



STG Art Sessions

Character Detectives: Acting from the Inside-Out

Created by STG Teaching Artist: Mara Palma

This curriculum is tied to an interactive lesson plan:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IneAMdqTnQ&list=PLsWT392033WGtRE6crVRTzX-G7WNdBoSo&index=2>

Description: In this workshop, we will use the book, LA MARIPOSA by Francisco Jiménez as our “text” just like theater makers use a theater script as their “text.” We will learn ways that an actor can get to know a character from the inside out before playing them on-stage, and using guided activities, use our imagination to create details about that character.

Goal: to take students through a text-based and imagination-based preparation process an actor uses to get ready for a role

Grade(s) /Age(s): 4-6 / 9-12	Video Length: 20 min
Materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comfortable clothing• Notebook and writing utensil• Access to LA MARIPOSA by Francisco Jiménez	Space needs: Allow enough space for your arms to fully extend outward from your body.

INTRO:

Today, we will warm up our voices and bodies, create a character profile, and end with a physical activity that engages our imaginations. When an actor prepares to play a role, they become a character detective to find clues about a character and the story within the text.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE: If you haven’t already, please read the book and/or watch the recording of the book reading here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y00AgwmrnOo&list=PLsWT392033WGtRE6crVRTzX-G7WNdBoSo&index=1>

NEW LEARNING: An actor uses 3 tools when doing their theatre detective work...

- Their voice, Their body, Their imagination

WARM UP

Vocal and body ladder

Before we begin, actors typically do a warm-up before an audition, rehearsal, or performance. Just like an athlete who warms up their body in order to get ready for a race and prevent injury, an actor also warms up their voices, bodies, and imaginations to get ready for creative theater work! This warm-up is called a vocal ladder because we will be using each sound to move up our body, like climbing the rungs of a ladder.

“Zoom” - low to the ground - mixing a cauldron

“Whoa” - belly button - both hands on lower abdomen

“Shah” - diaphragm/below sternum - one hand front of body, one hand back of body

“Goh” - middle of chest - spear image, one hand shoots out front, one hand shoots out back

“Mmmah” - top chest/collarbone - swipe arms apart from center of chest to top of shoulders

“Fuhn” - front of lips - plosive, one hand from lips and moving outward

“Haahhh” - front of mouth/along jaw - spread hands like a net

“Bah” - middle of cheeks - hands from middle of cheeks outward

“Deh” - top of cheekbones - hands from top of cheekbones outward

“Payyy” - eyebrows - hands curved and move downward

“Kiehh” - middle of forehead - pointer finger move upward

“Rrreeeh” - crown of head - hand follows shape of a water spout

POST-ACTIVITY INQUIRY: What did it feel like to warm up your personal vocal ladder?

EXERCISES/ACTIVITIES

INTRO TO ACTIVITY: Character Profile

One of the first things actors do when they get a new script or play, is they want to know which character they are playing so that they can start doing detective work about the part they will play. This detective work includes looking up some information about their character and then using their imaginations to fill in some of the other details that they can't necessarily find in the script. Since you've already read the book or watched the recording we can jump right into character profiles. Let's begin by choosing one of the characters in LA MARIPOSA, like Francisco, Curtis, Miss Scalapino.

Write your answers to the following questions:

Name:

Age:

Describe your family:

What is your greatest wish in the world?

What is your greatest fear in the world?

What is your life motto, or slogan?

What is a secret you have?

What does my character say about themselves? Be a script detective here!

What do other characters say about me? Word/phrases are fine here!

What gets in the way of me getting what I want?

Once you can identify what gets in the way of your character, you have identified the obstacles, a fancy way of saying anything or anyone who gets in the way of your character.

You can pause this video while you think about and write down your answers. [PAUSE]

Using what you wrote for sentence #4, we're going to think about a character's objective, a fancy way of saying what a character wants in that moment or situation. Let's write your sentence together using this format:

My name is [CHARACTER] and what I want more than anything right now is to [VERB]

INQUIRY: Will you share with me what sentence you wrote about? [Pause to listen]

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT: Actors use their character's objective as a guide to understand their character, because it can tell you what a character will do to get their objective. If what I want more than anything right now is to drink water, in any situation, I will always try to find water and something to drink with! This internal desire can really help drive a character's actions in the play, and since an actor must step into a character's shoes, it will really help you with your acting choices in a performance.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: Character Biography with Physical Anchors

I want you to imagine you are getting to know the main character, so we will use the example of Francisco. You have gotten to think about some details of this character's life, sometimes called a character's backstory.

Now, I'm going to challenge you to use your imagination to think of more details which we haven't talked about yet, and you may have to create for yourself in your head. I'll ask questions, and once you have an answer in your head, don't say it out loud... but anchor that detail to a part of your body by touching it or giving it a gentle tap with your hand. Let each detail be anchored to a different part of your body.

Know that there is no right or wrong answer for this activity! The answer to one question you might choose to anchor in your elbow, but the next answer you might choose to anchor in your knee. Feel this out - you might think of the idea right in that spot.

Body Care/Modifications- I will be [seated/standing] for this exercise, but you can also be [seated/standing] for this. Always remember: Be gentle on your body, and take care of yourself. If anything doesn't feel good, go ahead and modify the movement until it feels good for your body.

What I had for breakfast was...

My favorite food is...

When I put on my new red hat, I thought...

When I was walking about from my house, I felt...

When I was on the school bus, I felt...

On the first day of school, I thought...

I saw the caterpillar and I felt...

My favorite part of the playground is...

When I wore the green jacket I felt...

The moment Curtis pushed me to the ground I felt...

When I saw the butterfly emerge, I thought...

When I won the drawing prize, I felt...

POST-ACTIVITY INQUIRY: What was it like to anchor your answers to a different part of your body?

CLOSING

One of the actors' tools is imagination, and in this activity, you're adding in another one of the actors' tools: the body! We are giving your imagination a place to "anchor" each detail you come up with about your character. You may even have heard someone tell you about "muscle memory": how riding a bike or doing a cartwheel, once you've done it, your body remembers the next time that you do that activity. Practice it enough times, and the activity will come more easily to you. So that's what we're doing here - we're using our imagination to come up with the details, and then using your muscle memory to help you remember those details. Great work!

During our session, you learned how to warm up with a vocal ladder, used your character detective skills to create a profile, and used your imagination and body to create a memory bank for a character. Give yourself a pat on the back for the wonderful work you've done!

Next up, if you had fun exploring LA MARIPOSA by Francisco Jiménez, you'll like the other videos in this series! You can visit the playlist for all of the LA MARIPOSA sessions here – <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLsWT392033WGtRE6crVRTzX-G7WNdBoSo>

Thank you for joining us, and you can learn more about us and our programs at www.stgpresents.org/artsessions

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK

We appreciate and welcome your feedback! You can share your experience from any of our pre-recorded video sessions with us in this anonymous survey - <https://www.tfaforms.com/4765455>

SHARE A PHOTO/VIDEO

If you tried any of these activities, please feel free to share a photo or a short video! We'd love to share what people are doing via our socials!

- Instagram @stgpresents
- STG facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/stgeducation>

ABOUT THE TEACHING ARTIST

Mara Elissa Palma



Mara Elissa Palma (she/her) is a teaching artist, writer, and multi-passionate person. Originally from the Philippines, she calls Seattle and Los Angeles home. Mara's teaching experience includes the Unusual Suspects Theatre Company, Center Theatre Group, Seattle Theatre Group, and Seattle Public Theater. She earned her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theatre Studies and Political Science at Wellesley College in Wellesley, MA. She is also a Creative Consultant, which means she helps aspiring artists how to figure out if a creative career is their calling in order to set up a firm foundation for a long fulfilling career, write their own hero's story, and learn how to have a productive conversation with family and friends. Connect with her: www.marapalma.com @marapalma.creative