

# NEVER AGAIN THEATRE CURRICULUM:

“Communicating Through Theatre”

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## Communicating Through THEATRE

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# PREPARING YOUR ACTORS

*In order to be in a good state to learn and create, an actor must have warm and stretched muscles, an energized body, and an alert mind. He or she must also have a good working relationship with the other actors in the group. These games and exercises are a good way to start your sessions, to get your actors trusting, warmed-up, energized, and focused. There are only a few games and exercises listed here, so it is good to use any others that you know already from other classes. Remember that you can always invent more games of your own!*

## STRETCHES :

**Breathing** – Make breathing a priority, it is essential in stretching. To give your students an awareness of the rhythms of breath, work frequently to match one breath to each movement: inhale = one movement; exhale = one movement (whatever movements you choose to do). This regulates breathing and warms the muscles. Once the body is a little warmer, and if you do stretches that are a little bit more pushed, rest in the same position during several inhalations and exhalations. Breathing relaxes the muscles and allows you to go further into the stretch.

**The Body** – Some stretches that involve several muscle groups:

- Clasp your hands with your fingers interlaced, turn your palms to the ceiling and stretch upwards, as if you were attempting to touch the sky.
- Clasp your hands behind your back, interlacing your fingers. Spread your legs and drop your torso to the floor, while stretching your arms up towards the sky.

**The Back :**

- Stand with legs spread and touch the ground with your hands, legs straight and palms flat on the ground. Move one hand more to the center of the floor, and lift the other to the sky. Do the same with the other side.
- Sit on the ground, with legs crossed. Raise your arms to the sky to stretch the torso, and then turn the torso to the right. Let your left hand fall on your right knee, and your right hand come down behind you, on the ground. Rest in this position for several respirations, trying to turn the torso further with each exhale. Do the same on the other side.

**The Legs :**

- Sit on the ground with your legs stretched straight in front of you, and touch your feet (or try to). Do the same with your legs spread, stretching your arms first to one leg and then the other.

- While standing, grasp your left ankle and bring it up to touch your left bottom. Do the same thing on the right side.

### **The Arms:**

- Place your right hand on your left shoulder. Take your right elbow with your left hand and pull it back and to the left. Do the same thing on the other side.
- Raise your right arm towards the sky. Bend it at the elbow and touch your back. Take your right elbow with your left hand and push it downwards. To also stretch the **side of your torso**, pull down and to the left. Do the same thing on the other side.

### WARM-UP AND ENERGY GAMES:

**Tunnel Tag** – One person is the “wolf” and must catch all of the others. If the wolf touches you, you must freeze, with your legs spread out. If someone crawls under your legs, you are free again. The wolf wins if he or she freezes EVERYONE. The others win if the wolf gets tired and gives up.

**Name Tag** – One person starts as the wolf. If the wolf touches you, you are out of the game. But if you say the name of someone else before the wolf can touch you, then that person (whose name you just said) becomes the new wolf, and can try to touch people. The last person in the game is the winner.

**Zip-Zap-Boing** – The group stands in a circle, one person starts by passing a “zip” to the right or left, or a “zap” across the circle. A “zip” must always continue in the same direction, a “zap” must always go across the circle (i.e. can’t go to someone next to you), and a “boing” sends it back to the person who passed it to you. Someone who makes a mistake or takes too long to pass it on is out and has to sit down. The last three people standing are the winners.

**1-2-3 Soleil** – One person faces the wall and says “1-2-3 Soleil.” They can turn around before starting to say it, or after they have finished, but not while they are saying it. The rest of the group lines up against the opposite wall and tries to approach the person counting, but when the counter turns, they must freeze. If the counting person turns and sees you moving, you have to go back to the beginning (against the wall). The first person to touch the counter becomes the new counter. **Variation** – You can make it more difficult for the group by adding extra rules (they have to move by jumping, they have to freeze on one leg, they have to walk with their knees pressed together, they have to walk backwards, etc).

**Obedience** – Work in pairs. One person is the “director” and can make you move around the room with signals (by pointing across the room, signaling up to make you jump, pointing to the floor to make you fall, etc.), and the other person must follow the directions given. Then switch roles. Afterwards, have BOTH people direct and BOTH people follow at the same time. **Variation** – After they have gotten used to this game in pairs, have the entire group play this

game together, where everyone must follow any instruction given to them by anyone else in the group, and everyone has the right to give a direction to anyone else in the group.

**Energy Pass** – Stand in a circle. One person starts by “passing” a sound and action to the person beside him or her. The next person copies the action and passes it on, until the whole circle has done the noise and action. This should happen as fast as possible. Then the next person makes a new sound and action. Go around the circle until each person has passed a sound and action around the circle.

**River / Coast** – One person leads the group by calling “river” or “coast.” The river is a jump into the circle, the coast is a jump out. If the group is already on the river, they should not move if “river” is called again; same with coast. If anyone jumps (or tries to jump) at the wrong time, they are out. The last person in the circle is the winner.

**Shake It Out** – Shake the left arm 8 times, then the right arm 8 times, then the left leg and then the right leg. Then do it all again, but shake 4 times, then 2, then 1. Do this very quickly, building the speed as you get closer to the end.

#### TRUST GAMES:

**The Human Knot** – The entire group makes a circle, crosses their hands, and then grabs the hands of two other people in the circle (each hand should be grabbing only one other hand). The group must then work together to “untangle” the knot, without letting go of each other’s hands.

**Blind Sheep** – Work in pairs. One person will close the eyes. The other will “steer” them in the room by placing one finger on their back. Pressure on the middle of the back means “walk forward.” Pressure on the left side means “turn left,” and the right side means “turn right” (turn TOWARDS the side where your partner is pushing). No pressure means “stop.” It is the responsibility of the person steering to take care of their partner and make sure they do not bump into anything or anyone. **Variation** – Allow the blind partner to walk around the space alone, the guiding partner will only touch them if they are in danger or about to walk into something, otherwise, they do not touch them at all. This can be developed further so that the blind person chooses an activity to complete (go to the bathroom and wash hands, find backpack and take out cell phone, find their friend and shake her hand, etc).

**Human Bottle** – Working in groups of three, have one person stand straight without bending at the waist (like a bottle) and have the other two stand in front and behind the bottle, pushing him or her very gently back and forth between them. The most important thing here is that the bottle stays straight, and allows her- or himself to go off-balance, giving full weight to the people in front and behind. When they get more comfortable, **Variation** – Have one person stand in a circle and be the bottle, with the whole group pushing and supporting. When the actors feel comfortable enough with this exercise, they can do it with their eyes closed. Remember those supporting the bottle must RECEIVE the weight before pushing again.

**Trust Fall** – One actor stands on the edge of a high surface (table, etc), with his back to the group. The group lines up in two rows holding each other’s arms, ready to receive the one who will fall. The falling person must remain straight, like in the bottle exercise. This exercise should be done only in groups that are very focused and have been working together for a while, can do the bottle exercise well, and have a good understanding of remaining straight, trusting, and giving weight.

**Falling Numbers** – The teacher gives every person a number (which they memorize and then put in their pockets; keeping it a secret). The group walks in the space until the teacher claps and the group freezes. Then the teacher calls out a number. The person with that number must crumple and fall to the ground, the job of the group is to be alert and catch this person before they hit the ground. When the group is very good, the teacher can call out two or even three numbers at a time. Make sure to remind the students to be aware of who is around them, especially behind, where no one can see them.

#### FOCUS AND CONCENTRATION GAMES:

**Counting Together** – The group stands in a circle, very close together, with the eyes closed. The teacher chooses a number (ten is fairly easy, twenty is very hard) that the group must count to. There are no rules about who can count when, it is random and as they desire. But if two people talk at the same time, the group must start again from one. The key to this game is to breathe, be attentive, vary the rhythm, and count slowly.

**Moving Together** – The group walks in the space together (remember to breathe, look, fill gaps, and not run into each other). The teacher has them slowly speed up the pace, very gradually, until they are running very fast, and then just as gradually talks them through the process of slowing down to a stop. The whole process should take at least three or four minutes. The group then does this process on its own, without a teacher talking them through it. **Variation** – The group can walk together at a fixed pace but start and stop together on an impulse, without talking. This is very difficult to do suddenly, with no slowing down or speeding up, and should be attempted after the group has been working together for a while.

**Guess Who’s Leading** – One person leaves the room and the group decides a leader. The leader does actions and the group follows; the person who left the room returns and must guess who the leader is (they have 3 guesses). The key to this game is to NOT look at the leader.

**“Go”** – Standing in a circle, one person in the circle points at another. The person who is pointed at says, “go,” and the person who is pointing begins to walk towards the person who said “go.” The person who said “go” must then point to the next person. **Variation** – Instead of “Go,” you can say the name of the person pointing to you, or some other word.

**Eye Contact Pass** – The group stands very close in a circle, “passing” around eye contact. Eye contact must be maintained for long enough for the pass to be clear. No one is allowed to laugh.

# FREEING THE BODY

*An actor's body is the instrument he or she plays. It is important that this instrument is "in tune" and free of imbalances, tension, and blocks so that the actor can have a full and free range of physical expression and movement. Freeing the body and finding a "neutral body" is an ideal—something that we work towards for an entire lifetime; an actor never stops the work of examining his or her own body, and releasing the tension he or she stores in it. The exercises listed here can be used from the time we are beginners to the time we are professionals.*

## Key Points:

- Breathe
- Relax (shoulders, neck, stomach...)
- Open eyes, see everything, "soft focus"
- Stand upright—back is straight, spine is tall and stacked one upon the other, weight is grounded and spread across feet, feet are shoulder-width apart, knees are not locked, pelvis is tucked under the hips, the hips rest between feet and shoulders, head sits straight on shoulders, no unnecessary movement of feet, arms, etc.
- Walk upright—breathe, "drive" from the pelvis, feel weight of your body roll across your entire foot, be aware of tension and work towards symmetry, eliminate unnecessary movements (swinging, swaggering, limping), be aware of hands and arms.
- Move with minimal effort necessary.
- Be aware of personal habits, tensions, and imbalances in the body and continually work to release them.

## Exercises:

**Roll up the Spine** – With feet shoulder-width apart, inhale, and then exhale as you release your head and spine and drop your upper body to the floor. Make sure your shoulders and neck are relaxed (the teacher can come around and push on your head to check). Then, slowly, one vertebra after another, begin to stack your spine back up, finishing with the head rolling up last. *This exercise emphasizes upright standing.*

**Human Puppet** - Imagine that you are a puppet and that you are being stretched up by invisible strings connected to your hips, nape, head, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and fingers. One by one, be pulled upwards by the strings, and then allow the strings to be "cut," releasing from the fingers, then wrists, elbows, shoulders, head, nape, and hips. *This exercise emphasizes articulation, tension and release, and body awareness.*

**Walk in the Space** – Walk with a neutral body, as a group, filling the entire rehearsal space. Be sure to be aware of others so as not to bump into each other, and be aware of the space and fill any gaps you see. Focus on walking upright, breathing, and keeping your eyes up and alert. *This exercise emphasizes spacial (space) awareness and body awareness.*

**Driving the Pelvis** – Walk in the space with a partner holding on to your pelvis, to hold you back. After a couple of minutes, your partner will release you and you will walk in the space on your own. Feel how all of your movement is “driven” by your pelvis. *This exercise emphasizes upright walking.*

**Human Clay** – Work in pairs. You are a lump of clay and your partner is the “artist” who will mold you. Allow yourself to be molded, and stay in the position your partner puts you in. Focus the entire time on breathing and keeping your muscles relaxed. **Variation** – Instead of “molding” you, your partner will press on different parts of your body with one finger. Move in the direction that you are pushed, paying particular attention to respecting the exact direction you are pushed in, and the exact body part pushed. *This exercise emphasizes body awareness and articulation.*

**Observe and Copy** – Work in partners. Watch your partner walk (as neutrally as they can) in the space for two or three minutes. Pay attention to where they hold tension, how they move, and how they hold their head, neck, shoulders, torso, arms, pelvis, and legs. Is their head forward or back? Is their pelvis tilted back or tucked under? How do they walk? What part of their foot touches the ground first? Do they take big steps or small steps? After careful observation, copy your partner, and walk as much like them as possible. Your partner will stop and watch you. After a bit, exaggerate their imbalances and tension, pushing them further so that your partner can see them. **Variation** – Do the same exercise, but as a group, with half of the group walking and the other half watching someone they have been assigned to observe (note: it should be a secret for the people being observed who is observing them). Afterwards, have the group of observers copy and exaggerate, and allow the group who was observed to guess who is copying them. *This game emphasizes body awareness.*

**Leading Body Parts** – As a group, walk in the space with different body parts “leading,” for example the nose (head pushed forward, shoulders farther forward than pelvis), knees, toes, hips, left shoulder, right shin, etc. This game can start with the teacher naming different parts of the body to lead with, but as the students become more comfortable with it, students can take turns choosing new body parts for the group to lead with. **Variation** – Choose different parts of the body to “resist” or “hold back” with. Same concept as leading, but the opposite, so the whole body moves forward while one part hold back and stays behind. *This exercise emphasizes articulation and body awareness.*

**Minimal Effort Movement** – Choose different movements—lifting the arm, turning the head, sitting on a chair, standing up off the ground, etc. With each movement, try it with different parts of the body “leading” (i.e. neck turns to turn head, then eyes move across room to turn head; or finger lifts to lift arm, or shoulder lifts to lift arm). You will find that leading with the extremities (fingers, toes, nose, eyes) will give a smoother, more effortless movement. *This exercise emphasizes tension release and body awareness.*



## FREEING THE VOICE

*As we use our voice everyday to communicate with people around us, we get used to speaking without effort. In theatre, however, what we say is not only for our acting partners, but for the whole audience, which can be very large (and very noisy!), so we need to work much harder to be heard. We don't want to shout though, because it hurts, and after two days of speaking like this you'll lose your voice. Contrary to what we think, voice doesn't come from the throat but from a fantastic action that our bodies do all the time: breathing. It's so natural for us that we don't even pay attention to it, but breathing is the key and it is important to take time to work on it. In addition, the voice—like a costume or the body—is a very important tool that gives your character a clear identity. If you play an old man with your own voice, people will never believe you; it is important to find a voice which matches the character and body.*

### Key Points:

- Remember that you talk for the audience, not only for your partner on stage: speak loud and articulate.
- Remember that you talk to be heard by the people in the last row of the audience; speak even louder and articulate more.
- To speak loud doesn't mean to shout, but to project the voice—don't hurt your voice!
- A strong voice comes from the breath and a contraction of the stomach, not from the throat.
- ALWAYS BREATHE: inhale/exhale, and relax your shoulders

### Exercises and games:

#### **Breathing exercises:**

##### a) Lying on your back, totally relaxed

Place your hands on your abdomen, just under your bellybutton, and exhale all of the air in your lungs, exhale as much as possible. Then inhale slowly, to fill your abdomen as much you can. Hold it few seconds, then exhale slowly. Repeat it few times.

##### *Variations:*

As you exhale, produce sound by humming, and then open the mouth to let the voice out. Try with different voices, from low to high.

##### b) The flower

Start in a crouched position, heels touching each other, arms crossed, head down. Inhale slowly while going up and opening the arms as large as possible. Hold it, eyes opened, look far. Exhale slowly until your body takes the least amount of space possible, in a crouched position. Repeat it a few times.

### c) The resonating chambers of the body

The human body has different resonating chambers, from where you can feel vibrations when you make a sound: **the nose, the back, the chest and the lower abdomen.**

- the nose: you can feel the vibration if you try to talk like a duck, or a witch. The voice is usually high, sharp and not very nice.

- the back: somebody puts his hand in your back, between the shoulder blades. Breathe where the hand is, feel the air in this place, and then produce a sound.

- the chest (2 by 2): B gives his weight to A, as if falling forward. A puts his hands on the chest of B. While B is making a sound (aaaaaaaah...), A is shaking B's chest.

- the lower abdomen (2 by 2): A goes behind B and puts his hands on B's lower abdomen, just under the bellybutton. While B is making a sound, A is shaking the lower abdomen. The voice goes out louder and stronger.

### **Playing with voice:**

#### a) The noisy creatures

Put your hands on the ground, far enough from your feet. Both legs and hands have to stay straight. Relax the neck, so your head feels totally free. Make sounds with your mouth; be as creative as you can: find different kinds of sounds, weird noises, timbre of the voice, etc... And move in the space in that position, meeting the other creatures. Keep your neck relaxed so you just see what is between your legs.

*In this position, the column of breath is totally open, from the abdomen to the head. You can experience really interesting sounds and resonations. Be careful to not block it with the neck by pulling the head up. Keep it relaxed.*

#### b) Directing the voice (2 by 2)

A is the conductor and B answers by making sounds. A conducts B with his hand, going up, down, making circles, or any kind of gestures. B makes sounds that correspond to these gestures. Then you switch.

### **Projecting the voice:**

a) Yawning is great: when we yawn, we take a lot of air into the lungs, and when we exhale the column of breath is opened wide. The sound we make when yawning is really deep and large. So just yawn, keep this feeling and reproduce it!

b) In pairs, in a big space (or outside): facing each other, start a daily conversation with a normal voice. Then one takes a step back, and another, and another, but both keep the same volume of the voice, until you cannot hear what the other person is saying. Start the exercise, but this time, each time you take a step back, adjust the volume of your voice. The pair who goes the furthest and can still understand each other without shouting, wins. For that you need to use the contraction of your abdomen and to breathe properly.

#### *Variations*

The precedent exercise is to learn how to project the voice in the space. But it is also important to learn how to articulate. For that, do the same exercise but instead of talking, just whisper. You will win if you articulate enough.

c) Pushing the voice when you are pushed down: One person comes in front of the others and says something neutral (a cooking recipe, what he did the day before, or anything else). You need to develop it enough, not just 2 lines! Then you repeat exactly the same text, but this time 5 or 6 people try to pull you down to the ground (without hurting you!). You have to resist and continue talking. With the effort, the voice becomes really strong.

#### **A body, a voice:**

*When you want to create a character, you first choose a certain body. From this body, without having an intention, some clear aspects of personality appear. This has to be the same with the voice. There is certain logic between the body and the voice. If your character is a shy person with the shoulders closing to the inside, the head down, the feet turning inside, you cannot give him a big, strong, authoritarian voice (unless you want to create a comic effect but that has to be consciously done). You need to give him the right voice and the right way to talk.*

Everybody walks in the space with the body they've chosen and they exaggerate it. When we clap the hands, they meet 2 by 2. Each one of them asks 2 questions and answers 2, in a voice that matches the body they have chosen. Then they leave. Each time they leave, they choose another body and, of course, another voice.

# STAGING AND SPACE

*Space is essential in theater because it determines how the audience sees and hears the actors. The stage belongs to the actors, they need to own the space and use it as a tool to convey their message. An actor does not perform for himself or his partner, he performs for the audience. Therefore he needs to open the space so that the audience can see properly.*

## The Stage:

Up Right (UR)	Up Center (UC)	Up Left (UL)
Stage Right (SR)	Center Stage (CS)	Stage Left (SL)
Down Right (DR)	Down Center (DC)	Down Left (DL)

AUDIENCE

## Key Points:

- Create a clear space for practice.
- Decide on 2 (or more) points of entrance/exit. ALWAYS ask the students to enter through those points to make the stage exist.

### **When on stage...**

- Face the audience.
- Be sure to be seen by the audience. Counter-crossing: when you are upstage and other actors are downstage, place yourself so that you are not behind them and the audience can see you.
- Leave a distance between you and your partner: you want space for the voice to resonate and it gives space for the audience to feel included. Remember: you are playing for the audience.
- Do not stand in profile, even in a configuration where two people are talking facing each other. Stand in “three-quarter stance,” with one foot forward and one foot out.
- In a group scene, make sure that you are not in a straight line. Standing in a line in front of the audience is not dynamic. Try to find a way to take some space. A few tips:
  - \*play with levels. A character can be standing, another crouching, another one sitting...
  - \*play with depth. A character can be standing at Down Right (DR), another between Down Center(DC) and Stage Right(SR), another one between Down Stage and Center Stage...

-Remember that your place on stage, the distance between you and your partners, from where you enter and where you exit, EVERYTHING concerning the space and the actor's body in it is MEANINGFUL and it will be interpreted by the audience.

### Exercises:

**Run and Learn** - Have the students come on stage, or on the space you defined as the stage. Then, using the vocabulary you can find on the diagram, have them run from one point to another on the stage. For example, they all run upcenter when you say "Upcenter."

**Chair exercise** - Ask someone to put a chair on stage. Ask someone else to enter the space and stay on stage *without talking*, for as long as they want, then exit. Have the students notice that small actions distract attention and being still and PRESENT is more powerful. Go through the basics of: entrance/exit, taking time to see the space.

**Enter, talk and exit** - Ask one student to come on stage and talk about something he is very passionate about. The aim of the exercise is similar to the chair exercise but it introduces talking. Talking makes it even more difficult to pay attention to the space. Correct any unnecessary arms or torso movement, or unnecessary pacing and movement of the feet.

**Enter, meet and exit** - Ask two students to come on stage and improvise a short scene of two people meeting. They can talk. The exercise shows that a partner is part of the space and needs to be acknowledged as well. Students will see the importance of distance between two actors to include the audience and the different way of staging a conversation: three-quarter stance, the two people facing the audience...

**Distance** - Have the students work in pairs and walk slowly towards each other, until they face each other, almost touching noses. You want them to experience how distance affects the relationship with the other person. Usually, the closer they get, the more intimate it is. Then, have two students come on stage and have a short conversation (Amakuru? Ni meza, amakuru yawe? Ni meza, etc.) Then have them do the same conversation several times but change the distance between them each time. They will see how distance modifies relationship even for the audience.

**Taking the stage** - Have two to six students come on stage and ask them to experiment with different configurations. You can use the stage map above to choose places (UR, UC, UL, SR, CS, SL, DR, DC, DL). Discuss the impact of each configuration with the students.

**Tableau** - Have the students work in groups of five. Each group has five to ten minutes to create a "picture" or a "tableau" of a situation. They must not move! Once they have created the tableau, they show it to the other students who have to guess what the situation is. Make sure to pay attention to everyone in the tableau, even those who don't seem to have a major role. There is always something to see.

# MIME

*Sometimes we think that theatre is only about talking and delivering a text. In fact, what really makes sense for the audience and touches them is in what they see, not what they hear. The mime helps us to learn how to be on stage without saying a word but still being able to tell a story. Miming is the ability to show the existence of something while there is nothing. This means that it is through the language of the body that we can show images to the audience. The mime is a great tool to teach us how to involve the body on stage, and how to not be dependent on real objects and sets to do theatre. It is a difficult skill to acquire, and part of the difficulty comes from the fact that it requires a very attentive sense of observation. We can mime only what we really know; what we have observed in details. The magic of the mime is in the precision of the details.*

## Key points:

- Observe the objects to mime and the interaction of the objects with the body: if you hold something how do you hold it? What is the weight? The texture?
- When you mime, take time to articulate every change in your body: one action may be articulated in 10 movements
- You give existence to an object by seeing it first
- Once you have created an object or a space, it still exists for the audience so you cannot forget it or destroy it by going through it (if you pass a door and then close it, don't forget to open it again when you are leaving!)
- Be really precise in details

## Games and exercises:

**With and without** - for this exercise, it's good to have a very simple object, like a wood stick, or anything neutral. Manipulate it. Observe how it feels in your body: the way you hold it, how you open your hand and how you close it on the object, its size, its weight; hold the object with one hand, then with two, turn it, what are the movements you need to do? Then put the object down and repeat the movements you just did. You need to use the memory of your body. Focus on all the details you noticed. If you have a doubt, take the object again, observe it and put it back. Do it until you think it is precise enough.

**Passing objects** - in a big circle, somebody starts passing an imaginary object to the next person. He has to show the size, the form, the weight, the texture of his object. The person who receives it, receives it as it is, respecting all the details that have been shown, but then transforms it to a totally different object and pass it to the next person, etc., until everybody in the circle has passed the object.

**Put your clothes on!** - in a big circle, somebody who is wearing a jacket or a sweater or anything he can take off, will take it off really slowly so everybody can see the details of his movements. Be really attentive. Then the person puts his jacket on again. Then everybody tries

to repeat the same movements he did. It is interesting to see another person doing it for real because there are many different ways to put clothes on and off. Then everybody tries to remember the exact movements he or she does to put clothes on. *Variations*: from this exercise, it is good to encourage the students to observe the movements they do when they are at home, the way they wake up and get ready. Observing ourselves is the best way to learn.

**Create a space** - each person takes his own space in the class, and everybody remembers everything he needs to do to enter his own house. Be as precise as you can. How many steps are needed to go from the street to the door step? Are there stairs, and how many? What kind of door is it? Do you have the keys and how are they? What is the first thing you do when you enter your house (everybody has rituals: some will run to the bathroom, some will go to the kitchen, some will call somebody, etc...) in any case be as precise as you can. It is very fun to recreate a space we know so well and in fact discover that there are so many details we forget! It is good to show the others what you have done. From this exercise, you can now create any kind of space you want.

**Actions** - now that you know how to create a space, you need to introduce actions. Because you play with nothing else than your body, clear actions on stage are the best way to be understood by the audience. Everybody in his own space in the classroom, chooses an action: (here are some examples if they don't have ideas)

washing dishes	driving a car	sewing a dress	cleaning the house
cooking	washing clothes	painting a wall	cutting grass
planting seeds	chopping wood	digging a hole	

Repeat the action as many times as you need to be the closest possible to the real actions. Think of the details and articulate your movements. When everybody is done, show some of them so everybody can see how it works. Then everybody keeps his action but this time makes it really big—enormous. You need to engage the body. Then, so the opposite—make the action as small as possible but still be precise in the movements.

**The workers** - make groups of 3 or 4 people. Each group is a group of workers who build a house together. You don't need to talk at all: one starts miming an action related to building a house, and another one comes and adds an action, and then the third and the fourth one. That's how we build an action together. From the moment you have a common space created, you can started playing, add characters and a story.

# CHARACTERS

*In theatre, we don't need to invent anything. Everything already exists in real life. What we do though is observe reality, choose some parts of it, and transpose it onto the stage—especially when we want to create a character. To define a character is to find a body, a temperament and a voice. Observe people around you: your teachers, your friends, the milkman, the bus driver..., they all have a certain way to walk, certain attitudes, mimics, tics or habits, certain way to talk, certain characteristics. The characters are first in the body. If you use any of these characteristics and push them in your body, you will have the beginning of a character. Then you will add a voice, and then a costume. All of this means that you have to be aware of your own body as an individual and leave it behind you when you come on stage. Always start from the **neutral body**.*

## Key points:

- start from the neutral body
- Lead with different body parts ( see *Freeing the body* session)
- Once you have a body **you need to keep it**. If you lose it, if you come back to your own body, the character disappears.
- find the right voice ( see *Freeing the voice* session), and costume to fit your character.
- Be precise in details: i.e. the character may always touch his nose when he is embarrassed, or any other mimics you observe.
- Give your character a life (different from yours): who is he, what does he do, what does he like, doesn't like, etc.... and use it in situations (this may help you to know how to react in certain situations, or to know what are his motivations)

## Exercises and games:

### ***Defining a character***

**Find a body** - all students walk in the space, choosing 1 or 2 parts of the body to lead the walk. Think about the different articulations and all the possibilities they give: feet – knees – pelvis – chest – shoulders – head, each of them pulling back or forward (examples: nose forward, shoulders forward + feet outside, pelvis forward, feet inside + pelvis back, chest forward + chin back, pelvis back + chest forward, toes forward + shoulders back...).

The first time the facilitator claps his hands, the students stop and look around them. They have to stay in their characters, observe the other characters but not talk to each other. Then they walk again. This time, they are not in the classroom anymore; they walk in the street, alone.

The second time the facilitator claps his hands, they see a bill of 5000frw on the ground. How are they going to react **as characters**? (let them work alone, and each see their own bill).



The third time the facilitator claps his hands, they all meet with another character. The first one to talk explains to the other one that he has lost a bill of 5000frw and asks him if he hasn't seen it. How are they talk and react together **as characters**? In any case, KEEP THE BODY.

*Variations:* the actions they do when you clap the hands can be anything else. It's basically just a provocation to help them to define some characteristics from the body they've chosen. They can have forgotten an object; one can recognize the other one who doesn't recognize him back, etc... To be clearly understood, you may need to show an example with 2 people before the group.

**Find a voice** - everybody walks in the space with the body they've chosen, exaggerating it. When the facilitator claps the hands, they all stop and say a phrase like "*I really want a chocolate cake*" with a certain voice. And walk again. Do it few times. Each time they have to say the phrase trying a different voice, until they think they have found the right voice for their characters. Don't hesitate to ask some of them to show to the rest of the group what they found, and the group can decide whether the voice matches the body.

**Find the characteristics** - work in pairs. Each character presents himself to the other. Be specific. The facilitator can give a list of questions about the name, the age, the profession, the hobbies, favorite things (music, food,...), least favorite things. They must stay in character. Once both have answered the questions, they go in front of the rest of the group and each one presents his partner while maintaining their own character. *Don't lose the body and don't lose the voice.*

### ***The characters in situations***

**Interviews** - One person comes on stage as a character, facing the group. The facilitator will ask him questions, as in an interview. It can be an interview for a job, for an audition, to enter a university program or anything else. You can ask any kind of questions, but whatever happens the person interviewed has to stay in a character, answer as his character, and react in character.

**First Improv** - 2 people come on stage. At the beginning, each of them starts in opposite side of the stage, as if in a different space. Each of them is getting ready to leave (use mime). These characters have an appointment together but they have never seen each other before. Once they meet, how are they going to interact?

**Second Improv** - 5 people on stage. A big party has been organized by someone rich. The facilitator has to decide upon the space and describe it (SL there is a buffet, DSR there is a marble statue, etc). Everyone has been invited, but the owner is not around, and none of the guest know one another. The first guest arrives and examines/illustrates the space alone. The second enters, but they do not speak. How do they react to each other? What do they do? We do the same with the 3<sup>rd</sup>, then 4<sup>th</sup>, then 5<sup>th</sup>. Once all of the characters have entered, they can begin to speak. *This exercise teaches nonverbal communication and interaction. It shows what kind of connections can exist – attraction, repulsion, conflict, awkwardness, etc. Each actor must stay in character, but must also be attentive to the space and listen to the others on stage*

## EMOTIONS AND STATES

*When a character comes on stage, they carry an emotion or state (or both). The character (body and voice) are what remain fixed. The emotions and states can change, depending on what happens during the scene. These emotions and states can be communicated by using the voice and by using the body. Emotions and states can change gradually, in reaction to a succession of events or simply in response to the passage of time. They can also change suddenly, in response to some dramatic trigger. But whenever they change, they change for a reason.*

### Key Points:

- Speaking our emotions (“I’m sad”) is not enough, we have to show them with our voices and with our bodies.
- Emotions are affective (sad, happy, angry, afraid, confused) whereas states are physical (tired, hungry, sick, energetic, need to pee, lost), but they both can affect each other (being sad makes me tired, having to pee makes me irritable, etc).
- Our emotions and states affect how we react and respond to the world around us. The world around us can also affect our emotions and states.
- The moments where our emotions and states change on stage (our reactions) are the most dramatic and interesting moments for an audience.
- The emotion or state must be scaled to the provocation which causes it. A small emotional change can happen quickly, or with very little provocation. Large emotions (hysterical sobbing, violent anger, jumping with joy) take longer to build than small emotions, or require larger, more dramatic “triggers.”

### Some Emotions:

Sad	Irritated	In Love
Happy	Confused	Frustrated
Scared	Amazed	Hopeful
Joyful	Tempted	Proud
Angry	Ashamed	Embarrassed
Sorry	Surprised	Disappointed

### Some States:

Sick	Tired	Itchy
Need to pee	Hungry	Sore
Energetic	Awake	Drunk
Hot	Cold	Tense
Relaxed	Lost	Injured
Thirsty	Trapped	Unconscious

### Exercises:

**Emotional Bodies** – Walk in the space. The teacher will clap to freeze the class, and then give an emotion, walk with that emotion, showing it in your body. Continue until the teacher freezes you and gives you the next emotion. *This exercise shows how to use the body to convey emotion.*

**Emotional Meetings** – Walk in the space with an emotion (as in Emotional Bodies exercise) but when the teacher claps, “meet” someone else in the space and greet them, remembering to keep your own emotion and react to theirs. **Variation** – Students can do this exercise choosing their emotions or states for themselves, so that when they “meet” someone, that person may have an emotion or state different from their own. *This exercise teaches improvising in an emotion or state, while guarding your own emotion/state and reacting to the emotion/state of someone else.*

**Avocados** – Choose a line that is emotionally ambiguous (example: “My grandmother eats avocados every day”), and speak the line in a circle, having each person speak with a different emotion or state. Remember to use body as well as the voice to convey the emotion or state. **Variation** – Make a list of 10-20 emotions and states, and deliver the line in pairs, each time your partner must guess which emotion or state you were speaking with. *This exercise teaches how to convey emotions and states with body and voice instead of text.*

**Emotions Swap** – Two actors will enter the scene, each one with a different emotion. By the end of the scene, the actors must “trade” emotions. It is important that there is a logical reason for both changes of emotion, and that the changes are given enough time for us to understand and believe the change of emotion. It is also important that both actors are aware of the fact that they need to make proposals to their partner, to help them change their emotion. *This exercise teaches how to scale the provocation and the time of reaction to the emotional shift, so that the scene is believable. It also shows the dramatic importance of the “moment of change.”*

**Open Doors** – One actor improvises a scene where he/she opens a door, but it is the wrong door. The actor opens a second door, but it is still a wrong door, and opens to the same room he or she just accidentally opened the other door to. The actor opens a third door and STILL it’s the same wrong room. His or her embarrassment increases each time. *This exercise teaches how to change emotions, and how to let a chain of events “feed” a growing emotional change.*

**The Spitball** – One actor improvises a class that he or she is teaching about a subject that he or she is incredibly passionate about. The excitement for the subject grows and grows until the actor loses him- or herself completely in the explanation. At that moment an imaginary student hits the actor with a spitball, and the actor reacts. *This exercise teaches how to build an emotional state, and how to change the state suddenly in response to an external “trigger” or provocation.*

**The Revelation** – Two actors improvise a scene. Before the improvisation, they have decided on their relationship and the location of the scene. They also each decide (secretly) a secret that they will reveal to the other at some point in the scene. The important thing is to pay attention to the moment of revelation, and to scale their reaction and emotional change to the size of the revelation. *This scene teaches reaction, and scaling the reaction to the provocation.*

# MOTIVATION

*In life, people do things, and say things, for a reason. On stage, this is still true. It is important that everything a character says and does is being said and done for a reason that makes personal sense to that character. Even when information must be given to the audience so that they understand the story (“exposition”), as a character, you must find a reason to give that information that isn’t just: “The audience needed to know,” or, “The director told me to,” since in the world of the character, there IS no audience and no director. The lines an actor speaks and the actions they take are WHAT a character does on stage. The motivation is WHY they do it, and as an actor, it is very important to understand both.*

## Key Points:

- Everything a character does and says is motivated by a desire, or **motivation**.
- Characters, like people, can have just one desire or many desires at the same time.
- “**Complementing motivations**” are desires which facilitate each other.
- “**Conflicting motivations**” are desires that block one another; these are often dramatically interesting and can create engaging scenes and stories.
- Characters, like people, can sometimes say one thing and actually mean something different. The lines they say are called “**text**.” The hidden thoughts in their head are called “**subtext**.” We use our words to communicate the text, and our actions, emotions, and tone to communicate the subtext. It is important that the audience understands both.
- Desires can lead to **actions**, which are more powerful on stage than text alone.
- “**Exposition**” is information given to an audience to help them understand a story. Exposition, like all text, must be connected to a character with a desire. Actors and writers must think of creative ways to do this so that the lines do not seem forced or fake.

## Some Motivations / Actions:

Teach	Obtain	Discover	Hide	Take	Win
Learn	Find	Understand	Refuse	Protect	Defend
Attack	Hurt	Destroy	Build	Create	Escape
Tease	Play	Show off	Confess	Impress	Provoke
Possess	Prove	Apologize	Blame	Accept	Deny

## Exercises:

**Motivations Improvisation** – Create a situation where two people have complimenting motivations (example: one wants to tell about the date she just went on, and the other wants to hear all about it) and have them improvise the scene. Then change one person’s motivation so

that it conflicts with the other person's motivation (example: instead of wanting to talk about the date, the character wants to be quiet because her parents are in the next room and might hear) and improvise the scene again. **Variation** – Improvise a scene where two people have complimenting motivations, and then ask for a volunteer to play a third character with a conflicting motivation. As they progress and begin to understand motivations, you can allow the students to choose their own motivations and make up conflicting motivations in response to the proposals of their peers. *This exercise illustrates complimenting and conflicting motivations.*

**Inner Voice** – Two actors come to the stage to improvise a situation with a lot of tension (for example: first date, job interview, boy-meets-girl, immigration interview, church confession, etc). Two more actors to join them and speak their internal voice, or subtext. Remind the four actors to work together, react to what their partner is saying or doing, and not to steal focus or talk at the same time. This improvisation can be very funny if done well. *This exercise illustrates subtext and enforces teamwork in improvisation.*

**“I’m fine”** – Two actors work together and build and exchange of a couple of lines. It can start very simple, like, “Amakuru,” “Ni Meza.” Then they play the scene in two very different ways, so that the final line in the exchange has two different subtexts (for example, the first time the actor says, “Ni Meza,” his subtext can be “I’m GREAT!” and the second time it can be, “I’m feeling very sad but don’t want to talk about it.”). Audiences can guess the subtext, to see how clear the actors are being. The exchanges and subtexts can get more interesting as the students advance. **Variation** – choose a line and go around the circle, have everyone say the line with a different subtext. *This exercise emphasizes using your emotions, voice, and body to show subtext.*

**Text Analysis** – Take a play or scene from a play and discuss it with the group, to decide together what the characters' motivations and subtext are. This is a very good thing to do with a play that you are going to perform, at the beginning of a rehearsal process, perhaps a scene at a time, before you practice it on your feet. *This exercise helps to understand the characters in a scene and their underlying motivations and subtext.*

**Empty Dialogue** – Write an exchange of about ten lines which are “empty,” or meaningless without any actions to explain them (example: A) Oh B) Yes A) Now B) What A) Here B) No... etc). Working in pairs, the actors construct a scene, giving meaning and motivations to each line. *This exercise emphasizes using actions and body to show motivation.*

**Expose It!** – Have the group improvise in pairs or threes. Choose pieces of information which each actor must communicate to the audience about themselves, or about the other person. This can start simple (her name is Anna, your favorite food is goat brochette, you are seven years old, etc, that person is your sister, etc) and get more complicated as the actors progress. Once the actors get very good, give the tasks to a group, so that they are all responsible for communicating the information together. *This exercise teaches how to write exposition in a believable and natural way, connecting it to the characters and their motivations.*

# WRITING AND DRAMATIC STRUCTURE

*Working from improvisations, students can create stories and entire plays. In order to do this, it is important to understand the structure of a story – how it begins, how it develops, and how it ends.*

## Key Points:

- In theatre, the base of every story is CONFLICT. It creates **tension**, provokes **reactions** and **changes**, and allows us to get to know the characters better.
- “**External Conflict**” comes from two or more people in disagreement or with conflicting desires and motivations. *Conflict doesn't always mean confrontation!* Conflict can result in confrontation, but it can also be expressed without confrontation and violence.
- “**Internal Conflict**” exists in one person who wavers between two choices. She fights with her feelings and her conscience.

## Story Structure:

- 1) “Once upon a time...” : the initial situation. We present the place, the characters, and their daily life. the initial situation presents a certain balance (“initial balance”).
- 2) “One day...” : the disruptive element, appearance of a conflict, which provokes change.
- 3) “And so...” : reaction to the disruptive element, change, and move towards resolution.
- 4) “Finally...” : final situation. Consequences of the conflict and new, or “final,” balance.

## Character :

\*is human. Even if he's the “bad-guy” in the story, he has character traits that are human, and with which the public can identify.

\*is known and discovered through his reactions to events in the story.

\*undergoes CHANGE over the course of the story (all characters change, even if only a little).

## Exercices :

**Meeting** – Ask two students to improvise a simple meeting between two characters where they meet and have a conversation. Redo this improvisation (and re-create the dialogue so that it is the same conversation) but introduce a conflict : give each person a conflicting motivation, find a reason to disagree between them, make them enemies, etc. *The comparison will show students that conflict can introduce tension into a scene which, at the beginning, was not that interesting.*

**External Conflict** – Give improvisations based on external conflicts. Examples: a person wants to be friends with another, but the other one ignores him completely; a girl wants to go out to

meet her boyfriend, but her brother won't allow her to; etc. *These improvisations will make students feel the tension brought to the stage and above all the different ways that conflict can be expressed—gestures, regards, etc. Conflict is expressed in words as well, but it is expressed primarily in the body. Pay attention to the space between the characters and how it is used.*

**Internal Conflict** – Give students conflicts based on internal conflicts. Examples: a person leaves a box with another one, tells him not to open it no matter what, and leaves him on stage, to decide what to do; a man walks on stage with two boxes, one is filled with important papers that his boss needs immediately, the other is important things for his brother, who lives on the other side of town and leaves in ten minutes, and both are equally urgent—what should he do? *These improvisations introduce internal tension and show that an internal conflict isn't necessarily shown with words, but it generally shown with expressions and actions.*

**Resolution** – Give a conflict to two students and have them improvise until they find a resolution or reach a breaking point. Have two others improvise with the same conflict, but find a different resolution. Keep asking more students to do the improvisation until the possibilities are exhausted. *These improvisations stimulate the imagination and show how many possibilities there are in a single story.*

**Build a Story** – Ask 4 students to be the “storytellers.” One gives the initial situation (“Once upon a time...”), another the disruptive element (“One day...”), the third gives the reaction-resolution (“And so...”), and the last gives the final situation (“Finally...”). The game can be very fast, the students should come up with the different elements of the story very quickly, without thinking too hard. This will give you funny and fresh stories. **Variation #1** – Do the same game, but do it in a circle, and write several stories with the group, where every four people there is a new story. This can be done as a race against the clock (i.e. we have to get around this circle of 16 students, telling 4 stories, in under two minutes). **Variation #2** – With the original game (with only four storytellers), add three students who will mime the story that the 4 are telling. For this variation we can take more time to create a coherent story. The mime will start by creating a picture tableau for each section (4 pictures total), and then they can work to link the pictures through mimed scenes, or speaking improvisations which complete the stories outlines by the storytellers.

**Analyzing Models** – Take pieces of theatre, books, traditional stories and fairy tales, stories that the students have seen, read, or know. Dissect and analyze these stories according to the scheme to identify the four main parts: initial situation (“first balance”); disruptive element; reaction-resolution; and final situation (“new balance”). This is a very good exercise to do with a story you are going to tell, or a play you are going to perform. If you are writing your own play, it is important to make sure it has all of these elements.

## TEACHING A CLASS

*Now that you have all of these theatre skills, it is up to you to transmit them to your peers and use them in your work. The most important part of teaching is not giving information; the most important part of teaching is making sure that your students **have received** and **understand** the information given. This is done by having them experience all of these concepts and skills directly, through exercises and improvisation, and to make sure they have understood what you have taught by asking them questions and making them think and process on their own.*

### THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Pay attention to the collective energy of the room. What do your students need? Are they tired and unable to digest information? Do they need an energy boost? Are they bored? Do they need a fun game? Are they confused? Do they need you to stop and explain? Are they goofing around? Do they need a focus game or discipline? Remember that it is not their job to make teaching easy for you; it is YOUR job to make learning easy for THEM.
- Do not be afraid to set rules and boundaries. Make sure students turn off their cell phones, throw away gum, take off extra jewelry, wear comfortable clothes, and listen when you speak. If the class is being loud, tell them to listen and don't continue teaching until you have the attention of the entire room. They WANT to learn, but sometimes need you to be strict and provide structure so that they can have a learning environment that is productive and focused.
- GO SLOWLY. We have crammed a lot of information into three days (and wish we could have taken much, much more time with you all). The material you have in this manual can last you a whole YEAR. Doing one exercise well can take an entire session if you are creative and keep introducing new ideas and variations to keep the class interesting and moving forward. These concepts can be learned very quickly with the mind, but it is the BODY that needs to learn them for them to appear on stage, and exercises must be done again and again before the lessons within them become instinct, or part of the body-memory.
- HAVE FUN! Theatre is a fun and effective way of connecting to your collaborators and communicating with your audiences. If the training for theatre is not fun, then the performances themselves will not be fun either. It is easy (especially as the first performance draws near) to panic and, become bossy, worry about doing the piece "right," get stressed, and to stop having fun. Remember that as a teacher, you are the most skilled person in the room. Be patient with the various levels of your students, and never stop laughing and smiling!



## SAMPLE LESSON PLANNING SHEET

**Date :** Sep 15, 2009 **School/Club:** Kagarama YC **Lesson #:** 7 **Topic:** Motivation

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	TIME
The Human Knot	Trust and group dynamic	10 mins
Yoga	Stretch / Warmup	15 mins
Tunnel Tag	ENERGY	5 mins
Discuss Motivation	Introduce the idea of desires and conflicting desires.	5 mins
Motivations Imrov., in pairs, on their own.	Allow students to experience complimenting and conflicting motivations for themselves.	7 mins
Motivations improv, whole group watching a pair or two on stage.	Allow students to see the effects of conflicting and complimenting motivations on stage.	10 mins
Ask students to create a simple scene based on motivations, ask them to be creative and original with the conflicts they choose.	Allows students to begin to think creatively about conflict, and to begin to structure improvisations into scenes	15 mins
Watch a few of the scenes as a group and discuss.	Allows students to present work, and to learn from the work of others. Teaches good audience skills (attentive listening, learning).	15 mins
Ask questions to students, allow them to ask questions (Q and A)	Verify that students have processed the information, allow them to digest and ask questions about what they are confused about.	5 mins
Group ritual (song, rhythm game, or dance)	Finishes the session together, as a group, lifts energy.	3 mins
		<b>TOTAL TIME:</b> 90mins

# Communicating Through **THEATRE** – LESSON PLAN

Date : \_\_\_\_\_ School/Club: \_\_\_\_\_ Lesson #: \_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	TIME
		<b>TOTAL TIME:</b>