



Teaching Devised Theatre

The Essential Handbook

40 ready-to-go lesson plans for creating original plays with young performers.

Written by Tilly Lorence

A Beat by Beat Book
www.bbpress.com

*“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities,
but in the expert’s there are few.”
- Shunryū Suzuki*

Published by Beat by Beat Press
www.bbbpress.com
Copyright © 2023 by Tilly Lorence

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any other storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the author or publisher

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Why I Wrote This Book	2
How to Use This Book	2
Your Role as the Facilitator/Director	3
Teacher Reflective Practice	4
Lesson Activity Overview	5
UNIT A: THE FOUNDATIONS	8
Lesson A1: Establish Guidelines	9
Lesson A2: Ensemble - Sharing Power	12
Lesson A3: Taking Risks	16
Lesson A4: Group Storytelling	19
Lesson A5: Intro to Devising	22
UNIT B: PROCESS I: DEVSING FROM A STORY	24
Lesson B1: Exploring the Story's Narrative	25
Lesson B2: Exploring Settings Part 1	28
Lesson B3: Exploring Settings Part 2	30
Lesson B4: Exploring Characters Part 1	33
Lesson B5: Exploring Characters Part Two	35
Lesson B6: Exploring Conflict Part 1	38
Lesson B7: Exploring Conflict Part 2	41
Writing the Script	46
Lesson B8: Voice	47
Lesson B9: Vocal Reactions & Sound Effects	50
Lesson B10: Blocking Rehearsal	53
UNIT C: PROCESS II: DEVSING A THEMATIC MONTAGE PLAY	55
Lesson C1: Selecting the Theme	56
Lesson C2: Exploring the Theme	59
Lesson C3: Inquiry Into Action	62
Lesson C4: Devising First Scenes	66
Lesson C5: Presenting First Scenes	68
Lesson C6: Devising Second Scenes	70

Lesson C7: Sequencing the Scenes	73
Lesson C8: Ren Run	76
Lesson C9: Devising an Opening	78
Lesson C10: Devising an Ending Part 1	81
Lesson C11: Devising an Ending Part 2	84
UNIT D: PROCESS III: DEVSING A CHARACTER-BASED PLAY	86
Lesson D1: Exploring the Theme	87
Lesson D2: Creating a Central Question and Character	89
Lesson D3: Creation of a Relationship Web and Scene Cards	94
Lesson D4: Sharing Research.....	100
Lesson D5: Devise First Scenes	101
Lesson D6: Presenting First Scenes	103
Lesson D7: Generate Additional Material	105
Lesson D8: Sequencing the Material.....	108
Lesson D9: Devising Ensemble Work.....	110
UNIT E: THE REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE PHASE	112
Rehearsal and Performance Overview	113
Lesson E1: Developing Scenes (intended for Processes II & III)	118
Lesson E2: Devising Transitions	121
Lesson E3: Costumes/ Props	124
Lesson E4: Rehearsal/ Dress Rehearsal	126
Lesson E5: Final Performance	128
Lesson E6: Reflection.....	130
APPENDICES	131
Appendix A: “Ways I Can Contribute” Worksheet.....	132
Appendix B: 7 Steps for Devising a Scene Worksheet.....	133
Appendix C: Acting Basics Worksheet.....	135
Appendix D: Role-on-the-Wall Worksheet (detailed)	136
Appendix E: Role-on-the-Wall Worksheet (Simple)	137
Appendix F: 3-2-1 Bridge Worksheet.....	138
Appendix G: Play Theme Discussion Worksheet (Individual).....	139
Appendix H: Play Topic Discussion Worksheet (Group)	140
Appendix I: Reading and Interpreting Images Worksheet	141
Appendix J: Peer Feedback Worksheet	143

Appendix K: Research Task Cards	144
Appendix L: Plot Structure Diagram	145
Appendix M: Color — Symbol — Image Worksheet.....	146
Appendix N: Post-Devising Reflection Worksheet.....	148
Appendix O: Teacher Reflective practice.....	149
Appendix P: Rehearsal & Performance Phase Planning Sheet	150
Appendix Q: Additional Drama Conventions, Techniques, & Ideas	152
Appendix R: Bibliography, Resources and Acknowledgements	157

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You have decided to embark on the challenging yet highly rewarding adventure of devising theatre with young actors. Devising is a dynamic process where a group of actors collaboratively build an original play from scratch. The creation of the play is a rich learning experience that is driven by active exploration, experimentation, inquiry, and meaning-making.

The benefits of devising are immense! First of all, it is a method that empowers **all** cast members. Since there is no inherent casting hierarchy, it invites every actor to contribute equally to the creation of the play. Each participant has the opportunity to share their own unique voice, ideas, and talents. When skillfully facilitated, a safe, non-judgmental environment is fostered where all ideas are initially accepted and validated. Participants gradually trust more in themselves, more in their creative abilities, and ultimately, more in the collective power of the group. Devising fosters the “4 C’s” of Twenty-First Century Learning: Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication and Collaboration.

Devising is different from group playwriting in that the actors **actively explore** the play’s key themes through improvisation-based activities. The dramatic material, including the dialogue, is generated through structured improvisations. Afterward, the dramatic material is sequenced and then crafted into a script. In addition, devising is typically focused on exploring and understanding universal human concepts rather than on perfecting narrative skills.

Devising is different from performing scripted plays in that from the outset, the final product is unknown. This open-ended aspect of devising can make it daunting for directors, especially if they have never devised plays before, have tight deadlines, or are working with young and inexperienced performers. However, rest assured, devising is not one big chaotic free for all! Like performing scripted works, the director needs to plan and structure the rehearsal time properly, research, and reflect upon what worked and what could be improved upon after every rehearsal. Devising also differs from performing scripted plays in that since the material is discovered and generated during the process, the rehearsal period is more condensed. More time will be spent on exploring themes and generating material than on developing acting technique.

"The playbuilt play reinforces the idea we are all creative beings,
that everyone has ideas, and collectively that we are strong."
- Carole Tarlington & Wendy Michaels

Why I Wrote This Book

This book was written to provide practical processes for directors newer to devising who are working with performers aged 8-14. Although there is literature available on devising theatre with older teens and adults, there are few books published that provide step-by-step processes for younger actors.

In my experience, I found my initial devising experiences to be terrifying! At graduate school, I had acquired knowledge and strategies on how to facilitate devising with older actors. However, I lacked clear frameworks and strategies that would realistically work for less experienced devisers. In my opinion, young devisers, as well as directors newer to devising, benefit from more structure. For example, with cooking, first, you learn to make a dish by following a recipe. Then once you've done that, you have an understanding of how things work, and you are in a position to play with the ingredients to create your own flavors. To allow you to focus on implementation, I have laid out three processes in a step-by-step format. Just like the actors, you will get on your feet, try out techniques, and learn as you go! Although there is no one correct way to devise theater with actors, my hope is that you will use these processes, tips, and supporting materials as starting places to ultimately empower your own confidence, creativity, and intuition.

How to Use This Book

Before beginning any devising process, it is essential that your group can work together as an effective ensemble. I recommend with all casts that you begin with **The Foundations**. Laying the proper groundwork ensures the right environment for group safety. The actors need to trust each other enough to feel secure in taking creative risks. Without a cohesive ensemble, you may find devising to be more chaotic than adventurous. These first steps will help your cast to establish ground rules, listen to each other, discuss ideas, and play together through drama activities.

Once your group can effectively work together, you can begin one of **The Processes**. If you have never devised before, I strongly recommend reading through the entire book prior to selecting a process. Since devising involves a journey into the unknown, you will want to make sure that you are well equipped with all of your tools to help you confidently lead your group through uncharted territories.

The 3 Processes are presented in order of development. **Process I** is Devising from a Story and is intended for ages 8-11. **Process II** is Devising from a Theme: Montage Play. A montage play does not have a traditional narrative structure, it is a collage of theme-related pieces strategically woven together to convey meaning to the audience. The montage play process is

recommended for ages 11-14. **Process III** is Devising a Character-Based Play and is geared for ages 12 and up.

Once your cast has completed exploring, generating the material, and writing the script draft, move on to **The Rehearsal Phase**. You will find lessons organized sequentially here, some intended for different processes. Once the play is fully rehearsed, you're ready for **The Performance Phase**. I have also included helpful tips, worksheets, additional drama conventions and reflection ideas in the appendices.

“The devising process is always an exploration of the human experiences suggested by the theme. Think of it as a journey towards understanding the experiences, through to organizing your discoveries and ideas into a communicable form for others”
(Advanced Drama and Theatre Studies, Neelands & Dobson, 2008. p. 249)

Your Role as the Facilitator/Director

Before setting off on your devising adventure, it's helpful to reflect upon your directing style. Are you the type of director who pre-blocks every action? How comfortable are you with uncertainty? How do you navigate sharing decision-making with the actors? How might you maintain control yet also provide space for student voice and choice? No matter what your regular style of directing is, embracing the concept of **actors as co-creators** is key in devising.

Since the first stages of devising are process-driven, I recommend shifting your perspective from acting as a director to acting as a **facilitator** from the outset. As much as possible, you will guide the actors to devise the play by providing structure, drama conventions and by asking questions. One important facilitator objective is to empower the actors' own decision-making rather than directly telling them what to think or do.

Since the final phase of devising moves into the rehearsal and performance of the play, you will also need access to your director's hat. You will need to apply the same skills and competencies as when producing a scripted play for performance with young people.

As a **facilitator**, your objectives are to guide the group to:

1. Create a safe, non-judgmental environment
2. Work together as an ensemble
3. Explore key themes through drama conventions & inquiry
4. Generate material for the play

5. Structure the material into a script draft

Once the script is crafted, your objectives as the **director** are to:

6. Finalize script edits
7. Coach acting
8. Refine transitions & blocking
9. Organize production elements
10. Organize the performance

TIP: Text written in italics suggests how I would specifically communicate ideas and instructions to students.

Teacher Reflective Practice

A skilled devised theatre facilitator can either tighten or loosen their grip on the leadership role to best serve the specifics of the group. It takes **practice, patience, and reflection** to learn how to negotiate this tricky balance! I highly recommend keeping a journal and scheduling time for teacher reflective practice after every rehearsal.

Here are a few guiding questions:

- When did I successfully empower student voice and choice?
- What strategies did I use to achieve this?
- When was it necessary to offer more structure or guidance?
- What moments were challenging?
- What could be improved upon for the next rehearsal?

“Patience is a key quality in devising work.”
- Jonathan Neelands & Warwick Dobson

Lesson Activity Overview

UNIT A: THE FOUNDATIONS		
<p><u>Lesson A1: Establish Guidelines</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define “devising” • Likes/Dislikes • Create a Cast Contract • Create a Cast Talking Stick 	<p><u>Lesson A2: Ensemble - Sharing Power</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define “ensemble” • Keep the Balloon Up • Group Mirror • Group Pictures • Group Environments 	<p><u>Lesson A3: Taking Risks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shake It Out on “7” • Clap Around the Circle • Sound Wave • Stomp/Clap/Name/Gesture • Creating a Company Name • Creating a Company Cheer
<p><u>Lesson A4: Group Storytelling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clap Across the Circle • Sentence of a Story • Telling Anecdotes • Still Images • Carousel Theatre 	<p><u>Lesson A5: Intro to Devising</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rainstorm • Create an Original Soundscape • Inventor • One Minute Pantomimes 	
UNIT B: PROCESS 1: DEVISING FROM A STORY		
<p><u>Lesson B1: Exploring the Story’s Narrative</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing Objects • Story Whoosh! • Story Around the Circle 	<p><u>Lesson B2: Exploring Settings Part 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exaggeration Walks • Visualizing Contrasting Environments • Collective Drawings 	<p><u>Lesson B3: Exploring Settings Part 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Are You Doing? • Soundscapes • Tapping In • One Minute Settings
<p><u>Lesson B4: Exploring Characters Part 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass the Statue • Identifying the Characters • Character Walk-Abouts 	<p><u>Lesson B5: Exploring Characters Part 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character Dance • Yes! Let’s... • Role-on-the-Wall • Teacher-in-Role Hot Seating 	<p><u>Lesson B6: Exploring Conflict Part 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gallery Walk - Role-on-the-Wall • Taking Sides • Carousel Theatre - Moments of Conflicts • Character Hot Seating • Building a Bridge
<p><u>Lesson B7: Exploring Conflict Part 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Columbian Hypnosis • Rumor Mill • Alter-Ego • Conscious Alley • Cross-Cutting • Meetings • Casting Wishes 	<p><u>Lesson B8: Voice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxation Exercise • Connect Body & Voice • Voice Exploration • Tongue Twisters • Read the Script • Pair Practice • Group Share 	<p><u>Lesson B9: Vocal Reactions & Sound Effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling Movement & Sound • Vocal Reactions • Foley Artist Pantomime • Adding Sounds to the Script
<p><u>Lesson B10: Blocking Rehearsal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Block the Play • Narrative Pantomime • Narrative Pantomime Swap • Still Image Series • Night at the Museum 		

UNIT C: PROCESS II: DEVISING A THEMATIC MONTAGE PLAY		
<p><u>Lesson C1: Selecting the Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five Things • Brainstorming Quick Writes • Sharing Ideas • Devising a Pitch • Pitching Themes • Voting • Defining Devising Goal 	<p><u>Lesson C2: Exploring the Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image Lure • Wordscape • Theme Anecdotes • Carousel Theatre 	<p><u>Lesson C3: Inquiry Into Action</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essence Machines • Chalk Talk • Creating Still Images • Carousel Theatre
<p><u>Lesson C4: Devising First Scenes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound Wave - Theme • Developing Still Images Into Scenes 	<p><u>Lesson C5: Presenting First Scenes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Are You Doing? Theme! • Scene Practice • Presenting the Scenes 	<p><u>Lesson C6: Devising Second Scenes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitty Wants a Corner • Creating a Mind Map • Determining Second Scenes • Devising Second Scenes • Performing the Scenes
<p><u>Lesson C7: Sequencing the Scenes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound Wave - Theme • Sequencing the Material • Beginning, Middle, and End • Sequencing the Scenes in Groups • Sharing the Sequencing 	<p><u>Lesson C8: Ren Run</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stage Direction Game • Ren Run 	<p><u>Lesson C9: Devising an Opening</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick Writes • Developing One-Liners for Performance
<p><u>Lesson C10: Devising an Ending Part 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement Around the Circle • Big/Tiny/Twisted • Deep Listening • Connect with the Lyrics • Bodystorming • Song Analysis 	<p><u>Lesson C11: Devising an Ending Part 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement Around the Circle • Creating Collective Images • Devise Choreography for the Choruses • Devise the “C” Section • Devise a Strong Ending Image • Putting It All Together 	
UNIT D: PROCESS III: DEVISING A CHARACTER-BASED PLAY		
<p><u>Lesson D1: Exploring the Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gallery Walk - Theme Quotes • Dramatic Presentation of Quotes • Exploring Characters - Still Image Into Actions 	<p><u>Lesson D2: Creating a Central Question and Character</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essence Machines • Create a Theme Pie Chart • Develop a Research Question • Create a Protagonist • Role-on-the-Wall 	<p><u>Lesson D3: Creation of a Relationship Web and Scene Cards</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character Walk • Create a Relationship Web • Generate Scene Cards • Research Tasks
<p><u>Lesson D4: Sharing Research</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Columbian Hypnosis • Present Research Assignments 	<p><u>Lesson D5: Devise First Scenes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sculptor and Clay • Casting • Role-on-the-Wall • Devise Scenes 	<p><u>Lesson D6: Presenting First Scenes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitty Wants a Corner • Presenting Scenes

<p><u>Lesson D7: Generate Additional Material</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zip-Zap-Zop • Superhero Zip-Zap-Zop • Devise Additional Scenes • Present & Record Material 	<p><u>Lesson D8: Sequencing the Material</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Elements of Plot • Sequence Scenes • What's Missing/What's Not Needed • Devise Missing Pieces • Writing the Script 	<p><u>Lesson D9: Devising Ensemble Work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devise Bookend Movement Pieces • Devise Ensemble Roles in Scenes • Devise a Greek-Style Chorus
--	---	---

Below are 3 sample lesson plans from
Unit C: Devising from a Theme.

Lesson C1: Selecting the Theme

OBJECTIVE: The actors will collectively brainstorm and vote on one theme of interest.

MATERIALS:

- Talking stick
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Devising Journals
- Pencils

WARM-UP: Check-in Circle (5 min)

How are you feeling? What's something that's important to you?

WARM-UP: Five Things (5 min)

- Ask the actors to stand in a circle.
- Teach the cast the following chant: “Fi-ve Things, Five Things, Five Things, Five Things, Fi-ve Things!” While reciting it, ask the actors to pat their thighs to reinforce the rhythm of the words.
- Once the cast can successfully perform the chant synchronized, assign a leader to start the activity.
- Explain that the leader will make eye contact with another actor across the circle, say their name, and give them a category. For example: “Jon, name five things in your locker.”
- The receiver of the category states 5 things as quickly as possible without editing. After each thing, the cast chants the number. For example, the selected person: “a rotten banana” cast: “one!,” selected person: “the math test I failed,” cast: “two!” . . .
- Once the cast has chanted “five!,” The cast repeats the initial “Fi-ve Things” chant and continues the activity until all cast members have participated.

DISCUSSION: Montage Play (5 min)

Explain to the cast that today they are going to brainstorm themes of interest in small groups.

Tell them that ultimately the cast will select one theme to devise a thematic montage play.

Explain that a **montage play** is a collage of scenes, monologues, spoken word and movement pieces without a story narrative. The play will focus on exploring different aspects of the theme.

The focus will not be on creating a linear plot structure. Propose: *Have you seen a movie or play before that does not have a traditional plot structure? Why might playwrights create a play in this manner?*

ACTIVITY: Brainstorming Quick Writes (6 min)

Have the actors find their own space. To promote relaxation, lead them through a few deep breaths. Hand out the Play Theme Discussion Worksheet found in Appendix H. Give them five minutes to answer the following questions:

- What do you wonder about?
- What do you care deeply about?
- What are three things about being human that you find challenging or confusing?
- What are the three things you think are most challenging for society?

ACTIVITY: Sharing Ideas (15 min)

- Divide the class into groups of four
- Ask each member to share their prompt responses with their group. Remind the cast that their job is to practice listening and accept all ideas without judgment.
- Once everyone has completed sharing, give each group 7-10 minutes to discuss the following three questions:
 - *What themes interest all of us?*
 - *Why is each of these themes worth exploring further?*
 - *What themes would an audience care to view a play about? Why?*
- Based on their responses, ask each group to decide on one strong theme to pitch to the other cast members.

“There are no wrong choices; just strong choices.”
- Jeannine Profeta

ACTIVITY: Devising a Pitch (7 min)

Ask the groups to create a one minute creative “pitch” to sell their theme. Encourage them to involve all members in selling the idea in a theatrical way. Project or write the following questions:

- *Why is this theme of interest to your group?*
- *Why do you think the cast should create a play on this topic?*
- *Why would an audience care about seeing a play on this topic?*

TIP: Young actors will often want to jump to conclusions to pre-determine the plot or genre. Gently redirect them to focus on selecting a compelling topic of interest for exploration. Explain that in this play, the focus is on exploring the topic and that the sequencing will be determined later.

ACTIVITY: Pitching Themes (10 min)

One at a time, invite each group to present their topic. Write the proposed topics on chart paper for the entire group to view.

ACTIVITY: Voting (5 min)

After each group has pitched their topic, conduct a whole group silent vote. Ask the actors to close their eyes and raise

TIP: If students are struggling, remind them that drama is about human relationships and conflict. For first time devisers, I also recommend guiding them to select a topic of which they have prior knowledge or experience.

their hands for their preferred theme. Narrow the selections down to two, then conduct one more silent vote to determine the devising theme. If the group is unable to reach an agreement I recommend guiding the group to consider how they might weave the themes together.

ACTIVITY: Defining Devising Goal (5 min)

Now that the cast has identified the theme of exploration, ask them to clearly state the theme and define its importance. Write their statements on poster board:

1. Our chosen theme is _____.
2. This theme is worth exploring because _____.
3. The audience should care about this theme because _____.

CHECK-OUT CIRCLE: (3 min)

What is one image connected to our chosen theme that comes to mind?

STUDENT HOMEWORK:

Tell the class to be prepared to share a two to three minute anecdote connected to the chosen theme at the next class. They may select a story from their own lives, from the life of a family or friend or from the media.

Lesson C4: Devising First Scenes

OBJECTIVES:

- The groups will develop their still image and caption into a short scene through a step-by-step process.

MATERIALS:

- Chart paper of interpretations from the last session
- Markers
- Pencils
- Copies of the 7 Steps for Devising a Scene Worksheet (Appendix B). Print one for each of the groups that the class formed in the last lesson.

WARM-UP: Check-In Circle (5 min)

How are you feeling? What is one thing that you're excited about?

WARM-UP: Sound Wave: Theme (5 min)

- Gather the cast in a circle. Ask one person to create an exaggerated movement with an accompanying sound. Each subsequent actor performs the same movement and sound one after another in a wave-like fashion around the circle. Perform a few rounds of this until the cast appears warmed-up in their bodies and voices.
- Next, repeat the following activity and connect it to the theme: *“What does [theme] look and sound like?” What does [theme] feel like? How might you show [theme] really exaggerated in your body and voice?* Encourage the actors to have some fun and experiment with this. Remind them to do, not think.

ACTIVITY: Developing Still Images Into Scenes (35 min)

- Ask the cast to assemble with their group from the last session.
- Explain to the cast that today they will devise their still images into two to three minute scenes through structured improvisations.
- Provide each group with a “Chalk Talk” poster from the previous lesson and a 7 Steps for Devising a Scene Worksheet (Appendix B)
- Ask them to work through the steps sequentially. Older students can move through the steps at their own pace while you simultaneously circulate and offer guidance. For younger actors, it can be helpful to provide time restrictions for each step and to have the cast work through them at the same time. This will ensure that the groups stay engaged, accountable and on task for each step.

“The teacher needs to be active and mobile in the room, facilitating the drama work as it emerges being leaderly but not directing it.”
- Christine Hatton & Sarah Lovesy

- Circulate among the groups and if appropriate, offer guidance. Remember that the focus should be on their process. Allow them space to work through the scene themselves without over-imposing.
- Collect the worksheets and ask the cast to gather in a circle for check-out.

CHECK-OUT CIRCLE: (10 min)

What are two things that worked well in your rehearsal? What's one thing that was tricky?

What's one thing to improve upon?

Lesson C9: Devising an Opening

OBJECTIVE: The cast will be guided to devise an impactful opening sequence.

NOTE: Now that the main scenes have been devised, the next step is to create a strong beginning. There are several ways this can be achieved. For beginning devisers, I recommend developing one-liners from quick writes. This activity is inspired by Carole Tarlington & Wendy Micheal's techniques in *Building Plays*. If your cast is large, you may require additional rehearsal time. Alternative ideas for devising openings are found in Appendix Q.

TEACHER'S PREP:

Prepare a list of open-ended statements connected to the theme. Make copies of these one-liner sheets for each student. For example, in a play with the theme of rumors, these statements might be:

- Rumors are...
- Rumors happen when...
- When I hear rumors, I...
- When I spread rumors, I...
- At school, rumors...
- On social media, rumors...
- In society, rumors...

MATERIALS:

- Video recording device
- Prepared one-liner sheets
- Pencils
- Speaker for soft focus music
- Optional: stage furniture (rostrum boxes or chairs)

To maximize time, omit a Circle Check-In. Begin the class by playing soft focus music and inviting the actors to find their own space around the room.

WARM-UP: Quick Writes (15 min)

- Invite the actors to find their own space around the room. Play soft music and engage them in a breathing exercise. Once the group appears relaxed and centered, read through each question and pause. Invite them to silently reflect on their answers without judgment.
- Next, provide each student with a sheet of paper with the questions on them and a pencil. Ask them to sit up and now to quickly write their responses without editing. Tell them that their answers will be kept anonymous so they can respond truthfully. Ask the students not to put their names on their papers. Once they are finished, they should hand them to you faced-down.

- Shuffle the papers and distribute one to each student. Ask them to silently read through the responses and select one that they feel is powerful. Tell them to rehearse speaking the line aloud.

ACTIVITY: Developing One-Liners for Performance (35 min)

Once you have determined the one-liners, the next steps are to devise the following:

- A) The physical form (blocking) of the actors
- B) The speaking sequence
- C) Individual movements
- D) Group reactions

- Begin recording video.
- First, invite the actors to create a whole group stage picture. Depending on the theme, guide them to consider using stage furniture, levels (sitting, standing, laying down, kneeling, etc.), and their physical proximity to each other. *How can you use the stage to show the theme? Where might you position yourselves to show the theme?*
- Next, sequence the speaking of the one-liners by randomly assigning a number to each actor. Rehearse the one-liners vocally until the sequence flows smoothly.
- After sequencing, ask the actors to create a physical shift for their line. The movement expression should be motivated by the line's meaning: *How can you show the line's meaning in your body?* This could be in the form of a shift in body position (sitting to standing), a gesture, movement or moving to a new location. Invite all the actors to simultaneously rehearse their one-liners and experiment with various physical shifts for one or two minutes. Next, rehearse the sequence incorporating the chosen physical shifts. Take a moment to reflect using these questions: *What worked well? How might we strengthen this piece?* Consider the students' suggestions and guide them to make adjustments.
- Once the stage picture, sequencing and individual physical shifts have been clearly established, add group reactions. First, ask the group to express vocal and physical reactions after each one-liner. *Which reactions were most effective? Shall we use a reaction after every one-liner? After only certain one-liners?*

***TIP:** In some cases, it's helpful to suggest types of reactions to the cast. For example, in a play about rumors, the devised one-liners were increasingly exaggerated bits of gossip. Since the actors' reactions to each line were almost all the same, to prompt variety, I provided specific direction. I suggested that the first reaction demonstrated receiving a "juicy" text, the second reaction showed sending a text back, the third reaction exhibited connecting with others' (in person, not virtually) over hearing the information, and the fourth reaction would be a unified exclamation (i.e., "OMG! No Way!")*

CHECK-OUT CIRCLE: (10 min)

What's something that surprised you during today's lesson? How has your understanding of the theme developed today?

STUDENT HOMEWORK (Optional):

Tell the cast that at the next rehearsal they will devise a full ensemble movement piece to end the play. Invite them to contribute a song stimulus connected to the theme. Ask them, *Do you know a song that expresses the feeling of the theme?* Alternatively, you can assign this task to an individual or pair of students. Ask the student(s) to share their selection with you prior to the next rehearsal so you have time to prepare.

Appendix B: 7 Steps for Devising a Scene

Worksheet

Group member names: _____

Theme: _____

Research question: _____

STEP 1: As a group, determine the building blocks of your scene:

- The Event (what is happening)
- The Purpose (why is it important / how is it connected to the theme)
- The Setting (where & when):
- The Characters (who):
- Their Relationship (how are they connected):
- The Conflict (what is the clash or struggle):

STEP 2: Recreate your original still image and restate the caption. Improvise the scene by incorporating the above information. Focus your attention on how the characters act and react to each other.

STEP 3: With your group, determine the beginning, middle and end. Devise 4 images: (1) Beginning (2) Conflict (3) Something that happens (4) Ending

Practice moving between the images in creative ways. Write down two discoveries made.

-
-

STEP 4: Rehearse the scene and improvise the dialogue. Continue to focus your attention on how the characters act and react to each other.

STEP 5: Slowly work through any moments that feel confusing to make the story clearer.

STEP 6: Rehearse the scene a few more times until you feel confident enough to perform it for the cast.

What are two things that worked well?

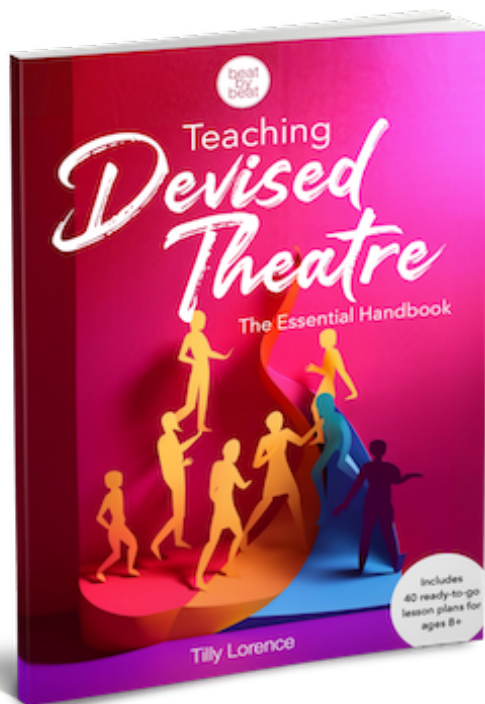
-
-

What's one thing your group would like to develop further?

-

STEP 7: Perform your scene. Celebrate your progress! Write any helpful feedback notes from the cast or your teacher here:

Download your copy of *Teaching Devised Theatre* today!



- 166-page eBook with 41 step-by-step lesson plans
- Instant download (PDF)
- A lifetime license to print/copy for personal classroom use
- A 30-day no-risk guarantee!

[Add to cart.](#)