Henry IV: Bringing Characters to Life

DURATION: 15 - 45 mins if lead in full.

OBJECTIVE: To understand how to bring characters to life, physically and vocally.

KEY LEARNING POINTS:
• Use physicality to create characters.
• Understand the Laban efforts.
• Understand how characters and relationships are communicated through the body, movement and space.

YOU WILL NEED:
• A large clear space.
• Participants to have an understanding of some of the key characters in Henry IV (you could look at the Henry IV: Character Descriptions or do the Henry IV: Understanding Characters and Relationships exercise first).

IT’S NICE TO HAVE:
• The Henry IV: Character Descriptions.

ACTIVITY:
• This can be run as a stand-alone activity or build on from Henry IV: Understanding Characters and Relationships exercise.

Laban Efforts
• Explain that you are going to look at how we might begin to bring characters to life and that you are going to start by playing with different ways of moving. Explain how Rudolf Laban developed a system of movement analysis; initially for dancers and choreographers it is increasingly used in actor training called Laban Efforts.
• Explain that you are going to look at how we might begin to bring characters to life and that you are going to start by playing with different ways of moving.
• Ask the participants to move around the space, filling all the gaps and making sure that they don’t bump into anyone. Layer in the instructions, stop and go, and encourage the group to freeze and begin walking again at exactly the same time.
• Ask participants to move around in a heavy and then a light way and notice how this feels different. Ask them to move around fast and...
then slow, and then move directly and then indirectly. Ensure that all participants are comfortable with the terminology and explain that we are going to play with layering these ways of moving together.

- Identify an effort from the left-hand column of the table of Laban Efforts below and ask participants to move around the room, layering in the three qualities. For example, if you select Punch ask them to move in a way that is direct, fast and heavy at the same time.
- You can give more detail if participants need it. For example, if encouraging them to move heavily “Imagine your whole body feels like lead, you can barely pick up your feet” or “imagine that you are walking in really thick mud and it’s nearly impossible to pull your feet up to take the next step”.
- Explain that together direct, fast and heavy make the Laban Effort ‘Punch’ and that is how we are moving around the room now. Ask participants to imagine that you have an energy dial. When that dial is at one the Punch quality is a secret internal quality, no one in the room should know they move in a punch way. When the dial is at ten, this is the most exaggerated version of Punch possible. Play with turning the dial up and down. How does this change the movement?
- Split the group in half and get half of the group to be an audience whilst the other half continue to move with the Punch quality. The audience should think about how they would describe a character that moves in this way. Which character from the play could this be? For the actors, how did it feel like to move in that way? If that character was going to greet someone else in the space what would that look or sound like, can you try this out? It might be helpful to reference the Character Descriptions here for participants to clearly see all the characters.
- Swap the audience and actors and try out a different effort. How is this character different, how would you describe them? Think about how they might feel, what status they have, what job would they have? How does turning up or down the dial of energy change the character?
- Get the whole group back up on their feet and ask them to play their Laban Efforts alongside each other. What is it like to have two different qualities in the space? How do the greetings change the relationships? Ask a couple of participants to step out of the exercise and be an audience. What relationships and characters can they see? Who from the play can they see?
- You could continue this trying out all the Laban Efforts and reflecting on what types of characters this creates.
- Ask the group to reflect on what it was like to create characters from the play starting from movement? You could ask participants to find quotes from the play that describe the characters and match the quality of movement. For example, Prince Hal described as “the most rascal-liest, sweet young prince” (Act 2: Scene 2)
- Does one character move with the same quality for the whole of a play? What things might affect their physicality? What Laban Efforts did you notice in the production?
Leading with Body Parts

- Ask participants to move around the room and balance the space.
- Allow participants to think about how they naturally move around the space: Do they move fast or slow? Do their arms swing? How do their feet contact the floor—heel to toe, toe to heel, do they lean on the inside or the outside of their feet? What is their posture like? Notice other people in the space and greet them.
- Ask participants to move around the space with a different body part leading them around. Begin by asking them to move around the space being led by their nose. What does this feel like? How does it affect your pace and the rest of your body?
- Ask participants to imagine that they have an energy dial. When that dial is at one, the body part leading should be a secret internal quality, no one in the room should know that you are being led around the room by your nose. When the dial is at ten, this is the most exaggerated version possible. Play with turning the dial up and down. How does this change the movement?
- Encourage participants to greet each other. What does this look like? What does this sound like?
- Split the group in half so that half of them are an audience and the other half continue to move being led by their nose. Ask the audience to reflect on what characters, relationships and stories they see. Are there any characters in the play that might move in this way? Why and when? It might be helpful to reference to the Character Descriptions here for participants to clearly see all the characters.
- Actors should reflect on what it is like to do. Are there other body parts we could lead with?
- Switch audience and actors over so that the audience are now moving around the space. Ask them to lead with their chest. Encourage them to greet each other. What does this feel like? How does it affect your pace and the rest of your body? Play with the energy dial. Ask the audience to reflect on what characters, relationships and stories they can see.
• Then ask participants to lead with their nose. Explain that when you clap your hands they should switch to leading with their chest. The audience should reflect on what this was like to watch? What was the difference vocally and physically? Ask the audience if there are any stories they can see?
• Split the actors in half and ask half the group to lead with their head and half with their chest. Again, play with the energy dial. What is it like to greet each other? Ask the audience if there are any new or different relationships between these characters? Who could they be in the play?
• As a whole group ask the participants if characters have to lead with one body part through the whole play? What might affect their physicality? Are there any other body parts we could lead with to create any of the other characters in the play?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:
• You could develop this by asking participants to split into small groups, pick a different character and improvise a scene or stage a section of the play.
• You could stage a character catwalk with each participant (or groups of participants) representing different characters.

KEY WORDS:
Laban Efforts – a system of describing or analysing movement developed by the Choreographer, Rudolf Laban.