

## **Drama Home Learning Task**

**Year 9**

**Practitioners**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Tutor Group \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Given out: Monday 16 September      Hand in: Monday 23 September

Parent/Carer Comment
Staff Comment
Target

# JUST A MINUTE

## THE BRIEF

Your task for this week is to prepare a **One Minute Presentation**. The presentation should argue the merit of **ONE Drama Practitioner** you will learn about in this booklet

### WHAT IS A PRACTITIONER IN DRAMA?

A Practitioner is a director, performer or theatre group whose work has had a major impact on the way we view theatre and/ or film. Practitioners influence the work of artists working in the performing arts industry and usually will come up with their own unique style of performance.

What will you be learning?

- You will be learning about the acting techniques used by different practitioners.
- You will also be learning to prepare and put on a timed presentation. This is important in all aspects of work where you will have to present to an audience. The timed element is especially important in the world of business where you might encounter giving timed pitches for products.
- Oracy - you need to be able to speak clearly and slowly in your presentation. You also need to make a judgement on the merit of method acting and explain that judgement with well-reasoned justification.

What will you need to do?

- Prepare your speech- I am not looking for you to write down a minute speech and read it out; however, a written list of bullet points will help you structure your speech. You can then speak about each bullet point in turn.
- Research - this booklet contains some information on three different practitioners, remember your speech only needs to be about **ONE OF THEM**.

To really 'Wow!' me...

- Make a judgement on the merits of a practitioner's work and justify why you feel this way. Don't just say 'I don't think Brecht was very good'. Explain **why** you don't like his way of working.

## **Task One – Tutor Reading**

**Read the information on; Konstantin (Constantin) Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht and Physical Theatre (starts on the next page).**

**Task Two – prepare your speech on one of these practitioners. Use the links to have a look at some of these techniques in practice.**

### **Konstantin (Constantin) Stanislavski**

Two clips that look at the work of Stanislavski in practice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0whzQfMN2g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpEGXrDSXo8>

### **Bertolt Brecht**

David Tennant breaks the fourth wall in Hamlet.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8VOZLjQbvQ&list=PL9A93B73AF924E53E&index=4>

An introduction to Brecht from the National Theatre.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-828KqtTkA>

### **Physical Theatre**

A clip from DV8's 'To Be Straight With You'. The play is a piece of verbatim theatre and takes real interviews about people's attitudes towards homosexuality and combines them for a performance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvctLx8H8xs>

A clip from DV8's 'The Cost of Living'. The play looks at outsiders in society.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIDxSGyO\\_TQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIDxSGyO_TQ)

Frantic Assembly's trailer for 'Othello'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx9CuMObPK4>

## Naturalism and Stanislavski

‘Remember: there are no small parts, only small actors.’

### Konstantin Stanislavski

Russian practitioner Konstantin Stanislavski's ideas are very influential. He believed in naturalistic performances that were as realistic as possible, and invented techniques that you can use.

Stanislavski's real name was Konstantin Sergeevich Alexeyev but he adopted the stage name of Stanislavski in 1884. Born in 1863 to a life of considerable comfort as a member of one of the most affluent families in Russia, he died in 1938 at the age of 75. His family loved the theatre and he was able to indulge in amateur theatricals as a boy. But when he took a stage name it was to conceal his theatrical work from his family. However, in 1887 he had his father's approval and eventually became an established figure.

As a serious theatrical practitioner, he made careful notes and evaluated his work, a habit he followed from the first steps in his career. Later he was to write major texts on the art of performance:

- *My Life in Art*
- *An Actor Prepares*
- *Building a Character*
- *Creating a Role*

Konstantin Stanislavski rejected **Melodrama** where acting was big and over the top. Instead he wanted the audience to believe they were watching real life when watching a performance. He wanted the audience to really feel something for the people on stage and to do that he wanted theatre to be a mirror that would reflect reality.

In **naturalistic** the audience care about the lives of the characters onstage. They forget their own lives for a while and escape into the lives of others. When an audience cries for a character or feels emotion through the events happening to them it's called **catharsis**.

### Techniques used to create a realistic performance

**The fourth wall.** An invisible wall between the audience and the stage. To create the illusion of reality Stanislavski never wanted the actors to break this wall. This meant that actors would ignore the audience and pretend they did not exist.

### Method of physical actions

Imagine a simple activity like cleaning your teeth and then imagine a husband cleaning his teeth whilst deliberating on how to tell his wife about his mistress. This is a simple illustration of how a physical action can release the necessary emotions.

### Subtext

The script of a play could be called the text. The **subtext** is the actual meaning and motivation behind the lines that are spoken and the actions taken. For example, the heroine might say to the hero, "I love you" and we might assume that it is the happy ending fairy tale moment. But the delivery would be very different if she was worried that he was about to walk out on her.

## If

Stanislawski said that the character should answer the question, 'What would I do if I was in this situation?' Also known as the '**magic if**', this technique means that the actors put themselves into the character's situation. This then stimulates the motivation to enable the actor to play the role.

## Objective, super-objective and the through line

An **objective** is the reason for our actions. What are we trying to achieve? Life, people and circumstances constantly put up barriers in our way. Each of these barriers presents us with the objective of getting through them. You shouldn't try to express the meaning of your objective in terms of a noun, always use a verb, eg 'I wish to...'

The **super-objective** is an over-reaching objective, probably linked to the overall outcome in the play. We use the word super-objective to characterise the essential idea, the core, which provided the impetus for the writing of the play. A character's objectives are likely to be stages in the journey towards the super-objective. If that journey is perceived as a clear path to the super objective, then you have your **through line**.

## Bertolt Brecht – Epic Theatre

'Art is not a mirror with which to reflect reality but a hammer with which to shape it.'

**Bertolt Brecht**

The playwright Bertolt Brecht was born in 1898 in the German town of Augsburg. After serving as a medical orderly in the First World War and appalled by the effects of the war, he went first to Munich and then to Berlin in pursuit of a career in the theatre. That period of his life came to an end in 1933 when the Nazis came to power in Germany. Brecht fled and during this period the Nazis formally removed his citizenship, so he was a stateless citizen.

Brecht was against **naturalistic theatre (cathartic theatre)**. He believed that while the audience believed in the action onstage and became emotionally involved they lost the ability to **think and to judge**. He wanted his audiences to remain objective and distant from emotional involvement so that they could make considered and rational judgements about any social comment or issues in his work. To do this he used a range of theatrical devices or techniques so that the audience was reminded throughout that they were watching theatre; a presentation of life, **not** real life itself. His kind of theatre was called **Epic theatre**. He called the act of distancing the audience from emotional involvement the **verfremdungseffekt**. In English this is usually translated into **Alienation** or **Distancing Effect**.

His approach to theatre suits work which has a political, social or moral message. Perhaps you want the audience to consider the meaning in a **parable** (a story with a wider moral message). You might want to explore a theme or issue and make your audience consider varying viewpoints or sides to an argument. If so you can learn a lot from the distancing devices used in Brechtian theatre.

## Techniques used to break reality of the play and create verfremdungseffekt

**Breaking the Fourth Wall.** Stanislawski was the first to talk about the imaginary wall between the audience and the action. Brecht encouraged actors to break the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience to remind them they are watching a play. Think Deadpool breaking the fourth wall in his films.

**Minimal Set or Costume.** Brecht would have only symbolic costume or set pieces. Actors would wear all black and then use sashes or symbolic pieces of costume to show character eg a flat cap might be used to show a farmer, or a sash with the word 'farmer' written on it.

### **Narration**

Narration is used to remind the audience that what they're watching is a presentation of a story. Sometimes the narrator will tell us what happens in the story before it has happened. This is a good way of making sure that we don't become emotionally involved in the action to come as we already know the outcome.

### **Multi-roling**

Multi-roling is when an actor plays more than one character onstage. The differences in character are marked by changing voice, movement, gesture and body language but the audience can clearly see that the same actor has taken on more than one role. This means the audience are more aware of the fact that they are watching a presentation of events. Cross-sex casting is also possible in Epic theatre as we don't need to suspend our disbelief.

### **Split-role**

This is where more than one actor plays the same character. For instance, the actor playing the main character might rotate from scene to scene. This keeps that character representational and inhibits emotional involvement and attachment on the part of the audience.

## **Physical Theatre**

At its simplest, you could define Physical Theatre as a form of theatre that puts emphasis on movement rather than dialogue. But remember there are a huge number of variations as the genre covers a broad range of work. But essentially Physical Theatre is anything that puts the human body at the centre of the storytelling process. As a result it's often abstract in style, using movement in a stylised and representational way. With the expression of ideas choreographed through movement, such performers use very little or no dialogue at all.

### **Famous Practitioners**

**DV8.** DV8 are arguably among the main practitioners of Physical Theatre as a 'full' art form. They focus on looking at the dramatic potential that can be unlocked from movement. Their work is often described as existing at a crossroads where dance, sound and drama meet. DV8 are well known for using Physical Theatre to explore complex aspects of human relationships and social or cultural issues.

**Frantic Assembly.** Inspired by the work of DV8 and Volcano Theatre Company, Frantic Assembly combine acting, dance, lighting, music, projection and treat every element with equal importance. Where DV8 are more dance orientated, Frantic Assembly have no formal dance training. This allows them to be very free in their movement work. Frantic Assembly have become one of the most in demand physical theatre groups in the country creating work with The National Theatre in 'The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Nighttime.'

### **Stylised movement**

Imagine a production of Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*. Usually we hear about the battle at the start of the play. How would it affect the production if instead we saw the fighting in a stylised fashion with the witches

clearly controlling the action as though they were puppeteers? Kenneth Branagh's 2013 production of *Macbeth* was hailed for its physicality, particularly during the battle scene at the beginning of the play.

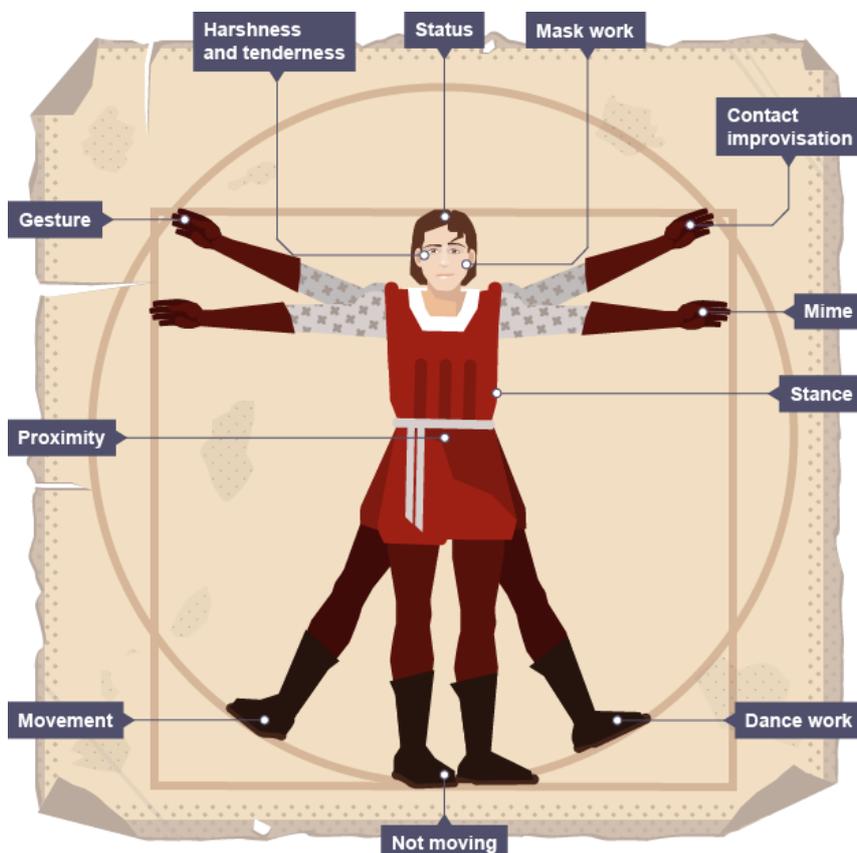
## Technical Importance

The set design and space is a really important aspect of Physical Theatre. The stage is often symbolic of a theme looked at within the play. Take DV8's 'The Happiest Day of my Life' as an example. The play looks at a failing relationship and an affair that begins when a couple take in a lodger. The set is that of a normal living room. However, the room is surrounded by water as it is contained within a giant swimming pool. Anything illicit or damaging to the relationships or mental health of the characters occurs in the pool and not in the living room. However, as the play continues the living room slowly sinks into the pool, so as the characters sink into depression and their relationships fail the 'safe' place that has been the living room also fails and falls into the symbol of everything bad that is the swimming pool.

## Combining art forms

Physical Theatre has a focus on movement but can be separate from the spoken word or united with it to expand and explore its meaning. It may well be devised or contain substantial elements of work beyond the printed script. These elements could be other art forms such as music, dance, the use of media or visual images. So you could use a combination of elements that may also be combined with script, for instance. You could reach out to the audience in a way that challenges the so-called fourth wall, making the audience a collaborator in the action. (It's not unusual for Physical Theatre to actually encourage or demand audience participation.)

## Physical Theatre techniques



So if the body is the actor's musical instrument, how can you produce the music of Physical Theatre?

- **Mime** – This usually means stylised movement but can be comparatively realistic.
- **Gesture** – A gesture may be something small but can have emotional impact or it can be a particular movement that defines a character.
- **Status** – This may be executed by use of levels or by distance or strength of contact, or a combination of all of these with voice work.
- **Proximity** – How close or far you are from your co-performers can be a source of very powerful impact. For example, the threatening gangster who speaks to his victim from a distance of perhaps a couple of inches.
- **Stance** – This is associated with strength as the body could radiate assertion and authority or weakness by stance, incorporating posture.
- **Harshness and tenderness** - Used here as umbrella terms to focus on the fact that in physical work the gestures and bigger movements come together to express the emotions of the piece.
- **Movement** - Every movement needs to be rehearsed with precision.
- **Not moving** – If the stage is full of characters moving, immobility can have a powerful effect.
- **Mask work** - The impact of a mask is visual and without the facial features to show action, movement becomes an even more central performance instrument.
- **Dance work** – Don't be afraid to include dance in your work; you don't have to be an experienced dancer. 'Dad dancing' can work well in a comedy for instance!
- **Motif** – This is repeated use of a movement pattern which has meaning and reminds us of the central theme of the work.