

DRAMA *Works*

Year 9 Drama Plans

EXTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Much of the work in this series of drama lesson plans for Year 9 relies on skills already learned in Years 7 and 8. For those who have not got these books, or for whom drama lessons begin in Year 9, it might be worth considering purchasing at least the Year 8 Drama Plans. The specific skills that are covered in some detail there are: **stage positioning** and **focus**, including work on **the use of eye contact**. **Mime skills** are taught in a precise and logical way. Helpful hints and ideas for dealing with **spontaneous improvisation** are covered and there is much detailed work on **the shaping of polished improvisations** with a view **towards devising skills**. Also covered are **narrative skills**, **physical theatre ways around 'problems'**, **what 'works' dramatically and what does not - but can be made to ...** Finally, the book ends with detailed **character work**, **using melodrama**, **Commedia dell'Arte and clowning** as its basis, finishing with a couple of lessons on more **'realistic' stereotypes** that lead naturally into the start of this year's work.

Sometimes I have been able to give some quick revision guidance on such as mime skills, but really, if the students have started from scratch this year then some of the lessons in the Year 8 book would benefit them enormously before starting on the work in this book. Indeed a lot of this book, especially in the area of improvisation, assumes a certain level of competence. The follow-on lessons in this book might then be part of your Year 10 teaching and might be better for that - and certainly better than just plunging novices into the deep end of improvising and devising, which they will find very hard.

This book, then, covers: **naturalistic characterisation** - focusing on **movement as affected by status, age, profession and mood**; on **building a character's details to give depth** and on the need for **justification for all a character's behaviour**.

Some **'real' characters in 'real' situations**, which explore the kind of social situations they might encounter are explored, with focus both on **furthering improvisation skills - spontaneous and polished** - as well as demanding a response and **understanding** of such issues as **peer pressure, parental pressure and other relevant subjects**. Role swapping and character justification are used to encourage understanding of all sides of problem situations. **A devised project** on the subject of bullying is worked through, both to explore the issue and to further the devising skills begun in Year 8.

Confidence in a variety of social situations is concentrated on, from **using a telephone** competently to **judging the right language to use** when meeting and greeting a variety of different people of all ages and social positions.

There is more work on **handling crowd scenes** and on **directing an audience's focus of attention**.

Finally, the year's work ends with **an extended scriptwork project**, culminating in performance.

All the skills built up in detail in the previous two books are used: observation, teamwork, tolerance, evaluative and reviewing skills; as well as more technical acting and performance skills, such as mime, physical and narrative theatre.

Emphasis throughout all three books is on good practice for both teacher and students. At all times a climate of mutual listening and tolerance is encouraged, so that the potential frightening freedom [for the teacher - and for the shy children] of the drama lesson happens within the elastic sides of a discipline

built up by the acceptance of certain basic 'rules' which are always insisted upon.

For those who have not got either of the previous books, *Drama Plans Year 7* and *Drama Plans Year 8*, I will repeat the few rules outlined there on structuring your drama lesson. These rules a class will quickly become used to and it will mean that they treat the structure you impose with as much respect as any formal lesson sat behind desks.

1. The children change into appropriate clothing for drama, at the very least tracksuit bottoms or similar and soft-soled flat shoes or bare feet. This is practical and invites both comfort in moving and lack of embarrassment, particularly for the girls.

2. After changing, they move automatically into a seated circle in the centre of the room. It is better if the circle is seated on the floor, not chairs. Some exercises specify chairs but on the whole, if I have said 'seated', I mean on the floor.

3. As soon as the teacher joins them in the circle, they fall silent. This is the signal that the lesson is about to begin.

4. When you indicate that an exercise has finished, they sit where they are on the floor, fall silent and listen to the instructions for the next exercise. They should never move - e.g. to get into pairs or groups - until you have indicated that all instructions have been given.

5. Lose no opportunity of promoting the idea of tolerance and of working together to build a mutually supportive group. This might mean that you occasionally choose groups and pairings yourself, so that they do not get fixed with the same partners and friendship groups. If this is done often it will be accepted as part of the 'drama thing' and will not elicit groans!

6. Most of the last exercises of the lesson are 'performance' ones, where the groups present their work to the rest of the class. Establish from the start where performances happen, i.e. on the stage or on the floor, and where the group should sit in relation to them. Some of the exercises in this book require a stage, or at least a performance area which is clearly defined, others might merely need an audience sitting in a horse-shoe shape leaving the open end free for performance; both audience requirements should be shown them and the signal for audience positions should also be a signal for silence and concentrated attention.

7. Retain this shape for the ending session, which should always be an evaluative discussion of what has been learned. The teacher then moves into the open end of the horseshoe or onto the performance area to lead the discussion.

8. This book often demands some preparation or written evaluative work. This may have been started in previous years but should be insisted on in this year, as a preparation for the type of work required for G.C.S.E. Insist that description of the task performed is kept to the minimum so that evaluative comment becomes the focus of each student's attention - both of their own preparation and performance and that of others in the class.

The discussion at the end of the lesson should ask the right questions for them to start thinking in an evaluative way. What worked and what did not? Why do they think this was so? What improvements could have been made? What skills were being used? How successfully? And so on.

Note that I use the word he and him throughout this book, as I do in all my books, taking as excuse the word 'actor' which is used for either sex. No offence is meant and of course all exercises can be adapted to either sex.

Extract One

LESSON ONE

needed: a soft ball or - better still - a beanbag

As with the two previous year plans, it is important to start with a bonding session. There has been a long summer break and even if all the group knows each other, they will not be a 'unit' necessary for working together on drama skills. More than likely there will be newcomers to the group too. For many reasons, it is important not to plunge them straight into improvisations or other skills until some bonding has taken place. The work in these first two lessons, then, will concentrate on building a group that is prepared to work closely together, and reaffirming the need for trust, tolerance and concentration.

1. Introduction Game: Stand the group in a circle and place a soft ball or beanbag - better because it won't roll - in the centre of the circle. A member of the group stands in the centre next to the ball. He describes two members of the group [using only physical characteristics, including clothes, shoes etc.] After the description, which must be short and snappy, he throws the ball in the air and both of those described run to catch it. The person who gets it sets the loser a non-threatening forfeit, such as reciting something, hopping around the circle, or whatever. Then the winner of the ball describes a further two people, and so on.

This game becomes tedious quite quickly. Play it to the full if you have a group that are new to working together; otherwise move onto the next activity after a few rounds of it.

2. Discuss how difficult it is to describe accurately - how many recognised the descriptions in the opening game, for example? - and yet it is an important skill: think of police statements, etc. Working in pairs, each should briefly decide on accurate physical descriptions of their partner, which might aid, for instance, a photofit artist.

The pairs now swap around so everyone has a different partner and the same activity occurs. Finally there is a third pairing.

At the end of this pairing the group go back once more into the circle. Each person takes turns in giving a close accurate description, as they have planned, of one of the three partners they have encountered. Can everyone tell who is being described? **N.B. No shouting out. Impose a strict rule that no one is to interrupt until the speaker has finished their description.**

3. At the end of the Year 8 book, some time was spent on imitation with a view to accurate presentation of a person's mannerisms in walking, talking, etc. Organise the class into small groups. Each group is to decide on one of their number who everyone in the group is going to 'be'. They must study both movement and way of speaking. Movement needs to cover walking, way of standing, body posture etc. and facial expression. They should look closely at the way hands are used. When speaking, mannerisms become more pronounced, both physically and in voice tone. Each group should work on the movement, making it as accurate as possible, then plan a short monologue which the whole group will present, one taking over the voice from another at chosen times.

Each group then presents their character to the class. Can everyone tell who is the subject?

N.B. The subject takes part in this exercise as well. He is of course playing himself, but acts as a useful reference point for the imitators.

If time, repeat this activity with another subject, so that everyone has had a turn at being an imitator.

4. Finish with a class discussion and evaluation of the difficulties discovered. **

** For those of you who have not got the earlier two Drama Plan books, read the notes in the introduction on the structuring of drama classes and the importance of evaluation.

LESSON TWO.

More bonding with the focus on accurate observational skills. This kindly focus - and make sure it is kind - on individuals in the group and on each other re-inforces the lessons learned over the previous two years about tolerance and drama as a co-operative subject where people must be prepared to work with anyone in the group, not just their friendship groups.

1. Tee-ak-ee-allio. Start with a boisterous game to get everyone's blood moving. For this game, the class is divided into two large teams. Each team has a 'base' in a corner of the room, at opposite ends from each other. The object of the game is to capture as many of the other side as possible and imprison them in their home 'base.' Capture is achieved by tapping a member of the opposing team on the head, at the same time calling 'Tee-ak'. The captive is then taken to the base where he must stay unless released. Release can only occur by a member of the captive's own team running through the enemy base calling out 'Tee-ak-ee-allio!' All captives may then rejoin the game.

The game continues until one team has captured the other or, more likely, until they are all exhausted and ready to move on to something else!

2. Sitting in a circle, the teacher starts to talk or do an action which must be copied by each member of the group in turn. The trick here is to be doing something, such as crossing the legs, whilst speaking a simple sentence. The next person repeats the same sentence but is told he is wrong unless he, too, is crossing his legs.

I use the following sentence: I was going out to the nightclub wearing any imaginative item can be added here. The point is that the item of clothing is simply a diversionary device. The real point is the crossed legs, folded arms, etc. Each person in turn will then say: 'I was going out to the nightclub wearing ...' adding their own idea or copying the same as the teacher. If they are not also doing the real focus of the exercise then the teacher tells them: 'Sorry, but you won't be allowed in.' Even those who, by chance are, say crossing their legs, will take a little time to cotton on to what is really happening here. Students are always intrigued and frustrated by this game - in about equal measures.

Make sure that students know not to spoil the game by blurting out their 'discovery' when they realise it.

Ideas to use are: crossed legs, folded arms, head on one side, one hand raised higher than the other, scratching an ear, saying 'um' or 'er' before the item of clothing, and so on.

Another fun version of this is the 'elephant' trick. For this you need a small box or book or similar. You kneel in the middle of the circle and place the object on the ground, turning it several times as you speak. You ask, 'How many elephants are there dancing on this box?' whilst turning the box in a very definite way. They will of course think the answer is the number of turns of the box you make, when in fact the answer is the number of words you use in the question! It will take them ages to realise this!

Keep varying the number of words you use: 'How many are there now?' Answer '5.' 'And now?' Answer '2.' And so on.

3. Now get the class up into pairs. Each pair is to plan a conversation in which the subject under discussion is never actually mentioned. E.g., if the subject of the conversation is 'oranges', one person might start by saying,

'I bought a big bag at the Supermarket yesterday.'

'Why was that then?'

'I had a recipe I wanted to try.'

'Oh, a pudding for the dinner party tonight?'

'That's right. Anyway, I peeled them as instructed...' etc.

Extract Two

LESSON THREE

Year 8 Drama Plans ended with some early work on naturalistic characters, having spent some time on melodrama, pantomime, commedia dell'arte and such like broad characterisations.

This lesson and the following few weeks follow up this work and expand it. The lessons will also introduce various social issues for exploration and discussion.

1. Start with a familiar exercise in which the whole group moves randomly around the room. If preferred, use my familiar grid exercise, where all students must imagine the floor marked out like graph paper, all straight lines and squares. They can then only move along these imaginary lines, without bumping into anyone or stopping. Beginning the session by instructing the whole class to move like this imposes an extra discipline which makes them concentrate better.

Having established a disciplined way of moving around, without bumping or talking or stopping, instruct them that today we are going to think about age, profession, and other 'external' factors such as weather and time of day and how that affects the way people move.

In this opening exercise, just to introduce the idea, throw up a jumble of suggestions for them to react to instantly:

old person; toddler; teenager; businessman; soldier; policeman; farmer; model; pop star; athlete; walking in deep snow; in a gale; on a hot sunny day; late at night; early in the morning; going to work or school; coming home from school or work.

2. With this work behind them, sit the class in a circle for discussion about some of this. How far does what one does for a living affect movement? It might sometimes be a matter of status; someone who is the boss of a company might feel more certain of himself than the factory worker and thus stand taller and walk more confidently. Some physical jobs might dictate a style of walking which will spill out into everyday life - such as a policeman or a soldier. Some heavy physical work might distort the body in some way - heavily muscled upper torso, for instance, for those constantly carrying heavy weights - and thus affect the movement.

Weather conditions and times of day may affect the way you move either by affecting a person's mood or simply because, for instance, a strong gale is hard to walk against.

Finally, can the class identify the different changes in musculature which occur at different ages which will affect movement? e.g. a toddler and an old person might feel unconfident about their ability to balance and thus plant their feet more deliberately and hesitantly.

3. Ask the whole class to find a place on the floor and curl up as small as possible. For this exercise they will be working at times completely on their own and at times in spontaneous groupings. Make sure they remain listening; even when working in groupings the focus is on movement not speech, so there should be no need to talk - until you invite them to do so.

Tell them first that they are new-born babies. If they have personal experience of observing babies, they should draw on that. Help them by describing their feelings - reacting to sudden noise, to bright light, to a familiar face such as the approach of mother. Allow them to remain like this for a few minutes, reacting in their mind to light, patterns on the ceiling perhaps, a moving toy, a slamming door.

Move them up a stage to pre-walking - crawling or 'bum-shuffling'. Once again, ask them to base their response on observation if at all possible.

Next ask them to start to experiment with trying to walk, as if for the first time - pulling themselves up, taking the first few steps. Ask them to think about how difficult this really is, how hard to synchronise, to balance.

Now the children are playschool age and can interact with the rest of the group for the first time. Try this at first with no sound: they are at playschool and it might be beneficial if the teacher is 'in role' as the playschool leader.

Then try adding sound - but at the first signs of 'hamming it up', losing reality, take them back to silence. If this keeps happening, it is not a bad thing because it will quickly make them see the difference between 'generalising' or stereotyping and reality based on observation and their own memories.

Finish with the children at around seven or eight. It is the school playground so the group can react with each other. Use the same method as before - focusing on movement first, in silence, adding sound and taking it back to silence again every time you feel they are generalising again.

4. Sit the group down for a discussion of what is happening here. Can they remember what it was like to be at playschool? First starting 'big' school? Around seven or eight years old? What did they like to play when in the playground? At home? What things did they surround themselves with in their bedroom? What was a favourite toy? Can they remember first playing in snow? Wearing something they loved to wear, or they hated? What was it? Why did they have to wear it?

You can add many things to this list but the above should be enough. You don't want to overdo it.

Encourage some of the speakers to relate their memory by standing or sitting out front and talking to the whole group. See if the group notice any slight reactions in the body or the face when the teller relates various experiences. For example, an involuntary flinching when describing the prickly feel of a hated sweater.

These little movements and facial expressions give the sense of reality and help the audience to believe in the truth of what is being said.

This sharing of memories should become a feature of all the work done on naturalism at whatever level. For it, it is essential the group should feel that they will not be laughed at; the promotion of a warm and tolerant atmosphere is the first essential.

5. Finish with the class in small groups. They are to try to bring to life a childhood memory of one of the members of the group. Every effort should be made to make all the characters as real as possible and to this end there must be evaluative group discussion afterwards. See if after the performances, the class can spot when a performance strikes them as real or if it seems insincere or generalised.

Extract Three

LESSON NINE

When improvising, the tendency is always to 'go for the obvious' or to 'generalise.' In the next three lessons, we are going to look at situations which are as realistic as possible and which they might already have come across. By dealing with the 'familiar', the students need to be asked if their organisation of material in their improvisations make for likely scenarios and whether the people in the scene have reacted in a believable way.

All the situations involve differences of opinion in some way. It is to be hoped that by playing the part of a character who has a different attitude to the student's own, he will gain some understanding of other viewpoints. It is imperative, therefore, that all scenarios are discussed afterwards.

These three lessons are a little different in style from the usual skill-based ones. The focus gradually moves more into experiencing everyday social problems. Because I feel that occasionally these might touch a raw nerve, I have introduced 'acting' exercises into them so that they can take comfort in the fact that it is an 'act' and not 'real.' However, the intention is still to create as real a situation as possible and to experience different viewpoints.

1. Acting arguments is always quite difficult. It is likely that the scenarios explored this week will involve an argument of some sort. Arguments fall roughly into two types. The first sort are those which happen out of different point-of-views over some issue. These sort are likely to start fairly calm, even reasonable, though if both sides refuse to give an inch it could build to being more heated as both sides become frustrated.

The second sort are those which are based on something unreasonable to start with, for example two groups of people hating each other without any real explanation other than skin colour, religious belief or some belief that that person or group of people are responsible for things going wrong in society or their own lives.

Discuss examples of both of these sorts of 'argument.' e.g. the first sort might be as 'cool' as a debate about the rights and wrongs of 'cloning', or a difference of opinion about killing animals for sport or a teenager trying to convince parents that at sixteen he should be allowed out with his friends on a Friday night.

The second sort of argument is likely to be as irrational and emotional as the situation in Romeo and Juliet, where two families simply feud out of a long-established habit of hatred or the situation in Germany in the 1930s, where Jews were blamed for everything going wrong politically and socially in the country.

Can they think of their own examples of both types of argument?

2. The class are divided into pairs who are told to 'argue' with each other about anything at all - the style of their shoes, their taste in food. Make sure that the subject matter is not emotive for this exercise - we are concentrating on 'acting' arguments rather than on the subject-matter.

Ask them to give the argument a 'shape' - not according to what they are saying - which is not at all important - but how they are saying it. e.g. a usual shape would be to start slow and relatively calm, to build to a crescendo, gathering speed, heat and intensity, then either to sort it out, subsiding to a calmer state to finish, or to reach a climax which would mean one opponent leaving in frustration or wanting to hit the other. Take care - instruct no touching. Hitting can be indicated by freezing at the moment of impact.

Once they have a shape, ask them to cut out words and concentrate on the shapes their bodies make - the tension of the muscles and so on. The effect should be of a televised argument with the sound turned off. Pick out individual pairs for focus here, to allow others to see convincing ones.

Now add sound again, but no words. They make sounds with their throats, lips, teeth, breaths - whistles, claps, growls, hisses etc. See if they can find a repertoire of aggressive sounds that can give the *effect* of an argument. Once again, focus on a few pairs for 'showing' the effectiveness of their work.

Obviously, we have moved right away from realism here but it is worth reminding them that even non naturalistic acting has to be based enough in reality to be recognisable. The 'shape' of the argument should be recognisable, as should be the tone of it, here explored through sound.

3. Now ask them to pick one of the following scenarios, focusing on the argument itself. They should not allow themselves to be carried away but try to remain as 'actors' - staying aware of shape and clarity.

- A parent tackles a teenager about the amount of money they spend on CDs or clothes
- A parent tackles a teenager about his refusal to help at home
- A parent tackles a teenager about someone he perceives to be an unsuitable friend
- A teenager tries to convince a parent that he should be allowed an increase in pocket-money
- A teenager tackles a parent about wanting to stay out later than midnight
- A teenager tries to convince a parent that he should be allowed to go on holiday with his mates rather than with the family

Once they have played this through as one character, they should swap roles and try the same scenario from another point of view.

See as many of these as possible and then discuss:

Which role was easier for them to play? Why?

Would it help if they gave some more 'background' to the two characters?

How far were these scenes 'typical'?

Which characters were more realistic? What would need to be done to make the adults, for instance, more convincing?

Extract Four

LESSON FIFTEEN

This lesson focuses on crowd scenes and how to deal with them and is a natural progression from the work on the characterisation of individuals within groups explored earlier in Lessons Ten and Eleven.

For those that have used the Year 8 book, Lessons Four and Five of that book dealt with how to keep the audience focus on the important moments even when there is a large crowd on the stage. Remind them of this first. Inevitably, some of the problems posed by crowd scenes are ones of positioning and focus.

1. Ask the class to divide in half, each half to stand in a line at opposite ends of the room. They should be facing each other.

To get the students used to the idea of all working together in large numbers ask one volunteer from each side to step into the centre. Each volunteer faces the opposing line.

The volunteers are instructed to move slowly and smoothly, as if they were performing a familiar mirror exercise. The whole line opposite mirrors these movements exactly.

Ask them to try to work towards such togetherness that initiator and imitators are absolutely synchronised.

You can of course swap movement initiators as often as you like.

Then vary this by asking the whole line to react instead of copy - but they are still trying to achieve synchronicity so the stimulus movements must all be of a type that a group action can react to, e.g.:

the initiator mimes pushing - the group leans back as if being pushed;

the initiator mimes a low slow motion punch, all react as if hit in the gut.

Now use two volunteers as a pair and ask the whole of the rest of the class to find a place in the room where they can all see clearly what is happening between the two.

Partner A, with a cross face, holds Partner B by the ear; B's excruciating face and action is mimicked as if it were happening to every member of the class.

B pulls a hideous face at A who mimes slow motion outrage - mirrored by the whole class, and so on.

Thus the class are always mirroring the reaction, not the action. The results of this work can be very funny.

Try a variation of this to end with which involves large numbers of the group being attached in some way to each other: they should stick together like iron filings on a magnet - in a cluster rather than a line. Now see if they can perform some of the above exercises without coming unstuck. This too can look highly entertaining.

2. The comic features of the last exercise can be exploited if tackling crowd problems in a non-naturalistic way. I would like to look at some ideas of this kind before returning to naturalism, if only to keep the physical theatre option always in mind.

Divide the class up into large groups of around ten. Each group should now find an interesting way of 'sticking' physically together whilst allowing some moveability as well as the visibility of every face: people's heads could be stuck under other people's arms, between legs, and so on; levels should be varied and interesting, stooping, crouching, standing on tiptoe - work first on making an interesting grouping.

I call this group exercise 'the many headed monster', which is a fairly accurate description of it!

Once a suitable position is found, try the following characterisations for the group:

- aristocratic and snobby;
- gossipy;
- flatterers;
- doomed souls being taken to hell.

You could try just moods too:

- an angry group, a suspicious group, and so on.

A suitable way of moving all together in 'character' needs to be found, accompanied by very exaggerated and contorted facial expressions and sounds. e.g. a group of gossipers might be continually getting in to huddles punctuated by nosy craning of necks, out of which we hear giggles, screeches of delighted shock and surprise, sibilant whispers and 'ssshhh'ing sounds.

Watch some of the results of these, which can be an absolute delight and will show them that, if the style of an improvisation is non-naturalistic, this kind of idea can be one way of dealing with a crowd.

3. In fact, the above work is the opposite extreme to what we are going to do now, which is crowds in a realistic setting.

The physical theatre approach does not seek to give each individual member of the group a separate character but rather seeks to make a point about the nature of crowds by generalising and exaggerating crowd behaviour.

For the following exercise the groups should stay in their tens or more. They are to try the following situations:

- a crowd waiting to get into a very popular film;
- a crowd watching firemen rescue a family from a high bedroom window;
- a crowd of refugees waiting with their belongings to be taken to a camp.

Try this spontaneously first and allow the class to watch each other. Then ask them to spend a few minutes in their groups deciding who they are, what their relation to each other is - if any - their age, what they do for a living, the kind of mood they are in and why.

Once these decisions have been made, play the crowd scene again, watch them and invite comments and comparisons. Which worked best and why? What other improvements could be made?

I suggest that reminders about focus and the shape of the scene might be important here: which elements of the crowd do you want the audience to be watching and at what moments? How can this be achieved?

4. Finish with a whole shaping of the scene according to the above findings. Work towards making the scene as effective and interesting as possible. One caveat, though - for the purpose of the exercise the individuals within the crowd are important not, for instance, the invisible firemen and family being rescued. They must find a way of keeping tension up, making the audience aware of what else is going on whilst retaining interest in the individual reactions of the members of the crowd.