

Zara Samuel (2500872) Improvising and Devising Process Workbook

This is my progress workbook for Improvising and Devising.

I went into this module already equipped with a passion for story telling and writing. I was eager to brainstorm and rush ahead and I wasn't experienced in collaborating on stories. Learning to slow down and focus on one part of the story at a time helped to create a higher quality of work

I found that acting out the ideas and seeing how they could theoretically work helped make the story decisions easier.

Working with a team on storytelling was a different experience to what I am used to. Having multiple different thoughts, ideas, and perspectives made coming up with ideas very simple. I rarely ever felt as if my thoughts were unheard. The group underwent challenges as we had never before worked collaboratively on this level for a longer period of time. We initially attempted to avoid conflict when presented with different varying ideas, which made the process slower. With time, however, the communication within the group improved massively as we listened to each other and respected the boundaries set.

Doing further research on the prompt helped me to ground my ideas in reality and narrow down the themes I wanted to explore. It furthered my understanding of the world my character lived in. I understood what stakes they were dealing with.

I've noticed that improvisation is vastly different to working with a script. While there is still a level of structure, the responsibility falls more on the actors to create it rather than writers. This module showed me the perspective of a writer and an actor. Writers have to think logistically about how their ideas can function and what themes they are trying to convey.

My research on improvisation has led me to Commedia dell'arte. I considered a few Commedia dell'arte character tropes when thinking of my character of the pirate captain in the show. These tropes are useful because they provide a base of personality traits for an actor to draw quick inspiration from. Myself and the group decided my character would be the antagonist. She's motivated by her grief and I wanted this to show through my movements and the way I carry myself.

My character would move with heavy, purposeful steps. This symbolises the age and grief she feels. Though her knees are bent and far apart and her stance is sturdy, her head is held high with confidence.

When crafting this character, I considered status. My character's status was higher than the others because she was in charge— she was their leader. This was asserted through her rigid, grounded posture and intense use of eye contact. When she loses her status at the end, she doesn't make eye contact with any of the other characters anymore and her movements are small and light. I intentionally did this to show how her refusal to accept grief exposed her weaknesses.

Pantalone is the Commedia dell'arte character I found suited my character most, though they weren't fully the same. I took inspiration from the stance and walk of Pantalone while adding more stoicism.

In contrast to the Captain, I also played a friend of Meg (the time traveller protagonist) from 2016. For the modern friend, I used a much more bubbly personality. Though this character sat down almost all the time, I made her movements light and fast like Laban's dabbing effort.

Moving into the site specific set changed the performance. I had to consider how my voice would manage to fill the space. This was accomplished by opening my voice up through vocal warmups, rather than by yelling.

I also had to consider how I would move on a set. I had to ensure I was not blocking anyone from being seen as well as avoid turning my back to the audience. Turning away from the audience and closing myself off would make it harder for them to hear me.

After the final performance, I felt pleased with my work. I had created a clear and understandable story with my group. I was proud of my characterisation of the Captain—especially of her movements and how they portrayed her strong will. I felt that I could have put more work into strengthening my voice, making it sound less strained and clearer. I struggled to fill the space with my voice. Incorporating things such as humming exercises into my daily routine will make vocal care a habitual part of my routine and improve my performance.

I believe the piece could have benefited from the use of Lazzi as I noticed within myself that I struggled to maintain the pace of the performance.

Looking back at the start of the module, I wish we had more time to explore improvisation through games. Movement games would allow us to “break down self-consciousness and free the actor’s body/think mechanisms”. Games with as much simplicity as catching and passing a ball around a circle encourage us to pay attention to each other and work together; skills that are necessary for devising.

Site specific theatre is very different to the performances I have done this year. There is the focus on opening up the voice. I also had to consider how I used the space. It helped my performance to walk around the space beforehand so that I could observe where I could move and where would be best for the scenes.

I also could have shown more dedication to using the dialect of 18th century pirates as this would have improved the immersion into the piece.

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Appendices

My character is Captain Avy Kane. She is an older pirate captain with an air of grief surrounding her. Her wife was killed in battle and she never recovered from the loss. She keeps an emotional distance from her crew and often puts on a face of arrogance; as if she is too good for them.

I took inspiration from images like this. The red coat suits her bold personality and also connotes love and violence.

