

Psychodrama and the Holocaust:

An Interactive Workshop

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Overview

This is an interactive workshop designed for teachers who prefer a less frontal setting. The subject and method are adaptable for every age group, including adults. My particular population is high school. My students are in a non-traditional setting, as many of them have learning disabilities, ADD, and a range of emotional and psychological issues.

The workshop is in two parts. The first part is an experiential lesson in building scenes through psychodrama. In the last hour I will present the film (60 minutes) of the play we produced this year as an excellent example of what can be achieved through this method of teaching.

Part One: Building Characters:

Duration: appx 60 minutes.

I will present four time periods, personalities and locations representing different experiences during the Holocaust, for example:

- 1. Emanuel Rosenbloom, The Warsaw Ghetto 1940**
- 2. Dr. Mengele, Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1943**
- 3. A child who has fled, alone in the woods, c. 1942**
- 4. A righteous Gentile, Germany, 1944**

The characters themselves can be generated by the participants. I usually supply the first one, then they are eager to use a person to whom they feel connected. (If I'm lucky, I often have a student who chooses a relative who survived. This makes a particularly interesting session.) In any event, the session proceeds in the same way.

A volunteer assumes the identity of the character and takes the stage.

I will then begin to question the character about his/her experience. The volunteer explores the character from the inside;

How does this person feel?

What does this person think about?

Is he ever afraid?

What is the nature of his spiritual life?

Do these things change during the course of the time period?

After a few questions I turn the questioning over to the participants. The volunteer is allowed to talk as much as he/she wants. At times I will guide a student to perceive his surroundings, i.e. where is he, what does it look like, smell like, how's the weather, etc. Sometimes the character really develops deeply and the volunteer ends up giving a monologue.

This process is repeated until time is up. Characters are encouraged to dialogue as well. The more alive the characters are, the deeper the experience for the students.(As this workshop is, by nature, spontaneously generated, there is very little written ahead of time. If this description is insufficient, please let me know.)

Workshop Goals:

This approach is very rich in emotional education. The students gain a deep understanding of who these people were, what they felt, how they made decisions based on the deepest human emotions and the most basic human instincts. The goal of the workshop is to assist teachers in accessing emotional material from fictional and/or historical characters from the Holocaust. This method is particularly designed as a follow-up program for students who have been to Poland. The course I designed was given over a period of six months, though it certainly can be effective in a much shorter course.

Despite the seriousness of the subject matter, the workshops tend to be fun and uplifting.

I will have some written material available.

I will require a DVD player and screen.

I would prefer to be in a larger room or one with a stage or platform if possible.