

# Teacher Techniques for Enhancing Character

*(intended for use with the course profile for ADA4M, Unit 4, Activity 4, Strategy 3)*

These activities are suggested for teachers to help students develop ‘deeper’ characters.

## **1. A Day in the Life (whole group)**

A student, in character, will carry out several improvisations with small groups. The teacher and group select one character to focus on. The teacher then divides the remaining students in the class into several small groups (3-4) each with its own setting and context. For example, one group might be the character’s family, another might be the character’s soccer team, another might be the character’s associates at work, or members of a community volunteer group. Each small group member is to define a specific role for him or herself and a relationship with the central character. No member of the group is to take on the role of the central character.

Each group defines a playing space in a corner of the room and then the central character begins the improvisation by entering one of these playing spaces. When the central character feels that the improvised scene has reached an appropriate ending point, he or she leaves the playing space and moves on to the next. It may be helpful to use lights (or a verbal cue that lights are ‘on’) so that students know when they are improvising and when they are ‘dim’ and become part of the audience.

After the central character has improvised with all of the small groups it is useful to have a brief discussion with the whole class to reflect on the new information that has been created through the improvisations. The teacher might ask; What additional information do we have now about this character as a result of this improvisation? Was there anything surprising? Was any of this material inconsistent with what we already knew about the character? Where there are inconsistencies, which details will we decide to keep and which will we discard?

## **2. Hot-seating (small group)**

A character is seated in front of a small group who ask questions to compel the actor to improvise answers. (Examples: Why did you do that? What did you think would happen as a result of your actions? When did you first realize...?) This is an excellent way to motivate students to think about causes and consequences and spontaneously invent background material.

After the hot-seating it is useful to have a brief reflective discussion to allow the group (and the hot-seated actor) to recall and clarify details of the newly created material. The teacher might ask; What additional information do we have now about this character as a result of this improvisation? Was any of this information inconsistent with what we already knew about this character? Would any details need to be changed to make this new information ‘fit in’ to the larger context? Did the character ever lie during the improvisation? If so, why?

## **3. Writing-in-role (individual portfolios)**

The teacher will ask students to write in the role of their character. To make this an effective method of producing character background information, the teacher should give a specific context for the writing. Here are some possibilities:

1. Write a letter to a close friend and confidant in which you: a) describe the moment when you met the person you love, or b) explain your reasons for making a major change in your life, such as moving away, breaking up a long-term relationship, or changing a career path, or c) describe a traumatic experience you have had.
2. Write a letter of resignation or farewell.
3. Write to someone that you fear may be suffering from depression and try to cheer him or her with reminiscences of your past.

4. Write a letter demanding an apology from someone.
5. Write a diary entry for a particularly important day like a graduation or wedding day.
6. Write a diary entry for your first day on a new job, at University, in a new home.
7. Write a speech that you plan to make to your family about an important decision you have made.

#### **4. Creating character memories (whole group or small group)**

This is a game that can be used by whole groups to create background material for a character.

Players are seated in a circle. They are all 'in role' as the same character. The teacher reviews significant details about the character such as age, attitudes, occupation and significant relationships. One player starts to create a 'collective memory' by saying "I remember..." and adding a sentence about an experience in the character's past. At the end of the sentence, the player points to another player in the circle and says "and then..." The player being pointed at must provide the next sentence in the 'memory'. Players continue until each has had at least one turn. The game can continue for some time. The teacher may side-coach to elicit more sensory images or specific details.

A reflective discussion should follow using questions similar to those above. The teacher may also wish to ask: "What impact would this memory have on the character today?"