



2010-11 HOT Season for Young People Teacher Guidebook

Performance in which Hopefully Nothing Happens

Theatergroep Max.

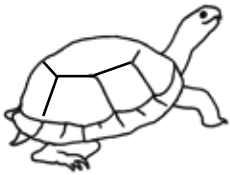


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Tennessee Performing Arts Center



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Dear Teachers,

Congratulations on choosing an extraordinary theatre experience for your students!

This Dutch production brings many surprises and delights as it plays with our understanding of the circumstances and traditions of theatre. Its very title undermines our concept of what a play should be. Of course, though it proclaims that “hopefully nothing happens,” something is constantly happening: a subtle reaction, an uncooperative set, or an actor simply waiting on stage to growing hilarity!

If the performance can be classified, it fits in the category of **postmodern theatre**. This guidebook explains in a clear and interesting way the ideas and characteristics of postmodernism. Most of the images contained in the guide also belong to a postmodern sensibility that derails expectations of what has always been.

We believe your students will be stimulated by a new point of view and challenged in their perceptions. We know they will be laughing!

TPAC Education

Special note:

The design of the set creates limited sight lines for some seating in TPAC's Polk Theater. We restricted the number of students coming to the performance for this reason, and so you will notice empty seats on each of the far sides of the theater.



Table of Contents

About the Company	page 2
A Brief History of Postmodernism	page 3
An Interview with the Director	pp. 4-5
Postmodernism Is Everywhere	pp. 6-8
Activity: Postmodern Playwriting	page 9
Activity: Character Building	pp. 10
Activity: Entrances and Exits	page 11
Activity: Charades	pp. 12-13
Activity: Snapshot Stories	page 13
Activity: Tour of A Space	page 14
Theatre: A Conspiracy of Belief	page 15
More Theatre Terms and Conventions	pp. 16-17
Activity: What's the Moment?	page 17

Guidebook compiled and written by Mark Cabus

A note from our Sponsor ~ Regions Bank



For over 125 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we have committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC's Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.

Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.



Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President
Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area



About Theatergroep Max.

Theatergroep Max. is a Dutch company that makes accessible and adventurous theatre for children, young people, their friends and family, and everyone who feels young.

Theatergroep Max. longs to tell fairy tales, campfire and nonsense stories about pull-all-the-stops-out, wild, loving people.

Theatergroep Max. believes art is about experience, about playing with realities, and daring to think and feel something that you might think or feel in everyday life but actually are afraid to think or feel.

Theatergroep Max. performances are close and intimate, grand and compelling, personal and universal with all the clarity of a child combined with the unpredictability of child-like thinking.

Theatergroep Max. is a professional theatre company with a national and international appeal, rooted in the South Holland region and focused on a close cooperation with the city of Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

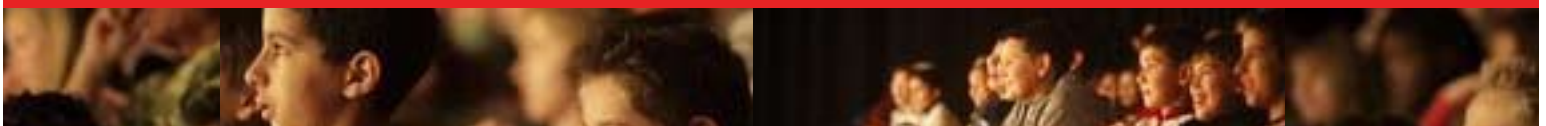
Theatergroep Max. plays in small and large theaters, in schools and at special locations all over the world.

When Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens—under the direction of Jetse Batelaan—won the 2005 Golden Cricket, a prize for Best Youth Performance in the Netherlands, the jury at the competition said, "When you open with an empty stage you're either insane or a genius.

Theatergroep Max. is both. They don't follow conventions. They've got guts".

- from Theatergroep Max.'s website

Did You Know?: The premiere postmodern play, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, is sometimes referred to as "the play in which nothing happens." Do you think the folks at Theatergroep Max. are lampooning or paying homage to this very serious play by calling their show, *Performance in which Hopefully Nothing Happens*?





A Brief History of Postmodernism

In the early twentieth century, authors, composers, architects, and other intellectuals and artists rebelled against the restrictions of Victorian Modernism that insisted upon a concrete, even literal, view of reality. Architects began creating buildings with both form and function; composers developed fresh ways to create new music; authors reacted against old styles of poetry and fiction. Out of this revolution came the Bauhaus architects, Arnold Schoenberg in music, T.S. Eliot in poetry, and Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, and James Joyce in literature.

*In the years following World War II, a new energy in the arts and philosophy emerged that resulted in Postmodernism. Fiction writers like Vladimir Nabokov and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. began to experiment in their novels. Composers like John Cage investigated new forms of and approaches to music making, even using new techniques for generating sounds. **Dissatisfaction with the old ways brought about new means of looking at reality, language, knowledge, and power.***

The 1950s and the 1960s brought with them new approaches to popular arts. Rock 'n' roll, a fusion of black and white music, exploded American culture with artists like Elvis and Chuck Berry, testing racial and artistic boundaries. The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and The Rolling Stones boldly experimented with new sounds and lyrics with political or social relevance. With the coming of the 1970s, the attitudes of movies shifted from pure entertainment to vehicles for social and political change. These new films sometimes abandoned traditional story in favor of more disjointed and nonlinear narratives.

*At the same time, television—the ultimate instrument of postmodernism—emerged as being an important medium on its own. Initially, there were situation comedies like *I Love Lucy* and variety shows like *The Ed Sullivan Show*, but by the late 1960s and the early 1970s, these established methods were giving way to less formal and more commentary programming like *All in the Family*, *Laugh In* and *Saturday Night Live*. The line between news and entertainment blurred with news magazine shows like *60 Minutes* and *Entertainment Tonight*, and with the coming of MTV in the 1980s, that line disappeared completely.*

Through all of these innovations, the separations between reality and illusion have dissolved. *World social situations are visited with a mouse click. Facebook and the Internet allow any individual to examine and reexamine, invent and reinvent themselves each and every day for all the world to see and judge.*

As poet-politician Vaclav Havel noted, seeing a Bedouin on a camel in typical Arab dress, wearing jeans beneath, listening to an iPod through an earpiece and drinking a soft drink is no longer odd or unexpected. It is this disintegration of cultural, social and political boundaries that have lead to the present postmodern world.



An Interview with Jetse Batelaan

Dutch director Jetse Batelaan has practiced his craft throughout his home country of the Netherlands and through France, but with *Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens*, he and Theatergroep Max. won a national prize: the 2005 Golden Cricket for Best Youth Performance in the Netherlands. Mr. Batelaan's plays tend to go against the spirit of most modern children's theatre productions; being as they're not fast, big or busy, but rather intimate, small, and detailed. Yet it's these very qualities that give them their great impact and resonance with audiences everywhere. His style reflects and even magnifies reality in comically absurd and illogical ways. Jetse Batelaan is truly one of the up-and-coming directing talents in the Netherlands today.

1) *What inspired you to create Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens?*

As a child, there was a time that I became aware of the fact that every day would bring me new experiences. Before that moment, I had the idea that I could remember everything of my whole life. But once I realized that wasn't possible, I faced the challenge that every day would bring new experiences, and that the total amount of those experiences would become too big to remember. Forgetting became—in my sense of it that time—the consequence of becoming older. The only possible solution I could come up with was to experience as little as possible, and then there was less to forget.

2) *The play appears to be improvisational, as if the actors were inventing it on the spot. What was your process for developing the play? How much of it—if any—is improvised live?*

Everything was developed during rehearsal time. We started out of nothing, but this doesn't mean that everything is based on improvisation. The play is based on ideas. In fact, we did lie down on the floor in despair for hours during our rehearsals. But we dared to face the Nothing, and from there, from the darkest well of a creative process, the ideas came up.

3) *The play imagines that concepts of theatrical performance—like The Detail or The Moment—can have human characteristics. The actors even go so far as to hold conversations with and a funeral for them. What prompted this very funny idea?*

It started from an intuition that we needed some physical representation of an Event passing by at the end of the play. I could only imagine it as little paper puppets crossing the stage. From that image, the other characters developed.

- 4) *There are many striking and clever images in the course of the play, but at one point, the security guard seems to literally split into two different people. What are you exploring with this idea?*

We tried to create scenes that could not possibly happen in real life. When the security guard is hiding and “looking for himself,” we knew that he never would succeed. In some respect, you can see how the drawings of M.C. Escher (a Dutch surrealist artist known for his mind-bending graphic explorations of architecture and infinity) were an inspiration for this image.

- 5) *Your Theatergroep Max. audiences can be very vocal, talking directly to the actors during the performance. How important is the audiences’ participation to the play?*

The energy of the audience is very important. It’s only because of the fact that the audience brings a specific set of expectations that the performance is alive. This doesn’t mean that they have to react out loud. It’s enough that they will bring their desire for and expectation of a performance that something happens. The audience is the antagonist of our main conflict. It’s their desire for an entertaining performance where lots things happen fighting against our absurd efforts of escaping that expectation that the play gets its momentum.

- 6) *This production is quite different from most plays in American children’s theatre. What would you like our audiences to take away from the performance?*

That nothing in life is set. You can always look at things in a different way, from a different perspective. There are no borders. If you can create an entertaining performance where nothing happens, then anything is possible. Dare to do nothing, even if you are on stage.





Postmodernism is Everywhere

What is Postmodernism Exactly?

Postmodernism is self-aware, experimental, and ironic. In a world of conflicting social and political ideals, postmodernism presents the real world as unpredictable and urges its audience to search for their own individual understanding of it. It contrasts opposing and contradictory elements to force us look at something familiar in a whole new light. Essentially, postmodernism raises questions rather than trying to supply answers.

Take Andy Warhol and Jerry Seinfeld.

Wait. What Have Warhol and Seinfeld Got to Do With It?

Artist Andy Warhol and comedian Jerry Seinfeld are more alike than you might think. While these two come from very different fields, pop art and stand-up comedy, respectively, the postmodern movement has heavily influenced them both. While they admire and elevate popular culture and celebrity, they make fun of it at the same time. Warhol's multiple images of Marilyn Monroe glorify and commercialize the actress simultaneously, while even as Seinfeld obsessed over himself and his stardom—going so far as to create a television series that bore his name—he lampooned his life and career, questioning the value of his own success.



Are There Other Examples of Postmodernism I Might Be Familiar With?

Sure. The Simpsons and Family Guy mix pop cultural references with social commentary, making audiences think while they're laughing. The hit show Glee mashes old and new musical genres and styles together, creating a whole new point of view. And that's just Fox TV. The self-aware styles of The Office and Modern Family comment on the documentary to comic results. And let's not forget all 36 seasons of Saturday Night Live.

Anything Else?

Certainly. Familiar movies like The Matrix and Avatar question what is real and offer alternatives dark and dangerous. Comedies like Young Frankenstein and the Austin Powers series spoof accepted movie genres and characters. Lane Smith's book The Stinky Cheese Man and David Wiesner's The Three Pigs subvert traditional fairy tales and nursery rhymes with tongue-in-cheek pictures and comically-tampered narratives. Painter Roy Lichtenstein's oversized Fifties cartoons hang alongside the street art of graffiti artists Keith Haring and Banksy, displaying "low" art in "high" art museums all over the world.



Oh. So Does Postmodernism Happen in the Theatre?

Absolutely. The Lion King utilizes masks and puppets to assist actors in telling the story of Simba and his animal adventures, and while those actors are fully visible behind the masks and puppets, the audience is knowingly transported to another world. By reinventing the 100-year-old Oz books of Frank L. Baum, a whole new mythology is created for the musical Wicked. By contrasting an 19th Century morality tale with a rock music score, Spring Awakening creates an individual viewpoint that is both timely and timeless.

But it's more than that.

Have you ever watched a play that was set in an historical period and noticed something out of step with the time in which the story was set? Something that is conspicuously old-fashioned or modern? More than likely the director has chosen to introduce an anachronism into the play. Perhaps it was a prop that didn't exist at that particular time. Or a costume is too risqué or too modest. Or perhaps someone drops an inappropriate "yeah" or "uh huh" or another word or phrase from our own time. That is postmodernism creeping in, altering the work and calling attention to its artificiality. In this way, postmodernism accuses the play of trying to bamboozle the audience, pretending to be real, but not being able to fool us into mistaking it for reality.



So, What Do I Look for in a Postmodern Play?

Despite the fact that postmodernism rejects both genre and style, a postmodern theatrical production might make use of some or all of the following techniques:

- 1. The normal ways of seeing and representing the world are challenged and set aside.*
- 2. A mixture of cultural and historical references is used.*
- 3. The storyline appears to be illogical with scenes giving way to a series of seemingly random moments.*
- 4. Characters exhibit irrational and absurd behaviour as if it were normal.*
- 5. There is a rejection that "High" and "Low" art are separate and dissimilar. They may blend farce and slapstick together.*
- 6. The play steers clear of reality, creating its own truth and its own logic.*
- 7. The audience is integral to inventing a meaning for the performance and may even be addressed directly and/or included in the play.*



photo by Joep Lennarts

What's This Particular Postmodern Play About?

Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens is postmodernism at its most entertaining. Its two actors are brainy pranksters with a genuine flair for silliness. One half of the duo is a black-suited security guard paid to keep the stage empty. The other fellow is an actor wearing eighteenth-century frills determined to enter and play his part. Put them together on a relatively bare stage, and you have the very essence of drama: conflict. Along the way, time, space and the notion of theatre itself are twisted and twirled into preposterous new ideas. The result is a wonderfully daft hour that redefines what makes up "a performance."

Think Monty Python for kids!



Activity: Postmodern Playwriting

This game is best played under the "pressure cooker" of time. The first four steps get one minute each to answer. Encourage students to react immediately, instinctively, writing down and trusting their first impulse.

Materials: Notepaper; pencil or pen.

- 1. Everyone writes down the name of a famous person, living or dead (examples: President Obama or William Shakespeare), at the top of a piece of paper. When they're finished, they fold the paper over the name and pass it to the person on their right.*
- 2. That next student writes down an everyday occupation worker like plumber or accountant and folds the paper over their answer. They, too, pass the paper to the right.*
- 3. Next, the third student adds a place, either famous or general. Encourage the students to be creative with examples like the Empire State Building or the Moon. This student passes on the paper to the next.*
- 4. The fourth student writes down an everyday action like cooking dinner or washing a car.*
- 5. The fifth and final student opens the paper. What they have been given are five unrelated elements necessary for them to create a postmodern play: two characters, a place and an activity indiscriminately thrown together.*
- 6. Each student has fifteen minutes to write a short one-page play of these two characters engaged in the designated activity at the specific site. There's no need for logic or explanation with their scenes either. Encourage students not to over-think their story but rather to go with their first impulse.*
- 7. When the time's up, cast the plays, read them aloud and perform them.*

PLAYWRITING WARMUP: *Ask all your students to write an excuse as to why they can't make it to school tomorrow. Give them three minutes to do this. The piece should be no longer than one minute and no shorter than two sentences. When the students return, ask them to read his or her excuse out loud. Nonsense, creativity, and playing with words should be encouraged.*

Example: I'm sorry I can't be in school tomorrow. I have to take my cat in for an eye examination. She keeps walking into walls, and it's making her wall-eyed.

Aim: *To begin to understand the relationship between an original voice and content.*



Activity: Character Building

Actors specialize in building characters. They begin by putting themselves in someone else's shoes, and by imagining how that person feels, hoping to find some kind of truth to the events that occur on stage. The character of the Actor in Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens gets very frustrated with many of the circumstances in the play. To portray that, the actor playing the Actor visualizes the character—how he walks, how he talks—and by exploring how that character feels within those frustrating circumstances, is able to reveal that aspect of the story for the audience.

There are many ways of building a character, but it's best to start with the physicality, the voice, and the mannerisms of the person that is to be portrayed. If you start with imagining that you are in another person's body—walking the way they walk and talking the way they talk, gradually, as you continue to pretend, you will start exploring how you would feel if you were that someone else.

1. The class stands or sits in a circle.
2. Each student visualizes quietly about a person they know or deal with in day-to-day life, preferably someone not present in the class or at school.
3. They should try and see the person, and using all their senses, feel the person they see. Example: If it's your sister, and she chews gum and sticks her hip out when she talks—try doing all that. If it's the mailman that speaks in a very deep voice and walks around in heavy boots—try that.
4. After the image is clear, the students move and speak in their own version of that person. They should do this as a group at first, diminishing the chance for self-consciousness.
5. After five minutes of exploration, stop the class, and ask if anyone would care to share their character with the group.

Hint: Encourage the students to "see" what they remember, to really try and capture the person as opposed to faking a voice or being a cartoon.

Character Building Warm-up: Ask each student to tell a lie as if it were really true, and that the lies should be as outrageous as possible. They should try and top each other.

Examples:

1. My mother brands cows for a living.
2. On weekends, I swim with dolphins and translate for them.
3. I have never, ever been angry.
4. Aliens kidnapped my grandfather.

Aim: To introduce the idea of embracing as true something that is not real.



Activity: Entrances & Exits

Most everyone's familiar with the comedy improv show, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, and the hilarious situations that come of focused spontaneity.

In the play, an actor tries to enter the stage for his scene, but a security guard refuses to give him entrance. In this activity, students are asked to put themselves in the shoes of the two performers and improvise a scene around entering (or exiting).

The important thing to remember with improvisation is that students should try every possible tactic to achieve their goals, other than physical contact. Nothing is too outrageous or absurd. Improvisation involves living in a pretend world in a given circumstance playing every moment truthfully and imaginatively. But most of all, it should be fun.

Entrances

- Two students partner up and decide who is "A" and who is "B."
- They must pretend they are outside a place together. "A" wants to enter. "B" wants to keep "A" out.
- Ask the other students for suggestions as to where "A" and "B" are and why "A" needs to enter.
- When the teacher says, "Go," they begin.
- The scene plays for 2-3 minutes.
- Call out "freeze."
- They switch roles and play the scene again.

Exits

- Two students partner up and decide who is "A" and who is "B."
- They must pretend they are inside a place together. "A" wants to leave. "B" wants "A" to stay.
- Ask the other students for suggestions as to where "A" and "B" are and why "A" needs to exit.
- When the teacher says, "Go," they begin.
- The scene plays for 2-3 minutes.
- Call out "freeze."
- They switch roles and play the scene again.

It's important to note that some students will be better at this (and other) games than their peers. Please emphasize that students not be allowed to criticize each other's work or skill. If the teacher enthusiastically leads the applause after each presentation, no student will feel singled out as being unqualified or less talented.



Activity: Charades

In the play, Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens, the actors are required to personify theatrical terms to advance the plot of the play.

Charades is a fun pantomime game that asks players to act out words or phrases in a competition, one team against another. With each turn, a single player acts out a word or phrase for their respective team while the teacher keeps track of the time. For example, if the word was "football," it could be broken down into "foot" and "ball," and each is acted out until someone guesses the word correctly.

The team with the most correct answers at the end wins.

Equipment: *A watch or clock; theatre terms written on individual piece of paper.*

Rules:

- 1. Divide into two teams.*
- 2. Have an even number of words from the Theatre Terms section (on pages 16-17 in this guidebook) written down on separate slips of paper and put them in a hat or bucket.*
- 3. One at a time, a member from each team draws a slip of paper from the hat.*
- 4. This person stands in front of their team, and with a signal from the timekeeper, begins pantomiming their word. They have thirty seconds to get someone on their team to guess the word correctly.*
- 5. First, they must indicate how many words and/or syllables are in the word by holding up that number of fingers. Words, first. Syllables, second.*
- 6. Next, indicate which word you want to start acting; hold up three fingers for "Third Word", and so on.*
- 7. Start acting silly!*

Some students may never have played Charades before so these "tricks of the trade" will come in helpful, if thoroughly explained before starting.

- To divide the word into syllables:** *Lay down x number of fingers on your forearm (where x is the number of syllables.) To begin acting out the first syllable, lay down one finger on your arm and proceed. Repeat for the next syllable, or jump to the third or fourth syllable, laying down the right number of fingers each time.*
- When someone calls out a correct word:** *Point at that person and nod your head to indicate "yes!" Traditionally, the actor touches his/her nose, meaning "on the nose", but you need to make sure that all players understand that gesture!*

- **"Sounds like"**: *Cup your hand around your ear.*
- **"Little word"**: *Bring your thumb and index fingers close together. The people guessing should now call out every little word that comes to mind ("on", "in", "the", "and," etc.) until you gesticulate wildly to indicate the right word.*
- **"Longer version of the word"**: *Pretend to stretch an elastic band.*
- **"Shorter version of the word"**: *Chop with your hand.*
- **"Close, keep guessing!"**: *Frantically wave hands to keep the guesses coming.*

Keep in mind, that often, in the hubbub as a team calls out its guesses, someone does say the correct word but the actor doesn't notice. So insist students speak loudly, clearly, and repeatedly.

Have fun!



Activity: Snapshot Stories

Theatre is a series of living snapshots or pictures that, strung together, tell a story within a specific space. Usually, a set designer looks with a visual artist's eye at the possibilities of the stage and how it might look, but bear in mind that a set can be anything. A drama may require a real-looking living room and kitchen, or as in Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens, the set, with the exception of three walls, a piano, and a table and chair, is a blank stage in which the actors create the pictures primarily using their bodies.

1. *Ask each student to find a section of the classroom that inspires him or her to assume a particular position with his or her body and to freeze, as if he or she were a snapshot. Students might:*
 - a. *Crouch in a corner.*
 - b. *Lie on the floor.*
 - c. *Hide behind a desk.*
 - d. *Stand flat against a wall.*
2. *Ask the students to visualize how they look in the space as a Snapshot or as a Silent Scene.*
3. *Ask them if the shape of their bodies brings to mind an emotional situation: Are they afraid? Showing off? Being a monster? Being glamorous? Becoming an inanimate object?*
4. *Repeat the exercise again, encouraging the students to find new snapshots. Eventually, expand the game with two or more students in the same section of the classroom. The rest of the class watches and makes suggestions as to what stories or images come to mind*

A photograph of a wall with a security camera and a sign that reads "WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?". The sign is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The camera is a black, cylindrical model mounted on a metal bracket. The wall is light-colored and has some greenish stains or mold near the camera.

Activity: Tour of a Space

When performing, an actor must be able to invest the performance space with emotion and memory in order to fully play a scene. If it is a dangerous place or one of joy and wonder, the actor must supply the qualities necessary to energize the space.

This game gives each student the opportunity to learn how to inhabit a space by investing in a favorite place from their past and sharing the "experience" with a partner. Encourage students to relate the emotional importance of the space, not just describe it in a clinical way. If the partner asks a question about a particular detail, the guide should respond with a specific story.

- 1. Everyone gets a partner, closes their eyes, and thinks of an actual physical place (a room, a building, a forest, an island, a church, a playground) that is very special to them.*
- 2. Each person pictures his or her place in great detail (color of the curtains or the texture of the grass) as if it were actually in the classroom.*
- 3. Everyone opens his or her eyes and imagines their special place right in front of them.*
- 4. Each person then takes their partner on a timed, three minute tour of their special place, as if it existed in the classroom. They must describe the physical aspects of the place in absolute detail, including why it means so much to them.*
- 5. Everybody MUST move around. No standing and just talking.*
- 6. If someone finishes early, either the leader or the partner should ask questions, encouraging the "tour guide" into describing the space with greater detail.*
- 7. When time is up, the leader calls out "switch" and the other partner conducts the tour.*

Vocal Exploration of a Space: *In the play, the actors yell and whisper, creating different effects on stage. To better understand the use of sound and its dynamics, ask students to stand together in a circle. Have them begin saying the Pledge of Allegiance or a familiar rhyme, over and over. Slowly widen the circle until the students are spread as far apart as possible. Then come together again, asking them to listen how the sound changes as they move from close to far and back again.*

- 1. As the circle spreads apart, your voices should become louder and louder. As the circle moves in, the voices become softer and softer.*
- 2. As the circle spreads apart, the voices become softer and softer. As the circle comes together, the voices become louder and louder.*

Aim: *To experience sound dynamics at different distances within a space.*



Theatre: A Conspiracy of Belief

The theatre depends upon a conspiracy between actors and audience, an agreement that what is happening onstage is really happening. It is a willing suspension of disbelief. Of course, this demands that certain rules or conventions be used in order to find some kind of consistency in what is, fundamentally, an inconsistent art form. These rules are an indispensable part of theatre craft, and as the play Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens bends and even breaks these rules, it's important to know why they are being used and what they mean.

For instance:

The Fourth Wall *is an imaginary wall separating the stage from the auditorium in a naturalistic drama. The term comes from the idea of building three walls of a room on the stage and leaving the fourth or imaginary audience wall open, so that we can look into the room through the pretend divider and spy on what's happening inside.*

In the theatre of ancient Greece and of Shakespeare, the theatre building itself was the world of the play, and everything and everyone within the confines of the building were included in the drama. However, nowadays, when an actor 'breaks the fourth wall' and addresses the audience directly, it may take us by surprise. But like those early spectators, when it happens, the actors are encouraging us to be co-conspirators with them in the action of the play.

Exits and Entrances *occur at an imaginary borderline between two realities. As actors travel from off stage to onstage, they move from the real world of wings, dressing rooms, and back stage into the make-believe world of the play. As they leave the stage, they cross the dividing line in the opposite direction.*

This conspiracy hinges on the audience's willingness to believe in the onstage reality and to ignore all evidence of the offstage one, granting the actors permission to move back and forth from one reality to the other without explanation.

The Moment *and* **The Detail** *are dramatic devices. In order to be effective, they need to be convincing enough to get the audience to invest in the make-believe reality of the play. One is an instant of importance that shifts the story in a new direction, like when the poor man wins the lottery or the rich man loses everything. That's The Moment. The other, The Detail, is a small but specific element that gives special meaning to a character or an action. Perhaps that lottery-winning poor man has a gambling addiction, or the ruined rich man is a bankruptcy lawyer.*

In Performance in Which Hopefully Nothing Happens, both of these theatrical ingredients are gifted with human characteristics, as if they were characters in the story.

More Theatre Terms & Conventions

- Actor/Actress:** *A male or female person who performs a role in a play, work of theatre, or movie.*
- Antagonist:** *A person or a situation that opposes another character's goals or desires.*
- Center stage:** *The center of the area defined as the stage.*
- Character:** *A personality or role an actor/actress re-creates.*
- Climax:** *The point of greatest dramatic tension or transition in a theatrical work.*
- Comedy:** *A theatrical work that is intentionally funny.*
- Costume:** *Clothing worn by an actor on stage during a performance.*
- Crisis:** *A decisive point in the plot of a play on which the outcome of the remaining action depends.*
- Cue:** *A signal, either verbal or physical, that indicates something else, such as a line of dialogue or an entrance, is to happen.*
- Directing:** *The art and technique of bringing the elements of theatre together to make a play.*
- Director:** *The person who oversees the entire process of staging a production.*
- Downstage:** *The stage area toward the audience.*
- Dress rehearsal:** *The final rehearsal prior to opening night in which the show is run with full technical elements. Full costumes and makeup are worn.*
- Gesture:** *An expressive movement of the body or limbs.*
- Improvisation:** *A spontaneous style of theatre through which scenes are created without advance rehearsal or a script.*
- Make-up:** *Cosmetics and sometimes hairstyles that an actor wears on stage to emphasize facial features, historical periods, characterizations, and so forth.*
- Monologue:** *A long speech by a single character.*
- Motivation:** *A character's reason for doing or saying things in a play.*
- Play:** *The stage representation of an action or a story; a dramatic composition.*
- Playwright:** *A person who writes plays.*
- Props:** *Items carried on stage by an actor; small items on the set used by the actors.*
- Protagonist:** *The main character of a play and the character with whom the audience identifies most strongly.*
- Rehearsal:** *Practice sessions in which the actors and technicians prepare for public performance through repetition.*
- Run-through:** *A rehearsal moving from start to finish without stopping for corrections or notes.*
- Script:** *The written text of a play.*

Stage:	<i>The area where actors perform.</i>
Stage crew:	<i>The backstage technical crew responsible for running the show. In small theatre companies the same persons build the set and handle the load-in. Then, during performances, they change the scenery and pull the curtain.</i>
Stage manager:	<i>The director's liaison backstage during rehearsal and performance. The stage manager is responsible for the running of each performance.</i>
Stage left:	<i>The left side of the stage from the perspective of an actor facing the audience.</i>
Stage right:	<i>The right side of the stage from the perspective of an actor facing the audience.</i>
Theatre:	<i>To imitate or represent a story or narrative in performance for an audience; the performance of dramatic literature; drama, the world of actors, technicians, and playwrights; the place where dramatic performances take place.</i>
Tragedy:	<i>A theatrical work that has an intentionally unhappy ending.</i>
Upstage:	<i>Used as a noun, the stage area away from the audience; used as a verb, to steal the focus of a scene.</i>

Activity: What's the Moment?

When an actor enters the stage, his or her character experiences a special moment. In this game, students play specific characters coming into a specific situation or moment. They should strive to communicate the age, the occupation, and the mood of the characters involved. These characters are absorbed in what has just happened offstage and what they want to do onstage. After the entrance, continue acting for about 30 seconds to establish fully the moment and then freeze. The rest of the class should try and guess what the moment is.

Materials: *Index cards with characters and moments written on them.*

- A presidential candidate arrives at a victory party after winning (or losing) an election.*
- A naughty young child enters the kitchen, looking for forbidden cookies.*
- An out of shape hiker finally reaches the mountain summit after climbing all day.*
- A snooty teenager learns a bit of juicy gossip and enters to phone a friend to share it.*
- An exhausted parent enters a messy living room after a long, hard day at work.*
- A new student enters cafeteria from the the lunch line, alone, and looks for a place to sit.*
- A nervous young person enters an office for their first job interview.*
- An elderly person enters a train and looks for a seat as the train begins to move.*
- An actor steps up to the stage to accept an Academy Award.*
- A first-time babysitter looks in on a pair of troublesome children who are finally sleeping.*
- A talkative teenager returns home from the dentist, after having had three cavities filled.*
- A new teacher enters a classroom filled with misbehaving students.*
- A hyperactive child wakes on Christmas morning and goes to open presents.*

These are just suggestions. Please feel free to create your own moments for students to explore. If you have an especially creative class, you might ask them to invent their own moments.



TPAC Education
PO Box 190660
Nashville, TN 37219
615-687-4288

Visit us online at www.tpac.org/education

