

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Preface | 1 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| Part A — Basic Acting Skills | 5 |
| Chapter 1 | |
| Welcome to Drama | 7 |
| Life Values in Drama, Sports and World of Work | 8 |
| Chapter 2 | |
| Orientation: Body, Voice and the Senses | 12 |
| Warm-up Exercises | 12 |
| Relaxation | 13 |
| The Senses | 14 |
| Exploring the Stage Space | 17 |
| Remembering a Movement | 18 |
| Relating to Another Performer | 18 |
| Chapter 3 | |
| The Stage and Acting Terms | 21 |
| The Proscenium Stage | 21 |
| Stage Terms | 21 |
| Acting and Directing Terms | 23 |
| Directing Terms | 26 |
| Basic Guidelines for Traditional Stage Movement | 28 |
| Chapter 4 | |
| The Body | 31 |
| Exploring Body Movement | 31 |
| Pantomime | 34 |
| Stage Business | 37 |
| Charades | 40 |
| Chapter 5 | |
| The Voice | 45 |
| The Vocal Instrument | 45 |
| Eating, Speaking and Breathing | 46 |
| Four Ways to Change Sound and Tone | 48 |
| Rate, Pace, Tempo or Rhythm: “Pick It Up!” | 51 |
| Pronunciation and Diction | 54 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 6 | |
| Hamlet's Advice to the Players | 58 |
| Analyzing Hamlet's Advice | 59 |
| Audition Form | 63 |
| Chapter 7 | |
| Practical Skills and Considerations | 64 |
| Body and Voice | 64 |
| Emphasizing an Idea | 65 |
| Special Voice Skills | 66 |
| Entrances and Exits | 68 |
| Using a Telephone | 72 |
| Takes and Double-takes | 73 |
| Stage Fighting | 74 |
| Playing Love Scenes | 75 |
| Treating Mistakes as Normal | 75 |
| Chapter 8 | |
| Listening, Relating and Projecting | 78 |
| Listening and Relating | 78 |
| Thinking and Reacting | 80 |
| Listening and Relating on the Telephone | 83 |
| Including and Relating to Others: "Vibes" | 84 |
| Reacting and Responding | 85 |
| Relating and Projecting to an Audience | 86 |
| Actors' Relation to Each Other and the Audience | 90 |
| Projecting on Different Shapes of Stages | 91 |
| Part B — Preparing to Perform a Scene | 95 |
| Chapter 9 | |
| Improvisation I: An Introduction | 97 |
| Definition, Explanations and Value | 97 |
| Ways to Use Improvisation | 98 |
| Starting Points | 99 |
| Chapter 10 | |
| An Actor's Process | 109 |
| Finding, Creating, Memorizing and Rehearsing | 109 |
| The Class Presentation | 123 |

Chapter 11

| | |
|---|-----|
| Basic Blocking and Showing Relationships | 125 |
| Introduction | 125 |
| Territories and Home Bases | 126 |
| Simple Settings | 128 |
| Exploring Stage Positions and Character Relations | 130 |
| Movement | 133 |
| Sample Blocking Approach | 143 |

Part C — Techniques in Character Development . . . 163

Chapter 12

| | |
|--|-----|
| A Brief History of Modern Acting Theories | 165 |
| Theatricalism and Realism | 165 |
| Naturalism and Realism | 166 |
| Other Influences | 171 |
| Technique and Instinct | 174 |
| Looking Forward | 177 |

Chapter 13

| | |
|--|-----|
| Character Traits and Emotions | 179 |
| Character Traits | 179 |
| Emotions | 185 |
| Ambiguity | 191 |
| Aspects of The Method Explained | 192 |

Chapter 14

| | |
|--|-----|
| Images and Observations | 197 |
| Picturing Images | 197 |
| Picturing and Projecting Images | 198 |
| Using Costumes, Props and Makeup | 201 |
| Observing Animals and People | 203 |
| Observation Form | 207 |

Chapter 15

| | |
|---|-----|
| What Does Your Character Want? | 212 |
| Motivations, Intentions, Objectives and Subtext | 212 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 16 | |
| Types, Analysis and Representation | 223 |
| Character Types | 223 |
| Analyzing the Character | 224 |
| Defining the Character | 226 |
| Character Analysis Form #1: Given Circumstances | 228 |
| Similarities and Differences: You and Your Character | 229 |
| Imaginary Circumstances | 229 |
| Character Analysis Form #2: Imaginary Circumstances | 231 |
| Representation | 232 |
| Part D — The Playscript | 235 |
| Chapter 17 | |
| Elements and Structure of the Play | 237 |
| Introduction | 237 |
| Formal Elements of Drama | 237 |
| The Unities: Time, Place and Action | 241 |
| Structure of Drama | 241 |
| Chapter 18 | |
| Types and Styles of Drama | 247 |
| Introduction | 247 |
| Types of Drama | 248 |
| Styles of Drama | 254 |
| Modern Styles | 257 |
| Chapter 19 | |
| Improvisation II: Creating Your Own Scenes | 262 |
| Different Objectives | 262 |
| My Made-up Character Form | 266 |
| Part E — Film Acting | 277 |
| Chapter 20 | |
| Acting On-stage for an Audience | |
| Versus Behaving for the Camera | 279 |
| Show and Tell | 279 |
| Size of Performance | 280 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acting for Film: Body, Voice, Thoughts and Emotions | 281 |
| Relating to the Camera and Direction | 285 |
| Memorizing, Rehearsal and Continuity | 286 |
| Filming Conditions | 288 |
| The Director and Film Acting | 290 |
| Appendix | 295 |
| Curriculum Objectives in Drama | 295 |
| Comprehensive Objectives for Drama | 295 |
| Bibliography and Reading List | 297 |
| About the Author | 299 |

Illustrations:

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Scenes from The Odd Couple (female version)</i> <i>by Neil Simon</i> | 149 |
| <i>Scenes from Isn't It Romantic?</i> <i>by Wendy Wasserstein</i> | 150 |
| <i>Scenes from The Rainmaker by N. Richard Nash</i> | 151 |
| <i>Scenes from California Suite by Neil Simon</i> | 152 |
| <i>Scenes from Shadow Box by Michael Cristofer</i> | 153 |
| <i>Scenes from The Dining Room by A.R. Gurney, Jr.</i> | 154 |
| <i>Scenes from Taking Steps by Alan Ayckbourn</i> | 155 |
| <i>Scenes from The Effect of Gamma Rays on</i> <i>Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds by Paul Zindel</i> | 156 |
| <i>Scene from Lone Star by James McLure</i> | 157 |
| <i>Scene from Laundry and Bourbon</i> <i>by James McLure</i> | 157 |
| <i>Scenes from The Mousetrap by Agatha Christie</i> | 158 |
| <i>Scenes from Stepping Out by Richard Harris</i> | 160 |
| <i>Pictures of the theatre staff and set of All My Sons</i> ... | 161 |

Preface

For the Educator: The View Inside

I suppose it all began in Miss Bannon's fifth grade class. For some reason unknown even today, the school district of Tucson, Arizona decided to have every fifth grade class in town put on an improvised production of *Hansel and Gretel*. The plan for Sam Hughes Elementary was to have 5A present Act I, 5B Act II and 5C, Miss Bannon's fifth grade class, to present Act III. After everyone in the class improvised Hansel, I tried out. Acting was easy because I had been acting out movies for years by myself in my living room. I was cast as Hansel for Act III, the scenes where Hansel and Gretel are captured by the witch, held in a cage and fattened, and finally push her into the oven.

After practicing a whole semester for this twenty-minute improvisation we eventually presented the production for appreciative and doting parents at our own elementary school. It went well for this type of event and would have been fine if it had ended right there.

But no. The school district decided to take Act I from Carrillo Elementary, Act II from Roskrige and Act III from Sam Hughes and perform this improvised production of *Hansel and Gretel* in the Tucson High School football stadium on a warm night in mid-May! It was outdoors with microphones and the audience at least 50 yards away. And we never once rehearsed together!

Well, at this point in time I can only imagine how awful it must have been. I can also understand why the school district decided to abandon the whole project the following year and many years thereafter.

However, it didn't end there for me. I was very fortunate to live in the same town with Mary MacMurtrie, a well-known teacher of children's theatre. Since I had enjoyed playing Hansel, my parents signed me up for summer classes with Mary MacMurtrie's Children's Theatre. For three years I did poems and monologs in back yards and living rooms, radio dramas on Saturday mornings, one-act plays at local churches and full-length productions once a year in the spring at the Temple of Music and Art. It was a great experience and a wonderful way to spend grades six through nine.

After acting in more plays in high school, and then college, while I was majoring in psychology with a philosophy and history minor, I became serious about teaching drama as a lifetime career. This led to studying speech, drama and theatre at the University of Arizona, San Diego State College and Stanford University.

Upon earning my education degree, I had the opportunity to teach high school drama — only drama — in my own studio theatre for fourteen years. During this time I created countless acting exercises, directed many, many productions, wrote original scripts and published four short plays with Samuel French. Two of these, *Final Dress Rehearsal* and *Once Upon A Playground*, continue to be performed by numerous high schools and junior highs. Even more importantly, I had some wonderful students who have become lifelong friends.

When Tucson Unified School District expanded its arts programs, I had the privilege to serve as drama coordinator for the whole district for eight years. During this time I was able to develop curriculum materials and conduct workshops for teachers from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This also gave me the special opportunity to work with some excellent, highly qualified drama teachers in the nine high schools and sixteen junior highs in the district to create new exercises and activities for their classes.

Once, at a Thespian conference, when I was serving as moderator, some teacher asked about a particular subject on acting. I said, “I have four pages on that subject, and I will send them to you.” At that point another teacher, with whom I had worked frequently, spoke up and said, “He has four pages on everything.” As I smiled I realized that I perhaps had the makings of a whole drama textbook.

Moving to California, I served as artistic director of a community theatre in South San Francisco for six years. This allowed me to work with adult actors in the community, which was a slightly different, but an equally valuable and rewarding theatre experience. During this period I became a member of Dramatists Guild and the Screen Actors Guild.

Over the years, I’ve continued writing new exercises and activities for the classroom, and my collection of these materials has grown ever larger until they have presented somewhat of a storage problem. Since I almost never throw any of these away, I now have stacks and shelves and boxes and file cabinets full of games, activities, explanations and exercises on acting. I have written and collected these for years and years in the thought that I would someday take time out to actually write this textbook.

I feel truly fortunate to have had a variety of theatre and drama experiences. I just needed to decide which were the best of all these materials, then organize and unify everything into a cohesive textbook on acting for students in high school and college. The hardest part has been deciding on the optimum sequence and what *not* to include.

But now I’ve done it. This is the result. So, here ‘tis. I hope it’s helpful.

Introduction

Acting for Life: A textbook on acting is aimed at high school and college level drama students. It is designed in scope for both advanced students who want to improve their techniques and beginning students who want to explore the experience of acting and develop basic skills for the first time.

It is also for the English teacher who is assigned (or chooses) to teach drama and needs a variety of materials for acting, as well as for the experienced drama teacher with extensive training.

Through a chapter-by-chapter planned sequence of explanations, exercises and activities, the student can learn a variety of skills and techniques for acting and gain knowledge of related drama subjects. These step-by-step approaches offer the student a full range of experiences that should not only enhance acting abilities but also increase self-awareness and cooperation among classmates.

Beginning subject areas include: sense awareness, use of body and voice, Hamlet's advice to the players, improvisation, listening and relating to other actors, memorizing and rehearsing, basic blocking and character relations. Advanced chapters include character development with emphasis on character traits and emotions, images, establishing objectives and intentions, script analysis and acting for film.

Just as students take music classes in order to sing or learn to play an instrument, or take art classes in order to learn to draw or paint or sculpt, so too, students take drama classes in order to learn to act and play a wide range of characters.

Through the experience of playing characters in a variety of scenes, these exercises also offer drama's relation to life experiences that not only guide students into better understanding of some processes of acting, but also offer greater self-awareness and better understanding of others in a rapidly changing and ethnically diverse society.

While a great deal of thought has gone into the best sequence in which to present the material in this acting textbook, it is not necessarily an optimum approach for all classes on all levels of drama at all times. It was approached in terms of a natural progression of needed skills and a hierarchy of difficulty. But it is so interrelated that there are references in many chapters to other areas

that expand current ideas or are reminders to the actor of former material that reinforces the current activities.

Most of the material is highly accessible for all drama students. Some of the early explanations and exercises may seem too simple for older or advanced students while some later chapters may seem too difficult for younger students who are experiencing classroom acting for the first time. In all cases, the teacher needs to use discretion as to what is appropriate for a particular group and the order in which the material is presented.

There is no way to fully anticipate all the possible situations or variations of valid approaches in advance. Astute teachers will no doubt be able to find an optimum approach for their students to learn the joy of acting and self-discovery. *In acting, as in life*, the interaction of human relations experiences can offer enlightening insights for never-ending personal growth.