

Teacher's Place

Drama as a Catalyst for Exploring Literature

A Teacher Training Workshop

**A Teacher Resource Guide
1999 - 2000**

Introduction:

This resource guide supplements the **Teacher's Place** teacher training workshop, *Drama as a Catalyst for Exploring Literature*, presented by The American Place Theatre (APT). The exercises are designed for teachers of grades seven through twelve.

Objective of the Workshop:

To introduce basic theater games which establish an ensemble-feeling in the classroom while developing the imagination and strengthening oral and written communication skills.

To present strategies for using dramatic exercises to encourage meaningful interaction with literature.

To explore methods of using curricular literature as a springboard for self-discovery and self-expression.

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This workshop is based on Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*. However, the activities presented can be adapted to any work of literature. We encourage teachers to apply the strategies outlined here to the books in their curriculums throughout the school year.

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Overview:

Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* tells the story, from the time just before Fidel Castro came to power until the 1980s, of a Cuban family divided by both geography and politics. The point-of-view shifts amongst three generations of women as they deal with their relationships to each other and to their motherland of Cuba. Through the familial interactions of Celia del Pino and her children and grandchildren, we see several versions of the revolution and its effect on people of Cuban descent.

Cristina Garcia (author) was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1958 and grew up in New York City. After attending Barnard College and the Johns Hopkins University Schools of Advanced International Studies, she worked as a correspondent for *Time* magazine. *Dreaming in Cuban* is her first novel.

Rinne Groff (teaching artist) is a performer, writer, and teacher. She began her involvement with The American Place Theatre in 1992 with the TeamWorks program which used theater exercises in history and social studies classes. She continues her work as a teaching artist in APT's Urban Writes program in which high school English classes work throughout the academic year to develop acting, playwriting, and directing skills. The Urban Writes program culminates in a performance created and performed by the students at The American Place Theatre in May. Rinne also runs the Outreach Program for Target Margin Theater at the Henry Phipps Plaza Community Center. She is a founding member of Elevator Repair Service Theater Company which recently completed a tour of Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. She is currently getting a masters degree in Dramatic Writing at New York University.

Workshop:

◆Introduction

Name Game: The group forms a circle. The leader provides an example of the format by completing one or more of the following sentences. Everyone in the circle follows suit.

My name is _____ and right now, my favorite book is _____.

My name is _____ and my family is originally from _____.

My name is _____ and one place I dream of going is _____.

◆Warm-Up

Concentric Circles

The group divides into two. Group A forms a circle, facing out. Group B circles around Group A, finding a partner to square off with. Now we have two concentric circles, the inner one facing out, the outer one facing in. The leader asks Group A to talk to Group B about a particular subject for one minute. Then it switches, and for one minute, Group B talks, and Group A listens. After both have had a turn, the inner circle rotates, and two different people are facing each other. A new topic of discussion is given to the circle.

◆Topics of discussion

Tell your partner a story about a bicycle.

Describe to your partner an ideal meal.

Describe to your partner an ideal Saturday night.

Tell you partner about a favorite book and why you like it.

Tell your partner about a time you were afraid.

Tell your partner about a dream you have dreamt at night.

◆Prep Activity

Relating to the Text

The group forms a circle, and a copy of *Dreaming in Cuban* is placed at the center. Each person has the opportunity to place their body in relation to the book, thus expressing something about how they feel about it. (E.g. A person who knows nothing about the book may stand at a distance from the book and stare at it. A person who thinks he's going to love it may cradle it in his arms. A person who thinks it's going to be boring may turn his back to the book.)

Alphabet Relay

The leader shows the book *Dreaming in Cuban* to the group and asks them to brainstorm all the words (adjectives, images, themes, places) that come to mind, based solely on the cover and the title. (If people in the group are familiar with the book, they may include that information as well.) The leader writes down all the words that the group says. Next, the leader breaks the group into several sections of five to seven people. Each section is given a magic marker and a large sheet of paper with the alphabet written down the left side. The leader gives each section a word from the brainstormed list and tells them they have to come up with one word for each letter of the alphabet that relates to the word they were given. (E.g. If the word is "love," the section might write: "Awesome, Beautiful, Caring, Devotion, Eagerness...") The first section to complete their alphabet wins. Each section shares their list with the rest of the group.

◆Energizer

Shake and Freeze I

The group forms a circle. The leader tells the group to shake their bodies all around when he says "shake," and stop moving when he says "freeze." The Trainer "shakes" and "freezes" the group a few times. Then the leader informs the group that instead of "freeze," he will now say a word, and the group should freeze in a position suggested by the word. For example, if the Trainer says "shake" and then "happy," the group should freeze in a happy position.

Shake and Freeze II

After a couple of rounds of Shake and Freeze, the leader asks everyone except one student to unfreeze. He asks the group, "If this frozen image were a character, what might be one line of dialogue that this character would say?" The leader solicits a few possible lines of dialogue. The exercise is repeated but this time, the leader unfreezes everyone except two people and asks the group to come up with line of narrative that describes the image created by both frozen people.

◆Main Activity

Creating Frozen Images I

The Group divides into sections of three people. Each section is given a line of text taken directly from *Dreaming in Cuban*. It may be narrative or dialogue. The section must come up with a frozen picture which includes at least two people and which conveys something about the line of text. The third person may participate in the frozen image or may direct it. When the section presents their frozen image to the rest of the group, they must incorporate the line of text (i.e. a character may speak the line from their frozen position, or all the performers may say the line together, or one person who is not in the image may speak the line while the group is frozen). Each section shares their work with the rest of the group.

Creating Frozen Images II

Each section creates the image before and the image after the one they have already created. Each image may have one line of dialogue or narrative associated with it. The three images should tell a story. Each section shares their work with the rest of the group.

◆Closure: Lesson Plan

The group forms a circle. Everyone in the group completes the following sentence: One thing that interests me about *Dreaming in Cuban* is...

◆Closure: Workshop

The group forms a circle. Everyone in the group completes the following sentence:

One thing I learned today is...

Dreaming in Cuban

Dreaming in Cuban: by Cristina Garcia. Ballantine Books, New York. 1992.
(excerpted sentences)

- p.3. From her porch, Celia could spot another Bay of Pigs invasion before it happened.
- p.4. "Without your support, *compañeros*, without your sacrifices, there can be no revolution." -Fidel Castro
- p.12. "My father died last night and I have to be at work in an hour." -Felicia
- p.27. I tell her how back in Cuba the nannies used to think I was possessed. -Pilar
- p.37. "Write to that fool. If he doesn't answer, you will marry me." -Jorge
- p.52. I'll be a good mother this time. -Celia
- p.87. "Mirrors are for misery, nothing more. They record decay." -Felicia
- p.93. Her aunt did not attend church and derided those who did.
- p.121. My sister and I call our mother "not-Mamá." As in not-Mamá charred the chicken and is cursing in the kitchen. -Luz
- p.157. Could her son, Celia wonders, have inherited her habit of ruinous passion?
- p.165. The rebels have been released! Now the revolution is close enough to smell. -Celia
- p.171. Why can't the Americans see the Communists in their own backyards, in their universities, bending the malleable minds of the young? -Jorge
- p.185. I trust only what I see, what I know with my heart, nothing more. -Herminia
- p.203. At midnight, I awake and paint a large canvas ignited with reds and whites, each color betraying the other. -Pilar
- p.224. When Lourdes finally danced with her nephew, she felt beholden to the congas, to a powerful longing to dance.
- p.229. "Will I see justice done?" -Tia
- p.232. "Well, I've always envisioned myself in a flared red skirt like the flamenco dancers wear. Maybe with a few carnations." -Celia
- p.233. She tells me that before the revolution Cuba was a pathetic place, a parody of a country. -Pilar
- p.239. "I'll bring you back to Brooklyn. We'll go to Disney World this summer." -Lourdes
- p.242. The sea beckons with its blue waves of light.

Follow-Up Activities

◆Name Game

The group forms a circle. Everyone in the circle completes the following sentence: My name is _____ and the character in *Dreaming in Cuban* that I like best is _____.

◆Warm-Up

Greetings

The group divides in half. One section stands against one wall and the other stands against the opposite wall. When the leader says, "Go", the two sections switch sides. As they pass each other in the center, they should greet each other however they wish. Then the leader begins to set conditions. For example, "As you cross, greet the person across from you using only your eyes," or "As you cross, greet the person across from you using only your feet." The leader can also qualify the nature of the greeting. For example, "Greet the person across from you as if you are surprised to see her," or "Greet the person across from you as if you are worried about him."

◆Main Activity

Letter Writing

Each student chooses a character in the book and creates a letter that character might have written during the course of the novel. Then the students switch papers and get the chance to act out each other's letters in character.

◆Closure

Everyone in the group has a chance to express one wish for a character in *Dreaming in Cuban*.

Essay about Dreams: Write a short essay about your dreams. Do you remember your dreams? Do you have a favorite dream or a recurring nightmare? Do you think your dreams communicate important information to you? Can you control your dreams? What's the relationship between daydreams and the dreams that come to you at night?

Drama-in-Education Resources

Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.
London: Routledge, 1992.

Heathcote, Dorothy and Bolton, Gavin. *Drama for Learning*.
Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational, 1995.

Neelands, Jonathan. *Making Sense of Drama*.
London: Heinemann Educational, 1984.

Neelands, Jonathan. *Structuring Drama Work*.
New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

O'Neill, Cecily. *Drama Worlds*.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational, 1995.

O'Neill, Cecily and Lambert, Alan. *Drama Structures*.
London: Hutchinson Education, 1987.

O'Neill, Cecily and Lambert, Alan. *Drama Guidelines*.
London: Heinemann Educational in Association with London Drama, 1977.

Morgan, Norah and Sexon, Juliana. *Teaching Drama*.
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational, 1987.

Spolin, Viola. *Theatre Game File*.
Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989.

Wagner, Betty Jane. *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium*.
London: Hutchinson Education, 1988.

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