

Year 8

Year 8 Drama Students will build on basic skills learnt in Year 7 by developing and extending their repertoire of improvisational devices and genres. They will develop their performance skills and ability to project, commit and communicate character. Alongside this they will be introduced to working with a full play script performing sections and commenting on theme and directorial intent. Students will finish the year being given the chance to apply all of their skills in a piece of guided devised work. Year 8 Drama gives students the opportunity to work individually, in pairs and in small groups. Students are encouraged to consider their strengths and areas for improvement when working with others: for some this will mean developing skills in directing, and for others this will mean improving their teamwork skills. Challenge is set accordingly, and is always aspirational.

We start the year recapping our basic skills from Year 7. Classes are mixed up at the start of Year 8, so time is given in the first few weeks to building a working relationship with the whole class. Trust and teamwork are focussed on and we teach the students about the importance of an ensemble approach to making theatre: one where the group of actors on stage is more important than individual actors. Once a strong group dynamic and understanding has been formed, we are ready to start with our first project.

We start with a scheme of work based on a true story. Central to the story is a character who has made a series of mistakes which have led to a tragedy. Students are encouraged to consider the human fatal flaw, and are challenged on their perceptions of 'right and wrong'. Is a character 'bad' just because they have made mistakes? What events in a person's life may lead them to make mistakes? Students are encouraged to consider these questions and use them to frame an ongoing improvisation. The story provides us with ample opportunity to teach students new structural devices. We draw from both naturalistic and non naturalistic styles, and students start to learn that there are no limits to what can be presented on stage - and that tapping into audience imagination is key to engaging them.

Techniques learnt range from direct address, thought tapping, split stage, surrealism, montage and stylised movement. Students are also taught how to structure a narrative and are encouraged to experiment with the chronology of a story in order to find new ways of communicating meaning. Skills in characterisation are also revisited and we look to embed a more sophisticated approach to the use of vocal and physical technique for characterisation.

The second term starts with an introduction to the theme of 'childhood'. Students explore the notion of playing a part that is younger than them, and we use this to further develop a physical approach to characterisation. Students are introduced to the work of Constantin Stanislavski, and his work with actors on achieving truth in performance. They are encouraged to use their experiences as younger children: the games they played, the imaginary worlds they occupied - and use them to inform character and plot. This work leads us to the play 'Blood Brothers' by Willy Russell, and students are led through the story through a combination of summarising the plot and studying key extracts.

The focus of this unit is on the actors job to interpret a role for performance. We teach the students key approaches to working with script by looking at Stanislavski's techniques of 'units and objectives', and by considering factors such as subtext, motivation and non verbal communication. Lessons are exploratory and students are encouraged to 'play' with the text and try a range of options when working with one scene. Alongside a focus on script work, we also use the story as a hinge for

developing students improvisation. Key moments from the play are read, but then improvised by the students to encourage them to interpret the characters for themselves and develop freedom in their characterisation away from the confines of the written word. The themes of class, opportunity, loyalty, love and fate are all explored and the scheme of work culminates in a piece of assessed devised work that seeks to predict the ending of the play, based on their understanding of it. 'Blood Brothers' fits into the genre of musical theatre, and whilst this is not the focus of our work on the piece, students are asked to consider what the effect of key songs and pieces of music have on the overall communication of meaning.

As well as developing their skills in acting, students often finish this unit being able to talk articulately about the impact of class, fate and the effects of recession on a community as well as what their opinions are on the nature/nurture debate.

The final term provides the opportunity for students to use the skills that they have learnt and developed throughout the year and apply them to their own piece of devised work. Students are given a stimulus and guided through a 4 week process of devising. The process is structured to give students both the guidance and confidence to create their own original work; but also to allow them the freedom to express their creativity. This piece of work is assessed and also provides opportunities for peer and self assessment, as well as teacher assessment.