

What's the (Back) Story?

*In this episode, we learn about the earliest documented Jewish play, **Exagoge**. It begins with a character, Moses, telling his own backstory, which covers the history of his family and goes up to his arrival in Midian. This kind of expository monologue serves to help the audience understand who the character is and to have the information needed in order to follow the play. This exercise is designed to guide students through the writing of an expository monologue. It will be most effective for students in grades five and up.*

- 1.) Invite students to choose a figure from history that either interests them individually or that you are studying as a group.
- 2.) Ask the students to list three important incidents/examples from that person's life. This list could include large public activities that the person helped to organize, speeches that the person delivered at historic events, roles that the person performed in films or plays, songs they wrote, art they made, etc.
- 3.) Have each student choose which of the three events they would want to focus on if they were to create a scene.
- 4.) Now, ask the students to research the person's life in a variety of ways, focusing on what occurred before the event that they have chosen. This research could be done by reading books, watching videos, or searching on the internet.
- 5.) Next, instruct the students to make a list of ten occurrences from what they learned that they think are of particular note or interest. They should be sure to include the person's point of origin, the circumstances of their birth (place, time period...), as well as other turning points in their life.
- 6.) Now, have the students write down at least two sensory details for each of the ten items they listed. These can include sights, smells, and sounds that they think might be associated with the item.
- 7.) Then, encourage students to identify to whom this person might wish to tell their tale. They could choose one of the person's friends, a family member, or even a grade school class of students.

- 8.) Using this information, instruct the students to write a monologue in which the person tells their history up to the point of where the incident they identified earlier begins. Invite the students to include at least five of the occurrences and, at minimum one sensory detail for each occurrence.
- 9.) At the end of the monologue, ask the students to write one line that introduces the next "scene." For example:
 - a.) "And then I moved to..."
 - b.) "I didn't know what was coming until I met..."
 - c.) "Suddenly, I found myself in a new place..."
- 10.) Give space for the students to share their work with each other, inviting questions and observations to learn what is being received by the viewers/readers/listeners.