

Character Development

script

You finally have a typed up clean copy of your script. The cutting was successful and you are ready to go. What next? It is time to “flesh out” your characters. Take them from 1 dimensional paper dolls to 3 dimensional believable characters. Although interpreting literature is not acting, an awful lot goes on behind the spoken word if you are to have an effective presentation.

Much of the content of this presentation is taken from Thane Rehn’s *As I Was Saying* and Lanny Naegelin and Ron Krikac’s *Getting Started in Oral Interpretation.*

I Create Character Profiles

1. Sift through the text to find about the character

Put on your detective hat and comb through the entire piece of

literature from which your selection is taken looking for every tidbit of

information you can find about each character that you will be

playing.

-what the author or playwright tells you in the intro

-read the dustjacket

-in the text

-physical descriptions

-character traits

-life history

-motivation

-what the character says about himself/herself

-how other characters describe him/her

Now write out a complete description of everything you know about this

character and you will have created a character profile.

Don’t forget the narrator – he is often the most important character in the

story.

1. Map out the relationship between characters

Try to understand the relationship between the character and other characters.

This includes what each character thinks about the other and how those thoughts affect the way they act towards one another.

Notice how the relationships change over the course of your piece.

II Translate the Character Profiles into Physical Characteristics

This is where you translate all the verbal descriptions and info about the

character into physical characteristics. Details are critical here!

-how would this person stand, walk, move?

-what is their age, gender, personality?

-what are their habits?

-observe at the mall

-observe at the game

-observe at church

-observe on tv – at movies

-notice how often people blink when they are nervous

-notice how people hold their hands when they are embarrassed

-own voice

-own posture

-own attitudes

Is there a real person that this character reminds you of? Use characteristics of

that person to help craft your character.

III Distinguish each character from each other

One of the biggest challenges for your audience is being able to clearly know

which character is speaking. You must help them by distinguishing your characters from one another so the audience can follow the story without being confused.

1. Assign a different vocal register to each character

-a little girl would be a soprano, an older woman could be an alto, and a

young man a tenor

Students often use accents to help separate their characters (and impress their judges)

-from tv or movies

-find a friend or an acquaintance with that accent who can read your

character’s part and record it. Then listen over and over to it until you can

speak it like the native.

1. Give each character a distinct posture and mannerisms

Avoid overdoing this though, and turning your characters into characteratures!

IV Understand the Narrative Flow

1. Identify the central conflict of your piece

All good stories have conflict, climax, and resolution. Identify what the central conflict is in your piece. Between which characters does the conflict occur? Is it an internal conflict in the life of one character?

1. Identify the Climax of your Piece

When does the climax of your piece occur? How does this change each character?

1. Don’t miss the Humor

Mr. Rehn suggests that every single scene, no matter how serious or tragic, contains some humor. Look through your script for lines that bring a smile to the face of your audience.

V Build the Subtext

Subtext is – as the word itself suggests – what is happening under the lines. In

real life we are constantly going through a great deal in our mind and body that

others aren’t aware of – but they reflect our moods, speech and action. Subtext

tries to consider those processes for your characters.

This is the difference between a good and a great delivery. Actors use it all the

time. But it takes work! The payoff, however, is great. Think of it as color TV

vs. black and white.

The subtext is a written representation of what is happening in the mind of your

character at every point in the script. Mr. Rehn suggests prepping for this by

doing the following:

“Create five columns on a large piece of paper. The first column is the actual spoken words from the text. The other four columns will contain the thoughts, memories, senses, and intentions of the characters who are speaking the text. Thus, for each spoken line of dialogue, you will be able to scan across all five columns for in depth info about what that line really means.”

1. Character thoughts

The 2nd column should contain what the character is thinking and what their mental state is. You may find the character is saying just the opposite of what he/she feels. You need to convince the audience what the character is really thinking despite what they are saying.

Here are two examples from the Getting Started in Oral Interpretation Book:

*“You may smile at a friend and say, “Sure, it’d be great to go to your little sister’s piano recital with you,” when you’re really thinking, “I’d rather have my teeth pulled than sit through two hours of tinkling torment.”*

*“In the play Dino by Reginald Rose, a caseworker asks the angry Dino, “Did something happen last night, Dino? The unhappy young man snaps back, “No!” He really means, “Yes!”*

When a character says one thing while thinking the opposite, he becomes more complex and rounded.

1. Character memories

The 3rd column is used for memories of the character speaking. This encompasses all the life history that has gone into the character leading up to this moment. What has happened in the past between this character and the character he/she is speaking to? Are there other memories impacting this character’s behavior?

1. Character senses

The 4th column lists anything the character is sensing. What is she seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, or tasting. You need to understand what your character is aware of during each scene.

Here is an example from of this from Getting Started:

*“You know from reading “A Defenseless Creature” that Kistunov is*

*experiencing great pain. Imagin how his leg feels. Is the pain sharp or dull?*

*Steady or throbbing? Extending through the whole leg of affecting just a*

*part of it?”*

This can also include activities the character might be doing at the time.

1. Summary and intentions

This column sums up the other four columns. This tells what your character actually wants from the character she is speaking to, and what she is trying to accomplish by her action.

Subtext is a lot of work – but worth all the work!