YOUTH TAKE THE STAGE

AN INTRODUCTION TO Interactive Theatre

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Youth Take the Stage:
An Introduction to Interactive Theatre

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This one-day interactive theatre workshop includes about 6 hours of training and is designed primarily for adults who work with young people in out-of-school settings. No drama or theatre experience is necessary to participate, just the desire to work with young people who want to perform and who want to make a difference on individual, community and global issues. The workshop ideally is also conducted with 10 to 15 youth participants of similar ages (for example, young people in grades 6 to 8 or grades 9 to 12).

The training for the young people can end with this one-day workshop, or the workshop can be just the first step toward forming a performance troupe that "takes the show on the road." Such a troupe may perform for community groups, peers and younger youth.

Theatre Versus Theater

American students usually are taught that "theater" is the American English spelling of the word and "theatre" is its British English spelling. However, most American stage professionals and educators spell the word "theatre," rather than "theater." This difference in spelling is intended to distinguish stage productions from those shown at a movie theater. Michigan State University's Department of Theatre uses the "re" ending, so this curriculum will, too.

Why Make the Theatre Interactive?

> **"I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."**
>
> – Oscar Wilde, Irish poet, novelist, dramatist and critic, 1854–1900

You've just about said it all, Mr. Wilde! Theatre is a powerful and compelling way of showing what it's like to be human, because it tells stories about us – how we see the world and how we see ourselves in the world. These stories show us conflicts that may be familiar or new to us, and we watch to see what happens to the characters as the action unfolds on stage.

Interactive theatre is unique in that it is participatory. The audience not only watches, but becomes part of the production. In interactive theatre, the drama stops at a high point in the conflict when one or more characters have important decisions to make. Audience members are then invited to talk with the actors on stage. With the help of a facilitator who moderates this interaction, actors and audience members work together to devise positive ways to resolve the conflict. The actors then incorporate one or two of the audiences' suggestions to resolve the conflict. Forum theatre (see the sidebar on pg. 6) is a variation on interactive theatre in which an audience member replaces one actor on stage to act out audience suggestions. Either way the audience can see or experience firsthand how well their suggestions play out.

Interactive theatre is a dynamic way to bring young people together to explore important issues and identify constructive ways of dealing with them. The issues can be individual, community, global or some combination (such as health and fitness, peer pressure, bullying, substance abuse, violence at home or in school, mental illness, racism, sexism, homophobia, teen pregnancy, homelessness, poverty, hunger, child labor and environmental protection).

What Leaders Need to Know

Through 4-H interactive theatre, young people can learn to perceive and make distinctions among the moods, intentions, motivations and feelings of others. They will experience scenes, characters and situations that may be similar to or very different from their own lives. They will – by means of researching an issue, role playing, developing characters, improvising and performing – truly walk in someone else's shoes.

During the intensive workshop outlined in this book, the participants will get to know each other in fun ways. They'll begin to experiment with some of the building blocks of theatre, and get a taste of acting, improvising and performing with audience participation. They'll also build important life skills, including self-esteem, community service learning, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving and decision-making.

Facilitation and Audience Interaction

The facilitator's role is not to express personal opinions or to educate the audience. The most effective facilitators stay neutral in order to draw out differing opinions

A TYPICAL INTERACTIVE THEATRE PERFORMANCE

A typical interactive theatre performance runs from 35 to 45 minutes long. It may be set up something like this:

▸ The facilitator welcomes the audience and introduces the troupe, explains interactive theatre and the audience's role in the performance, and introduces the drama's issue. *(About 5 minutes)*

▸ The troupe performs their prepared drama. *(5 to 7 minutes)*

▸ The facilitator leads the interaction between the audience and the actors, who stay in character on stage. *(15 to 20 minutes)*

▸ The facilitator brings closure to the performance by summarizing the main points raised by the interaction and by having the actors step out of character and introduce themselves by sharing information such as their first names, ages and schools. The facilitator thanks the audience for being part of the performance. If available, issue fact sheets are handed out to the audience. These sheets list important facts, resources and where to go for one-on-one support. *(10 minutes)*

and reactions. They project genuine interest in the audience members' feelings, experiences and opinions. (More information about the facilitator role appears in "Facilitating the Drama's Interaction" on pg. 9.)

The length of the interaction time will vary, because the same drama performed for two different audiences may evoke very different responses. However, setting a time limit of 15 to 20 minutes serves to move the interaction along. Depending on the level of interaction between the characters and the audience, the facilitator's participation level will vary. Because the facilitator does not to play a character in the drama, he or

FORUM THEATRE: A FORM OF AUDIENCE INTERACTION

In forum theatre, a member of the audience is invited to assume one actor's role during the interaction phase of the performance. (The stand-in is recruited at the start of the interactive phase.) The cast member whose role the audience member assumes, sits out. The troupe then recreates the scene with the help of the new performer from the audience. The new performer acts out his or her suggestion for dealing with the drama's issue. The audience is invited once again to react to this revised scene.

Forum theatre allows the audience to more actively engage in the drama by enacting their suggestions. This technique is used only if the chosen audience member feels that he or she can act out a positive alternative. Several audience members can contribute during a performance, but usually only one audience member at a time works with the troupe. Use this technique only when the troupe members are very comfortable with their drama and have performed many times. Try it for the first time with a small audience (30 people or less).

she is often in the best position to clarify audience comments or to raise questions for the audience.

The personal nature of some of the issues dramatized in interactive theatre make it important to provide support for audience members who may be dealing with similar issues. One or more support persons (such as a counselor, school nurse or youth group leader) attending the performance should be pointed out to the audience as "someone you may wish to talk to."

Before the Workshop

Read the workshop schedule that follows and prepare as needed for each activity (see the "Activities" section on pgs. 15 to 27). The workshop drama (the scripted part of the performance) is short – only 5 to 7 minutes long. With experience and hard work, touring dramas can go up to 30 minutes.

Workshop Schedule

This workshop provides about 6 hours of training; ideally the training is done in one day.

MORNING (2.5 to 3 hours)

▸ **Get Started** *(10 to 15 minutes)* – Welcome the participants. If they don't already know one another, provide name tags. Give a quick introduction to interactive theatre and briefly go over the schedule and the goals for the day. Explain to the group that they will get a taste of what it takes to be a part of interactive theatre. If the participants plan to form a troupe after the workshop, explain that ultimately this could mean performing for their peers, younger youth and community groups.

▸ **Get Active** *(60 to 90 minutes)* – Jump right in with the following theater activities:

- Becoming a Troupe Member *(15 to 20 minutes)*
- Bubbling Emotions *(20 to 25 minutes)*
- Combating Stage Fright *(10 to 15 minutes)*
- Rights and Responsibilities *(15 to 25 minutes)*

▸ **Take a Break (10 minutes)**

▸ **Work Together as a Troupe**

- Bring the group back together and have them carry out the **Tableaux – Scene Building** activity *(20 minutes)*. List the characters that were part of the tableau on newsprint. Post the list where everyone can see it.
- Building on the characters that emerged in the **Tableaux – Scene Building** activity, do the **Hot Seat – Character Development** activity (see pg. 25). This is an excellent way to began to develop plot and character. *(45 minutes)*

AFTERNOON (3 to 3.5 hours)

▸ **Group Energizer** *(5 to 10 minutes) –* Do the **Touch and Imagined Props** activity (see pg. 27).

▸ **Plotting –** Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

The plot is the way a story unfolds, with one action causing a second action, the second action causing a third and so on. Central to the plot are the characters, a problem or conflict, and a solution or resolution. Interactive theatre should clearly present the problem using well-defined characters. Remember that the audience interacts with you – the actors – while you stay in character, to move to the drama's resolution.

Ask the participants to return to the small groups they worked with earlier to complete their dramas. *(5 minutes)*

▸ **Putting It All Together** *(75 to 90 minutes) –* The groups revisit their scene and character lists from the Tableaux and Hot Seat activities. Then they decide which story they wish to tell and choose the characters who will tell it. They can play Hot Seat again to develop new characters or old characters who didn't have a chance to be "hot seated" before. The groups then rehearse their dramas and make changes until they are satisfied with the stories and their performances.

▸ **Show Time!** *(60 minutes) –* The groups perform their dramas for one another (this includes audience interaction time; about 30 minutes for each troupe). The workshop leader acts as the facilitator.

▸ **Reflect On It** *(15 to 30 minutes) –* See **Reflecting After a Performance** on page 13.

▸ **Evaluation (10 minutes)**

▸ **Celebrate!** Food is always good. The troupe will be hungry after working hard all day.

After the Workshop

The interactive theatre workshop we've just described introduced interactive theatre and began to build acting and story-building skills. At later meetings, the group can learn more about the general topic they've chosen as their focus, such as health, nutrition and fitness. (See "**The Community Connection and Researching an Issue**" on pg. 8.)

Next they can move on to brainstorming a new conflict within their chosen topic to dramatize. Use additional meetings to create the new drama using the Tableaux and Hot Seat activities.

Encourage the participants to do additional research as needed and to rehearse extensively. You may wish to bring in a local drama teacher or theatre expert to critique their script and performance and a topic expert to critique the play's content.

ACTIVITIES

Each activity description outlines its purpose and the life and learning skills and theatre skills it's designed to help the participants develop. The activities begin on page 15.

The Community Connection & Researching an Issue

Over time, (troupe members) will gain a sense of empowerment within their communities by doing this kind of community service.

The time constraints of a one-day workshop that emphasizes developing a single scene dramatizing a single conflict don't allow much discussion about a community connection or researching an issue. Nevertheless, the participants are drawing from their own experiences and knowledge of their community as a form of research as they develop characters and do scene work.

Having members of the group gather background information from each other should immediately help them develop their scenes and characters due to the different connections to and perspectives on the issue or conflict they have. Knowing more about the issue at hand will also prepare them for audience questions during the facilitated, interactive portion of the performance. You might also have each troupe think about and generate a list of where and how they can gather information about the community issues that are being dramatized by their scenes.

Starting Out

A first step might be to state the scene's issue as a series of questions. Suppose one of the small groups decides to dramatize the problem of gang activity in their community. To begin with, they need to ask questions that bring different perspectives to the issue. A first question might be "What is a gang?" This could lead to "Is there a gang situation in our community?" followed by "What is your experience with young people joining gangs? Do you know anyone who has joined a gang?" These questions lead the participants to think about the overall concept of gangs and how it relates broadly to the community and individually to gang members.

The first few questions could in turn stimulate other questions, such as:

▸ Do gangs, in general, always engage in the same behavior and activities?

▸ How are gangs different from or similar to other youth clubs?

▸ What makes a gang member part of the group?

▸ Do all gang members wear clothing that is different from what other teens wear?

▸ What gangs exist in our community?

▸ What's "in it" for gang members? That is, are they looking for acceptance? Do they want to imitate someone in a gang? Are they trying to get revenge for something and use the gang as the vehicle for doing so? Are they rebelling against something or someone?

Youth Connecting With Their Communities

Troupe members, in choosing an issue or conflict that they feel strongly about (such as violence, school bullying or substance abuse), are encouraged to connect with their communities by looking closely at the needs of their peers. They also need to think about the role they will have as peer educators and role models as they develop and perform their dramas for people their own age or younger. Over time, they will gain a sense of empowerment within their communities by doing this kind of community service.

Facilitating the Drama's Interaction

What Does "Facilitating a Drama" Mean?

In interactive theatre, the drama is stopped at a high point of the conflict when the characters have an important decision to make. The audience is then asked to interact with the actors, who remain in character on stage. A facilitator who is not an actor in the drama leads, or facilitates, the interaction between the actors and the audience. Through this interaction, the audience provides possible conclusions to the drama.

The goal is not to find the one right answer, but to show the audience and the actors:

▸ That there might be many possible ways to handle a conflict.

▸ How to work positively toward solving the problem.

The interaction actively engages the audience in exploring and examining their own life experiences; they are encouraged to think broadly and deeply about the issue. Each audience member becomes part of the performance and part of the solution.

It's the facilitator's job to tell the audience that interactive theatre is not about making choices to get laughs or to escalate hostility. The interaction should be friendly – and even funny at times – but the central goal is to help people face important issues and find satisfactory ways to cope in a sometimes difficult world. The interaction is not about entertainment, but about serious reflection.

Who Is a Facilitator?

For the first few performances, the facilitator is usually an adult leader or a community resource person such as a social worker, school counselor, or someone else with strong facilitation skills. As the teen troupe members gain experience with the interactive process and performing, the adult facilitators should step aside in favor of the teens, especially when the troupe performs for other teens. The most effective facilitators are often the audience's peers. This means that young people facilitate best for a youth audience and adults facilitate best for an adult audience.

The Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator is a very important member of the troupe and needs to be involved with the troupe from the early issue brainstorming sessions, through the research about the issue, and into the final dress rehearsal and performances. The facilitator introduces the troupe and the drama's issue to the audience at the beginning of the performance. After the troupe has performed their rehearsed script, the facilitator works to create a meaningful interaction between the audience and the drama's characters. The person must understand that the goal of the interactive phase is to help the audience reflect seriously on the drama's issue or issues. The facilitator then helps bring closure to the drama.

Characteristics of a Good Facilitator

A good facilitator:

▸ Is enthusiastic and confident.

▸ Is easy to hear.

▸ Is unbiased and nonjudgmental.

▸ Is a good listener.

▸ Accepts the feelings of all individuals.

▸ Is knowledgeable about the drama's issue or issues.

▸ Respects the troupe members and the audience.

▸ Is true to himself or herself (that is, doesn't try to be someone else).

Behaviors of a Good Facilitator

A good facilitator exhibits many of the following behaviors:

▸ Asks open-ended questions.

▸ Brings the audience into the performance by drawing out reactions, feelings and thoughts.

▸ Reflects, paraphrases, clarifies and comments as needed.

▸ Encourages personal thought and examination.

▸ Asks the audience to identify the characters' goals and motivations.

▸ Asks the audience to consider the consequences of the characters' behavior.

▸ Ensures that there is broad participation from audience members.

▸ Keeps the audience from becoming hostile.

▸ Keeps the cast from dominating the interactive phase of the performance.

▸ Provides a buffer between the characters and the audience.

▸ Understands that some audience members may be uncomfortable or may not want to be at the performance.

▸ Rejects "magic solutions" (see the sidebar on "The Magic Solution") to the issues presented in the performance.

THE MAGIC SOLUTION

If an audience member suggests what seems like a "magic solution" to the drama, the facilitator might ask *"Would that happen in real life?"* If the audience responds that it would, then that alternative should probably be considered a viable solution, and not magic. This audience response may be the beginning of a process of self-motivation and the stimulus for real action.

Bringing Closure to the Drama

When the designated interaction time is over, the facilitator summarizes the main points for the audience and cast. This summary may include a list of the audience's and cast members' discoveries, impressions, choices and consequences. It's important that the audience understands the impact the drama's issue or issues can have on the lives of young people, their families, friends and communities. The facilitator should remind the audience that they have examined some but not all of the possible solutions to the situation presented in the play.

The facilitator then asks the actors to take turns stepping out of character and introducing themselves by giving their first names, ages, and schools, and by making the final statements that they've prepared ahead of time. For example, "My character, Susie, is not at all like me, but I found it helpful to act out her character because now I understand better how she feels."

SUPPORTING THE AUDIENCE

One situation that may arise at any interactive theatre performance deserves special mention. It's important to provide support for audience members who have trouble dealing with a serious topic such as school bullying. Support people such as a counselor, school nurse, or the youth group's adult leader should be available to help the audience as needed. The facilitator or another adult must make sure that the support person connects with audience members who are visibly upset during or after a performance.

Taking the Performance on the Road

Identify Audiences & Performing Spaces

Think about groups in your community who might like to see a performance of your interactive theatre troupe.

Performance spaces can be anywhere that the audience and the actors will fit. While stages are great, interactive theatre can fit into lots of places, including classrooms, meeting rooms and worship spaces. If necessary, simply clear one end of a room and set up chairs either theatre-style or in a semicircle. Try to ensure that everyone in the audience can see and hear. The goal is to develop an intimate feeling, which can often be achieved more easily in smaller spaces than in big, cavernous ones.

Publicity & Marketing

Your group can generate interest in their interactive theatre performances by talking about the production to everyone they know and by sending notices to:

▶ Television stations

▶ Radio stations

▶ Local newspapers

▶ School newsletters

▶ Your county MSU Extension newsletter and web site

▶ Your local school system newsletter and web site

▶ Free classified ad or community events web sites

Publicity can be used to:

▶ Advertise performances.

▶ Recognize sponsors.

▶ Help with fund-raising.

Recognizing sponsors in printed programs or issue information sheets that are handed out at the performances increases the sponsors' visibility in the community, thereby increasing the likelihood that they'll continue supporting your troupe. The company that prints the programs for your show may be willing to offer a discount in exchange for an ad in the program.

Budgeting, Fund-Raising & Record–Keeping

Budgeting

Establish a troupe budget. Remember to include expenses such as:

- Meeting snacks
- Meals while touring
- Phone costs
- Postage
- Mileage to and from performance sites
- Publicity costs (such as advertisements and printing)
- Technical costs (such as for music and props)
- Room or stage rental
- Chair rental

Fund-Raising

Start fund-raising with businesses, organizations or individuals in the community as soon as you begin to identify audiences and performing spaces. Also consider applying for small arts grants; check with your state arts or humanities councils. Other funding sources in your community may include:

- United Way discretionary funding
- Parent-teacher groups
- Educational drug-free schools funding available through intermediate school districts
- Corporate foundations
- Community foundations
- Civic organizations

The 4-H interactive theatre program has many characteristics that are appealing to community funders, such as young people:

- Engaged in community service.
- Tackling serious community problems.
- Acting as peer educators.

Record-Keeping

Use the *Michigan 4-H Treasurer's Record Book* (4H1203; available on the Michigan 4-H Youth Development web site at *web1. msue.msu.edu/4h/*) to keep records of all money collected and spent. Include in-kind donations, such as free printing of the issue information sheet in exchange for listing the printer on the troupe publicity materials.

Set up an account with a local bank or credit union. Be sure to follow the Internal Revenue Service (online at *irs.gov*) procedure for setting up an EIN (employer identification number).

Remember the "three R's" in managing the troupe's money:

- **Receipts –** For all deposits, withdrawals and expenditures
- **Record –** All exchanges of money, including donations
- **Reconcile –** Monthly with your financial institution statement

If the organization from which you're renting performance space doesn't have one, work with them to prepare a rental contract. One of the adult troupe leaders and the appropriate person at the performance site must sign it.

Remember to invite current and potential sponsors to attend the performance (individuals at the performance site may be able to suggest potential sponsors).

Have the parents or guardians of each participant under age 18 complete and sign a permission form and a medical and media release form **before the first performance**. Participants aged 18 and up can legally sign for themselves. Group members who do not have completed paperwork on file with the group may not perform.

Reflecting After a Performance

*I*t's important to remember that performing requires the young people to take big personal risks. This is especially so when they perform a drama that addresses sensitive and emotional life issues in front of their peers. Playing an unlikable character who engages in hurtful and mean behavior is a risk. Playing a character who makes self-destructive decisions is a risk. Playing someone out of one's own character, even if the character is positive, can be scary. Interacting with a live audience as part of the performance also can be challenging and unpredictable.

A reflection time for the troupe members immediately after each performance is recommended. Just as the performance provides closure for the audience, reflection time provides it for the troupe members.

To help young people feel okay about their performance experience and to grow as people and as performers, it's important that the informal, post-performance discussion be safe, confidential and honest.

Positively changing the lives of young people who become part of an interactive theatre troupe is a major goal of interactive theatre. Giving them a chance to practice important life skills and to learn basic theatre-related skills are two of its major objectives. The adult leaders need to keep these goals and objectives in mind. This is especially important as the young people reflect on their performances.

Approach the reflection time from the perspectives of the troupe members and the quality of the performance. As the discussion flows, these two perspectives will likely overlap.

> *To help young people feel okay about their performance experience and to grow as people and as performers, it's important that the informal, post-performance discussion be safe, confidential and honest.*

SO, HOW'D IT GO?* (POST-PERFORMANCE REFLECTION)

*Adapted from Ferrari, T. M., & Vertefeuille, P. (1995). *Reaching out for teen awareness: A model for education through interactive theater.* Orono: University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Adult leader: Tell me about how you felt out on stage today.

Youth #1: At first I was nervous, but as time went on, I felt more comfortable. I didn't really know I had changed much. I just got really caught up in what the audience was doing, so I felt like they really hated me because of the way I was acting – sort of snobby.

Youth #2: They did hate you!

Youth #3: It shows they were really getting into the drama and that most of them had strong feelings against drugs.

Youth #4: One of the kids said something about not using drugs and everybody started clapping. They did that a couple of times. The first time they did it, I almost started crying. I was saying to myself "Yes!"

Reflection Questions

After each performance, have the troupe members gather in a quiet place, and ask them the following personal experience questions:

▸ Are you having fun? Why?

▸ Did you feel any stage fright? Why or why not?

▸ If you were feeling stage fright, what do you think might help you overcome it?

▸ What kind of creative and positive ways have you discovered through these performances for solving problems and making decisions?

▸ Do you feel like you're part of a team when you're performing? What makes you feel that way?

Next, ask them the following theatrical quality questions:

▸ Could the audience see, hear and understand the actors?

▸ Do we need to do voice work?

▸ Did the audience stay engaged throughout both the scripted and the interactive parts of the performance? What were some of the signs of that?

▸ Did any of you have trouble staying in character?

▸ Were the emotions you expressed as actors believable? Appropriate? Why or why not?

▸ Were there holes in the scripted part of the performance? *(For example, perhaps the relationships between the characters were unclear.)*

▸ Did you know enough about the issues raised in the play to answer the audience's questions?

▸ Did we handle all of the concerns and questions raised by the audience? At future performances, what might we need to do beyond giving an issue resource sheet to each audience member?

▸ What was the impact of our performance on the audience?

Becoming a Troupe Member

PURPOSE:

Getting to know each other

OBJECTIVES:

The participants will:

▸ Play at thinking imaginatively.

▸ Feel comfortable sharing ideas with others.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

▸ Teamwork

▸ Self-esteem

THEATRE SKILLS:

Exercising imagination

MATERIALS:

❑ Newsprint or large piece of paper

❑ A wide-point marker

❑ Masking tape

❑ Index cards or sheets of paper (one per person)

❑ Pencils or pens (one per person)

TIME:

15–20 minutes

SETTING:

A comfortable space where the youth can work in pairs and as a whole group

PROCEDURE:

Before the activity:

Write the following incomplete sentences on a sheet of newsprint. Adapt the list to your group's interests.

▸ If I were a car, I would be a _____.

▸ If I were a building, I would be _____.

▸ If I were an animal, I would be a _____.

▸ If I were a food, I would be _____.

Display the sheet where everyone can see it.

During the activity:

1. Distribute the index cards and pencils. Give the group 3 or 4 minutes to write or draw their responses to each of the incomplete sentences.

2. Ask the participants to find and introduce themselves to a partner. Ask them to take turns sharing their responses to the sentences and explaining why they chose those responses.

3. When the introductions seem to have been completed, have the participants stand in a circle. Ask for volunteers to introduce their partners by name and to share their partner's response to just one of the incomplete sentences. Have the group members take turns introducing their partners.

TALKING IT OVER:

▸ Ask the group the following questions:

▸ Was it hard to come up with an object such as a car or food to represent you? Why?

▸ How did you feel about sharing your responses and explaining why you chose those responses to your partner?

▸ Why do you suppose someone would answer question #1 with a VW Beetle and another choose a Ford Ranger truck? (**Helper Note:** Substitute two different responses that participants in your group gave.)

▸ What can these different responses tell us about each other?

▸ How would someone who saw herself as a German shepherd dog act? (**Helper Note:** Ask the participants to answer this question with words.)

▸ How would someone who saw himself as a small poodle act? (**Helper Note:** Ask the participants to answer this question with words.)

Bubbling Emotions*

PURPOSE:

Becoming comfortable with one another and experimenting with a basic acting technique

OBJECTIVES:

The participants will:

▸ Practice brainstorming to identify emotions.

▸ Express emotions nonverbally using facial expressions and body language.

▸ Start to come together as a group.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

▸ Teamwork

▸ Self-esteem

THEATRE SKILLS:

Expressing emotions

MATERIALS:

❑ Newsprint or other large paper

❑ Markers (at least one per person)

❑ Index or card stock, at least 8.5 inches by 11 inches (one sheet per person, plus one)

❑ Scissors (several pairs)

❑ Masking tape

TIME:

20–25 minutes

SETTING:

A space where the group can work in a large circle

PROCEDURE:

Before the activity:

1. Gather the supplies you will need for the activity and read through the instructions.

2. Cut out a large speech bubble to use as a model to show the group. Depending on the age and skill levels of your group, you may want to photocopy an outline of a speech bubble onto the index stock.

During the activity:

1. Ask the youth to brainstorm a list of at least 20 emotions or feelings. Record their responses on newsprint. Display the list where everyone can see it.

2. Give each person a sheet of index or card stock and tell them to cut out their own large speech bubble.

3. Divide the participants into two equal groups. Have each group stand in a circle, one inside the other, and face the other circle. Ask the group in the inner circle to set aside their speech bubbles for now.

4. Ask each participant in the inner circle to choose an emotion (either one from the list the whole group brainstormed or one that's not on the list). Ask them to show the emotion they chose on their face and with body language. Tell the members of the outer circle they'll have a few minutes to walk around the inner circle and observe the emotions being acted out.

5. After a few minutes of observation, read aloud or paraphrase the following:

   If you're in the outer circle, stop and pair up with the person directly across from you in the circle. Examine the body language and facial expression of the person in front of you in the inner circle. Now, based on your observation, fill in a speech bubble with something you think your partner in the inner circle might say. For example, a person who appears to be showing surprise might say something like, "I can't believe I won the lottery!"

* Adapted from Campbell, A. (1994). Re-inventing the wheel: Breakout theatre-in-education. In M. Schutzman & J. Cohen-Cruz (Eds.), *Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism* (pp. 59–63). New York: Routledge.

6. When the outer circle group seems to be done writing, ask for a volunteer from the inner circle to share their display of emotion while his or her partner from the outer circle displays his or her speech bubble for that emotion. Continue around the circle, having the partners take turns sharing.

7. Next, have the inner and outer circles trade places and repeat the activity. Encourage the new inner circle members to choose different emotions to act out than the first group did.

8. After the second round of emotion sharing, have the participants tape their speech bubbles to the walls of the room where everyone can see them.

TRY THIS, TOO:

Instead of having the participant select an emotion to act out, write the names of several emotions on slips of paper and put them in a hat. Have each person draw a slip from a hat and act out the emotion they drew.

TALKING IT OVER:

Ask the group the following questions:

▸ How did it feel to express positive emotions? Negative emotions? How is this the same or different in real life?

▸ What role does body language play when you're talking to people in real life?

▸ Is it easy for you to read other people's body language? Why?

▸ What emotions do you think you express best?

Combating Stage Fright

PURPOSE:

Learning to handle stage fright

OBJECTIVES:

The participants will:

▸ Understand what stage fright is and how it affects people.

▸ Learn one technique for handling stage fright.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

Self-esteem

THEATRE SKILLS:

Handling performance anxiety and stage fright

MATERIALS:

None

TIME:

10–15 minutes

SETTING:

A comfortable, open space

PROCEDURE:

During the activity:

1. Tell the group how common stage fright is. Say something like this:

   Many actors and public speakers suffer from "stage fright." Stage fright is our reaction to the stress of performing in front of others. When we experience stage fright, our hands might get sweaty, our voices might shake and our hearts might pound loudly. All of these are normal and natural reactions to a frightening situation. When you're frightened, you may want to run away, but of course when you're performing you can't do that! You can learn to deal with these feelings so they won't interfere with your performance. Actors and public speakers have developed many exercises to bring their stage fright under control.

2. Tell the group that they will now do one exercise designed to reduce stage fright. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

   Stand up. Think about a situation in which you've been nervous or had stage fright. Think about how you felt mentally, physically and emotionally. Okay, now yawn several times (this will help relax your voice). Enjoy the feeling of being at rest. Now raise your right arm as high as you can above your head. Shake it very hard, then put it down at your side. Repeat this with your left arm. Think about how you feel now.

TALKING IT OVER:

Ask the group the following questions:

▸ What are some activities besides acting when people might feel stage fright and other forms of performance anxiety? *(Before taking a test, playing basketball, showing a horse, giving a speech.)*

▸ How might you use the technique we learned today in those situations?

▸ What do you do to cope with stressful situations that make you feel anxious, nervous or afraid?

▸ How did you feel while you were remembering a stage frightening experience?

▸ What changed about your feelings while you were doing the relaxation exercise? After you had finished it?

Rights & Responsibilities

PURPOSE:

Becoming a troupe

OBJECTIVES:

The participants will:

▶ Examine what it means to be a part of a theatre troupe.

▶ Agree on the rights and responsibilities of troupe members and adult troupe leaders.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

Teamwork

THEATRE SKILLS:

Theatre discipline

MATERIALS:

❑ "Troupe Rights and Responsibilities" handout (one per person)

❑ Newsprint or other large paper

❑ Markers

❑ Masking tape

TIME:

15–25 minutes

SETTING:

A comfortable space where the participants can sit in a circle

PROCEDURE:

Before the activity:

1. Make one copy of the "Troupe Rights and Responsibilities" handout for each person.

2. Read through the instructions for the activity. Think about how you might guide the discussion of the "Talking It Over" questions.

During the activity:

1. Tell the group that being part of a performing arts troupe is hard work, but that it's also fun, challenging and exciting. They'll enjoy these benefits and learn basic acting and theatre production skills – if they're willing to make the necessary commitment to the troupe. (*Helper Note:* If this workshop is intended to be an introduction to interactive theatre only, and there will be no more meetings, you can still use this activity to help the participants learn what it would be like to be part of a theatre troupe or to commit to participating in a school play.)

2. Distribute the "Troupe Rights and Responsibilities" handout.

3. Ask for a young person to volunteer to read the youth section of the handout aloud, then an adult volunteer to read the adult leader section aloud.

4. Ask the group the following questions and record their answers on newsprint:

   • Do the responsibilities listed on this sheet seem fair? Are they reasonable? Why or why not?

   • Who will benefit from observing these rights and responsibilities?

   • What would happen if there were no rights and responsibilities involved with being involved with a theatre troupe?

   • Who would suffer if no one observed the responsibilities on these sheets?

   • Do any changes need to be made to these lists?

   • Are any rights or responsibilities missing?

5. Help the group reach agreement on any changes or additions that have been suggested.

6. Tell the group that everyone must make a commitment to support and respect this set of rights and responsibilities. Ask the group for their support and commitment to the troupe members' rights and responsibilities list.

7. Agree that you and any other adult leaders of the troupe also will give your support and commitment to the adult leaders' rights and responsibilities list.

8. If the group has agreed on any changes to the handouts, tell them you'll distribute the revised rights and responsibilities lists at the next meeting. Also consider writing a copy on newsprint and post it at your regular meeting place where everyone can see it.

TALKING IT OVER:

Ask the group the following questions. It would be helpful for you to think about these questions before the meeting so you can be prepared to guide the discussion.

▸ How would you describe your rights and responsibilities at home? At school?

▸ Have you ever observed a situation where someone had more rights than responsibilities? What happened?

▸ Have you ever observed a situation where someone had more responsibilities than rights? What happened?

Troupe Rights & Responsibilities

TROUPE MEMBER RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Youth troupe members have the right to . . .

▸ Have fun and develop friendships.

▸ Sit out an activity that makes me feel uncomfortable.

Youth troupe members have the responsibility to . . .

▸ Attend all meetings, rehearsals and performances (unless excused).

▸ Be on time.

▸ Learn acting parts on schedule.

▸ Be cooperative and practice teamwork.

▸ Listen to the adult leaders and try out their suggestions.

▸ Keep track of props, costumes, and other troupe property and return them when a rehearsal or performance is finished.

ADULT TROUPE LEADER RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Adult troupe leaders have the right to . . .

▸ Have fun and develop friendships.

▸ Have the cooperation and teamwork of the troupe members and other adult leaders.

Adult troupe leaders have the responsibility to . . .

▸ Provide a safe and supportive environment for the young people.

▸ Assume a facilitative versus an authoritarian role with the young people.

▸ Listen to the group members and try out their suggestions.

▸ Be prepared and on time for all meetings, rehearsals and performances (unless other arrangements have been made).

▸ Make a long-term commitment to the group members.

▸ Not ask the group to do something that he or she, as the adult leader, would not do.

Tableaux – Scene Building

PURPOSE:

Creating a small drama using tableaux

OBJECTIVES:

The participants will:

▸ Practice nonverbal acting skills.

▸ Discover tableaux as a theatre technique to develop a scene.

▸ Learn to work together to create a scene.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

▸ Teamwork

▸ Problem-solving

▸ Decision-making

THEATRE SKILLS:

▸ Learning to use only facial expressions and body movements to tell a story

▸ Beginning scene work

MATERIALS:

❏ Newsprint or a large piece of paper

❏ Markers

❏ Masking tape

❏ "Tableaux Scenarios" handout (one per person; optional)

TIME:

20–40 minutes
(**Helper's Note:** Since this is an activity that can become a building block for future scenes, don't rush it, but be sensitive to whether your group is becoming bored.)

SETTING:

A comfortable, open space

PROCEDURE:

Before the activity:

Make one photocopy of the "Tableaux Scenarios" handout for each person. Read over the instructions for the activity.

During the activity:

1. Tell the group that now they're going to learn an acting technique called tableau. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

   A tableau is simply a "frozen picture" or scene created by live actors. A tableau can be a starting point, a high point, or an ending point of a scene or drama. In interactive theatre, the play or scene stops at a high point and the interaction between the characters and the audience begins. Using the tableaux technique, you're going to learn how to tell exciting, sad or funny stories using just your faces and bodies – because in tableau work, no words are spoken.

2. Depending on the size of your group, divide the participants into two or more teams. Pass out the "Tableaux Scenarios" handout or let them brainstorm their own scenario ideas. Ask the teams to decide on one scenario – either from the handout or one they make up on their own – to dramatize in a tableau.

3. Give the teams about 5 minutes to develop their tableau. When both teams seem to have worked out their ideas, re-turn their attention to the larger group by reading aloud or paraphrasing the following:

   At the count of three, you will freeze into your group tableau. One, two, three, freeze!

4. Have the teams hold their poses for a few seconds, then say, "Okay, thaw out."

5. Next have the teams take turns presenting their work. Tell them that a good tableau tells a story that is immediately recognizable.

6. After each team presents its tableau, ask the audience the following:

   • What does this tableau say?

   • What is exciting about this tableau?

   • Where is the focus of the tableau?

- How was your attention directed to this focal point? *(Body level, body direction, eyes, grouping of characters)*

- Ask the audience to come up with a title for the tableau (such as "People Save Child as Building Collapses"). Naming a tableau is a good way to give constructive feedback. The team in the tableau may either accept or reject the title.

TRY THIS, TOO:

Experiment with other sources for tableau ideas such as family photos, wax works in a museum, holograms, illustrations in a picture book, cartoons, store window mannequins, statues in a park and a DVD set on "pause." Newspaper photos and articles provide good idea sources; for example the following are real newspaper headlines: "City evicts squatters: Bulldozers clear spot called home" and "Woman critical after push from truck."

TALKING IT OVER:

Ask the group the following questions:

▸ Was it easy or hard to involve everyone in your group in your team's tableau?

▸ How would you change your tableau to make it more easily understood or more exciting?

Tableaux Scenarios

Your group may choose to act out one of the following scenarios.

EATING DISORDER

HEADLINE: High school wrestler develops eating disorder on coach's advice

Nate is on the wrestling team at his school. Before the season began, his coach told Nate that he could place better if he wrestled in a lower weight class. Nate followed his coach's advice and began exercising more and eating healthier. As a result he dropped down to the next weight class and began winning more wrestling matches. By the end of the season, however, he is exercising all the time and isn't eating enough. He is exhausted most of the time and is obsessed with losing more weight so that he can wrestle in the lowest weight class. Nate's teammate, Hiroshi, and his sister, Lara, confront Nate and talk to him about eating disorders.

STEROID USE

HEADLINE: High school football players caught in steroid scandal

Kyle is a high school junior. He's a starting defensive lineman on the football team and he wants to earn a college football scholarship. Kyle is nervous about standing out when college scouts come to the games. His senior teammate, Eric, tells him about some pills Eric's been taking to help him bulk up and play better. As the pair are talking, their coach walks in and asks what they're talking about.

DIET PILLS

HEADLINE: Young women use diet pills to develop media-ideal body

Cara and her friends have been looking at homecoming dresses for weeks in magazines and stores. The dance is coming up, and Cara wants to be able to fit into a gorgeous black dress that she saw in Teen Best magazine. She talks with her friends, Macy, Chinell and Josefina, about dieting, and Macy suggests Cara try some diet pills that she's been thinking about trying herself.

HUNGER

HEADLINE: Children in "food insecure" families miss meals, grades suffer

Tonya's family is among the 11.8 percent of Michigan households that are considered "food insecure," that is, they don't have the money to provide a steady or large enough supply of food to meet the nutritional needs of the entire family. Although Tonya and her four siblings receive free lunches at school, her parents can't afford to provide two more meals a day for them. Tonya often ends up eating only one meal a day. Her grades are suffering because she can't concentrate. Some of her classmates think she's lazy.

DISCRIMINATION

HEADLINE: Muslim girl attacked at school because of her religion

Nadia, Stephanie and Becky argued on their school bus about which part of their neighborhood was better. The bus driver told the girls to quiet down and when they did, assumed the issue had been settled. When the girls entered the school building, however, Stephanie and Becky began hitting Nadia and tore off her hijab (a head scarf worn by Islamic women and girls). They yelled degrading names at Nadia and accused her family of being involved in the terror attacks on September 11, 2001.

Hot Seat – Character Development

PURPOSE:

Focusing on character

OBJECTIVES:

The participants will:

▸ Learn a technique for developing a character.

▸ Practice concentration and focus to stay in character as an actor.

▸ Learn how to think, feel, talk and move like a character they're playing.

▸ Explore plot development by understanding the connections between characters.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

▸ Self-esteem

▸ Empathy

THEATRE SKILLS:

▸ Understanding character motivation

▸ Remaining in character as an actor

▸ Understanding how theme, plot and character build on each other

MATERIALS:

❑ Paper

❑ Masking tape

❑ Pencils or pens

❑ Markers

❑ A straight-backed chair

TIME:

45 minutes

SETTING:

An open room with chairs that can be moved around

PROCEDURE:

Before the activity:

Arrange the chairs in the room so that one chair (preferably one with a straight back) is at the front of the room, facing all of the other chairs. Write "The Hot Seat" on a sheet of paper and tape the sign to the chair.

During the activity:

1. Ask for a volunteer to sit in the chair labeled "The Hot Seat." Have the person choose a character to play from one of the scenes that were acted out in the Tableau – Scene Building activity. Tell the person to stay in character throughout the hot seat session. Have the person announce to the group which character he or she has decided to play.

2. Tell the group they'll be asking the character in the hot seat questions that will help them understand the character and his or her relationships to the other characters in the tableau. If, for example, the person on the hot seat has chosen to play a mom whose family is homeless, the questions might include:

   • How do you feel about losing your home?

   • What's the hardest thing about being homeless?

   • How has being homeless changed your relationships with your children?

   • How has being homeless changed your relationship with your children's school?

3. Ask for one or two volunteers to record the facts about the character in the hot seat that emerge during the session. Everything they record could be useful in preparing the script later. Encourage them to record:

   • Phrases the character uses

   • Physical description (including age, gender, appearance, mannerisms and more)

   • Emotional description (such as angry or worried)

   • What the character does for a living

   • How the character behaves

   • What the character believes

   • Any other information that helps us better know the character

4. Let the group continue questioning the first character for as long as it takes them to get to know him or her.

5. When the questions for the first character have slowed or stopped, ask for another volunteer to take on a role and sit in the hot seat. Also ask for new volunteer recorders for each new character. Continue until you have hot-seated two or three characters from each tableau. By then the group will have created a fairly complex set of characters and may have the beginnings of a plot for each tableau.

TALKING IT OVER:

Ask the group the following questions:

▶ What did it feel like to be in the hot seat?

▶ Why do different people react differently to this situation?

▶ Has there ever been a situation in real life where you felt as if you were in the hot seat?

Touch & Imagined Props

PURPOSE:

Creating believable theatre

OBJECTIVES:

The participants will:

▸ Experience the fun of theatre.

▸ Work on concentration and focus.

▸ Play at thinking imaginatively.

▸ Explore tactile awareness as an acting skill.

LEARNING & LIFE SKILLS:

▸ Problem solving

▸ Decision making

THEATRE SKILLS:

▸ Working with imagined props

▸ Using a technique called inner monologue

MATERIALS:

None

TIME:

5–10 minutes

SETTING:

A comfortable, open space

PROCEDURE:

During the activity:

1. Have the participants sit in a circle.

2. Tell them that this activity will help them develop their ability to concentrate and will increase their tactile awareness. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

    Tactile awareness is a skill that actors use to accurately convey on stage the qualities of an object in real life. For example, if an actor on stage picks up a fake ice cream cone that is simply a cloth wrapped into a cone shape, he or she must know what a real ice cream cone feels like (that is, it's crumbly, it's cold, it's melting). This knowledge of real ice cream cones helps the actor convince the audience that the fake ice cream cone is real.

3. Now explain that you'll be "side coaching" them through a technique called inner monologue, in which they'll "think the thoughts" of a character and act out a set of imaginary actions.

4. Read aloud or paraphrase the following:

    Close your eyes. Extend your hands in front of you. Reach out and pick up an imaginary bar of soap. Feel the soap. Think about the questions I'm about to ask you, but don't answer them out loud. What shape is your soap? What is its texture – rough or smooth? How does it smell? What color is it? Can you feel the brand name molded into it?

    Next wash your hands with your bar of soap. Feel the soap in the water. How slippery is it now? Rinse your hands and dry them on an imaginary towel. Now put down the towel and silently open your eyes.

TALKING IT OVER:

Ask the group the following questions:

▸ How might this activity be useful as you rehearse a scene or try to create a character?

▸ How might it be helpful to you in everyday life to use the technique of inner monologue or "thinking the thoughts" of your character?

Glossary

This list defines how these terms are used in *Youth Take the Stage: An Introduction to Interactive Theater*.

Brainstorm:
Idea generation technique in which participants think of as many ideas or solutions on a given subject as possible without judging or criticizing the ideas generated.

Cast:
Noun–The actors in a play or theatre piece.
Verb–To assign roles in a play or theatre piece.

Character:
A person an actor in a scene or play has been assigned to portray; the imaginary person the script is about.

Character development:
To give a character physical characteristics, behaviors, thoughts and feelings.

Conflict:
Element in theatre that describes the hero's problem, or the situation that stands in the way of the hero achieving his or her goal. Also called *central conflict*.

Crew:
People who work off-stage or behind the scenes to make a theatre production run smoothly.

Dialogue:
The spoken words in a play.

Director:
Person who guides the cast and crew to create a cohesive and unique performance.

Double casting:
When two cast members take turns playing the same role in a single performance or from one performance to another.

Drama:
Story told in dialogue and action that combines character, place and mood to create a work of art performed on a stage or before an audience; the written literature of the theatre.

Ensemble:
Adjective–A style of acting in which a cast works together as one, as in ensemble acting. It is the ultimate in teamwork, such as when the players on a sports team work as one.

Noun—Name for a performing group that does ensemble acting.

Facilitator:
Person who directs the interaction between the actors and the audience during an interactive theatre performance. The facilitator ensures that the drama is brought to a conclusion.

Forum theatre:
Form of theatre performance in which a member of the audience is invited to assume an actor's role during the interaction phase of the performance.

Hot seat:
Theatre game in which the cast explores a character or plot point. An actor in the "hot seat" stays in character and answers questions other group members ask.

Improvisation:
A scene or play that actors create spontaneously. Informally called *improv.*

Improvise:
To create a theatre piece on the spot or spontaneously. (Improv actors sometimes insert actions that they have successfully used in other improv situations.)

In role:
When an actor behaves as the character he or she has been cast as, not as himself or herself. Also *in character*.

Inner monologue:
An acting technique in which an actor "thinks the thoughts" of a character while preparing to play a character and performing on stage.

Interaction phase:
Portion of an interactive theatre performance when the actors and audience exchange information about the piece in progress. Troupe members remain in character during the interaction phase of a performance.

Interactive theatre:
Style of theatre where the audience participates directly with the actors to stimulate the audience to more deeply think about the drama's issue.

Issue:
Focus of the script; also referred to as the *theme* or *central conflict* in the story.

Pantomime:
Verb–To carry out an action without words.

Place:
Noun–Imagined location where the drama's action occurs.

Play:
Noun–Performance in which actors assume roles as characters.

Player:
One who plays a role, an actor.

Plot:
The way a drama or story unfolds, with one action causing a second action and a second action causing a third action and so on.

Props:
Small items used in a play to make a set look more realistic. These can be either **hand props** (the actors touch or carry hand props) or **set props** (larger, mostly stationary props used to create a mood and sense of place). Also called *properties*.

Rehearsal:
Practicing a play, or part of a play, in preparation for performing it in front of an audience.

Role-playing:
To play a role or character that is different from yourself.

Rotation:
When the actors change characters in a production so everyone has a chance to play every role.

Scene:
1. A short section of a play. 2. The physical place where the action of a play is set.

Scenario:
The story or plot of a theatre piece.

Script:
The written form or record of an interactive theatre drama; includes stage direction as well as dialogue.

Set:
The physical setting where a drama or other play is performed. Set designers use props such as walls, stairs, doors, furniture and trees to transform the stage into the physical setting of a play. In the interactive theatre performances described in this book, the set is usually created from a limited set of props, such as chairs and tables.

Side coaching:
Technique in which the director stands off to one side of the stage and gives oral instructions to the actors. This form of coaching helps the actors focus on and fine-tune the development of a scene or character.

Speech bubble:
Graphic (borrowed from cartoons) in which an actor's thoughts or speech are shown to the audience.

Tableau, plural *tableaux*:
Technique in which live actors "freeze" in a set "frozen picture" or scene using live actors. A tableau can be a starting point, a high point or an ending point of a scene or drama.

Theater *(American English)*:
Building or room in which movies are shown or plays are performed.

Theatre *(British English)*:
A performance with live actors; the place where such a performance takes place.

Theme:
Central idea or action in a drama or play.

Warm-up:
An activity that helps actors focus before a performance or rehearsal.

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