

Teacher's Place

Exploring Original Dramatic Work through Literature

A Teacher Training Workshop

**A Teacher Resource Guide
1999 – 2000**

Introduction:

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

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This workshop is based on Richard Wright's *Black Boy*. 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 curricula throughout the year.

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Overview

Joseph Edward (artist/educator) has received several awards for his work as an actor and director. Moving easily from drama to comedy and musicals, he has performed Off-Broadway as Officer Bream in Michael Henry Brown's *The Day the Bronx Died*, Joe in *Acts of Contrition*, Gordon in *Cold Sweat*, and Bumble in *Besswax*, co-starring Ruby Dee. Regional theatre appearances include Jesus in *Godspell*, Walter Lee in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Roscoe in *Black Eagles*, at the St. Louis Black Repertory Theater, Martin Luther King in *The Meeting* at The Kenedy Center, and as M'Bekan in the critically acclaimed *Jungle Rot* at the Cleveland Playhouse. At the American Place Theatre, he most recently recreated the role of Langston Hughes in *Zora Neale Hurston: a Theatrical Biography*.

Mr. Edward has had several works produced as a playwright: *The Gift of Light* premiered at New York's TADA theater in 1994, *A Dream Come True* was produced by the St. Louis Black Repertory Theater, *Island Fling*, a musical, had its premier in Trinidad and toured the Caribbean. His latest work, *Fly*, ran at The American Place Theatre and has been nominated for four AUDELCO Awards. Mr. Edward is recognized as a gifted practitioner of arts-in-education. For the last decade, he has worked in classrooms throughout the country inspiring the creativity of thousands of young minds, using performing arts-based concepts and instruction. Presently he is an artist-educator for The American Place Theatre's *Urban Writes* Program and founder of Take Flight Productions, an educational theater program.

Workshop Outline

Overall objective:

To share strategies and activities with participants that can help them facilitate original dramatic work through theme-based writing.

✿ Introduction

Who Are You?

Ask participants to sit in a circle. Each participant will be asked to state the name of his/her favorite book. As we move around the circle, each person must state the names and favorite books of all the people who went before them, then state their own name and favorite book.

Literature Seat

While participants are seated ask, "What come to mind when you hear the word *Literature*?"

Literature Ball

Ask participants to stand and do the same thing, only this time, instead of going around the circle, they should say what comes to mind when each hears the word *Literature* the ball comes to them. The facilitator writes the responses down on the board. Someone will probably say *Theme*. If no one does, write it on the board.

Theme Exploration

Give participants an index card and pencil. Give the participants one minute to write their definitions of theme.

Themes Based on the Title: *Black Boy*

The Facilitator circles *Theme* on the list on the board, holds up a copy of the novel, *Black Boy* by Richard Wright, and writes the title on the board. The group is asked, "Based on the title of this novel, let us predict what kinds of themes might be in the book." One of the members of the group writes the responses on the board.

Predictions: *Black Boy*

Ask participants to predict what kinds of characters might be in the literary work. A different member of the group writes the responses on the board.

✿ Writing in Teams

Objective: The participants will practice creating original thematic written material. The participants will write and act out a theme-related, two-character scene.

Creation Teams

Participants are divided into teams of two. Each pair must choose one of the themes listed on the board and two of the characters listed on the board and write a short scene.

For example:

Teenager:	When are you coming home from the hospital, Grandma?
Grandma:	I don't know, might not come home at all.
Teenager:	What do you mean? You can't stay here forever.
Grandma:	(sighs) You're right, honey, can't stay here forever.
Teenager:	You're not going to die, are you Grandma? I don't want you to die. Why do people have to die anyway?
Grandma:	I think because God wants us to come back eventually.

The participants act out the scenes.

Discussion / Sharing

After each scene, the group determines which of the themes was meant to project. They should discuss how the theme was projected. How could it have more effectively communicated its theme? When all scenes have been presented, the group can ponder, if there were going to be an evening of scenes, how they might be connected.

Reach Me with Movement and Sound

Participants form a circle. When the facilitator says a word, the group vocalizes a sound that communicates that word. Add a movement to that sound. Then say, "When I say 'pain,' vocalize a sound that communicates 'pain.'" Add a movement to that sound." Working as a group, change the sound and movement of pain into the sound and movement of freedom.

At this point, hand out selections from the text you wish to explore, in this case *Black Boy* by Richard Wright. Ask the participants to read them silently.

Thoughts Aloud

Ask the participants to brainstorm themes in the excerpt. One participant can list them on the board. The participants can name characters in the excerpt. A different participant can write the names of the characters on the board. The group can voice their thoughts about the characters as they are presented.

Creation Teams

Ask the participants to break into three teams. Using the list of themes from the board, each group should create a performance piece and prepare to present it to the whole group. One group is assigned to create a non-verbal movement piece. Another should write a scene using dialogue. The third group should communicate the theme through sound only. Each created piece must have a beginning, middle, and an end.

Presentation

The three groups should perform their pieces for the whole group. Remind the group to be respectful of the work of the other participants. Appropriate behavior during the presentations should be discussed before they are shown. The leader should stress that they are works in progress.

Question and Answer Session

When all groups have shown their work, participants can ask questions about the other groups' work, moderated by the facilitator. The facilitator may also have some thought-provoking questions for the whole group. The leader may ask the group how these scenes could be prepared for a unified performance. What modifications might have to be made? How might they be woven into a whole presentation?

*** Closure: Pass the Energy**

*** Follow Up Activities**

Essay Monologues

Have participants choose one of the characters in a literary work or historical event and write a monologue based on the perspective of that character.

Thematic Writing

Write a short story, play, or poem based on a theme in a literary work. The participants can also be asked to write an essay based on a personal experience related to that theme.

Out-of-Context Characters

To explore a character chosen from literature or history, participants improvise his or her actions in an unusual setting and/or situation. (E.g.: Hamlet in space)

Side-Coaching Terminology

When participants are working in groups, the leader may assist without interrupting the work. This process is called “side coaching.” Some approaches the leader might use are listed here:

Allow yourself to be seen: come into the playing space.

Gibberish: Verbal communication other than real language, done without think time.

Improvisation: To do with little or no preparation.

Physicalize that thought: Give physical expression to a budding emerging emotion.

Share your voice: Speak so that everyone can hear you.

Stage Picture: Helps the players see the audience view. Bring audience into stage space.

Use your whole body: Helps to physicalize emotions, feelings, thoughts, and character.

Vocalization: To create a sound using voice.

Drama-in-Education Resources

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

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

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N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

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London: Heinemann Educational in Association with London Drama, 1977.

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