

## LESSON 1: THE NIGHTMARE (ABSTRACT PHYSICAL THEATRE)

**INQUIRY:** How can we use our bodies in abstract ways to create something that is theatrical and exciting?

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### ADDITIONAL NOTES & SUGGESTIONS

#### REGISTER QUESTION:

(5 mins)

“Stories are wild creatures... When you let them loose, who knows what havoc they might wreak?”

- What havoc might stories wreak?  
or
- What do you think this means?  
or
- Is there a story that has ‘wreaked havoc’ with you?

Have the question on the board as they enter and ask students to have their answer prepared in one clear sentence so that they can speak with the ‘violence of articulation’ that Anne Bogart talks about in A Director Prepares. This means thinking of an idea (or an answer in this case) and committing to it whole-heartedly. Train them this way every lesson to get them out of habits of meandering around an answer that takes up 3 minutes of the lesson. We have added ‘violence of articulation’ reminders to all register questions and feedback slides as we found it started to make a difference to how students answered questions with this fancy name given to speaking clearly and efficiently and committing to an idea. If it doesn’t work for you, you can delete it.

**READING:** Pages 19-23 (Act One: Scenes 1-3)

(10 mins)

#### DISCUSSION:

(5 mins)

- What interests you so far?
- How would you describe Conor’s relationship with his mum?
- The nightmare is described as ‘a collage of abstract aural and physical elements’. Can you describe any memories of your own nightmares - either recent or from when you were a child?

In discussion, pick students to respond to your question based on what you think they are capable of. Everyone should be ready with an answer that they can speak with clarity. But you only need to actually hear from a few people so that you can move on to practical work.

#### WARM-UP: QUALITY OF MOVEMENT

(5 mins)

Invite students to walk the space: brisk pace; finding the gaps; covering the whole space and moving to the corners of the space as well as the centre. Find balance and harmony as an ensemble. Develop a **soft focus** - an awareness of the whole room and the energy of the room as they move and change shape. You have a **kinesthetic awareness** of your own body and those around you. You are aware of how you fit into the group as the group moves in harmony.

Next invite them to start adding different qualities to their movement (reminding them that they should still keep balance and harmony and not make contact with anyone or anything):

- You are floating lightly and indirectly through the space
- You are thrusting directly and heavily through the space
- You are flicking directly and lightly through the space

There is a slide for the warm up - but best to just work with spoken instructions.

Qualities have been drawn from Laban’s Efforts in Action <https://labaneffortsinaction.com/labans-efforts> and from Japanese BUTOH.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You are being flicked: imagine yourself as a fly being swatted around by a giant hand</li> <li>You are moving through water: your body is light but it is hard to move forward</li> <li>You are moving through a raging fire: the flames threaten to take you at any point</li> <li>Your legs are in deep sludge but your upper body is threatened by flames</li> <li>You are the sludge: you're a gooey organism that moves and grows and changes shape, half liquid; half solid. You are being stretched and pulled like a giant child is playing with you. You are the slime in her hands as she stretches and pulls you and sees how far she can make you stretch before you break. She rolls you back together and places you in the jar again.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>MAIN ACTIVITY: CREATING AN ABSTRACT NIGHTMARE</b> (15 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Groups of 5 or 6</li> <li>Each person in the group describes something they can remember from a nightmare and the group must try to create that image as a group with your bodies. This should be a still image.</li> <li>Put these into an order so that you have 5 or 6 <b>still images</b>. Rehearse moving from one to another. Make the still images <b>dynamic</b></li> <li>Now add a quality to each movement, drawing on the ideas we explored in the warm-up. You can use some of those qualities or add your own.</li> <li>Work with kinesthetic awareness of your company so that you all arrive in each still image at the same time, hold the image for a moment, and then move into your next image.</li> <li>You might choose to add some text or sounds to each image, or you could use movement and stillness only. If you choose to add sounds or words, make sure you choose something from the dreamworld, perhaps something you can remember from your own dreams or nightmare.</li> <li>Add music to enhance the atmosphere.</li> </ul>	<p>Ideally take them through this process step by step to make sure they are keeping to time restraints. The slide has animations so you can add instructions as you give them verbally. They will work much faster if you take them through each stage and limit the amount of discussion and planning they can have. If time is too tight, reduce to 3 images.</p> <p>Sometimes it's best just to add music to the sharing of the work and let chance play a role in if it works or not. Or you could give them three choices from the soundtrack to choose (but this can take up precious time).</p> <p><b>MUSIC OPTION</b>   <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWUHH9t7Tj0">Nightmare Music</a>  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWUHH9t7Tj0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWUHH9t7Tj0</a></p>
<p><b>SHARING:</b> (2-15 minutes, depending on what you have left)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you have lighting facilities, add some moody lighting.</li> <li>Invite students to share work and prepare a comment on one moment they felt was evocative or frightening.</li> <li>We have added four different options for sharing the work in the slides: Focussed Sharing / Rolling Sharing / Split Sharing / Simultaneous Sharing.</li> <li>These are just names we gave to the different ways we try to manage sharing work with time restraints. If you teach the scheme more than once, you will quickly get a sense of how much time you realistically have and what works, so just go ahead and adapt it for your own context.</li> </ul>	<p>Lighting and sound really help create atmosphere here and will make the students take themselves more seriously.</p>

*This is a free sample resource from [www.the-understudy.org](http://www.the-understudy.org)*

*The full scheme of learning includes: 9 lessons; 66 slides; 2 practical assessment suggestions (all editable).*

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