

## Warm-up exercises

### DRAMA TEACHER NOTES

Here are some warm-up exercises to help you get started.

#### Hot potato

The group stands in a circle. A beanbag (or a pair of rolled-up socks) is tossed across the circle from person to person. Each time a person tosses the potato, he or she calls out a letter of the alphabet. When the teacher calls 'freeze' (or the music stops), the person holding the 'hot potato' has to imagine the beanbag is an object starting with the last letter called out. So if it was 'H', the person might imagine it is a hat and wear it. The group tries to guess what the object is.

#### Wink murder

The whole group closes their eyes as one person is tapped on the shoulder, becoming the murderer. The students then all move freely around the room, with the murderer winking at each victim in turn. The victim must keep moving normally to the count of ten, and then die in a spectacular fashion. At any time players may raise a hand to indicate they wish to guess the identity of the murderer. If they are incorrect they too must die and take no further part.

#### Walk and talk categories

Establish a rhythm; keep it slow at first, and then have everyone recite the alphabet, saying one letter per step. Then the days of the week, months of the year and other rote-learned lists. Then have everyone walk, saying a new item from a given category for each step taken. Start with simple groups, such as colours or boys' names. If a player is unable to think of an item, that player freezes until all players are frozen. The last one moving selects the next category for the group to use.

#### Nursery rhyme time

The group stands in a circle. Do some general warm-ups to rap music, stretching, clapping and stamping. Different group members can take turns to lead the action, which the group copies. Then everyone in turn says a line of his or her own choosing from a nursery rhyme, doing some actions with it. The whole group repeats the line and the action, and then moves on to the next person. So, someone may say, 'Hey diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle' while stamping his or her right foot and clapping. The group watches and then copies.

#### Gospel rhythm

The group sits in a circle. They are named in turn Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, then one, two, three and so on around the circle. Set up the rhythm of two claps followed by two clicks of the fingers or slaps on the legs. The whole group continues clapping and clicking throughout this warm-up. When the group has the rhythm well established, 'Matthew' begins by saying 'Matthew' on the first click and either another name or number on the second. So, it might be: clap, clap, 'Matthew, ten'. There is silence for the clapping, then 'ten' must come in with his or her own name and another

name or number. So the sequence would be: clap, clap, 'Matthew, ten', clap, clap, 'ten, three', clap, clap, 'three, Luke', and so on until someone breaks the rhythm. Whoever does this goes to the 'end' of the circle, becoming the last number. Everyone numbers off again and the whole process starts afresh.

## Who's the leader?

This warm-up game gets the group working together physically while warming up the bodies. The group stands in a circle. One person stands in the middle, eyes closed. Someone is chosen as the leader and begins an action, which the group copies. When the group is moving well, the person in the middle opens his or her eyes and tries to spot the leader. The leader changes the action from time to time and the group follows the changes. This can be done to music to set the tempo. The leader can be instructed to change at certain times to add a degree of difficulty, or this whole exercise can be done as the group moves around the space.

## What are you doing?

With the group in a circle, one player begins miming an action. A second player comes in and asks, 'What are you doing?' The first player continues to mime the action but says another action. This is the cue for the second player to begin miming that action. Player one leaves and a new player enters and asks, 'What are you doing?' Players are out if they:

- say what they are doing
- do what they say
- say something that has already been said
- take too long to say anything.

A useful rule to add, depending on the group, is 'switch', so that players have to swap actions. This deters suggestions of embarrassing actions, as the player who comes up with the idea may have to mime the action!

## Mirror mime

This is usually done in pairs, with one person leading the action and another person mirroring the actions. Pairs should try to work together so that an observer is not able to tell who is leading the action. Abstract movement to music is a good starting point, but specific tasks are also a challenge.

## Pudding

The group walks around the room meeting and greeting each other, shaking hands and saying hello. Then introduce a new social custom, whereby different body parts must touch, such as left elbows, and the word 'pudding' replaces 'hello'. Anyone who laughs must sit out.

## Shape shifters

The group moves around the room as if stung by bees or shaking honey off their fingers or some other stimulus leading to big movements. On a command they freeze. They take stock of their frozen shape, and then begin to walk around the room as a character inspired by their frozen shape. They hold short conversations with others in character.

## Snaps

In small groups, work in silence during a countdown from 10 to create a 'photograph' of a given title. The title can be something concrete, such as 'Christmas morning', 'the accident', 'the bully' or something more abstract, such as 'conflict', 'loss', 'fear' or 'harmony'. The real challenge is to work effectively with no talking.





## Countdown

The group stands in a circle and counts down from ten to zero. What makes this hard is that only one person at a time may speak, except at the end, where the whole group has to say 'zero' in unison. If two or more voices are heard, the count returns to ten. Try the same task saying the alphabet.

## Lifeboats

Several sheets of newspaper are placed around the room. While music plays, everyone moves around the newspaper. Each time the music stops, all players need to be on newspaper 'lifeboats' or they drown. One by one the newspapers are made smaller or removed, so that it becomes increasingly difficult for players to balance on the newspaper.

## Two heads

In pairs, link arms to become one two-headed person. This person speaks with each head contributing one word at a time. So:

Head A: How

Head B: Do

Head A: You

Head B: Do?

Head A: My

Head B: Name

Head A: Is

Head B: Alfred.

The real challenge comes when you have mastered this basic concept: the two-headed people progress from robotic sounding zombies to more well-rounded characters. Discuss with your partner your character's name, occupation and mood. Try to make the sentences sound more conversational. Meet some other people in the room and, when you feel confident, set up some short improvisations with pairs of two-headed people.

## Fruit salad

The group sits in two lines facing each other. The pairs facing each other are labelled as various types of fruit: apples, oranges, grapefruit and so on. There is one caller who calls out one piece of fruit. The two players with that label must race around the outside of both lines and back into their own places. The first one back in place earns a point for his or her team. If the caller says 'fruit salad' everyone has to race around the area and the team which is back in place first earns two points.

## Shipwreck

One player is blindfolded and must cross treacherous rock-filled waters, which comprise all the other players seated at random around the room. The player is assisted only by a partner, who can call out only 'left' or 'right' as a guide.

## Rank and file

Post-it notes or stickers with the numbers one to however many are in the group are put on players' backs. Without any talking, the group must place themselves in correct numerical order. This must be done in silence and nobody is allowed to touch anyone else, but any other form of non-verbal communication is permitted.





## Freedom

Someone is chosen to be 'it'. When other players are tagged by 'it', they must stand still until two other players link arms around them, hold their hands up and drop their arms down, saying 'free!' You can develop other methods of releasing people, such as having someone crawl through their legs or touch their forehead.

## Yes, no, oh no

A person is seated in front of the group and questions are fired at that person by any member of the group. The person tries to stay in the seat for at least one minute and is out if he or she says 'yes' or 'no', or laughs or hesitates too long in replying. You can decide whether to have them assume a character or be themselves, but it is not a requirement that they speak the truth! A variation to this is that they are only allowed to say a silly phrase such as 'baked beans' in reply to any question and are out if they laugh.

## The big machine

One player begins making a simple repeated sound and action. A second player adds to this, working off the rhythm and sound. Each member of the group progressively becomes part of the big machine. Some can sit, stand or lie down. Some may move just one finger, others may move their whole body. Once the machine is complete, have a controller play with the speed, slowing it down and then speeding it up until it explodes. The parts all collapse and then rest before beginning the next machine.

## Whole body mime

Working individually, players use all or part of their bodies to represent a given object such as a toothbrush or a telephone. This is then done in pairs or small groups. Then the whole group all join together to represent something, such as a vase of flowers, a car or a computer. This is best done with no talking, and people just have to see where they are needed. Add pressure by giving a set time, such as a count of ten, to create the object.

## Mime line

The group divides into smaller groups, who sit in lines facing the back of the room. The first player in each line turns to the front and watches someone doing a simple mime, such as threading a needle. They then turn and tap the next person on the shoulder and mime the same activity as closely as possible to this person. The mime is passed down the lines in the same way that a message is passed on in 'Chinese whispers'. The last people in all the groups then simultaneously show the whole group the mime they saw. The challenge is for the mime to remain unchanged down the lines, but they usually end up very different! There should be no talking during this activity.

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