

INTERLUDE - A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

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NOTES FROM MONDAY'S INTERLUDE SESSION

This lesson sequence comes from many years teaching theater and devising new work with young people. I originally learned some of these strategies during my time at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. This is a generative sequence that I've used in a variety of different contexts - with theatre and English/ELA students, and in out-of-school time settings focused on playwriting, devising, or writing. Feel free to break this sequence up however works for your timing.

1. Warm-up: Lead with Your...

Invite students to walk through the space in as they typically would walk. They should take care to give space to others as they walk through the room. After a minute, invite student to walk through the space leading with their nose. *How does this change your impact your body? How does this posture feel? What adjectives would you use to describe a character who walks like this?* Continue this pattern inviting students to lead with different parts of their body – feet, knees, hips, shoulders, etc. Invite them to choose a body part to lead with. Invite them to play with levels of exaggeration or discretion.

2. Pick out a photograph & an individual in the photo.*

**For this activity it is important that students pick an individual that is of their own race. This is particularly important for White students. Students of color may pick out individuals of their own race, or those that are White. This is because people of color live in a society that is pervasively White, and therefore have experience with White culture. White people do not have the same experience with other racial/ethnic cultures and therefore risk creating characters from stereotype. Please read [Beverly Daniel Tatum's article, "The Complexity of Identity: Who am I?"](#) for more context. It matters what experiences create characters of color (especially without doing any research) in the same way that it matters [what bodies perform characters of color in plays](#).*

3. Fill out Character Creation Worksheet

4. Becoming Character

- a. Return to *Lead with Your...*
Walk around the space and think about your character. How does your character walk? Try out different ways of leading. This isn't about finding a caricature but about finding the truth/authenticity of that character.
- b. Introduce yourself (as your character) and finish the sentence "If I could do anything, I would..."

5. Extension activities

- a. Write & perform a monologue (give a word/sentence limit to keep it concise & detailed). They could start the monologue with "If I could do anything, I would..."

- b. Vlog (what would this character vlog about?) Post/share through Flipgrid, Google Classroom, etc.
- c. Improv. Put two characters in conversation with each other. A great prompt is a high stakes question - “Are you going to tell?” (virtual tips: use Breakout rooms for the improv scene, make it a video assignment over Zoom & have students record themselves in an improvised dialogue with each other. Or, during class have them have write to each other through the chat feature and save it to read aloud at a later time, or write more from.
- d. Stage Picture. The character creator recreates the most important picture that the character owns/has on their phone or that they keep. They direct other students into their poses and then include themselves as their character “This is a picture of...” (virtual tip: Have students take photos of themselves as each of the characters in the photo and then collage them together in PPT.)

Ideas from other participants (*apologies if I missed any, I was pulling from memory*)

- Use photographs/images from historical moments/time periods. Discuss who might not to present in imagery.
- Have students go into breakout rooms to all create from the same photograph.
- Print out photographs and laminate them, creating a file of imagery.
- Have photographs of individuals of a variety of ages – making sure to have plenty of the age that you are working with.