

## Topic Exploration Pack

### Practitioners: Frantic Assembly

#### Foreword by Karen Latto – OCR Subject Specialist Drama

As part of our resources provision I was keen to ensure that the resources have been created by experts in Drama and in Education. For our practitioner requirement, this included resources which were made by working Theatre Makers about their own company’s practice and working methods.

I would like to thank the team at Frantic Assembly for creating this resource for OCR to support AS and A Level teachers. This resource has been created by Scott Graham alongside the Learn and Train team at Frantic Assembly and talks from their perspective as working practitioners in the field of Theatre.

Introduction .....	1
Additional teacher preparation .....	2
Activity 1: Chair duets .....	3
Activity 2: Fluff picking.....	6
Activity 3: The dangerous dance .....	7



# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

This Topic Exploration Pack supports OCR AS and A Level Drama and Theatre.

### Introduction

Frantic Assembly was formed in 1994 by Scott Graham, Steven Hoggett and Vicki Middleton. None of us had any formal training and I think this meant we had a healthy disregard for the rules. We were happy to find inspiration anywhere and quickly recognised that we were capable of achieving more together than we might do apart. I think this inspired our interest in the collaboration between different artists and in the blurring of boundaries between theatre and dance.

We seldom worked on existing plays, preferring to make work about what was on our minds at the time. (Othello was an interesting diversion as we had originally set out to make a show about racial tension and found that Othello was the most exciting way for us to do this.) Our productions were born from conversations and events in our lives. We developed the ideas and collaborated with writers and other creatives, forging a style of work that felt true to us. As soon as we felt we had made a discovery or learnt something we thought it was important to find a way of teaching it and passing it on. This was the bedrock of what has become our Learn and Train programmes.

Frantic Assembly's work is often labelled 'physical theatre' and is often highly energetic but I believe it is merely story telling through physical nuance. This physicality can be brutally explosive or minutely observed. Each can have a dynamic and complex effect on an audience. This focus on detailed story telling through physicality has implications beyond work labelled 'physical theatre.'

Central to the company's work is the Frantic method, which seeks to use simple devising processes to empower performers to achieve more than they might initially think they can. This positive thinking is often articulated within the rehearsal room with the motto 'always forward, never backwards.'

These devising processes can lead to choreographic work being performed within a production or be part of vital character exploration. Each process usually asks the observer what they have learned from watching an exercise. This allows the performers to harness the potential of the audience to understand stories that emerge through movement.

Many of the processes use what we call Building Blocks to help us explore the potential of a process one step at a time. It is important to us that these are simple processes that can be used by people of all range of experience, expertise and physical ability.

*Scott Graham, Artistic Director of Frantic Assembly*

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

### Additional teacher preparation

For further information about Frantic Assembly, visit: <http://franticassembly.co.uk>

Each production that Frantic Assembly have produced has an accompanying information resource pack available for teachers and students. You can download them for free here:

<http://franticassembly.co.uk/resources/>

Each production has a dedicated page on the Frantic Assembly website, often including videos about the rehearsal and creative process.

To explore each Frantic Assembly production, visit this page on their website:

<http://franticassembly.co.uk/productions/past/>

Watch this video exploring the Frantic method and Building Blocks:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BC9uJrY9Bh8>

Watch this video exploring the Frantic method and creating choreography:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7R\\_V2iCZoY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7R_V2iCZoY)

### Suggested activities

#### Activity 1: Chair duets

Chair duets is a devising process that is simple and accessible to all experiences and most physical capabilities. It is particularly useful with groups that have diverse abilities or have concerns about their limitations or involvement in dance. An instructional step by step Chair Duets video can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/PB-9LERSyY8>

1. Everyone starts sitting. It initially involves two performers and a series of touches, embraces, flirtations, and rejections, all while sat on a couple of chairs.

Eventually you can engage the whole class in this task by pairing them off and giving everyone the same clear instructions. It is also interesting to try a few groups of three to see what challenges and opportunities this brings.

Once students are in couples or groups ask them to take a chair each and find a space in the room where their chairs can sit side by side.

2. One of the partners should create between two and four moves, moving their hands or moving the hands of their partner's, placing them on their thighs, shoulders, knees, around necks, or they could choose to place their partners hands somewhere on the partner's own body, thighs and shoulders, etc. They can also adjust the position of their partner, pulling them forward or pushing them back into their chair.
3. Once they have done this, they remain in their final position and the other partner takes over and creates another two to four moves.

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

4. Now, the original partner continues from the last position and creates a further two to four moves.

**It is important to keep this simple and to make tiny, bite sized chunks of material because they need to be remembered and linked together. Think of these little chunks of material as building blocks. They need to be solid and robust but will come together to make something much more complex eventually.**

**Try to avoid story telling at this early stage. Look out for students developing attitude in the moves. By that I mean moves that scream 'get off me!' or 'I want you!' Keep the movement neutral at this stage. We will look at story telling later.**

5. Once the students have around 15 and 20 moves between them they need to make the transition between each movement and between each partner's moves fluid.

From the outside we can often see that split second where one partner passes on the responsibility for the moves once they have executed the moves they created. You want them to be able to perform the choreography where you cannot see the 'joins.' To achieve this takes a lot of practice.

Once they have got their moves clean, fluid and fast it is time to play with context and storytelling.

6. Tell them that what they are both looking out at is a television and they are both sat on a sofa. They never take their eyes off the television and are oblivious to the contact between them and their partner. A story and history immediately presents itself.

But that is just one context. Explore other possibilities of reinventing that story by changing the speed and intensity.

Do the embraces and touches that once went for nothing now seem full of longing and risk?

- What if you ask one of the partners to continually look at the other?
- What does this do to the story?
- Does one of them become oppressive? Cruel?
- Is one of them imaginary?

Explore by using different music.

- What does that change?

Slow it right down.

- Are we now focussing on the journey of the hands towards contact rather than the contact being made?
- Has this changed the experience for the observer?

Of course you can simply practice to get it as fast as possible. It can be quite mesmerising. You can also turn this into a group scene. You can do this in several different ways.

### Simple version of chair duets

A simple version might be to use just two chairs (or three if you have a group of three) and start with Group 1. Group 2 need to agree a cue with Group 1 for them to come in and take over,

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

ejecting Group 1 out of the chairs. They can find interesting ways to do this but it should be in keeping with the choreography. This process recurs until all couples or groups have run their choreography in the chairs.

### Complex version of chair duets

A more complex version uses the created chair duet choreography but requires each performer to create a mini chair duet with a new partner. This creates the links that allows for a more fluid group scene.

To do this, name each pair AA, BB, CC, etc. and place everybody in a line so that the person in the left chair of Group AA is next to the person in the right chair of Group BB. The person in the left chair of Group BB is next to the person in the right chair of Group CC.

AA BB CC DD EE etc.

We now create new partnerships to work on mini duets that will serve as links.

The person in the left chair of Group A takes the person in the right chair of Group B and makes a short chair duet with them using the same techniques and focus as before. Now that everyone has a new partner, pair up the remaining couple. In a group of 10 it would look like this.

AB BC CD DE EA

The section created by EA allows the completed scene to loop if you want it to. For example,

AA AB BB BC CC CD DD DE EE EA AA etc.

If not you can finish it with EA.

Once this is complete you can then return to focus on a couple (or three) chairs. Start with the original couple and then have the first person from the second couple come in and find an interesting way of ejecting the person they have **not** created a mini duet with from the chairs. When sat they can then do the mini duet until their actual partner comes in and ejects the other person, allowing them to start their full chair duet.

This process gets repeated until the last couple gets interrupted by the very first person to be ejected. This is the last mini duet. You might finish here or find a way for the original couple to connect together on the chairs, potentially allowing the choreography to loop.

The ejections should be swift but creative!

**Repetition and rehearsal is key, as is focus and communication. In order to achieve a fluid and fast result the team need to identify cues within the choreography so that all transitions are exciting and seamless.**

**Essentially, you are free to find choreographic complexity using a very simple creative process. Just don't forget to explore theatrical context. This is where meaning will emerge and be reinvented.**

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

### Activity 2: Fluff picking

This is an incredibly simple task that involves picking imaginary bits of fluff, dust, whatever, off the clothes of a partner.

This act can be seen on any train, in any pub or shopping centre, basically anywhere you might find a couple that are obviously very comfortable with each other's touch. It betrays an intimacy and history between people.

1. Ask students to get into partners and sit them opposite each other. One should go first and find five moments of fluff or dust to pick from their partner's body. Consider the quality of the touch. Is it a wipe, a pick, or an adjust? Each one is slightly different.
2. Repeat this sequence until it is memorised and secure. The second partner then does the same. What you end up with is two students with five moves each.
3. To make this more interesting the partners (A and B) can then play with the sequence.

The sequence could look like this:

A – does move 1  
A – does move 2  
B – does move 1  
A – does move 3  
B – does move 2  
B – does move 3  
B – does move 4  
A – does move 4  
A – does move 5  
B – does move 5

But it is purely up to the partners.

**This is a very simple sequence of ten moments that should be fairly easy to remember but, as with all of our tasks, it is important to start simple and then build up, to add more moves once the performers are comfortable and are sure they have the first section remembered. As ever, we ask you to think of these early stages as building blocks.**

4. Once they have rehearsed the new order of their moves, you could then start to play with the complexity. Ask them to adjust a move each so that they are now occurring simultaneously. This helps the choreography from falling into a predictable pattern and keeps both partners active.

Even at this early building blocks stage the effect can be beautiful and mesmerising.

5. The beauty of this process is that, from this simple start, it can become much more complex:
  - Ask the students to stand up. How does that change the choreographic effect?
  - What if you then change the touches into pulls or pushes and allows the performers to move the rest of their body in response to this?

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

This process has provided the building blocks for much more complex and dynamic choreography. It can offer an organic way into lifting and catches, but don't miss the opportunity to also explore the more subtle possibilities.

- What if you slow it down?
- Does the touch become fearful? Dangerous? Provocative?
- Does the touch heal? Does it thrill?
- What if they both close their eyes? Does this change things?
- What if the choreography happens in an empty lift? Or in a busy lift?
- Does that change things? In a kitchen? In a field in the middle of a football match?

**You should never miss the opportunity to explore potential. That is why it is important to think of every stage as a building block. It is solid and secure but you can always build on it. Veering off and trying something does not destroy the process. You can always return to the simplicity of the task and rebuild.**

This technique was used during the rehearsal process for our production of *Lovesong*, and became the basis for some of the duet work which appears in the performance. You can find out more about this process in the *Lovesong* resource pack:

([http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Lovesong\\_Resource\\_pack.pdf](http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Lovesong_Resource_pack.pdf)) and

Watch *Lovesong* on Digital Theatre here:

<http://www.digitaltheatre.com/production/details/lovesong/play>

### Activity 3: The dangerous dance

This devising technique was a very important part of the creation of *Stockholm* by Bryony Lavery. It is a process that demands a more prolonged focus on one couple and uses the rest of the group as vital observers.

When creating *Stockholm* we were adamant that we wanted the characters to possess a difficult and palpable love. We wanted them to have something that no one else could share. A way of moving that only belongs to them. When they dance they show the world that they are totally together and the world can only watch in awe.

During the rehearsal process for *Stockholm*, we asked our performers to create their own version of a gentle Tango or anything that looked like it might belong in *Strictly Ballroom* or *Strictly Come Dancing*!

It needed to be a set sequence of shared movement. It needed to be tender, fun, flirtatious and intimate. We then took this material and took it through many directorial twists that told us much more about our characters and the tensions at the heart of their relationship.

You can try this with a couple of students or even pair the class into many couples. The task is simple but it must be taken seriously. It should aim for all the qualities listed above.

1. The students should create a string of gentle 'strictly come dancing' type material that allows them to move around a room. Encourage them to use the whole room.

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

2. Once they all have their 'dance' you should allow each one to be performed with the rest of the students watching. Give them space and conducive music and lighting.

The results may provoke giggles but you will obviously get the best results by taking the task deadly seriously. Keep reassuring the students of this importance.

Pretty soon you might get a duet that is sensuous and proud. It might be wild and adventurous. It might be gorgeous and full of love. You might even feel like a voyeur watching it! You may also think it is a 'performance' by two self-indulgent lovers. This is ok too.

3. The next step is to make little directorial changes and see how this reinvents things. Think about the tension that exists in the house in Stockholm.

Set the duet in the kitchen of the characters' home. Try running the dance again. Maybe one of them does not want to dance as much as the other. Maybe they want to cook or continue cooking instead. Or maybe there is a phone ringing in the background and they want to answer it.

Instantly what you might find is that what started as an act of union has become something that might appear as bullying or controlling.

Why can't they answer the phone? Will this be an act of betrayal? How dangerous is it to show your desire to answer the phone? What would the ramifications be if one of them stopped to answer the phone?

This can create an immediately complex relationship. It allows both the performer and observer to make new discoveries.

You can take this further. Why not try and add the layers below to the dance.

- What if one of them wants to say the word 'sorry' throughout the dance? Maybe they start inaudibly and then build up to screaming?
- What if one of them is crying throughout? Or, more subtly, what if one of them has their eyes closed while the other keeps theirs open?
- What if there was a third person in the far side of the room that one of them cannot stop looking at but the other cannot see?
- What if you change the intensity or force of the touch? What if a step in one direction becomes a push that takes them both across the room? What if turns become flings, hurtling each other around the room?
- What if you change the room? What if you bring tables and chairs close to them but ask them to keep to their choreography? How has the story changed now that they are crashing into those chairs and tables?
- If you are feeling daring you might ask them to perform the loving version of the dance on top of the tables and chairs and touch the ground. Does it make the movement defiant? Heroic? Does it set the lovers adrift from the rest of the world? Does it become a game of risk between them?

By exploring the context and adding or taking away details you can ramp up the intensity and emotional complexity of what began as a simple loving dance.



# DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Teacher Instructions

This is how we made the cataclysmic fight towards the end of Stockholm. We took the pattern of their loving dance and corroded it until it became brutally violent, yet it remained connected to their love and was still reminiscent of the patterns of their earlier dance. This gave the violence a deeper resonance as it was connected to their love and this felt entirely in keeping with the Stockholm syndrome theme at the heart of the play.

But this process can be applied beyond the production of Stockholm. It is essentially a way of exploring a history between characters and unearthing tensions that might exist in their lives.

You might even want to merely use it as a character study and dispense with the choreography after the exercise. The dance allows characters to connect and inadvertently betray aspects of their relationship without using words.

This process, or similar variations, has proved vital in the Frantic Assembly rehearsal room.

For more information about Stockholm, take a look at the Resource pack here:

[http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Stockholm\\_Resource\\_Pack.pdf](http://www.franticassembly.co.uk/media/media/downloads/Stockholm_Resource_Pack.pdf)

We'd like to know your view on the resources we produce. By clicking on '[Like](#)' or '[Dislike](#)' you can help us to ensure that our resources work for you. When the email template pops up please add additional comments if you wish and then just click 'Send'. Thank you.

If you do not currently offer this OCR qualification but would like to do so, please complete the Expression of Interest Form which can be found here: [www.cr.org.uk/expression-of-interest](http://www.cr.org.uk/expression-of-interest)

Looking for a resource? There is now a quick and easy search tool to help find free resources for your qualification:

[www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/find-resources/](http://www.ocr.org.uk/i-want-to/find-resources/)

### **OCR Resources:** *the small print*

OCR's resources are provided to support the teaching of OCR specifications, but in no way constitute an endorsed teaching method that is required by the Board, and the decision to use them lies with the individual teacher. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the content, OCR cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions within these resources.

© OCR 2016 - This resource may be freely copied and distributed, as long as the OCR logo and this message remain intact and OCR is acknowledged as the originator of this work.

OCR acknowledges the use of the following content: n/a

Please get in touch if you want to discuss the accessibility of resources we offer to support delivery of our qualifications: [resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk](mailto:resources.feedback@ocr.org.uk)