

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITY PACK

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

BY ANTON CHEKHOV
A REIMAGINING BY GARY OWEN



DIRECTED BY RACHEL O'RIORDAN

THE CHERRY ORCHARD WAS STAGED IN SHERMAN'S MAIN HOUSE DURING THE AUTUMN SEASON OF 2017.

The following pack provides some production background and context as well as providing you with the tools to answer an exam question on the Actor In Performance elements of this production.

There are both practical and academic questions within this – please be safe when completing the practical exercises.

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PRODUCTION CREATIVES

RACHEL O’RIORDAN – Director

- Rachel is an Irish born theatre director.
- She is the Artistic Director of Sherman Theatre. She was previously the Artistic Director at Perth Theatre.
- She holds a PhD from the University of Ulster.
- Rachel won the Best Director award for *Absolution* in the First Irish Theatre Festival Awards in New York as well as the Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland (CATS) for *The Seafarer*.
- Previous collaborations with Gary Owen include: *Iphigenia In Splott* and *Killology*.
- *Iphigenia In Splott* transferred to the National Theatre, New York and toured the UK.
- Following on from its Sherman premier in 2017 *Killology* was also produced at The Royal Court Theatre in London.

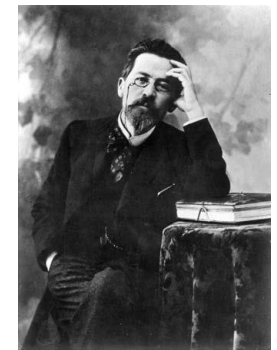


GARY OWEN – Playwright (Associate Artist for Sherman Theatre)

- Gary was born in Pembrokeshire.
- He attended Brynteg Comprehensive School, and the European Film College in Denmark.
- He was a script editor at BBC Wales Drama from 1998 to 2000.
- He held the post of writer in residence at Paines Plough between 2001 and 2002.
- In 2003 he won the Meyer-Whitworth Award for new writing for the theatre.
- His plays have been performed around the United Kingdom, and abroad as far as Canada, Australia and Germany.
- *Iphigenia In Splott* won the best New Play UK Theatre Award 2015 and the James Tait Black prize for Drama 2016.

ANTON CHEKHOV – Playwright

- Anton Pavlevich Chekhov was born on January 17 1860, in Taganrog, Russia.
- His grandfather was a serf (the legal property of landowners) – a form of slavery – who eventually bought his family their freedom in 1841 for 875 rubles.
- In 1879, Chekhov began to write comic stories to pay his medical school tuition. His later stories had deeper and more profound themes.
- Over ninety percent of Chekhov's published work appeared before he was 28.
- In 1896 he returned to drama, eventually becoming the in-house playwright for the Moscow Arts Theatre.
- He was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1898. Sadly he succumbed to the illness on July 1st 1904, just a few months after *The Cherry Orchard* premiered.



REVIEWS OF GARY AND RACHEL'S PREVIOUS WORK

KILLOLOGY



'It's an open wound of a play – raw and sore – but full of compassion too.'
The Guardian

'Gary Owen's intelligent new play unpicks a destructive father-son relationship with precision and empathy.'
The Stage

'It's played out on a desolate landscape in Rachel O'Riordan's pitch-perfect, exquisitely performed production.'
Lynn Gardner

'A beautiful balance of love and hate, Killology is both disturbing and life-affirming.'
The Arts Desk

IPHIGENIA IN SPLOTT

'...artistic director Rachel O'Riordan captures the play's many tonal changes in her production, which is fluid and textured. It's a masterclass on how to keep an audience focused.'
The Stage

"Owen tells a really good story and one involving cliff-hangers which are brilliantly handled in Rachel O'Riordan's tightly controlled production"
The Guardian

"This is the best sort of monologue, the kind that leaves you with all sorts of detailed mental pictures of what you have just imagined." *The Times*

"...Rachel O'Riordan is attuned to every hormonal adjustment in Mr. Owen's empathically imagined heroine."
New York Times



CHARACTER LIST

ORIGINAL - 1904	REIMAGINED - 2017
Madame Lyubov Andreievna Ranevskaya A landowner.	Rainey The ancestral landowner.
Yermolai Alexeievitch Lopakhin A merchant.	Alun Lewis A self-made businessman.
Leonid Andreieievitch Gayev The brother of Madame Ranevskaya.	Gabriel Rainey's brother.
Varya Ranevskaya's adopted daughter, aged 24, who manages the estate.	Valerie Rainey's adopted daughter, who manages the estate in her absence.
Anya Ranevskaya's daughter, aged 17.	Anya Rainey's biological daughter and University student.
Peter Trofimov A student, Grisha's Tutor and Anya's love interest.	Ceri Anya's former Tutor, socialist and love interest.
Boris Borisovich Simeonov-Pishchik Another local landowner whose estate has hit hard times.	
Charlotta Ivanovna A governess.	
Firs An eccentric and elderly manservant, aged 87.	
Yepikhodov A clerk.	
Yasha A young manservant.	
Dunyasha A housemaid.	Dottie The family's housekeeper.
A Stranger A vagrant passer-by	
The Stationmaster and The Postmaster Both officials attend the party in Act III.	
Grisha (<i>Unseen</i>) The son of Ranevskaya, drowned many years ago – before her departure to Paris.	

CONTEXT

THE ORIGINAL PLAY

- *The Cherry Orchard* was written between 1901 and 1903.
- Chekhov planted a large cherry orchard on his own estate.
- However, when he sold the land the new owner cut down the cherry trees.
- Stanislavsky, the play's director, interpreted the play as a drama, against Chekhov's wishes, who had originally intended for the play to be a comedy.
- Many see the play as undeniably tragic; focusing their analysis on Ranevsky's downfall.
- There are however, some undeniably comical moments such as Gayev's 'Ode to a bookcase' speech.
- Whether the play is a comedy or a drama is still debated today.
- Critical reception of the play outside of Russia was mixed, partly due to translation problems – which only added to the debate over the style of the play.
- The play is faulted for being unheroic, negative, and devoid of plot.
- George Bernard Shaw said that "hearing Chekhov's plays make me want to tear up my own".

THE ORIGINAL SETTING

- The action is set on the ancestral estate of Lyubov Andreyevna Ranevskaya in the provinces of Russia just after the turn of the 20th Century.
- Act I takes place in the nursery of the house on a cool day in May.
- Act II takes place in mid-summer, near the cherry orchard.
- Act III takes place on the evening of a party. It is also the day of an auction which will decide the fate of both the estate and the orchard.
- Act IV takes place several weeks later in the nursery (as Act I), with the family preparing to leave forever.

THE REIMAGINED SETTING

- The action is set on the ancestral estate of Rainey in South Pembrokeshire, during the early 1980s.
- Scene I takes place in the living room of the family house in the early hours of the morning.
- Scene II continues the action in the living room during the following day.
- Scene III continues the action in the living room a few days later.
- Scene IV takes place on the day of the auction to sell off the estate.
- Scene V takes place the following morning at breakfast, with Rainey preparing to leave the estate forever.

ORIGINAL SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT	UPDATED SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 1861 The Emancipation Declaration became law – giving the serfs their freedom. • This led to even greater social reforms and awareness across Russia. • Ultimately this led to a free-market economy which undermined the power of the nobility, and even impoverished some of them. • Wealthy landowning families were forced to sell their estate in order to pay their debts, so the situation displayed in <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> was familiar to the society of Chekhov's day. • The 1890s saw Russia's industrial development lead to a growth in both the middle and working classes resulting in more politically radical times. • Additionally during this period poor living and working conditions combined with high taxes led to strikes and agrarian disorder. • The Russian working class were the first to establish political parties in order for their voice to be heard which lead directly to the formation of radical parties. • Together these events contributed to 1917 Revolution through a new found sense of self-awareness for all classes of people. • Symbolist poets saw the play as a narrative poem mourning the loss of beauty in the world. • Bolsheviks interpreted the play as a precursor to the 1917 revolution, because of Trofimov's speeches (which were censored by the Tsarist regime for the 1904 performance). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 following a damaging series of strikes during the winter of 1978–79, dubbed the "<i>Winter of Discontent</i>". • She promised change and on arrival at Downing Street she said, paraphrasing the Prayer of Saint Francis: <i>"Where there is discord, may we bring harmony; Where there is error, may we bring truth; Where there is doubt, may we bring faith; And where there is despair, may we bring hope."</i> • By 1982 (the year of the Falklands War) the economy was showing signs of recovering; inflation was down but unemployment was at a 50 year high. • Thatcher introduced limits on public spending, and reduced expenditure on social services but increased taxes. • By 1986 almost a fifth of Welsh men had been jobless for five years or more. • Nearly 84,000 Welsh council houses were bought under the "Right to Buy" scheme between 1980 and 1991(60% of final total sold by 2017). This scheme allowed council tenants to buy the property they lived in from the council. • Between 1979 and 1990 over 140 miles of motorway and trunk road were laid in Wales. • In 1980, Gwynfor Evans (former president of Plaid Cymru), threatened a hunger strike if the government did not honour its commitment to provide a Welsh-language TV service. • The period of 1979-1990 is remembered as a time when Britain's social fabric frayed to the point of snapping. Riots in inner cities highlighted deprivation and social division; a perception of a growing gap between the richest and poorest added to the sense that something was wrong.

Describe 3 things that intrigue you about Sherman Theatre's *The Cherry Orchard*:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____



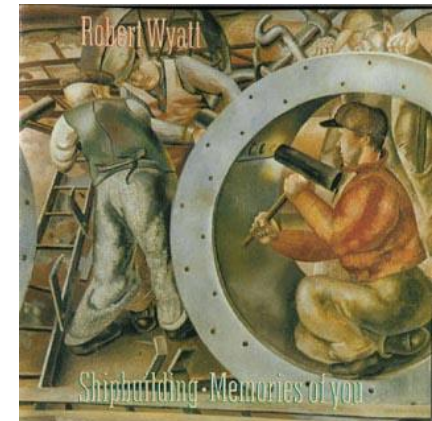
Listen to:

Shipbuilding by Elvis Costello, 1983

and

Ghost Town by The Specials, 1981.

Consider how they reflect the mood of the society at the time of Gary Owen's *The Cherry Orchard*.



Which character(s) within the play might they relate to most?

What other music from this period might reflect the mood of the play?

DIRECTOR'S AND PLAYWRIGHT'S THOUGHTS ON THE PRODUCTION

Gary Owen says about his relationship with Rachel O'Riordan - "It's good to have developed a sort of short hand with somebody. It makes it much easier to work with someone when you have a level of trust."

Rachel O'Riordan says "Gary is Wales' most exciting playwright so it is right that this playwright and I (as the Artistic Director) have a partnership because he's a very significant in the UK generally and especially in Wales."

"There is a huge love for Gary's work in this city [Cardiff] and in this theatre. So it enables us to take our audience on a journey introducing that audience that maybe aren't so familiar with Chekhov but very familiar with Gary Owen's work to a new look at a classical text."

Rachel O'Riordan.

"I wanted to put *The Cherry Orchard* in Pembrokeshire because I like to write from things I know, from places I know. I grew up in Pembrokeshire in the late 70s, early 80s so I know that area. It just struck me that it was a time that had some similarities to the context Chekhov was writing for. He was writing for a time in Russian history when the entrepreneurial class was on the rise. And I think that is something that very much happened in this country in the early 80s and I began to think how I would change the play and I just realised I could think of actual people who were part of my life growing up in Pembrokeshire that matched the characters..."

Gary Owen.

"...which is always really exciting for an audience because if Gary can recognise them, so can the audience."

Rachel O'Riordan.

"If an audience comes in with a preconceived notion of what they think something should be that can be tricky for a writer. I think in this instance Gary's response to the play has been so bold in a brilliant, brilliant way as to put that problem to bed really very quickly."

Rachel O'Riordan.

ACTING SKILLS – VOCABULARY

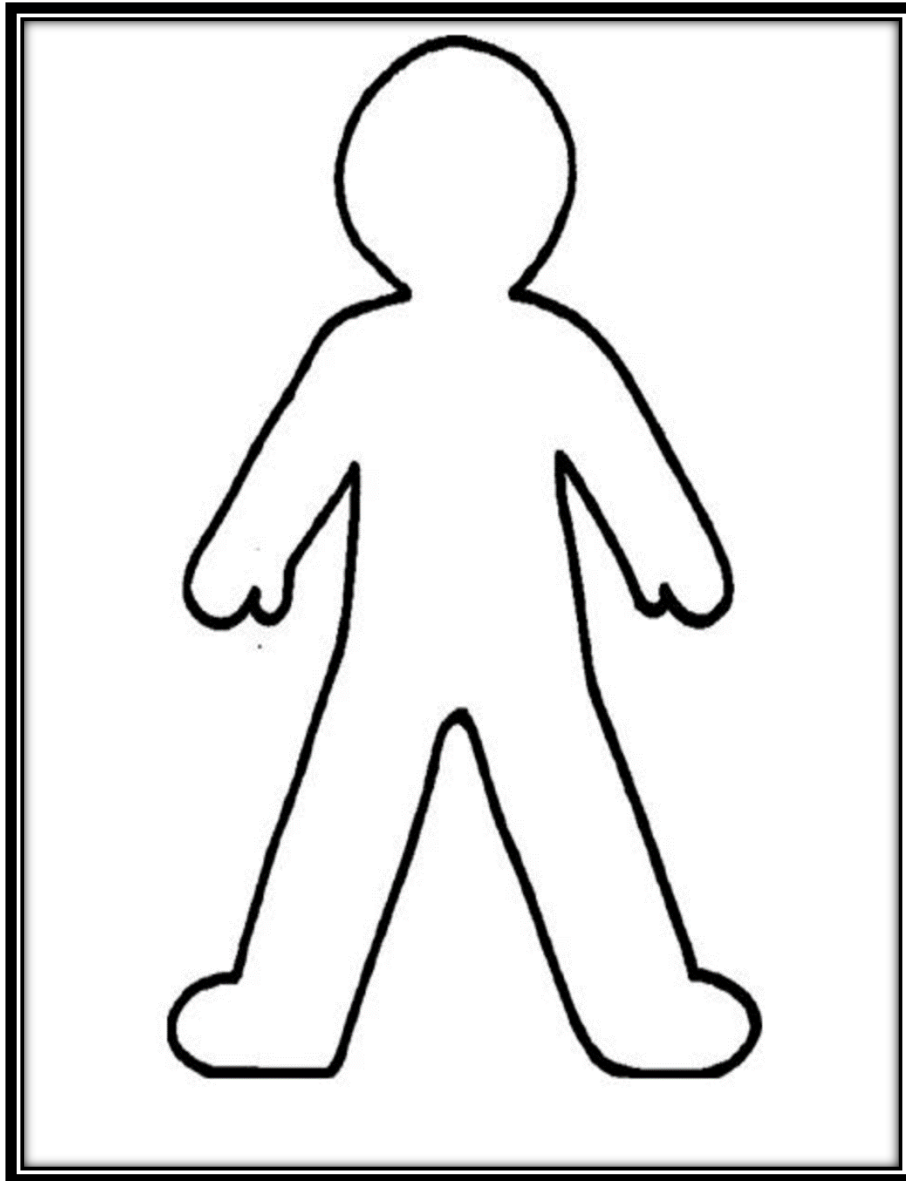
Link the definitions with the correct word.

Physicality

Gait	The position in which someone holds their body when standing or sitting
Eye Contact	A person's manner of walking.
Facial Expression	The way someone stands, especially when deliberately adopted (as in cricket, golf, and other sports)
Gesture	The amount of space between people and their surroundings.
Pace	The look on someone's face that conveys a particular emotion.
Posture	Where the actors gaze is focused.
Proxemies	The speed at which someone walks, runs, or moves.
Stance	An action performed to convey a feeling or intention.

Vocal

Tone	Speed in speaking.
Accent	The flow/frequency of words and phrases
Inflection	A temporary stop in action or speech.
Pace	Give particular emphasis or importance to a point, statement, or idea.
Pause	Quantity or power of sound; degree of loudness.
Pitch	The manner of speaking that expresses a particular feeling or mood.
Rhythm	The degree of highness or lowness in the voice.
Stress	A distinctive way of pronouncing a language (associated with a particular country, area, or social class)
Volume	The modulation of intonation or pitch in the voice.



INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURE - ONE

These are things we experience in our everyday life that affect the tension held within our body.

Look at the figure opposite. Consider that it is you.

Internal Pressure

What things are yours to control that push outwardly from you on a daily basis? (Write some of these inside the figure.)

- Your fears (People / Things / Places you are afraid of).
- Your desires (What you want / like).
- Your physicality (How you look / Stand / Sit / Walk).
- Your opinions (What you think of everything).

External Pressures

What things are there that put pressure on you on a daily basis over which are brought on you by other people / things? (Write some of these around the figure.)

- Work (To provide top service).
- Exams (To get results).
- Friends (To do what they want / need from you).
- Family (To do what they expect of you).
- Enemies (To avoid them).
- Environment (Where you work / live / play / shop etc).

Where in your body do these things place pressure on you?

Another way to look at these as your personal versions of Stanislavski's objectives and obstacles. In this case consider the internal pressures **OBJECTIVES** and the external pressures as your **OBSTACLES**.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES – TWO

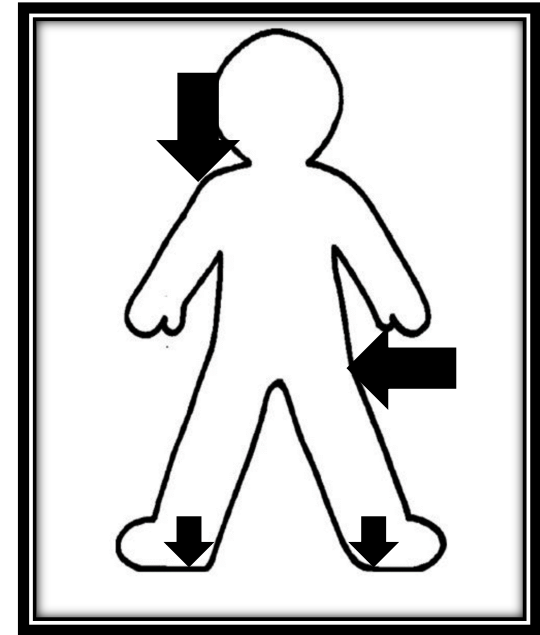
Physicalising Pressures

It is possible to create a character just by playing their pressure points, and walking in their skin.

Look at this example figure.

Their obstacles and objectives have been changed into arrows that represent the force being placed on their body from outside or in. Stand up and try to replicate the physicality it will create if you follow these forced arrows.

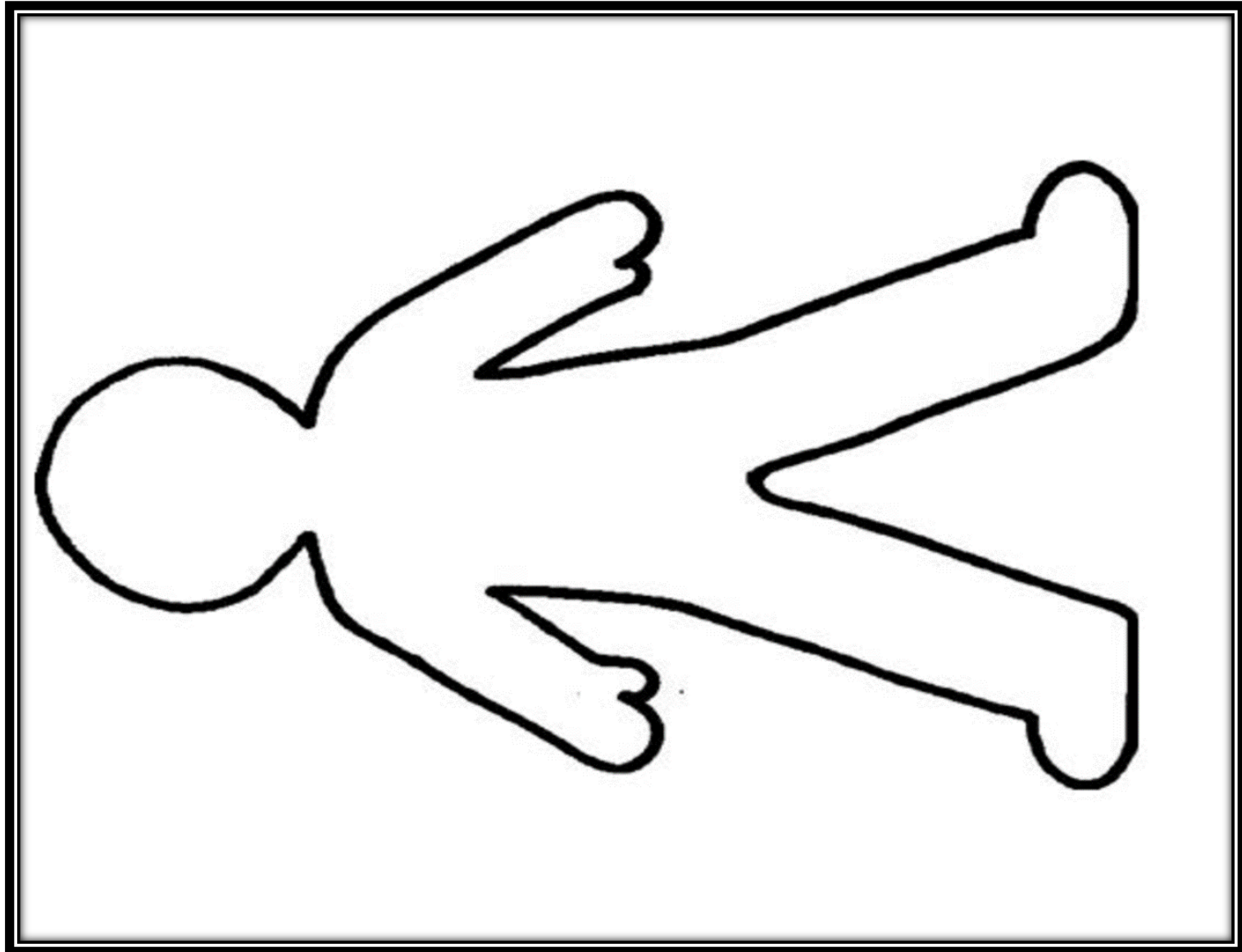
Describe how it effects your body (using the physicality key words above):



Follow these instructions to try it out on yourself.

1. Consider your objectives and obstacles from the first part of this section.
2. Allocate these objectives and obstacles a force number between 1 (*the weakest force and smallest arrows*) and 10 (*the strongest force and biggest arrows*).
3. On the next page you will find a large outline. Put your arrows on this retaining their internal or external role.
Do not label what these arrows represent.
4. When you have done this stand with your feet shoulder width apart and relaxed; a neutral position.
5. Now you should attempt to replicate the physicality represented by these arrows. Allow your body to bend and flex to suit it. This will feel uncomfortable.
6. Try to be true to the forces you have drawn. Hold this position for at least 10 seconds.
7. Whilst allowing those forces to still work on your body get yourself into an upright position – as close to neutral as possible but fighting against the forces. Feel the pressures at work on you.
8. Hold this for 10 seconds. Now relax.
9. Answer the following questions:
How do you feel now? Where do you feel the pressure most? What – in the world of the character – might it be that causes that?
10. How might this exercise help an actor?

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES



ANALYSIS OF AN ACTOR IN PERFORMANCE:

“ RAINEY: (sitting) Next hour and how long, precisely? You know, don't you? ”

Imagine you are the actor playing Rainey how might this line be delivered?
(Do not forget the vocal skills key words)

What would this convey to the audience?

Describe the elements of Rainey's physical performance based on the photo opposite:

Stance – Wide / Narrow _____

Hips – Back / Forward / Centred / Left / Right / Sat _____

Feet – Planted / Sideways / Spread _____

Hands – Open / Fist / Splayed _____

Arms – _____

Chest – Pushed Out / Collapsed in _____

Neck / Back – Arched / Straight _____

Eye Contact – Held / Broken _____

Facial Expression – Eyebrows / Lips / Forehead _____

Proxemics – Audience / Set / Characters _____

Consider these questions:

Where are her arrows? Are they internal or external?

What emotional state is demonstrated by this physicality? Finally why not try the pressures exercise on this character?



ANALYSIS OF AN ACTOR IN PERFORMANCE:

“ RAINEY: I’m so sorry. But I had to. I had to. ”

Consider these elements of the performance:

Stance, Hips, Feet, Hands, Arms, Chest, Neck, Eye Contact, Facial Expression

We will now try out Michael Chekhov’s *Visualisation Physicalisation Exercise*. This encourages an actor to inhabit a characters physicality by first imagining it then stepping into it, and taking it on.

1. Look at the image opposite. Take in as much as possible.
2. Now stand relaxed with your feet shoulder width apart and arms by your side.
3. Look through these instructions and then close your eyes and follow them or ask someone to read these instructions. The important thing here is to take your time.
4. Imagine the character is right in front of you, standing with their back to you.
5. Look down at their feet and slowly track up to the top of their head noting each detail of their physicality as you do.
6. Once you reach the top of the head imagine that they are turning to face you.
7. Observe them in profile from feet to head.
8. Observe them as they face you from feet to head. Take in as much as possible. Now you can see their face note what it looks like.
9. Watch them return to their starting place. Back to you.
10. Now you are going to step into them.
11. Imagine where they are standing has become a giant jigsaw piece into which you will fit your body.
12. Step forward into their body.
13. Push your body physically into them. Taking on their physicality. Stretch and flex your body and face into the space.
14. Now step back out of them and back to your relaxed stance.
15. Open your eyes and feel where the tension in your body is.
16. Why do they hold their tension in that part of their body? // How does it affect the rest of them?



ANALYSIS OF AN ACTOR IN PERFORMANCE:

“ RAINEY: (sitting) Next hour and how long, precisely? You know, don’t you? ”

OR

“ LEWIS: (standing) Next hour and twelve minutes. Assuming the auction starts on time. ”

Now answer the following question using the skills you have been practicing:

Imagine you are playing one of the characters in the photo. How might the actor playing your chosen character deliver their line? What are they trying to tell the audience? Give reasons for your answer by referring to the actor’s physical and vocal skills.

(Continue on more pages as required)



ANALYSIS OF A SCENE IN PERFORMANCE:

“ LEWIS: (leaning on the sofa) Listen you. I can save this place. ”



Imagine you are playing Lewis how might this be delivered?

What would this convey to the audience?

Describe these elements of the actor's performance:

Eye Contact

Facial Expressions

Proxemics

What would these choices convey to the audience about the relationships between the characters within the scene?

ANALYSIS OF A SCENE IN PERFORMANCE:

“ LEWIS: (standing) It’s done then. ”

“ RAINEY: (sat on the sofa) You have bought Bloumfield. ”

Using the picture below try to answer the following question:



Explain how the actors in this scene might use their acting skills to sustain the audience’s interest.

You should refer to physical skills, vocal skills as well as your understanding of the play.

(Continue on more pages as required)