

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-53016-4 – Structuring Drama Work : 100 Key Conventions for Theatre and Drama 3rd Edition

Jonathan Neelands, Tony Goode

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Structuring Drama Work

3rd edition

Jonathan Neelands and Tony Goode



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-53016-4 – Structuring Drama Work : 100 Key Conventions for Theatre and Drama 3rd Edition

Jonathan Neelands, Tony Goode

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

Information on this title: education.cambridge.org

© Cambridge University Press 2015

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1990

Third edition 2015

Printed in Poland by Opolgraf

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-53016-4 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate. Information regarding prices, travel timetables, and other factual information given in this work is correct at the time of first printing but Cambridge University Press does not guarantee the accuracy of such information thereafter.

IGCSE® is the registered trademark of Cambridge International Examinations.

NOTICE TO TEACHERS IN THE UK

It is illegal to reproduce any part of this work in material form (including photocopying and electronic storage) except under the following circumstances:

- (i) where you are abiding by a licence granted to your school or institution by the Copyright Licensing Agency;
- (ii) where no such licence exists, or where you wish to exceed the terms of a licence, and you have gained the written permission of Cambridge University Press;
- (iii) where you are allowed to reproduce without permission under the provisions of Chapter 3 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, which covers, for example, the reproduction of short passages within certain types of educational anthology and reproduction for the purposes of setting examination questions.

Contents

Introduction	1	Spotlighting	51
		Tag-role	53
		Teacher-in-role	54
		Telephone/radio conversations	56
		Time line	57
		Time will tell	58
		Will they – won't they?	59
PART 1			
A GUIDE TO DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS	4		
A. Context-building action	8	C. Poetic action	61
Circle of life	9	Action narration	63
Circular drama	11	Alter ego	65
Collective character	12	Analogy	66
Collective drawing	13	Behind the scene	67
Commission	14	Caption-making	68
Defining space	16	Ceremony	70
Diaries, letters, journals, messages	17	Chamber theatre	71
First impressions	18	Come on down!	73
Games	20	<i>Commedia dell'arte</i>	74
Guided tour	21	Cross-cutting	76
Making maps/diagrams	22	Documentary theatre	77
Objects of character	23	Flashback	78
Role-on-the-wall	25	Folk-forms	80
Simulations	26	Forum-theatre	81
Soundtracking	27	Genre switch	82
Still-image	28	Gestus	83
The iceberg	29	Living newspaper	84
The ripple	31	Masks	86
Theory-building	33	Mimed activity	87
Unfinished materials	35	Montage	88
		Physical theatre	90
B. Narrative action	36	Play within a play	92
A day in the life	37	Prepared roles	94
Critical events	39	Readers' theatre	95
Everywoman	40	Re-enactment	97
Good angel/bad angel	41	Reminiscence theatre	98
Gossip circle	42	Revue	100
Hot-seating	43	Ritual	101
Interviews/interrogations	44	Role-reversal	103
Mantle of the expert	45	Shape-shifting	104
Meetings	47	Small-group play-making	105
Noises off	48	Soundscape	107
Overheard conversations	49	TV times	108
Reportage	50	Verbatim theatre	109

D. Reflective action	110	Thought shower	137
Are you moved?	111	Thought-tracking	138
Builders of bridges	112	Voices in the head	139
Character box	113	Wall of China	140
Choral speak	115	Walls have ears	142
Empathy knots	117	Window on the world	143
Finger ballet	118		
Gestalt	119		
Gifting	120	PART 2	
Giving witness	121	STRUCTURING DRAMA	
Group sculpture	122	FOR LEARNING	
Harmony	123	OPPORTUNITIES	145
If I were you ...	125		
Marking the moment	127	PART 3	
Moment of truth	128	THEATRE AS A	
Narration	129	LEARNING PROCESS	157
Postbox	130		
Power line	131	Acknowledgements	169
Space between	132		
Spectrum of difference	133		
Taking sides	135		
This way/that way	136		

Introduction

Note on the 25th Anniversary Edition

Since the first edition of *Structuring Drama Work* in 1992, there have been significant developments in the social and artistic uses of theatre and drama. We have tried to reflect these changes in this new edition. We have added new conventions to make 100 available here and have recognised the all-pervasive impact of the digital world in our cultural connections for each convention.

We have also, in our vocabulary and use of examples, sought to recognise the growth of applied theatre in a range of contexts from social justice programmes to business and corporate education. Participatory forms of applied theatre have grown from the same foundations of socially committed, educational and inquiry-based art that is the inspiration for *Structuring Drama Work*.

The idea of 'ensemble' as a guiding principle for the making and sharing of theatre that is based in social relationships and co-creation has taken hold in both the artistic theatre and in socially engaged applied theatre and drama work. *Structuring Drama Work* is based in these same principles and the very idea of conventions assumes an 'ensemble' approach to the making of meanings in social circumstances. We have thus strengthened and made explicit the ensemble foundations in this new edition.

The purpose of this book is to outline some of the conventions that are available to participants engaged in structuring dramatic activity; whether it be an improvisation or devising workshop, an active exploration of a text and its meanings, or a participatory workshop structured for others. In addition, the book sets out models for the process of structuring dramatic activity so that the use of conventions can be seen as part of a dynamic process that enables participants to make, explore and communicate meaning through theatre form. In this sense, the conventions offer a pallet of ideas and ways of working in drama from which a wide range of exploratory, devised and text based drama work can be created.

The conventions are drawn from a wide range of sources including process drama, applied theatre as well as the work of key practitioners such as Brecht, Stanislavski, Boal and others.

The book is not an exhaustive guide to the practical study of theatre; rather, it identifies varieties of form that might be used or experienced as part of the more comprehensive art-process of communicating and interpreting meanings through theatre. The conventions and the examples are designed to support and enrich the study of drama in the curriculum and can be used as supplementary material for the Cambridge IGCSE and

other syllabuses. The range of conventions corresponds to the Cambridge IGCSE syllabus and would easily transfer to a scheme of work supporting the full syllabus, as well as to other schemes of work including the study of dramatic texts.

The emphasis is on conventions that are often used in exploratory and rehearsal stages of dramatic inquiry and performance. However, many of the conventions can also be adapted for use in performance and this will depend on the experience and creativity of teachers, practitioners and the groups they work with. Theatre has no rules of course, and we hope that the fluid use of conventions across the making and performing of theatre will add fresh and new ideas for communicating theatre to audiences.

It is assumed that, as with all art forms, the experience of theatre is distinguished from real-life experience by the conscious application of form to meaning in order to engage both the intellect and the emotions in a representation of meaning. In theatre, meanings, social codes and interactions are represented, shaped and crafted through the conventions of dramatic activity. The same would hold true for all other art forms that use recognisable and conscious conventions of form in order to convey meanings. It is assumed that understanding the possibilities (and limitations) of form gives insight into the medium of theatre, and offers participants the possibility of operating greater control over the medium and its personal and social uses.

Definitions of theatre and dramatic convention

The definitions of theatre and dramatic convention presented below assume the following:

- that the term theatre does not describe a single form of activity, e.g. the performance of a playwright's work to an audience
- that theatre exists as a process for the interpretation of human behaviour and meanings as well as for their expression; it responds to a basic human need to symbolise the world through art forms
- that meaningful and personally useful theatre activity is the right and prerogative of all people, enabling all to maximise the culture of their ethnicity, class, gender, age or ability
- that a comprehensive study of theatre needs to go beyond a consideration of dramatic texts and the skills associated with acting
- that understanding theatre is an active process that enables a participant to build from subjective responses to theatre experiences towards the formation of valid critical judgements and generalisations about the nature and availability of theatre.

For the purposes of this book the following working definitions are used:

Theatre is the direct experience that is shared when people imagine and behave as if they were other than themselves in some other place at another time. This definition seeks to encompass all forms of creative imitative behaviour – from the loose and spontaneous imaginative *play* of young children (which becomes internalised, but still used in later life as a way of rehearsing conversations and events to come) through to the more formal experience of *the play* performed by actors for an audience.

Meanings in theatre are created for both spectator and participant through the actor's fictional and symbolic uses of human presence in time and space. These may be enhanced by the symbolic use of objects, light and sound. Dramatic convention describes the form that this relationship takes at different stages of the theatrical experience. Some theatre traditions and syllabuses distinguish methods, styles and genres from 'conventions', we have borrowed from these traditions but the essential quality of 'Structuring Drama Work' is that it uses the term 'convention' to describe different ways of structuring actors in time and space across a broad range of drama and theatre applications.

Conventions are indicators of the way in which *time*, *space* and *presence* can interact and be imaginatively shaped to create different kinds of meanings in theatre. Particular conventions will, therefore, emphasise different qualities in the theatrical possibilities of time, space and human presence. In terms of time, for instance, an improvisation will create a relationship that is very close to reality in the sense that time elapses at life-rate and the actor behaves and uses space naturalistically; in **still-image** time is arrested and frozen so that a period of time can be spent enquiring into a single moment represented in the tableau; in **mimed activity** the actor's use of space is often overtly symbolic, going beyond 'natural' gesture and uses of space in order to communicate specific meanings.

Part 1 of this book provides some of the conventions that make up the 'palette' that organisers¹ and participants use in theatre; the application of the palette to create a picture requires those skills of sensitivity, perception and craft that develop through practical involvement and experimentation in theatre itself. Parts 2 and 3, therefore, introduce processes that may assist participants and organisers in exploring the applications of the palette of conventions.

¹ Throughout this book we use the term 'organiser' to describe those individuals who take responsibility for structuring the drama work of others. The term therefore encompasses applied theatre practitioners, teachers, directors, youth leaders and so on, as well as those participants working within self-initiating drama groups who take short-term responsibility for the group's experience at particular points in the process.