

Study Guide: Students & Educators

ATLANTIG THEATER COMPANY



Written by Andy Nyman, Derren Brown & Andrew O'Connor
Directed by Andrew O'Connor & Andy Nyman

World Premiere Event
DERREN BROWN: SECRET

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**Section I:
The Play**

Synopsis
Acclaim for
Derren Brown



SYNOPSIS

Be part of the startling world of mind-reading, suggestion and psychological illusion at the hands of UK phenomenon, Derren Brown. This spellbinding theatrical experience challenges us, in the most jaw-dropping way, to take a closer look at the stories and beliefs that guide our lives. In the UK, Derren Brown's critically acclaimed shows have played sold out runs in the West End and been awarded two Olivier Awards.

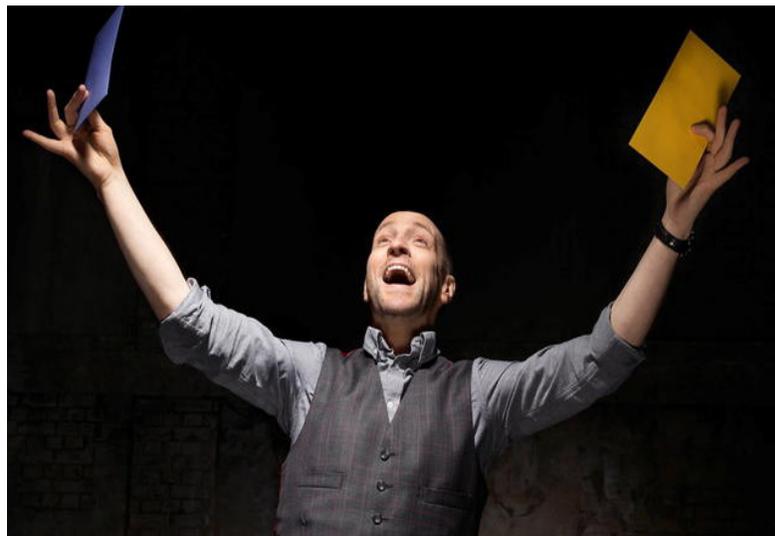


ACCLAIM FOR DERREN BROWN

Derren Brown: Infamous
By Ben Williams, TimeOut

'We're all trapped inside our own heads,' states Derren Brown at the top of his latest show. Disappointing, eh? Who wouldn't want to take a peek into Derren's mind and discover his methods? And in 'Infamous' – which sees Brown writing with regular collaborator Andy Nyman again after 2011's solo 'Svengali' – there are plenty of astonishing acts of 'mind-reading' to leave you befuddled.

Of course, as with any Derren Brown gig, we can't reveal exactly what happens here. But we can say that 'Infamous' is a funnier, more personal, and less creepy show than Brown's previous offerings, and features mind-boggling memory feats, a lot of super-accurate 'guesswork' and the odd splatter of blood.



Sat on a single stool in the middle of a disused-theatre set (think 'Dragon's Den' minus the wads of cash), the newly slap headed Brown begins with some simple, but effective pieces of telepathy. From there, the show slowly builds in scale and impressiveness to a spectacular multi-illusion finale that constantly exceeds itself.

'Infamous' is a masterclass in presentation. The key to all of Brown's tricks (and they are just tricks) is the set-up and atmosphere, and allowing the audience to decide whether the method is really reading body language and predicting behavior, or in fact something more simple. One illusion in the first half is effectively repeated in the second, but by repackaging it with a more somber environment and subject matter, it's far more powerful and emotional.



Derren Brown: Miracle, Palace Theatre, review: 'completely astounding'
By Dominic Cavendish, The Telegraph

I have never been to a Christian evangelical convention in America. You know, the ones where a super-smooth preacher praises the Lord, lays hands on the afflicted, has them in awe of his healing powers, causes mass hysteria. Oh and asks the assembled to dig deep into their pockets. Surely no one with any rational wit about them would go to one, would they, except to sneer?

Well at the Palace Theatre, the grandest theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue, the illusionist, hypnotist, mind-reader and wonder-worker extraordinaire Derren Brown is doing something completely astounding. He is giving audiences the chance to experience at first-hand what it is like for a spirit of transformation to descend on a

group of people. He promises to change your life, awaken you to powers you never knew you had. He adopts the approach of those suspect bible-bashing types – flaunts and exposes their working methods, the way they prey on the need of the vulnerable to believe. But he does so in a way that passeth satire, even understanding. The show is called 'Miracle', and by God, or Whoever, it lives up to that title.

In this, the finest work of his I've seen since he first made waves in 2000, he begins as always by affably imploring us not to divulge what we have witnessed, to ensure that those who flock to see him have the benefit of surprise. I do feel a beast to flout that commandment – and those who hate spoilers of any kind should look away now. But at a time when religious extremism and heinous superstition are running rampant across the world, what he is doing seems so significant in a wider context that it's impossible to keep totally schtum.

His initial avowed intent is to get us to think about the stories we tell about ourselves, the baggage we carry, how we might be hampered by the idea of past mistakes, future goals. Uncannily – creepily - adept at manipulating those he's talking to, he begins with some early, easy game-playing with our responses. He forecasts, for example, randomly garnered phrases in a variation on the parlor game of 'consequences' and intuits exactly which sweets spectators are unwrapping. Later come his quasi-religious shenanigans.

Everyone is required to stand and shut their eyes. In his smart grey suit, Brown, 44, could pass as the businessman-next-door but he acts as if overcome with a fevered spiritual intensity. We must imagine our better happier selves pinging at high speed into us – flashes of light pulse across the auditorium. Then punters are invited up to talk about how their aches and pains have vanished. Even though I only had a vague sentiment of corporeal improvement a remarkable number oblige with ecstatic revelations – they couldn't all be plants, could they? And before my doubting eyes, the vision of two spectators was contrastingly improved and impaired, to the bewilderment of each. And me. And others: on my row on the gala night, a celebrity huddle containing the comedians Tim Minchin and Mark Watson looked on in attentive amazement.

The take-home message - even for those of faith – is life-affirming: we are infinitely suggestible, but also incredible. Mind over matter is a godsend fact of life. We should trust in ourselves, not the putative intermediaries of higher powers. I could say more: about the volunteer invited to eat a shard of mashed-up light-bulb, another who proves comically incapable of holding on to two coins as Brown lifts them in plain sight. But go forth, seek and ye shall find. Brown is not the Messiah. He is, though, a very clever boy.

Section II:
Creative Team
Performer, Writers and
Directors bios





DERREN BROWN
Performer, Writer

DERREN BROWN (Performer, Writer). After abandoning a career in law to develop his skills at psychological magic, his big break came in 1999 when he was asked by Channel 4 to create the television show “Derren Brown: Mind Control,” which was an immediate success when it aired in December 2000. Since then, on stage and television, he has exhilarated audiences world-wide with his unique brand of mind control, suggestion, showmanship and illusion. Having redefined the genre of magic, Derren has become synonymous with the art of psychological manipulation and his television shows have become must-see events, for which he has gained a reputation as a performer prepared to constantly challenge and break down boundaries. He has garnered rave reviews and coveted awards, including the 2012 BAFTA for Best Entertainment for “Derren Brown: The Experiments.” His legendary specials include “Russian Roulette,” “Séance,” “The Heist,” “Hero at 30,000 Feet,” “How to Predict the Lottery” and “Apocalypse.” He has convinced a man to assassinate Stephen Fry and stuck viewers to their sofas through their television sets. Recently in “Pushed To The Edge,” he revealed the psychological secrets of obedience and social compliance with extraordinary results, once again creating passionate debate within the media and dividing opinion up and down the country. His live shows have won him two prestigious Olivier Awards for Something Wicked This Way Comes (2006) and Svengali (2012), and numerous nominations. He has played to sold-out houses across the country every year since 2003. His two most recent shows, Infamous, (2013, 2014) and Miracle (2015, 2016) have toured to great success and critical acclaim. He has also received praise for his best-selling books, Derren Brown: Tricks of the Mind and Derren Brown: Confessions of a Conjuror, which have sold over 700,000 copies worldwide. His third book, Happy, made the Top 10 Best Seller’s list and further cemented his reputation as a highly distinctive writer. Derren also enjoys considerable success as an artist. His book Portraits offers a collection of his painted caricatures of famous faces. Since then he has moved into highly accomplished ‘straight’ portraits and street photography and been exhibited at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery in London. www.derrenbrown.co.uk. @derrenbrown



ANDY NYMAN
Co-writer, Co-director

ANDY NYMAN (Co-writer, Co-director) is an award-winning actor, director and writer who has earned acclaim from both critics and audiences for his theatre, film and television work. He has collaborated with Derren for over 15 years, having co-written much of Derren’s television and theatre work. Andy also co-wrote and directed most of Derren’s theatre shows including Something Wicked This Way Comes, which won the Best Entertainment Olivier Award. As an actor, his most recent stage work includes Martin McDonagh’s Hangmen in London’s West End and Jamie Lloyd’s revival of Stephen Sondheim’s Assassins at the Menier Chocolate Factory. On television he was most recently seen playing Winston Churchill in the BBC drama “Peaky Blinders” and starred in the BBC drama “The Eichmann Show.” His many film credits include The Brother’s Bloom and the hugely popular Death at a Funeral. This year he will be seen in cinemas in the new Liam Neeson thriller The Commuter. Andy has also just co-written and co-directed Ghost Stories, the film version of the hit play written by Andy and Jeremy Dyson, starring Andy and Martin Freeman that will be in cinemas in 2018.



ANDREW O'CONNOR
Co-director, Co-writer

ANDREW O'CONNOR (Co-director, Co-writer) began his career as a magician, standup comedian and actor in theater and television. Notable roles include Bill Snibson in Me and My Girl and the title role in Barnum. In 1997 he retired from performing to concentrate on writing, producing and directing. For television, he was the co-founder of Objective Productions which he ran from 1997–2015, during which he created and produced dozens of television series including “Peep Show” and the Derren Brown series and specials “Star Stories,” “The Cube” and “Fresh Meat.” His television shows have been nominated for 50 national and international awards and won 16 awards including 5 BAFTA awards. Theater directing credits include 42nd Street, The Odd Couple (female version NYT), The Nerd, Anything Goes and Derren Brown: Miracle. Andrew was the co-producer on all of Derren Brown’s stage shows that have been nominated for four, and awarded two, Olivier Awards. Film – Director/Producer/co-writer: Magicians, which won best comedy at the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival and was nominated for a US BAFTA for Best British Comedy Film in 2008. Director/Producer/co-writer: Jerked, which was chosen to premiere at the SXSW film festival and will be released in 2017. Producer: That Awkward Moment.

Section III: Your Students As Audience

Theater Vocabulary
Relating Themes to
Our Own Lives



**“Plays should tell simple,
honest stories.”**

—David Mamet, American playwright &
noted actor, William H. Macy, founders
of Atlantic Theater Company



THEATER VOCABULARY

Teacher Objective

To be able to discuss theater through a common, shared vocabulary.

Student Goal

To understand that the most effective way to discuss theater and new ideas is through a shared vocabulary.

Action: The events that move along the story of the play and which influence the characters within the play.

Characters: Individuals the audience learns about from their actions and reactions.

Ensemble: A group of performers working together to create a complete production.

Dialogue: The exchange of speech between two characters which reveals the feelings of the character as well as the story of the play.

Monologue: A speech by one actor on stage which is intended to reveal the inner thoughts of the character the actor plays.

Character Arc: The change produced in a character by the events and other characters in the play.

Musical Theater: A twentieth century creation where writers and musicians collaborate to create a play which features song, dance and drama.

Mood: The overall feeling the play evokes.

Costume: The clothes, boots, etc., worn by the actors based on their character.

Prop: Objects used by an actor to enhance their character. For example, wine glasses at a bar for drinks.

Set: The constructed environment of a play within which the action takes place.

Sound: Noises and music used in the play.

REVEALING THEMES TO OUR OWN TIMES

DERREN BROWN: IMPROVISER

Improvisation, commonly shortened to just “improv,” is a form of theatre-making and performing with origins as early as the 16th century. The basic definition of improvisation is “to speak or perform without preparation.”

What is perhaps the most recognizable form of improv today is that made famous by The Second City school and comedy club in Chicago, whose alumni include Stephen Colbert, Tina Fey, Steve Carell, and many more. The teachings there are based on the practices of a woman named Viola Spolin, who came up with a series of exercises to encourage performers to free themselves from judgment and fear by embracing performing without preparation. Much of her work involves performers observing the people and space around them and performing based on what they see in the moment. At The Second City, performers are trained in these techniques so that they can create skits and stories on the spot, using suggestions from their live audience.

Another common form of improvisation is TheatreSports, originated by a man named Keith Johnstone, where performers compete against each other in improvisational games. Perhaps the most famous example of this is the television show *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, famous for games like “Scenes From a Hat” where performers draw prompts out of a hat and have to act them out.

While improv can come in many forms, what unites it all is the idea of being present and responding to the world around you. By truly listening, it shouldn't matter whether or not you have lines memorized beforehand.

As you watch *Derren Brown: Secret*, think about the idea of improvisation. Has Derren prepared everything that he says and he does before he performs? How does the audience affect his performance? How does watching improv change how you feel as an audience member?

DERREN BROWN: ILLUSIONIST

In his performances, Derren Brown achieves things that seem impossible by using his skills as an illusionist.

To be an illusionist is to create tricks that deceive the eye, to make people think that they see things that are not really there, as if by magic.

While the idea of creating illusions has existed for centuries, for a long time the practice of magic was associated with the work of the devil, so it was not done publicly. Until the 18th century, magic performances were typically seen at fairs, not in theatres. It wasn't until 1845, when a man named Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin founded a magic theatre in Paris that this began to change on a large scale. Robert-Houdin was famous for making mechanical devices that appeared to move as if they were alive. His legacy has inspired other magicians throughout history such as Harry Houdini, famous for escaping from devices such as straitjackets and handcuffs; and David Copperfield, who became famous for his televised illusions such as making the Statue of Liberty disappear or walking through the Great Wall of China.

While some of these tricks might sound difficult or as though they require advanced technology, that is often not the case. One of the earliest theatrical illusion techniques, created in 1861, was called Pepper's ghost. The trick, created only using a cleverly-angled plate of glass, is able to make it appear that there is a ghost-like figure in a room. You might know Pepper's ghost from its more contemporary uses: a more high-tech version of the illusion has been used to make it appear that pop stars Michael Jackson and Tupac Shakur were on stage after their deaths.

Each illusionist throughout history has brought their own twist to the craft, and Derren Brown is no exception. As you watch the show, consider what kinds of illusions he creates. How are they similar or different from ones you have seen before? Do you have ideas about how they might have been created? Unfortunately, most illusionists agree on one rule: they never reveal their secrets.

DERREN BROWN: SOLO PERFORMER

At its heart, theatre is about storytelling. The act of telling stories has existed for as long as we have documented history. Before written history began, storytelling was an oral tradition where myths, legends, and personal stories would be passed down by individuals telling and retelling them.

The idea of a solo performance has evolved over history, dating back at least to medieval England when professional storytellers, or bards, were employed by wealthy patrons to recount the stories of their lives. Perhaps the largest recent influence on the form's popularity, however, was a man named Spalding Gray. Gray was famous for his autobiographical monologue-plays, in which he mostly performed simply sitting at a table with a microphone, speaking to the audience.

Various kinds of solo performances are still popular in the New York theatre today. Sometimes actors play themselves, sometimes multiple characters, or sometimes technology or audience members provide the other characters in a piece. The way that each solo performance is structured depends on how the performer thinks it is best to tell the story.

Derren Brown infamously uses psychological manipulation in his performances, appearing to read minds, and making audience members think that they see things that are not present or behave in unexpected ways. How is he using his skills as a solo performer to achieve his desired effect? How are you, as an audience member, part of the story that he is trying to tell?

**Section IV:
Your Students
As Actors**

Post-Theater Creative
Response Activity

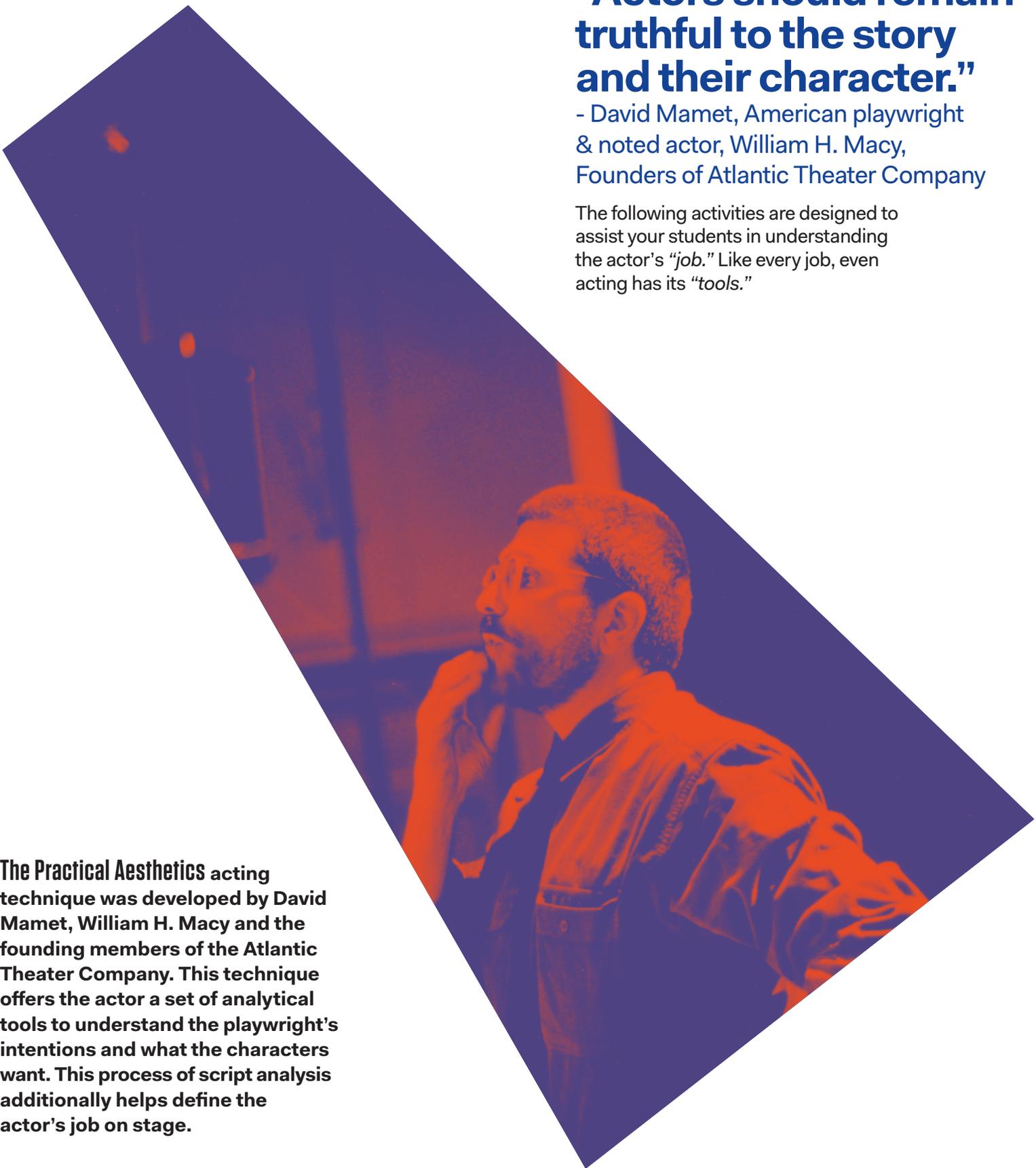
Common Core & DOE
Theater Blueprint



“Actors should remain truthful to the story and their character.”

- David Mamet, American playwright & noted actor, William H. Macy, Founders of Atlantic Theater Company

The following activities are designed to assist your students in understanding the actor's *“job.”* Like every job, even acting has its *“tools.”*



The Practical Aesthetics acting technique was developed by David Mamet, William H. Macy and the founding members of the Atlantic Theater Company. This technique offers the actor a set of analytical tools to understand the playwright's intentions and what the characters want. This process of script analysis additionally helps define the actor's job on stage.

UNDERSTANDING IMPROVISATIONS ACTING ACTIVITY

Teacher Objective

To engage students in using their minds and bodies together as communication tools.

Student Goal

To explore how to effectively communicate using their mind and body together.

Materials

Large open space for movement.

“I HAVE A FRIEND...”

Step One

Someone stands in front of the group and describes a “friend” of theirs. The description should have three descriptive elements: One physical, one emotional and the third open to the person’s discretion. Example: “I have this friend, he talks with a really high voice, he’s always angry, and he’s always eating peanuts... and here he comes now.”

Step Two

After they describe their “friend,” the person on stage points to someone in the audience, who then has to take on those characteristics and come on stage. So EVERYONE should be listening the the described characteristics.

Step Three

The person from the audience takes the stage in front of the group as the character speaking in a high voice, being angry, and pretending to eat peanuts. The audience may ask them three questions and they must answer in character.

Step Four

After the three questions, this person now introduces a friend of theirs: “I have this friend.” They’re really short but they walk like a tall person, they’re always giggling, and they love to show off their tattoo... and her they come now.” And so on...

**Section V:
Your Students
As Artists**

Post-Theater Creative
Writing Activity
Common Core & DOE
Theater Blueprint

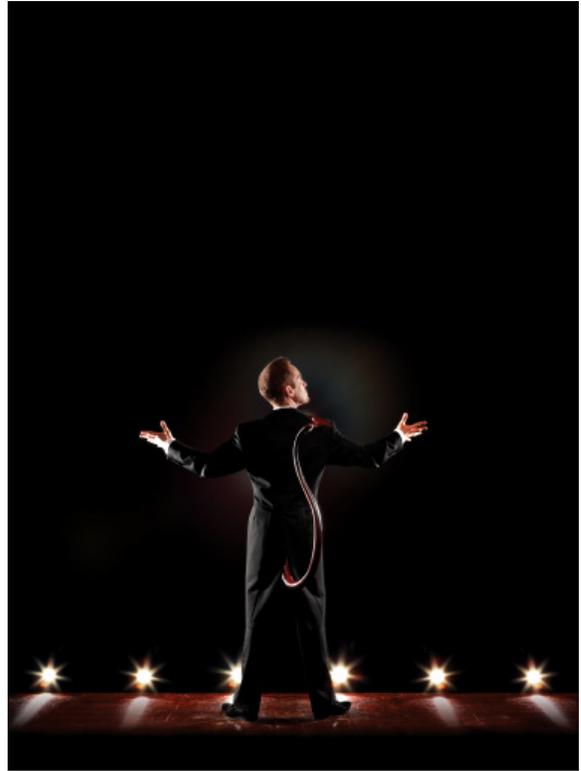


“Create your own work.”

- David Mamet, American playwright
& noted actor, William H. Macy,
Founders of Atlantic Theater Company



The following activities will assist your students in understanding themselves as artists creating original work that connects with their own experiences and world.



POST-THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITY

Teacher Objective

To develop critical thinking skills through examining a theme in *Derren Brown: Secret* and how they relate that theme to an individual creative response.

Student Goal

To understand that a critical theme from *Derren Brown: Secret* forms the truths and messages of the play.

Materials

One of the main focuses of *Derren Brown: Secret* is his personal life journey. Using the writing trigger “each of us holds a ‘sacred memory’ within our hearts that fuels our spirit to move us forward,” share your ‘sacred memory’ and how it is moving you forward right now, today.

Step One

Discussion of the role personal journey plays in *Derren Brown: Secret*.

Step Two

Share the Writing Trigger “Each of us holds a ‘sacred memory’ within our hearts that fuels the spirit to move us forward...”

Step Three

Allow 7 minutes for your students to free-write their reflection / response to this message.

Step Four

Ask the students to share their reflections/ responses.

COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

Enduring Understanding

Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices. For example: Jobs, relationships, hopes for the future.

Theater conveys the meaning behind an individual's struggle to have his or her life choices validated by family, friends and society/community.

Essential Questions

Does the direction and staging reinforce the themes of moral dilemma and manipulation, the ability to rise above a given circumstance for transformation?

Do you accept the concept put forward in *Derren Brown: Secret* that we are the product of our decisions and choices, but we can sometimes transform ourselves, even in the face of adversity?

Strand Benchmarks

THEATER MAKING: ACTING

Benchmark: Students increase their ability as imaginative actors while continuing to participate as collaborative ensemble members. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on and think critically about their own work.

THEATER MAKING: PLAYWRITING/PLAY MAKING

Benchmark: Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.

DEVELOPING THEATER LITERACY

Benchmark: Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THEATER

Benchmark: Students demonstrate a capacity for deep personal connection to theater and a realization of the meaning and messages of theater.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Benchmark: Students invigorate and broaden their understanding of theater through collaborative partnerships with theater professionals.

Section 6: The Atlantic Legacy

Atlantic Theater Company &
Atlantic Acting School

Inspired by the Group Theater, Stanislavsky, and a passion for ensemble acting, David Mamet and William H. Macy formed the Atlantic Theater Company with a select group of New York University Undergraduate drama students. Since its inception in 1985, Atlantic has produced more than 100 plays and garnered numerous awards, including: 12 Tony Awards, 15 Lucille Lortel Awards, 16 OBIE Awards, six Outer Critics Circle Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, three Drama League Awards, three New York Drama Critics Circle Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Noted productions include: *Spring Awakening*, *Port Authority*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Boy's Life*, and *American Buffalo*. The Atlantic Theater Company's mission is to produce plays simply and truthfully, utilizing an artistic ensemble. Atlantic believes that the story of the play and the intent of its playwright are at the core of a successful theatrical production.

The Atlantic Acting School fosters new generations of actors by passing on the tools learned from Mamet and Macy and by preparing students for all aspects of a career in film, television and theater. The Atlantic offers studies through New York University, a full-time conservatory program, part-time programs and summer workshops. Atlantic for Kids offers acting classes in an after school setting as well as summer programs for children ages 4 to 18.

Linda Gross Theater
336 West 20th Street
New York, NY, 10011

Atlantic Stage 2
330 West 16th Street
New York, NY, 10011

ATLANTIC ACTING SCHOOL