. Cues, shifts, and the prompt book.
8 • Dress and performance	36-39	Oct 19 to Oct 22	Tech, dress, final dress, and an audience.

Two days off inside the run. Labor Day, Monday September 7, and Monday October 12. Both are worth checking against your building’s calendar before you print anything. It’s also worth planning on losing three or four more days to drills, assemblies, and testing. Phase 5 is where the slack lives.

The deadline wall

Post this on day one. These dates do not move.

DAY	DATE	WHAT IS DUE
6	Thu Sep 3	Mystery analysis packet, part 1
10	Thu Sep 10	Theme locked by class vote
13	Tue Sep 15	Character sheets complete
16	Fri Sep 18	Top three job choices submitted
17	Mon Sep 21	Jobs assigned, job board goes up
21	Fri Sep 25	Every department: one visible first draft
26	Fri Oct 2	Act 1 dialogue, revised
30	Thu Oct 8	SCRIPT LOCK. One hundred percent draft.
32	Tue Oct 13	Actors off book for Act 1
35	Fri Oct 16	Set and props build complete
37	Tue Oct 20	Dress rehearsal, costumes final
39	Thu Oct 22	PERFORMANCE

How our class runs

The same shape every day, so nobody has to guess.

SEGMENT	TIME	WHAT HAPPENS
Open	5-8 min	A game. Wakes up your body, your voice, and your listening.
Status	5-6 min	Each department, sixty seconds. Red, yellow, or green.
The work	25-32 min	Whatever today's slide says. Everyone has a task.
Close	5-7 min	Log what you finished. Notes. Sometimes Statue.

Three things that are always true.

- **Bring a pencil.** Scripts get marked up constantly. Pen is a lie.
- **Check the job board.** It is the truth about what your department owes today.
- **Log your work.** Two sentences in your slides. That is your record.

Daily plans

PHASE 1

DAY 1 THURSDAY, AUGUST 27

Welcome to the crime scene

OBJECTIVE I can explain what our company is building over the next 39 class days and name three ways I will help it succeed.

AGENDA

- **8 min.** Welcome and who's in the room. Your name, and one mystery you love: book, show, movie, game.
- **10 min.** Drama room guidelines. How we treat the space, the tools, and each other.
- **10 min.** The serious talk. Thirty-nine class days. One audience. One shot. What responsibility looks like in here.
- **12 min.** Game: West Wind Blows.
- **8 min.** The road map. Empty stage today. Live audience on Thursday, October 22.

NOTE

Exit ticket on your notecard: one thing you want to be great at by October.

DAY 2 FRIDAY, AUGUST 28

The language of the crime

OBJECTIVE I can define victim, motive, clue, red herring, and alibi, and find each one in a short mystery.

AGENDA

- **8 min.** Game: Wink Murder.
- **12 min.** Mystery vocabulary. Victim, motive, clue, red herring, alibi, suspect, detective.
- **18 min.** Short case read. Mark every clue. Then decide which ones are lying to you.
- **10 min.** Share out. Which is harder to write well, a real clue or a good red herring?

NOTE

Keep your vocabulary sheet. We use these seven words for the next eight weeks.

DAY 3 MONDAY, AUGUST 31

Yes, and... somebody dies

OBJECTIVE I can build a story with my classmates by adding on to their ideas instead of taking over.

AGENDA

- **8 min.** Game: One Word Story, murder style.
- **20 min.** Game: Mafia. Learn the rules. Learn to lie with a straight face.
- **10 min.** Debrief. What made a lie believable? What gave somebody away?
- **8 min.** Closer: Statue.

NOTE

Mafia is our thinking game. We will play it all quarter. Get good at it.

DAY 4 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

Cite your evidence

OBJECTIVE I can name a suspect from a case file and defend my choice with evidence from the text.

AGENDA

- **8 min.** Game: Mafia.
- **20 min.** Case file: Who Hurt Alex Chen? Find the criminal. Then find the motive.
- **12 min.** The prosecution. Claim, then evidence, then reasoning. Two teams argue two suspects.
- **5 min.** Verdict and reveal.

NOTE

A theory with no evidence is a guess. Same rule will apply to our script.

DAY 5 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

How a mystery works

OBJECTIVE I can analyze how a mystery keeps its audience guessing.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game: Murder Chase.
- **25 min.** Screening: *Clue*. Analysis packet, part 1. Track clues, red herrings, and suspects as you watch.
- **15 min.** The rules of the genre. Knox's ten rules of crime fiction. Which do we keep? Which do we break on purpose?

NOTE

Mystery analysis packet, part 1 is due at the end of class tomorrow.

DAY 6 THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

Stealing like an artist

OBJECTIVE I can finish my mystery analysis and name one structural technique I want in our show.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **22 min.** Finish *Clue* and the analysis packet.
- **10 min.** “One technique I’m stealing.” Write it, post it on the wall. We build our show off this list.
- **10 min.** Theme brainstorm launch. Times of year, special events, spoofs, organizations.

NOTE

DUE TODAY: mystery analysis packet, part 1.

DAY 7 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

Where are we trapped?

OBJECTIVE I can generate theme ideas and build on other people’s ideas without shutting them down.

AGENDA

- **6 min.** Game: Kitty in the Corner.
- **18 min.** Theme brainstorm, round robin. Every idea gets written down. Nobody vetoes anything yet.
- **15 min.** Flesh it out. Setting, time period, why they can’t leave, who is in the room.
- **8 min.** Narrow to six. Closer: Statue.

NOTE

Six themes move forward. Pitch groups form Tuesday.

PHASE 2

DAY 8 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

Build the pitch

OBJECTIVE I can build a pitch that names our setting, the trapped situation, and why an audience would care.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **8 min.** Pitch groups and requirements. Setting, time period, why they can't leave, the mood, one killer image.
- **30 min.** Pitch work time. Make us see it. Specific details beat general vibes every time.
- **5 min.** Status check.

NOTE

Pitches are Wednesday. Every person in the group speaks.

DAY 9 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

Pitch day

OBJECTIVE I can present my group's pitch clearly and support it with specific details.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **8 min.** Final polish.
- **28 min.** The pitches. Four minutes per group. Everybody speaks.
- **7 min.** Audience notes. For each pitch: strongest hook, and biggest hole.

NOTE

Bring your notes tomorrow. You are voting for the best show, not for your own idea.

DAY 10 THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

The vote

OBJECTIVE I can vote based on what will make the strongest show rather than on whose idea it was.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **8 min.** Final questions for the pitch groups.
- **10 min.** The vote. Our theme locks today.
- **15 min.** Locking the frame. Where, when, why they can't leave, the mood of the room.
- **7 min.** Exit: name one character this world needs.

NOTE

This decision is permanent. Everything else gets built on top of it.

DAY 11 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

Who's in the room?

OBJECTIVE I can create a character who belongs in our world and wants something specific.

AGENDA

- **6 min.** Game: Murder Bunny.
- **10 min.** Character types. Guests, hosts, staff, crashers, frenemies, the one nobody invited.
- **22 min.** Character sheet, part 1. Name, role, what they want, what they're hiding.
- **8 min.** Closer: Statue.

NOTE

A character with no want is furniture. Give yours something to chase.

PHASE 3

DAY 12 MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

Put it in your body

OBJECTIVE I can play my character's body, voice, and status, not just their name.

AGENDA

- **6 min.** Character statues. Freeze as your character. We read you and guess who you are.
- **15 min.** Character sheet, part 2. Body, voice, status, signature line.
- **18 min.** Enemy / friend. Improvise the scene using your character as the source material.
- **6 min.** Share out.

NOTE

If we can't tell your character apart from you, keep working.

DAY 13 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

Introduce yourself

OBJECTIVE I can present my character and explain how they connect to at least two other characters.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **10 min.** Finalize character sheets.
- **22 min.** Character presentations. Sixty seconds each, in character.
- **10 min.** The relationship web. We map it on the board. Every character needs at least two ties.

NOTE

DUE TODAY: completed character sheet, parts 1 and 2.

DAY 14 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

Everyone has a reason

OBJECTIVE I can write a motive that a real person would actually act on.

AGENDA

- **6 min.** Game: Cat and Mouse.
- **18 min.** Motives sheet. What would make your character lie? Steal? Kill?
- **16 min.** Motives mingle. Find two characters who share a secret with yours. Write it down.
- **8 min.** Share out.

NOTE

Weak motives make a boring mystery. Push past your first idea.

DAY 15 THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

Who makes a show?

OBJECTIVE I can explain what one theatre job does and why the show fails without it.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game: Murdle.
- **8 min.** Production organizational chart. Every job on the chart, and who answers to whom.
- **20 min.** Job jigsaw, part 1. Read your job. List what it owns. Find its deadlines.
- **15 min.** Jigsaw groups. Teach your job to your group. They take notes on you.

NOTE

Tomorrow you rank your top three. Come in knowing what the jobs actually do.

DAY 16 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

Where do I fit?

OBJECTIVE I can rank my job choices and justify my top pick with evidence about my own strengths.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **20 min.** Job walk. A station for every department. Ask questions. Take notes.
- **15 min.** On your notecard. Your name, your top three choices, and why for your number one.
- **8 min.** Closer: Statue.

NOTE

Writers are the directors. Actor is a choice, but everyone will be an actor.

DAY 17 MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

You have a job

OBJECTIVE I can name my job's first three responsibilities and my department's first deliverable.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **12 min.** Job assignments, and the job board goes up.
- **12 min.** Portfolio packets. Find your role's section. Read it. Highlight your deadlines.
- **15 min.** First team huddle. What does your department owe by Friday? Write it on the board.

NOTE

The job board is the truth. Check it at the start of every class.

PHASE 4

DAY 18 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

Beginning, middle, end

OBJECTIVE I can outline a beginning, middle, and end that plants clues and pays them off.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game: Wink Murder.
- **10 min.** Set the stage. Setting, time period, mood.
- **25 min.** Outline the plot. Beginning: who they are, why they're here, first red herrings. Middle: conflict rises, the murder, a pile of clues. End: the big reveal, then the resolutions.
- **8 min.** Share out.

NOTE

Every clue you plant, you have to pay off. Write down both halves.

DAY 19 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

Break it into scenes

OBJECTIVE I can break our story into scenes and say who is onstage and what changes in each one.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **22 min.** Structure the scenes. Location, who is onstage, the action, what changes by the end of it.
- **13 min.** The mystery map. The crime, the clues, the red herrings, the solution.
- **8 min.** Present and combine ideas.

NOTE

If nothing changes in a scene, we cut the scene.

DAY 20 THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Research day

OBJECTIVE I can find and organize the research my team actually needs to build this world.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice.
- **18 min.** Setting research. Furniture, clothing, slang, technology, music, humor. Upload to the shared slideshow.
- **17 min.** Job research, three lists. What I know about my job, what I don't know, and what I don't know that I don't know.
- **8 min.** Share out. One image that changes how we see the show.

NOTE

Share your research doc with me before you leave today.

DAY 21 FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

First drafts, every department

OBJECTIVE I can turn my research into a first sketch, list, or draft that my department can actually use.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game choice. • **28 min.** Department work time. • **12 min.** All-department share out. • **5 min.** Closer: Statue.

DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY	DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY
Writers	Scene 1 dialogue, first pass	Set	First sketches and a rough groundplan
Props	Master props list. Ask the writers.	Sound	SFX list and underscore playlist
Costumes	Costume inventory. What do we own?	Lights	Light plot start, moving head research
Publicity	Poster draft and save-the-date design	Actors	Character-in-the-world improv scores

NOTE

DUE TODAY: every department brings one thing we can look at.

PHASE 5

DAY 22 MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

Writers write

OBJECTIVE I can write dialogue that sounds like my character and moves the scene forward.

AGENDA

- **6 min.** Actor-led warm-up. • **6 min.** Status update. • **30 min.** Work time. • **6 min.** Log it.

DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY	DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY
Writers	Scenes 1 and 2 dialogue	Set	Finalize the groundplan with me
Props	Sort the list into build, buy, borrow	Sound	Find underscore for the opening
Costumes	Sketches or reference pictures per character	Lights	Read the manual chapter on patching
Publicity	Poster to final draft	Actors	Table work. Whose scene are you in?

NOTE

Heads up, writers. This part is tedious. Be patient. It is supposed to feel slow.

DAY 23 TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

Take the note

OBJECTIVE I can give a specific, useful note and take one without getting defensive.

AGENDA

- **6 min.** Warm-up. • **8 min.** How to give a note. • **28 min.** Work time. • **6 min.** Log it.

DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY	DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY
Writers	Scenes 2 and 3 dialogue	Set	Flat designs and paint elevations
Props	Begin construction on the big three	Sound	Build the cue list off the outline
Costumes	Pull pieces, mark what's missing	Lights	Begin the light plot on paper
Publicity	Posters up in the building	Actors	Scene work with a writer-director

NOTE

“I don’t like it” is not a note. “The clue in scene 2 lands too early” is a note.

DAY 24 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

Deadlines are promises

OBJECTIVE I can meet a deadline that my teammates are counting on.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up. • **6 min.** Red, yellow, green. • **30 min.** Work time. • **7 min.** Log it.

DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY	DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY
Writers	Scenes 3 and 4. Act 1 dialogue due Friday.	Set	Get the flats and bases, start building
Props	Construction continues	Sound	Compile the playlist, list every SFX
Costumes	Organize by character, note the gaps	Lights	Patch dimmers, hang what you can
Publicity	Save-the-dates go out this week	Actors	Memorize what is already written

NOTE

ACT 1 DIALOGUE IS DUE FRIDAY. Everything downstream depends on it.

Hearing it out loud

OBJECTIVE I can read our script aloud and identify what will confuse an audience.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Game: Wink Murder.
- **25 min.** Cold read, Act 1. Whole company, out loud, no stopping for mistakes.
- **12 min.** Notes from the room. Where did we get lost? Did you catch the clue? Who disappeared?
- **6 min.** Back to department work.

NOTE

Writers, today’s notes are your revision list. Nothing matters more than that list.

Revise

OBJECTIVE I can revise my work based on what the read-through revealed.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up. · **30 min.** Work time. · **8 min.** Job board check. · **5 min.** Closer: Statue.

DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY	DEPARTMENT	WHAT YOU OWE TODAY
Writers	Act 1 revisions, scenes 5 and 6 draft	Set	Build day. Flats up, bases secured.
Props	Build day. Finish the hero props.	Sound	Record or edit your custom SFX
Costumes	Fittings begin. Measure everyone.	Lights	Focus session with me
Publicity	Program layout and ticket plan	Actors	Off-book work on Act 1 scenes

NOTE

DUE TODAY: revised Act 1 dialogue. Blocking starts Monday.

PHASE 6

DAY 27 MONDAY, OCTOBER 5

Scoring the script

OBJECTIVE I can explain the difference between blocking and acting, and record my blocking in my script.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **10 min.** Scoring your script. How to write blocking down so you can still read it three weeks from now.
- **26 min.** Blocking: scene 1. Writer-directors lead. Everyone offstage builds and paints.
- **7 min.** Notes.

NOTE

Bring a pencil every single day from here on. Pen is a lie.

DAY 28 TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6

On your feet

OBJECTIVE I can walk my blocking for our opening scenes without being told where to go.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **30 min.** Blocking: scenes 2 and 3. Offstage: build, paint, prop construction.
- **8 min.** Notes.
- **5 min.** Log it.

NOTE

Write your blocking down as we set it. We are not going to do it twice.

DAY 29 WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7

Finding the body

OBJECTIVE I can make a strong, specific choice about how my character reacts to the crime.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **30 min.** Blocking: scenes 4 and 5, the murder. Offstage: build and paint continue.
- **8 min.** Notes. Ten people cannot all gasp. Find your own reaction and commit to it.
- **5 min.** Log it.

NOTE

Safety first on any staged violence. Slow it down until it is exactly right.

DAY 30 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8

Script lock

OBJECTIVE Writers: I can deliver a finished script. Crew: I can name every prop, cue, and costume our show needs.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **8 min.** SCRIPT LOCK. One hundred percent draft due today. No new lines after this.
- **27 min.** Blocking: scenes 6 and 7. Crew: cross-check every needs list against the locked script.
- **8 min.** Notes.

NOTE

Anything not on your list by tomorrow does not exist on opening night.

DAY 31 FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9

First stumble-through

OBJECTIVE I can run my scenes start to finish with my blocking in my body and my script in my hand.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **12 min.** Finish blocking: scene 8.
- **22 min.** Stumble-through, Act 1. Keep going. Do not stop for mistakes.
- **6 min.** Notes. Closer: Statue.

NOTE

OFF BOOK FOR ACT 1 ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13. Use the long weekend.

PHASE 7

DAY 32 TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13

Off book

OBJECTIVE I can perform my Act 1 scenes without holding my script.

AGENDA

- **6 min.** Actor-led warm-up.
- **10 min.** Line-thru. Act 1, off book, sitting in a circle.
- **22 min.** Run Act 1. On your feet, off book. Offstage: paint and finish props.
- **7 min.** Notes.

NOTE

Calling “line!” is allowed. Reading off the page is not.

DAY 33 WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14

The whole thing

OBJECTIVE I can run the entire show and take useful notes on my own performance.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **28 min.** Full run-through number 1. Start to finish. No stopping.
- **10 min.** Notes.
- **5 min.** Crew: cue sheets started.

NOTE

Stage manager starts the prompt book today. Every cue and every shift goes in it.

DAY 34 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15

Cues

OBJECTIVE I can call or take a cue at exactly the right moment.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **12 min.** Paper tech. The stage manager calls every cue out loud. Board ops mark their scripts.
- **24 min.** Run with sound and light cues. No scenery shifts yet, cues only.
- **7 min.** Notes.

NOTE

A late cue reads as a mistake to the audience. Know your line before it comes.

DAY 35 FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16

Shifts

OBJECTIVE I can move set and props quietly, in the dark, in under sixty seconds.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **12 min.** Choreograph the scene shifts. Who moves what, where it lands, and who gets out of the way.
- **22 min.** Full run with shifts.
- **8 min.** Notes. Publicity: final house and ticket plan.

NOTE

The audience should never watch us solve a problem. Rehearse the shift.

PHASE 8

DAY 36 MONDAY, OCTOBER 19

Tech rehearsal

OBJECTIVE I can hold my performance together while tech is being added around me.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **32 min.** Tech rehearsal, cue to cue. We will stop constantly. Stay ready, stay quiet, stay kind.
- **6 min.** Notes.
- **5 min.** Preset check. Everything back to its opening position before you leave.

NOTE

Patience today is the job. The crew is learning the show in real time.

DAY 37 TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

Dress rehearsal

OBJECTIVE I can perform in full costume and stay in character when something goes wrong.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **32 min.** Dress rehearsal. Full costume, props, lights, sound. No stopping.
- **6 min.** Notes.
- **5 min.** Front of house walk-through. Tickets, programs, seating, where the audience enters.

NOTE

Costume problems get solved TODAY, not tomorrow. Tell your coordinator now.

DAY 38 WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21

Final dress

OBJECTIVE I can identify and fix the last thing standing between us and a great show.

AGENDA

- **5 min.** Warm-up.
- **30 min.** Final dress, no stops. Treat it as the show. Because it is.
- **6 min.** Fix list only. One note per person: what are you changing tomorrow?
- **7 min.** House prep and company circle. Set the audience space, ticket table, and programs.

NOTE

Tomorrow: call time, costumes on, props preset, before anything else happens.

DAY 39 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22

Performance

OBJECTIVE I can perform for a live audience and support my company from onstage and off.

AGENDA

- **10 min.** Call time and actor-led warm-up.
- **10 min.** Safety check. Props preset. Sound and light check.
- **5 min.** House opens.
- **THE PERFORMANCE**
- Strike and post mortem circle.

NOTE

Thank the people who came. Then thank the people who built it with you.

Reference

Mystery vocabulary

Days 2 to 4. Keep this in your packet all quarter.

WORD	WHAT IT MEANS
Victim	The person the crime was done to.
Motive	The reason a person had to commit the crime.
Clue	Information that helps solve the crime.
Red herring	Information planted to send you the wrong way.
Alibi	Evidence that a suspect could not have done it.
Suspect	Someone the audience has reason to doubt.
Detective	The character who asks the questions we're asking.
The reveal	The moment the audience learns the truth.

Test yourself: point to one of each in the last mystery you watched.

The rules of the genre

Ronald Knox, 1929. Which do we keep? Which do we break on purpose?

1. The criminal appears early, and we are never inside their head.
2. No supernatural or magical solutions.
3. No more than one secret room or passage.
4. No invented poisons or gadgets that need a science lecture.
5. No lucky accident solves the case for the detective.
6. No unexplained hunch that happens to be right.
7. The detective is not the criminal.
8. The detective shows us every clue they find.
9. The sidekick never hides their thinking from us.
10. No surprise twins or doubles unless we were warned.

One of Knox's original ten was a racist stereotype, and it has been replaced here. Rules made in 1929 aren't automatically good rules, which is worth some class discussion.

Who's in the room?

Day 11. Character type bank.

GROUP	WHO THEY ARE
The guests	Best friends · frenemies · couples · secret admirers · the ex · the party crasher
The staff	Host · servers · cook · maid · butler · door person · chauffeur · house staff
The outsiders	The uninvited · the one nobody remembers · the person who shouldn't be alive
The investigators	The detective · the amateur sleuth · the witness · the helper · the skeptic

Every character needs four things.

- **A want.** Something they are chasing in this room, tonight.
- **A secret.** Something they would lie to protect.
- **A tie.** History with at least two other characters.
- **A body.** A way of standing, moving, and speaking that is not yours.

Outlining our plot

Days 18 to 19. The framework we build inside.

- **1. Set the stage.** Setting · time period · mood · why nobody can leave.
- **2. The people.** The victim · four to six suspects · a detective · witnesses and helpers.
- **3. The mystery.** The crime · the clues · the red herrings · the solution.
- **4. The shape.** Beginning: who they are and why they're here, first red herrings. Middle: conflict rises, the murder, a pile of clues. End: the big reveal, then the resolutions.
- **5. The scenes.** For each one: location · who's onstage · the action · what changes.

Rule of the room: every clue you plant, you pay off. Write down both halves.

Who makes a show?

Days 15 to 17. Our production company.

DEPARTMENT	WHAT IT OWNS
Directors and writers	Write the script, cast it, block it, run rehearsal.
Set design and crew	Groundplan, flats, paint, scenery, the build.
Lights and electrics	Light plot, hang, focus, patch, program, operate.
Stage management	The prompt book, every cue, every shift. Runs the show.
Props	Every object an actor touches. Build, buy, or borrow.
Sound	SFX, underscore, playback, levels, cue list.
Production manager	Deadlines, materials, and who is behind.
Costumes and makeup	Inventory, fittings, quick changes, the look.
Publicity and house	Posters, programs, tickets, and the audience.

Writers are the directors. Actor is a choice, but everyone will be an actor.

Theme idea bank

Day 7. Seeds only. Your job is to beat these.

CATEGORY	IDEAS
Trapped places	Remote island · mansion · yacht · cruise ship · train · airport hotel · beach resort · tiny theatre
Events	Fancy gala · masquerade · wedding · birthday · New Year's Eve · graduation · class reunion · the fair
Time periods	Victorian · the 1920s · the 1980s · Y2K · right now
Twists to steal	The missing person is the killer · the person who suspected murder did it · narrated flashback · breaking the fourth wall · a great many red herrings

Whatever we pick has to answer one question: why can't these people just leave?

Post mortem

After the performance. Post mortem means "after death."

1. What moment in the production are you most proud of, and what specific choices led to it?
2. If you could go back to the rehearsal process, what is one thing you'd do differently, and why?
3. What surprised you most about seeing your work in front of an audience?
4. How did collaborating challenge you, and what did you learn about working in multiple roles?

5. What will you carry forward into your next creative project?

Answer in writing first. Then we sit in a circle and say it out loud.