Teaching and Performing Theatre for Youth Using Physical Storytelling

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Teaching and Performing Theatre for Youth Using Physical Storytelling

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

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Alison Brooke Quinlan Turner MFA

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Major Director: David Leong, Department Chair, Theatre Dept.

For children to enjoy theatre they must see a story played out physically. The same is true when children act. Young performers must be taught to act using a simplified version of the Stanislavski System that puts emphasis on playable action. This thesis evaluates current acting texts for youth based on whether or not the author is able to outline a method that is accessible for children, and highlights the importance of playable action in scene work. It also provides a guide to teaching theatre for youth based on a class of the author’s design where students developed curriculum, managed classes of students, and executed lessons that emphasized the importance of physicality in acting. It includes the process and script of a devised play based on Lewis Carroll’s poem Jabberwocky where the story was told through movement. The final section is results of these experiments and feedback from children.
Introduction

Schools, churches, and children’s drama clubs have historically put on performances by children. The purpose of these plays varies from holiday celebrations, to historical messages, but the result is typically the same. Kids don homemade costumes, memorize lines from a script, and then stand on stage, surrounded by their set, under bright lights, and step out one at a time to deliver asides to the audience. It is fantastic that these kids learn vocal skills, like projection, articulation, and how to stand on stage, open to the audience so that they can be seen by their friends and family. Vocal elements are important tools for every young actor. But why is visual story-telling left out of the early teachings of acting? In most of these performances there is no storytelling, no action, no acting. Why are these youth learning to use only their voices but neglecting the physicality of the craft? Perhaps it is because instructors do not know what resources are available to aid in teaching physical acting or that they themselves never understood playable action, maybe it is the result of children’s plays lacking a physical story, or it could be that the instructor’s acting vocabulary is confusing in conveying physicality to these children; whatever the case, this problem needs to be corrected. Watch any child play make-believe and you will see that children inherently “act” with their bodies; therefore they have the ability to do the same on stage.

In this thesis, I explore the importance of physical story-telling and action in theatre for youth, not only in performance but in teaching theatre to children as well. When I refer to youth, I am speaking of children under the age of fourteen, though much of what I found
can be applied to high school students as well. The essay is divided into three main sections: in Chapter One, I outline some resources for teaching youth theatre and discuss their strengths and weaknesses; in Chapter Two, I explore what we as instructors can do to improve teaching theatre by emphasizing action and simplifying the Stanislavski system through a class titled Teaching Theatre for Youth; and finally, Chapter Three is the recordings of a devised performance, which highlights the importance of physical story-telling in theatre for young audiences with a one act adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s poem, *Jabberwocky*.

I began by researching current youth theatre texts and resources, finding their strengths and weaknesses in using physical story-telling, and highlighting what may be missing. I have reviewed well known texts, as well as some that are more obscure, discovered ones to be avoided and why, and created a list of six effective textbooks that could be used in schools for teaching theatre to youth; books that contain not only vocal instruction, but lessons in physical action as well as Stanislavski terms for youth.

The second chapter reflects on a course I created to teach theatre for youth by emphasizing action and storytelling as well as creating a vocabulary that is accessible for young actors based on the Stanislavski System. I have included instructions on developing a curriculum, as well as structuring a theatre class for youth that allows them to learn the craft. In the class, we worked to redefine some of the basic Stanislavski terminology, which I have listed, and we developed several new and adapted exercises to teach these terms. A few of these exercises are also incorporated. This chapter, along with the class, is meant to be a training guide for instructors who teach child actors.

Finally, to exemplify the importance of physical storytelling in youth theatre, a cast of eight actors and I devised a short performance based on Lewis Carroll’s poem, *Jabberwocky* that
places an emphasis on using the body to tell a story. Because the poem is nonsense, we were forced to find ways to convey our message, and this process, including the ideas and problem-solving strategies are recorded in Chapter Three. We not only worked to develop a story, with which children could connect, but also used creative strategies to tell this story clearly without the help of language. We discovered that by using movement, as well as puppetry, masks, visual art, music, sound effects, and subtext, we were able to have some success in our endeavor. This chapter shows our journey and includes the final script with blocking and sound cues.

I conclude this thesis with a short summary of the feedback from Lewis Carroll’s *Jabberwocky* when performed for groups of youth at local libraries, as well as conclusions I have made based on research, the work of the class, and workshops the aspiring theatre instructors taught to groups of middle school students. I hope to not only offer suggestions for theatre texts but present for teachers a collection of resources, lessons in curriculum building and teaching physical storytelling to children, and an archive of a new piece of theatre for youth that highlights the importance of physical story-telling.
Chapter 1: Existing Materials

From my experience in teaching youth theatre, the biggest issue young actors experience is that they do not use their bodies to tell the story of a scene. Perhaps they are embarrassed to be active in front of their peers; maybe society—more specifically television and other media that require little effort or movement in order to engage—has affected them so much that they have subdued their natural instinct to use their physicality to express their desires; or maybe the children get wrapped up in reading a script and they forget that anything exists below their heads. In any case, when young performers take the stage, they naturally begin speaking lines, but often fail to do anything physical. How can theatre instructors correct this behavior? What resources are available to help teachers get students to be more active when performing on stage?

There are a plethora of materials that are designed to help students and teachers with the craft of acting, but many instructors do not know where to begin. As discovered when searching through training books, not all acting texts are equal: some are beneficial only for specific needs, and others are out of date and offer no advice for a modern child. Consequently, most acting books are written for beginning adult actors and their language is not accessible for students whose ages are fourteen and under. Others books are directed towards children, but pander to young performers, are too advanced for a middle school education, or contain vague exercises that promote creativity but do not offer advice on how these activities relate to scene work.
Others still may offer a useful chapter or two but are not worth purchasing the whole book for classroom use.

After sifting through texts that should be avoided and others that contain some worthwhile advice, I have narrowed the recommendation to several textbooks that every teacher should read and keep in his or her classroom as “go-to guides” for lessons, games, scenes, and applications, because of their accessibility for children, their practicality, and the knowledge they provide. In this chapter, I outline resources that are too advanced or not suitable for work with young actors, books that theatre teachers may read to gain their own knowledge in exercises or pedagogy theory, and finally, six texts that all theatre teachers should have to use in their classrooms.

The Problems

Most of the resources that exist as acting training guides are meant for adults. Although many performers begin performing at a fairly early age, they typically do not start to learn about acting technique until college. The following books are fantastic for training young adult actors but should be avoided when searching for resources on teaching youth theatre because their concepts and language are too advanced for children. Among these are Bruce Miller’s *The Actor as Storyteller*, Sonia Moore’s *Training an Actor*, as well as *An American Acting Training*, Robert Benedetti’s *The Actor at Work*, Robert Cohen’s *Acting One*, Samuel Selden’s *First Steps in Acting*, Arthur Bartow’s *Training of the American Actor*, and David Zinder’s *Body Voice Imagination*. Many, like the works of Moore and Benedetti, highlight Stanislavski’s techniques for the American actor, while others, like the texts of Bartow and Miller, include methods of Lee Strasberg, Uta Hagen, Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, Michael Chekhov and Jerzy Grotowski.
The concepts of Stanislavski’s system as well as his terminology can be challenging for young performers to grasp, and though exercises from the other practitioners may be used in the classroom, the child actor is probably not ready to explore a variety of acting methods. A training textbook for a young actor should not only contain a guide to the basic elements of the Stanislavski system, but it should incorporate the most basic lessons in storytelling, as well as information on how to use the voice and body on stage. Books like Cohen’s *Acting One*, Selden’s *First Six Steps in Acting*, and Benedetti’s *The Actor at Work* do just this, however, their language is meant for adult actors and even most of the exercises used in the texts refer to plays like *King Lear*—a play with which young performers are not familiar.

My second concern with many acting guides for teachers who instruct children is that the writings are vague and they offer either lengthy theory on what children need, or they list a series of exercises with no purposes or applications to scene work. Michael Malkin, who writes a useful book on theory and instruction, argues that children need, “more theatre, less creativity [in their acting classroom]” (Malkin 13). He goes on to explain that children are born with an innate sense to create; therefore, our job as theatre instructors is not to teach children how to be creative—a common misconception with many acting texts—but to instill in them skills they can use for the stage.

Based on this theory, Betty Keller’s *Improvisations in Creative Drama* can be a useful resource when looking for warm-ups and theatre games. Keller’s work, however, does not aid a theatre teacher in understanding how to develop an acting curriculum, nor does it explain how to apply the exercises to the acting craft. The problem with several workshops in this book, such as the ones titled “Painting with Music;” “Mirrors and Shadows;” and “Semi-Structured Happenings” is that they appear to be unrelated to acting technique when done with young
performers. These games can be an effective tool to get young performers using their bodies, but if students do not apply the lessons directly to their acting, they will be unable to make a connection between theatre games and acting. If a theatre instructor simply needs exercises, he or she will probably find more resources online on websites like improvencyclopedia.com, and need not spend money on this book.

Katherine Mayfield has a similar problem to Keller with her work; *Acting A to Z*. This text acts more as a dictionary for students to better understand the terms used in the theatre, rather than a step-by-step training guide for young performers. As a classroom resource for students to research common acting terms, this could be useful, but again, online resources would prove to be more effective in this regard.

Another issue with vagueness in resources for teaching theatre for youth is that, while there are countless books that offer theatre education theory, many do not outline how the concepts can be put to practical classroom use. Among these are *Theatre and Education* by Helen Nicholson, *The Dramatic Curriculum* by Richard Courtney, and *The Drama Classroom* by Philip Taylor. No doubt that studying these theoretical texts—which offer information on the historical development of classroom drama, question the purpose of drama in a classroom, and challenge the structure of the theatre curriculum in general—may make one a more knowledgeable teacher, but these books, despite their titles, present no practical guides to teaching theatre for youth. I do suggest that teachers read books on theory, and any of these would be valuable for better understanding the purpose of a drama classroom, but none are necessary to have for day-to-day use in working with children.

Other theory texts provide information on the psychological nature of children in a drama classroom, but again offer no classroom advice. Peter Slade’s *An Introduction to Child Drama* or
Gavin Bolton’s *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education* can be useful study tools for an aspiring teacher to better understand his or her students, but even these books do not suggest how to prepare for and deal with the behavior. As a trained teacher who studied Erik Erikson’s and Jean Piaget’s stages of development, I appreciate the importance of understanding students’ behavior and cognitive development; therefore, these texts (or at least chapters from them) could be beneficial readings for those studying pedagogy, but on the whole, they will not necessarily make one a better teacher. I suggest borrowing and reading these works as opposed to purchasing them for everyday use.

The above textbooks may be informative for specific classroom needs, but *The Magic If: Stanislavski for Children* by Elizabeth Kelly, and *The Amateur Actor* by Frances Mackenzie, which are written as workbooks for young actors, brought on the most disappointment when doing research because though they claim to be tailored to children, their language is not accessible for the reading level of students fourteen and under. Even in the later editions of *The Amateur Actor*, (originally written in the 1930s and revised in the 1970s), the exercises and lessons seem archaic. While this book offers concepts like “no actor should ever make a movement or gesture unless he knows exactly what he means by it,” (Mackenzie 54) at the same time it makes antiquated assumptions like “women…seem to have less sense of poise, and less control of their movements [than men]” (Mackenzie 53). Some principles in the text can be advantageous for an acting teacher to better understand the use of movement and voice for the stage, but on the whole the language is outdated for practical classroom use and the concepts are not accessible to teach to children.

Kelly’s *The Magic If: Stanislavski for Children*, published in 1973, offers a less archaic approach to acting technique, but still one that is outdated for today’s youth. This text, while
written as a guide for children—the first section is titled “Hello, Kids”—uses language and concepts that are much too advanced for most young performers. One of the chapters, titled “Concentration: Circles of Attention,” outlines Stanislavski’s theory on how a character can concentrate on herself and things directly nearby, how she can have an open awareness of those around her, or how her attention can live beyond herself and the people nearby. With lessons like this, the book delves into many facets of the Stanislavski system that child actors may not be prepared to explore.

A Stanislavski acting system for children should be limited to the simplest acting components of the craft, such as the use of the senses, identifying given circumstances, imagining the “magic if,” and exploring objectives, obstacles and tactics (which consequently, are glossed over in this text). These lessons are the foundational elements of the craft. Although these few terms can also be challenging for actors young and old, limiting the number of concepts makes the task more manageable and allows children to focus on what is most important. The exercises in Kelly’s text, like “the memory of feelings,” “adaptation,” and “tempo and rhythm,” should be explored only after the actor has had a chance to practice the building blocks of the technique.

Not only are the concepts in this book difficult to teach to young actors, the examples given to illustrate the theories seem out of touch with today’s youth. For example, in the chapter, “Extending Your Senses” the following instance is given to outline the importance of the voice:

When a newborn child cries, the doctor is happy because he knows the passageway to his lungs is open and he is breathing and healthy. If a baby does not cry at birth, the doctor often slaps him to make him cry, just for the purpose of hearing the sound that tells him the airway to the child’s lungs is working. (Kelly 45)
Though this is a true example of the use of the voice, it is not one with which young performers can identify. A better anecdote might be to talk about when a child is on the playground, falls and scrapes his knee on the concrete and yells out. The release of the voice is an important expression of the emotion. This example is something to which each child can relate, because he has probably had that experience and can remember it readily. It is challenging language that makes Kelly’s book seem unappealing for young actors and though there are several chapters in it like “The Magic If,” and “Discovering Meaning through Actions” that might be valuable for theatre teachers to read in order to give them a sense of using the Stanislavski system with children, the overall book is not a great resource for an acting classroom.

Six Books All Theatre Teachers Should Have and Use in Their Classrooms

*Training the Young Actor* by Michael Malkin: Like *The Amateur Actor*, originally written in the late 1970s, (unfortunately making the pictures slightly outdated), this book offers sound advice for the theatre instructor on the teacher’s job in the classroom, how he or she can create an effective curriculum, the proper vocal, physical, and character uses on stage, and a simplified guide to the Stanislavski system. It also contains chapters on puppeteering and Reader’s Theatre—two elements often taught as part of an acting curriculum, and a chapter on directing, since many theatre teachers will also be asked to direct a production.

Malkin begins by discussing the teacher’s responsibility to students in the classroom and suggests that the instructor’s job is not to teach creativity, but to allow students to bring their imaginations to their work while teaching them stage techniques. He offers exercises that are useful in the classroom and begins instruction with using the voice and body on the stage. Much of his writings address the issue of students’ lacking physicality in their performances. The
chapter on movement offers cartoon images to help the reader understand physical positions on stage and what these convey about the story that is being told. He continues to exemplify the importance of physical exercises for the acting classroom throughout the other chapters. Malkin is even effective in his sections on tempo and rhythm in the voice and body of a character, because he addresses these topics in a way that is comprehensible for children, saying that “students can use tempo/rhythm techniques to help create and control the moods and emotions of their characters” (Malkin 30). The balance of theory, practice, guidelines, and exercises in this text make it a perfect resource for theatre instructors to have and use in their classroom.

*Theatre Games for Young Performers: Improvisations & Exercises for Developing Acting Skills* by Maria Novelly and *More Theatre Games for Young Performers* by Suzi Zimmerman:

Both of these texts present not only exercises, but complete lessons in movement, voice, improvisation, and scene building for young performers. They also offer instructions for teachers in creating goals for the classroom and planning an acting curriculum. In the scene-building sections of the text, story-telling becomes the central focus of the lesson for children, and it is reiterated throughout the chapters. These volumes are important resources for theatre teachers to return again and again when preparing daily lessons and units because of their complete guides to executing activities as well as applications to scene work. Teachers can use the ready-made lesson plans of *Theatre Games* and *More Theatre Games* when searching for new ideas for their class.

*Theatre Games for the Classroom* by Viola Spolin: Well known in theatre curricula across the country, this book is a staple for any acting teacher. The exercises are mainly for use with younger students, but can be adapted to meet any age group. Spolin’s focus on specificity in her exercises and lessons is beneficial for teachers who want to work on a specific acting
technique with their students, and the way she breaks down the purpose of the games is helpful in selecting an appropriate exercise for the specific work being done. For example, her exercise in eye contact—a common element left out of children’s theatre lessons—helps students understand the importance of looking at their scene partner in their work. The one area where her text lacks is that she does not translate the acting lessons from exercises to scene work. A teacher using this book would have to make the applications on her own. Overall, Theatre Games for the Classroom is useful because it contains appendixes and charts to assist with organizing exercises for certain workshops as well as finding a suitable game for a particular group.

Kids Take the Stage: Helping Young People Discover the Creative Outlet of the Theatre by Lenka Peterson and Dan O’Connor: The two editions of this book are the most recent and valuable resources for the theatre instructor because the exercises are simple and relatable to children of all ages. Throughout the textbooks, which can be used as guides for teachers or read by youth, students explore the internal and external life of the character simultaneously. Each unit of activities and lessons is challenging and steeped in Stanislavski technique, yet the language is modified for young performers’ comprehension. Instead of using the term objectives, Peterson and O’Connor ask their actors what the character wants or needs.

Another example of altered language is found in the chapter titled “The Basic System,” where the students use the questions of who, what, why, where, and when (instead of the term “given circumstances”) to score their scripts:

In a nutshell, here is what actors do to find their characters’ thoughts and needs:
1. Determine the facts—that is, the answers to the five Ws—in each part of the story.
2. Link to each the fact the sensory elements that pertain to them.
3. Make these elements “real” to themselves in their imaginations.
4. Respond to the sensory elements as they believe the characters would. (Peterson and O’Connor 21)

These practical guidelines of scoring can be useful to actors of any age, and the examples given in the text are from plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, whose stories are typically known to middle school and high school students. The language of the book is on the level of an early teen, which allows teachers to use it with their students if necessary.

Much of the book also deals with the physical act of performing, and improvisations like the following can be successful tools for getting students to “do” while they speak:

**One-Line Improv**
Give each team one word or a short line. Their task is to develop a short skit using that line, word, or phrase so that their physical behavior will reveal the situation in which the line is used…The rest of the group must try to guess the situation. Here are some examples of short lines along with potential situations:

1. “Quick, Hide!”
   A surprise party, or thieves, or seeing unwanted guests approaching, or kids using their father’s computer, or little girls using mom’s makeup.
2. “Now look at yourself.”
   A hairdresser or makeup artist to a client, or a photographer showing proofs. (Peterson and O’Connor 85)

Exercises like this one can be found on every page of *Kids Take the Stage*, and because these activities are simple and combine voice and movement with story-telling, they become a valuable resource for the theatre teacher. In fact, I would list the editions of this book as the number one tool a theatre instructor should have on her shelf as a “go to guide” for her classroom.

*Theatre: Art in Action* from the National Textbook Company: This theatre textbook is one of the leading books used in high school theatre classes across the country. Though it may be too advanced for students under the age of fourteen, it gives the instructor an idea of where the curriculum is headed and how to prepare students who may go on to study theatre in high
school and college. It also offers recommendations on how to teach voice, movement, and acting technique, as well as lessons in theatre history and staging practices. Since most youth theatre books do not mention history and styles of performance, this text can be beneficial in introducing the students to these elements of theatre at an earlier age if the teacher wishes.

The list of textbooks available as resources for theatre teachers continues to grow; therefore, what is recommended today may be passé in the next few years. I hope, however, that the above has been helpful for those wishing to narrow down the search for materials. The books mentioned in the section titled “The Problems” may be useful for certain research in the field, but on the whole were selected for this category because they were one-dimensional, or the information in them could also be found on the internet. The six that were selected as beneficial for classroom use were done so because they offered a balance of classroom theory, guides to structuring a theatre curriculum, exercises and applications for scene work, as well as an accessible vocabulary for young actors.
Chapter 2: The Class

Many of the resources for theatre teachers contain sections on voice, movement, and acting technique which, if taught separately to a group of children, result in a compartmentalization of these acting components in their young minds. As mentioned earlier, the biggest problem child actors have is using their bodies to tell the story of a scene. In the following chapter—based on the course I designed called Teaching Theatre for Youth—I outline the importance of using movement in all exercises, including those that focus on vocal technique, as well as emphasize the significance of physicality when applying the techniques to improvisations, open scenes, and text work. Some of the resources that have been explored in the previous chapter were influential both in structuring the class as well as this section and I hope the outcome of this will be a “how to guide” for developing an acting curriculum that sets up an environment where students can create, that stresses physical story-telling, that simplifies the language of the Stanislavski system, and makes connections between games and scene work.

Teaching Theatre for Youth is designed to train potential theatre instructors to teach young actors by simplifying and utilizing the elements of the Stanislavski system, with an emphasis on playable action. The aspiring teachers in the class explore the purpose of warm ups and exercises in teaching. They learn how to design a lesson plan for a workshop, and how to execute that workshop with young performers in such a way that allows children to best retain and apply the information in scenes. They also learn techniques for teaching, like classroom
management, discipline, and adaptation for when the unexpected occurs. Instructors who take this class prepare for various scenarios, like the issue of running out of material while teaching, the challenge of students losing focus on the subject, ways of altering material for special needs children, and how to reach those that simply do not seem to understand the concept. The last part of the course focuses on creating a children’s theatre unit to a group that can be taught over a period of days or weeks.

By the end of the class the aspiring teachers are able to identify important acting tools for young performers. They simplify acting lessons and use physicality, or the external life of the character, to approach the craft. Through exercises and lesson planning, students utilize techniques in classroom management, discipline, improvising material, accommodating special needs, and effectively evaluating a student’s progress. Midway through the semester they execute successful workshops for children that will include an icebreaker, warm-up, teaching exercise, and assessment. Finally they conclude the semester by developing original theatre units that include performance projects for their students.

The teachers taking Teaching Theatre for Youth read Michael Malkin’s Training the Young Actor by as well as sections of Children Take the Stage by Lenka Peterson and Dan O’Connor, Theatre Games for Young Performers by Maria Novelly, and Theater Games for the Classroom by Viola Spolin. These texts are also used as resources for them when they begin to create their own workshops and classroom units. It is recommended that they buy Theatre: Art in Action from The National Textbook Company as a resource for use in their classrooms.

They also read excerpts from The Magic If: Stanislavski for Children by Elizabeth Kelly, The Amateur Actor by Frances Mackenzie, Acting One by Robert Cohen, The Actor as Storyteller by Bruce Miller, First Steps in Acting by Samuel Selden, and Acting A to Z by
Katherine Mayfield. The instructors analyze these texts and label each as effective or ineffective for teaching youth. They explore why they believe them to fall under one category or another and find pros and cons for each in classroom setting. They discuss the language of the texts, the accessibility of the games for different age groups and the theories in teaching. Having some practice in assessing resources allows the teachers to begin researching materials on their own with a critical eye, and starting their own collections of tools for their classes.

In Teaching Theatre for Youth, the teachers discuss meeting the needs of their students’ abilities. They evaluate the different learning modalities and focus on how to reach students of all learning styles by utilizing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities. After examining Eric Erikson’s and Jean Piaget’s stages of development—which are social and cognitive theories on the development of children’s minds—the instructors gain an understanding of what their potential students might be able to process and how they might react to lessons and classroom scenarios. Finally, the instructors examine Bloom’s taxonomy to ensure that the assessments they develop will reach the highest order of thinking for their own students. While evaluating what an acting class should contain, they start building daily lesson plans within a selected unit to teach students through a variety of learning techniques, and create assessments that challenge the children to evaluate and apply the knowledge they obtain.

The students critique and analyze each other’s work in the class as well as visit the classroom of two theatre instructors to observe and review. They look for effective execution of instructions, motivation of the instructor, techniques in classroom management, and overall usefulness of lessons for acting students. The analysis of fellow classmates and other instructors is meant to help them think critically about their own aesthetics as teachers as well as problem solve to find the best solution for themselves in a variety of teaching situations.
The following is a record of what is taught in Teaching Theatre for Youth to prepare instructors for careers as theatre educators. Lessons in planning a curriculum, breaking the ice, creating a safe space, warming-up, simplifying the Stanislavski system, and developing exercises, application, and assessment can assist an aspiring teacher to be effective in his or her classroom endeavors.

**Planning the Curriculum**

The instructor should begin by identifying learning outcomes for the young performers in the class. What does he or she want the students to know by the end of the course, and how will learning this improve the students’ performance? For example, a teacher might want her students to learn vocal technique, pantomime, ensemble work, staging, and know a little about the Stanislavski system. She first needs to question whether these are vital to the children’s success as actors. If the answer is yes, this becomes a list of units for the class, if the response is no, then the topic cannot be justified as a unit and the teacher should continue to explore what is important for the group. In many states, there are standards of education that must be met. These standards can be a starting-off point, or can help the teacher fill in gaps of what might be missing in the curriculum.

Once the major units have been established, the teacher identifies the lessons within each unit. What must be taught in order for students to understand the concept? For example, a vocal unit might include individual lessons on projection, articulation, and inflection. This list will be the beginning of the day-to-day lesson plans. Within each day, a well-constructed lesson should contain warm-ups or icebreakers, exercises and activities that illustrate the concept, as well as
some sort of application to scene work, and an opportunity to assess the student’s knowledge of the lesson.

The written plan for that day—referred to as a lesson plan—should have a detailed description of the purpose or objective of the day and/or the learning outcome, which is what the students should know after the day. It should also contain the state’s standards (if any) that are being met, in order to justify that the curriculum falls under the legal requirements. The lesson plan should then list materials needed for the day, and if there are none, it should note this. Keeping a standardized format will help the teacher stay organized, and knowing whether or not certain materials are necessary for the lesson will ensure that the instructor will not have forgotten something important to carry out the day’s activities.

The exercises are then listed, with variations and a debriefing session if necessary, as well as an estimated time for the activity. Finally, any other work or discussion is included. Discussion with the students is a good way to evaluate their understanding of the day, but specific questions must be asked to guide their thought process. Include the prompt questions on the lesson plan. For example, asking the students what they learned, might lead to many different answers and an unclear understanding of the objective of the day. By making the prompt more specific, the students can be guided to thinking about the application of the work. “How can you use that physical exercise, which demonstrated levels, to explore more movement in your own scene?” is a more specific question and will lead the students to consider the goal for the day. A well-structured lesson plan with the elements from above is the first step in preparing for the day.

**The Ice Breaker**
How does an instructor create a safe environment for students to explore, while still enforcing discipline? The icebreaker activity, if used effectively, can serve both of these purposes. As students of acting ourselves, we all recognize the importance of feeling comfortable within a performance class. Youth, more than any other group of people, need a safe place to explore so as not to stifle their creativity. Many times what hinders their expression is a peer’s reaction to their idea or action. A fellow classmate may respond to another’s actions in a way that makes the student feel like his expression was silly, embarrassing, or not as good as someone else’s. With the icebreaker, an instructor can set up an environment where being silly is the expectation, while setting boundaries and rules that negate judgment to develop a safe learning atmosphere.

Encouraging risk taking and the feeling of looking silly in front of others is vital for a young student’s acting work so that they may create characters that are unexpected, interesting, and engaging. If youths are self-conscious in their performances, they will be less likely to take the risks needed to bring their performances from predictable to interesting. In the ice breaker activity that a teacher leads on the first day of class (or at the opening of every class), she can encourage risk taking and exploration in her students by modeling this behavior, as well as praising others for doing the same. As an instructor it is important to be willing to do what is asked of your students. If an instructor is the first to demonstrate trust, silliness, and discovery in front of the group, the students will understand what is expected of them, and will feel more comfortable following suit. A name game titled “Zombie” is a good example of how modeling might be accomplished. The game goes as follows:

**Zombie**
Have students stand in a circle and one-by-one tell everyone their name. Select one student to stand in the middle of the circle and be “The Zombie” or model the behavior by being the Zombie first. Whoever is in the center must take on the persona of a Zombie and slowly begin to move towards a victim, who is standing around the outside of the circle and attempt to tag that person on the shoulder with his hand. (The student may emulate a Zombie anyway he chooses, but the Zombie may never move quickly.) In order to not get tagged by the Zombie, the student must call out another person’s name in the circle, at which point, the Zombie will follow the instruction and the named person becomes his/her next victim. If a Zombie manages to tag a victim, that person becomes the next Zombie and the original Zombie takes the spot of that person in the circle.

**Variation:** If a student steps away from the Zombie, or bends backwards to avoid being tagged, that person becomes the Zombie (www.improvencyclopedia.com).

Students might be hesitant in a group of peers to “be the Zombie,” however, if the instructor begins and creates a large and creepy Zombie character, it helps to take the pressure off of the rest of the class. Students also respond well to having the power to scare each other, and may not realize that they are acting—something that makes them feel nervous doing on the first day of class. As the laughter of the exercise ensues, the students become more relaxed, more playful, and get to know each other.

Once the instructor has modeled being silly herself, she must continue throughout the exercise to encourage big choices and risk taking in the students. For example, if a student takes a risk, the instructor should always comment on the choice with some sort of positive reinforcement: “wow,” “ooh this one’s really creepy,” “that’s awesome,” etc. This will not only make that individual child feel good about taking a risk but will allow others to notice this praise.
and help to set an expectation. Students of all ages respond well to this positive reinforcement, and if used correctly, they will begin to crave it. It is important to note, however, that a shy child should not be discouraged, but positively reinforced as well, the way a coach of a young sports team might do: “you’ve got it,” “nice,” “keep going,” “good.”

There is a difference between this coaching and the praise that was given for success. The wording of the two is very important. If the language used to coach is the same as the praise, then there is nothing to work toward. Set the bar high and coach until the praise is warranted. For a student who does not wish to try and may be rebelling to purposely show off for his peers, the instructor may choose to be silent and not reward the child in any way, or end the activity and move on to another exercise before he begins to get positive encouragement (i.e. laughter) from other students in the class. Setting the standard for silly behavior by modeling what is expected and praising the students who commit to acting silly will begin to allow the students to not only feel free to explore, but encouraged to do so throughout the semester.

**Setting Rules to Create a Safe Space**

The next tactic in creating a safe space is setting expectations, boundaries with rules, and, in turn, planning and enforcing those rules. In order for students to feel safe expressing themselves, an instructor must not only model and encourage the behavior that is expected, but he must cut out the negative behavior that discourages this freedom. Once young students reach a certain age, they may become less apt to look silly and take risks in front of one another because someone in their life—an older sibling or an adult perhaps—made them feel embarrassed for doing so. From that embarrassment, resentment was formed, and often times a need to feel the same power that their discourager had over them is the result. This is commonly
known as acting “too cool” for the activity. It is important for a teacher in the first icebreaker to begin to recognize who may fall under this category. As we will discuss later, foreseeing a problem will be the first way to cut it out. Though it might take weeks to break this “too cool” behavior, the instructor can create a place where the negative judgment of others will not be tolerated.

Beginning a class by going over the rules and consequences is important. During the icebreaker, the teacher can begin to enforce those rules and set standards for the semester. The rules of the class should be short, be worded to sound positive, be easy to remember, and should be explained in a way that gives students a chance to take ownership over their workspace and their behavior. A rule such as “Don’t leave trash on the floor” may be clear and easy to remember but sets a negative tone, which is often a turn off for students. Imagine a landlord saying, “it’s fine to hang things on the walls but don’t paint anything.” Immediately one might have less respect for the landlord because his language was condescending. One might also feel more tempted to paint the walls, in order to spite the belittling landlord. Instead, imagine a landlord says, “feel free to paint the walls as long as they are repainted white before moving out.” One would probably no longer feel resentment for this command because she was treated as a responsible person. The same is true with classroom rules.

The semantics of each rule is important and should be carefully thought out so that the students understand that they are being treated with respect and are expected to behave in the same way. Avoid negative demands, and instead of beginning a rule with the word “don’t” try giving a guideline of what should be done instead. An instructor might say, “respect the space.” This is an easy enough rule to remember, it is worded to sound positive, and in debriefing the students, the teacher might say, “whatever mess we make while exploring, we’ll clean up before
we leave.” Other rules might include, “respect your instructor,” and “respect each other.” The former gives the teacher in the room authority, while the latter sets the standard for not judging each other and allows the instructor to discipline judgmental attitudes that might arise while others are expressing themselves.

After explaining the rules, students need to take ownership over them. Having students give examples of how someone might not respect each other gives them a way to have input in what is important in the classroom. Another way to have them take ownership and empathize with the rules is to have groups select a rule or several rules, and have them act out a scenario where the rule gets broken, emphasizing why it is important to follow the guidelines. This activity also opens up a chance to discuss what they believe the consequences should be for breaking a rule.

Rules have no meaning without penalties for breaking them. Consequences should be simple to remember, fair, and should be enforced with no emotional attachment. If the consequences are too elaborate, it is easy for the student to forget the punishment, or for her to attempt to negotiate with the details. For example, imagine a landlord says, “feel free to paint the walls as long as they are repainted white before moving out. There is a $200 fine for not doing so.” This consequence is clear and, though unfortunate, it has nothing to do with an emotional reaction. Imagine how one might feel if the landlord says, “If the walls don’t get repainted white before moving out, the tenant will type up a six-page formal apology to the building, and a two-page apology to the next residents, as well as find a paint crew and hire them to finish the job.” Would anyone actually type up apologies? Might the next logical question be, “what will happen if I don’t?” The same is true for students; clear penalties help them to understand the consequence and allow the teacher to be consistent in giving out the punishment.
Sometimes a warning is enough to stop the behavior, so perhaps the expectations go as follows: “breaking one of the rules will result in one warning. After one warning, the student will be asked to step out of the exercise.” The consequences may vary depending on the classroom, but they should always be the same for each rule and the same for every student. Emotional responses should also be removed when disciplining students, because it can cause their emotions to elevate as a response. The rules are there to make everyone feel safe, and if broken, a consequence should be enforced. Once the consequence is over, the student may return to an activity. It is important to note that a child receiving a punishment must be given the opportunity to succeed again, because if he is not, there is no reason for him to desire to succeed. He will also become a behavior problem if there is no opportunity to rejoin the group. Allowing a student the opportunity to return gives him the chance to make a decision to behave more appropriately in order to return to the group. Not only will it help him think, but it allows him to take ownership over his behavior.

Students wish to be treated fairly and will notice if someone is getting different treatment than themselves. It could make them lose respect for the instructor and feel the need to rebel as opposed to wanting to please. Therefore, no matter who the student is that broke the rule, she will need to be given the same punishment with no emotions attached.

In extreme situations, where a student has had the opportunity to rejoin the group and still continues to misbehave, he must be removed from the group in order to ensure the success of the rest of the students. Coming to theatre class and being allowed to participate should be a privilege. Having alternative work, like a reading and writing assignment, for students who have recurring behavior problems is a way of giving them the opportunity to acknowledge the benefits of joining in and following the rules because they are able to see that the other option of isolated
work is much less fun. The ideal situation is one where this student be given work to do and moved to another classroom so that their presence does not hinder the rest of the children.

Overall, students want the praise, they want to be treated with respect, and they want to be included; therefore, the rules will give them the structure to succeed and set up expectations for creating a safe space. Using the rules in congruence with an icebreaker will establish expectations from the beginning and give the instructor a chance to begin enforcing them in order for others to feel comfortable expressing themselves, which is vital to any theatre or acting class.

There are a few other tactics that a teacher can utilize to diminish opportunities for students to break rules in the room. Instructors should be familiar enough with their lesson to be able to move quickly from one activity to the next in order to eliminate the dead time that allows for students to misbehave. He will also need to look out for students who might be slyly attempting to make fun of others. Some ways to eliminate the problem before it arises would be for him to remain a physical presence at all times by acknowledging that he sees what is happening by making eye contact with the student, moving close to the student when she is acting out, or to ask a student to move away from another.

The teacher should mill about the classroom during group work, while at the same time placing himself in a position to see the rest of the room to ensure that he is able to recognize potential problems. Keeping a note of which students should not work together because they either do not get along or get they along so well that they waste time, is important. Also, asking a student who might be having difficulty behaving to be an assistant can help give that student a sense of responsibility in the activity. Finally, the teacher should have some means for quieting and refocusing a group at the end of an activity, or when the instructor needs to speak.
Establishing a clapped pattern, setting up a call and response, or flicking the lights will let students know that hearing or seeing this will mean they must stop what they are doing and take their attention to the instructor. Sometimes simply redirecting the attention by using this focus cue can eliminate potential problems in the classroom. Eliminating the potential for behavior issues, as well as recognizing and addressing a problem early will ensure that fewer problems arise. The list of steps to extinguish problems is lengthy but vital to managing a room of children and, if followed, can help the instructor develop a safe place where students can take risks in their acting.

Icebreaking and setting the learning environment on the first day of class are imperative to creating a room where students can explore and express themselves. Modeling the behavior that is expected in being silly when appropriate as well as modeling respect with the rules will help students see what is expected. Encouraging students with positive reinforcement in their acting as well as in the wording of the rules will help students want to rise to the expectations. Finally, enforcing the rules with clear consequences, fairness and no emotion, and eliminating problems early will help students to understand the seriousness of the expectations, as well as will cut down on the negative behaviors that do not allow everyone to feel comfortable exploring and expressing.

**Simplifying Stanislavski**

The elements of the Stanislavski system are the most widely used methods in western acting technique, which makes them important in a young actor’s training. The terminology Stanislavski uses, however, is difficult for children, and often can often result in uninteresting and over-conventionalized performances. Words like “objective,” “obstacle,” and “tactic” have
a different connotation for young actors than for adults. Children recognize the word “objective” as what a teacher writes on the board at the beginning of class, in order to show them what they will be learning for the day. They may understand the term “obstacle” in the phrase “obstacle course,” but most do not use the word “tactic” in their vocabulary. In order to teach theatre to youth, it is important to build their foundations, but the semantics should be altered into terms that they can understand. In this class, we worked to simplify some terms in order for the language to become more accessible.

At the same time, we chose to keep some of the language that is unrecognizable to students, in order to expand their vocabulary. New words like “endowment” that have no connotation to children, seemed appropriate for use since they would not confuse one meaning for another, while terms like “given circumstances” were altered to be more accessible for them. Therefore, the narrowed list of ten acting lessons— influenced by Stanislavski’s system—that we felt were important to young actors are as follows:

1. Backstory
2. Environment
3. The Needs
4. The Stops
5. Tactics
6. Endowment
7. Magic If
8. Subtext
9. Listening/Reacting
10. Character Building

1. The Backstory: Actors often begin scoring their scripts, or researching their roles, by looking at what Stanislavski calls the character’s “given circumstances.” By this he is referring to the character’s history or backstory, which can be found or assumed by researching the script. Imaginary circumstances comprise the missing pieces of the backstory that are left out of the
script and that the actor must fill in herself in order to get a clearer picture of what the character’s personality might be like. For young actors, we simplify these terms and refer to both as the character’s backstory. This term reinforces the concept that story-telling is important and that the audience should see the effects of the history in the present. We emphasize this by use of sense work. Since all acting must be overtly physical at this age, the character’s backstory should be evident in how the character sees, hears, feels, smells, and tastes her world. Students should still be expected to use their scripts to inform the backstory, but should be inspired like detectives to find out everything they can about the character, and then make assumptions about this person based on what is known. Having the students interview their characters as if they were detectives, lawyers, or talk show hosts, can be an engaging way to get students to create a backstory. An improvisational exercise that then has the students live and interact in a sensorial manner to the physical world that they created while showing how they feel about it, can get them to physicalize the use of this backstory more effectively.

2. Environment: Stanislavski’s “given circumstances” not only comprise a character’s history but his present as well. The present environment, therefore, should not be excluded from a young actor’s technique. In Teaching Theatre for Youth child actors create their surroundings using their senses. It can be helpful to have each student draw a picture of the space, or make a list of adjectives to describe it in terms of how it looks, feels, sounds, smells, tastes, and how it makes him or her feel internally. The actors then go through a series of exercises that allow them to react to their spaces, so that they may understand the difference between thinking about the environment and making it important for the audience in the scene.

3. The Needs: For most students the word “objective” does not create a visceral feeling. Stanislavski’s theory is that every character has a “super objective,” or something she wants
throughout the play, and any number of “objectives,” that she wants in a given scene. In order for students to comprehend what the instructor wants from them, the language used must give
them an innate reaction, and the word objective does not. Instead, we ask students what the
character needs more than anything else in the play (Super Objective) and what the character
needs from the person in which she is speaking at the time. Students are more apt to connect
with the word need than the word “objective” because it is a word that they already understand
and use. It is also vital to point out that the need must always be physical, like our human need
for food or shelter, and that the need should be something physical from the other person.

Students usually lean towards expressing their needs as something verbal from the other
person when they first begin acting. For example, a girl might say that, in the scene, Sue needs
to explain to her friend why she hurt her feelings. Coaching this student by simply asking, “why
does she need to explain?” can help condition her to begin using more a more physical
vocabulary. The student may even need to be asked, “why?,” several times before she reaches a
response that is physical. The student must also be able to explain physically how she knows that
her need is being met, but both of these will be difficult to get from a young actor at first.

Therefore the conversation might go something like this:

Student: I need to explain to my friend why I hurt her feelings.

Teacher: Why do you need to explain?

Student: To make her feel better.

Teacher: Why do you want her to feel better?

Student: Because I want her to forgive me.

Teacher: Oh, so you need her to forgive you. Why?

Student: I want..
Teacher: …need. (The use of this word becomes more powerful when trying to pursue physically later in the scene.)

Student: I need…her to be my friend again.

Teacher: How will you know if she is your friend again? What can she do physically to let you know that she is your friend?

Student: She could give me a hug.

Teacher: Great! So, you need her to forgive you by giving you a hug.

The need from the other person must always be measured by some physical cue. If there is no way of knowing whether this person has met our need as a character, then how do we know when we have gotten what we need? The concept of need is probably one of the most difficult notions to teach; therefore time must be spent practicing finding it as well as ensuring it is physical. It is also a good idea to remove language to help students identify an external need. Saying to a student whose need is not physical, “Ok, don’t say anything, but try to get what you want,” can be a good way for the student to check in and ensure that the need can be played using the body. Once the student is able to express needs in these terms, the rest of the work becomes slightly easier because a physical vocabulary has been set.

4. The Stops: The word “obstacle” refers to what is standing in the way of the character’s “objective” or need. Instead of “obstacle,” we ask our students “What is stopping you from getting what you need?” or “Why can’t you get what you need?” This “what” or “why” will help a student better define the stops. A character must have something stopping him, or else the scene would end. Identifying things that are physically stopping the character will help the student use his whole body in telling the story of the scene.
5. **Tactics**: Tactics are what a character does at any given moment of the scene in an attempt to overcome what is stopping him from getting what he needs. Tactics lead to the action of the scene, so again, they must be identified as physical. In Teaching Theatre for Youth, we define the use of the word tactic by asking the students, “What are you doing to get what you need?” Using the words “tactic” and “doing” interchangeably, helps the students to understand that the action of doing is important. Again, if the student cannot “do” without using words, the “doing” needs to be more physical.

Here is an example of that same conversation between the teacher and student where the instructor helps the girl identify her tactics:

Teacher: So, you need her to forgive you by giving you a hug. What is standing in the way of you getting forgiveness?

Student: My friend is really mad. She won’t even look at me.

Teacher: Good, and what are you doing to get her forgiveness?

Student: I am explaining to her that I didn’t mean to hurt her feelings.

Teacher: Ok, explaining. Try to do that with her right now without talking.

Student: Um…I can’t.

Teacher: I see, then that is not what you are doing. Why don’t you try right now to get her forgiveness without talking and see what you find to do.

(The girl playing the friend will require some coaching so that she knows not to give in until she really feels compelled. The friend also has a need and is pursing that actively.)

The students improvise the scene with no dialogue. The friend turns away from the girl because she is angry with her. The girl attempts to touch her shoulder. The friend turns away. The girl
tries giving her friend her notebook as a gift. The friend turns away. The girl gets on the floor and humbles herself at her friend’s legs. The friend finally sees how badly the girl feels and helps her up, giving her a hug.

Teacher: Great job. Now, tell me what you did to get your hug.

Student: First I tried to touch her shoulder softly. Then I tried to give her a gift. Finally I begged her to forgive me.

Teacher: Yes, you found three tactics. Now make each of them an “ing word” and you have what you were doing. (This will probably require more coaching. It can also be helpful for the class to make a list of active verbs on the board from which she can choose.)

Student: Comforting, coaxing, begging.

Once the student is able to play her tactics using her body, layer the text back on. The tactics might change, but as long as they remain physical, the student is on the right track.

6. **Endowment**: Endowment is used to refer to substituting something from the actor’s life or something that has more meaning to an actor for something in the scene, in order to allow the actor to make a personal connection with the object, person, or environment. The phrase “raising the stakes” is also often used when asking actors to make a moment more important to the character than it appears at the time. Because the word “endowing” is fairly new to young actors and they do not have a preconceived notion of the word, we have chosen to use this word with a classroom of child actors. It should be taught after students have a grasp of the character’s backstory to help them feel things about the environment they are setting. The term can also be used when a student works with a prop or actor and needs to give that object or
person a personal meaning. For example, the friend in the scene above may need to endow the actor playing the girl by imagining that she is her real life sister and her sister stole something from her room. Endowment can be taught in a variety of ways, but an effective lesson might include using the senses again to pretend and show the audience that a spoon is a sword, that the sunny classroom is a snowy day or that the boy across the room is a famous person.

7. Magic If: Magic if is a term coined by Stanislavski that refers to an actor’s ability to use her imagination to put herself in the character’s shoes and act and react the way this person might. It is also a way of using the backstory to affect the character, as well as empathizing with the character. When teaching magic if, the instructor could have the student improvise different scenarios as the character. While doing so, the instructor should check in with her to make sure that she is doing what the character might actually do as opposed to what she might do. For example, an actor improvising as the character of Bilbo Baggins from The Hobbit, might give the legendary ring over to Gollum because Gollum is creepy and he no longer wants to deal with him. The actor is reacting naturally but not as if he actually was Bilbo. Bilbo needs the power that this ring gives him because he has never felt powerful in his life; therefore, the actor needs to react as if he feels this way towards the ring. He might also use endowment to give the ring personal meaning to him by pretending the ring is something he treasures most in his real life. As one might notice, all of these lessons are woven in and out of each other. It is difficult to teach one without another, which is why the simplification of the terminology is important.

8. Subtext: Another term that is important to introduce to young actors is subtext, which refers to the real meaning behind the language. For example, in Annie, when the orphans say, “We love you Miss Hannigan,” they do not really love her, but loathe her, therefore, this particular line is said sarcastically, so that the audience understands that the orphans do not like
Miss Hannigan. The real meaning is “We hate that you force us to tell you that we love you.” Subtext is important to physical acting for youth because it directly affects the actor’s tactics. If the student reads the line, “I love you Miss Hannigan” with assumption that it is not a lie, then she might assume the tactic is to please. This may be a good choice for one of the actors who does indeed need to make Miss Hannigan happy in order to stay her favorite, but it is not great choice for all of them. When Annie says, “I love you Miss Hannigan,” her tactic might be to undermine Miss Hannigan’s authority. “To please” and “to undermine” are very different in how they affect a person’s physicality, therefore, identifying subtext is crucial to the external life of the character. Teaching subtext by first having students make a physical adjustment for how they feel then say the line with this posture, can help them explore different ways they may perform the line.

9. Listening/Reacting: Listening in a scene is vital to an actor’s ability to play a role and react to what is happening around him or her, but can be difficult to teach and even more difficult to assess. Exercises like “One Word Story” (www.improvencyclopedia.com) can be useful in helping students to practice listening because as the group stands in a circle and creates a story, each person can only add one word to the story each time it is his or her turn. This game forces students to listen and respond to what was given to them as opposed to being able to plan what to say. Though it is clear to the instructor when a student is not listening in a scene, the child is often unable to recognize this. Improvisations like the one above must therefore be incorporated daily when studying listening/reacting to give the students more practice at these skills and ingrain in them the ability to do so.

10. Character Building: Students must be taught physical techniques to create characters. They use the above knowledge to inform their choices in developing these characters but must be
assisted in making physical changes in their bodies to show what this person is like. Have students walk around the room and explore changing the shape of their movement as well as the tempo, the size, the weight, the tension, the focus, and the purpose, then have them demonstrate combinations of these changes. Ask other students what type of person walks this way, which will lead to a discussion of how their own character walks. All of these techniques will teach the students how to show the audience the important elements of story in performance, and will get them to use their bodies in their acting.

These ten terms are the main lessons we use in Teaching Theatre for Youth to teach Stanislavski based lessons to young students. Keeping their vocabulary limited can help them to grasp the few concepts that are being taught, and ensuring that the lessons and exercises are physical when teaching this vocabulary will allow the students to think less about their character while on stage and become more active in their performances.

The Exercises

According to the State University of New York education website, 25-30% of students learn best by having visual demonstrations, 25-30% by auditory means, and 15% by doing activities, with the last percentage preferring a mix of two or three styles. (http://www.oswego.edu/about/centers/CELT/learningstyles.html) In a theatre class we meet all of these needs by having students listen, see, and interact in order to learn stage pictures, the language of the theatre, and the physical ability to act. When an instructor in a theatre class for children, explains without the use of visuals or demonstrations, the student’s eyes glaze over and the complex concepts being taught are often lost once the students exit the classroom. In order to engage the students, a theatre teacher should use physical demonstrations that allow the students
to explore and find lessons on their own. We call these teaching demonstrations exercises. The exercise should be structured in a way that introduces a concept, builds upon it, and allows the students to physically discover the lesson.

The following are some sample exercises that were created in the Teaching Theatre for Youth class with a group of students who followed the above structure to teach students the simplified Stanislavski concepts. Each of their main objectives was to get students to use their bodies more in their acting to create a physical story. Many of them are original ideas that were developed in class, and some have roots in other exercises that have been passed down from generations of acting classrooms. At the end of each activity, a suggestion of how to apply the work to performances is included.

**Senses are Awesome! (Backstory, Listening/Reacting, and Subtext):** Standing in a circle, have students one at a time say something about him/herself. After the student makes a statement, the rest of the group will raise their arms and say “Awesome!” to validate that they heard what was said. Continue to go around the circle and have each student say something that he/she saw that day on the next go-round, then something he/she heard, smelt, tasted, and felt. Each time the students will respond by saying “Awesome!” Debrief students by talking about the importance of using the senses in acting as well as how the word “Awesome” might have changed because of the students’ reaction when hearing different phrases. Have students practice their lines together but only by saying one line at a time, giving time to listen and react. Have the partner react in their own words instead of saying the next line. Make notes of the reactions and add them to the actual lines.
Brushing Your Teeth (Environment and Endowing): Have the students pantomime brushing their teeth at a sink, including all of the other normal activities they do while brushing their teeth, like rinsing, spitting, etc. Emphasize attention to detail like turning on the water, letting it warm up, feeling the bristles on their teeth, and tasting the toothpaste. Have the students repeat what they created a couple of times to talk about specificity and defining the environment.

Have students do the exercise in a group of ten or less, interacting with the other people who are in the bathroom, getting ready at the same time. Do the same exercise again at half the time and a quarter of the original time. Debrief the class by having them talk about the environment and what it was like to “raise the stakes” or endow the situation with more importance. Questions to ask include: “How did it feel to have to hurry?,” or “Did you give yourself a reason to be in a hurry?.” Next, have the students pantomime scenes they are using for class showing specificity and then have them raise the stakes in some way to make the need more important.

Sculptures (Backstory and Characterization): Pair students up, and let them decide which student will be “A” and which will be “B.” Have student “A” sculpt student “B” into an angry parent. After giving them a few seconds to construct their partners, have them freeze and talk about what they see. Discuss how postures and gestures can make a person look like the character, and how changing their physicality can inform how the character feels. Have them come up with postures and gestures to represent the characters they are currently playing in scenes, monologues, or performances. You may also have one student pose another. There should be a pose for each line, like still frames that show the story.
Fabric Toss (Needs/ Stops/ Tactics): This is an exercise that is done while students are doing scene work, to help them find physical tactics. Each student has several scraps of fabric in his or her pockets, or in hand. As the scene is played out, have students use the fabric to get what they need. For example, if the student is comforting his scene partner, he may give the partner a piece of fabric, whereas, if the character is berating his partner, he may throw the fabric at the other person. It is important to tell the students not to hold back what they are feeling, therefore if they feel like ripping the fabric, they may do so. Be careful with this exercise so that the students do not get hurt. It is helpful to let them know not to throw fabric at another actor’s face and to be aware where the fabric lies on the floor. Debrief the students by having them perform the scene without the fabric but still connecting physically with what they need from the other person. If necessary, slowly start bottling up these extreme tactics and have them use the same energy as would make sense in the scene. For example, it might not be appropriate for Emily to throw things at George when she is angry with him in the play Our Town, but she can achieve the tactic of beating him up with her posture and voice.

Platypus Rex (Physical Story Telling and Listening/ Reacting): Have one or two actors stand on stage. Have the rest of the audience stand facing the stage, as if representing a Greek chorus. The chorus’s job is to tell the story of the characters on stage while those characters act it out physically. Instead of everyone in the chorus speaking at once, however, each member will add one sentence to the story, forcing the chorus to not only watch the action, but to also listen to the story in order to add onto it. The characters on stage do not speak, but pantomime the story as it is told to them. This will not only reinforce story-telling, but will allow the chorus to see how
big action on stage makes the story more interesting. Have the students apply this to scene work by identifying the story that occurs in their scenes and then playing it out physically.

**Quack (Subtext):** Have students come up with onimonoia-type words, like quack, oink, splash, swish, ooze, whiff, blab, and yap and list them on the board. Try to use as many consonant and vowel sounds as possible. Then, give the students a phrase and have them perform the line with the influence of a specified word from the board. Have the students comment on what the inflection did for the phrase. Did it change the meaning of the line? Then have students express the lines from their scenes using onimonoia to color their language and give it subtext.

**Super Heroes (Magic If and Characterization):** For this activity, students will create a super power for themselves, without telling anyone else that power. Have them walk around the room and see how the power changes their movement. Have them interact with each other the way someone with this power might. Then, discuss how having a secret power made the character more interesting. Assign secret powers to characters they are currently playing to help them build a more physical character and color the way they react to their partners.

These exercises can be adapted to meet the needs of young children or even high school students and are fun ways to demonstrate the terminology and technique that is being established. There are many more games and activities that can be used in the classroom and books like *Kids Take the Stage*, *Theatre games for Young Performers*, and *Theatre games for the Classroom* are excellent resources for finding appropriate exercises for teaching specific lessons. It is important to remember, however, that unless the games are discussed and applied to their
performances, young students will not understand the relationship of the game to their acting technique. It is also better for students to make these discoveries themselves through guided discussion of how the exercise relates to their acting, because they will more likely remember the lesson as well as take ownership over the application of the concept into their scene work because it was their own idea.

**The Application**

Young actors look forward to going to their drama classes because they get to move around and play games, yet they often do not understand the purpose of the games nor could they tell someone how those exercises apply to acting. It is imperative to make sure that the students understand why they are playing games and, in every class, to have them use the lessons learned from these activities in their acting improvisations, open scenes, monologues, and scene work. Having students articulate the purpose of the activity is the first step in getting them to think critically about the techniques established in the activity. Every exercise should have a quick debriefing session with the students where they are guided to express what they are able to take from the game into their performances.

The application of the games will ensure that the class is able to connect the lesson with the acting they are doing. Students should not be told what the purpose was but be allowed to discover the answers on their own because they will have more ownership over their work if given the opportunity to find their own applications. This does not mean, however, that the instructor should leave the discussion open ended; actually the opposite is true. The teacher should plan specific questions to ask for every exercise to help guide the students in their thinking. Every answer the students have is valid and should be encouraged, even if the lesson
the student found was not the intended purpose of the activity. If the students are not thinking critically enough and their answers are vague, the teacher needs to ask more specific questions to probe and see if they students can dig deeper. For example, a debriefing with a group of students after playing “Quack” might go something like this:

Teacher: What do you think the purpose of this game is in an acting class?
Students: To try saying lines differently than we would normally do.
Teacher: Why is that important in your acting?
Students: Because we might find a new way to say our lines.
Teacher: Why do you need new ways to say lines?
Students: Because it is more interesting…?
Teacher: Sure. There’s more that happens as well. Sue, do something for me. Try growling the line, “there’s no place like home,” then do it again and try swishing it. (She does). What is the difference?
Students: She didn’t sound happy the first time. She didn’t want to go home.
Teacher: Great! That is exactly what it sounded like! So, why is it important to try saying lines different ways?
Students: Because sometimes we can mean different things than what it seems like the line means.
Teacher: Yes! This is called subtext! When we say the line “come in” and we “punch it” what does the line now mean? Does it mean “please get in here,” or does it mean something else?”
Students: Something else.
Teacher: What does it mean?
Students: “Get out!” “Come in if you have to.” “Come in quick before anyone knows you here!”

Teacher: Yes, it can mean any number of things, because the subtext has changed! What about when we “swish” the line? What is the subtext then?

Students: “I have a secret to tell you.” “I’m sad and I give up.”

Teacher: Absolutely! Now, Mary, in your scene with John from You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown what is the first tactic you use?

Mary: I need to get John’s attention because he is playing Linus and I am playing Lucy, so I grab the book he is reading.

Teacher: Yes you do. So when you say that first line, “you know what I’m gonna be when I grow up? I’m gonna be queen!” what is the subtext?

Mary: Pay attention to me.

Teacher: Sure! Now give me an onimonopia word that you might write by that line to help you know how you want to perform it.

Mary: Boom.

Teacher: That is a fun choice! Let me see you perform that line now booming it!

Mary: (She does and it now changes in her body and voice)

Teacher: (Addressing the rest of the class) How was that line different now in her voice and body?

Students: She made it big and powerful. It helped her to pursue her tactic more. It was clear what she needed.

Teacher: Yes, finding the subtext will help tell the story of the scene better to the audience. We can more clearly see what she needs and what tactic she is
using to get what she needs. Grab your scripts and let’s look at the hidden meaning in all of your scenes. By each thing you say, write the subtext and a word that helps you to perform the subtext. If you are having trouble figuring out the subtext, try performing the line few different ways with a few different onimonopia words first, then see what feels right, and have your scene partner help you. I’ll be coming around to help you too.

Preparing the questions ahead of time, the teacher was able to lead the students in a discussion of the lesson. If the instructor had talked about subtext before the exercise, the students would feel the need to have the correct answer in the discussion and opposed to having the freedom to discover it for themselves.

The instructor was also able to bring up lessons that had already been discussed and used. This is significant to note because the students need to see how all of the previous lessons lead to the next and recognize how each is as important as the last. Finally, the teacher refused to give the answer, but continued to narrow her questions so that the students would figure out the lesson on their own, and at no time was another answer given incorrect. Each answer was a step in the direction of figuring out the application of the work. A discussion led in this manner will encourage students to think critically about the exercises in class as well as their acting craft.

This conversation with the students was also used as a segue-way to help the class first think about how they can apply the exercise to their work, and then to begin practicing that application. The instructor also structured the class in a way that the debrief would take the students directly into their scenes while the lesson was fresh in their minds, which must happen in order for them to start relating what they learned to their acting. If an exercise is done at the
end of class, the class will have much more difficulty applying the purpose of it to their scenes. They also need the instructor’s guidance during the application stage because they will have questions as they face challenges in the text. The teacher may need to remind students to try performing each line to see if it seems appropriate for the character. They should avoid over-thinking in their scenes and be encouraged to try things in rehearsal, because they may believe an acting choice will not be appropriate, but find in practice that it actually works nicely. During the application stage, students should never sit and discuss, but continue to improvise and rehearse with their partners. They will constantly need to be reminded that rehearsal is about doing not talking since acting is physical.

**The Assessment**

Once the students have a chance to rehearse and develop their performance, how does an instructor know whether or not his students understood the lesson? Often times the instructor had the students apply the lesson to their work, but he also coached them to do so, therefore it is not possible to predict whether or not the student will be able to make the application on his own. Student’s may be tested in a variety of ways to judge their understanding, including written quizzes and tests, essays, oral discussions, presentations, and performances. All are effective ways of gauging a student’s progress, but in order to reach the highest levels of thinking on the Bloom’s Taxonomy scale, the students must be able to take the lesson and make the application to his work without the help of the instructor.

Watching and critiquing performances is one of the best ways to measure a student’s understanding in an acting class. Teachers should have a rubric to grade their students so that those children can see exactly what needs to be improved and why. They should also be given
feedback on their own scene and get a chance to give feedback to their peers. Often times students are able to recognize problems in others and in helping those others to solve their problems, they learn how they should solve them for themselves as well. Assessments should happen frequently for every performance, and the students should also be challenged to assess their own performance as a way of taking ownership over what they know needs to be fixed.

With frequent assessments from the instructor, fellow classmates, and themselves, the teacher should notice that the students are progressing in their technique and she should continue to challenge them in their craft. When critiquing others, the students need to be aware of how to do so in civil and diplomatic way. Having the students begin with elements of the performance that “worked for the audience” is a good way to start the discussion. They should then move to things that can be improved. The wording of the critique allows them to avoid negative comments, but continue to encourage each other instead. Having students label what they see that needs to be improved and having them help prescribe how to make the performance better, without the assistance of the instructor, can get them to grow in their own performances as well as give the teacher an opportunity to assess their progress.

**Conclusion**

Teaching youth theatre is often times a challenge because acting is a difficult craft that requires self-awareness and focus, but using the above guidelines for classroom management, building a curriculum, and executing effective lessons can help a teacher be successful. It is imperative that the instructor understand how to develop a curriculum that starts with the most basic elements of acting technique and simplifies terminology of the craft that is currently inaccessible for young students. Establishing a clear and simple curriculum will allow the
students to take logical steps in becoming better actors. The teacher will also need to create a safe place for the students by giving them the permission—as well as encouraging them—to be silly and take risks. He will also need to actively manage the classroom by enforcing rules and eliminating behavior issues that arise in order for the students to feel no judgment from their peers when they do take risks. The teacher must structure the day’s lesson so that the students are able to observe and practice the skills being learned, as well as discover how to apply that skill to their acting, with coaching from the instructor. The teacher will need to assess the students’ progress daily to gauge whether or not they understand how to apply the skills. Throughout the semester he should continue giving them opportunities to build onto and practice the basic acting lessons. The guidelines, exercises, and demonstrations above as well as the texts *Theatre Games for Young Performers, Theater Games for the Classroom, and Kids Take the Stage* are resources for instructors to effectively teach a youth theatre course.
Chapter 3: Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky

As a demonstration of the importance of physical story-telling in theatre for youth, a team of undergraduate performers and I—which, I’ll refer to as the creative team—crafted an adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s nonsensical poem, Jabberwocky. The poem begins as follows:

T’was brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimbal in the wabe
All mimsy were the borogoves and the mome raths outgrabe.

Though many have theorized and assigned meaning to the made up words, Carroll himself admits that his works are nothing but nonsense. Carroll’s sentiment leaves much open to interpretation within the poem, which lends itself for use as a performance piece where meaning and story must be conveyed through movement.

The idea of creating a play based on Jabberwocky came from a collection of experiences in my undergraduate and professional careers. Performing in workshops with The Bread and Puppet Theatre and Pilobolus—a dance company that explores unusual ways of moving and shadow puppetry—gave me some background in creating interesting physicality and story-telling on stage. In my undergraduate Voice and Movement IV class, we were challenged to devise a performance piece as an exercise in creative story-telling, based on an abstract poem titled, The Last Tree. The words of the poem were jumbled together in Avant-Garde style, but each line gave us ideas of where the story might go. The title alone seemed to represent a world where the environment had been destroyed and the people sought to find the last living shrub. We did not
use props, a set, or costumes, but had only our bodies to develop each scene. While working on this project, I connected deeply with this style of theatre and knew that it would come into play later in my career.

Working with children in theatre in the years following graduation gave me a chance to appreciate the art of theatre for youth. Work-shopping and directing youth in theatre allowed me to see how limitless this style of performance could be. It was playful, experimental, and imaginative, and it seemed that groups of young audiences were able to more easily believe non-realistic staging than adults. When directing plays like Willy Wonka, Seussical and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow with a middle school, I came across many challenges in creating the special effects that exist in these scripts. For example, there is a scene in Willy Wonka where two people fly. We did not have the budget or the technology to fly people from the grid, but we did have our imaginations. The production team—also a group of middle school students—brainstormed ways to make this happen. One eighth grade girl, who remembered a segment we had previously studied in class on puppetry, suggested that we use shadow puppets. Her idea led to the creation of a sixteen foot screen built from sheets and lumber, where shadow puppets were projected from behind it with a pin spot light that gave the effect of flying. It was nontraditional effects—like this one utilized because of limited funding—that make me a firm believer in low technological, but creative, story-telling. The experience of unconventional techniques when working with youth influenced me to want to find more non-traditional scripts for staging youth Theatre.

My search ended with Jabberwocky, a poem by Lewis Carroll from his book Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There. I wanted to combine the use of physical story-telling with puppets and possibly masks to build this nonsensical world. After searching some of Carroll’s letters and writings I identified with his experience in conceptualizing the epic poem,
The Hunting of the Snark, where he mentions randomly thinking, “the Snark was a Boojum, you see” (The Annotated Snark 96). This nonsensical sentence emerged from him and, not knowing what it meant, he decided to write a poem based on it. I felt the same way about Jabberwocky. I had decided to create a play out of it, but the ideas of recycling pieces of garbage to create instruments to make music, masks for animals, and a puppet for the Jabberwock seemed to come from nowhere. I am sure these ideas were subconsciously influenced by my work with Bread and Puppet, Pilobolus, seeing the plays Stomp and The Lion King, and from the use of creative staging in my work with children, however, I was unsure how these elements would work succinctly until I began working on the project. This devised piece could have been performed by children using the acting lessons from the previous chapter; however, I was able to create the play using college students, and because of their theatre backgrounds and training, you will not see the acting language developed for children used in this section.

The Process

I began developing the framework of a story about a family whose tradition is to slay the Jabberwock as a coming of age ritual. Inspired by the environmental story in my undergraduate experience, I envisioned the Jabberwock to be a beautiful creature that represented nature and the earth. In juxtaposition, the humans in the story should be corrupt, which could be represented by them being clothed in garbage. After two generations of slaying the Jabberwock, the third child should somehow come to appreciate the Jabberwock and be conflicted by the decision to either kill it and uphold tradition, or preserve its beauty and be shunned by society. I wanted the creatures to be visually pleasing through the use of masks and puppets, and the humans to be less
esthetically desirable, to make comments on environmental issues. I also wanted to incorporate rhythm and music in a nontraditional way.

Having researched some of Carroll’s works, as well as other theories on youth theatre, I got ideas of how to effectively reach a child audience. As David Wood mentions in his texts on children’s theatre, the children should not be patronized or spoken down to, but should be treated with respect. At the same time, the story should always be shared with the audience by keeping the characters facing downstage as much as possible (Wood 228). Winifred Ward, another theorist of children’s theatre, stresses the importance of the story having some sort of moral and ensuring that the climax of the story come near the end in order to build the suspense throughout (Theatre for Children 60-80). I wanted to keep the story specific enough to be understood by our target audience, middle school students—a group in which I felt most comfortable targeting since my students were of this cohort—but at the same time honor Carroll’s ability to create work that allowed for open-ended interpretation.

Carroll’s nonsensical writings were often analyzed by others who would find allegories or other hidden symbols behind the language. As he mentions, however, in a response to someone question the meaning behind his nonsense,

I’m very much afraid I didn’t mean anything but nonsense! Still you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them: so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer meant. So, whatever good meanings are in the book, I’m very glad to accept as the meaning of the book. (The Annotated Snark 22)

In the same regard, I wished to keep some of the movement in the story and the symbolism open-ended in order to allow the audience to interpret what they wished. I also wanted to create enough depth for the performance to be as interesting for adults as youth, which, in my opinion, all good children’s authors do.
With a general idea in place, I contacted designers to brainstorm creating this vision. I met with an undergraduate design major at Virginia Commonwealth University who immediately latched onto the idea and began brainstorming how she could bring the vision alive. We talked about the concept of having the visuals be “frighteningly beautiful” and how we did not want to play only to the children in the audience but keep the adults entertained by the visual story as well. We soon had a crew to design the costumes and masks; the puppet and the props would be the responsibility of the cast and me.

When holding auditions, I looked for actors who were willing to attempt unusual movement, like walking while in a backbend, or contorting into a pretzel, and who seemed comfortable being challenged. I cast eight actors (four female, four male) to play a variety of roles in the performance, including a strong male from Panama, a gymnast, a dancer, and an English major, a female who had belly dancing experience, a male with some martial arts training, a male to play the father and son, and a small female who was in the drum line in her high school, who would play the lead. They each brought their own experiences and outlooks, as well as their physical and rhythmic abilities to the process, which allowed us the opportunity to look at the story from many diverse perspectives.

In our first rehearsal we read through the original poem and translated the nonsense language using The Annotated Alice, which gave word origins and theories from The Oxford English Dictionary as well as other sources. In our translations were what theorists believed to be synonyms of Carroll’s words, some based on origins and others found from rearranging letters of other words in anagrams and word puzzles. We discussed the concept of the performance and I outlined the parts of the story that I had previously created. We debated on other concepts that could arise from what we could create including, man versus self, the power of a young girl in a
male-dominated world, coming of age and the loss of innocence, society’s control over the environment, and several others. With no ending set, I asked them to begin brainstorming a conclusion that would give the story a clear ending but also be unexpected. They seemed excited and began thinking of options, which they would share in rehearsals to come.

In the next few rehearsals we worked to block the general story that was already conceptualized. Using some techniques I learned in a graduate mime class with Professor David Leong, we transcended time, relived parts of the story that existed as memories, and transformed from one character to another. We also looked up videos of movement groups like Pilobolus and Cirque De Soleil to find inspiration in creating new movement. We worked to develop abstract sculptures using the actors that were not playing a character in the scene. These sculptures became the backdrops for the scenes, each producing a mood that felt appropriate for the action being played down stage of it. After a couple of weeks, we worked to build the characters of the story by using physical techniques in animal work, tempo, weight, and physical shape. Each actor did his or her own animal research to add some specificity to his or her gate and create more believable animals.

Once the masks were ready for rehearsal, the cast began to work with Dan Granke, a fellow graduate student who had been training in the Lecoq method under Dody DiSanto, and would bring some of that knowledge and training to the cast. They worked to shape their characters based on the influence of the mask and began to use the mask as the eye of the character. They also created a counter mask movement to use when their characters are angry, uncomfortable, or afraid.

In another rehearsal we brainstormed endings to the story, and after discussing almost forty possibilities, we combined several to make our conclusion. Once all of the elements of
story, character movement, blocking, and physical sculptures were in place, we worked
diligently to expand on what we had created by adding rhythms, sound effects, and delving
further into the acting. Since the cast had grown as an ensemble, and expanded their physical
abilities, we were able to improve on the tableaux by making them more elaborate and
challenging, as well as detailing more of the sound effects.

The cast also worked with another graduate student, Matt Johnson, on puppetry for the
Jabberwock. Once the structure of the play was finished, we continued to work, collaborate,
alter and delve deeper until the play opened in the Shafer Street Playhouse for a group of college
students, parents, and faculty. Some were confused and others followed and appreciated the
work that had gone into developing what we titled, *Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwock: An Original
Adaptation in One Act*. The following is a more detailed description of our collaborative process
as well as a guide to devising youth theatre based on what we learned in our own experiences of
creating this piece.

**The Story**

The first step to devising a performance for children is to decide upon a story. The
elements of character, setting, conflict, and resolution all must occur within every performance,
and each beat of the performance, but what are the differences between stories for children and
other stories? In a children’s literature class I took as an undergraduate theatre major, we sought
to answer these questions. Children’s stories tend to show the world through a child’s eyes,
which is epic, fanciful, and, above all, a world where children are important. In youth stories,
the heroes are young and the adults are either not present, or villainous. Carroll’s poem
*Jabberwocky* already contained some of these elements, like an epic story of a son slaying a
creature. However, it is open-ended and does not have all of the elements of a complete story; as the character Alice says after reading it, “Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don’t exactly know what they are! However, somebody killed something: that’s clear…” (The Annotated Alice 197). The wild creatures and the slaying of the Jabberwock already fulfill two of the elements of children’s stories: the fantasy and an epic story respectfully. The fact that Alice is confused by it allows for much interpretation in our staging.

Following the theory on children’s literature from my class, I knew that the adults would be the villains; therefore the Jabberwock must be good. The rest of the story began to fall into place: a society of people whose coming of age tradition was to slay this creature, an animal they feared above all else. In doing so, each child would become an adult and in turn become just as corrupt as the rest of society. The pattern would one day be broken by a child who is brave enough to face his/her fears, see the beauty of the creature, and not wish to slay it. The story takes place in two locations: the whimsical jungle where the Jabberwock lives, which according to Carroll theorists is an island where the Bandersnatch, Jubjub Bird and Snark also reside, and in the home of a human family (The Annotated Alice 195). Having the setting, characters, and problem in mind, I then needed a group to fill in the gaps and complete the story.

The framework was set, and in auditions it was clear that the lead character should be a young girl. Not only was an actress the best fit for the role, having a young girl see the beauty of nature made sense and added another layer of symbolism and metaphor to the story. The ending would not be decided until later in the process, once the cast had a chance to delve into the world of the play, and the style of physical story-telling. It was important to me to leave the ending undone in order to allow the cast to help develop the story, giving them more ownership over the process, as well as concocting an ending that would be surprising to the audience.
About two weeks into rehearsals—after the cast was told to compile their thoughts—we finally sat down to discuss the ending. Would the little girl kill the Jabberwock and uphold the tradition of her family or would she abandon her family for what she believed to be right? One at a time, actors in the artistic team pitched ideas. The following is a list of possible endings that were deliberated, (some more plausible than others):

- She kills the Jabberwock, returns home, but is banished to live in the jungle for the rest of her life.
- She kills the Jabberwock but realizes it has a baby and she has to raise it.
- She does not kill the Jabberwock but in turn it kills her.
- The Jabberwock insists that she kill it in order to honor her father.
- She returns home, but her father kills it.
- She wakes up and realizes the whole event was a dream.
- She looks in a mirror and realizes that the world in which she lives is not real, but a picture in someone’s house.
- She slays the Jabberwock but out of regret, changes her ways and teaches her own children differently than she was taught.
- She slays the Jabberwock but raises its child.
- The Jabberwock dies in childbirth and so she takes its head back to her father, but raises the baby.
- The girl stays in the jungle and dies, then turns into a Jabberwock herself.
- The family comes to all appreciate the jungle and its creatures after she saves the Jabberwock.
- The girl lies to her family telling them she slayed the Jabberwock, but it dies of a broken heart.
- The Jabberwock eats her.
- The father comes into the jungle and attempts to slay the Jabberwock again but accidentally kills his daughter.
- The girl is too afraid to face her father and lives the rest of her life in the jungle.
- The Jabberwock is slain by the father but he sees his daughter’s heart break and they have a funeral for it.
- The Jabberwock is preserved but comes back to kill the entire family.
- The father accidentally kills his daughter in an attempt to kill the Jabberwock and the other animals kill him.
- The girl finds a mirror, steps through it and realizes that the Creatures are her family and the humans are creatures who are being slain.
- The daughter takes the Jabberwock back home, and it kills her father, so she is forced to kill it.
- Because the girl loves the Jabberwock, it becomes human.
- Preserving the Jabberwock makes the other creatures angry and they gang up to kill it instead.
• The father and the Jabberwock were plotting this test for the daughter all along. She passes by not killing it.
• The creatures begin to talk and take over the story.
• The daughter kills another animal instead.
• The daughter steps out of the story and closes the book. It turns out the whole thing was a story she was telling her children.
• A giant book closes and all the characters are squished.
• They were all rehearsing for a play.
• The girl becomes stuck in the animal world and has to kill the Jabberwock to get out.
• The father goes into the jungle and something bad happens to him. The girl is distraught.
• The girl colludes with the creatures to play a trick on her dad.
• The father and grandfather slay the Jabberwock together, but then they both turn into Jabberwocks.
• A war breaks out between animals and humans, leaving them all dead.
• The creatures join together to make one large creature and fight and kill the father.
• They break into a musical number and all is well.
• The girl grows and goes into the woods to look for the creature she saved, but it is extinct.
• Lewis Carroll begins writing the poem.
• The daughter convinces the family not to slay the Jabberwock and the father writes about it.
• The Jabberwock is saved and writes the story.
• The White Queen appears and saves the Jabberwock before the humans kill it.
• The whole plot has been a game of chess that two people are playing.
• The father follows the girl into the jungle in an attempt to slay the Jabberwock but accidentally kills himself.

After listing these ideas, we discussed the important elements in ending a children’s story. We did not want suicide to be an option because it does not set a moral for young people. Following Ward’s advice, we knew there should be some sort of lesson that could be taken from the ending and we wanted to also include the theories from mime class where Leong argued that if a character dies, the audience in some way must feel satisfied by that death, or the death must serve some purpose in the moral. This means that the little girl in our story could not die unless her death teaches all of society that killing the Jabberwock serves no purpose and that nature
should be preserved. Though much of the artistic team felt that she needed to die to serve the story, we revisited the elements of children’s stories and decided that perhaps this was not the best way to end our performance. We also knew that somehow we had to make this ending clear to a group of children using only physicality.

After several more days of deliberation, the ending presented itself as a combination of several suggestions: the girl would disobey her father, but, angered with her and afraid that she would be killed by the creature, he would return to the jungle to slay the Jabberwock himself. Following a short battle, the father would fall on his sword and the last member of the corrupt society would cease to exist. The girl would continue to live in the jungle, feeling a part of this new world. Several years later a boy—who also represented Carroll himself—would find her and she would tell her story while he wrote it down, preserving it for the future as a warning of what once was. We agreed that this ending satisfied the need for some sort of death to break the cycle, as well as gave a moral and had a somewhat happy ending with a twist. The creation of a new children’s story was finished.

**Movement**

Character movement was the most important element in telling the story. Using some mime technique as well as a slight exaggeration in all expression, we worked to develop how these characters might act if they did not have the use of language. The set would also need to be created using people, and the transitions between becoming a character and becoming part of the abstract tableau would need to happen seamlessly so as not to distract from the performance. There would also need to be a distinction made between educated society and jungle animals that could be created with movement. Finally, we would need to create two different locations, and
tell a detailed story that was clear enough for a group of eleven to fourteen year olds while leaving room for interpretation from all ages.

In auditions, I asked the actors to showcase odd or interesting movement, and in this process I found an actor who could walk while in a backbend—something I envisioned when conceptualizing this performance—as well as several others who had the ability to create specificity in their movement. Since each actor was to play more than one character, he/she needed to be able to produce a couple of different styles of movement as well as be willing to take physical risks while traveling and in static positions. The eight actors that were used each brought their own unique movement abilities and training to the process. From diverse movement backgrounds, they all had a willingness to explore and push themselves physically, and it was because of this that we were able to explore so much during the rehearsal process.

We began by researching and exploring physical ways of creating the abstract art that would become the backdrops for the different scenes. The creative team—which I’ll use to reference the group since they were more than actors in this process—researched videos of gymnastic and dance groups such as Cirque Du Soleil, Pilobolus, and others. They began attempting to lift each other using Pilobolus’s theory that a person can hold more weight than what may seem, as long as he/she takes on ten percent of that weight at a time. The cast found this to be true and they immediately began exploring. They not only experimented with physical positions but with transitioning in and out of those poses as well. As the process continued, they realized that as each of them became stronger and more flexible, they were eventually able to discard the original tableaux created—because of their progress—and were able to complete more difficult and impressive images in rehearsals. The most interesting and practical physical positions were selected to be used during the performance.
Another element of movement important to our story-telling was character development. Again, because each actor portrayed more than one character, he or she needed to create a very different physicality for each. The actors playing animals started researching an animal of interest. This animal may or may not have been similar to the look of the mask, but acted as a foundation for animal movement because the isolation of animal’s body parts differs from a human’s. Then, as they began working with masks, the actors’ animals melded into a nonrealistic creature that was based in animal movement but also had elements that were distinctly non-animalistic. The result was the creation of a new kind of creature.

The actors playing humans also worked on their physical characterization to establish the age and temperament of their characters as well as relationships between one another. They did this in the posture, tempo, weight, and intention of their movement. They also focused on developing the physical body of more than one character. For example, when the father tells his son the story of his slaying the Jabberwock, he transitions into the past and must become the boy reliving this experience. In doing this his movement changes from a powerful, confident adult into a nervous, insecure adolescent. Though he did not have to play two different people, he had to create movement that made a distinction between himself as a child and an adult. The same was true for the son who later becomes the father of a young girl.

The difference between the humans’ movement and the creatures’ was also important, and allowed the audience to see the dissimilarity between an educated society versus a primal world. The daughter who does not slay the Jabberwock and is left in the jungle after her father’s death, begins to become more like an animal in her movement, and the distinction between these two worlds becomes important for her to show that time has passed and that she has forgotten how to move like a human because she is now one with the jungle.
An additional element in story-telling was the use of transitions between time and space. We utilized mime conventions to convey the conversion between the real world and a memory, the passage of time, and traveling a long distance. When the father moves from telling his son a story to reliving the story himself, he uses the technique of spinning around before entering the story to show that some change has been made. This spin symbolizes an alteration in character or place, and when his voice and physicality change with the spin, it allows the audience to assume that the actor is playing a different character. Spinning back in and returning to his own vocal quality and physicality tells the audience that the moment he described was in the past.

Another mime technique is used to show the passage of a long journey when the second father and his daughter enter and exit the jungle. While walking slowly behind the created tableau, the people in that sculpture shift and those moving at a medium height level, directly in front of the traveler, move in the opposite direction to create the illusion that a great distance is being walked, as opposed to the few yards that the actor is actually traveling.

The final mime technique used is the passage of time. We utilized this convention twice, once when the son grows older and becomes the father, the second when the daughter has been in the jungle for some time and wakes to see a new human. By shifting the tableau again while the actor who is growing older stays still, it gives the feeling that the play is progressing, and then by having the character convey a different physicality allows the audience to understand that a growth has taken place. These techniques were either outlined in Leong’s mime class or were adapted from other techniques showcased in that same course.

The final element of movement that was utilized was the tribal chaos during transitions between scenes. The team worked to create moods with their movements to heighten emotional moments in the play. For example, at one point, the son begins to hear his heart pound and
reacts to the terror he feels within. During this time, the tableau shifts slightly, with each actor moving one at a time by making a very subtle and staccato physical isolation. As the sound of the heartbeat quickens, the isolations get faster and odder; and when the heartbeat is at its quickest the movement becomes tribal chaos, with the actors jumping, thrusting, and contorting their bodies in opposition to the beating. Other transitions were similarly used to establish mood, such as when the ensemble moves together slowly and unnaturally as the humans entered the jungle. This adds to the creepiness of the situation, and the fear the character feels. When the character exits the jungle, in contrast, the actors begin thrusting and moving against the rhythm in tribal and chaotic patterns. The cast also developed transitional details like the slow growth of the Tumtum Tree whenever it was needed to comfort an actor or the slow shift of the tableau to allow that passage of time that was previously mentioned. With the use of these tempos and patterns of movement we hoped to create moods that would help tell the story of how the characters felt.

**Language**

Because the poem is a combination of gibberish words and nonsensical story, the subtext became vital in our performance. The creative team began by researching word origins and theorized meanings of made-up words using *The Annotated Alice* as well as several internet sources, to establish, in their own language, what the character was saying at any given moment. However, the character of Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass* says, “When I use a word…it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less,” which we believe is a reflection of how Carroll himself feels about language (*The Annotated Alice* 269). Because Carroll took his own creative liberties, we knew that the denotations given would only need to
serve as a framework until we discovered our own meaning in the words. Having the actors understand what they were saying became a foundation for them to explore their own meaning and subtext in the lines.

Before rehearsals began, I mapped out the first half of the script but was flexible in allowing the cast to change the sections of the poem being used if they felt that another stanza would be more appropriate in a certain place. It was important to us, however, that the rhythm of the poem and the rhyming patterns only be broken at a time of high emotional expression, in order to create a script that emphasizes the importance of these moments. The creative team began by speaking the language of the poem with the translations as subtext while creating the story of a father passing the responsibility of slaying the Jabberwock to his son. The actor playing the father chose to use the language to scare the boy reinforcing the job’s importance to him, when the son appeared resistant to slaying the beast. The boy later speaks the same stanza to his own daughter, but because he seems unhappy that she is a girl—calling her son—and she wants to please him, this actor’s tactics were different from his own father’s and therefore the subtext of the lines was altered.

Another subtext emerges for the same stanza when the daughter enters the jungle, and then another still when she exits and speaks that stanza to explain why she did not slay the creature. At this point, the actors began suggesting segments of the poem to complete the remaining parts of the story. The process was trial and error and often times the actors would explore a few lines, but find that the phrasing or the consonant sounds of another section lent itself better to the situation, which is how the rest of the script was established.

As a group, we also experimented with the language of the jungle animals. In the beginning of the process, the noises made were mostly tribal but authentic for an animal. It was
suggested by Johnson, however, who was coaching the puppetry, that the group explore more nonsensical language in the creation of the animals. We immediately latched onto this idea, and the artistic team began testing sillier sounds by using strange consonant pairings. The overall effect was fantastic. The comedic moments became funnier and the creepy parts of the performance were stranger. With this new freedom, the actors also began to find a language amongst themselves, where one silly sound usually followed another and a pattern formed.

The animals and humans developed subtext through their nonsense languages and were able to express their feelings through gibberish. The intention behind anything spoken was a key component in guiding the audience through the story and creating a mood for them to feel, as well as not permitting a single stanza to feel overused in the play. Even though the story was created through movement, the subtext behind the vocalization allowed the audience to connect with the intention of the character as well as the moods that were being created.

**Masks and Puppetry**

Because *Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky* was not intended to be a realist piece of theatre, I knew that we wanted to use nonrealistic elements like masks and puppets to suggest the animals of the jungle. I envisioned most of the creatures being developed using masks, and the Jabberwock being created with a puppet manipulated by two or three actors. I also wanted the movement to be as nonsensical and as un-human like as possible to keep with the surrealistic theme that Carroll establishes in the poem. While doing research I saw a cartoon design of a bird that was created using the back of a human’s legs, and because a bird’s legs bend in opposition from a human’s the effect was interesting. I decided that one or both of the bird’s masks should be worn on the backs of the actors’ heads so that their legs would look more like that of birds’. I
also wanted some other animal movement to be utilized in characterization and envisioned one of the actor’s walking while doing a backbend with the mask worn upside down because of the unnatural look to this position. With the combination of natural animal isolations and unnatural movement, I hoped to have a product that was whimsical and imaginative, but also one that was eerie to help tell this unsettling story.

The creative team worked with a mask coach to define the specificity of their characters based on the design of the masks. In mask work, Granke led the team through exercises and explorations to have the masks guide the actors in their movement and to see the world through the eyes of the mask as opposed to their own eyes. They expressed their own individual stories through the mask and showed feeling and produced breath in the creatures. Granke also had them develop counter-mask scenarios for when the character was not feeling comfortable with its environment. They appreciated the detailed workshops and coaching and continued to explore the elements they learned throughout the rehearsal process.

The actors who portrayed the Jabberwock, as well as those that interact with it, worked with a puppet coach. The puppet consisted of the head and tail of the Jabberwock with the two actors creating the body and limbs, by having one actor sitting on the other’s back. The head was worn on the first actor’s right hand, and her left hand depicted the Jabberwock’s left hand. The actor who was holding her on his back used his right hand for the Jabberwock’s right, and he controlled the tail—a dowel rod with a long strip of fabric attached—with his left. In workshopping with Johnson, the two actors who were selected to play the Jabberwock practiced breathing together and crafting similar gestures in their hands to represent one creature as opposed to two. Johnson had them synch where their own eyes would look in order to give focus to the face of the creature. They also worked to make the tail move in patterns that
represented the way the creature was feeling at any given moment. With Johnson’s guidance, they established specificity in movement of the Jabberwock’s limbs and also sculpted typical behaviors of the creature like drinking water, resting, fighting, sniffing, and cuddling. The most difficult element to create was the creature’s death. In the play we devised, the Jabberwock—or at least two versions of the same creature—dies twice, once from being stabbed and a second time from a beheading. Johnson and the actors established abstract movement, breath, and sound to produce a horrifying but abstract image of the creature’s death.

The fundamentals of masks and puppetry were included to give color to the play as well as visual art for the audience, but they also added to the story that was being told. Because the humans were clothed in garbage and the musical instruments were also made of trash, the beautiful visuals of the masks and puppet juxtaposed with the junk added another layer of interpretation for the audience. Since the play was nonsensical and nonrealistic, it was also important to have epic elements of story-telling like masks and puppetry to help tell the story that was being devised. With help from two talented coaches, the cast not only gained knowledge of techniques but were able to explore some components of story-telling that would not have been possible without the use of masks and a puppet.

**Sound**

I envisioned one more element to further the plot and keep the attention of a young audience throughout the story, and since we had already set non-realistic conventions, the next logical step was to build on the play with the use of sound. Having been a dancer and dance instructor for several years, I knew the importance of music and sound effects to the mood of a performance. I wanted to include some sort of sound score in our portrayal of the poem, but
having actual music fed through a sound system did not seem to fit our minimalist theme. Since I wanted the actors to produce sounds with non-traditional props, it stood to reason that the score would be created by the actors as well.

We began by collecting articles of trash and putting things together to make noises for the different characters. As in developing the movement, it was a tedious process of trial and error. We attempted to make sounds that represented each foot step of the characters, using shorter, high pitch sounds for characters who appeared light, and slower, deeper sounds for heavy creatures. This posed a challenge for the actors who now not only had to hold intricate tableaux but also needed to find time to make sounds as the animals moved about. It was evident that the same actor could not always make the sound score of another character, and it became increasingly difficult for one or two actors to produce the sounds when all of the creatures were on stage. On top of this, the actor-musicians could not always see the movement and were unable to sync the sounds with the character’s footsteps; therefore the sounds did not seem to fit the movement. The artistic team felt as if they were hitting a wall.

Through frustrations, we decided to keep working at what we developed, in hopes that the problems were a result from lack of practice. In one rehearsal I began to notice that although one creature’s rhythms did not match her feet, there was something about it that seemed to represent her attitude. It was at this point that we began to explore other sounds as ways of representing the creature’s attitude or internal rhythm as opposed to attempting to match the exact rhythm of its feet. This worked much better, and the actors were able to more easily produce the sound effects for each character.

We also explored rhythms to represent the sounds of the jungle versus the sounds of the civilized world. As characters moved into the jungle the sound of drumming was present and
became accelerated the closer he/she got into the wilderness. That music continued to emerge in the jungle, like when the son is able to hear his heartbeat. The only sound that existed in the human world was that of a realistic drum roll to build the suspense of passing down the armor. Again, we used a juxtaposition of sound and tempo to represent chaos verses a structured world.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the purpose of developing this piece of theatre was to explore the elements of story-telling in theatre for youth. Guided by the theories of Wood, Ward, and Leong, we developed a story that we believed would interest and engage children ages eleven and up. After researching the Carroll’s writings and theories on his books, we attempted to honor his nonsensical vision of interpretation while setting a concrete story. We primarily used mime techniques and the influence of dance to sculpt interesting movements and positions, as well as characters. The subtext of each person’s vocals, along with the rhythms and sound effects added to the mood and intention of the characters; and the use of visual art and nonrealistic elements, gave us the ability to explore the creation of this piece of youth theatre, which would hopefully be understood by children but still be interesting for adults. The result was a performance of story developed through movement and sound that was hopefully clear as well as layered with interpretation.
Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky: An Original Adaptation in One Act

Jabberwocky

(From Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There by Lewis Carroll, 1872)

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought --
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
                          And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through

The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!

He left it dead, and with its head

He went galumphing back.

"And, has thou slain the Jabberwock?

Come to my arms, my beamish boy!

O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!'

He chortled in his joy.

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

All mimsy were the borogoves,

And the mome raths outgrabe.
**Characters:**

Father: Later becomes the Grandfather

Son: Later becomes a Father to a girl

Daughter

Tove: A creature in the jungle

Borogove: A bird in the jungle

Rath: A creature in the jungle

Jubjub Bird: A bird in the jungle

Bandersnatch: A creature in the jungle

Jabberwock: A terrifyingly beautiful jungle animal

Young Man: May also represent Lewis Carroll
Father is sitting with his Son, recollecting the experience he had when upholding the family tradition of slaying the Jabberwock. Both are clothed in trash. On the other part of the stage a moving tableau is created with people’s bodies.

FATHER:

’Twas Brillig,
(A whistle and the tableau begins to shift into another tableau of an abstract forest.)

And the slithy toves
(A Tove comes forward. For each creature someone else from the tableau makes the sounds of its movement. The Tove’s sound is rhythmic and fun.)

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
(Tove begins digging and scratching in a circular motion)

All mimsy were the borogoves,
(A Borogove enters and begins doing bird things. The Borogove’s sound is a high pitch ticking.)

And the mome raths outgrabe.
(A Rath comes DS and screeches in its own way. The Tove is creepy and the actor performing it walks in a back bend position. The sound of the Rath is something in between the oink of a pig and the croak of frog.)

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
(As the father tells the story, he spins and suddenly becomes part of the memory.)

Beware the jubjub bird,
(Jubjub Bird enters with its mask worn backwards, making the back of the human the front of the creature. The sound of the Jubjub Bird is similar to that of the other bird, but more eerie. It frightens the Father)

And shun
The frumious bandersnatch!”
(The Bandersnatch crawls on and interacts with the Tove, then sees the Father, and crosses to him like a predator stalking prey. The sound of the Bandersnatch is a rattle. The father backs away but is startled by the Jubjub bird. He just misses the Bandersnatch’s swipe and scares it off by drawing his sword. As the animals exit the DS playing area, they go into another tableau.)

The Jabberwock enters accompanied by the sound effect of a low steady drum made by others in the tableau. The Father reaches for the courage to strike it and after some hesitation, he does.

One, two! one, two! and through and through (He stabs the Jabberwock and it screams and eventually falls.)

The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, (He observes the damage that has been done and begins to feel his power. He is perhaps less of a child in this moment and more of a man.) And with its head (He spins and becomes part of reality again. Telling the story to his son)

He went galumphing back.
Father removes the armor he is wearing and places it on his son. He presents the boy with a helmet. The last thing he hands the boy is the sword, and he sends him into battle. During this exchange, two actors in the tableau make the sound of a drum roll, which slows down and ends as they finish the ritual of putting on the armor.

The tableau begins to move as the boy walks behind it SR, creating the visual that he is traveling further than he actually is by having the actors move on a medium level going SL, while others move at a very low level SR. The Father sits facing US and produces a rhythm that gets increasingly faster as the boy travels deeper into the jungle. The animals begin to make more noise as the boy travels. Their sounds are a combination of actual animal sounds and nonsensical words. At the end of the rhythm there are two loud beats, which instructs the tableau to freeze. The boy comes around the front of the tableau and gazes at his surroundings.

SON:

`TWAS BRILLIG,
(The forest echos the word “brillig,” each person with different intention. Each person in the tableau changes position slightly when saying this word. The Son looks frightened until he sees a creature he recalls from his Father’s story.)

AND THE SLEATHY TOVS
DID GYRE AND GIMBLE IN THE WABE:
ALL MIMSY (Tableau begins to echo this word again as they each ) WERE THE
BOROGOEVES,
(trying to remember, then seeing the Rath creep up to him) AND...THE MOME RATHS
OUTGRAVE. (He runs from it, but it chases him. He gets close to the Borogove, and it begins chasing him as well. Finally he jumps over the Rath and avoids both of them. Shaken, he reevaluates his position.)

HE TOOK HIS VORPAL SWORD IN HAND:
(The sound of a heartbeat is heard. On the first four beats, the boy reacts to it, getting increasingly scared. After the four, each person in the tableau makes a small staccato movement which continues as the beat gets faster until they are moving incredibly chaotically and the boy falls to the ground and screams.)

LONG TIME THE MANXOME FOE HE SOUGHT--
SO RESTED HE BY THE TUMTUM TREE (The tableau shifts to reveal a tree and boy sees it.)
AND STOOD A WHILE IN THOUGHT..

AND, AS IN UFFISH THOUGHT HE STOOD,
THE JABBERWOCK WITH EYES OF FLAME,
(The Jabberwock emerges from behind the tree and crosses DS to drink water or do some other animal like movement.)

CAME WHIFFLING THROUGH THE TULGEY WOOD,
AND BURBLED AS IT CAME! (Jabberwock enters)

The boy is taken aback by the Jabberwock and panics. He attempts to swipe at it but the Jub Jub Bird and the Bandersnatch enter to begin assisting the Jabberwock. While avoiding the bandersnatch, the boy accidentally runs into the Jabberwock with his sword, cutting its head off...
and killing it. The animals gather to morn its death with loud cries and the boy exits with the head. As soon the boy begins to exit UR, the tableau begins to circle with wild chaotic movements and the sound of the rhythm that was played while the boy entered is heard again, though much faster. The boy circles the tribal chaos twice clockwise as they move in the opposite direction to create the illusion of the boy traveling back home to his father. At the end of the chaos two loud beats are heard and the tableau is created and frozen again. The Father stands facing DS.

FATHER:

AND, HAS THOU SLAIN THE JABBERWOCK?
COME TO MY ARMS, MY BEAMISH BOY!
O FRABJOUS DAY! CALLOH! (The tableau echoes, “calloh!”) CALLAY! (The tableau echoes, “callay!”) HE CHORTLED IN HIS JOY.

The Father exits and the Tableau shifts to the sound of two whistles. The boy sits and contemplates what just happened and how he now feels. A girl emerges from the tableau and crosses to the boy. He sees her, and realizes that she is his Daughter and that he was caught in a day dream. During the following dialogue, the boy replicates the movements of his Father who told him this story. The conversation is much faster this time.

FATHER:

`TWAS BRILLIG, AND THE SLITHY TOVES
DID GYRE AND GIMBLE IN THE WABE;
ALL MIMSY WERE THE BOROGOVES,
AND THE MOME RATHS OUTGRABE.

BEWARE THE JABBERWOCK, MY SON!
(On this line, we can tell that the father wanted a son and that the daughter has never felt like she was appreciated.)
THE JAWS THAT BITE, THE CLAWS THAT CATCH!
BEWARE THE JUBJUB BIRD, AND SHUN
THE FRUMIOUS BANDERSNATCH!

The ritual with drum roll of passing of the armor is repeated. At the end, the Daughter attempts to plead with her Father but he turns away from her. She crosses behind the tableau SR and it shifts while the Father sitting upstage plays another tribal beat that gets increasingly upbeat the further she gets into the jungle. The animal sounds get increasingly wild throughout this transition and end on two loud beats with the tableau frozen. During this shift the original father exits the tableau and stands US of the son, both facing US. The girl is nervous but sees no creatures during the following dialogue.

DAUGHTER:

`TWAS BRILLIG, AND THE SLITHY TOVES
DID GYRE AND GIMBLE IN THE WABE;
(The Father and Son turn DS and join in with the Daughter on the next two lines, starting out quiet and getting louder until she shakes them out of her head.)
ALL MIMSY WERE THE BOROGOVES,
AND THE MOME RATHS OUTGRABE

BEWARE THE JABBERWOCK, MY SON!
THE JAWS THAT BITE, THE CLAWS THAT CATCH!
BEWARE THE JUBJUB BIRD AND SHUN
THE FRUMIOUS BANDERSNATCH!

Enter Bandersnatch who begins to stalk her prey. She starts to chase and attack the Daughter until the Tove enters and scares the Bandersnatch away. The Jubjub bird enters, corners the girl and begins to peck at her until the Jabberwock crosses through the chaos and howls, scaring off all other animals. She sees the creature, and though scared, knows what she must do.

DAUGHTER:

SHE TOOK HER VORPAL SWORD IN HAND:
LONG TIME THE MANXOME FOE SHE SOUGHT—
(She holds up her sword but out of fear drops it. When she reaches down to retrieve it, the Jabberwock moves in so close that she is frozen. It sniffs her, rubs its head on her while making a purring sound. During that exchange, the girl realizes that it is not going to hurt her and that it is quite friendly. She begins to pet it and its leg shakes like a dog showing that it enjoys the attention.

SO RESTED SHE BY THE TUMTUM TREE,
(The Tumtum tree grows behind her and she crosses to it.)
AND STOOD A WHILE IN THOUGHT.

(She contemplates whether to disobey her Father and her culture or preserve the animal. During the next part of dialogue, the Father and Son turn back DS and say the words with her, again starting quietly and building in volume.)

ONE, TWO! ONE, TWO! AND THROUGH AND THROUGH
THE VORPAL BLADE WENT SNICKER-SNACK!
HE LEFT IT DEAD, AND WITH ITS HEAD
HE WENT GALUMPHING BACK.

(She makes a small scream shaking her family out of her head and begins to run out of the jungle clockwise. During this, her rhythms are played but with much more intensity and chaos. The father returns to the tableau. The people move chaotically counterclockwise and end in a tableau. She circles twice and is home on the two beats.

FATHER (The original son):
AND, HAS THOU SLAIN THE JABBERWOCK?

DAUGHTER:

(In an attempt to explain.)

`TWAS BRILLIG, AND THE SLITHY TOVES
DID GYRE AND GIMBLE IN THE WABE;
ALL MIMSY WERE THE BOROGOVES,
AND THE MOME RATHS OUTGRABE.

FATHER:

`TWAS BRILLIG?... `TWAS BRILLIG?

FATHER AND
DAUGHTER TOGETHER:

AND THE SLITHY TOVES
DID GYRE AND GIMBLE IN THE WABE;
ALL MIMSY WERE THE BOROGOVES,
AND THE MOME RATHS OUTGRABE.

FATHER:

(He rejects her apology and hands her the sword again, sending her back into the jungle to do
her job.)

ONE, TWO! ONE, TWO! AND THROUGH AND THROUGH
THE VORPAL BLADE WENT SNICKER-SNACK!
HE LEFT IT DEAD, AND WITH ITS HEAD
HE WENT GALUMPHING BACK.

She returns into the jungle, the tableau moves to help her travel again. A new rhythm is played,
one that is sad and defeated, but becomes increasingly chaotic as she gets into the jungle. The
original Father may need to exit the tableau in order to help play the music of the creatures.

He can stand SL facing upstage. Once she is there, the tableau freezes on two beats and the
Bandersnatch is out. She is scared and holds up her sword, but the Bandersnatch recognizes
that she is protected and allows her to pass into the jungle. The Tove and Mome Rath are also
DS. The Daughter goes to pet the Mome Rath and it reacts with silly wobbly movement in its
approval. The Jabberwock enters and the girl crosses to it with her sword. She wants to please
her Father and attempts to get up the courage to slay the beast.

DAUGHTER:

SHE LEFT IT DEAD…SHE LEFT IT DEAD…SHE LEFT IT DEAD!
She cannot do it and falls to the ground instead. The Jabberwock comforts her and she rises with purpose, knowing that she needs to stand up to her father. She begins to travel out of the jungle as the tableau circles in chaos. This rhythm is different, more determined, and it does not take her but one circle to get out of the tableau. The original Father reenters the tableau. On two loud beats, she is home and the picture is frozen. She speaks to her Father with determination and finality.

DAUGHTER:

AND AS IN UFFISH THOUGHT SHE STOOD,
THE JABBERWOCK WITH EYES OF FLAME,
CAME WHIFFLING THROUGH THE TULGEY WOOD,
AND BURBLED AS IT CAME.

She hands him the sword and exits into the shifting tableau. He looks at the sword for a moment, realizes she is gone, and rushes out with determination to protect his daughter and to also kill the beast. The tableau continues to move to a haunting slow rhythm. At the end, the picture is frozen and the Jabberwock is DS with the girl.

The Father sees this, and out of concern for her life, pushes his Daughter away. She tries to grab him back and the Jabberwock moves quickly because it is frightened. This battle continues until the Father trips, turns, and falls. Once he is down, we realize that he fell on his sword. The girl runs to him! The Jabberwock comforts her. The Father sees his mistakes for the first time and apologizes over the following dialogue.

FATHER:

AND AS IN UFFISH THOUGHT HE STOOD
THE JABBERWOCK WITH EYES OF FLAME
CAME WHIFFLING THROUGH THE TULGEY WOOD…

He dies. The animals begin to howl the way they did when the Jabberwock died. The Daughter screams a raw animal sound that represents the beginning of her becoming more of an animal. The Jabberwock helps the girl up and she places the sword, armor, and helmet DC as a sort of memorial of her Father. The Bandersnatch and Tove help carry off the body of the Father. And they each cross back to become part of the tableau. The sound of haunting morns and singing is heard. The Daughter goes and lies by the Tumtum tree and sleeps.

There is a transition in the sounds to represent that time has passed. The girl turns over. A Young Man (maybe a young Lewis Carroll) enters from behind the tableau with a book and feather pen. He is taking notes on the things he sees. The Borogove enters and interacts with him. Maybe she pecks him slightly or rips a page out of his book. He continues to write about it and explore more creatures. The Bandersnatch enters from behind the Tumtum tree as the sleeping girl awakes. It goes into predator mode as it sees the man, but the girl steps in and stops it.
The Young Man crosses to the Daughter who attempts to stand. She is mostly animal now and struggles to get to her feet. He tries to help her but she pushes him away falling down again. She distrusts him and he offers her his book to show that he is peaceful. She grabs it and sees that he is writing about the jungle. He encourages her to share her story and she hands the book back to him. She speaks out to the audience and slowly gets to her feet during the next dialogue. She is smiling as she recollects her story and how she broke the tradition of a corrupt society. As she speaks, the tableau behind her melts into little balls of people with their heads down. The animal sounds fade out as well.

DAUGHTER:

`TWAS BRILLIG, AND THE SLITHY TOVES
DID GYRE AND GIMBLE IN THE WABE;
ALL MIMSY WERE THE BOROGOVES,
AND THE MOME RATHS OUTGRABE.

She looks at the Young Man, he closes his book. At the sound of the book, the tableau changes to look at the audience, a position that looks final.

Blackout.
The Results

The Research and Class

What I hoped to gain from this thesis project was a useful guide for aspiring theatre instructors and directors. In Chapter One I analyzed and discussed common resources that exist for teaching theatre for youth. What I found were many books on theory, some books with games, exercises and lesson plans, many useless and useful materials, but no complete pedagogical tool. Therefore, a well-rounded theatre guide for an instructor should include the following:

Chapter 1: Classroom Theory. This chapter should contain some child psychology and act as a guide to developing curriculum that serves a child’s needs, as well as contain tips in classroom management and executing an effective lesson.

Chapter 2: Simplifying the Stanislavski System. A second chapter should be included with acting terminology that is accessible for youth. It should also incorporate sample exercises for teaching students the new language.

Chapter 3: Application and Assessing. This section should guide an aspiring teacher to use the simplified system in text work, as well as instruct a teacher on how to assess her students to ensure that they comprehend the lessons.

Chapter 4: A guide to directing and the differences between teaching and directing youth.

Chapter 5: A sample of how to create scripts using stories for children.

A text containing this information would be valuable resource for teachers across the country.

The book should also be combined with a training course for aspiring theatre educators.
Chapter Two, which is based on a class called Teaching Theatre for Youth, bridges the gaps missing in the inadequate resources by discussing the complete process of building a children’s theatre curriculum, addressing classroom management, lesson planning, as well as execution, application, and assessment of student’s progress. Most of the topics discussed in the chapter were lessons from the course; however, several were altered because of trial and error with the first group of students taking the class. The students and I worked to develop a simplified method to use with young students, as well as exercises to add to a teacher’s repertoire that teach specific elements from the new vocabulary. The emphases of the course and chapter were to get young actors to actively engage in the lesson and to teach them to utilize physicality in acting.

One of the assignments for the students in the Teaching Theatre for Youth class was to teach workshops to children at a local middle school. After watching them execute the workshops they designed by using the principals highlighted in chapter two, it became clear that the techniques of classroom management were the most important elements of teaching an effective workshop to a group of children. Only those who were able to manage their group were able to get the young performers to focus on the elements of the acting workshop. Engaging the students with the use of physical exercises was the second most important tool utilized in these workshops.

The students from this particular school—one that was overcrowded and where many students with frequent behavioral issues were put in the same classroom—needed to be not only actively engaged in the lessons, but needed controlled physical activity because of their ability to get too rowdy for the classroom space. For example, exercises where the instructors had the students meander about the room became chaotic, loud, and uncontrollable, whereas exercises
where some children were given the opportunity to perform while others were observing were very effective. The students at this school also could have benefited from more time with the workshop leaders to develop a space where they felt comfortable being silly. They were less trustful of the workshop leaders and many took almost the entire workshop to warm up to the stranger in their classroom. In one case, two workshop leaders—one the assistant of the other—visited the same class on simultaneous days. Because the students recognized and respected them from the first day’s workshop, they were immediately more open to the work being done and were able to behave themselves while taking risks in their acting.

After the series of workshops, the instructors from Teaching Theatre for Youth reflected on their experiences and learned much from the practical work. The knowledge I gained from watching instructors from my class teach, was that aspiring teachers can only learn so much from reading a text or taking a class; the real learning experience came for them from practical work with a group of children. In a class like Teaching Theatre for Youth, the professor should include as much practical work as possible to give students the opportunity to put their theories into practice and succeed or fail on their own.

The Performance

The purpose of staging a performance of *Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky* was to experiment with the importance of physical story-telling in youth theatre. With the combination of subtext, movement, music, sound effects, and masks and puppets, the creative team sought to create a physical story that would be entertaining and enlightening for a group of children ages eleven to fourteen. After the troupe performed on a Virginia Commonwealth University’s campus and at a
community space in Richmond, VA, where the feedback had been mostly positive, they traveled to two libraries to present their work for two diverse groups of children.

Having received feedback from several professors at the university, the group reconvened and worked to clean up the movement transitions. The critiques had indicated that there was a confusion of tempo: what each tempo represented, when the tempos were different, and when the players moved purposely with the music as well as against it. We had also been advised to pay closer attention to when the cast freezes in an abstract tableau and to make sure to sync those moments of stillness with the entire ensemble. Since the cast had settled into their original direction, I also worked with them to delve deeper into some of the acting moments by raising the stakes, and exploring what might happen if a character does not succeed, why they are angry, when they want to please, etc. The cast worked diligently to make the movement and acting more specific and were satisfied to get the opportunity to continue improving on their work. After a few rehearsals, they were ready to get feedback from children.

The response from audience members of all ages varied widely. Children, ages six and under seemed pleased to have interesting visuals to watch. They commented on the tree, which was created using two or three actors that formed throughout the performance when a character mentioned it. Several children mimicked the strange movement from where they were sitting, attempting to do a backbend or a pose they found interesting. Others were later heard in the library making the silly noises they had heard during the show, and one girl’s mother mentioned that her daughter created a play using her stuffed animals later that day at home. They laughed at the funny moments, as well as at times that were serious, and as a group, though they were unable to follow the story, they appeared to be engaged by what they saw.
The children between the ages of six and ten were often the most confused by the performance. They were not as engaged by simply watching visuals, and were still too young to completely comprehend the story. This age group also seemed less impressed by the difficult physicality of the characters and the pictures created. Some had questions about a certain element, like why the lead character was female, or why the actors did not point their feet when dancing, but for the most part they were unconcerned with the story. Overall, some claimed to have liked it fine, but very few were enthusiastic about watching the play.

On the other hand, the target audience—ages eleven to fourteen—appeared to have understood what they were watching. They not only comprehended the physical story but were able to pull morals from the show as well. They appreciated the difficulty of the physicality, and though most were not enthusiastic about seeing the performance—a common characteristic for this age group—they did seem to enjoy and appreciate it on several levels, mentioning how people should be kind to animals and appreciate nature.

Though the performance was intended for children, the most interesting feedback came from adults. Staying true to Lewis Carroll’s vision for his own work, we attempted to allude to several potential themes without establishing one true lesson or concept. Because of the response from the adult audience, I feel that we were successful in our endeavor. The adults were able to find several lessons and symbols in the work, which included elements of feminism, society’s role in nature, Darwinism, humanity’s growing increasingly weak throughout time, and the use of subtext in language, and although most of the young audience did not find the performance frightening, many adults commented on the creepiness of the story-telling.

Overall the project solidified that children of all ages can engage in a physical story, whether or not they completely understand it, and language in youth theatre can be secondary as
long as the story is being told through movement. People of different ages are able to find
different levels in the same story, therefore keeping a children’s performance somewhat open-
ended will allow those of all ages to enjoy it.

In documenting the process of creating *Lewis Carroll’s Jabberwocky* as well as the class
Teaching Theatre for Youth, I hope that this thesis can be used to guide others in their endeavors.
I intended the first chapter to help teachers narrow their search for effective resources and in the
second section, I created a guide that I used in class to teach theatre to young actors by
simplifying the Stanislavski system and applying games to technique. The last chapter
document the process of devising a piece of theatre for youth and discovering the important
elements in physical story-telling. Whether as a resource for someone who wishes to teach and
direct youth theatre, as something to help guide a person designing another theatre for youth
class, or for a group devising a performance for children, I hope that the trials and errors of my
own experiences from this thesis can benefit them in some way.
Bibliography


Vita

Alison Brooke Quinlan Turner was born on January 29, 1982 in Richmond Virginia as an American citizen. She graduated from Greensville County High school in 2000 and received her Bachelors of Fine Arts in Theatre performance from Longwood University in 2003. She taught Dance in Tuscaloosa, Alabama for three years and taught Theatre in Chesterfield County for four years while pursuing acting. She received a Masters of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2013.