

CHARACTER MEMORY EXPLORATION:  
WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO APPLY IT TO YOUR CLASSROOM

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

By

DANA B. GIAMPICCOLO  
Bachelors of Fine Arts, Montclair State University, 2005

Director: DR. NOREEN C. BARNES  
DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES, THEATRE

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, VA  
August 2010

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

This thesis represents the start of my work within the classroom, and the beginning of a path that blazes with dedication and glows with inspiration gleaned from amazing teachers of both past and present.

To the brilliant minds of Dr. Suzanne Trauth and Dr. Noreen Barnes, who are two remarkable women empowered by both the knowledge that they carry and the fire of their spirits. You are both inspirations and heroes to the woman I am and the woman I am growing to be.

To Barry Bell, Glynn Brannan, Gary Hopper, Kathleen Legault, Aaron Anderson, and all the people at VCU that laughed with me day after day, who kept a smile on my face, and the joy in my perspective.

To Josh Chenard, Jenn Catton, Betsy Mueller, and the family I made here for keeping my sanity in check and making Richmond feel like home.

To Janet Rodgers and all of the artistes in my life – past and present – for seeing the magic in what we do and constantly exploring its possibility.

To my wonderful Acting II students, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for the dedication, determination, and joy you brought with you to every class.

To Sandra Vandyke for casting me as Juliet all those years ago and igniting my love affair with theatre.

To George Warren, Stephen Waldrup, and my family at Center Stage for giving me the skill and the spirit to go and pursue my dreams.

And most of all to my family, my heart. To my wonderful parents who never acted as a blockade but would sooner build a bridge for me. Thank you for coming to the hundreds of shows, concerts and dance recitals, and for hauling me to countless lessons. Your unwavering support, belief in my ability and constant love will be forever cherished.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
 Chapter	
1    The Premise.....	4
2    The Approach.....	8
The Person I Needed To Be.....	9
Paperwork, Paperwork, Paperwork.....	11
3    Major Assignment #1: Etude Scenes.....	15
Beginning Character Memory Exploration.....	21
4    Major Assignment #2: Audition Monologues.....	31
Character Memory Exploration.....	39
5    Major Assignment #3: Scenes.....	46
Character Memory Exploration.....	53
Conclusion.....	62
Works Cited.....	67
Appendices.....	68
A    Syllabus.....	68
B    Original Fall Teaching Calendar.....	73
C    Robert Barton Etude Scenes.....	81

D	Grading Evaluation Form.....	84
E	Biography, Suzanne Trauth.....	86
F	Biography, Barry Bell.....	87
	Vita.....	88

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Supplemental Assignments ( Etude Scene).....	16
Table 3.2: Paperwork.....	16
Table 3.3: Perfect Day; <i>An example of visualization text</i> .....	29
Table 4.1: Supplemental Assignments (Monologue).....	33
Table 4.2: Childhood Delight.....	40
Table 4.3: 5 Objects Exercise.....	44
Table 5.1: Supplemental Assignments (Scenes).....	47
Table 5.2: Quick and Easy Exercises.....	53
Table 5.3: Character Memory Exercises.....	56
Table 6.1: Addition to Class Policies.....	62
Table 6.2: First Assignments.....	63

## ABSTRACT

### CHARACTER MEMORY EXPLORATION: WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO APPLY IT TO YOUR CLASSROOM

By Dana B. Giampiccolo

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2010

Major Director: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes  
Director of Graduate Studies, Theatre

The purpose of this study was to implement *Character Memory Exploration* (a specific pathway towards character justification) within a BFA Acting II course. Primarily using given circumstances and magic if, *Character Memory Exploration* creates a rich and developed character history through a combination of visualization exercises, improvisation, and writing.

The following summary will show individualized exercises and how to implement them, as well as their original purpose, placements, and pairings. This work also delves into student responses and my own successes and failures throughout the experience.

The primary conclusion of this writing is that *Character Memory Exploration* leads to an actor having stronger relationships with props, set and scene partners, a better handle on a character's physical life, and a thinking actor who reacts in an honest and grounded manner on the stage.

