

# **Introduction to Uta Hagen: Advanced Acting**

Session Design by Molly Cameron

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

### **Content Standards**

- High School Extended Pathway, Standard 1, Concept 1, Evidence Outcome F
  - Connect internal and external work to fully realize the character (DOK 2-4)
- High School Extended Pathway, Standard 2, Concept 1, Evidence Outcome F
  - Determine through problem spotting if another actor's or one's own performance is believable and truthful (DOK 1-3)

### **Enduring Understandings**

- Students will understand that there is more to people than what is just seen on the surface, and in order to realistically play a character they must dig deeper to find what is not seen.

### **Key Knowledge**

- Students will know Uta Hagen's 7 questions for character development
- Students will know what transference is and how to use it.

### **Skills**

- Students will be able to critique another student's short scene, focusing on how realistic it was and if they stayed in character.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **Performance Tasks**

- Students will Perform a short 2-3 minute scene in which they realistically show destination, searching for an object, or waiting in order to connect internal and external work to fully realize the character.
- Students will participate in the game I Am and the following discussion in order to demonstrate their understanding that there is more to people than what is just seen on the surface, and in order to realistically play a character they must dig deeper to find what is not readily seen.

### **Other Assessments**

- Students will fill out the attached worksheet before performing their scene in which they answer Uta Hagen's 7 questions and questions about transference in order to demonstrate their knowledge of Uta Hagen's 7 questions for character development and what transference is and how to use it
- Students will answer questions based on the attached rubric in which they evaluate another student's performance in order to critique another student's short scene, focusing

on how realistic it was and if they stayed in character and determine through problem spotting if another actor's or one's own performance is believable and truthful.

## **MATERIALS NEEDED**

### **Students Materials**

- Character Worksheet
- Scene Rubric
- Pen/Pencil
- Notebook
- Any materials/props for their scene

### **Teacher Materials**

- Scene rubric
- Slips of paper with each exercise to give to the students

## **LEARNING PLAN**

### **DAY 1**

#### **Framing/Hook**

1. I Am...
  - a. Have students stand in a circle facing in.
  - b. Go around the circle and have each student say something that is visible that is true about them and step forward
    - i. E.g. I have brown hair, I have blue eyes, I am short, etc.
  - c. If it is also true for other students in the circle have them step forward, take a beat and then everyone steps back into the circle.
  - d. Once everyone has said something that is visibly seen about themselves, go around a second time and have them say something about them that is not seen and step forward.
    - i. E.g. I am stressed, I am tired, I feel alone, I feel unseen, etc.
  - e. Again, if it is also true for other students have them step forward, take a beat, and step back.
2. We are...
  - a. Once everyone has gone ask if it was easy to tell these things about each other just by looking at them.
    - i. If they say yes, ask how?
    - ii. If they say no, ask why?
  - b. Ask if they can connect a little more to their classmates knowing that they may not be the only ones feeling or going through something.
    - i. This is a good spot to discuss some current issues in the world and how we are all human in the end. There are things that everyone is dealing with

that we do not see and we should strive to foster an empathetic environment by not judging those we come in contact with.

- c. Ask if they think that characters in plays also have more going on than is just seen?
  - i. Ask if they think it would make their performance more realistic if they were to dig deeper into what is not seen for their character
- d. Have students get chairs and sit audience performer.

## Process

1. Who was Uta Hagen?
  - a. Uta Hagen was someone who was very much interested in what was not seen and how to find that and connect it with what is seen to make a strong and realistic character.
  - b. Uta was a German actress and theatre practitioner.
    1. She originated the role of Martha in the Broadway premiere of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee, and was She was Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Among many others.
    2. She won two Tony Awards for best actress in a play, one being for Martha, and also received a special Tony Award for lifetime achievement in 1999.
    3. She died in 2004 at the age of 84
2. Uta Hagen's Method
  - a. Her method builds on what Stanislavski had developed. She said she wanted "to find a true technique of acting, how to make a character flow through me."
  - b. She is also quoted saying, "Once in a while, there's stuff that makes me say, That's what theatre's about. It has to be a human event on the stage, and that doesn't happen very often."
  - c. Explain that it takes a very long time and a lot of training to reach Uta's ideal performance, but that we are going to make a start.
3. Transference
  - a. Explain that one way Uta believed we could create the human event was by using transference.
    1. Transference is when the actor transfers feelings and circumstances from their own life to that of their character
      1. E.g. If your character is furious at someone, you would think of a moment or circumstance where you were furious (or as close to it as you can). You would imagine what your body felt like, what you saw or heard, and how you showed your feelings physically. You would then use those same sensations and feelings to influence your character and their physicality.
4. The Seven Questions
  - a. It would be good to write or project these so that the students can also read them.

- b. Just like Stanislavski had his questions for character, Uta had hers (and they are similar):
    1. Who Am I?
      1. What is my present state of being?
      2. How do I perceive myself?
      3. What am I wearing?
    2. What Are the Circumstances?
      1. What time is it? (Year, season, day? At what time does my selected life begin?)
      2. Where am I? (What city, neighborhood, building, and room do I find myself in? Or in what landscape?)
      3. What surrounds me? (The immediate landscape? The weather? The condition of the place and the nature of the objects in it?)
      4. What are the immediate circumstances? (What has just happened, is happening? What do I expect or plan to happen next and later on?)
    3. What Are My Relationships?
      1. How do I stand in relationship to the circumstances, the place, the objects, and the *other people* related to my circumstances?
    4. What Do I Want?
      1. What is my main objective? My immediate need or objective?
    5. What is My Obstacle?
      1. What is in the way of what I want? How do I overcome it?
    6. What Do I Do to Get What I Want?
      1. How can I achieve my objective? What's my behavior? **What are my actions?**
  - c. Ask what is similar and different about her questions and Stanislavski's?
    1. One way is that up until now most acting methods dealt more with the mental and physiological side of things where as Uta focuses more on using the physiology to influence the physical. She focused more on actions and what the body does in response to different situations.
  - d. Show the video of one of Uta Hagen's Acting Classes
    1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7v5zB-jg40#t=237>
5. The Exercises
    - a. Each group will perform a different exercise.
      1. *NOTE:* Groups will be assigned after the exercises have been explained.
    - b. Hand out, or have them write down, the directions for each exercise so that they can rehearse at home.
    - c. Explain that these exercises will be performed in class tomorrow, which means they will want to rehearse that day after school so that they may be prepared for their performance.
    - d. Explain the exercise directions as you hand them out so that students have a chance to clarify if anything is confusing.

1. *NOTE:* Make sure to explain that these scenes should not be pantomime, which means students should bring any props they may need (as much as they can, obviously they will not bring furniture). The scenes also do not have to be silent. It is okay to talk or make noise as long as it is realistic.
2. Group 1 will perform Physical Destination
  1. *Purpose:*
    - a. The purpose of this exercise is to test those things that send us from one place to another, that determine the logic of physical life.
  2. *Presentation:*
    - a. Explore two to three minutes of your behavior in the pursuit of a simple task. Choose circumstances that necessitate an entrance from the wings into the playing area and eventually an exit into the wings.
  3. *Keep in mind:*
    - a. While occupied with the task on stage, you may also choose to leave *momentarily* to get or leave something in another room before reentering the playing area.
    - b. As in all of the exercises, your story should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
    - c. In the examination of your selected actions, put your destinations under a microscope to discover how many are consciously motivated, how many occur by reflex, and which of them are subconsciously instigated.
3. Group 2 will perform Moment to Moment
  1. *Purpose:*
    - a. The purpose of this exercise is to help the actor address one of the most difficult technical problems: how to repeat selected actions at every performance from moment to moment, as if for the first time. It is achieved by a suspension of knowledge of what is to come, by "forgetting" everything except what is needed *at the moment* with the profound innocence that is part of an actor's soul.
  2. *Presentation:*
    - a. Select specific circumstances for a two to three minute event, during which you will search for—and eventually find—an object that you have mislaid or believe to be lost.
  3. *Keep in mind:*
    - a. The final presentation of this exercise should truly test your ability to direct your full attention to one need at a time. Make yourself believe in the existence of each new moment.

- b. Be sure that the missing object has meaning to you, so that your stakes remain high while looking for it.
    - c. As in all of the exercises, your story should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
  - 4. Group 3 will perform Finding Occupation While Waiting
    - 1. *Purpose*
      - a. The purpose of this exercise is to test the body's experience while pursuing a psychological goal
    - 2. *Presentation*
      - a. Explore two to three minutes in which you are waiting for an event or person. Choose a situation in which you are psychologically occupied. Avoid situations that demand a variety of "interesting" activities such as a return from a trip, when you might be carrying books or suitcases.
    - 3. *Keep in mind*
      - a. Try to find true inner and outer occupation with a minimum dependence on tangible objects, strip yourself of all but the essential objects.
      - b. Do not attempt to re-create imaginary animated objects such as people, animals, or cars. This does not mean, however, that you cannot be waiting for a person or car, but you should exit towards them not have them come onstage to you.
        - i. E.g. waiting in the park for a ride, once you see the car exit towards it with a wave, etc.
      - c. As in all of the exercises, your story should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
  - e. Divide students into 3 groups
  - f. On the day of the performance each student should bring any materials or props they need to complete their scene.
  - g. Give them the attached worksheet and have them begin filling it out
    - 1. What they do not finish in class will be homework

### **DAY 2 and 3:**

- 6. Performing
  - a. Have each student perform their short scene in which they complete their task for the rest of the class.
    - 1. *NOTE:* Alternate the three groups so that there is a mix of the different exercises.
    - 2. As they perform have the other students refer to the attached rubric to answer questions on their performance.
  - b. Once their scene has finished ask them the following
    - 1. What was hard or easy about this scene?

2. What did they do to prepare?
3. What did those in the audience notice or learn?
  1. Base the questions to the audience on sections from the rubric to get specific feedback

## **Reflection**

7. I Learned
  - a. Have students stand in a circle and look down. When they have thought of one thing they have learned about each other or about acting have them look up.
  - b. Go around the circle and have them say what they learned, beginning with “I have learned that...”

# Uta Hagen's Character Analysis

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following for your two to three minute scene:

1. Who Am I?
  - a. What is my present state of being?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How do I perceive myself?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. What am I wearing?
  
2. What Are the Circumstances?
  - a. What time is it? (Year, season, day? At what time does my selected life begin?)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. Where am I? (What city, neighborhood, building, and room do I find myself in? Or in what landscape?)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. What surrounds me? (The immediate landscape? The weather? The condition of the place and the nature of the objects in it?)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. What are the immediate circumstances? (What has just happened, is happening? What do I expect or plan to happen next and later on?)



3. What Are My Relationships?
  - a. How do I stand in relationship to the circumstances, the place, the objects, and the *other people* related to my circumstances?
  
4. What Do I Want?
  - a. What is my main objective? My immediate need or objective?
  
5. What is My Obstacle?
  - a. What is in the way of what I want? How do I overcome it?
  
6. What Do I Do to Get What I Want?
  - a. How can I achieve my objective? What's my behavior? **What are my actions?**
  
7. What is Transference?
  
8. How did you use Transference in your scene?

## Uta Hagen Exercise Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_

POINTS	1	2	3	5
<b>WAS THE SCENE REALISTIC?</b>	The scene was not realistic at all, looking forced with no natural movement	The scene was slightly realistic, but still looked forced with a few natural movements	The scene was mostly realistic, but still looked forced at times with some natural movement	The scene was completely realistic with all natural movements
<b>DID THEY STAY IN CHARACTER?</b>	They broke character constantly and continuously looked for reaction from the audience	They broke character 4 or more times and looked for reaction from the audience 4 or more times	They broke character 2-4 times and looked for reaction from the audience 2-4 times	They did not break character at all and did not look for reaction from the audience
<b>DID THE SCENE HAVE A CLEAR BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END?</b>	Their scene did not have any of the following: a clear beginning, middle, or end	Their scene had only one of the following: a clear beginning, middle, or end	Their scene had two of the following: a clear beginning, middle, or end	The scene had a clear beginning, middle, and end
<b>DID THEY UNDERSTAND THEIR SURROUNDINGS AND ENVIRONMENT?</b>	They did not have clear surroundings or environment. The audience could not see where they were	They had 1-2 moments where their surroundings and environment were clear. The audience could almost see where they were	They had 3-4 moments where their surroundings and environment were clear. The audience could mostly see where they were	They had clear surroundings and environment. The audience could always see where they were

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## Physical Destination

- *Purpose:*
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- *Presentation:*
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- *Keep in mind:*
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  - As in all of the exercises, your story should have a clear beginning, middle and end.
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