ROLEPLAYING FOR REAL LIFE

STAFF AND YOUTH TRAINING AVAILABLE IN HOW TO PROVIDE PEER EDUCATION THROUGH YOUTH ISSUE IMPROVISATIONAL THEATER

ROLEPLAYING FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION
EDUCATIONAL THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE
DRAMA THERAPY TRAINING FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Ellen Williams, Expressive Arts 4-H Agent
RUTGERS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
59 Lipman Drive, Waller Hall Room 113, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901
Phone: (848) 932-9214   Fax: (732) 932-8956   Email: williams@njaes.rutgers.edu

Training is provided for staff and youth interested in developing improvisational theatre performances around issues impacting youth (e.g., peer pressure, career choices, substance abuse, identity, violence, relationships, etc.). Youth audiences are more inclined to respond to information if it is presented by their peers. Peer education theatre is a particularly effective approach for it “brings to life” situations common to youth’s life experiences and engages youth audiences in interactive discussion.

Roleplaying for Real Life enables youth players to explore difficult situations from the safe distance of dramatic enactment. Youth can choose to play themselves or elect to play characters other than themselves. Role reversal leads youth to see situations from others’ perspectives.

Drama helps youth
Develop empathy for others’ situations
Improve decision-making skills
Explore consequences
Practice refusal skills
Explore their values
Release emotional tension
Increase their self-esteem
Rehearse for life situations they will encounter
Develop the imagination
Improve in communication skills
Enhance concentration and focus
Develop teamwork/Work toward collective goals
Disclose personal concerns in a non-threatening forum
Explore alternative behavior by roleplaying various options
Reveal thoughts and feelings that might otherwise remain hidden
Develop conflict resolution skills
Release emotions
Experience the natural tendency to play
Develop self-discipline
Learn more about personal motivations and issues
Establish sense of personal control
Roleplaying for Real Life;
Rehearsal for a Better World

Developed by:
Ellen Williams,
Expressive Arts 4-H Agent,
Associate Professor,
Rutgers University,
New Brunswick, New Jersey

In Roleplaying for Real Life; Rehearsal For A Better World, youth identify social issues of concern and improvise original scenarios dramatizing these issues. The process includes: brainstorming of issues, group improvisation activities, scenario development, and techniques for leadership of group discussion.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRESENTER:
Many youth will have the perception that drama means theatre experience and auditioning for a part to perform before an audience. It is important to dispel this image so that youth are receptive to participation. From the outset, establish the fact that no prior acting experience is necessary. In Roleplaying for Real Life : Rehearsal For A Better World, the focus is not on performance, but rather on group process.

Because the youth are entering the dramatizations in character roles, they are more free to explore issues than if acting as themselves. In the process of roleplaying real life scenarios, youth develop the ability to make constructive real life choices. In processing their improvisations through group discussion, youth identify resolutions to the conflicts and issues dramatized in the scenarios., in effect “rehearsing for a better world”.

In Roleplaying for Real Life : Rehearsal For A Better World, youth engage in three levels of improvisation, in which they first create a spontaneous group image, then move to creating a scene from that image, and finally improvise this scene before the larger group.

AUDIENCE:
Middle-High School Levels

Materials Needed:
Chalkboard/Easel Paper
Chalk/Markers
Props and costumes optional

Background:
The term "roleplaying" refers to improvisations that explore characters' responses to dramatic situations. Roleplaying develops imagination, empathy, decision-making ability, values, clarification, communication skills, teamwork, and conflict resolution skills.

Learner Objectives:
> Utilize brainstorming techniques to identify social issues
> Develop improvisational skills leading to group improvisation
> Demonstrate ability to lead group discussion following group scenarios

Time: Prep Time: 10 minutes
Lesson Time: 1 1/2 hours
Clean Up Time: 10 minutes
Learning Activities/Procedures:
In a circle, begin by conducting a drama warm up or brainstorming session. Ask each youth to complete the sentence “The biggest concern of my age group is...” Record the responses on a chalkboard or easel. Ask the group to see if there are any commonalities among them. Following group discussion, have the group select their top 3 issues. (for example, unemployment, substance abuse, bullying, etc.). Highlight these on the chalkboard/easel.

Now have the group form smaller groups of four. Following is a sample activity leadership text for your reference:

“As a group, you have identified the social issues of greatest concern to you. Now, in your groups, you will dramatize those issues. When I call out the issue, as a group, freeze in a position which represents that issue. This group image is called a tableaux. Think of yourselves as characters in a photograph”. (As you call out issues, each group assumes the tableaux positions).

Now as I call out these same issues, assume your tableaux positions, but now each of you will think of who your character might be based on your physical position and facial expression. Turn to your fellow group members and introduce yourselves in character. Together create a scene in which your characters reflect the issue being dramatized. For instance, a youth in a crouched position might become a victim of bullying, another with arms folded a disinterested bystander, etc.” (Repeat this activity until all 3 issues have been dramatized within the groups). “Now that you have explored all 3 issues, your group will select the one that resonated the strongest with you. Develop that scene further. Leave the resolution of the issue open ended.”

Each group presents their scene before the group. “Invite the audience to join you in coming up with possible resolutions. In your group play out those endings that are suggested. Invite those who made those suggestions to assume roles in your scene”. Following each scene, volunteers from each group lead a group discussion on how the resolutions could be implemented “in real life” to address these social issues. Ask each group if they are interested in developing their scenario more fully and presenting it to outside groups. If so, they could consider Roleplaying for Real Life: Rehearsal for a Better World as community service, peer education, or other educational outreach initiative.

Experiential Learning Questions:
1. Share: How did your group determine what issue to dramatize?
2. Reflect: How did your character’s responses relate or not relate to your own personality?
3. Generalize: What did you learn about yourself and your fellow group members in the Improvisation process?
4. Apply: How can you apply to your own life situations the skills you utilized in Roleplaying for Real Life; Rehearsal for a Better World?