



Young Critics Resource Suite
Workshop 1

Exploring Theatre

Workshop Duration

You will need approximately 90 minutes – 2 hours to deliver this workshop in full. The times beside each exercise are a guide to their duration. These are just an approximation and the length of an exercise will depend on factors such as the size of the group. Use your own judgement. You might want to give an activity more time where the group are particularly engaged and/or where lots of discussion is being generated. Include a short break if needed (after the mapping exercise could be a good place).

Preparation and Materials

For this workshop you will need flipchart paper and felt-tip pens.

Resources

Refer to the following resources in the 'Exploring Theatre' section:

- *What are the Elements of a Production?*
- *Who are the People Involved in A Production? (The Makers)*
- *What are the Elements of a Night at the Theatre?*
- *What is the Function of Theatre?*

The Workshop

- **Breathing re-energiser (2 mins)**

First, invite the group to stand in a circle facing inwards. Ask the participants to stand with their eyes closed and take a few moments pause to get themselves ready for the workshop ahead. Ask them to become aware of their breathing. After a few moments, ask them to gently breathe IN over a count of 4. Then ask them to breathe OUT over another count of 4. Tell them to repeat three or four times and to fold their arms when they feel focused and ready to work. Once everyone in the group has folded their arms, ask them all to open their eyes.

- **Anyone who? (10-15 mins)**

You are now going to make a series of statements. If that statement is true for any member of the group, that person crosses the circle and finds a new place in the circle. Use 3 or 4 obvious ones (e.g. *Anyone who...is wearing jeans,* *Anyone who...has brown eyes*) to warm them up and get the group mixed up a little.

Then... Anyone Who:

Has ever acted in a production before.

Has ever worked backstage before.
Has been to the theatre in the last year.
Has been to the theatre in the last 6 months.
Has been to see a local or amateur production.
Has been to a production in your local arts centre.
Has been to see professional theatre.
Has been to see a production at the XXXX Venue.
Has ever had an 'Oh WOW moment' watching a production.
Has ever had an 'Oh NO moment' while watching a production.

You can investigate further with questions such as, 'What roles did you play?' 'What did that job involve?' 'What did you enjoy about it?' 'What elements of the production really worked for you?' 'What didn't work for you?' 'What are your expectations when you see a production at the XXXX Venue?' 'Tell us about your 'Oh WOW moment'.' 'What's the difference between amateur and professional work?' etc.

Facilitator's Note:

This exercise should move quickly so try to avoid long conversations. If you know the group really well, then maybe you can think of some more creative questions to get started. Try and speak to each participant at least once. This is a really good way of spotting those who may be very articulate or those who may be not too comfortable talking in front of the group. You can gauge the level you can converse with an individual beyond yes/no answers and can quickly move on to the next person without causing embarrassment to anyone. It is also a useful way of introducing key phrases/words and noting the differences between amateur and professional work etc.

- **Mapping Exercise (20 + minutes)**

Ask the group to imagine the workshop space is the city, town or region where they live. Decide on a location or landmark in the area and allocate a spot in the workshop space to represent the location or landmark. Then, invite each participant to place themselves where they live on the 'map' in relation to the chosen location/landmark. Make sure they use the entire workshop space. Once all the participants have placed themselves, ask them to tell you where they live. There might need to be some adjustments at this stage to get the 'map' correct.

In turn, ask each participant if they know of any theatre venues located close to them or that they have reasonable access to.

Depending on the individual answers you can follow up with questions such as:

Have you ever been there?
How often do you go?
What type of productions/ programme do they offer?
What are your expectations of going to see a production there?
What was the standard of the productions you saw?
How do you find out what's on there/ decide what you are going to see?
What's the ticket price?
Who do you go with?
Are there any barriers to attending?

Facilitator's Note:

This a useful exercise to discern their access to theatre and their awareness of what is on offer in the local area. It's also a great way of letting everyone know what's out there and investigating further the difference between amateur/community and professional theatre. Again you don't need everyone to answer all the same questions and the conversations should move quickly enough.

- **Roving Brainstorm (30 – 60 minutes)**

Now, you are going to explore 4 very big questions with the group:

1. *What are the Elements of A Production?*
2. *Who are the People Involved in A Production? (The Makers)*
3. *What are the Elements of A Night At The Theatre?*
4. *What is the Function of Theatre?*

Write each of these questions on a separate sheet of flip chart paper and put them in four different places in the room. Divide everyone into 4 equal sized groups. Give each group some pens and 1 blank sheet of flip chart paper. Ask each group to place themselves at one of the locations where you have placed the questions.

Ask the groups to brainstorm their answers to their particular question. They have two minutes to write their responses on their sheet. Allow them to chat and debate but remind them to get writing as they don't have much time.

After two minutes ask the group to stop. Make sure they leave their sheet beside the question. Tell each group to move in a clockwise direction to the next question and the next sheet. When all the groups have settled, ask the groups to read the existing list on the sheet in front of them.

Where they agree with a response already on the sheet, instruct them to place a tick beside it (✓). Where a response is included that they don't understand, they circle it. Next, ask this group to add to the list for a further two minutes. Continue this until each group has visited each sheet once and has returned to its original question.

Once all the groups have returned to their first sheet, invite each group to appoint a spokesperson who will call out all the answers on the sheets. Give them a couple of minutes to read over their sheet so they have a reasonable understanding of what is written on it. Ask the spokesperson from the first group to present their question and the responses to it. Then lead a discussion with the whole group focused solely on this question. Repeat this for all four groups and all four questions.

Finish with any learning you want to summarise or any general points you wish to make. For example, you might want to emphasise how theatre is dependent on collaboration and how with so many variables, it is a risky undertaking! You might also want to ask why the live theatre experience is still important and relevant in the world today.

Facilitator's Note:

During the roving brain-storm, make sure the groups are moving in the right order. Keeping the groups moving means they don't lose energy by sitting down for too long. If, however, you feel that moving the groups could be too disruptive, the participants can stay in one place and instead you can move the sheets of paper around accordingly.

While you want to get a good overview of what the participants know, it is also a chance to gauge their feelings about theatre. It is an opportunity to promote discussion, challenge perceptions and investigate the obstacles in going to see theatre. The participants can begin to expand their theatre vocabulary and can begin to develop their ability to discuss theatre and theatrical productions. If new or unusual words such as 'dramaturg' appear on the lists, allow space for these to be explained. If possible, the lists should be stuck up on the walls and used as reference for the duration of the programme.