

Henry V - Characterisation and script exploration :

Note: this is the full exercise as sent to the actors in our production, in March 2021.

I'm extremely fussy about character development- to me, it's one of the most key basic things (along with line learning) that delivers an excellent show . Develop a rock solid, believable, detailed character and you are roaring ahead.

This is something which we will begin to run in rehearsals giving everyone time to work at it.

In normal times this is a cross between hot-seating and a mocked-up TV chat show setting. I've been fiddling with it for zoom.

To prepare you'll need to go through your script (the bits you're in AND the bits you're not!) with a fine tooth comb. And then...

Now, bear in mind the setting we are using. Post apocalyptic near-future. Not from war but from natural disasters- ecological problems from humans messing around, plus a massive solar flare. Wars happen for natural resources.

PREPARATION TASK 1: getting facts from the script.

Go through the script and note down

- * who your character is (age, nationality, social status, etc)
- * what do they say about themselves? (Motivations, likes, dislikes, habits, hopes for the future, life experiences in the past, family, etc)
- * What do other characters say about them? Are those things true or not? Why?
- * what do they do in the story and why?
- * what does the manner in which they speak, tell you about them? (Important with Shakespeare text especially!)

PREPARATION TASK 2: fill in the gaps.

* these can be anything that you build to round the character. This is where you create back stories in depth to round out the characters: For example, does Fluellen like ice cream? Would King Henry go to war over a coffee shortage? How did the Bishop of Ely find his/her faith as a child? What did King Charles of France see in the sky when the biggest solar flare in history knocked out the worlds technology? Does Katherine enjoy gardening? Before the natural disasters destroying technology and such, What did the Constable enjoy most on Tv? Do you have a spouse or children? Think of what is in keeping with the character but also (I'm a great fan of this) use aspects of yourself. There are no right or wrong answers in this bit; it is all about creating a unique, well rounded character.

THE INTERVIEW

NOW what will happen over the next few rehearsals (I will be targeting the "old hands" first!) is the TV interview exercise. And most characters are likely to get more than one. They won't all be the same day- they will be divided up. They will also assume that the events in the act(s) being rehearsed that day, are the "current" events happening.

Your character will be brought in for an interview (over Zoom!)- it is really important that you are working in- character for this and have done your preparation work! It's not a thing that can be "winged".

Think about-

After years or decades with no electrical technology, what do you think about being called up for a TV interview?

Are you in favour or not of the war? Why?

If you are going to war, why? Do you believe in the cause? Is it because your king said so? Is it for money or plunder? Or pride? Or something else?

Tell us about your life over the past ten years.

How do you react to and feel about events unfolding now?

* the interview questions may vary!

A hugely important note: While we are all familiar with the overall plot of Henry V, and the outcomes, motivations etc; this is about exploring the specific characterizations of a disparate group of individual people, who will not all think the same, believe the same or be motivated the same way (exactly as in the real world).

If you have more than one character, run this exercise for them all, though you may only be interviewed for one or two.

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To help; we will have a brief discussion at the start of each rehearsal, of the story arc and the themes in Shakespeare's writing, within that act, how it related to those before and after, and main character details. Questions are welcome!

Laura Jury