

Dramatic Storytelling Workshop: *Creative writing without pens*

Objectives:

To make team members aware of all the storytelling tools they already possess and to teach them some of the storytelling tools that professional writers and improvisers use to create new material on the spot.

Through comedy, games and improvisations, the aim is to encourage everyone to tell their own stories. The workshops are designed to give them confidence, allow them to access their own creativity, write immediately in the way they speak and help them perform their own stories as part of groups or individually.

Workshop Overview:

After two very quick warm-up games (chosen from *Voice Copy*, *Slow Motion Race*, *Pass the Scrunch Face*, *Name Ball*, *High Hanging Fruit*) designed to loosen up the limbs, the voice and to dispel any self-consciousness, the first workshop starts with **Insta-Stories** going around a circle, with each player supplying one line at a time to tell us 'what happened next'. This is an easy introductory game that's low focus – i.e. they all have to work hard but the group's attention is only on them briefly.

Next come the **STIMPROV** team improvisations. I split them into smaller groups of three to four. I show each team a picture of a location or a person, a strange prop they pick at random from a bag and a line of dialogue. They take three minutes to spitball an idea and then perform it whether they're ready or not, so they've had time for a basic blueprint but then must make it up on the spot going in whichever direction each member chooses. With the three different areas of stimuli along with the shared load, this immediately shows just how arbitrary or random story ideas can be and nonetheless how effectively they can work.

Real Life Intrudes – each person contributes one short verbal story of something that happened to them or to a close friend or colleague. (Of course, if they're stuck it can be something they read online or saw on the news.) The only rule is that it's gleaned from real life. It highlights the kind of incident that each writer values and should be using and pursuing in any fictional stories they wish to create. A very useful twist on this is **Whose Story is True?** I split the class into twos and have one tell the other a short true story that the listener has to retain and make their own. We hear the story from both speakers and have to decide who's telling the truth. It shows how much creativity goes into animating both versions. It dawns on people at around this point that they are engaged in storytelling for most of their social interactions, all day long.

It is a conscious decision to utilise the two forms – improvising a scene in the moment and relating a story verbally. It varies the skills they're using and refreshes minds as we go.

We play games like **Three-Headed Expert**, where each person of three is only allowed one word each as the expert waxes lyrical on his or her chosen topic; **Press Conference** where one person leaves the room and then must figure out which world famous notable they are from the journalists' questions; **Supported Storytelling** where the storyteller in the centre is replaced whenever s/he gets stuck by someone who jumps in whenever they see her struggling. It's high focus on one player yet across a short time span for each.

In the second session or later on in a one-off workshop, to give the storytellers a break from coming up with their own material, I give them **Scripted Scenes** I've written for each group and direct them as I would professional actors. Firstly, they play them with the scripts in their hands and afterwards, without scripts, filling in anything they can't remember with their own lines. It's the latter – paraphrasing, filling in the blanks and making the scenes their own that I'm interested in seeing here. Sometimes all we need is a bit of scaffolding from which to leap off into the unknown.

I demonstrate the dynamics of **high status versus low status** power relations in every story and how it underpins every dramatic interaction and how necessary it is to write it into each scene. This is the case for drama or fiction. Every scene must 'turn' – in a two-character scene, both of their statuses should change. Then we improvise status scenes like a car crash with one seemingly to blame, a boss firing a worker, an awkward debt collection between friends, or indeed an actor telling an audience member to turn off their ringing phone. All of these games force the players to think on their feet, be instantly creative and make up narratives. It is also great fun and naturally brings in a lot of comedy, especially when we play the scenes a second time, against the power dynamic.

We'll work on free association games too, like **Shared Dream** where we all lay on the floor and close our eyes and one by one, answer a volunteer dream leader's questions as to where we imagine ourselves to be and what we're doing. Basically, it's an agreement across the room to 'dream the same dream.' One reason I play this game is to remind everyone to always be alert for story or business ideas, to have a notebook beside their beds, as frequently some of our best thinking happens when we're either falling asleep or waking up.

First line / First Paragraph: I'll ask the players to come up with the first line of a very short story that they'd be happy to continue in the following class. This shows the power of momentum, that once they happen on a line that piques their interest, they're away. All they need is the first line and then the first paragraph. Writing is like lowering yourself down into a mine – it requires total immersion, but then once you're down there, all you have to do is have fun and keep yourself entertained.

In the first session, I give them two minutes (gun-to-the-head deadline) to come up with the first line - dictated onto a voice recorder - in the second session – it's the first paragraph and then on a third meeting, I'll ask for volunteers to tell or act out a whole – very short – story at the end of the class. And by then, we're off...