

Virtual #VIRAL: From Stage to Computer Screen

by Maria McConville

In our home away from home, the stage, we have direction. It is upstage, downstage, stage right, stage left, and, of course, center. We create tension on the stage when actors use distance to establish relationship. Now we are stuck in little boxes on a screen emoting! I don't know about you, but this temporary fix can be frustrating. But sometimes when there are limitations, great work is sparked. How can we use this little square to help us communicate a character? These exercises will help students take control of their performance so that it is specific, organic, and still theatrical—even if we are in little boxes on a screen. Use these exercises when rehearsing *#VIRAL (virtual version)* or any other virtual play from our catalogue.



WARM-UP

Students get to stare at themselves in the camera! Guide them through stretching out their face. Encourage them to get close to the camera so they can see what their face does when it is given direction. Offer some character stereotypes or extreme emotions and have the students create them using just their face. Examples are hero, villain, despair, overjoyed...you get the picture.

ACTIVITY 1

We know how important the distance between actors is on stage. This activity applies that same idea to your student's video square. Just a few simple choices from an actor can give so much information to an audience.

- Three actors have a choice of choosing to be up close to the camera, as far away as possible from the camera or lurk in the middle. Classmates watching consider who this character is, where they are, based on how close they are to the camera/where they are in the screen.
- Three new actors now select a proximity to the camera and create a gesture. Actors should hold this position in tableau to allow fellow students to create a story based on what they see their fellow actors doing,
- Three more actors have a turn. They must choose a proximity to the camera, a gesture, and a facial expression. Classmates discuss the characters they can infer from those choices.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What relationships do you see?
- Can you imagine where these characters are?
- How does the relationship change when one of these elements (Proximity to camera, gesture, facial expression) is adjusted?

ACTIVITY 2

Now we can apply these choices to your monologue or scene.

- Actors should make a big choice for their proximity to the camera, gesture and facial expression for the Beginning, Middle and End of their piece.
- Exaggerate these choices at first and create bold tableaux. Now the actors have created a physical score of the characters journey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What did you learn about your character?
- How does your character change over the course of the monologue?

ACTIVITY 3

Through this next part of rehearsal, actors can take the time to work through their monologues incorporating their physical choices.

- After a few runs, they can incorporate as much or as little of the physical score to performance of the monologue.

Have fun! If you would like to share your take on this lesson with us, e-mail

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Maria McConville has been a NYC Public School teaching artist since 2005. In the past she has worked with the Theatre Development Fund, LeAP! Onstage, and Periwinkle Theater for Youth, and as a Shakespeare and Playwriting teaching artist with Theatre For A New Audience. Her students have performed and adapted the work of Shakespeare, written their own plays, devised ensemble performance pieces, sang and danced in musical productions, and performed their peers work on a Broadway stage. Growing up in New York, Maria attended LaGuardia High School of Performing Arts for Drama, and recently adjudicated the auditions for incoming students. In addition to being Stage Partners' Education Director, Maria is also a playwright; her published plays include "#Censored" and "#Viral" (Stage Partners) and "To Date or Not to Date" (Playscripts).



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