

**Student Resource Sheets,
Preparation and Stimulus Material**

**MAKING
THEATRE**

**The Frazzled Drama Teacher's
Guide to Devising**

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CREATING A CHARACTER: GETTING STARTED

To get as high a mark as possible you need to create characters who are:

- Convincing and believable.
- Different from each other, if you play more than one character.

Most people are better at playing certain types of character than others. For instance, some people are more convincing in high-status roles and some are better at low-status characters. Professional actors are often 'typecast'. This means they usually play the romantic lead or the villain or someone very posh. Some people enjoy playing a 'baddie'. Some people are good at playing characters much older or younger than they are in real life. Ask yourself and the others in your group:

- What are my strengths and weaknesses?

Play to your strengths when you can, but also push yourself outside your comfort zone when you need to.

Remember:

- Use what you know about how different people behave, talk and react in real life to make sure that the characters and relationships you create are believable.
- How people move, stand and sit reveals a great deal about their mood, situation and feelings.
- What people say and don't say, as well as how they say it or don't, reveals a great deal about who they are and who they are with.
- No matter how different a character is from you, there is always something that has happened to you that will enable you to connect with what the character is experiencing.

Some forms of theatre require big gestures and exaggerated ways of moving and speaking. Depending on the style of your piece, you may be playing larger-than-life characters – but they still need to be based on truthful, recognisable human beings.

As rehearsals progress, use student resource sheet 3 to develop more depth, more detail – and gain more marks!

Don't fall into the trap of working out plot in advance. That won't gain high marks because, in this exam, it's not the story you tell, it's the way that you tell it!

So, if you want to get the highest possible marks, don't just ask yourself:

- **What's the story we want to tell?**

You should also ask yourself:

- **How do we want to tell this story?**
- **Why do we want to tell this story?**
- **What effect do we want to have on the audience?**

Why? Because your piece will be assessed on the way that plot, theme, style and form come together, and how effectively you communicate with an audience.

Here are some other important questions to ask at the start of your devising process:

What makes a good beginning?

- There is no single right way to begin – grabbing the audience's attention is what counts. The audience don't need to know who the characters are from the outset, or where they are, but we do need to want to find out more.
- With a partner, make notes or discuss a play, film or TV programme you have seen where the opening made you want to keep watching. Why did it do so?

How will our play be structured?

- Sometimes the action takes place as a continuous narrative. This is known as linear structure.
- Sometimes a play uses moves backwards and forwards in time.
- Sometimes a play begins at the end of the story, and then flashes back to the start of the story, to follow events through and explain what happened.
- Some plays are a series of interconnected stories or scenes on a particular theme.

There are many different **narrative structures**. None are right or wrong but some are more appropriate than others, depending on how you want to tell your story.

Make sure you know what the following terms mean so that you can use them.

- **Three-act structure / Cliffhanger / Dramatic irony / Climax and anticlimax / Contrast**

Your group also needs to consider:

- **What do you know about different styles and theatrical genres?**
- **Does your story fit into a particular genre?**

Also, list all the **techniques** and **conventions** you have learned about different ways to communicate to an audience. You don't need to use them all in your piece – but which will you use to tell your story in the most effective way?

The audience doesn't need to be told everything about a character's background. But you need to know! The more you know, the greater the depth and detail you will bring to your characterisation – and the higher the mark. Here are some things that you will need to know about the character(s) you are playing. There maybe other things you want to add.

- Gender and exact age.
- Body language, walk, gestures, posture and mannerisms.
- Personal history: home, family, social background, past experience.
- Relationships with others, especially status.
- Voice and vocabulary.
- Strengths and weaknesses; hopes and fears.

These questions are based on the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938), who created a system that he hoped would lead to a truthful style of acting.

1. Who am I?

All that you have imagined and decided about your character, or, if your piece is based on a true story, all the facts you know about that character.

2. Where am I?

Alone or with other people? In a quiet or a noisy place? Is this a familiar place where you feel comfortable or a strange, even hostile environment? Inside or outdoors?

3. When is it?

Not just time of day, not just time of year, but which year?

4. Where have I just come from?

What has happened to the character immediately before the scene starts? How has it affected them?

5. What do I want?

Do you want something from the other person in the scene? Are you happy with your situation? Do you want to change it? Why do you want it? Why do you want it now?

Will it make your day or your whole life better? Do you need whatever it is desperately, to keep yourself alive?

6. What will happen if I don't get it now?

How will you get what you want? What must you overcome?

Remember to:

- Keep asking yourself these questions as your character(s) develop. The more you discover, the more likely it is your answers will change, develop and evolve.
- Think about how what happens to your character(s) during the course of the play changes and affects them. How will you communicate this to the audience?

To gain the highest possible marks, bear in mind the following tips and pitfalls throughout your devising rehearsal process:

- Rehearsal is reworking. It is very different to just working on a scene and showing it in a single lesson. Rehearsal involves revisiting, refining, editing, honing, discarding, paring down and polishing. In other words, doing it again and again, until it's as good as it possibly can be!
- As your piece develops, you might decide that there is a better place to begin than you thought originally. You will not know whether that's the best beginning from the start of your devising process.
- *Show don't tell.* Reveal through action, behaviour, body language and expression. Don't have characters tell us what they wouldn't actually say. For example, in real life, most people don't say, 'I'm angry.' They show they are angry by how they move, their tone of voice, etc.
- Is the effect you want to have on the audience clear? (Scene by scene, and sequence by sequence, as well as overall.) And what is that effect? Do you want to make them think about the world we live in? Make them sympathise with one character or angry with another? Do you want to create a tense or scary atmosphere that will have the audience on the edge of their seats? Do you want to move them to tears?
- Don't have too much plot! It will mean you are not working in the depth and detail you need to maximise your marks.
- Don't rush. Give the audience time to register characters, relationships, atmosphere, key plot points.
- A performance needs energy: volume and commitment are required, even in rehearsal.
- Avoid blackouts and avoid too many scene changes – marks are available for how you incorporate the transitions from scene to scene.
- Know your assessment criteria. What do you have to show in your work? Are you showing it?
- Is your piece the right length? Keep checking as you rehearse so that you don't have to cut out whole sections or extend other parts at the last minute.

Making Theatre

GROUP-WORK PREFERENCE

High-quality devised theatre is underpinned by effective group work. List five of the skills or personality types that you think are needed to create an effective rehearsal group.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Bearing in mind your own strengths and weaknesses, state one person with whom you think you can work productively and one person with whom you think you cannot work productively. Your comments should focus on:

- Their skills and qualities rather than their personality.
- How working/not working with the people you name would improve your work and increase your skills in drama.

I would benefit from working with _____
because _____

I would not benefit from working with _____
because _____

Bearing in mind your own strengths and weaknesses, state one person that would benefit from working with you and one person that would not benefit from you.

_____ would benefit from working with me because

_____ would not benefit from working with me because

When reviewing your schemes of work, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there opportunities for increasingly long and independent rehearsal processes in preparation for the devised theatre requirements of your exam specification?
- Are there opportunities to develop an understanding that process has worth in and of itself, and that rehearsal involves experimentation and discovery, not just getting it right first time and moving on?
- Are there exercises and activities that enable students to develop understanding of different approaches to characterisation, including how such concepts as status inform characterisation?
- Are there exercises and activities that analyse dramatic structure, in particular what makes an effective beginning for a piece and how to sustain the audience's attention?
- Are there exercises and activities that will enable students to understand that revealing through action is more dramatically effective than telling through speech?
- What opportunities do students have to see theatre (whether trips to the theatre, visiting theatre companies or GCSE/A-level/BTEC work by older or other students)?
- What opportunities do students have to perform, whether to other classes or to other audiences?
- What opportunities do students have to understand the conventions of various theatrical genres and apply these to their own practical work?
- Generally, teachers stress the responsibilities of the audience: to be attentive and supportive. At what point do students become aware that the performer has responsibilities too? (Such as audibility, configuration of space, performance energy and commitment.)
- What opportunities are there for students to recognise and demonstrate their understanding of the medium and elements of Drama within their work and how these can assist and clarify dramatic form?

Making Theatre

ENSURING BOYS' ATTAINMENT

Boys respond well to physical tasks.	
Boys prefer comedy, perhaps as a defence mechanism to avoid working in depth or revealing emotion.	
Boys are resistant to starting tasks.	
Boys' responses are raw or literal, whereas girls' responses are more considered.	
Girls discuss and plan for longer; boys stand up sooner.	
Boys take longer to settle.	
Boys get over conflict more quickly than girls. Boys don't hold grudges or, if they do, they mask the fact, as an acceptable social response.	
Boys' written work (and verbal evaluation) is weaker than girls'.	
Boys are more confident with physical work and more able to take risks.	
Boys like competition. They want to win, but don't want to lose face so may not participate through fear of failure.	
Boys love and need praise.	
Boys prefer an immediate response. They are not so good at deferred gratification – hence a sustained rehearsal period is inherently problematic.	
Boys are more delicate than girls with regard to criticism.	
Boys are worse at listening to instructions. (A statistic claims boys can't hold more than three instructions at one time.)	
Boys are not as good at abstract work.	
Boys cannot concentrate for as long as girls.	
Boys are better at performing aggressive emotions and at stage fighting.	
Boys are less enthusiastic readers: words equal work.	

Transgressive Love

VRBANA BRIDGE

They stood by the window
And watched the old church
Burn for the second time.
The light from the fire
Made her glow like an angel
As she pulled him down and smiled.
They lay on the bed,
There were shouts all around
They could shut the whole war out.
With the squeak of the springs
And tomorrow's dreams
And the beating of their hearts.

He would lay his arms down for her.
She would forgive his brother's crime.
They would do anything
To make it past Vrbana Bridge.

Well he looked up to Jesus
And she looked to the east
Where the sun was soon to rise.
She asked for Allah's blessings
To keep them both alive.
They had friends in high places
Who could do them a favour,
Turn a blind eye.
They'd seen so much hate
And death every day,
'Let's just let those two walk by'.

They would lay their arms down for her.
They would forgive his brother's crime.
Just for one moment they would
Let them pass Vrbana Bridge.

Through a crack in the wall
Of a sandbagged building
The soldier saw them fall.
He said, 'If love was their only armour
It did no good at all.'
They lay for six days
In a final embrace.
They had shut the whole war out.
The soldier blames the other side
But even he has his doubts.

He would lay down his arms down for her
He would forgive his brother's crime
He would lay down his arms
To let them pass Vrbana Bridge.

© Jill Sobule (Feel My Pain Music/ASCAP) and Robin Eaton (Left Right Left Music/BMI/Admin BMG)

Montage

EXTRACT FROM 'THE TRIAL'

Someone must have been telling lies about Josef K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested. Every day at eight in the morning he was brought his breakfast by Mrs Grubach's cook – Mrs Grubach was his landlady – but today she didn't come. That had never happened before.

K. waited a little while, looked from his pillow at the old woman who lived opposite and who was watching him with an inquisitiveness quite unusual for her, and finally, both hungry and disconcerted, rang the bell. There was immediately a knock at the door and a man entered. He had never seen the man in this house before. He was slim but firmly built, his clothes were black and close-fitting, with many folds and pockets, buckles and buttons and a belt, all of which gave the impression of being very practical but without making it very clear what they were actually for.

'Who are you?' asked K., sitting half upright in his bed. The man, however, ignored the question as if his arrival simply had to be accepted, and merely replied, 'You rang?' 'Anna should have brought me my breakfast,' said K. He tried to work out who the man actually was, first in silence, just through observation and by thinking about it, but the man didn't stay still to be looked at for very long. Instead he went over to the door, opened it slightly, and said to someone who was clearly standing immediately behind it, 'He wants Anna to bring him his breakfast.'

There was a little laughter in the neighbouring room, it was not clear from the sound of it whether there were several people laughing. The strange man could not have learned anything from it that he hadn't known already, but now he said to K., as if making his report 'It is not possible.'

'It would be the first time that's happened,' said K., as he jumped out of bed and quickly pulled on his trousers. 'I want to see who that is in the next room, and why it is that Mrs Grubach has let me be disturbed in this way.' It immediately occurred to him that he needn't have said this out loud, and that he must to some extent have acknowledged their authority by doing so, but that didn't seem important to him at the time. That, at least, is how the stranger took it, as he said, 'Don't you think you'd better stay where you are?'

'I want neither to stay here nor to be spoken to by you until you've introduced yourself.'

'I meant it for your own good,' said the stranger and opened the door, this time without being asked.

Franz Kafka, translated by David Wyllie (www.kafka-online.info/the-trial.html)

We All Come From Somewhere Else

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- When did you come to [*wherever you live now*] and why?
- What were your first impressions when you arrived?
- How did your parents meet?
- What's the most frightening experience you've ever had?
- What was the happiest day of your life, so far?
- What was the saddest day of your life, so far?
- What were your school days like?
- Were your parents strict?
- What is the biggest change you have seen since your childhood?
- Who lived in your house before you?
- How did you meet your partner?

Additional questions:

1.

2.

3.

We All Come From Somewhere Else

ARRIVAL: PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I expected something beautiful but at the time it was very very dirty and everything seemed to be so black. We were very distressed. We arrived about half-past eleven in the evening. It was raining – awful, terrible weather it was.

I was very homesick. It looked very different. It was a big city and I come from a very small island. I was a bit confused. The first time I went on the Underground I got lost.

My friend came to meet me at Waterloo. The scene was just a lot of people. Everybody who come off the train and who come to meet relatives. So it was just a big crowd of people.

There was curious onlookers standing around looking: anxious black people and curious white people.

I was on the train and when I looked out through the window and see all these little houses and outside is so black, I said to somebody, ‘When are we going to reach England?’

My husband came to meet me, everything was strange.

Nowhere to live, nowhere to sleep, nowhere – nobody wanted to know you. If I had money I would have gone back straight away.

When you arrive, people try to communicate with you through sign language or they shout at you. They think perhaps by shouting they can make you understand what they are talking about.

It was a feeling of total confusion having to go through immigration and all the people around you that you didn’t know. I felt utterly despairing. It was a feeling of total confusion because I suddenly realised I’d arrived, I’d left home and I arrived here.

I cried like a baby the first week I was here. You had to be at work by 6.30 a.m. If you were late you would be disciplined.

At the time you used to get signs saying, ‘No Irish, no Blacks’. You know, that saddened me, coming from a place where they tell you this is the mother country.

You had to keep your dignity. A lot of boys came here and had mental breakdowns because of that stress.

From Sun a-Shine, Rain a-Fall: London Transport’s West Indian Workforce (London Transport Museum) and *Motherland* by Elyse Dodgson (Pearson Education Ltd)

No Inspiration Required

PAIR EXERCISE (A) AND TRIO EXERCISE

Pair Exercise (A)

A is a person packing up a room (this is mimed, of course). No dialogue. B is another character who is watching. The pair need to experiment to decide:

- Whether B is present from the start.
- Whether B is standing or sitting.
- Whether A acknowledges B's presence in any way during the scene.

When A is finished, they pause for five seconds precisely. B says to A: 'It's time to go now.'

A does not respond.

Trio Exercise

Prepare the following sequence of movements. No dialogue should be added.

- There are three chairs.
- A is walking up and down.
- B enters and sits on one chair. They tap their foot, repeatedly.
- C enters. A keeps walking up and down, B keeps tapping.
- C exits.
- D enters.
- B stands.
- D takes B's seat.
- A pauses. Then continues walking up and down.
- B exits.
- C enters again. Sits on another chair.
- D and C make eye contact.
- A stops walking. Opens their mouth, as if about to speak. The scene ends at this point.

SOLO EXERCISE (A) AND PAIR EXERCISES (B) AND (C)

Solo Exercise (A)

There is an empty chair in an empty room. A person walks in and sits on the chair. The rest of the group watch, then suggest:

- Who is the person? For instance: old, young, high or low status?
- Where is the person? Is it a familiar place or a strange place?
- What has just happened?
- What is about to happen?
- What is the person feeling? How can we tell?

Pair Exercise (B)

A. Well?

B does not respond.

A. Well?

B does not respond.

A. Did you go there?

There is a pause. B nods.

B. I found this note. (*Reads the following.*) 'I am what I am. I see the nature of my offence. It is finished. It is finished.'

Pair Exercise (C)

The pair sits opposite each other. They have a muttered conversation. They can talk gibberish, if they wish: the point is that the audience do not know what they are saying and, at this point, the actors do not need to know what or who is being discussed.

Stipulate that there will be three pauses. The pair should work out when. During each pause, each person should look left or look right or look up or look down. They could both do the same but do not have to. The looks might be simultaneous but do not have to be. One might be in response to the other. The pair should not make any decisions about why the pause or why the look in whatever direction: the point, as with preceding activities, is to allow the audience to interpret what is going on and, perhaps, why.

No Inspiration Required

SOLO EXERCISE (B)

The character mimes the following in the specified order. They may refer to the list of instructions as they do so: the purpose is not to test their memory but to see what the sequence suggests, both to the performer and to those watching. For this reason, it is useful to have someone who can read the sequence out so that, the first time through, the performer does not know what comes next.

The character:

- Sits (and remains so until the ninth action in the sequence).
- Smokes.
- Glance over to a bed.
- Coughs.
- Lifts handkerchief to mouth.
- Looks at handkerchief.
- Throws cigarette on table.
- Coughs.
- Stands.
- Goes to bed (to look at whoever is there, not to sleep).
- Bends.
- Kisses whoever is in bed.
- Goes to mirror.

The sequence should be performed twice: neutrally the first time then, the second time through, with whatever mood or emotion seems appropriate to the performer.

This Woman's Work

COLD DARK MATTER: AN EXPLODED VIEW



Cornelia Parker/The Frith Street Gallery

The Third Way

'PIRATE JENNY'

You people can watch while I'm scrubbing
these floors
And I'm scrubbin the floors while you're
gawking.
Maybe once ya tip me and it makes ya feel
swell
In this crummy southern town
In this crummy old hotel
But you'll never guess to who you're
talkin.
No. You couldn't ever guess to who you're
talkin.
Then one night there's a scream in the night
And you'll wonder who could that have
been?
And you see me kinda grinnin while I'm
scrubbin
And you say, what's she got to grin?
I'll tell you.
There's a ship,
The black freighter
With a skull on its masthead
Will be coming in.
You gentlemen can say, 'Hey gal, finish
them floors!
Get upstairs! What's wrong with you! Earn
your keep here!'
You toss me your tips
And look out to the ships
But I'm counting your heads
As I'm making the beds
Cuz there's nobody gonna sleep here,
honey.
Nobody – Nobody!
Then one night there's a scream in the
night
And you say, 'Who's that kicking up a row?'
And ya see me kinda starin out the winda
And you say, 'What's she got to stare at
now?'
I'll tell ya.
There's a ship,
The black freighter
Turns around in the harbour
Shootin guns from her bow.
Now you gentlemen can wipe off that
smile off your face
Cause every building in town is a flat one.

This whole frickin place will be down to
the ground.
Only this cheap hotel standing up safe and
sound
And you yell, 'Why do they spare that
one?'
Yes.
That's what you say.
'Why do they spare that one?'
All the night through, through the noise
and to-do
You wonder who is that person that lives
up there?
And you see me stepping out in the
morning
Looking nice with a ribbon in my hair.
And the ship,
The black freighter
Runs a flag up its masthead
And a cheer rings the air.
By noontime the dock
Is a-swarmin with men
Comin out from the ghostly freighter.
They move in the shadows
Where no one can see
And they're chainin up people
And they're bringin em to me
Askin me,
'Kill them now, or later?'
Askin me!
'Kill them now, or later?'
Noon by the clock
And so still by the dock
You can hear a foghorn miles away.
And in that quiet of death
I'll say, 'Right now.
Right now!'
Then they'll pile up the bodies
And I'll say,
'That'll learn ya!'
And the ship,
The black freighter
Disappears out to sea
And
On – It – Is – Me

Bertolt Brecht, translated by Marc Blitzstein (MDS (Hire & Copyright) Ltd on behalf of Universal Edition)

NOTICE OF CHANGE OF NAME

From the *Stratford Gazette*, 20th March 1915

I formally, wholly, absolutely and utterly renounce, relinquish and abandon the Christian and Surname of Carl Schneider.

I declare that I have assumed, adopted and determined and I intend henceforth, upon all occasions whatsoever to use and subscribe myself by the name of Charles Bennett instead of Carl Schneider.

Dated this 17th day of March 1915

Charles Bennett (Formerly known as Carl Schneider)

- Attention.
- Present arms.
- Shoulder arms.
- Stand at ease.
- Right turn (or left turn).
- Quick march.
- At ease.
- Fall out.

That day in My Lai, I was personally responsible for killing about twenty-five people. Personally. Men, women. From shooting them, to cutting their throats, scalping them, to . . . cutting off their hands and cutting out their tongues. I did it.

I just went. My mind just went. And I wasn't the only one that did it. A lot of other people did it. I just killed. Once I started, the – the training, the whole programming part of killing, it just came out.

A lot of people were doing it. I just followed suit. I just lost all sense of direction, of purpose. I just started killing any kinda way I could kill. It just came. I didn't know I had it in me.

After I killed the child, my whole mind just went. It just went. And once you start, it's very easy to keep on. Once you start. The hardest – the part that's hard is to kill, but once you kill, that becomes easier, to kill the next person and the next one and the next one. Because I had no feelings and no emotions or no nothing. No direction. I just killed.

No Feeling, No Emotion

MY LAI: TESTIMONY

‘I gave them a good boy and they made him a murderer.’

GI’s mother

‘We had orders, but the orders we had was that we were going into an enemy village and that they was well armed. I didn’t find that when I got there. And ordering me to shoot down innocent people, that’s not an order – that’s craziness to me, you know. And so I don’t feel like I have to obey that.’

Harry Stanley, Charlie Company

‘We were kids, eighteen, nineteen years old. I was twenty-one years old at the time. I was one of the oldest people around there among the common grunts.

Most of them [Charlie Company] had never been away from home before they went into the service. And they end up in Vietnam, many of them because they thought they were going to do something courageous on behalf of their country. Here are these guys who have gone in and in a moment, in a moment, following orders, in a context in which they’d been trained, prepared to follow orders, they do what they’re told, and they shouldn’t have, and they look back a day later and realise they probably made the biggest mistake of their lives. [There were] only a few extraordinary people who were in those circumstances who had the presence of mind and strength of their own character that would see them through. Most people didn’t. And for most of them – people that I was personally just stunned to discover had made the wrong choice they did – they all had to live with it. They had to live with it. And so do we all.’

Ronald Ridenhour, GI not with Charlie Company

‘When my troops were getting massacred and mauled by an enemy I couldn’t see, I couldn’t feel and I couldn’t touch, nobody in the military system ever described them as anything other than Communism. They didn’t give it a race, they didn’t give it a sex, they didn’t give it an age. They never let me believe it was just a philosophy in a man’s mind that was my enemy out there.’

Lt William Calley’s final speech to his court martial

‘I think of it all the time, and that is why I am old before my time. I remember it all the time. I think about it and I can’t sleep. I’m all alone and life is hard and there’s no one I can turn to for help. Then I think of it all the time. I’m always sad and unhappy, and that’s why I’m old.

I think of my daughter and my mother, both of them dead. I won’t forgive. I hate them very much. I won’t forgive them as long as I live. Think of those children, that small . . . Those children still at their mothers’ breasts being killed . . . I hate them very much . . .

I miss my mother, my sister, my children. I think of them lying dead. I think of it and feel my insides being cut to pieces.’

Truong Thi Lee, who lost nine members of her family in the massacre

From *Four Hours in My Lai* by Michael Bilton (Pearson Education Inc.)

Rehearsing is not about getting it right. That's the exact opposite of what it's for. I always say straight off, get up and try something. It's better. Because you may find something quite interesting that emerges in that stage. You often get people saying no to someone's idea before they've tried it. You say, 'Have you tried this?' 'No, no, that won't work.' Well, you don't know until you've tried it. It may be a brilliant idea. It might not be. But I always think you should try every idea. You've got to try it. And you can only know by doing it. You can't know by talking about it.

Paul Hunter, Told by an Idiot