**Introduction**

‘Create your own method. Don’t depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you.’ (Konstantin Stanislavski)

Stanislavski was one of the most influential theatre practitioners of the twentieth century, creating a detailed and disciplined system by which an actor could create a sense of truth on stage, challenging the melodramatic and declamatory style of acting present in theatres at the time. In this scheme of work I have picked out some key elements of Stanislavski’s system for you to use in the classroom as a way of highlighting to students the idea that actors have to train to learn their craft. There are many more aspects of his work that are not included here, and it would work well to use this as an initial approach to his work leaving room for more in-depth exploration of more challenging concepts in other parts of the drama curriculum.

**Learning objectives**

By the end of this scheme students will have:

- An understanding of why Stanislavski developed his system
- An understanding of what was expected from actors training with Stanislavski’s methods
- Explored practically a number of key ideas within Stanislavski’s system
- Created and developed work within a naturalistic style.

**Lesson 1: ‘Who am I?’**

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:

- What Stanislavski was reacting to in creating his method of actor training
- What is meant by the term, ‘a sense of truth’
- To create scenes practically, focusing on making them believable.

**Entry task (5 mins)**

Have on the board the question: ‘If you only had £5 left in the world what would you spend it on?’ Ask students for their responses and then explain to them that you have hidden a £5 note in the room and that if the students can find it they get to keep it.

On your command they start searching the room. It is vital they think this is real, so give them a tight time limit and countdown. Once the time is up and the students can’t find it move on and explain that we will come back to it later.

**Starter (10 mins)**

Ask students to mind map in groups all that they know about melodrama. Their response to the starter will depend on whether they have studied melodrama. They may have very limited knowledge. If students have never looked at melodrama before, use the melodrama picture resource and ask them to annotate the images with what they can see in terms of character, style, time period, etc.

**Melodramatic beginnings (10 mins)**

Ask students to walk around the room. Call out the stock characters of melodrama, and students must hold a freeze as that character. Again, if their knowledge of melodrama is limited, help them by showing a picture of that character. When you say ‘Go’ students should then move around the room as that stock character. Once you have looked at the key characters of hero, heroine and villain, students should then work in pairs to make the following freeze...
frames: Villain threatening Hero; Villain leering over Heroine; Hero beating Villain. Students choose one of their freeze frames and turn it into a scene. They should be encouraged to be melodramatic. Watch examples of work and reflect on the style of acting. How would an audience respond to this style?

Who am I?: Treasure hunt (10 mins)
Put up a picture of Stanislavski. Who do they think he is? Introduce students to his name and explain that this was the melodramatic style of acting that encouraged Stanislavski to develop a system of actor training. Why might he have wanted to do this?

Have around the room key pieces of information about Stanislavski. Students have five minutes to find six facts about Stanislavski and his work.
Ask students what they have found out about him.

Is there a £5 note? (10 mins)
Do students think there is a £5 note in the room? Explain that there isn’t, but how did they feel when they thought that there was? Students are now going to act looking for the money, trying to keep their reactions and movements the same as the first time they were looking. Discuss with students in what ways did they act differently when they really thought there was a £5 note and when they knew it was pretend? What were the main differences?

Whole class should now mind map: What can we do to make a performance naturalistic? Write students’ ideas on the board. Do they know what is meant by the term naturalistic? If not you will need to clarify this for them, although it is covered in the treasure hunt information.

Explain that Stanislavski wanted going to the theatre to be like peering through the fourth wall. Draw a stage diagram on the board: where do students think the fourth wall of a stage is? Make this clear for them.

Creating a sense of truth (15 mins)
Students are now going to try to create the believability that Stanislavski wanted his actor to create. In pairs students create simple scenes improvising the following situations:
- Sitting on a hot stove
- Drinking a hot cup of tea
- Eating something disgusting
- Reading an upsetting letter

They should all have a go at each of the scenes. Watch examples of students’ work and discuss what worked and what didn’t. What did they find difficult?

Exit ticket (5 mins)
Using a moustache template, students write down something they now know about Stanislavski and also something an actor needs to do in order to create naturalism on stage. Students stick their moustache on to the picture of Stanislavski as they leave the classroom.

Lesson 2: A world of pure imagination

Learning objectives
By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:
- The importance of the role of the imagination in the work of Stanislavski
- How to use imagination in the creation of practical work.

Entry task (5 mins)
As students enter the classroom, give each one a paper clip. How many different uses can they come up with using the paper clip? They are allowed to bend it out of shape, etc. Go around the room and ask each student to contribute one idea. There can’t be any repeats. This exercise encourages students to really use their imagination.

Starter (10 mins)
Pass round a piece of paper, pretending that it is a kitten. Students must handle the ball of paper with care and kindness, taking time to pass it to the next person as though it were a real kitten. When it comes back to you as the teacher, rip up the piece of paper and watch students’ reaction as they gasp in horror. Link their reaction to the role of imagination and how this was an important part of actor training for Stanislavski. Explain the idea of an actor believing what they were
doing on stage by using their imagination so an audience could also believe it was real.

**Becoming the object (15 mins)**

Explain that we are going to explore further the use of our imagination in performance. Hand each student a post-it note with an object/piece of furniture written on it. Students must then hold a freeze as that object. Go around the room tapping students on the shoulder. When they are tapped, they should tell the class what they can see, what they can hear and what they can smell as that object.

Students then get themselves into pairs. Give each pair a letter between a and e. They must improvise a conversation between one set of the following objects:

- a) Hammer and nail
- b) Blade of grass and shoe
- c) Toaster and piece of bread
- d) Iron and ironing board
- e) Pen and pencil.

Watch examples of students’ work and discuss how easy/difficult these situations were to perform. Why might they have been difficult?

**The food in the fridge (15 mins)**

Develop this idea further with students working in groups to create a piece of drama becoming the food in a fridge. Watch examples and discuss what students think the importance and benefits are of using your imagination.

**The introduction of observation (15 mins)**

Explain how many of Stanislavski’s techniques work together and that we are going to start looking at imagination combined with the importance of observation. Give students a post-it note with a room in their house. Students form pairs and have to describe that room as though they were selling it. Students then change partners and describe the room in their house as if they hated it.

Explain how observation and imagination link and how we will be focusing on observation next lesson.

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**Lesson 3: Observation**

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:

- How to develop a character from their observations
- The importance of detail within their characterisations.

**Entry task (10 mins)**

As students enter, give them a piece of paper with a secret task on it. They are to review their observation homework while keeping an eye on who comes in last to the class. Once this person comes in and joins the circle they should start to copy what that person does until they notice the class is following them. Introduce and discuss the importance of observation in the work of Stanislavski.

**Becoming a character (10 mins)**

Students should have observed a person for homework. Now they must walk around the room as that person. As students are doing this you should prompt them to consider the way that person walks, what their posture is like. Ask them to stand still; how does their person stand, which foot do they put their weight on? What do they do with their hands? You are encouraging students to add detail to their performances. Then ask the students to make a sandwich as their person, tie their shoelaces, watch TV, eat their dinner, etc., again encouraging them to focus on the smaller details, e.g. is their person right or left handed, etc.

**Developing the character through observation and imagination (15 mins)**

Still using their observed person, students will work in small groups and create a piece of drama set around a dinner table. They are reminded to keep it naturalistic, not a comedy, and they will need to create the connection between the characters as well as considering what the action of the scene should be. Watch students work and reflect on how accurate they think their performances are and how true to the person they are being.
**Hot seating (10 mins)**
Working in the same groups, students now hot seat each other. They can use what they know about the person they have observed, but have the freedom to improvise an answer if they do not know it factually. Discuss the purpose of hot seating and what effect it should have for the actor.

**Developing a scene (15 mins)**
Students are now going back to their dinner table scene and will work on it to improve the detail of their characterisations, based on the information they have gathered from hot seating. They should introduce that at some point in their scene one of the characters delivers a piece of bad news. They should work on their reactions to this piece of news making them believable and not melodramatic. Watch examples of students’ work and discuss how believable their performances were.

**Lesson 4: The Given Circumstances and ways into working with text**

**Learning objectives**
By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:
- What is meant by the term Given Circumstances and to be able to identify them and create their own.

**Entry task: Identifying the Given Circumstances (10 mins)**
As students enter give them the opening stage directions to a play (Blue Remembered Hills works well). Can they identify the who, where, what, when of these directions? Discuss what they have found. Introduce students to the term Given Circumstances.

**The scene that follows (10 mins)**
What impact do students think the Given Circumstances have on a scene? In pairs they now improvise the scene that they think follows the opening stage directions.

Watch students’ work and then as a class read the original scene. Discuss similarities and differences. Within the original scene can they identify the impact of the Given Circumstances?

**Creating your own circumstances (10 mins)**
In groups, give students a stick, a strip of stiff cardboard or similar. The stick is a knife. Students should decide on one of the following situations. You are contemplating killing a rival, or freeing a condemned captive, or performing an operation under difficult circumstances in which the patient may die.

Groups need to build up a whole scenario answering the questions Who? Why? When? Where? How? etc. Each one of these invented facts, or circumstances, will help the process of belief and make it easier.

Groups should then perform the scene but they need to believe that the stick is the knife and be able to see it before they start working on the scene. Watch examples of their work. Are the circumstances clear for the scene?

**Building on the circumstances (10 mins)**
Working in the same groups, students write on a piece of paper their own set of Given Circumstances for one of the following:
- Writing a letter
- Tidying a room
- Digging a hole.

Collect these in and then redistribute to the groups. Based on the circumstances they have been given, groups now improvise the accompanying scene. Watch examples and discuss how easy they were to work from. What other additional information might help the creation and performance of a scene? Introduce the idea of Given Circumstances around a character’s entrances and exits.

**Resources**
- Opening stage directions of e.g. Blue Remembered Hills
- Opening scene from the same play
- Given Circumstances sheet
- Exits and Entrances cards.
Entrances and exits (10 mins)
Treat the following activity as a game with volunteers performing from the following categories in turn. Others must guess, for instance, where they are coming from. Use the entrances and exits cards to cover the following:

A series of entrances showing:
- Where you are coming from
- What has happened offstage to affect mood (argument with boss, for instance)
- When – what time of day it is
- A letter calling off the engagement
- News of the death of a rich old aunt from whom you are due to inherit
- Why you are entering (to look for a lost purse, for instance).

A series of exits showing:
- Where you are going off to
- When – time of day
- Why – the reason for going
- What you are feeling (e.g. you are psyching yourself up to face a dreaded interview with the headmaster).

Back to the text (10 mins)
Having gone through these exercises go back to the opening scene of Blue Remembered Hills. Focus on the entrance of both characters. Apply the Given Circumstances for establishing the where, when, why, what of their entrance and use this to create a more effective and accurate entrance or exit to the stage. Watch students work and discuss the impact of identifying and establishing the Given Circumstances.

Lesson 5: Emotion memory

Learning objectives
By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:
- What is meant by the term emotion memory
- How to identify and use our own emotions on stage.

Entry task (5 mins)
As students enter give them a sherbet lemon. Students can eat the sweet, but must complete the senses checklist. Discuss students' findings about their sherbet lemon.

Starter: Recreating the moment (10 mins)
In pairs. Improvise a scene where one character offers the other a sweet: in this case a sherbet lemon. When the students eat the sweet they should recall their memory and feelings of the entry task as well as their reactions to the sweet and use this to create their performance.

Watch students' work and reflect on whether the improvisation was believable. Introduce students to the term emotion memory and Stanislavski's use of it in actor training.

Using memories (20 mins)
Give students a plain piece of paper and on it they are to draw a memory that had a very clear emotion: this could be one of happiness or sadness, but they must be comfortable sharing it with the class. Once they have drawn their memory they should turn to a partner and describe the memory to them in as much detail as possible, including how they felt at the time.

The pairs then become groups of four and they pick one memory to use as a basis for a scene.

They should improvise the scene with the person whose memory it is recalling the emotion at the time to create a believable moment.

Watch examples of work, and discuss how it feels to be recalling emotion when performing.

Applying the emotion (10 mins)
In advance, pre-select a scene from a play. Possible script suggestions are:
- Blue Remembered Hills
- Lord of the Flies
- Blood Brothers
- DNA.

Resources
- Sherbet lemons
- Senses checklist
- Plain paper
- Scene.

Show the following video to develop their understanding
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGk5f_iLIec
Students begin rehearsing it using their memories to recall the emotion needed for the moments in the script. Watch examples and discuss how difficult or useful we find the use of emotion memory.

**Lessons 6 and 7: Performance and assessment**

**Learning objectives**
By the end of the lesson students will have:
- Rehearsed and performed a scene from a play using the techniques of Stanislavski to create a believable and naturalistic performance.

**Rehearsal and performance**
Students should continue working in their groups from last lesson to rehearse and then perform for assessment the scene they began working on in the previous lesson.

Through their rehearsal and performance of the scene, students should show an understanding of the techniques of Stanislavski. With older students you could expect them to sequence their own rehearsal using the techniques they have learnt through the unit.

With younger students you might want to give them a rehearsal sequence that pinpoints the techniques they should use.

Following the rehearsal of their scenes students will perform as an end of unit assessment.

**Resources**
- Your school success criteria
- Selected scenes from the previous lesson.
Konstantin Stanislavski was a Russian stage actor and director who developed the naturalistic performance technique known as the ‘Stanislavsky method’, or method acting.

Born in 1863 in Moscow, Russia, Konstantin Stanislavski started working in theatre as a teen, going on to become an acclaimed thespian and director of stage productions.

He co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897 and developed a performance process known as method acting, allowing actors to use their personal histories to express authentic emotion and create rich characters.

He was part of a wealthy clan who loved theatre: his maternal grandmother was a French actress and his father constructed a stage on the family’s estate.

During the Moscow Art Theatre’s early years, Stanislavski worked on providing a guiding structure for actors to consistently achieve deep, meaningful and disciplined performances. He believed that actors needed to inhabit authentic emotion while on stage and, to do so, they could draw upon feelings they’d experienced in their own lives. Stanislavski also developed exercises that encouraged actors to explore character motivations, giving performances depth and an unassuming realism while still paying attention to the parameters of the production. This technique would come to be known as the ‘Stanislavsky method’ or ‘the Method’.

Treasure Hunt Information

Konstantin Stanislavski

1. He co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897 and developed a performance process known as method acting, allowing actors to use their personal histories to express authentic emotion and create rich characters.

2. Born in 1863 in Moscow, Russia, Konstantin Stanislavski started working in theatre as a teen, going on to become an acclaimed thespian and director of stage productions.

Treasure Hunt Information, Cont...

3. He was part of a wealthy clan who loved theatre: his maternal grandmother was a French actress and his father constructed a stage on the family’s estate.

4. During the Moscow Art Theatre’s early years, Stanislavski worked on providing a guiding structure for actors to consistently achieve deep, meaningful and disciplined performances. He believed that actors needed to inhabit authentic emotion while on stage and, to do so, they could draw upon feelings they’d experienced in their own lives. Stanislavski also developed exercises that encouraged actors to explore character motivations, giving performances depth and an unassuming realism while still paying attention to the parameters of the production. This technique would come to be known as the ‘Stanislavsky method’ or ‘the Method’.

Moustache Template

Using the information around the room find 5 facts about Stanislavski:

1. He co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897 and developed a performance process known as method acting, allowing actors to use their personal histories to express authentic emotion and create rich characters.

2. Born in 1863 in Moscow, Russia, Konstantin Stanislavsk
Resources for Lesson 2

Actor Training 1 (Naturalism-Stanislavski)
Observation Homework

Name of person I am observing:
How do I know this person:

Movement
Speech
Facial Expressions
Gesture and Posture

Use the spaces provided to make notes on the key characteristics of your person. You could choose a complete stranger for this task.

Resources for Lesson 3

Secret Mission Task

Pretend you are looking at your observation homework. Observe the class. Notice the last person to enter and start copying their actions. Sssshhhhhhh. Don’t tell them!

Resources for Lesson 4

Establishing the Given Circumstances

Who
what

Situation

When
Where
Senses Checklist

Before you eat your sherbet lemon make a note of the following:

Sight: (what does it look like?)

Smell:

Touch:

Now you can eat it!

Taste: