

Tight Doorways Into Big Rooms

Exercise 1

8 years +

[To be read out loud to the class in the quietest possible voice]

Lie down on the ground and close your eyes and try not to move. Let your body feel very heavy.

We're at the very end of a garden, in a clearing totally surrounded by trees. We can not see out and no one can see in, we can't even see the tops of the roofs, we can only see a circle of sky framed by the branches of the trees all around.

The clearing is matted with very long grass and in the middle of the grassy circle there is a murky pond of water in a big stone basin. In the centre of the pond there is an old stone fountain. The stone fountain itself is quite big, but there is no movement from the water, it is lying still.

The water in the pond has lay like this for a week, barely moving except when a water beetle decides to skid across the surface.

The water has a green colour from algae growing in it like an unwashed fish tank. If the water could feel like we do it might feel very heavy and uncomfortable, it might feel like it's stuck in the basin with it's own weight pushing down into the stones below.

When you fall asleep in the car or on a couch and you wake up feeling really uncomfortable This is how the water might feel right now. It wants to stretch out but it's stuck there, the only motion are beetles tickling across it's surface from time to time.

If the water could see it would look longingly up at the stone of the fountain, and feel jealous of how the stone was able to stand up like that all on it's own. From it's viewpoint the fountain looks very tall, it looks like it is reaching up all the way into the sky though the circle of branches all around.

You can probably imagine how the water in the pond forgets that it surrounds the fountain and starts to believe that the stone fountain is actually surrounded by a pool of sky. Upside down things can look very different and it's easy for the water to loose track of how things are held up, and what sort of shape they are.

Everyone can open their eyes now.

I'm sure you can all imagine the position the water was in...it had gotten so

used to seeing the world from this position that it was easy to forget about things.

The water had all but forgot about the grass, and never noticed that the trees were growing up and out but instead thought that the clouds in the sky were what pulled the branches very slowly closer into the clearing, shrinking the circle of sky.

Everything looks a different shape when you're lying down, and you can see things that you never usually get to see. Sometimes a bird lands to sit on the fountain in the centre of the pond, and the water could look up at the bottom of the bird's beak, and the detail of the feathers on it's little chest.

After days and days, the water could never tell exactly how long, but there was always something to look forward to. It began with a grumble in the centre of the pond, where the fountain stood. Slowly there was a small current in the water. I think the best way to describe this is to remember a time when you were really really hot, and someone turns on a fan or the window is opened in the car and you start to feel a small stream of cooler air running past you. That's probably what it felt like for the water, after lying still in one place for so long.

Now wherever you are lying, start to move your fingers. And slowly you can start to stretch out your whole body.

The grumble in the pond starts off slowly, only affecting the water that is right in the centre. But as soon as the water in the centre of the pond has made a few circles around, the ripples start to pick up the rest of the water. And soon the whole pond is churning at a slow but steady pace around and around the grumbling fountain.

[Reader can walk in the centre to start the movement]

Okay we're gonna copy the water here so everybody get up off the ground and we'll start moving slowly in a circle.

[Keep a slow pace and wait till the room is quiet except for the sound of feet]

The Fountain that stands in the middle of the pool, is shaped into pictures of lots of things that the fountain and the water could not understand. If the fountain was confused by anything, it was confused by this. Once a group of kids pointing at it had called things out by name and described actions and stories that they could see in the still stone fountain. They even seemed to talk about the stone as though it was made up of bodies like their's instead of the cold stone of the fountain. But it all felt the same to the fountain. A lump here, a bump there.

Now the water is still moving in a slow circle, being churned by a slow old motor pump at the base of the fountain. But while you're walking I want everyone to think of what the fountain might look like. Remember that the kids were able to see things in the fountain, so it must be sculpted in some

way. So what I'm going to do is call on people to go into the centre of the circle and act out something that might be sculpted in the fountain, a shape, a person, a scene. Once you find a pose, try keep very still because remember you're made out of stone.

[Call people in the class to go to the centre, let a few into the centre at once, and once they've done their pose for a while ask them to join back into the water]

[If the class is quiet enough ask some who are acting out the fountain to describe what shapes they are making.]

Keep the water flowing around

Now the water is excited...after lying still for so long it's finally getting to stretch out

[If possible where you are speed up the pace of the walking if you're outside...run.]

Now the very old motor, in the very old pump, in the very old fountain is starting to wake up. And what will happen when the pump in the fountain start to work? The water will be thrown up into the air separating into a thousand tiny little pieces. The water is so excited, it's been lying stagnant for so long and this is it's chance. It's going to go down into the pipes at the bottom of the fountain, it's going to be pushed up right through and out of all the holes carved into the stone.

So here is our project... how do we show the next bit of the story. How do we with our bodies, that are very different from water and stone show the fountain working? If we could use materials to help us what would you use?

Have a conversation with the class about ideas. The goal is to open up as many outcomes as possible, and get the class problem solving in a situation where there is no wrong answer. Keep the movement going while you talk together, acting out the unformed ideas as they come.

Exercise 2

8 years +

This exercise is one you can return again and again to. Make clear from the start that the class won't be keeping they make and the materials will be re-used each time a new project begins.

Materials: Keep a pile of re-usable materials, including things like sting plasticine, toothpicks, tinfoil, plastic bottles, paper cups, rubber bands, ribbon, cut up plastic strips... etc. Add some more basic art supplies, paper, pencils, scissors, glue, sellotape. Separate out the materials onto different table groups. Give each group a project from the list below. Make these projects as quick as possible (5 or 10 mins) you can set a timer or do a countdown – to set up a situation that is anti – precious in terms of its

production and warms everyone up to trying out different ideas. Repeat these quick projects with different projects given to them each time. For the final project give them a longer time and allow everyone individually to pick the project they want to spend more time on.

1. Make something that holds something else.
2. Make something that looks like it's climbing on something around you.
3. Make a slide and something that can slide down it.
4. Make an upside down drawing of the room you are in.
5. Make something that stands up on five legs.
6. Make something that looks like it has spattered onto the ground after falling from up high.