

A SAMPLING OF
A SENSE OF
WONDER
A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO
DRAMA IN EDUCATION
TED O'REGAN

DRAWINGS BY
JOHN O'REGAN

This short sample consists of Ted's Introduction, the first Session and a short playlet which is referred to in the Session. To order the book, please visit The Liffey Press website at www.theliffeypress.com.

INTRODUCTION

I AM A DRAMA TEACHER. Recently, I was meeting a class for the first time. I asked them what drama meant to them, and they came up with words like *stage, TV, plays, acting*. I said that drama to me was a serious business which helped people to understand themselves, and other people, better.

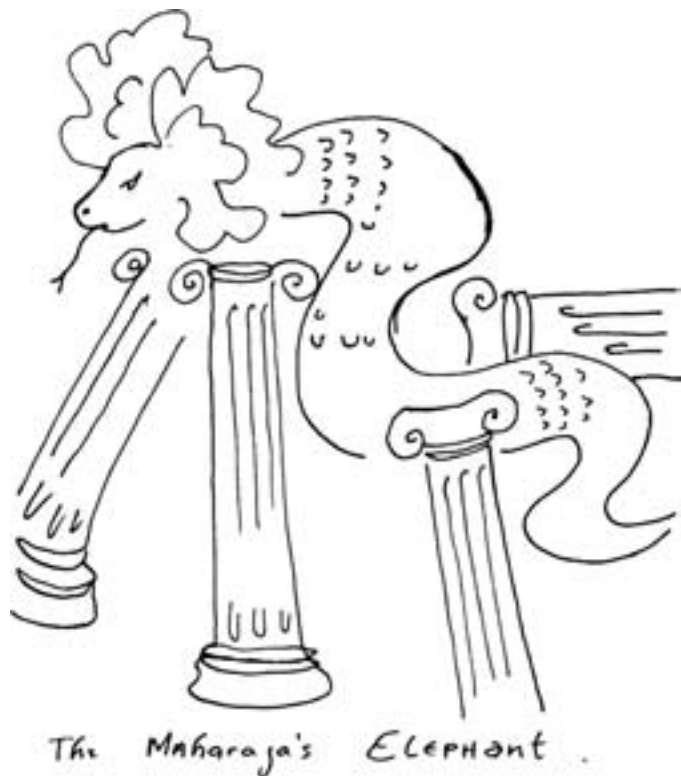
I recalled the old story of the Maharajah who received a present of the first elephant in India. He did not want other people to see his elephant, as then all his rival maharajahs would want one. He would let people into the elephant's room only when there was complete darkness. They had only the sense of touch with which to identify the beast.

The first person into the room got as far as the elephant's trunk. He rushed out and described the elephant as being like an enormous snake. The second felt the elephant's ears, which he described as being like large cabbages. The third man (women were not allowed to participate in those days) felt the elephant's legs and came out in awe to say that the beast must be as big as a temple as it had four large pillars to support it.

The people were very confused by these conflicting descriptions, and they went to consult a wise man in the hills. He said he could not describe the beast, as he had never seen one. He had, however, invented

special eyeglasses which could enable one to see in the dark, and he gave a pair to the people. When they got back, they begged the Maharajah to let them return to the elephant's room, and, when he agreed, they were able to observe the elephant through the special glasses. The people were thrilled. They spread the news, and now there are lots of elephants all over India. I told the class that drama could resemble those spectacles by enabling people to become aware of things from a new point of view.

(In Session 4 I will show how I elaborated this theme with the class.)



We all have special moments in our lives that leave us filled with awe, with a sense of wonder. Some years ago, in early May, I went with a group of enthusiasts to the Burren in County Clare to witness an annual phenomenon—the blooming of the blue gentian. True to form, in crevices of the limestone, the alpine plant appeared, a tiny flower with the most exquisite shade of blue I had ever seen. It was a moment of wonder, a moment of growth.

Most people, I am sure, would like to be agents of growth in themselves and others, and creative drama is one device which can help people to attain this end. It is only one device, I hasten to add, among many others, and a device which I have been trying to come to grips with and refine for most of my life. In my case I have read widely, copied shamelessly, invented occasionally, failed frequently and prayed constantly. In short, my career as a drama teacher has been a case of “something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue (as in gentian)”.

This book is based on a series of classes that, with the assistance of my colleague Ollie Breslin of Waterford Youth Drama, I presented to a group of childcare workers in Waterford. It is aimed at the youth leader rather than the drama teacher, hence an emphasis on the practicalities of running a session.

Each session is presented in two sections; an **Introductory Section** on the theoretical background is followed by a **Sample Workshop** with practical exercises.

I have provided a book list at the end. These books have helped me over the years. Regrettably, some may now be out of print.

Except in a few instances the classes described are structured between warm-ups, games, exercises, mime, movement, tableaux, role-play, improvisation, reflection and meditation. Some people may like to work spontaneously with their groups. I have nothing against that, but I would urge leaders to learn the principles of drama first. There is enough material in each session to last at least two hours.

SESSION 1

DRAMA FOR JOE SOAP

JOE AND JANE SOAP are average people with no “highfalutin” notions about their artistic or intellectual capacities. They have no ideas about being actors, but they like a good story in play, book or film form. They never thought drama could be for them, but it is, it is.

I am indebted to Brian Way (*Development through Drama*) for laying out the six facets of the personality that can be enhanced through drama activity. This shows how the activity is accessible to all human beings.

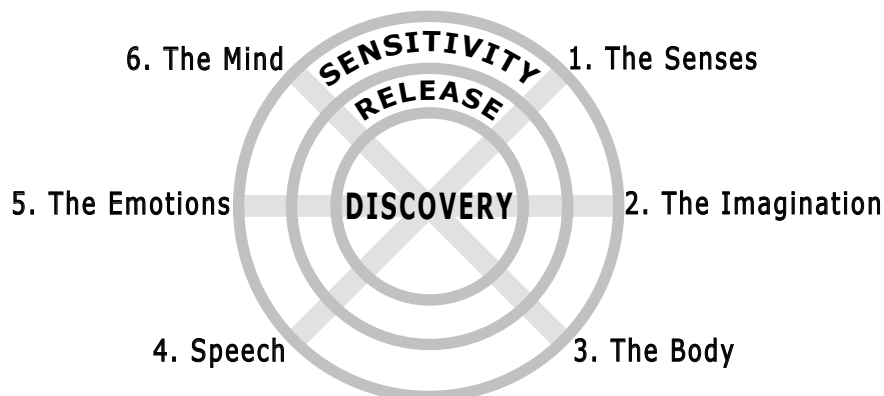
The concentric circles in the drawing below represent the person at various stages of development, from the discovery of his resources through personal release to sensitivity to others, within and without the personal environment. Drama can be used to focus on one or more of these facets in a challenging but non-competitive environment.



Person with highfalutin' notions

1. The Senses

The five senses are everyone’s birthright, but how often do we take note of them? The senses of taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing are blessed gifts, but we rarely take the time to be aware of them. Drama provides a special space in which these senses can be explored, tested and controlled.





2. The Imagination

Many people are afraid of imagination. People in authority often feel menaced by it. Imagination can be an unsettling factor in formal areas of life. Boats can be rocked, assumptions can be challenged, prejudices can be shown up for what they are. On a positive note, imagination can be a blessing that restores the drooping spirit and opens up new and creative vistas.

3. The Body

It is said that the human body contains up to 500 muscles but that in the course of a day the average person uses only about one quarter of them. Anyone who engages in an unaccustomed activity—such as

cycling, rowing, dancing—will be reminded the following day by aching muscles which have been drawn out of retirement. We communicate much more through posture, gesture and movement than we do verbally.

4. Speech

Language started with sounds. Stone age man (or woman) did not have the sophisticated methods of verbal communication that we possess today. It is said that many people have hidden vocabularies that often lie dormant until dramatic situations evoke verbal responses.

5. The Emotions

As human beings, we are all privy to the same emotions, good and bad. Drama provides a safe environment where people, often under the safety of a role, can explore these emotions, and, by so doing, learn to control them.

6. The Mind

A mind subjected to regular drama stimulation must of necessity be a livelier mind as a result. Drama does not focus exclusively on the intellectual or the academic. It is more concerned with developing the native wit and awareness of the average person.

RELAXATION AND CONCENTRATION

Of course, all activities must be imbued with the qualities of **relaxation** and **concentration**. We can all remember studying with intense concentration, but when we closed the book, we could hardly remember a thing. This is because one vital ingredient was missing—relaxation. We must first be relaxed before we can proceed in this activity, or indeed in any activity.

This session explores three fundamental methods of relaxation:

- Rhythmic Breathing
- Creative Use of Tension
- Auto Suggestion

Then we look at the virtues of **awareness** and **sensitivity**. Richard Reichert, in his book *Self Awareness through Group Dynamics*, says:

Sensory awareness is a basic part of being human. That is the main reason its nature and purpose deserve a place in any well-rounded education programme...

Each of us has far more capacity to receive sense stimuli than we realise. It is simply a question of cultivating the habit of awareness.

The result of a well-cultivated sensory awareness is threefold:

1. Daily life is more exciting, since sensory awareness can make the most routine tasks and situations opportunities for new discoveries.
2. Sensory awareness develops both creativity and curiosity, the two qualities needed to be intellectually alive.
3. Sensory awareness is the foundation for sensitivity to others.

TRUST

These considerations lead us to the matter of trust. Many relationships are blunted because trust has been lost. A definition of trust could be the ability to risk yourself, to put yourself in the hands of another, to put yourself at the service of another. Someone has to take the first step, physically or psychologically. In the Sample Workshop there are exercises given which involve trust, including a playlet that highlights the theme of trust, or, more accurately, that of mistrust.

A useful exercise here can be the non-directive leading of discussion after the reading of the play. The leader must be keenly aware of the direction that the discussion takes. Sample questions are given, but it is better to go with the flow, to encourage the timid to contribute, to control the contributions of the loquacious and the know-all, and to be sensitive to the needs and problems of the group. Identification with the issue can be deep, so be careful not to stir up responses that you may find difficult to handle.



Person who has stirred up difficult Emotions.

SESSION 1 • DRAMA FOR JOE SOAP

SAMPLE WORKSHOP

OBJECTIVES:

- *To identify six aspects of the personality that can be enhanced through drama work*
- *To stress the importance of Relaxation and Concentration*
- *To focus on the themes of Awareness and Sensitivity*
- *To explore the need for Trust in relationships*
- *To practise Non-Directive leading of discussion*

1. Limber

Everyone rotates arms singly, together, in opposite directions. Move feet, legs, trunk in circles.

2. "Fruit Salad" Game

All sit in chairs in a circle. Every third person in the group is nominated as "Apple", "Pear" or "Banana". When fruit is called out, those with that description must change place. When "Fruit Salad" is called, everybody changes place.

3. Six facets of personality

The leader draws a chart on the blackboard showing the circle diagram with six facets of the personality. Have a short discussion on the six categories—the **senses**, the **imagination**, the **body**, **speech**, the **emotions**, the **mind**.

4. Relaxation and Concentration

The leader talks about the importance of **relaxation** and **concentration**, and three ways to relax:

a. Rhythmic Breathing: Draw in your breath at a moderate pace and hold for a count of (say) three. Exhale at the same pace and hold for a similar count. The regularity of the rhythm induces relaxation.

b. Creative Use of Tension:

- i. This exercise depends on the fact that every muscle in the body is countered by another muscle that pulls in the opposite direction. Stretch your right hand and arm to above your head. As you do so, create tension by making the opposing muscles compete. Shake. Return your hand and arm to your side in the same tense way. Shake. Repeat with your left hand and arm. Shake.
- ii. Screw up your eyes. Tense your jaw and neck. Relax.
- iii. Place the palms of both hands together. Press until strain is felt. Relax.
- iv. Grasp the wrists of both arms. Pull. Relax.
- v. Lift one leg forward from the knee, again using the tension created by opposing muscles. Repeat with the other leg.
- vi. Imagine you are in bare feet. Pick up imaginary marbles with clenched toes and place them in another spot.

c. Autosuggestion: "The Spiral of Light": Everyone sits. Make sure they are sitting in a posture which neutralises the centre of gravity, so there is no strain on any group of muscles. Ditto with head.

The leader speaks in a calm voice: "There is a light which is permanently lodged at the base of your spine. It revolves in a spiral and it is warm and relaxing. Spend a moment locating this light. Now make the light move up your spine, spiralling up in seven movements to the base of your neck: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. It is now at the base of your neck and is easing away strain that you may feel there. Make the light move out to your left shoulder. Now bring it down your left arm in two movements of three spirals each and lodge it in your wrist. One, two, three, one, two, three. Now from its base in the wrist let it out to each of the fingers in turn starting with the little finger: one, two, three, one, two, three. Bring the light back up the arm in two movements of three spirals each—one, two, three.."

Continue with the exercise until the light has been directed along the other arm to the fingers, then down the spine again and down the legs and feet until finally returning to its resting place at the base of the spine. Discuss the effect of the exercises: (a) Rhythmic Breathing, (b) Creative Use of Tension, (c) Auto Suggestion.

5. The Flop Dance

The class will now be ready again for physical action, so we will teach them the Flop Dance. (I claim to have invented it but there is no copyright!) The basic idea is that you stretch and flop as many parts of the body as possible. It is by no means graceful, but can be good fun. Play or sing a lively tune. Break into pairs and let each pair invent its own cooperative Flop Dance.

6. The Stage Fall

Now teach the class the Stage Fall. Everyone stands in a relaxed posture. The Stage Fall is done in three movements:

- Everyone falls onto their knees on a signal.
- They sit to the side, placing hands on the ground before them.
- They slide one arm along the ground, stretch out and place the head on the biceps muscle.

When this has been done several times, it may be speeded up so that it appears to be one seamless movement.

7. Awareness and Sensitivity: Sounds

The leader discusses **awareness** and **sensitivity**, concentrating on sounds. The class listens to sounds on three levels:

- Sounds heard inside the room. (Insist that no deliberate sounds are made)
- Sounds outside the room
- Personal sounds made by oneself (not deliberately)



Listen carefully to sounds on each level separately. Now the leader moves quickly from one level to another. Check with the group as to the quality of concentration.

8. Focus on one sound

Use imagination to elaborate on one sound heard and on a story which could be evolved from it.

9. Sensitivity exercise

All lie on the ground. "You are a prisoner in jail. You are lying on damp straw listening to the rats as they gnaw on the walls. You get up painfully and go to the door of your cell. You turn the handle and the door opens. There is the sound of distant voices. You edge your way carefully down the hall, stiffening whenever you hear

a sudden noise. As you move down the corridor you come to an intersection. Carefully you peep around the corner and you see two guards sitting at a table. One is reading the paper and the other gets up and moves off through a door to an outside yard..." Continue with the story ad lib. Watch for the involvement of the group.

10. In pairs

A is blind and B is sighted. B leads A around his living room at home, describing all the objects in the room—furniture, colours, etc. A listens and on a signal recaps all that he can remember of the description.

Discuss the quality of listening, factors helping and factors hindering, techniques used (if any).

A now tells B what he did since he got up the previous morning. Then B recaps.

11. Discuss Trust in Relationships

Exercise in pairs: A is sighted, B blind. B extends his hand, which A covers with his own hand. On signal, A leads B around the room being careful to avoid any bumps or collisions. Hand contact should be as light as possible. Discuss the experience and the level of trust involved. An interesting variation on this exercise is as follows:

B stands on his own in the room. On a signal, A goes to a new partner, being very careful not to reveal his identity. On a second signal, A leads new B around in absolute silence. The leader signals the end of the exercise, and B opens his eyes. Discussion can be most animated.

12. Reading

Read "Not Up to Standard" (see Appendix 1). The leader leads a discussion of the play, preferably ad lib, but the following points may help:

- What do you think of Brenda's mother's action?
- Were Brenda's friends right in their handling of the situation?
- Why is Brenda deceiving her mother?
- What do you think of Martin's attitude?
- Have young people too much money and freedom these days?
- Is Brenda's mother a snob?
- Are you a snob?

13. Role-playing

In pairs, role-play a conversation between Brenda and her mother when they meet later that day.

14. Reflect on and evaluate session

Discuss how many of the six facets of personality were affected during the class and in what way?

APPENDIX 1

NOT UP TO STANDARD

CAST:

Martin, age 21

Jim, age 20

Judy, age 17

Brenda, age 17

Mrs Power, Brenda's mother

SCENE: café**PROPS:** café table, three chairs

(Sitting round a café table are Martin, Jim and Judy. They are talking)

Martin: I thought Brenda said she'd come in today.

Judy: Patience, lover boy, I saw her in town with her mother. She'll take a while to get away.

Jim: I wonder what excuse she'll think of this time. Last time was rich. She said she had to see the teacher about extra study.
(Jim and Judy laugh)

Martin: It's alright for you to laugh, but she gets a terrible time off that old lady of hers. Imagine a grown-up girl being treated like a seven-year-old.

Jim: Ah, the mother will get sense one of these days. She'll have to, or poor Brenda will crack up.

Judy: Talk of the devil—here she comes.

(Enter Brenda, breathless)

Brenda: Mammy's gone to see Mrs. Byrne. She should be in there for at least half an hour. I told her I had some shopping to do, so we're meeting at the Clock Tower at 4.30.

Martin: Are you coming on Sunday?

Brenda: To Castletown? Of course I'm coming.

Martin: How will you get away?

Judy: Her mother thinks she's coming over to my house on Sunday.

Brenda: So I am too.

Martin: I hope she doesn't ring up, cause she's a suspicious old sausage... Sorry, Brenda.

Brenda: Well, she is my mother, after all, and she's not too bad. It's only that she's a terrible worrier, that's all.

Jim: She seems to be thriving on it.

Martin: Yes, and you're the one that's suffering.

Brenda: I'm not suffering.

Martin: Look at your fingernails!

Brenda: They were always like that. You're not so perfect either.

Jim: Hey, what's this? Judy and I didn't come here to be the audience at a lover's quarrel. We have to make arrangements for Sunday.

Brenda: I'll be at Judy's at about 11.30.

Jim: That's a bit early!

Martin: Early for you perhaps, but you'd better not be late. We should be left by mid-day. I'll bring a spare jacket and helmet for you, Brenda.

Brenda: Will we bring sandwiches?

Martin: No need. I have a couple of quid, got a bit of back money at the job. We'll stop in Kilmore for a few jars. The pubs should be just open.

Jim: There's a chip van in the square in Castletown. We could get a bite to eat before we go up to the field. The concert is starting at 2.30. The early groups are a bit 'cat' but the Kings should be on at about 4.30.

Brenda: I have to be home at 7 o'clock, or Mammy will be making enquiries.

Judy: I thought we were going to have a day out. Every bloody time your bloody mother puts a fly in the ointment.

Brenda: Maybe you'd prefer if I didn't go at all.

Martin: Cool it, you two. Here we go again. We are all as happy as anything until your mother is mentioned, and then we're at it hammer and tongs.

Brenda: My God, there she is. (*Mother passes outside the window and looks in*) She's seen us! Oh no! She's coming in! She'll kill me.

(*Mother enters*)

Mother: (*Icily*) Good afternoon. (*to Brenda*) Could I have a private word with you, Brenda? (*Brenda stands up. Martin catches her hand*) A private word, Brenda.

Brenda: I thought we were to meet at 4.30. It's only a quarter past four.

Mother: Brenda, I wish to speak to you in private.

Brenda: I know what you're going to say. Everyone here knows what you're going to say. Why don't you say it out loud? Then the whole world will know.

Martin: Steady, Brenda.

Mother: You must be this Martin fellow. I've heard about you. How old are you?

Martin: Twenty-one.

Mother: Twenty-one! And you're trying to go with my daughter—a mere slip of a girl of 17. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Martin: Mrs. Power, you may not have noticed it, but your "slip of girl" is a grown woman and is capable of making up her own mind about who she is to go with.

Mother: Shut your mouth, you ignorant boy. She is not going to go with you anymore.

Brenda: Mother!

Mother: Be quiet Brenda. If you wish to go out with somebody, why not pick a decent respectable boy, and not one that goes around on a motorbike. Mrs Byrne told me she saw the two of you on a motorbike a few days ago.

Martin: We were insured, if that's what's worrying you.

Mother: It's not what's worrying me. My family has standards, I'll have you know.

Martin: And I'm not up to standard?

Mother: Look, Brenda is doing the Leaving in a few weeks' time. She is supposed to be concentrating on her work. How can she concentrate if you're perpetually bothering her and distracting her?

Martin: Am I bothering you, Brenda?

Brenda: Of course not!

Mother: Where were you last night?

Brenda: I was in Martin's flat, if you must know.

Mother: In his flat?

Brenda: Yes, playing records. There was about half a dozen other people there too.

Mother: And how long has this been going on?

Brenda: I don't know, about four months.

Mother: Four months! Look, child, you're only 17 years of age. You're still under my care. I don't want you going around with every gurrrier and guttersnipe in town.

Martin: Now the truth is coming out. So that's what you think of me.

Mother: Where are you from? Nobody knows. Who's your father and mother? A mother is entitled to know these things.

Brenda: If you don't shut up for this instant...I'm leaving...and I won't be responsible for my actions.

Mother: *(Ignoring her)* I'll have you know my daughter was carefully reared, and she is going to University next year. So you and your riff-raff friends keep away from her, and don't be contaminating her.

Brenda: Mother, stop it, will you!! Stop it!!

Martin: *(Getting up, posh voice)* Goodness it's 4.30. I have an appointment with my dentist, and then I've got to consult my accountant, before I see the bank manager. Excuse me. Coming folks? *(Judy and Jim rise. They all move out)* See ya, Brenda. *(Exit)*

(Mother and Brenda look at each other. Strained silence)

Mother: We've missed the bus. We'd better wait for another one. Will you have a coffee?

Brenda: The coffee isn't up to standard. Martin, wait for me. *(Goes out)*

(END)