



Junior Drama

Introduction to “A Performer’s tools” - BODY

Warm-ups / Mime / Body Language

The Performer's Tools: Body & Voice

- ▶ **Why focus on body & voice?**
- ▶ The two most important essential elements of drama and theatre are the performer and the audience. The interaction between the two creates the unique experience that we know as live performance. One cannot exist without the other.
- ▶ In live performance, the performer is the instrument of expression and uses mental, physical and vocal skills to engage the audience.
- ▶ Dancers spend hours developing flexibility, stamina, strength, balance and control to assist in their creative expression through dance. The performer also must develop mental, physical, and vocal skills to help create interesting and powerful drama.
- ▶ In these first few weeks we will build on what you already know from past drama work and will explore and develop the skills of body and voice for performance work .

Your intro to Drama will include...

- ▶ **Warm-ups** mini unit
- ▶ **Mime:** Creating Illusion through use of the body
- ▶ **Body Language:** Expression, Gesture, and Interpretation
- ▶ **Voice** in Performance
- ▶ **Formative Performance Task** -- For example - Create a devised Lip Sync Performance in groups (mime) or perform a group piece focussing on body and voice techniques using a poem as inspiration.

Specific Learning Objectives:

- ▶ **In this drama intro you will...**
- ▶ explore and identify the expressive potential of the body and voice
- ▶ select and incorporate mime, movement and voice into performance work
- ▶ incorporate your ideas and feelings to shape performance work
- ▶ use a variety of starting points to devise performance work
- ▶ explain and discuss how the performer's use of body and voice contribute to performance work

Warm-ups in Drama

Warm-ups have several purposes:

- ▶ to prevent injury from strained muscles or ligaments
- ▶ to help the performer relax and to relieve mental and physical tension
- ▶ to help the performer prepare both mentally and physically for performance work
- ▶ to maximise the expressive potential of the body

Warm-ups continued...



- ▶ The warm-up exercises you will do in class are divided into two categories:
- ▶ 1# **Physical exercises** - These are good for encouraging alertness and teamwork
- ▶ 2# **Centering exercises** - These are good for posture, releasing tension and preparing for voice work.

Physical Exercises

- ▶ **Stretch** -- Stretch different parts of your body by trying the following exercises. For each exercise you must stretch as hard as you can, without straining yourself .
- * Stand between two imaginary pillars and try to push them over.
- * Reach for a \$100 note dangling from the ceiling and just out of reach. Imagine that your feet are glued to the floor.
- * Lie on the floor. Imagine you have ropes tied to your wrists and ankles and you are being stretched in four directions.
- * Hug yourself as hard as you can.

▶ ***Roll, Stretch, Jump, Electric Shock --***

- ▶ First we will practice each of the following movements:
- ▶ **roll, stretch, jump, and electric shock.**
- ▶ Electric shock is where you pretend your body has been given a blast of electricity.
- ▶ On my signal, begin to walk through the drama space, maintaining an equal distance between all students.
- ▶ At any point *roll, stretch, jump, or electric shock* will be called when you are walking around the space and you must immediately respond to the request, react and move accordingly, and then return to walking around the space again.

▶ *Everybody do this --*

Class is to get into a big circle. Each of you are to take turns giving the class a warm-up exercise. For example, you may do a “star jump” and yell “Everybody do this” and the rest of the class has to follow and copy.



▶ *Move as though --*

Find a place in the drama space and make sure you are away from other students and objects -- standing on your own. You are to respond to my instructions as quickly as you can. Don't interact with other students...

- Move as though you are made of jelly
- Move as though you are made of molten metal
- Move as though you are made of crystal
- Move as though you are made of snow
- Move as though you are made of fire
- Move as though you are made of sloppy mud
- Move as though you are made of mist
- Move as though you are made of brittle twigs



▶ ***No Walking --***

In this exercise you have to find ways of moving through the drama room **without** walking. Once you have tried ways of moving through the room on your own, work with a partner and explore how two people can work together to move through the room without walking. Some ways of moving include crawling, sliding, tiptoeing, running, rolling, leaping, spinning, and jumping.

Write & Discuss...

- ▶ In your drama journals / workbooks - complete the following exercise... Write down the following answers on one of the blank template pages with the lesson focus being “Physical Warm-ups”.
1. How did you find each of the exercises you practised? Were they easy, hard, fun, confusing..?
 2. Explain how these exercises help **prepare** you for performance work. What **benefit** do you feel the warm-ups have in preparing you for drama work?
 3. Write down one or two other exercises that you think would be beneficial in preparing a performer for physical work. Explain why!

Centering Exercises...

- ▶ Centering is where we align the posture of the body so that we are standing straight and feel balanced. We all have our own personal way of standing that makes us feel comfortable . It may be putting our weight on one leg or folding our arms across our chest. In performance, because we are pretending to be other people and things, we need to be able to find a starting point that prepares us for performing. Centering helps our bodies to obtain a neutral starting point for acting work. It also creates a sense of stability because our weight is balanced over a central point. Once we are centered we are:
- ▶ physically prepared for any movement work
- ▶ mentally prepared because we are more focussed, which allows us to be more engaged with the character and the performance

▶ *Spine roll --*

To help achieve a sense of 'centre' it is helpful to use the spine as an indicator of where our centre is located. This exercise helps to prepare the performer by releasing tension from the neck and shoulders as well as correcting posture. Unbalanced posture can create unnecessary tension in the body.

All of the class needs to stand in a circle. Stand with your feet under your hips (slightly apart). Look straight ahead and keep your arms by your side. Count to seven and, as you do so, slowly drop your head forward on to your chest. Feel the weight of your head and allow this weight to 'unroll' your spine as you slowly bend towards the floor. It is important that you bend your knees when you are halfway down so that you don't strain your lower back. Once you have reached the hanging position, swing your torso gently from side to side to make sure your neck, head and arms are completely relaxed.

Once you have checked how relaxed you are, reverse the process and roll upwards, starting with the tail bone of your spine. Your head should remain hanging until your body is in a standing position. Then let your head drift up over seven counts. Once you come to a standing position, hold this final position before you relax back into the prep position.

Spine roll



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

▶ *Pendulum --*

Stand with your feet slightly apart and with your arms hanging by your side. Begin a very gentle rocking motion. Rock forward on to your toes and backward on to your heels. It is important that you only rock forward and backward as far as is comfortable without stumbling or falling over. Increase the size of the forward and backward rocking motion.

Once you reach a comfortable angle, begin to reduce the size of the rocking motion until the movement has almost stopped. It is useful to close your eyes at this point to gain a sense of what balance is.

Once you have come to a complete stop, hold the stillness for a moment.

Pendulum



Mime: Creating Illusion Through Use of the Body

“The ultimate goal of performers’ movement training is the integration of mind, body and spirit” . Jean Sabatine

What is mime?

▶ Mime is a form of performance that uses body language, gesture, and movement to create the illusion of objects, people and locations in an empty space. A mime artist may train solely in the art form of mime for several years, developing skills that help their ability to create illusion.

▶ Class Discussion -- Can you think of any famous mime artists from the theatre / TV / Film or live shows?

Famous Mime Artists...

- ▶ Charlie Chaplin as “The Tramp” (England)
- ▶ Marcel Marceau as “Bip the Clown” (France)
- ▶ Rowan Atkinson as “Mr. Bean” (England)
- ▶ The Boy with Tape on his Face (New Zealand)
- ▶ Clowns
- ▶ David Armand as Pop mime artist “Johann Lippowitz” (England)

Mime



Mime exercises...

The following exercises explore some of the basic skills of effective mime.

1. ***Pulling Faces*** - Facial expression is an important part of communicating in mime. Pull faces and explore the movement potential of your facial muscles. Sit in pairs, facing your partner. Use your jaw, eyes, and eyebrows to create as many facial expressions as you can. Take turns mirroring each other's facial expressions and then swap over.

▶ *Eye - Hand coordination --*

One of the keys to creating the illusion of smaller objects in mime is the use of eye-hand coordination. We tend to look at an object before we pick it up.

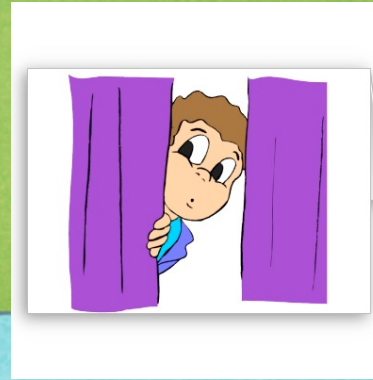
Imagine you have a hand-sized object in front of you, like a piece of fruit or a coffee cup. Make sure you look at the object first and see it clearly in your mind. Sometimes thinking of an object from your home helps to make the object seem clearer. Pick up and use the object, imagining its weight, shape and texture. Make sure your hands accurately represent the shape of the object.

▶ *Showing Weight and Quality --*

Imagine you have three boxes in front of you. One is neatly packed and filled with clothes; one is badly packed and filled with crystal; and one is falling apart and is filled with books. Pick up each box slowly and put it back down again. make sure you clearly communicate the relative weight and quality of each box.

Showing Length --

Get into pairs. Working with your partner, imagine you are both picking up a lengthy object - such as oars from a rowing shed or a ladder. With your partner, carry the object around the room. You will need to pay close attention to maintaining the distance between you and your partner to achieve the illusion of a set length.



▶ *Maintaining the Illusion --*

It is important to remember that whenever you establish an object or item of furniture in mime that the audience will not forget the position of the object and how it is used.

Make mental notes of marks on the walls and floor, for example, to help you remember the correct position of mimed doors, windows and items of furniture.

▶ *Maintaining the Illusion continued...*

Working in pairs - establish the positions of the following...

1. Mime opening a door that slides to the left, then walk through it and close it behind you. Your partner should then walk up to the same door, open it and walk through it, closing the door behind them.
2. Open a set of curtains, then open the window behind the curtains. Leave the position of the curtains and the window for your partner to adjust. The skill required here is to closely observe the position of the curtains and the window so that when you enter the scene you maintain the illusion.

Mime Role-Plays

Work with a partner and mime the following exercises. Consider how you can manipulate the elements of movement in your mimed role-plays to help achieve effect.

- ▶ **Two house painters** - One is on the roof and one is on the ground. A pulley system carries up heavy cans of paint and lowers empty cans of paint. You must mime this and not use any chairs or props!
- ▶ **Two landscape gardeners** - You each have a wheelbarrow that you fill with bricks and then push from one end of the garden to the other. The path you use winds and twists.
- ▶ **Two kite flyers** - It is a very windy day. The kite you are flying threatens to be blown away by the wind and eventually get tangled while in the air.
- ▶ **Two vets** - You are holding down an angry cat and trying to administer an injection.

Devised Mime Role-play

- ▶ Get into groups of three. Devise your own mime situation to show the class (around one and a half to two minutes in duration). Decide on characters, location, and a simple storyline. Make sure you include a range of objects that explore your ability to use space, to show size, weight, and length, and to maintain the illusion.



Write & Discuss...

- ▶ In your drama journals / workbooks... Outline the steps that you and your group took to prepare the devised mime role-play.
- ▶ Evaluate one other pairs mime performance - discussing how they made their story clear through the use of mime.
- ▶ Evaluate how well one performer used mime to portray the various qualities of an object, such as its size, weight and moving parts. In your evaluation, include examples of how they used movement and facial expression to add and to enhance effective communication in mime.
- ▶ Evaluate your own performance. Discuss your ability to mime weight and size and to maintain illusion.
- ▶ Comment on how others in your group assisted you in maintaining illusion.

What is body language?

- ▶ Discuss as a class.

Body Language: Expression, Gesture & Interpretation

What is body language?

- ▶ Human communication involves the whole body, not just words. Experts believe that verbal communication accounts for only 7% of communication between humans... therefore 93% of communication is through body language and is non-verbal! The message we give through physical poses, gestures, and facial expressions is called 'body language'. A performer's body language not only gives us information about their character's personality, it also provides us with information about their character's relationship with other characters.
- ▶ A gesture is a significant movement of part of the body, such as a limb, that is intended to gain a response from one or more people. Some gestures have a universal meaning - can you think of any? Other gestures have meaning that is specific to a culture - can you think of any?
- ▶ It is the general sequence of signals in body language and the situation in which they occur that is informative, or which provides us the information.

Exercise: Body Language

Body Signals

Working in pairs and taking turns showing your body signals to each other , find frozen poses and gestures to communicate the following emotions:

- ▶ boredom
- ▶ victory
- ▶ nervousness
- ▶ confusion



Body Messages

In pairs, use movements that finish in a frozen position to indicate the meaning of the following statements:

- ▶ 'Come here quickly'
- ▶ 'I don't know'
- ▶ 'Get away from me'
- ▶ 'Sit next to me'
- ▶ 'Something isn't right'
- ▶ 'I think I'm lost'

Write & discuss...

- ▶ In your drama journals/workbooks...
- ▶ Draw and describe what your body language may be if you were feeling embarrassed.
- ▶ Draw and describe what your body and face may do if you were feeling defensive.
- ▶ When you want to impress someone, what body language do you use?



Snapshots

Working in pairs, take turns...get into a frozen position/freeze frame/ tableau to communicate the following characters in the following situations...

- ▶ A young child looks enviously at another child's toy.
- ▶ A scientist makes an amazing breakthrough in their laboratory.
- ▶ An Olympic athlete at the end of a sprint realises they just missed out on first place.
- ▶ A scuba diver sees a shark in the distance.
- ▶ A shop assistant is caught stealing money by the manager.
- ▶ A teenager gets on a fast and furious ride at the amusement park.
- ▶ An elderly person finds their new seedlings have been trampled by teenagers.
- ▶ A teenager pretends to like a disappointing birthday present



What is a tableau? A tableau is like a picture or photograph of a group of people arranged in a way that is visually appealing and communicates information about the characters and the story. The plural of tableau is spelt "tableaux".

▶ **Tableaux**

Get into groups of four. Devise three separate tableaux or freeze frames which should show four people in a particular situation. E.g at the bus shelter, waiting in line to buy music tickets... Once you have tried three different tableaux, choose the best one to show the rest of the class. The audience will have to try and interpret the characters you've chosen and situations you are trying to communicate.

Augusto Boal

- ▶ We are about to complete an exercise developed by Augusto Boal.
- ▶ Augusto Boal is a South American theatre practitioner. He developed Theatre of the Oppressed, which is a form of theatre that involves the audience in the performance and allows them to find solutions to problems.

Great Game of Power

- ▶ Boal developed an exercise that explores how power and status can be exercised through body language and the use of space and levels. This exercise also explores how performers and their use of levels and space can be visually striking.
- ▶ We will place six chairs, one table and a bottle in the centre of the room. We need 3 volunteers to arrange the furniture to make the bottle the most powerful object in the tableau.



Great Game of Power continued...

- ▶ In the next step of the Great Game of Power, we need six volunteers in the tableau. We then need a seventh volunteer to arrange the chairs, table, bottle and participants to make one volunteer appear more powerful than the others.
- ▶ This step can be repeated several times by choosing different volunteers to create the new arrangements.

Write & Discuss...

In your drama journals / workbooks...

- ▶ Describe how the performers used effective body language to communicate power or lack of power.
- ▶ Which tableaux appealed to you? Describe why you found them appealing.

Interpreting Body Language

- ▶ Using the following photo on the next slide, prepare a short, mimed role-play in groups. Your performance will show the characters in the moments before the photo was taken. In your preparations, explore the body language of the different characters and the way the characters relate to each other. Your role-play must **start** with a tableau that you devise. It must **finish** with a tableau showing the positions of the characters in the photo.

Photo



Write & Discuss...

▶ In your drama journals / workbooks...

▶ Pick two characters from the photo. Interpret the predominant emotion or reaction of each character. Explain how each character's body language and facial expression helped you with your interpretation.

▶ Describe how you used body language, levels and space to convey your character's relationship to other characters.

▶ Describe any discoveries you made about the character you played while you explored their way of walking and using gestures.

▶ Choose one group's tableau. Describe your interpretation of two characters and their personality type. Base your interpretation on the body language of the characters in the tableau.

▶ Choose the group who had the most visually appealing tableau. Discuss how this group used levels and space to make their tableau appealing.

Fin.

