
Resource guide

Theatre in education learning module

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Introduction

This resource is a guide for teachers or youth workers leading groups of Young People aged 14-19 years old. It uses the powerful tool of drama to engage young people with the social issues explored in *The Spirit Level*.

This material has been devised by Holly Meechan and Eva Arnold who are both theatre practitioners with a combined 12 years of experience in leading drama workshops for young people on a number of subjects. The exercises have been trialled with several groups of young people in London with a positive response from both students and teachers. The workshop enables young people to personally connect with the themes by relating them to their own lives and experiences, thus then helping them to understand these themes in a wider context.

Key Themes

- Status
- Respect
- Community
- Trust
- Violence and crime
- Teenage Pregnancy

Dramatic techniques used

Drama games:

Used to bring the group together, warm up their bodies and voices, and focus their minds.

Image Theatre:

Used as a physical language to allow the participants to work spontaneously with visual images that are conjured from within the subconscious rather than the intellectual mind. This technique gives participants freedom to explore meaning without words. They can interpret

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meaning from two angles by both feeling it and observing it through images.

Forum Theatre:

Forum theatre is a technique used to explore oppression relevant to a chosen audience. Traditionally the audience will watch a play from start to finish where the protagonist fails to overcome an oppression. The audience are then invited to practically explore their ideas by becoming directly involved in the dramatic action. They can transform from spectator into what we call 'spect-actor'. This means they have the opportunity to come up on stage and take on the protagonist's role and try to change the outcome of the play. The actor's aim is to keep the conclusion as it was so it becomes a sort of fight or game between actors and 'spect-actors'. This game generates serious and fruitful discussion, and potential solutions to dealing with oppression.

Within this resource we use the principles of forum theatre, adapted especially for working in a short time frame with Young People. By both dramatising and performing the story, and observing each other's work the participants get to play the roles of actor and 'spect-actor'. The forum theatre exercises engage the Young People in the subject and empower them to not only imagine positive change, but to practise it.

Guide to the Resource

These exercises are designed to be used as a complete 1 hour 45minutes workshop or can be used separately on a pick and choose basis.

A 1 hour 45 minutes workshop should run as follows:

- One of the two warm up exercises (5 mins)
- Introducing income inequality (20 mins)
- Exploring status (10 mins)
- A game of Trust (10 mins)
- Image work (15 mins)
- One of the two stories (Violence or Teen pregnancy) (40 mins)
- Ending (5 mins)

There are options for extension work and timings may vary depending on the group.

Testimonials

“The workshop taught me how actions and words can completely change everything”

Year 13 student – Bridge Academy, Hackney

“I most enjoyed the forum theatre aspect of the workshop”

Year 13 student – Bridge Academy, Hackney

“I enjoyed the workshop because it is interactive” Year 10 student – St. Martin-in-the-Fields High School, Brixton

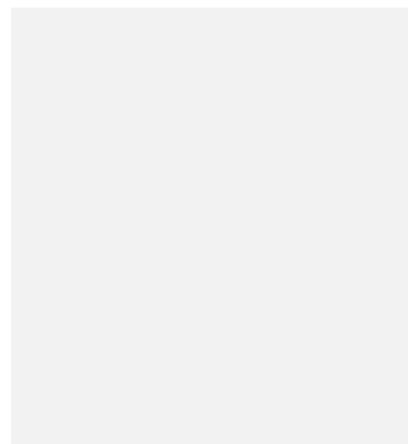
“I found the bit (about pay ratios) interesting because it was shocking” Year 10 student – St. Martin-in-the-Fields High School, Brixton

“I most enjoyed the acting out of the article about the three teenage sisters and finding out about the difference in income inequality. I found this interesting because it will affect future generations.” Year 10 student – St. Martin-in-the-Fields High School, Brixton

“I thought my students were very engaged with the subject matter. The theme of the London riots and the witness/perp statements were very gripping. The students were very keen to act these out. Good choices

for Drama” Teacher – St. Martin-in-the-Fields High School, Brixton

86% of the year 10 students and 78% of year 13 students who took part in the workshop stated that afterwards they were interested to find out more about The Equality Trust, the income gap and social issues.



Warm up exercises

Start the workshop with this warm up exercise, or your own alternative, to raise energy and focus the group.

Stop, Go, Jump, Clap

How to play

Ask the participants to spread out in the space. Tell them to follow the instructions in silence. Begin by asking them to walk around in the space changing direction, being aware of those around them and filling the gaps. Then sporadically give them the following commands:

- Stop – they must freeze
- Go – they resume walking
- Jump – they jump once on the spot
- Clap – they clap once
- Play around with these four instructions and when you think it is going smoothly, here are a few other options you can add:
- Smile
- Frown
- Shout – they must shout their name
- Whisper – they must whisper their name

Now stop the group and explain that the first two commands will be reversed. So Stop means Go and Go means Stop but everything else remains the same. Continue the game. You can then proceed to swap the other commands i.e. Jump means Clap and Clap means Jump. Smile means Frown and frown means Smile etc. Until eventually all commands have swapped meaning.

This exercise is a great warm up for the body and the brain. Whilst seemingly simple it forces the students to focus their minds and also think and act for themselves rather than following the crowd. During the middle of the game, where some instructions have new meaning and others retain their original meaning, the confusion can cause great amusement and participants will enjoy their mistakes and their triumphs at getting it right and wrong.

A circle of sevens

How to play

Ask the students to form a large circle. Explain that you will go around the circle counting from 1 to 7 repeatedly, each person saying one number at a time. Each number has a gesture to accompany it:

Numbers 1-4 and 6 – Sideways arm gesture towards the next person.

Number 5 – Arm goes under the opposite leg towards the next person in the circle.

Number 7 – Arm goes over the head in an arc gesturing towards the next person.

Begin by practising the exercise going round and round the circling counting and gesturing, trying to speed it up and perfect the actions as a team.

Then to take it to the next stage, remove the vocal counting so only the gestures remain. People have to count in their head to remember what number they are at and therefore what gesture to perform.

At this stage you can choose to start eliminating those who make a mistake (they must sit down to show they are out of the game) and play on until you have a winner.

Introducing inequality

Divide the class by eye colour and ask the groups to stand in separate parts of the space. Choose the smallest group (i.e. all blue eyed students) and give them a chocolate each, the other groups are left without. They will no doubt protest inciting a feeling of unfairness. This opener gives the students an immediate experience of inequality and how it feels to have or to go without. Ask the students to share their thoughts.

From here lead the discussion on to the subject of income inequality. Start by asking the students about leaving school and entering the world of employment:

1. What are their career aspirations?
2. What employment opportunities are there for them?
3. What can they hope to be earning?
4. Do they know what the minimum wage is? (£6.19 in London)

What do you think the income gap is between CEO of a FTSE 100 company (i.e. top boss of Burberry, Vodafone, Tesco) and one of their lowest paid employees e.g. Cashier/cleaner on minimum wage? How many times more is CEO earning on average?

Now look at pay ratio scale. You can first ask the students to guess the pay ratio. Then get them to unravel the scale until they reach 262:1.

This is the average pay ratio within a typical FTSE 100 company. This means the CEO is paid 262 times more than the lowest paid employee .i.e. £6.19 per hour versus £1,621.78 per hour.

Remind them that this is the average and a lot of companies don't reveal their figures, but one company we do have the figures for is Marks and Spencers. Ask the student to continue unravelling the scale to reveal this ratio.

The ratio is 656:1 which means the CEO is earning 656 times more than the lowest paid employee .i.e. £6.19 per hour versus £4060.64 per hour.

Questions:

- Do you think that is fair?
- Do you think by having such a large gap between what people earn could cause any problems in society? If so, in what way?

Exploring Status

Theme/Focus: Status/Respect/Social mobility

You will need a pack of cards for this exercise.

Give out the cards to each participant by placing the card on their forehead, asking them to hold it there with 2 fingers, making sure they don't see what their card is, but that everyone else can. Make sure you give out at least one of every card from Ace (low, 1) to King; the rest can double up depending on the size of your group.

Explain that the exercise will be performed in silence and it is important that students do not tell each other what their card is. Tell the group that number 1 (ace) represents a person of very low status, at the bottom of society, i.e. homeless and unemployed. The king represents a person at the top of the hierarchy in society such as CEO of a huge company, Prime minister or the Queen.

Instruct the students to walk around the space in silence, and begin acknowledging the other people in the room. They must then behave towards and interact with others according to the status of their card by using their body language, gesture and facial expressions. At the same time they need to gauge reactions towards themselves from others. They should then try to start behaving and carrying themselves accordingly, through their walk, posture and eye contact with others to fit the card status they perceive themselves to be.

Once the group have grasped this ask them to form a line with King at one end of the room and ace at the other, positioning themselves in order of status, guessing where they belong in the line. Then they can look at their card and see if they guessed correctly.

This exercise should lead into an interesting discussion about how income inequality can affect our attitudes towards status and influence our social interactions in society. First you can analyse the different behaviour performed and perceived, then here are some questions to put to the students:

- How did it feel to be your number?
- Why did you treat others in a certain way?
- Do you think this fantasy society in the game reflects real UK society at all? How? Why?
- What gives you status in society? – Money, age, education, achievements?
- Did you feel more comfortable with people of a similar number to you? How did it affect your behaviour?
- Would you have liked to change your number in the game?
- How easy is it to change your status, and move up the ladder in our society?

A Game of Trust

Theme/Focus: Trust

Here is a simple and effective game for large groups exploring trust, or you may choose to use your own alternative exercise.

Blind cars

How to play

Ask the students to get into pairs and then spread out in the space. One stands behind the other, the person in front is the 'car' and the one behind the 'driver'. The driver guides the car around the space by using the following physical commands:

Accelerate by gently pressing a finger in the middle of the car's back, the speed can be controlled by altering the pressure, if the finger is removed the car will ease to a halt.

Turn either left or right by touching the relevant shoulder.

Break sharply by placing both hands firmly on the shoulders simultaneously.

The 'car' must keep their eyes closed tightly throughout the exercise and put their trust in the driver to keep them safe. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure their car doesn't crash with any others in the space.

It can be nice with a large group to split them in two and have half the participants stand around the edges of the space observing the cars moving around. The aim of this game is to explore and build trust. Notice how people's body language and movement vary depending on how comfortable they feel in the care of their partner, and how confidence builds as the relationship between two participants builds.

Image work

Theme/Focus: Pride & Shame/Community/Trust

Part 1:

Begin by asking everyone to form a large circle. Explain that you will say a word and then count down - "3, 2, 1, freeze". On 'freeze' the students must become an individual still image to represent their interpretation of the word. This should be a quick fire exercise and they should form strong frozen statues. Having done one or two to warm up it is good for them to see each other's images. You can do this by asking half the circle to unfreeze and observe the statues on the other side of the circle and then swap over. You can ask the side who are observing to discuss what they see, objectively and subjectively.

Here is the list of words:

LOVE - FEAR - PRIDE - SHAME - HOPE

Part 2:

The next stage is to work as a whole group to create a large image. Explain that you will build the image in the centre of the circle, one person entering at a time.

The word you will work with is: COMMUNITY

It might be useful first to discuss what community means and prompt the group to think about a real community they are familiar with and everything that it is made up of.

The aim is for the group to create a realistic representation which includes the good, the bad and the ugly; the young, the old and everything in between. Also prompt them to think about the social interactions and relationships among people in the community, linking back to the previous exercise.

Throughout the process ask the participants in the circle to observe the growing image and think and discuss what has been created and what they think is missing. Each participant should carefully decide what they want to communicate and therefore how to position themselves before they enter the image. They should also be sure to consider themselves in relation to others already in the image.

When the group is happy with the completed image (not all participants need to be a part of the central tableaux) stop and ask everyone to return to the circle.

Now invite them to describe their idea of the 'ideal community'

- What would this community consist of?
- How would the people be interacting?
- What is needed to form a happy, well-functioning community?

- How different would it be from their real community?

Optional extension (to accompany above discussion):

Now go back to the original 'Community' image and work as a group, looking at one aspect/person at a time and make changes to gradually transform this image into a picture of the 'ideal community'. You can do this by another member of the circle entering and physically moulding the person in the image, or by discussing how they should change and asking them to alter themselves.

Story work

Story 1 – Riots

Theme/Focus: Violence/Crime/Imprisonment/Respect/Pride & Shame

Story

Mark is 17 years old and lives with his parents and younger brother in London. It was the summer holidays and he was bored at home when he received a BBM from his mate, Owen, saying to meet him down at the High Street. Mark wondered what was going on so he went to check it out. The scene he was greeted with was one of chaos with shop windows being smashed and people running from them with stolen goods. The streets were full of people: a mix of the curious and angry, young and old. It was impossible to distinguish between thieves, bystanders and those who simply wanted to cause damage.

A group of about 20 young people were wielding scaffolding poles taken from a nearby building site. They used their makeshift weapons to intermittently attack passing motorists and smash bus shelters. A man in a smart slim suit stood on the corner recording the violence on his mobile phone.

Mark spots his mates through the crowd running out of Foot Locker carrying several boxes of brand new trainers. Owen shouts to him "there you are... get involved before the police come. Check these out!" He shows him a brand new pair of trainers, Mark looks down at his own scruffy trainers, and then back up at the destroyed shop, he pulls up his hood and runs in. The shop is full of people grabbing what they can; he shoves his way through and manages to get his hands on a nice pair of shoes. Hearing a police siren in the distance he turns and runs. He pauses on the street corner to look for his friends when the man in the

smart suit catches his eye, “What are you doing? Are you stupid or something” he says. Mark punches him hard in the jaw and the man falls to the ground.

Working with the story

- Read the story to the group
- Split the participants up into 6 groups and give each group a section of the story. (link to printable story sections) Give them 5-10 minutes to create a dramatization of their section of the story. It is a good idea to suggest that all violence is enacted in the form of slow motion or freeze frame. Encourage them to be creative and think about the theatricality of the scene to bring the story to life.
- Gather the whole group together at one end of the room to form an audience and invite each group up to perform their scene in order 1-6.
- Discuss with the group:
 - What might happen to Mark next as a consequence of his actions in the story?
 - Why did he do what he did?
 - What might have sparked/influenced his behaviour?
 - How was Mark feeling at various points in the story?
 - At what points in the story could Mark have done or said something differently to prevent the predicted outcomes?

There is an option here to round off the discussion on the themes of violence, crime and respect and what motivates people’s actions; income inequality being one of the main influences.

OR

Continue into the drama exercises below and round off with this discussion at the end.

Development

To dig deeper into the story, thinking about Mark’s motivations and choices through drama you can ask the group to revisit 2 moments in the story and partake in these exercises which practically explore ways to change his fate.

Exploration exercise 1 – The Angel v The Devil:

Ask group number 4 to re-enact their section of the story, stopping just before Mark ‘pulls up his hood and runs in to the shop’. Ask for 2 volunteers in the audience to come up and stand either side of Mark to play the 2 voices in his mind. We shall call them the Angel and the Devil. This is a game of persuasion; the Devil’s aim is to convince Mark to go into the shop and steal the trainers as in the original story, the Angel’s aim is to achieve the opposite outcome.

You shall act as umpire to the game, so first allow each to give their best argument in turn, you can limit the time they have to speak and swap between the two to allow a dialogue. Then, increase the urgency by allowing them to speak at the same time, and finally count them down from 10 until time is up. It is up to the actor playing Mark to decide who had the strongest argument and therefore wins. Instead of stating his choice, he shall reveal it to us by completing the scene, either with the same ending as before (if Devil wins) or with an appropriate alternative, improvised ending (if Angel wins). The other actors in the scene should freeze during the Devil/Angel debate then resume action when Mark's character does, adjusting their actions/reactions accordingly but with their ultimate aim to remain true to the story and their character.

Exploration exercise 2 – Take their place

Now ask group 6 to re-enact the final scene, stopping just before 'Mark punches him'. Explain to the group the aim of this exercise is to change the outcome of the story for a more positive one, therefore improving Mark's fate. The game works by the participants watching, taking it in turns to replace the actor playing Mark. They need to think of one sentence and/or one action which they could do differently to change the outcome. You then restart the scene with the new actor. They begin by playing it out exactly the same but when it reaches the moment when the bystander says "What are you doing? Are you stupid or something?" we shall see the proposed new action/words. It is then we see if the player is successful by the other characters' reactions. The other actors in the scene must all try to keep the story the same. However, if they think the new proposition is convincing, realistic and true to the character they may allow a different ending. It is up to them to improvise accordingly.

Story 2 – Teen mums

In the summer of 2005, 3 sisters hit the headlines of the British newspapers because all three were teenage mothers.

One day, Jemma, the youngest sister was in bed at her mum's house with her boyfriend messing around. Neither really knew what they were doing, but somehow, sex happened. Jemma didn't tell anyone until it was too late, and so nine months later, aged 12, she gave birth to a baby boy.

The middle sister, Jade, was 14 years old and had started having sex with her boyfriend. She too became pregnant and was surprised as she thought it was something that would just never happen to her. Jade didn't want to be a mother so young and considered having an abortion but when it came to it she couldn't go through with it, so she also gave birth to a baby boy.

At around the same time as Jade, the eldest sister Natasha, 16, had a baby girl. Natasha had many friends already with babies, and she had never been interested in school, so unlike her sisters she welcomed motherhood. Natasha's boyfriend didn't want anything to do with their daughter but she was still glad to have her child that gave her purpose and love in life.

All three girls lived at home with their mother, and shared their bedrooms with their babies. Jemma and Jade struggled with school, and all three had to get by on benefits. None of the girls had any qualifications and none of the babies' Dads offered support. Their mother Julie found it hard to believe what had happened to her daughters. In her eyes they had ruined their lives, and she blamed this on the lack of sex education at school.

Working with the story

- Read the story to the group
- Divide the participants into 5 groups
- Give out story sections with headlines ([link to printable story sections](#)) to each group and ask them to create a freeze frame to represent their headline. It doesn't have to be naturalistic.

Headlines:

- 1 – The secret
- 2 – Abortion dilemma
- 3 – A purpose in life
- 4 – All living together
- 5 – Ruined lives

- Set up group as audience and performing space. Show freeze frames in order.
- On watching each image, ask audience to describe what they see subjectively and objectively.
- Discuss with the group:
 - What might the future hold for each of the three sisters?
 - What were their different views on becoming a teen mum?
 - Why did they all end up pregnant so young?
 - Who/what is responsible for what happened?
(Mum/society/education/boyfriends)
 - How could the outcome have been different? Would this be better?

Exploration exercise 1 – Inner monologues:

As a whole group, choose the most interesting freeze frame (you can vote on this) and ask that group to show it again. Look and discuss the image in more detail, thinking about the characters, emotions and relationships within it. Explain we are now going to get the image to speak, you will touch one person in the image on the shoulder and they should speak aloud the thoughts of their character at that moment from within their position in the picture. Touch each person on the shoulder one at a time, listening to their inner monologue. If the participant is struggling to speak, encourage them to use just one or two words that express the character's feelings.

There is an option here to round off the discussion on the themes of teen pregnancy and social mobility and the link to income inequality.

OR

Continue to explore the story further with exploration exercise 2 below and round off with this discussion at the end.

Exploration exercise 2 - Character hot seating:

Ask for four volunteers who would like to come on stage and take on the roles of the 3 sisters and their mother. The audience can then interview each of the characters, by asking them questions to try and understand their opinions, motivations and feelings more deeply. The actors put themselves in the shoes of the characters and do their best to answer the questions as true to their role as possible.

Here is a list of questions that could be asked if the audience need prompting.

Jemma

- Did you know anything about sex before you did it? Where/how did you learn?
- Whose idea was it to fool around sexually?
- Why did you do it?
- Why didn't you tell anyone?
- Do you wish you had had someone to talk to about it?
- If you could go back in time what would you have done differently?

Jade

- Whose idea was it to have sex?
- Did you know what you were doing? Do you feel you made an educated decision?
- Why didn't you use contraception?

- Did you want to have sex?
- How did you know about abortion?
- Why couldn't you go through with the abortion?
- Do you think you are old enough to be having sex/be a mother?

Natasha

- Did you plan to have a baby? Why?
- Why didn't you like school?
- Did you have any career ambitions? Why/why not?
- If you could do anything in life what would it be?
- What do you like about being a mother?
- What do you get from having a baby?
- Do you think you made the right choice to have a child so young?
- What do you think about your younger sisters also having babies?
- Do you agree with your mum that you've ruined your life?
- Do any of your friends have jobs or go to college? Would you have done either of those if you weren't a mother?

Julie

- Do you feel responsible in any way for what has happened to your daughters?
- Did you know they were having sex?
- Do you take any of the blame?
- What would you do differently if you could turn back the clock?
- What were your hopes and aspirations for your daughters?
- Is sex education a schools responsibility or a parent's?
- Is it hard being a single parent?
- What happened to the father of your daughters?

Ending

Recap the exercises and themes you have explored

- Status & respect
- Community & trust
- Violence & crime
- Teen pregnancy
- Social mobility

All these social issues are linked to one thing – Income inequality.

Remind yourselves of the pay ratio scale and the large income gaps. Ask the students what they think the pay ratio should ideally be? Prompt them to consider stress levels, working hours, skills & training required and level of responsibility etc. but also to think about how the

large income gap exasperates the social issues they have been exploring. Try to decide what would be a fair pay ratio in their ideal world.

Fact.

The ratio for Local authorities in Britain is 15:1 and for large charities it is 10:1.

Look at graph, ([link to printable graph](#)) it shows there is a clear link between income inequality and all the social issues explored in this workshop, along with many others. You can see where Britain lies compared to other developed countries – we are one of the most unequal. Japan and the Scandinavian countries are much more equal. You might want to discuss how you think they achieve this?

What possible approaches are there for bridging the gap and creating a more equal society?

Links to further reading.