

AT A DISTANCE TASTER PACK

Glyn Trefor-Jones

Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading across the world in 2020, we have faced challenges like never before. For those of us who teach and lead drama classes and workshops, it must be our priority to do so in a safe, secure, healthy way – whilst also observing social distancing, in order to protect our students and halt the spread of the disease. But, as the old adage goes... the show must go on! At a time when performers are needed more than ever, training the next generation of performers must also go on!

My new book, *Drama Menu at a Distance*, contains eighty games and exercises that offer fun, creative, learning experiences without the need to get up close and personal. Several exercises have been adapted from *Drama Menu* due to their appropriateness for socially distanced play, whilst the rest are new exercises that have been devised with distance in mind. Even at a distance, drama training can still be vibrant, engaging, energising and extremely rewarding – and these exercises set out to increase every player's performance abilities as well as respecting the rules of social distancing. This Taster Pack includes four games, one from each section of the complete book, to give you a brief (and hopefully tempting!) flavour of what it offers.

So... is what's in *Drama Menu at a Distance* simply eighty different ways of performing a monologue? Fortunately not! In fact, a great many of the exercises require lots of creative cooperation, collaboration and connection so, with some creative thinking, even without entering into the personal space of others, a collective learning experience can be achieved.

For however long we must keep our distance, we will continue to create, to reinvent, to strive and to feed our creativity. Performers are resilient and resourceful and we won't let a little thing like distance come between us and the drama! I invite you to embrace the new normal (for now) and I very much hope that you enjoy this Taster Pack (and the full book, if you buy it!), and find it useful with your students, participants and players, in whatever setting you work.

The Menu

For those of you familiar with the *Drama Menu* concept, you'll find that the format of *Drama Menu* at a *Distance* remains the same. The eighty exercises are categorised into menu-inspired 'courses' that increase in difficulty (and dramatic potential) as you progress through the book. Even at a distance, you will find the same progressive approach to theatre training, with exercises categorised into ever-more engaging courses. Just like a menu in a restaurant, you should choose one exercise

from each course (or two if you're feeling hungry) until you have a satisfying feast ready to be consumed! This Taster Pack include four games, one from each course.

The courses are laid out as follows:

Appetisers

These fast-paced warm-up exercises are devised to engage and enthuse, and are subdivided into 'Circle' and 'Non-Circle' Appetisers. Circle games can be a very effective tool for maintaining distance, but it's important to ensure that you have a large enough space in order to form an appropriately socially distanced circle.

Starters

With Appetisers consumed, the players will be energised, engaged and after something more challenging to satisfy their dramatic appetite. The Starters are the intermediary courses providing just that challenge – and then some! Players should be creatively stretched in this course and prepared for the final challenges to come...

Main Courses

The pinnacle of any meal, the Main Course provides the biggest test and also packs the largest creative punch. This is the time for practitioners to step back and allow the players to step up and do what they do best: devise, create and perform! All Main Courses in *Drama Menu at a Distance* conclude with a performance piece.

Desserts

In both this Taster Pack and the complete book, the Dessert course is devoted to games that work best in an online setting. So, if you haven't yet returned to leading drama sessions with participants physically present, then these games will 'zoom' you through this difficult period until we can all meet again, in person, in the playing area! You will also find most of the Desserts can be played in person as well – though make sure players keep socially distanced at all times, of course.

Throughout the book there are also a great many exercises which are particularly useful as they can be employed in a physical setting and, with a bit of adaptation and ingenuity, in a virtual/digital workshop as well. These are indicated with the following symbol:

Once *Drama Menu at a Distance* is published on 10 September, a comprehensive Resource pack will be available to download as an A4 PDF, which will contain all the resources required to get the very best out of each exercise. When it's available, visit www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/ drama-menu-at-a-distance and download the

Resource Pack. Find the desired resource and print out the required number of copies (ensuring that you have one copy per student to avoid sharing of resources), and make it even easier to unlock the true potential of the book and quickly deliver engaging and inspiring drama sessions.

Social distancing must not be seen as an end to creativity. In fact, the current restrictions may prove to be the catalyst for untold invention if we embrace what's possible, rather than lamenting what has been (temporarily) lost. Developing a new way of teaching and leading our students will only serve to broaden all of our horizons, if we have the courage to look towards a whole new world of dramatic possibilities just waiting to be discovered!

The global pandemic has provided an opportunity like never before to rethink the old, and bring a new approach to teaching drama. The more we allow ourselves to embrace these opportunities, the more creativity will emerge during this unprecedented time. So, let's make this period one that will be forever regarded as a time when teaching was reimagined and rediscovered – and our students emerged stimulated, challenged, reinvigorated.

I hope that the resources offered in *Drama Menu at a Distance* – and this Taster Pack – play their part in reinventing what is possible within the drama session. When we are able to come together again, and the restrictions of social distancing are a distant memory, I trust that drama practitioners and players alike will be better, stronger and more resilient for the experience. By navigating this time with imagination and open minds, when the curtain rises on a new era of live performance, there will be a whole generation of inventive, imaginative, well-rounded and resilient performers primed to take to the stage. At whatever distance, they will be ready once more to bring joy to our lives.

Until that time, stay positive, stay creative and stay safe.





Machines

A physical warm-up that visually demonstrates the importance of working as a cohesive company.

Ask the group to form an audience around the perimeter of the room and mark out six 'Action Areas' in the playing area, like this:

1	2	3
6	5	4

Now instruct a player sitting near Action Area 1 to enter the playing area and to perform a repetitious movement and sound. This might be a karate-chop motion with a 'Whoosh' sound, a jumping motion with a 'Boing', or perhaps a punch of the air with a 'Wahoo' – you get the idea; it should be something physically and vocally dynamic!

Once Player 1 is in full flow, it's time to build the machine! Ask Player 1 to repeat their action and sound continually, before inviting a player near Action Area 2 to enter the playing area and become the second moving part of the machine, by positioning themselves in the space and performing their own repetitive action and sound. Continue until all six areas are occupied with players performing actions and sounds – and one huge machine has been created.

After the first attempt, invariably the machine will not be a cohesive collaboration of moving parts, seamlessly working as one, but is more likely to be a collection of individuals doing their own thing. Stop the exercise and explain that the power of theatre comes from a company of players working in unison towards a common goal, not a group of individuals showing off! The machine's movements and sounds should be interlinked, each one driven by and affecting the others, so players should consider carefully before creating their machine part. After a couple of attempts, this message should be visually reinforced by the creation of a much more cohesive and connected machine. I like to end this particular exercise by speeding up the machine until it explodes – although this may not be appropriate with all groups!

Note: If you're playing online, speed the machine up by raising one hand and blow it up by raising two!





The Translator

An interactive and focused exercise that encourages players to listen and connect with their fellow performers.

Ask the players to form an audience and place three chairs in the playing area like below:

Next, ask for three volunteers to sit in the three chairs. Once they are sitting comfortably, inform the player in chair C that they are here for a job interview and that the player in chair B is the company boss who will be conducting today's interview. But this will not be a straightforward job interview, since the boss is from a faraway place with a language all of its own. They will be firmly reliant on the translator (the player in chair A) to ensure that the interview goes smoothly.

In order to decide upon the nature of the job, it's a good idea to take suggestions from the audience; this way you'll get a broad (and often wacky) range of job titles to choose from: America's next top model... lion tamer... cat-food taster... Let's go with lion tamer! With the occupation established, reiterate that the boss must speak in gibberish for the entire interview with strictly no use of their native tongue at all. Instruct the boss to ask the first question and, once they've muttered some indecipherable gibberish, ask the translator to translate the gibberish into English for the candidate. When the candidate replies, the translator should then translate the reply back into gibberish for the boss, trying their best to use the same 'language'. The translator should watch the boss carefully and do their best to get the general gist of the question before relaying it to the interviewer. Encourage the boss to be both physically and vocally engaging so that the translator has plenty to work with; if they monotonously drone out their questioning with no gesture or vocal colour, it will be extremely difficult for the translator to get a flavour of what it is they wish to ask the candidate.

Allow the interview to play out for a while before bringing it to a close, and have a post-interview discussion about how well the players worked together to complete the task. Did they listen carefully? Did they use the same 'language'? Did the boss help the translator by providing colour and physical gesture to the questioning? Does the candidate get the job?! When the debrief is over, choose three new players, a brand-new job title, an all-new language, and start over!

This exercise is all about awareness of the others. Success can only be achieved by working closely with your fellow performers so, even though this exercise is fun (and often ridiculous), there is a valuable lesson underpinning its playing.





Two Sides to Every Story

Creative thinking and commitment in performance are on the menu in this challenging but extremely rewarding (and often hilarious), courtroom exercise.

Divide the players into pairs, ask them to sit in a socially distanced space, and distribute a pen and piece of paper to each player. Next, ask each pair to decide who is to be the defence and who will be the prosecution. Explain that they are no longer drama students but high-powered lawyers who have been assigned to some of the most high-profile cases ever to come to court. Their task is to pit their wits against their fellow players and attempt to form the strongest argument in order to win the case.

The cases should be made up, based on famous works of fiction and fairy tales. You can either prepare some ideas before the start of the session, or ask each pair to invent their own. In each case, a character is facing charges for their 'crimes', such as:

- ★ The Big Bad Wolf accused of destroying a little pig's straw house.
- Cinderella's Wicked Stepmother accused of child neglect.
- ★ Jack (of the Beanstalk) accused of destroying property and murder.
- ★ The Wolf (from Red Riding Hood) accused of eating an OAP.
- ★ Goldilocks accused of porridge theft.
- Dorothy (just arrived in Oz) accused of witch murder.

The two lawyers will each have thirty seconds to convince the jury (the audience) of the guilt or innocence of the accused. Since these cases are all based on works of fiction, the cases can also be packed full of as much 'fiction' as the defence/prosecution lawyers can conjure up! Flair is more important than fact here – and the lawyers must concoct whatever story they can to prove, beyond any reasonable doubt, that their client is innocent or guilty. Allow ten minutes for the lawyers to prepare their cases as you set up the courtroom (a couple of socially distanced tables and chairs ought to do it).

With preparation time over, invite one pair to take to the courtroom in the case of the Court versus Voldemort (or whichever character). Toss a coin to see which lawyer will go first and let the arguments commence! In performance, players must use all their powers of persuasion to convince the audience of their case. They must show confidence, determination, truth, passion, focus – whilst using eye contact and charisma to attempt to connect with the jury.

Once both arguments have been made, it's time for the verdict, so ask the audience for a show of hands to decide if the accused is 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty'. Then it's on to the next case...





Pass the Potato

An inclusive exercise that encourages accepting, dramatic escalation and teamwork.

Number the players, and inform everyone that you have brought a very special item to today's session and that item is... a potato! Now, this is a drama session, so you don't need an actual potato – just use your imagination or, failing that, have every player run to the fridge and grab a real one.

This is no ordinary potato; it's a magical, temperature-changing potato that is used for demonstrating rising action. It will start life as a very cold potato and, as it's passed around the players, it will become increasingly hot until it becomes so unbearably boiling that it's almost impossible to hold!

The cold potato will start its path in the hands of Player 1, so instruct them to hold it out for all to see and to feel the coolness of the refrigerated potato skin against their palms... Now it's time to pass the potato. The potato will be passed from Player 1, to Player 2, to Player 3, and so on, until it returns to Player 1 and the cycle continues! You can do this by calling 'Pass' or, if you prefer, the number of the next player who will receive the potato. On your call, the player in possession of the potato must mime passing the potato and the receiving player must mime receiving it.

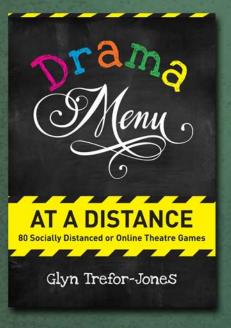
Encourage the players to increase the temperature gradually as the potato navigates its way around the group so that it doesn't go from lukewarm to boiling hot in two passes! To ensure success, players must focus on the others within the group (especially the player before them), so that, when they receive the potato, their reaction is a continuation of the work done by their fellow company members and there is a clear, gradual progression in the rising temperature of the spud. If a player noticeably drops the temperature or hikes it up excessively, stop the exercise and start again from the previous player and a cold potato.

Once you've perfected the potato, it's a good idea to try again – but, this time, use a drink which each player mimes sipping before passing on. This is no ordinary drink; it starts off as sweet and thirst-quenching and ends up as the most vomit-inducing, bitter brew ever tasted! Players should convey the changing taste with facial and vocal reactions.

This exercise can only succeed if players demonstrate strong teamwork skills... The more they focus on the others, the more successful they will be, proving that age-old adage: 'It's amazing what lessons can be learnt from passing an imaginary potato.' (Not actually an age-old adage – but use it often and it might become one!)

ENJOYED THIS TASTER PACK?

GET ALL 80 GAMES IN DRAMA MENU AT A DISTANCE



- A new collection from the author of the original hit Drama Menu
- Created specifically to help anyone teaching drama during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Dozens of games and exercises, all safe and secure to play with your group!

'An essential resource... a must-have for all teachers wanting to give their students the very best!'

Word Matters on Drama Menu

Published 10 September in paperback and ebook Save 20% on your copy when you order directly from publishers Nick Hern Books at

www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/drama-menu-at-a-distance

Glyn Trefor-Jones

Glyn Trefor-Jones is a theatre director, writer and teacher. Having gained a degree in Modern History and Politics from Cardiff University, he went on to pursue his creative ambitions by studying Acting and Musical Theatre at Hertfordshire Theatre School and, later, acting and creative writing at AARTS International.

Having toured extensively as an actor, performing in a variety of theatre, corporate and television work, he began to write and tour his own work, establishing Prospero Productions, Liberty Productions and the Bedford Rep Theatre Company. He has written extensively for young people as well as writing, directing and producing his own musicals under the production company Glyn Trefor-Jones Presents. His latest work, *Sunsets and Mornings* (book and lyrics by Glyn Trefor-Jones, music by David Jonathan), recently premiered at the Castle Theatre, Wellingborough.

He has always combined his theatre engagements with teaching work and has worked for an eclectic array of drama schools, youth theatre companies, schools and drama groups in both the UK and USA.

In 2005, Glyn established The Academy of Performing Arts, a part-time theatre school for young people between the ages of five and seventeen. The Academy quickly flourished into a thriving training academy with centres across Bedfordshire and Warwickshire. Glyn remains the creative director of all schools and continues to teach acting and musical theatre.

His first book, *Drama Menu: Theatre Games in Three Courses*, was published by Nick Hern Books in 2015 and has become a bestseller for drama teachers and workshop leaders around the world.