

Using Music and Movement to Develop Character and Illustrate Conflict Resolution

Terry L. Boyarsky

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This workshop was created to address some of the dynamics of music and movement that also apply to the theater. As a performing musician, singer, dancer, my teaching philosophy starts with deep experience. Later, we can (and will) discuss, notate, analyze, compare and share. Theater is an interesting art form because it shares aspects with literature and visual art, and contains facets of all the other performance arts - voice, movement, and music.

I was asked to create a workshop that gets students moving and making music. I took several ideas from theater (sequence, character development, and resolving conflict) and showed how these concepts also exist in movement and music.

Paying attention is the most important element in teaching; it is also the most important element in performance where perhaps it can be called **listening**. The best way to develop attention is to create games where mind, body, emotion, and spirit all work together. They have to be fun, intriguing, challenging and paced in response to the specific group. The exercises were set up as interlocking puzzle parts which involve and engage students immediately. We started with rhythmic and musical exercises to warm up the mind, ear and body before we did the following explorations. Here's how we worked:

1. IMPROVISATION TO DEVELOP CHARACTER

Moods: I asked for volunteers to create four statues, each one representing a contrasting feeling: **sad, mad, glad, scared**. Each statue must include posture, gesture, facial expression. The energy of each statue must relate to that state of emotion.

Form a circle: One by one and in the correct order (1. sad, 2. mad, 3. glad, 4. scared), each person will take the statue and hold it (freeze). I played the drum so the student can "meet" the beat, take the statue exactly at that moment, trying to truly inhabit each mood. The drummer can play big beats, or set up a meter, such as 4/4, and the statue can be taken on the downbeat (the first of 4 beats).

"Soundscapes:" Draw a symbol to represent each mood. Choose a conductor who will point to each symbol. Class will use their voices to "paint" the sound of this mood. The conductor can move from symbol to symbol, in any order, at any speed, to create a new piece.

Slow motion: Using both sound and statue, morph from one to the next in 8 beats. Class can predetermine the order, or choose a conductor to indicate the sequence. Play with and explore all these elements of posture, mood, sound and movement.

2. INTERACTING CHARACTERS


Contrasting Rhythms: Learn these two contrasting and interlocking rhythms. Practice saying them, clapping them, stepping them. Step the exact rhythm across the floor. It is very important to step lightly and flowingly and not to drum or stomp the feet into the floor. Create your own body percussion version (use snaps, claps, patches, and stamps) of each. Make sure they contrast, for example, use snaps and claps for the first one, pats and stamps for the second.

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a) "Class room drama" - (step backwards) - 

b) "Music and movement" - (step forwards) - 

Play with the dynamics (volume) and tempo (speed) of the rhythms. Divide the class in half. One half does one rhythm, the other half does the other. Do one after the other. Do simultaneously. Listen! Feel the energies and qualities in your voice and body.

Interacting: Choose partners, decide who will go first. Alternate taking the four mood statues. Decide on your meter, tempo, sequence of moods, and how long you will hold the statues. Experiment with trios and quartets. Experiment with floor space and levels (high, medium, low).

Person A	Person B	Person A	Person B
Statue 1	Statue 2	Statue 3	Statue 4

As you explore, start to notice the other person. Begin responding to exactly what you see and feel in the other person. Add your voice, as in the Soundscapes above.


3. RESOLVING CONFLICT

Brainstorm: Create a cast of four characters, each one having a predominant mood. Imagine a story line behind each character. What words would you use to describe this character? Create a word wall of adjectives for each character. and give them each a name.

For example, "Zhenya" - short, shy, ashamed, reticent, servile, simple.

Ostinato: Create a short chant that describes your character succinctly. This is the basis for the rhythmic motif which will be repeated for each character (an ostinato). Make decisions about the timbre of the voice: will it be high? low? growly? soft? accented?

For example, Zhenya speaking in the first person: "I am afraid I'm shy."

His rhythmic signature (ostinato) would be: ||  ||

Chant each character's ostinato 4 times in a row. Use your tone of voice, facial expression, posture, and gesture to strengthen the entire image of the character Zhenya. Move across the floor like Zhenya would move.

Musical/Movement conflict: Now pick some of the characters to have a conversation in movement, or body percussion (use the rhythmic ostinato), or chant. Experiment and observe. Try different combinations of people, use duos and trios, see if you can interact with just body movement. Try interacting with just your tone of voice, no words (vocables). Discuss different ways to resolve a conflict: Will the partners overpower each other? blend with each other? accept each other? find ways to coexist? negate each other?