

# ACTING WITH THE BODY

by Lindsay Price

Many actors forget the importance of acting with the body.

Use these physical exercises to become aware of the body as an acting tool.



The body can convey character, emotion, and environment. The body can work in harmony with the dialogue or in contrast. The body can tell a story without any dialogue at all.

## Physical Warm Ups

### » *Environment Walks*

Move around the room as if walking in the following environments: warm summer day, a light rain fall, a torrential downpour, the first snowfall, a wind storm, a hail storm.

Move around the room as if walking through or on the following: a mud field, an icy sidewalk, hip high grass, a rocky mountain, a vat of Jell-O, quick drying cement.

### » *Alphabet Body*

Students spell letters of the alphabet with their bodies. (I, X, T, L, U, K, J, N, V) Then they work in pairs (W, H, M, O, A, Z). Finally, in small groups students try to create a word just using their bodies.

### » *Slow Motion Race*

The last person across the room is the winner. Must take big steps, must have one foot off the floor at a time.

## Using the Body to Show Environment

### » *The Weather*

Groups create a tableau that shows the weather without using words or hands. (e.g. *Holding out a flat palm to show that it's raining.*)

### » *Entrances and Exits*

Students enter the space, sit and then exit. Their objective is to show both the location they're entering and where they're going.

### » *Entrances and Exits II*

In groups of three. The first person enters, establishes the space and exits. The next person enters, places a mimed object in the space (that must fit the space) and leaves it when they exit. Third person does the same. Bonus points if the third person can pick up and use the second person's mimed object before leaving.

## Using the Body to Show Emotion

- ❖ Show enthusiasm in your eyebrows, your shoulders, your fingers, your knees, your feet. Do the same with sadness, and anger. How do the specific body parts tense or release depending on the emotion?
- ❖ Create a full body physical pose for an emotion: What happens to the body when you're happy, mad, sad, scared, proud?
- ❖ In small groups, create a tableau that shows an emotional reaction. Show the

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tableau to the rest of the class. Can they guess the emotion?

- ❖ In pairs, improvise a scene surrounding a birthday present. One gives the present, and one receives. (Make sure the pairs solidify the relationship!) First time round, the giver and the receiver are both happy with the present. They must show their happiness with their bodies. Second time round, the receiver says they are happy with the gift, but presents a very unhappy body. How does that change the scene? Third time around the giver presents an unhappy body.

### Using the body to tell a story

#### » *Photo Booth*

Photo booth pics get four frames. In groups, students tell the story of an event using four tableaux.

Make sure there is a beginning, middle and end. Sample events include a picnic that gets rained out, a birthday party where someone drops the cake, a bully pushing someone then getting scared by a spider.

#### » *Location Mime*

In groups students tell the story of a specific location without words. Examples: A dog show where a dog is given the first place prize, which is then taken away when the dog bites the judge. A roller coaster where two friends have to pressure a nervous third to get on the coaster and then he has the best time of the three. Be specific with the location and its place in the story.

#### » *Feet Plays*

In groups of three, students create a short scene. The catch? Only their feet are showing during the scene (they're either behind a curtain or other students can hold up a cloth). Can the rest of the group understand the story, character and emotion by only seeing the feet?

### Using the body to show character

You can tell a lot about a character by how they stand, how they gesture, and how they walk. An audience should know what type of character an actor is playing the moment they step on stage, before they even open their mouths!

#### » *Shoulders*

The easiest way to establish a character is by placing their shoulders. Practice creating the following character types with the following shoulder positions.

- ▶ Are they a tense character? (shoulders up around the ears)
- ▶ Are they a relaxed character? (shoulders sloped down)
- ▶ Are they a shy character? (shoulders slumped forward)
- ▶ Are they a confident character? (shoulders pulled back)

#### » *Character Movement*

Practice moving about the room with different variables:

- ▶ Fast steps and then slow.
- ▶ Big steps and then small.
- ▶ Heavy steps and then light.

In each pairing think of a character who walks that way. For example – what kind of character moves quickly? (a businessman on his way to work) What kind of character moves with slow steps (someone going into a haunted house)

Then start combining the pairings:

- ▶ Fast, small, light.
- ▶ Slow, big, heavy.

Each student picks three types of movements and creates a character. They come up with a name, an age, and a job. They then introduce themselves to the group. 🎤