

AREA/S OF FOCUS Devising, Collaboration, Script-Writing, Performance

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION Participants devise and write a script conveying a storyline with a message that is pertinent to their community. Characters are assigned and after a series of rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and an optional technical rehearsal, participants perform the play for their community. After the performance, participants reflect on what they learned during the creative process and how they can continue to convey their message to their community and beyond.

TARGET GROUP Students, community members, non-profits

INTENDED OUTCOMES Strengthen group collaboration in a creative environment while sharing a message to the greater community.

TOTAL TIME 2-10 weeks

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS 5-15

MATERIALS Paper, pens, pencils, markers; Costume materials-repurposed clothing, fabric, masks, etc. ; Set materials-fabric, cardboard, plywood, paint, brushes, recycled materials, etc. ; Lights, music, sound effects, props as needed.

SETTING Large room or outdoors for rehearsal, performance space

INTRODUCTORY FRAME

A facilitator leads a discussion where participants speak about the overall message that they would like to convey to their community in a creative performance. This topic and message could range from climate change, loss of natural habitat, or the importance of recycling.

PROCESS

STEP 1 – DEVISING

- To begin the process, participants focus on how they want their overall message to

be communicated.

- Have participants find a comfortable place in the room, play some soft music and give them a series of writing prompts about what they know and how they feel about this issue, who is impacted, and some possible conflicts, situations and concerns that could be incorporated. Encourage participants to write without picking up their pen or pencil, even if they are not sure of what they are writing- the key is to not stop. The group comes together and discusses what images, storylines and characters stood out to them. This devising process may take a few days to a week depending on the time frame. Throughout these devising meetings, a facilitator should begin piecing together the group's favorite storyline and characters. To create more structure, a clear story-arch is written with an exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action.

STEP 2 - SCRIPT-WRITING

- Once a story-arc is created with a beginning, rising action, climax, and falling action – the script can be written. Participants are put into small groups and each group is responsible to write a section of the storyline.
- Groups share the pieces they wrote and the group gives feedback on the scene and how it fits into the overall story arc. This may take a few sessions.
- As soon as a script is written and characters are chosen, participants should begin to memorize their lines on their own time outside of the rehearsal process. Suggest that they ask friends to help them memorize their lines, and encourage participants to meet with each other outside of rehearsal to read-through their scripts as well.

STEP 3 - REHEARSAL

- The rehearsal process is a time to strengthen group bonds, develop characters on an individual level, and to piece the play together scene by scene. There is no need to rehearse the play in order, and actually it often works best if only the actors who are specifically in the scenes are called to rehearsal.
- In addition to rehearsing and staging the scenes, other exercises are often helpful to strengthening the process. Opening each rehearsal with an energy boosting exercise can really help set the tone and mood for rehearsal.
- In addition, “The Empty Chair” exercise is helpful to help participants connect with their character. While the ‘Walk As If’ exercise can help participants feel more comfortable in physicality and strengthen character development. Another exercise that can help participants in creating a personal narrative for their character is “Tree of Life”- this reflections can help participants see where their characters is coming from, where they are and where they are headed in the future.
- In the beginning of the rehearsal process, participants should have their scripts with a pencil to write down their blocking, or the movements and actions they make onstage. While ‘blocking scenes’, stop the participants periodically to tell them where they need to move onstage.
- As the rehearsal process continues over the next few weeks, participants should memorize all their lines and blocking which is known as “getting off-book”.
- At this point in the rehearsal process, a facilitator should give notes to participants when it comes to their character's journey in the play with questions like “What is your objective in this scene?”, “What is in the way of your objective?”, “What do you have to do to get your objective?” A facilitator can either pause the scene or have a dialogue with participants after the scene has been run from start to finish.

- As scenes are fleshed out and completed, rehearse the entire play from beginning to end.
- This is also when participants' entrances and exits from the stage are planned out and scene transitions with set pieces and props are coordinated.

STEP 4- COSTUME, SET, AND PROPS

- Participants can use fabric, recycled materials, or other clothing that they already own to create costume pieces for each of the characters.
- Depending on the performance space and what is manageable, participants can cut plywood or cardboard in the shape of set pieces they will need. The set, or the background of the performance is the location where the play takes place. Some plays may only have one setting (e.g. a forest), while some may have more than one setting (e.g. a town square and aboard a fishing boat).
- After the set pieces are cut, participants paint them. If this is not possible, a curtain or large piece of fabric can be used as a backdrop.
- As early in the process as possible, props should be made or purchased. Props are objects that actors use on stage that are not considered part of the set (e.g. a cane, a fishing net, a letter, etc.) The earlier actors have to rehearse with props the better, this way they are comfortable using the prop during the performance. Much like props, it is best to collect costume pieces throughout the rehearsal process and to begin set building early.

STEP 5- TECHNICAL REHEARSAL

- A technical rehearsal is only necessary if there is any music, sound effects, or light changes in the play. Depending on the scale of the performance, it may be helpful to have a stage manager. The stage manager is the person who double-checks the props to make sure everything is in the proper place before the performance, helps performers to enter on cue and makes sure that the play runs smoothly while in performance.
- If there are participants controlling lights or music/sound effects, the stage manager is also the person who will 'cue' them, or tell them when to turn the lights off, play music, etc. During a technical rehearsal, participants perform the play but either a facilitator or a stage manager will pause the action when a technical aspect comes up. The participant in charge of the sound or light cue will note where it happens in their script and then the scene will be run with the tech person being directed by the stage manager or facilitator.

STEP 6 - DRESS REHEARSAL

- After all the participants have their scripts memorized, all the scenes are blocked, and costume, set and props are assembled, it is time to have a dress rehearsal. A dress rehearsal is when the play is ran through from beginning to end with all participants wearing their costumes and with set pieces and props on stage as needed. It is a full performance without an audience.
- A dress rehearsal should be done at least once, but if time allows it two or three dress rehearsals is ideal. During each dress rehearsal, a facilitator writes down notes to give to the participants after the run through. These notes can range from "In this scene, there are a lot pauses in between the lines. Make sure you are listening to each other and driving the scene forward with your objectives." or, "This transition between scenes was a little unorganized. Let's go back and see

what adjustments we can make so it's easier for everyone.' It is most beneficial to have both the technical and dress rehearsals in the performance space if possible.

STEP 7 - PERFORMANCE

- The day of the performance, participants meet beforehand to set the stage, place costumes and props in their proper place, and do individual and group warm-up exercises.
- This could range from stretching and meditating to ground their nervous energy, to group exercises that help them to connect to each other and loosen up such as 'Zip-Zap-Zop', 'Yes, Let's!' and "Dance Circle'.
- Once everything is in place, or after the stage manager approves everything, the participants perform their play for the community.
- If the conditions are right, facilitate a dialogue with the community after the play to ask them what they learned about the issue and what actions they can take moving forward.

STEP 8 – STRIKE

- After the very final performance, all the set pieces, costumes, props, lights, etc. are taken from the performance space and stored somewhere safe before the next time the play is performed.

STEP 9 - REFLECTION

- Engage in a reflection with the participants about the process as a whole.
- What was their favorite part? What was the most challenging thing about the process? Did they make any discoveries about themselves or their creative capabilities?
- Urge participants to cite specific moments or memories that stick out to them the most. Have a dialogue about other opportunities where the play can be performed and the message shared.