

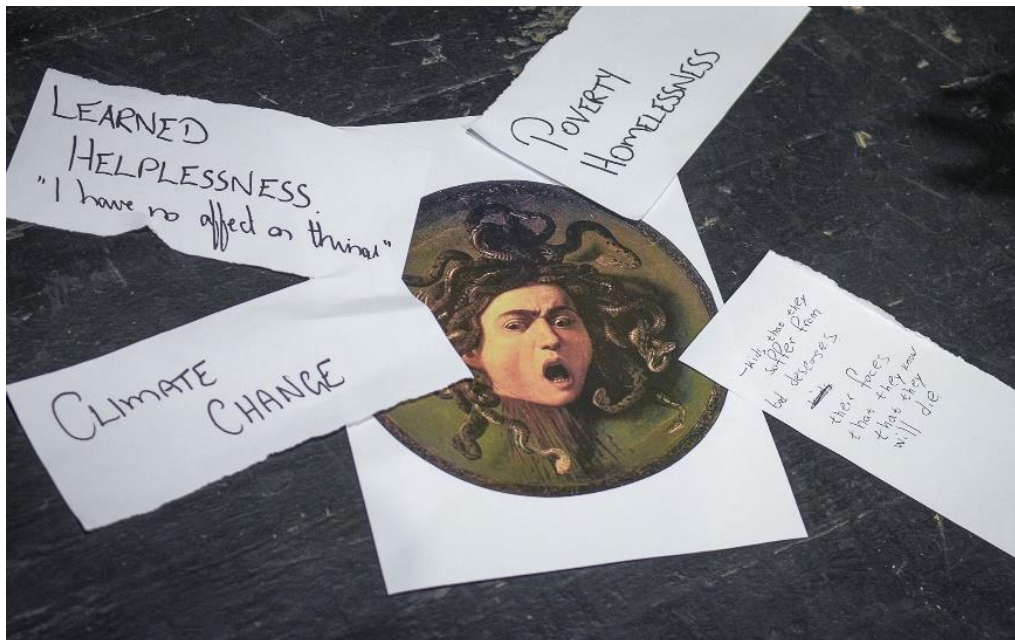
DemoDram Workshops

Looking into the eye of the storm: exploring social issues in fictional contexts

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Demo:Dram Workshop summary

The workshop is in two parts, the first part is an exploration of the world of a 14-year-old boy. The participants watch a morning in the boy's life when he should be at school, making decisions about why he acts as he does. At the end of this domestic scene the boy takes a kitchen knife, puts it in his pocket and leaves. The second part the participants examine how a drama lesson can help young people address some of the issues young people are facing through the dramatization of a fictional event. The participants use the story of Perseus, decide on its focus in a lesson and create an image of a moment in the lesson, they also had to decide where the boy is in the picture and if he is aware of the knife in his pocket.



Pic 1. Working with the Medusa

Target audience

This workshop was created for the participants of the summer school, however they could take elements from it, and adapted it for their lessons, if so I would suggest an age range of 14-16, It would be possible to extract the ideas behind the workshop and devise something for younger children.

What are the aims/overall goals of the workshop?

The aim of the workshop was to bring the world of young people into the front of our thinking, and explore how fiction can help them confront reality, particularly the idea that fiction enables us to enter the darkest of places safely, because we view the situation through the eyes of the other. To offer a methodology to enable teachers to explore issues through dramatic contexts.

What are the objectives/stages of the workshop?

The objectives of the workshop was to create a dramatic space in which we could explore how fiction can speak to, or resonate with the social issues we face in our present day lives. But, in doing so, to question the transmitting of 'correct' answers. To examine how we can enable young people to bring their whole selves to facing up to the problem of being human in our present times. In order to do this I wanted to bring the world of the young people into the mornings work, both the meta-narratives such as global warming, and the close up, reactive narrative of the young people in their daily lives. Then to play with how we might use fiction to begin a discussion with young people about our world. The first stage was to create the world of the young people, I did this by creating a scene that had 'givens', such as the boy would take a knife with him when he left his home, but also 'negotiables', such as who the letter was from that was delivered in the scene. The second stage was to try to make visible all that is silently at work when a young person is asked a question in the classroom. Such as, what the school thinks of the young person, what the teacher thinks of them, what the young person thinks of them self, what the child thinks the teacher wants them to say, etc. The third stage was for the participants to try and imagine a lesson in which the issues we currently faced are addressed through a fictional narrative, and to examine what has happened to what we previously established, where the child is focussed, who is the subject of the question etc.

Why this workshop? What is the rationale?

Schools, in becoming ever more prescriptive in what they are discussing, are narrowing and reducing the field of discussion of the human condition to only that which can be tested quantitatively. Therefore, the direction of speech and knowledge is predominantly travelling in one direction, more and more in UK schools, children are being told to be silent. There can be no democratic practice without participation of those involved, but we assume that just by giving the young people the opportunity to speak freely they will be able to, worse, we often think that the best way to address certain issues with young people we must tell them what the acceptable response is. I wanted to create the conditions in which we could challenge the educational paradigms that deny young people their experience in the world. Finally, we put lot onto young people, asking them to solve problems such as global warming and racism, but these problems are hard to look at, they raise all our existential fears and repressed social thoughts, so how to say what one thinks of them? Fiction allows us to look at the problems through the eyes of the other, to step into the shoes of the other, to say what we think through the other, for the other to be the subject of our interest, not ourselves, we can speak our minds without fear of judgment, because we are speaking of/as the other.

Description of workshop process: what we did and how we did it

The workshop began with a picture of Medusa, the participants were asked to view it as a metaphor for the present world, and asked them to name the issues that make up the world (as if they were the snakes in her hair), this was to give the participants something to look at that resonated with them. It also created the meta-narrative within which the young person, who they would be focussing on, was acting. The participants then watched a scene of the young person's morning, the facilitator would stop the scene to ask the participants to make decisions about the drama the scene was silent on, such as why his mum left him to go to work, who the letter he opened was from. The final decision the participants made was where the young person was going with the knife. In the second part of the workshop the focus is on teaching issues, however in making decisions about the young persons world, his world is very present in our discussions and artistic choices. The first task, in the second part of the workshop, tried to examine and articulate the social and psychological forces that influence the way a young person answers a question from a teacher. I first tell them a little about the school, it is mainly working class, with a sizeable immigrant minority on the roles, and there are about twenty languages spoken. We then created a still image of a teacher and the young person in the scene, the lesson was undetermined, as was the question. I asked who else was in the room, where the school/head teacher are in the room, and where his mum was in the room. I then asked what the boy see's reflected back when he looks at the teacher, what he sees reflected back when he looks at his peers, etc. These can all be recorded and placed around the classroom, I then tell the participants that there have been a few violent incidents I n the school, fights, bullying etc. The head teacher has asked the teachers to address these issues in their lessons and the drama teacher has chosen to address the issues through the story of Perseus. I gave the participants a (very) abridged version of the story and asked them to choose the part of the story the teacher chose as the central event in their drama lesson. I then asked them to create a moment in that lesson when the young person is asked a question. We then share backs those moments and the facilitator asks questions such as 'where is he looking?' 'Where is the teacher looking?' 'Where are the rest of the class looking?' 'Who or what is the subject under scrutiny?' Finally, the facilitator asks 'Where does the knife end up?'

Resources to support workshop

Coloured copies of Caravaggio's Medusa's head on shield, one for each group and strips of paper and pens.

A space in which to create a kitchen the scene with the young person takes place in. It is a choice of the teacher/facilitator whether to use objects or mime. If they use objects they will need an apple, an empty cereal box, a sealed envelope with a letter, a kitchen knife.

The actions are in Italics, the facilitators suggested interventions in bold.

*The boy comes to life, using his phone (picking up on what the participants have said). His mother comes into the room, speaks to him, he slowly puts his shoes on, she leaves. **What did she say to him?** (Participants could be asked to represent the mother, in depiction or in the scene. He waits, listens, takes his shoes off. He is messaged, he responds to the message. **Who do you think is messaging him?** He goes to the kitchen, looks for something to eat, there is nothing he wants, he takes an apple from the bowl, smells it, throws it in the air, takes a bite, chews (a long time, makes a face). **What does he want to eat? What's the difference between being hungry and having an appetite? If the apple could speak what might it say?** Takes a knife from the draw, cuts the apple, then takes the skin of the slice of apple, eats it, throws rest of apple in the bin. He sits down, he is messaged, he looks at message, puts phone down. **What is this message?** A letter is posted through the letter box, he goes and gets it, comes back to front room, he holds the letter up to the light. Puts the letter on the table. He is messaged, he looks, puts phone down. **What did he read?** Picks up letter, taps it on the table, holds it up to the light, puts it down, picks it up, he tries to open it carefully, puts letter down, gets up, picks up knife. He tries to carefully open letter with the knife, the knife slips, he cuts himself, blood on the letter. He rips open the letter, sucking his finger/thumb, he reads letter. **What kind of letter is this? What does it say?** He is messaged, he looks at message, goes to reply, stops, wipes the blood from his finger on the letter. Reply's to the message. **What did he write?** Puts his shoes back on. Stands up, gets his coat. Picks up knife, hesitates, puts knife in his pocket. Goes to leave, stops, picks up letter, goes to throw it in the bin, stops, gets a lighter out, looks around, puts lighter away, screws letter up and puts it in his pocket. **Why does he take the knife? What is he thinking? Do we want to change anything?** He goes out, checks himself in the mirror and sighs. **What does he see in his reflection? He leaves. Where is he going?***

Perseus's story.

The oracle had warned Acrisius that he would be killed by his daughter's son. As soon as he returned, he had his daughter imprisoned in a bronze chamber, but Zeus came to her in a shower of gold and impregnated her. Soon after Perseus was born. Fearful of the child, but fearful of Zeus also, he cast mother and son into the sea in a wooden chest.

Mother and child were washed ashore on the island of Serifos, where they were taken in by the fisherman Dictys, who raised the boy to manhood. The brother of Dictys was Polydectes, the king of the Island, as Perseus grew the king fell in love with his mother (Danae), and plotted to send Perseus away from the Island in disgrace.

He held a large banquet where all those invited were expected to bring a horse, Perseus, a fisherman's son did not have a horse, so to save himself from disgrace he promised the king anything he named.

Polydectes named the head of the Gorgon, Medusa.



Post workshop ideas

The workshop was devised specifically for the teachers at the summer school, they can choose to adapt it and use it how they wish. It could be adapted for creative writing tasks, or as a way into discussion for any issue facing young people.

Further reading

Dorothy Heathcote Collected writings on education and drama, Edited by Johnson, L O'Neill C, Signs and Portents. Stanley Thornes (Publishers) Ltd. Edward Bond and the Dramatic Child, Trentham Books.

