

**16th Street Actors Studio**

Melbourne, Australia

**16th Street Announces \$10,000 Playwriting Prize: The Cooper Prize**

The 16th Street foundation invites writers to apply for a prestigious new prize for dramatic writing.

The Cooper Prize is a new Australian playwriting prize that seeks to populate our cultural conversation with a wide range of artistic perspectives. It seeks to advance the principles of open enquiry, viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement.

All voices willing to tackle the most challenging themes with empathy, intelligence and nuance are welcome and dramatists with heterodox perspectives are especially encouraged to apply.

The winning playwright will receive a \$10,000 prize and their work will be considered for a full commission for production.

All finalists will receive a professionally directed public reading of their submitted scene with professional actors.

*"Freedom of Speech starts with Freedom of Mind. I believe that Culture and the Arts are upstream (more important) than politics and economics. I am delighted to support the 16th Street Foundation through this new writing prize. My hope is that writers will endeavour to be courageous and fiercely fight for the right to speak freely and wisely"* shares Peter Cooper, Founder of Cooper Investors Pty Ltd.

Dramatists are invited to submit an idea for a dramatic production no longer than three-paragraphs, a treatment, and a scene between 10 and 20 minutes in length.

We look forward to receiving a diverse range of submissions that explore the complexities of life and challenge our understanding of the world around us.

Applications are to be submitted to [admin@16thstreet.com.au](mailto:admin@16thstreet.com.au) by **December 15, 2023**.

**Please see below a 'note to the playwright' and attachments.**

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## A note to the playwright

This prize stands as an invitation to write work that speaks to our shared principles of freedom of speech, individual sovereignty, universal human rights and democracy. The Cooper prize is geared to transcend tribalism and politics, to expand the diversity of conversations and repopulate diversity of opinion in dramatic writing.

Unconventional viewpoints are especially welcome.

*“In a world of sinking certainties, people cling to the false security of something to believe they can believe in, such as a Flag, Religion or Tribal Identity, a sort of emotional lifebuoy to support them through these troubled waters. So the rise of Nationalism, Fundamentalism, Identity Politics and the reduction of every issue to the binarity of right or wrong is understandable. It keeps things manageable when we seem to have no capacity to stand at a distance to cope with the complexity of messy life. But life is messy and human beings are complex. And life is complex and human beings are messy. Reducing one another to algorithmic packages is - well - reductive. Boxing anyone who disagrees with us into a simplistic category (“All ...[fill in the blanks] are... [fill in the blank]”) puts us on a hiding to nothing. The space between opposing views appears unbridgeable. There seems no possibility of debate, even argument, only threats, abuse, accusations and the self-righteous upgrading of victimhood. But the unarguable reality is that we are all, every one of us, individual, utterly unique... and though we may to a degree fit into some categories, that’s far from being all we are.”*

- Mike Alfreds

**The following statements from a wide spectrum of creeds and political positions gives an indication of the breadth of the mission.**

**Martin Luther King Jr:**

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

"We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."

**Nelson Mandela:**

"To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

"Unity in diversity is the highest possible attainment of a civilization, a testimony to the most noble possibilities of the human race."

**Mahatma Gandhi:**

"Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes." "An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind."

"Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization."

"Artists have always been at the forefront of social change, challenging the status quo and provoking difficult conversations. Censorship seeks to stifle that impulse, and we can't let that happen." • Leah Purcell

"We need a more open and tolerant approach to the arts, where artists are free to explore difficult and complex issues without fear of censorship or retribution." • Joanna Murray Smith

"Like the puritan elect, they want to take their piety into the next world. Their books and their films don't even have the power to raise a good stench. The safe is always antiseptic. Is there God in that sky? Instead of looking up at the darkening sky above me, I close my eyes" • Christos Tsiolkos

"I think it's dangerous when people start to feel like they can't say what they think, and when we start to silence voices and ideas." • Suzie Miller

"It is poisoning our ability to engage with each other. It is creating a climate of fear, where individuals are afraid to express dissenting views or engage in open debate for fear of being ostracised or punished. It is a threat to democracy and freedom of expression, democracy relies on robust discussion, on the ability to say what you think, on the ability to challenge someone else's idea and has a chilling effect on free speech, where individuals self-censor or avoid certain topics out of fear of retribution." • Andrew Bovell

"The idea that there are certain things that we can't say, certain stories that we can't tell, is deeply troubling to me. As a writer, my job is to explore the full range of human experience, not just the parts that are comfortable or politically correct." • Melissa Lucashenko

"It's effectively censorship, and I don't think that's a healthy thing. We need a wide variety of views, and we need people to be able to express themselves. It's a form of authoritarianism, and it's a form of intolerance that I think is really unhealthy." • David Williamson

"I think the only way to fight censorship is to be absolutely clear about what you want to say, and then say it with all your might." • Harold Pinter