

CREATING CHARACTERS

by James Schilling for SCT Drama School Summer 2021 @ Villa Academy

CLASS OVERVIEW:

In this class, we will build complex, dynamic characters that can make scripts and scenes come alive. Explore a character's world: their inner life, thoughts, feelings, hopes, and fears and learn how to translate this work into how the character speaks, moves, and relates to the world and others. We will explore how to generate a variety of characters and inhabit them fully.

OBJECTIVES / OUTCOMES:

Students will develop an understanding of the importance of characters in storytelling. They will learn tools and skills for collaborating and using different aspects of the actor's body, voice, imagination, and concentration to embody characters different from themselves. They will be able to create their own characters and explore their characters' truths, backstories, relationships, and roles in scenes & stories.

VOCABULARY:

Character, Relationships, Ensemble, Collaboration, Exaggeration, Story, Given Circumstances, Objective, Obstacle, Actions, Tactics, Target, Dramatic Values, Relationships, Status, Stakes, Environment, Tableau, Improvisation, Focus

GENERAL SCHEDULE:

- Day 1 - Ensemble, listening, focus, collaboration, storytelling, throughline, character traits
- Day 2 - Body, movement / physical storytelling, imagination, environment, exaggeration
- Day 3 - Voice, range / dynamics, status
- Day 4 - Objective, obstacle, tactics, character creation, relationships, scenes

NOTES FOR EDUCATORS:

-Originally intended as a five day curriculum, the first day of this class was cancelled due to weather and thus the first and second days were condensed and combined. In a five day version, day one should focus on ensemble, listening, focus, and collaboration, with day two focusing on storytelling, story spine & structure, throughlines, and character traits.

-After every activity, invite reflection and comments/questions from students. A favorite phrase of mine (borrowed from the inimitable teaching artist Teague Parker) to use at the end of each reflection/discussion is "Does anything else need or want to be said?"

-Written originally for approximately twelve students ages 9-11, with more advanced options in some activities. Activities can always be divided into small groups, large groups, etc.

-All exercises were created/included with masks & social distancing in mind - thus no activities are predicated upon being able to see mouths or upon students touching or being in close proximity with one another (but all exercises could be done maskless or with closer proximity).

-I prefer a self-contained curriculum that can be taken into nearly any space and accommodates students with minimal resources, so please feel free to enhance any activity with props or materials that you have available (especially journals for reflections, observations, and homework). This curriculum specifically was designed for an outdoor classroom space with next to no available materials.

-Don't worry about including every activity in every day - you can always move activities to later days, reuse and/or extend students' favorites, or just ignore an activity in this lesson plan altogether. I just like to over-prepare!

-If you have questions about any activity or its description does not make sense to you, please feel free to email me at james@sst.org

DAY 1

- 1) Introductions: Make a circle. Name, pronouns, how you're feeling today, two truths and a lie - I'll try to guess the lie. (This is also a great way to get to know characters we are playing - what is true for them and what isn't true for them?) Also, has anyone made or played a character before - in a play or just for fun?
- 2) Community Agreement: What are the guidelines for our classroom? Kind, respectful, brave, patient, curious (ask questions!) and safe. That last one is especially important with COVID-19. Social distancing, masks stay on whenever indoors (if you need to briefly take a sip of water, that's alright, but try to quick), making sure hands stay washed/sanitized. Does anyone else want to add guidelines to our agreement? What's important to you - what will make you feel seen, heard, safe, and ready to have fun?
- 3) Discussion - Ensemble: Almost every character we play is part of an ensemble - a group of people working together to do or create something. We're part of an ensemble too! What could be qualities of a successful ensemble?
- 4) Name & Gesture Circle: To really get to know each other's names and to practice being in an ensemble (as well as being silly), we're going to say our name and do a big gesture to go with it. We'll go through our circle, each person will repeat every single name and gesture that has come before!
- 5) Sound Ball - Mix up the circle. Our voices are a great tool when playing characters, so explore what your voice can do! Make sounds you've never made before - not every character you play will sound like you. Pass a wild, wacky sound to the next person in the circle. They will catch it (make the same sound), then throw a new sound to the next person in the circle. Can incorporate gesture into this as well.
- 6) What Are You Doing? - Mix up the circle. This game uses imagination and body and involves *pantomime*, a skill we use often as actors when we don't have access to props. Pantomime helps the audience believe things exist that aren't really there. Demonstrate clear pantomime and unclear/lazy pantomime. In pantomime, every movement should be precise, have purpose, and help tell the story. Characters we play may be baseball players, mountain climbers, horse riders, who knows - pantomime is a great skill to help audiences understand who our character. We will go in our circle, each person pantomiming an action. The person after you in the circle will ask "What are you doing?", and you'll respond with any action other than what you are pantomiming. That becomes the action for them to do.
- 7) In/Out, Low/High, Dance/Freeze - One skill an ensemble should practice is listening and responding - characters also have to listen to other characters and respond to them too! This is a game of commands where the first round accelerates and the second round reverses the commands. If they're doing really well, you can do level three: I'll do an

action, and you do the opposite of what I do. (This game isn't about getting it right, so no worries if you mess up!)

- 8) Observation Game - The Mirror: Continuing with listening and observing, characters have to work together and are often informed by their relationships to other characters. Pair people off . One student will be A, the leader, and one will be B, the follower. Face each other. A will move their face and body in slow motion, and B will try to mimic their face/body as if they are a mirror. The goal is for an outside observer not to know who is leading and who is following. After a while, switch who is leading and who is following. If they're doing well, take away the assigned leader/follower, and let them naturally mimic each other and exchange leading/following.

- 9) Flocking: Continuing with this idea of leading, following, and responding to others, we will move together as a class. The individual at the front most part of the group leads everyone in controlled movement - model this. Move slowly and in a way that allows for everyone behind you in the "flock" to mimic your movements/gestures and move with you. The students follow, mirroring the leader. At a certain point, shift direction, and a new leader who is now at front of the group emerges and leads until their movement shifts focus to another leader. The objective is for the group to look like they are moving as one. (This activity can be done with or without music)

- 10) Observation Game - Quick Change: Remake our circle. Have one student stand in the middle and let everyone observe them and take in their appearance. Then, have everyone close their eyes. Have the student in the middle change three things about themselves - pull a sock down, change the part in their hair, raise one shoulder higher than the other, slouch, anything at all. Have students open their eyes and notice the differences. Noticing these details as an observer is as important to playing characters as coming up with changes to make a character!

- 11) The Machine: We will stand in a circle. Someone will start with a simple, repeatable sound & gesture. Each student, one by one, will add on with their own sound & gesture that connects to the person before them, making a machine. How to make your sound / gesture connect to the person before you - how does their gesture end? How does their sound end? How can that inspire your gesture / sound? How can you complement their component in our machine?
 After our machine is made, turn it off using an imaginary giant lever. Everyone will wind down and eventually freeze their component. Have one volunteer leave the machine (or do this part yourself), and turn each component of the machine on and off, describing what that part of the machine does. At the end, have the volunteer name the machine, then pull the giant lever to turn the whole thing back on! Does knowing what each piece does change how the sounds/gestures feel?
 Can repeat with a starting idea of the kind of machine the class wants to make.

- 12) Group Count: Form a standing circle and have everyone look at the floor or close their eyes. The goal is for the group to count from 1 to 10. Anyone in the circle will start with "1". Any other person will say "2", and so on until the group reaches 10. If anyone says a number at the same time as someone else, or anyone says two numbers in a row, the group must start again from 1. The goal of the game is to reach 10, but be patient and kind with one another - it is still just a game after all! If we hit 10, we'll try for 20, 30, so on, and see how high we can go as an ensemble.
Afterwards, ask students: What helped to make the activity successful? What was difficult, or didn't help? Did patterns emerge? Were their leaders or followers?
- 13) Zip, Zap, Zop: Mix up the circle. There are three levels to this focus & attentiveness game that is all about responding quickly and fast decisions.
Level 1 - A student starts by clapping at and making eye contact with someone in the circle and saying "Zip!". The person who they clapped at now claps at and makes eye contact with someone and says "Zap!" That person looks at and claps at someone and says "Zop!" This continues with accelerating tempo. If someone doesn't notice they are being sent the sound or says the wrong word, reset the tempo (you can also play an elimination version, but I like to include everyone). If someone doesn't send the sound in time with the current pace of the rhythm, reset the tempo.
Level 2 - Remove either the clap action or the words.
Level 3 - (Advanced option) Focus is passed by making direct eye contact only.
- 14) One Word / One Sentence Story: All characters exist inside of stories, and we tell stories by collaborating with our ensemble. In a seated circle, have the group tell a coherent story with a beginning/middle/end, having students each say one word in circle order. How can we, as an ensemble, make a real story that follows logic and has a story structure? After a few One Word stories, switch to One Sentence stories.
- 15) Story Spine: Pass out papers and have students write the seven step story spine structure.
- a) Once upon a time...
 - b) And every day...
 - c) But, one day...
 - d) And because of this...
 - e) And because of that...
 - f) Until finally...
 - g) And ever since then...

The Story Spine helps create well-constructed stories with beginnings that establish a main character, locations, routines, events that break the routines; middles that show the consequences of breaking routines; climaxes that set the resolution to the story in motion; and the resolutions. Demonstrate how the prompt works either with one of the fairy tales or just improvise a story that follows this structure.

As a class, come up with a new story following the prompts one by one, taking

suggestions.

- 16) Group Stories: Optionally, give the entire class the same location and character for “Once upon a time...”. Whether you do that or not, partner up students and allow 3-5 minutes to write a story with the spine. Reconvene and share, having students read their stories aloud.

Was it easy or hard to come up with ideas using this format? What part of the story was the hardest to come up with?

Now, give students 3-5 minutes to rehearse a scene version of their stories where they fill in the gaps, play the characters, and act out their story.

- 17) Reflection: Favorite thing we did, something you learned, something you’re excited about, etc.

DAY 2

- 1) Arrival: How are you today? Favorite fictional character and why (if a student doesn't have one, favorite celebrity or person in your life and why)? Something you remember from yesterday?
- 2) Warm-Up: Sound Ball (but today the ball of sound has shape/size/weight or a complimentary gesture), What Are You Doing (be specific with what you offer people - not just climbing a mountain, but climbing a scalding hot mountain. Not just washing a car, washing my car on the moon. Etc.), student suggestions/favorites
- 3) 5 Seconds to Make It!: Some characters we play may have nonhuman traits or not be human altogether, so let's practice playing weird things! Offer an object/thing for students to make with their bodies. Count down from 5 for everyone to make that object, then say "Freeze!". Inspect / observe how people are making the object, then have them let that shape go. Incorporate moving objects, so "Freeze!" means "Keep doing that motion!". You can split into two groups and have people observe and notice things. You can also have students go one by one, making an object without telling anyone what it is. We will all guess what it is and reflect on why we thought that.

LIST OF POTENTIAL OBJECTS:

- apple
- cruise ship
- Giraffe
- Balloon just about to burst
- Popcorn
- old man
- A dinosaur
- Sadness
- Anger
- Fire
- A tree in a storm
- An eagle
- A blinking eye
- A ticking clock
- A wave
- A train

- 4) Exaggeration Circle: In a circle, one student starts a small gesture. The next player does the gesture, but makes it even bigger, by about 10%. This continues until we get all the way back to the original person, who now does the most extreme version of that gesture. Encourage them to not lose the sense of the original gesture in their increasing exaggerations. After a few rounds, you can incorporate sound as well. This is a great way to start developing characters - take small traits and enhance them, find out where your character is extreme and where they're not. Two types of gestures: behavioral, which are normal, everyday gestures, and expressive, which are more poetic, abstract,

or symbolic and really convey an inner emotion or idea.

- 5) Discussion on Characters: From a distance, could you tell the difference between two people you consider friends and two strangers? How? What are major differences between a parent/guardian of yours and a teacher of yours? Between a sibling of yours and a more distant relative? In order to tell a story, our characters need to be believable. The more defined and specific the characters we make and the characters we play, the more it will connect with an audience.
- 6) The Bus Stop: Set up three chairs or three areas for students to stand "on stage". This is our bus stop. Three at a time, students will enter the stage, each going to one of the designated areas/chairs. They will enter, wait for the bus, then one at a time give up waiting and exit, all in character. Characters can be drawn from a hat, assigned by you so no one else can hear, etc. The goal is to put that character into every part of their body and convey specific behaviors related to the character while in the scene. After they exit, the observing students can guess the character of each actor. Repeat so everyone can wait for the bus at least once. Students may also exchange one or two lines of dialogue in character.

LIST OF POSSIBLE CHARACTERS:

- *A moody teenager listening to music*
- *An antsy 5 year old*
- *An important politician*
- *Someone on the run from the law*
- *A sneaky thief/pickpocket*
- *A dinosaur*
- *A business person late for an appointment*
- *A parent with several very large grocery bags*
- *A rock musician*
- *A shy, scared, lost child*
- *A news reporter*
- *A very old person*
- *An exhausted janitor*
- *A football player after losing a game*
- *A computer geek*
- *A bratty child*
- *A forgetful old person*
- *A tourist*
- *An ill person who needs a hospital*
- *A pop star*
- *A very wealthy person*
- *A nun*
- *Someone obsessed with phone games*
- *A dancer*
- *A secret agent*
- *A student studying for an exam*
- *An alien*

- *A clown*
- *A farmer*
- *A cowboy*

- 7) Night at the Museum: Split the class into two groups and have one group take the stage. From observing students, get a suggestion for a kind of museum. Assign one student to be the museum guard with the night shift. They will move around the space, looking at and admiring the “exhibits” which are made by the other actors - frozen statues of believable objects, animals, and things that would exist in the kind of museum we are in. When the night guard isn’t looking at someone, they move around as their creature/thing. If the night guard turns around to look, they must stop moving. If they are caught moving, they are out. The last person standing becomes the guard for next round.
- 8) Park Bench: In this classic improv game, there will be one actor sitting/standing onstage as if on a park bench. Another actor will enter and make up who they themselves are as well as, potentially, who the person on the bench is (i.e. a crazed fan of a popular author, a hero who saved the person’s life as a child, etc.) Their goal is to get the person on the bench to leave with any tactics they can think of, but they cannot use physical touch at all. The person sitting should accept whatever role the person may assign them and interact honestly, and leave when it feels appropriate to do so. Their goal is to stay seated, but not so much that they ignore what their partner is offering them and sit just for the sake of sitting and making it difficult.
What kinds of big characters can we play in this game?
- 9) Collaborative Environment: Get a suggestion for a location (or use examples below). Have half the class take the stage (six for this class size). One at a time, the first five students will enter the stage and announce that they are an object in that environment, then take the shape of that object and place themselves in the scene. The fifth student will make an entrance as a character who would be found in that environment and briefly interacts or acts in it. For example, if our location is a beach, someone may enter and say “I am a beach chair.” and then lay down like a beach chair. Someone may be an umbrella, waves, a seagull, etc. The final person will enter as a believable character in the environment - for a beach, they may be a sunbathing person, an ice cream vendor, a lifeguard, etc.
Run this several times with different location suggestions so that everyone has a chance to play and observe. Then, do a version where the second to final student is a believable character, and the final person is a character we would not expect in this environment to see what happens when characters are in circumstances opposite of our expectation. This could turn into a slightly longer scene. If we’re in a library, they could be a librarian who always yells. If we’re in a doctor’s office, they could be a sickly doctor. If we’re in a haunted house, they could be a bored, non-frightening ghost. If we’re at the beach, they could be a lifeguard who can’t swim or a sweater vendor.

LIST OF POTENTIAL LOCATIONS:

-a mall
 -a beach
 -classroom
 -office
 -gym
 -haunted house
 -playground
 -doctor's office / dentist
 -grocery store
 -zoo

- 10) Exaggerated Character Walks: One thing we can incorporate into the characters we play - especially the more extreme ones, but even the ones who are just slightly different from our normal selves - is their body. Have students mill about in their natural bodies / postures. After a few moments, tell them to pick one part of their body to move slightly differently or lead with. For example, if I say "Shoulder", everyone should find some way to walk around while moving their shoulder differently than they normally do. They might roll their shoulder, bring it to their ear, walk while leading with their shoulder, etc. Encourage them to exaggerate this little by little. Then, freeze them. Ask them: who is this character? Who are you and why are you walking like this? What are you feeling in this moment? You can have students find someone nearby and have a brief in-character conversation with them. Then, everyone drops this exaggerated body part and begins milling around normally. Repeat with several different body parts. This is one way we can find characters and establish things about them in a scene.
- 11) Emotional Pantomime: Another important part of characters is playing how they feel. Have one student (Student A) cover their ears or leave the room and a small group of 3-4 pantomimers take the stage. Have non-performing students choose an emotion for each of the pantomimers to play with. Once the emotion is chosen, Student A uncovers ears / returns to the room and gives them an action to mime, like riding a bike. At first, they perform the pantomimed action neutrally with no emotion. Then, on cue, they add the emotion to their pantomime. If the group chose Happy, they might smile (as best they can with masks), they might pump their fist, they might bob their head joyfully to imaginary music, etc. Repeat with different guessers / pantomimers and different emotions. How can we show how our characters are feeling with their bodies, even when they may not be speaking or may be doing something else in a scene?
- 12) Imagination Exploration: Our characters tell stories with their bodies, and are affected by their environment. Come with me on an imaginary journey. In a standing circle, have everyone close their eyes. Imagine you've been playing in the snow for a long time. What does it feel like? Put that feeling in your whole bodies - your shoulders, faces, hands, back, toes. Are your feet a little wet? Are your fingers numb? Are you shivering? Now, a snow storm picks up and is pelting you with wind and snow. Show me with your

bodies. Finally, you walk into a warm cabin. There's a fire burning. You take off your big winter coat. Someone hands you a cup of hot cocoa. You feel the warmth and relaxation in your whole body as you sit by the fire. Open your eyes.

How did it feel to go from one environment to the other? How did it change your body? How might we use this in a scene, story, play?

- 13) Late for Class: Have one student cover their ears or leave the room. This student is the guesser. Ask the audience for three excuses as to why the guesser is late for class, i.e. lost their dog, crashed their car, spilled hot chocolate all over their clothes, etc. You, the instructor, play the role of the principal and stand with your back to the classmates. Call in the guesser and demand to know why they are late for class. The classmates, behind your back, pantomime the first of the three reasons why the guesser is late. The guesser speculates their reasons based on the pantomimes. The principal's job (your job) is to keep the guesser on track. Give them hints if they are close ("Well that almost sounds likely, but not entirely") or let them know if they are way off ("There is no way that could happen"). Every now and then, turn around to check on their classmates. They freeze in whatever position they are in. Most likely it will be a bizarre position, such as crawling on the floor. Ask them what they are doing! The classmates must justify their positions to the principal. ("I'm looking for my dropped contact" or "I spilled paper clips on the ground!" while miming a dog, etc.) Once the student gets the first excuse right, the principal accepts the excuse, but demands to know what else kept them from class. The classmates move on and pantomime the 2nd clue. Remind them to work together and if something isn't working, try a different approach. The game ends when the guesser says all three excuses. Repeat so everyone has a chance to participate. Can also use the "Late for Work" version, where the person is an employee who is late for work.

How can we use our bodies to communicate?

- 14) Pantomime/Environment Silent Scenes: Pair students off or put them in small groups. Have them come up with a short story with a beginning/middle/end that uses the seven step story structure, then give them 5-10 minutes to rehearse a scene of their story that will be performed without words, only with their bodies. The audience can do their best to guess what happened in the scene.
- 15) Reflection: Favorite thing we did, something you learned, something you're excited about, etc.

DAY 3

- 1) Arrival: How are you today? Favorite word and why (or other icebreaker question)?
Something you remember from yesterday?

- 2) Warm-Up: Sound Ball, Exaggeration Circle with vocalizations (screaming is not a warm-up, how else can we exaggerate sounds?)

- 3) Vocal/Face Warm-Up: (Feel free to use your favorite vocal warm-ups here - I like to warm up the voiced and voiceless plosive consonants B, P, D, T, G, K. This can be done by having students repeat after you first slowly, then quickly: Bibbity bebbidy babbidy / bahbiddy bohbidy boobidah. Pippity peppity pappity / pahpitty pohpitty poopitah. And so on, hitting the voiced and voiceless plosives for each area of the mouth. If that doesn't make sense - it is hard to write phonetically - don't worry about it!)
We'll be in masks, but please test the limits of your mouth and face in this next activity. When I say "Lion", imitate a lion and make your face and body as big as you can, as if you are silently roaring. When I say "Lemon" imagine you have just taken a bit of a lemon and make your face and body as small as you possibly can. Alternate these two for differing durations.
Then, have students stand up straight and pull their shoulders up to their ears, then back, then relax them down. Have students put their hands on their stomachs and say "Ha! Ha! Ha!" focusing on expelling breath and making sound. They should feel their bellies bouncing - this is how we know our diaphragm is doing its job! That's where the strength of our voice comes from - our air. Practice a few times, and do "Hee! Hee! Hee!", "Ho! Ho! Ho!", "Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!". Have students repeat after you loudly and precisely: Articulate, Exaggerate, Project Your Voice! Repeat.

- 4) Vocal Exaggeration Circle: In a standing circle, have students repeat a simple tongue twister or phrase (examples below). Assign an emotion to the students to play with or let them pick the emotion they want to explore. Each person will say the phrase going around the circle, but the vocals and emotion will become more exaggerated as we progress. The goal isn't to scream - we want to be heard loudly but also clearly! Repeat starting at different points in the circle.

EXAMPLE TONGUE TWISTERS:

-Unique New York (Unique New York, You Know You Need Unique New York)

-Three free throws

-Red Leather Yellow Leather (Lavender Leather)

-Rubber Baby Buggy Bumpers

-Red Bulb Blue Bulb Red Bulb Blue Bulb Red Bulb Blue Bulb

-Red Blood Blue Blood Red Blood Blue Blood

-She sells seashells on the seashore

-A proper copper coffee pot

-Toy boat. Toy boat. Toy boat.

-Irish wristwatch, irish wristwatch, irish wristwatch

-Which wristwatches are Swiss wristwatches?

-She should shun the shining sun

-Flora's freshly fried fish

- 5) Gibberish Conversations: Explain gibberish: speaking with silly sounds that don't mean anything, but still communicate intention, ideas, and meaning. We've practiced pantomime and body language - these are important tools to go along with gibberish. Speaking in gibberish helps us focus on the sound and quality of our voice, rather than the words that we are saying. Demonstrate a quick gibberish conversation. Then, have students perform in pairs a 1 minute gibberish conversation with one another. Ask them: What were you talking about? Did you have any idea what the other person was saying? Why or why not?
- 6) Alien Translator / Gibberish Interpreter: In pairs, students will take the stage. One will play an extraterrestrial alien who speaks in gibberish, the other will play their translator. (Other possible situations listed below.) Ask the alien / gibberish speaker questions relating to their situation - if they're an alien, some example questions: Why did you come to Earth? What is your home planet like? What is your favorite part about Earth? Least favorite? What are some traits of your people? Anything else to share with us Earthlings?
- The gibberish speaker will respond one line at a time, using lots of physicality. Then, the interpreter/translator will mimic the motions and translate the phrases into English. Encourage the gibberish speaker to be very specific in the intention behind what they are saying. Encourage the translator to think carefully about making the gibberish make some sort of sense. You can also defer to the class to act as "the press" and ask further questions to keep a pair going. If using other scenarios, you can ask questions or just let the scene play out one nonsense line at a time.

OTHER POSSIBLE SCENARIOS:

-A scientist explaining their recent discovery of a 2nd moon

-A pop singer giving a press conference after falling asleep during their concert performance

-A child describing what it was like getting their first cavity

-A chef explaining how to cook their favorite meal, candy spaghetti (or anything else!)

-A farmer explaining how to milk a cow in record time

- 7) Gibberish Scenes: Have two volunteers play actors, and two more play interpreters standing on either side of the actors. Give the actors a topic of conversation (ideas listed below - can always take suggestions from class). The first actor speaks a gibberish line, and their interpreter translates. The second actor responds in gibberish (you know what they said thanks to their interpreter - respond to that!), then their interpreter translates what they said.

POSSIBLE CONVERSATION TOPICS:

-Lunch

-Laundry

- Horses
- Math
- Phones
- Swimming
- Mars
- Disneyland
- Cooking
- Jealousy
- Armpits

If time / group size allows, you may have students create gibberish / interpreted scenes in groups with a beginning, middle, and end.

- 8) Soundscape: In a standing circle, get a suggestion of an environment. One by one, go around the circle and have students add in a sound with their voice to make a soundscape of that environment. A beach may have waves crashing, wind blowing, seagulls, a vendor crying out, a beachgoer snoring, etc. A jungle may have all manner of creature sounds, rain falling, etc.
Can repeat a few times with different environments.
- 9) Birthday Parties: Have a student step into the middle of the circle. Congratulations, it's your birthday now! Have everyone sing Happy Birthday to them, but give them an environment and tell them to have that environment affect how they sing, feel, and act. After they've done so, have the birthday person return to the circle and make observations about how the environment influenced their party guests (as well as themselves). Then, have the next student enter the circle. Now it's your birthday! Repeat with a new environment. Continue for several rounds, everyone enjoying multiple birthdays (but of course not actually aging so quickly).

LIST OF ENVIRONMENTS:

- Library
- Hail storm
- Beach
- Dark cave
- Forest
- Living Room
- Sewer
- North Pole
- Inside a volcano
- Supermarket
- Hospital
- Haunted house
- Airport
- Church
- Desert
- Boat
- The Moon

- Messy Bedroom
- The nicest kitchen you have ever been in
- Underwater
- Bus stop

- 10) Discussion - Status: When characters interact, the principle of status always comes into play, whether we're aware of it or not. Explain and explore the idea of "status": The technical definition of status is "the relative social, professional, or other standing of someone." One way to think about it is how much power a character has in a scene, and the difference between how much power they have compared to the other character(s). We all have different status in different situations. For now, we will describe it on a 1-10 scale, 10 being practically a God and 1 being the lowliest creature you can imagine. What status are you? If a 10 walked in the room, would you talk to them? What about a 1? When was a time in which you were a 10 – in other words, when you had complete power and authority in a situation? How about a 1? What were some statuses we saw in that last game?
- 11) Status Exploration: Assign students a status number from 1-10, either via slips of paper or holding up fingers to each student individually or otherwise giving them a number in a way no one else can see. Without telling us their number, each student individually enters the stage (or goes to the middle of the circle), stands, and exits as that status number. Allow the observers to try and guess what number they were. What clues do we use as observers when paying attention to status?
- 12) Status Walks: Let students know they will be walking around the room acting either as high status or low status. Coach the students to act out various levels of their status:
- High Status: Make eye contact with others, hold head high and steady, shoulders back, walk in straight lines. If someone is in your direct line of movement, do not step aside, make them step aside (without touching). When you stop, spread out your body, take up space. When you speak, make strong statements, speak authoritatively and in complete sentences.
 - Low Status: Do not walk in straight lines. Avoid eye contact with others, look down to the ground, move your head around nervously, either be stiff or have hunched shoulders. Avoid others. When you stop, take up as little space as possible. Breathe quickly or irregularly. Rub your face, scratch your head, etc. When you speak, apologize for something and do not speak in complete sentences.

Assign half the students high status and the other half low status. Have students mill about for a minute or two as their status. Tell them to freeze and talk to whoever is next to them, regardless of status. How do these statuses sound in our voices? Tell the class to freeze. Switch status. High is low and low is now high. Have students mill about for a minute or two as their new status. Tell them to freeze and talk to whoever is next to them, regardless of status.

Afterwards, reflect: Which status did you prefer playing, high or low? What were your conversations like when you talked to someone of the same status as you? What was it like when you talked with someone of a different status?

- 13) 10% More / Less Status: One way to play with status is to take on stereotypical roles and exaggerate them: parent/child, king/jester, etc. The high status person gains more and more status while the low status person keeps lowering - embarrassing themselves, etc. It's also enjoyable to watch two characters of similar status try to gain or lose status - one common way we see this is people talking about how little sleep they got ("Ugh, I only got four hours of sleep because my dog was barking." "Oh, you think that's bad? I got two hours of sleep because my leg was cramping and it still hurts."). This next game will play with both raising and lowering status & relationships.

In pairs, have students take the stage (can also do this simultaneously to save time or if students struggle to focus as an audience).

Get a suggestion of a topic of conversation that people could care about or try to gain status over: an object, location, or event. For example, a birthday party. Student A starts small, talking about how great their birthday party was. Student B gains status by bragging about their birthday party as being even better. The two students go back and forth until they are bragging about ludicrous or ridiculous things, all in the name of one-upping each other and gaining status.

Repeat with other pairs. Can also add in a suggestion of a relationship - who are the two characters in this scene? Have some pairs try lowering status as well - how much worse was your birthday party & why?

Which did you prefer, raising your status or lowering it? The idea of raising or lowering your status in relation to your conflict is a strategy that you can use to move a story forward and discover things about your character and the characters they interact with.

- 14) Status Scenes: Break students into pairs or small groups. Have them write/rehearse scenes that involve a relationship with implied status. They will create a short scene, about 1-3 minutes, where we observe the scene play out as expected. Then, something will happen to switch the statuses in the scene somehow. If it's a king/jester, perhaps the Jester receives a letter informing them they are of royal blood. If it's a parent/child, perhaps the child gets sympathy from the parent somehow. If it's someone picking on someone else, perhaps the person getting picked on reveals a secret they know that switches the status. It could be anything!

Example scene scenarios are listed below - students play characters appropriate to the scenario or use their own ideas of what inspires them. Remind them to think about how their character moves and sounds!

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS	POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -At a dance lesson -Running a marathon -At recess -Studying for a hard test -Filming a movie -Long lost twins meeting after 10 years apart -On a jungle safari -Martial arts lessons -At a birthday party -Flying a plane -Robbing a bank -On a pirate ship -Visiting the Dentist -Training for a job -Taking a pet to the vet -Visiting the Doctor -Buying a car -Having your hair done at the salon -Visiting someone in hospital -On a spying mission -The first people in space -At a fancy restaurant -Looking for buried treasure -Customer complaining to chef about a meal -Two criminals on the run -Stuck in a car teetering on the edge of a cliff -Trapped in an elevator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Parent and Child -Teacher and Student -Boss and Employee -Celebrity and Fan -Athlete and Coach -Bank Robber and Bank Teller -Superhero and Nemesis -Puppet and Puppeteer -Ghostbuster and Ghost -Predator and Prey -Cab/Lyft/Uber Driver and Passenger -Dentist/Doctor and Patient -Mad Scientist and Assistant

15) Reflection: Favorite thing we did, something you learned, something you're excited about, etc.

DAY 4

- 1) Arrival: How are you today? Favorite thing about character creation / exploration so far? Something you remember from yesterday?
 - 2) Warm-Ups: Sound Ball, Exaggeration Circle, student favorites/suggestions
 - 3) Intro to Objective - The Treat: Have students get into a circle. Tell them to close their eyes and imagine that you have their favorite treat, whether that be their favorite candy bar, a new episode of their favorite show, a new book in their favorite series, whatever comes to mind for them when they think of something they badly want. Really imagine it and how much you want it, put it into your body. Now ask the group: do you want this thing? They can feel free to answer. Ask individual students: What is the treat? Why should I give it to you? What would you do for it? How would you get it from me? Open your eyes.
 - 4) Discussion on Objective: How did it feel to think about getting that? What you had was an objective - something you wanted. That imagination exercise was an example of setting an objective. Characters are always playing with three dramatic values: objective, obstacle, and tactics. Objectives are what you want. Obstacles are things in the way of what you want. Tactics are ways to get around or overcome obstacles and get what you want (they can be physical or emotional). Imagine a story where no one wants anything, where everyone just wanders around aimlessly. Not as exciting as when we can know, see, and feel what characters are going for! Watching characters overcome obstacles (or be defeated by them) is one of the most exciting parts of theatre. It's important for characters to have objectives because it's what moves the story along and keeps it interesting.
 What are some objectives a character might have? What could be an obstacle to these? What are tactics to overcome those obstacles? Write suggestions.
 We've essentially just written the outline for scenes! Keep these for later.
 - 5) Make Them Laugh!: Make a seated or standing circle. Ask one volunteer to come to the middle. The goal of the person in the middle is to make one student observing smile or laugh (we're in masks, so please be honest and raise your hand if you smile - it's more fun that way!). They can use any method (tactic) they want without touching or getting too close to anyone. If someone laughs or smiles, they trade places with the person in the middle, and the game continues. Try to keep a straight face if you're observing, but be honest if you crack! Use all the skills we've practiced so far to make a big character to make someone laugh!
- OR Revisit Park Bench here, focusing on objective/obstacle/tactics.
- 6) Gabba Jabba: Sometimes, how we tell a story is affected by the kind of character we are playing. Let's practice telling stories as ourselves and as characters. Students will give

30 second stream-of-consciousness monologues on a given topic. One by one, give each student a topic. They have to talk for 30 seconds about that topic as if they are an expert. For example: "Tell me everything you know about hats, chairs, noodles, teeth, ears, water, tissues, the sun, roads, oranges, etc." Doesn't even have to make sense, just keep talking! Free up your creativity, try not to get in your own way.

If short on time or students struggle to observe, skip this first part and just do the part below.

Then, collaborate with students on a list of kinds of characters. Avoid real fictional characters (like The Grinch or Voldemort), try to find different types of people: dentist, firefighter, barista, veterinarian, etc. Zombie, alien, vampire are also okay - just keep it a bit general. (if they throw out a name or specific character, ask them "what kind of character is that? necromancer? awesome! necromancer can go on our list.")

Do Gabba Jabba again, but assign them a character from the list. Their topic is related to their character. "You're a dentist? Tell me everything you know about teeth!" etc. How does their character talk about that thing? What is their opinion on it?

OPTIONAL EXTENSION: (if students are doing well at this)

Playing Opposites: Form a circle. One by one, have students state something that they believe. It could be silly or serious, perhaps it's "I believe every food is better when it's spicy." Have each student give a short monologue as a character formed around the opposite belief. So, if I believe every food is better when it's spicy, my character believes the opposite - food should never be spicy. Give an example monologue as a character formed around this truth. Go around the circle, encouraging students to be honest and believable while playing the opposite of what they believe. How does this character talk differently from you? Stand differently from you? What's their personality like?

- 7) Silent OR Gibberish Relationship Scenes: Another thing all characters are informed by is their relationships to others. In pairs or small groups, have students take the stage. Get a suggestion from the audience of a relationship (they should hopefully have ideas from yesterday). Then, get a suggestion of a scenario with a conflict inherent in it (or assign a relationship/scenario). For example: "You are a brother and a sister. You are playing catch in the house and one of you breaks a lamp. You need to deal with it before your parents get home."

These scenes are played without dialogue or in gibberish. Performers use pantomime to communicate actions, emotions, and what the relationship looks like.

How did you know what your partner was doing? What was it like to tell a story without words? For the audience - when was it clear what was happening? When was it unclear? Why?

OR

Tactic/Objective Scenes: To follow off of the discussion from earlier, have students pair up or in small groups create scenes together. Each scene must have a big character with

a clear objective, and three different tactics to achieve that objective. The first two tactics should fail, while the third should succeed. Give the pairs 5-10 minutes to make a scene and rehearse. Then, perform the scenes, and have observers identify objectives, obstacles, and tactics.

- 8) Discussion on Character: There are a million different ingredients that go into making somebody the person that they are. The more depth and detail we can show in our characters onstage, the more interesting and relatable the story will be. What goes into making a character - what are elements that make someone who they are? Take suggestions and scribe them somewhere. Suggestions if students feel stuck: Their background, family, hobbies, their likes and dislikes, their fears, their hopes, their dreams, their environment
- 9) Character Creation: Students will be given 10-20 minutes to fill out a questionnaire to make a character they feel excited about playing. Encourage them to be adventurous and believable. Questionnaire includes the questions listed below, and can either be written somewhere for everyone to see, passed out as individual handouts, or distributed in some other way for everyone to have one. Ideally, students have something with which and on which to write for this activity.

CHARACTER QUESTIONS:

- Age:
- Birthday:
- Pronouns:
- Place of Birth:
- Current Place They Live:
- Hair Color:
- Eye Color:
- Height:
- Family, if any:
- Relationship Status:
- Hobbies/Interests
- Favorite Music
- Favorite Movie/Book
- Biggest dream:
- Biggest fear:
- Someone they look up to:
- Deepest secret:
- Best friend:
- If they had a day to do anything in the world, what would they do?:
- Current job, if any:
- Past jobs, if any:
- If they have a job, do they like it or not? Why?:

-How much school have they completed?:

If students finish early, they may draw their character, begin writing a backstory, etc.

Once everyone is done, sit in a circle and allow everyone to introduce themselves as their character (use your voice!). Everyone will share name, age, pronouns, and three other facts from the questionnaire. As you meet each character, how does your character feel about them?

- 10) Character Barometer: Have students spread out around the room and mill around as their characters. Encourage them to discover things about how their character moves, which body parts they lead with, etc. You can prompt them with “It’s hot, how does your character feel about that? Move in that? Now it’s cold and rainy, discover how your character reacts”. How much can we learn about our characters just from moving around and imagining as them?

At random intervals, you will make a statement. Students will move to a part of the space to indicate how much they agree or disagree as their character. One side is 100% agree, one side is 100% disagree. They can be anywhere in between.. Feel free to ask characters as they find their place in the room - of those who agree, why? Of those who disagree, why? Of those in the middle, why? After going through many statements, come together for a reflection. What did you notice? Is everyone similar in the room? Was there a big range? What is true for them? What isn’t? How are they different from you? How can you play into those differences?

LIST OF POSSIBLE STATEMENTS:

- *Breakfast is the best meal of the day*
- *I like school*
- *I like pineapples*
- *I like pineapple on pizza*
- *I get scared easily*
- *I'd like to be famous one day*
- *I like sports*
- *I like visual art - drawing, painting, sculpting, etc.*
- *I'm an introvert (prefer to be alone in my free time)*
- *I'm an extrovert (prefer to spend time with others in my free time)*
- *I'd like to live in another country*
- *I like the rain*
- *I like sunshine & hot weather*
- *I watch TV every night*

At any point, feel free to freeze characters and ask them questions. Once students are comfortable, they can even begin to talk to one another as they mill around the room.

- 11) Character Scenes: Have students pair off or join small groups with other characters. Can do this randomly, or can pick characters who have discovered dynamics with one

another: they are similar, wildly different, already butting heads, etc. Give students 10-20 minutes to rehearse a scene involving their characters. Remind them of everything we've talked about in scene work - objective, obstacle, tactics, conflict, relationship, etc. Let the scenario for the scene be informed and inspired by which characters are in the scene.

You may even wish to write a small script for your scene.

Afterwards, perform and observe.

12) In-Character Games: If there is time remaining, revisit any student favorite games and have them play them as their characters. What is Zip Zap Zop like in character?

13) Final Reflection: Something you learned, something that is easy/hard, etc.