

CHARACTER DIALOGUE

Linda Hochheiser, Harborfields High School, Faculty Advisor; Educational Theatre Assoc., NY State Director

I was working with a group of 16-18 yr olds that were NOT beginners however when it came to expressing aggression and moving on to anger with dialogue and movement they became increasingly frustrated. One or two could grasp what I was looking for but most were lost. I "invented" this warmup to help get the actors in character with the characters they interacted with most and in one case two actors that NEVER spoke directly to each other on stage.

The warmup was designed for "The Desperate Hours" but I've used it in warming up Actors from Pete's Feat to Deathtrap.

Eleanor needed to be afraid of and later on stand up to Glen. So we paired them facing each other. Each described the other using an increasing level of hostility until one backed away feeling sufficiently intimidated. Example:

Eleanor to Glen.....Brown eyes, Brown eyes

Glen to Eleanor....Full lips, Full lips

Eleanor to Glen...White shirt, white shirt

Glen to Eleanor...small nose, small nose.

What they describe to each other can be ANYTHING they see on the other actor, by having them describe what they see if eliminates the "personal" and has the actor concentrate on the physical. They observe physical features and "see" the actor. Then they listen to the "insulting way they are being described" again not personal, but physical. The actors learned to "see" each other, listen to each other and my more aggressive actors were toned down and my shy actors built up.

We shifted actors down the line as a lot of them had to interact. What surprised me most was the sheriff, Brad who was always reflecting his rage at Glenn, however in the play THEY NEVER MEET. During warmups I faced them off each other and WOW what a wonderful warmup for them both.

I also had Dan and Eleanor face off using this descriptive "mirror" as they had to be both in love and frustrated with each other. Using this non-personal, physical description warm up I accomplished an amazing interaction on stage with all the actors.

We moved to using our hands to float over the actor and described in more detail, this allowed them to "touch" with their eyes and connect even more before they began to rehearse each scene.

I also had them, once I was satisfied with their connection to move into actual dialogue and the transition was wonderful.