

Slow Time by Roy Williams

Alicia Pope

KS4

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Introduction

Slow Time features three teenage boys, Nabs, Delroy and Ashley, one black, one Asian and one white. The action takes place in the hour before dawn after Delroy's first long night in a young offender institution. Each lad tells some of the story of how he got there and what might be waiting when he gets out; Nabs is itching to beat up the new boy and Ashley is on the brink. Their stories give us an insight into the crime, peer pressure and bullying that led to their incarceration.

This scheme of work offers some ideas for exploring the text using improvisation and devising with both on-text and off-text work as well as some practitioner-based ideas. It will begin student discussion on the text and its characters and enable students to start to explore the characters in the play to support their portrayal of them.

Learning objectives

- ▶ To explore how to create characters from limited information
- ▶ To create a non-verbal scene that establishes characters and their relationships
- ▶ To explore how we use stereotypes to create characters
- ▶ To create an ensemble performance of the opening of the play
- ▶ To use directorial skills to help your group develop their work
- ▶ To use a range of skills to create a character physically
- ▶ To explore a character's internal monologue
- ▶ To explore the contrast between Stanislavskian, Brechtian and Artaudian performances of the same scene
- ▶ To present costume ideas to the group
- ▶ To use their group's ideas to create a full costume for a character and present those ideas to the class, justifying their choices
- ▶ To use a range of different techniques to retell the boys' stories.

Session 1: Pre-reading character profiles

Learning objectives

- ▶ To explore how one might create characters from limited information
- ▶ To create a non-verbal scene that establishes characters and their relationships
- ▶ To explore how we use stereotypes to create characters.

Warm-up: Rotary improvisation

Ask students to get into pairs and label themselves A and B. As stand in the middle of the room to form a circle facing outwards; Bs stand opposite their partner so that two concentric circles are formed. As are given a starting line and the whole class improvises a short interaction simultaneously. Allow the scene to develop for thirty seconds to a minute and then shout 'change'. Ask all of the As to move round one person to their left and the Bs move round one person to their left (which is the opposite direction). They now have a new partner. A new starting line is given to the Bs and the exercise continues.

Ask students to consider that there are a number of ways each line could be said; it needn't be the most obvious idea; e.g. 'But why did you do that?' could be surprised, shocked, tearful, angry, etc.

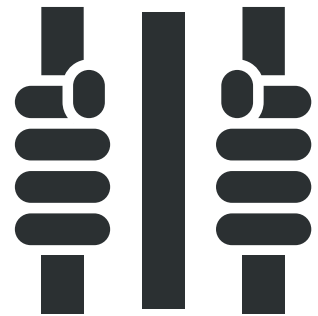
Examples of starting lines from the text:

- ▶ I know you can hear me.
- ▶ Are you going to talk to me?
- ▶ Are you calling me a liar?
- ▶ I don't want any trouble.
- ▶ Sing 'Humpty Dumpty' to me.

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Timings

The timings for this scheme of work are based on one-hour lessons although you may of course extend the work as necessary.



Text used: *Slow Time* by Roy Williams, published by Methuen, ISBN: 978-1-408-10109-4

Main activity 1: What's in a name?

Discussion: As a class, profile the teenage boys that you think would have the names Nabs, Delroy and Ashley. Consider: age, race, class, education, occupation, family, friends, social life, hobbies, etc.

In groups of three, ask students to create a non-verbal scene that establishes the relationship between the three teenage characters. Examples might include in class, at a bus stop, in a café, at a party.

Things to consider:

- ▶ Settings: Where are they? Why are they there? *When* are they there?
- ▶ Age: We know that they are teenagers but think about the differences between ages 14 and 19.
- ▶ Are the group friends? All of them? None of them? Two of them?
- ▶ How will the characters interact with each other and how will the use of proxemics establish their relationship?
- ▶ How will you use movement, facial expressions and physicality to create your character?
- ▶ What do you want to communicate to the audience about this group?

Rehearse and perform.

Audience questions for feedback: Where is the scene set? How can you tell? How old are the characters? Are the group friends? How can you tell? How do you feel about the group?

In all feedback encourage students to use drama-specific language; e.g. 'I could tell they were friends by the use of close proxemics and friendly facial expressions that included smiling and holding eye contact.'

Discussion: From the answers given in the feedback, how well did you communicate your intentions to the audience? What could you change?

Plenary

In what ways do you think that the characters you have created from their names are stereotypical?

Read the opening pages of the play and compare the characters students created with the characters in the text.

Session 2: Ensemble work**Learning objectives**

- ▶ To create an ensemble performance of the opening of the play
- ▶ To use directorial skills to help your group develop their work.

Warm-up: Look up, Look down

The students stand in a silent circle. When you call 'Look down', the group look at the floor. When you call 'Look up' the group does so, but they must try to make eye contact with someone across the circle. If eye contact is made then the two people sit down. If someone's eyes wander and they look at more than one person then they are out. This game relies on trust. Keep the game moving until everyone is out.

Main activity 1: Group directing and ensemble performance

Read up to p. 130 and discuss the boys' relationships up to this point. In groups of three ask students to take on the following roles:

Ashley: He has barely slept all night. He is sitting on the edge of his bed, staring at his poster-covered wall. He is pensive, almost agitated. He stands up, walks towards the wall and slowly starts removing all of the posters he has pinned up. He folds each one and places them on his bedside table.

Nabs: Has also barely slept. He gets up, removes a folded photograph from his pocket, and sits on his bed staring longingly at the picture before giving it a kiss.

Delroy: Has also had a sleepless night. He walks around his cell like a little boy lost. He doesn't know where to put himself and is terrified. He looks out of the window but sighs when there is nothing to see apart from the walls.

Girls can either take on the roles as male or adapt the roles to female.

Part one

Discuss each character and their status within the play and within the group of three.

Ask each student to rehearse the opening section for their character. Give them ten minutes to do this alone before asking them to perform it for their group.

Vocabulary

Some of the following drama terms will be useful throughout for directing a piece: proxemics, semiotics, blocking, stage directions, sightlines, technical effects, costumes, props, stage furniture, backdrop, scenery, projections, levels, subtext, context, wings, on/off and upstaging.

Extension 1

Ask students to consider the feedback given and rehearse the piece again, adapting their work as necessary.

Extension 2

Repeat the rehearsed scene but with dialogue. Consider how addition of vocal skills could change the scene.

All the following activities should take place after students have read the text.

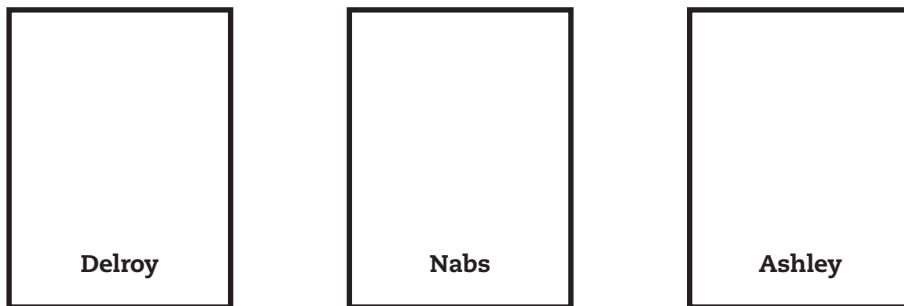
Things to consider: How old is your character? How is your character feeling in this moment and about the situation that they are in? How do they feel about what will happen in the coming hours? How will you use your physical skills to show this? How will you use your facial expressions to show how you are feeling? How will you move around your very small space? Will you move much at all? Why or why not? How do you want the audience to feel about you? Why?

Part two

Ask each student to show their work to the other two members of their group. As they watch, they should consider the questions above, and if they can clearly understand what is happening in the scene. Ask the observers to direct the performer with any ideas of how to improve their work. Repeat this for each person in the group.

Part three

Taking on each other's feedback, ask students to create an ensemble performance of the opening scene using a split stage as below. It will be important to rehearse the scene so that the timings are the same.



Rehearse, perform and feedback.

Extension idea

Perform the opening piece to music; a particularly good choice here would be 'Blinded By Your Grace Part 2' by Stormzy.

Session 3: Top Boy

Learning objectives

- ▶ To use a range of skills to create a character physically
- ▶ To explore a character's internal monologue.

Warm-up: Cliff-hanger

Ask two students to begin a scene. It is useful for you to set the scene or at least give students a starting line, e.g. police officer talking to a young offender. Alternatively, you could use parts of the play as further exploration.

As the improvisation progresses, either you or a member of the class shouts 'Freeze'. When this happens both actors freeze. A student then enters the circle and taps one of the actors on the shoulder, which is a sign that they should leave the improvisation. The new actor then begins a different scene which takes into account their partner's frozen position; the new scene continues until someone else shouts 'Freeze'.

Ask students to tackle this activity with a spirit of collaboration, ensuring that their aim is always to move the work forward and create rather than stop the work from progressing.

Main activity: Top Boy's internal monologue

In this activity students will take on the role of an imagined Top Boy or Girl. Their character can be based on Nabs, but they are free to explore their own ideas.

Ask them to stand neutrally in an individual space. As you move through different body parts, students should move to a position that they feel best reflects their character trying to be 'Top Boy'.

- ▶ Feet
- ▶ Legs
- ▶ Back
- ▶ Chest
- ▶ Shoulders
- ▶ Arms
- ▶ Neck
- ▶ Head
- ▶ Face – eyes, eyebrows, mouth, chin.

Ask students to hold their position and answer the following questions:

- ▶ What's your name?
- ▶ How old are you?
- ▶ Why are you here?
- ▶ When will you be able to leave?
- ▶ Who have you left behind?
- ▶ How do they feel about what you did?
- ▶ How do you feel about what you did?

When students have created the tableau of their character they should consider how they will physically move around the space as Top Boy/Girl. They should particularly consider their pace and use of withdrawal of eye contact. Ask students to move around the space, reacting to each other but not stopping and not using any dialogue.

Ask students to freeze. Give them one of the following lines and ask them to repeat the line and improvise their character's response. They should think about how they will use vocal skills including: pitch, pause, pace, tone, emphasis, accent, volume.

- ▶ I'm scared ...
- ▶ I want to go home ...
- ▶ When I get out of here ...
- ▶ The things that scare me the most are ...
- ▶ I wish ...
- ▶ If my mum/dad/girlfriend/nan was here I'd tell him/her ...
- ▶ If I could turn the clock back ...
- ▶ At the time I felt ... but now I feel ...
- ▶ I just want ...

Ask them to continue moving and then stop again and improvise with another starting line. The aim here is to explore the difference between what the character is showing externally and how they really feel. Of course, it will be interesting for students to explore characters who are not remorseful about their actions and whose aggression is exacerbated by their internal monologue.

Rehearsal, performance and feedback. Ask students to choose one or two of the starting lines and rehearse their improvisation for performance.

Session 4: Exploring practitioners

Learning objectives

- ▶ To explore the contrast between a Stanislavskian, Brechtian and Artaudian performance of the same scene.

Warm-up: Name Ball

Ask students to walk around the room. You begin by throwing a ball to someone in the room and saying your name. This person then throws it to another student saying their own name as they throw and so on. This continues until everyone has thrown the ball once. Next, the students need to say the name of the person they are throwing the ball to. After this, they must say the name of the person they want to receive the ball on the next throw. The game gradually turns into quite a complex test of memory and concentration.

Discussion: What do you know about the following?

- ▶ Stanislavski's ideas on naturalism including the use of emotion memory
- ▶ Brecht's ideas of breaking the fourth wall, specifically the use of placards
- ▶ Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty.

Main activity: Comparing Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud

P. 123: Ashley cannot take any more of this noise. He begins ripping up his bed sheets.

In groups of three, ask each student to play the role of Ashley once, using ideas from Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud. (It will be more effective if there are strips of material for students to use in their scenes.)

Some suggestions are:

- ▶ **Stanislavski:** A purely naturalistic piece in which Ashley becomes more and more distressed, begins ripping or tying the sheets until a noose has been

This session assumes some prior knowledge of Stanislavski, Brecht and Artaud.

made which he places around his neck. As it is Stanislavskian this scene must try to portray real life. Students might consider the use of emotion memory.

- ▶ **Brecht:** A non-naturalistic scene in which Ashley might break the fourth wall and connect with the audience. The use of placards could be very effective here perhaps with statistics on male suicide and information about how and where to get help.
- ▶ **Artaud:** A non-naturalistic approach perhaps with the use of multi-roling. Students should consider how they can make the audience feel uncomfortable with their work, perhaps with their use of non-verbal sounds like heavy breathing and crying as well as their use of proxemics. The material tied into a noose could be used to great effect here.

Students should rehearse their individual work and then come together in their group of three to show the work and direct each other. In some instances, e.g. if groups are using multi role, they will all perform together.

Performance and feedback. What techniques did the performance group use? How effective were they? For this scene, which practitioners' methods were most effective? Why?

Preparation task

Ask each student to design a costume for the character they played in today's work. The costume should be for wearing outside of the young offender institution. Students should create a detailed image of what their character would wear. They can draw or use pictures to create the costume, but they must be able to justify their choices in detail. As well as clothes, they should consider their character's hair and accessories.

Session 5: Costume design

Learning objectives

- ▶ To present your costume ideas to your group
- ▶ To use your group's ideas to create a full costume for a character and present those ideas to the class, justifying your choices.

Warm-up: Costume cliff-hanger

This activity requires a range of costume items that should be placed in a large box with a lid or closed bag so that students can pick a piece out without seeing it. Ask for a pair of volunteers. They should choose an item from the box and decide who their character is based on the item. Choose one person to star in the improvisation before freezing the action and asking someone else to choose a piece of costume and enter the scene. Unlike a traditional cliff-hanger, no one leaves the scene. Depending on your class size you could continue until everyone is in the scene or just restart when you feel that the scene is full enough.

Main activity: Costume designs

Place students into character groups, i.e. all the Ashleys together. If you have a large class you may opt to have two groups of each character. Ask students to present their costume design ideas to their group and explain their choices. Ask each small group to compile an overall costume design for their character, incorporating everyone's ideas. Each group should then present their final costume to the rest of the class justifying the choices they have made and what they feel their choices would tell an audience about their character.

Session 6: Telling the boys' stories

Learning objectives

- ▶ To use a range of different techniques to retell the boys' stories.

Warm-up

This game requires concentration and patience from students. If you have a large group, you may want to split them in half for this game and either have two groups playing at the same time or stay in a big circle and alternate between groups, which adds a bit of competition to the game.

Students have to count from one to however many people are in the group. The rules are:

- ▶ They must not simply count around the circle in order
- ▶ They cannot discuss who is going to have which number or who is to go next

- ▶ No one is permitted to say more than one number
- ▶ If a number is repeated they must start again
- ▶ If more than one person speaks at a time they must start again.

They may or may not get to the top number. If they do, they can simply play again and if they do not then it can be a challenge for next lesson. With a small group you might double the number or add a count backwards element to the game.

Main activity 1: Ashley's story

Re-read Ashley's story on pp. 130 and 131. In groups of five, ask students to make a list of all of the different elements of Ashley's story that could be explored, e.g. the court case, his mum's funeral, his family growing up on the estate, everyone saying Ashley was naughty but his mum loving him, etc.

Ask students to choose six ideas from the list and create a tableau for each one. For each image it important to remember that as tableaux are frozen images: everything that needs to be communicated to the audience must be done using facial expressions, posture, gesture and proxemics.

For each image, one person should step out of the tableau and narrate to the audience what is happening in the scene before stepping back into the freeze.

Ask students to choose three of the six tableaux and devise the scenes, e.g. the family holiday to Barbados, Ashley hanging out with the bigger boys from the estate, the altercation with the shopkeeper.

Rehearse and perform the work paying close attention to the skills involved in the tableaux and smooth transitions between tableaux and live action.

Main activity 2: Delroy's story

Re-read Delroy's story on pp. 131–133. Again, in groups of five, ask students to make a list of all of the different elements of Delroy's story that could be explored, e.g. the longing to be friends with Ashley and his friends; Delroy's dad's job in a factory; his mum's cleaning job; Ashley and his gang mocking Delroy; the robbery of the phone; etc.

As a group, ask students to choose five elements from Delroy's story and devise a short scene for each, trying to show different aspects of his character. Using multi-role, each student should take the lead role as Delroy, with the rest of the group playing any other characters.

Rehearse and perform.

Main activity 3: Nabs' story

Re-read Delroy's story on pp. 139 -140. As in the previous tasks, in groups of five, ask students to make a list of all of the different elements of Nabs' story that could be explored, e.g. Neela and Nabs' first meeting; Tariq liking Neela too; Neela talking to her friend Jasmine about Nabs; the altercation when Neela is insulted, etc.

Ask students to devise four scenes based on the information from Nabs' story that show how he feels about Neela. They should aim to choose scenes that show Nabs' transitioning from a little boy to someone capable of serious violence and should include the scene described in McDonald's. At different stages throughout the action the group should freeze the action and add lines of internal monologue to give the audience an insight into how the character is really feeling. E.g. When Nabs and Neela are at school. **'Nabs: Alright? Nabs internal: Oh my days! I love her! I love her so much!'**

Rehearse and perform.

The following activities could make the basis of several lessons for a class if you choose for the whole class do each activity. Alternatively, you might choose to give one of the three characters to one or two groups and cover all the work at once.

Extension idea

Consider the use of music, lighting and costume and add these elements to the work.

Extension ideas

There are many opportunities to explore the characters and their friends or family through off-text improvisation, devised scenes, hot seating and so on, all of which will give students a deeper understanding of the story and the characters.