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MUSEUMS  
GREENWICH

# Picture Yourself

The Armada National  
Outreach project

**Drama activities**





## **Classroom activity – This Is Not A...**

'This is not a...' is a great exercise for openness, awareness, spontaneity of ideas and for creating images and worlds through improvisation. Ask your students to form a circle and place an object in the middle, for example, a bottle. Ask the students to come into the circle one by one and pick up the object and say the words 'This is not a bottle, this is a...' They must think of an alternative use for that object and mime it to the others to guess what it is. Encourage the students to find a different use of the object every time so there are no repeats.

Next, students remain sat in a circle, and repeat the exercise, but this time the entire group react to the object. How the object is used needs precision so every student can see it clearly. For example, if the object is used as a remote control, the students may start acting out a TV programme.

Next, use the object to instigate a conversation or improvisation. Two or more students enter the space and are met with an object. The purpose is to have a mutual relationship and opinion towards the object. The pair or group cannot discuss the narrative they are communicating prior to the exercise and need to use their physicality to hold a conversation rather than using dialogue. The students can enter together or react to others and what is happening in the space. The rest of the group need to speculate what the object represents and what is materialising within the scene.

## **Classroom activity – Ensemble**

This activity is about the importance of interactions as an ensemble and relying on the senses of hearing, seeing and touch as well as the breath, to move as one group.

As a class, ask students to form a line, a square, a circle and a bunch. Ask them to move into these shapes without discussion and without being instructed. Without speaking, the group should move into these shapes.

Next, ask your students in small groups to form shapes, such as a triangle or diamond. The group needs to stand close to each other and should try to move as one. One student is the leader, and the others have to follow each other. They should start with

small movements, travelling slowly around the space. It's not about copying each other but feeling the tempo and rhythm of the movement. As soon as the leader turns, another student then becomes the leader, and so on. Encourage them to do this exercise without talking. Next, ask the students in their groups to explore and move through different environments such as through shallow water, stepping on hot sand or walking on the Moon. Ask students to close their eyes and imagine where they are and what it feels and looks like. Encourage them to use their entire body, including their breath. The leader shouldn't reveal which environment they have chosen, the others must guess. Add groups together and eventually form one or two groups, depending on the size of group.

## **Classroom activity – Putting Yourself in the Painting**

Freeze-frames are like a still image. They are useful to communicate an idea or tell a story quickly without words. This activity is good for teamwork and will help students gain a better understanding of themselves and their group.

Before you begin, ask students to make small groups. Collect a range of objects from around the room, e.g. a clock or a stapler.

Explain they are now going to construct their own group portrait. They need to consider how they would go about putting themselves in the image.

Ask them to consider how they can apply what they have learnt about the Armada Portrait to their own portrait. What would they want people to see? For example, similar likes and interests of the group. What objects would they incorporate and what is their significance?

Ask each group to make a freeze-frame. Half the room observe the portraits and then they can swap over.

Students must guess the significance of the objects and what each portrait is trying to say.

## **Classroom activity – A Play in a Day Through Play**

This exercise should encourage your students to be spontaneous and playful to discover new possibilities in themselves, the environment and objects. Ask your students to look at the Armada Portrait. What do they feel and see?

Ask your students to form small groups and explain they are to create scene(s) about the day the portrait was painted. They must set the scene and environment. Which characters were there and what were they like? Was Elizabeth I even there? They need to decide on the characters present, their fears, desires and fantasies. What happened – was there a conflict or obstacle? Whose perspective is it from? Did an object go missing? Was there a surprise visitor?

Next, ask them to repeat the process, choosing one moment or scene, and play it out with just objects. The students need to find objects to replace the mermaid, globe, crown, etc. Students act as puppeteers and a voice-over only. What do the objects symbolise? What is being communicated? Is what is being seen different to what is being heard? How does this and the scale change the narrative?

Alternatively, ask the students to play the objects. We know Elizabeth did not sit for portraits but imagine she did. Ask your students to invent what happened once the sitter had left the room. What did the objects say to each other? Ask the students to describe (as the object) what happened. For example, how did the chair feel when she got up? How does the crown feel not being on her head? Was the feather bruised when the Queen threw it to the floor?

Ask the students to write about their character to fully imagine themselves playing it. For example, what was the physicality and the character's relationship with the other objects? Students should consider their body language and how they move. Does their character display shock, anger or frustration? How might they use their voice to show personality? Does your audience feel amused or sympathetic? How can they use the space creatively? Does one character have a higher status over another, is it teasing or more intimidating than the other objects?

# Classroom activity – Seven Levels of Tension and the Different Faces of Elizabeth I

This activity helps to explore the tone of voice through nonverbal communication such as body language and facial expressions. How would Elizabeth I appear physically beyond the portrait? This activity will encourage improvisation and play and will help with clarity of focus and commitment to their performance. Explain how our body language and facial expressions can have a tremendous effect on how we are perceived by other people.

Ask students to walk around the room as if they are Elizabeth. They will inhabit a tension as you call out a different number. What is their body language and how do they move and walk?

- 1: Catatonic (exhausted)
- 2: Relaxed (at ease)
- 3: Neutral (ready)
- 4: Alert (curious)
- 5: Suspense (something is about to happen)
- 6: Passionate (fear or despair)
- 7: Tragic (with tension)

E.g. Level 2 – relaxed state: the queen is relaxed in her chamber; how does she walk and move?

E.g. Level 6 – passionate state: the queen feels threatened and she is in a heightened state. What are her movements like?

What happens when the queens meet each other; how do they interact?

Ask your students to form small groups and devise a short scene clearly showing the different levels of tension throughout. They need to decide where the scene is set, which characters are present and what happens.

You could apply this exercise to a play or story you are exploring by performing and identifying the different levels of tension of each character. Does it change the meaning of the scene?

## **Classroom activity – Power and Privilege**

This exercise will enable your students to think about if hierarchies of power and status shape perceptions, motivations and behaviours. Ask students to identify the labels used to create their identity, such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, religion and/or sets at school. Ask students to reflect on how each of their labels provide them with power and privilege and impacts on their experience and perspective of others. Are aspects of their identity influenced by their power and privilege?

Explain to your students they will now take part in a Think-Pair-Share activity to answer questions and share their response with the person sitting next to them. Think-Pair-Share provides an opportunity for students to work together towards a common goal, increasing their own and others' understanding.

Ask the pairs to share what they have discussed to the entire class.

- Is status about control?
- Can you be both powerful and vulnerable?
- What is the difference between power and control?
- What is the difference between status and power?
- Would you prefer to be powerful or have status?
- What is more important, money or power?
- What is another word for powerful?
- Is power good leadership, being respected or knowledgeable?
- What is privilege?
- What is power and privilege?
- What privileges do you have?
- Is privilege the opposite of oppression?
- Is it easy to notice oppression rather than privilege?
- What is a privilege and not a right?

- If you experience privilege, how can you challenge the systems that oppress others?
- How can you be a social justice advocate?

Ask your students to form small groups and explain they need to create a scene which shows:

- how an identity label can influence our perceptions of each other
- how having power increases or decreases a character's tendency to view another person's perspective
- a shift in power

Remind your students that the audience should be able to identify which character has the power and when the power shifts.

## **Classroom activity – I've Got the Power**

This activity will help your students start to think about physicalising the status of their characters.

Ask your students to provide an example of when they had the power, authority or the higher status in a situation. They may immediately think that they don't have the power but a status relationship can change depending on the situation.

Explain that they will be improvising scenes around status and power using playing cards. A two equals low status while the queen is the highest. Ask students to rank the jack, king and ace.

Ask two volunteers to take a playing card and keep the outcome of the card to themselves. The players must enter the space and meet in the middle and greet each other based on their status. Neither student knows the others' status or where and why they might meet. The rest of the class as audience must predict what card they had. Was their status recognisable in their walk, body actions and speech?

Extension: Based on what the improvisation played out, ask for a student to offer a scenario or conflict within the scene where the power shifts. The actors must keep their original status and characters from before.

How does power affect our communication? Is status about wanting or struggling to control? Is status about behaviour and perception rather than social rank? Perhaps someone with a high status playing card can be more generous and noble than a nine or ten playing card who has something to prove? Does having a high or low status require people to pay more attention to others and their opinions because their status is based on what others think?

Extension: Ask another two students to repeat the exercise, but this time they take another card and that is how they are going to perceive the other person.

If you are rehearsing a play or reading a book, ask your students to think about the characters and their status in each scene or chapter. How do they physicalise their status?

## **Classroom activity – Sound Picture**

Soundscapes are layers of improvised sound made by students that suggest a setting like a busy city street or a rainforest and can help students imagine what it might feel like to be there. 'Sound Picture' will enable students to use their bodies, objects and voices to reinvent the Armada Portrait, set the tone and mood and bring it to life through sound. You might like to have a range of different objects like paper, plastic bags or a percussion trolley. If you are in a drama or music space, you could use a microphone to explore amplifying sounds. Similarly, students can make sounds using their voices, upside-down chairs, objects in the classroom, or the floor.

Discuss the painting and the objects and what they symbolise. Consider, if the objects were sounds, what qualities they would have. For instance, the pearls or Elizabeth I's beating heart could represent a steady rhythm, whereas the crown a loud thud to portray how heavy it is. The feather, a hushed and soft whisper. The sounds of the



Armada ships against the rocks and the wind and sea could be percussive and explosive. The rustling luxurious fabric and starched ruff could sound atmospheric and broken. Voice and spoken word could represent Elizabeth's inner voice. Can your students represent the weight of her hand on the globe and all that it implies? Have conversations around empire, trade and the countries where gold, spices, pearls and sugar came from. What rhythms could emanate from those countries? What does power and privilege sound like?

The group should explore using multiple rhythms, repetition, echoes and ambient sound as an individual and/or as a collective. Each student could pick their own starting point from the painting or you could allocate the examples above to small groups to get a range of different sounds. Have a student be a conductor and the rest of the group be the orchestra. The conductor's role is to lead the group by controlling the volume, pitch and levels of the sounds using their hands. You could try amplifying some of the sounds or ask the students to move in and around the space. How do the acoustics or quality of a sound change if amplified or muffled in a box? If you have the technology, why not record the sounds and/or mix them to create their sonic Armada Portrait.

## **Classroom activity – Shaping Experience**

This exercise is ideal for a large group and will help your students think about the painting three-dimensionally, spatial relationships and awareness of others in the space. It will also support teamwork, movement, imagination and spontaneity. You may find it easier to have the grid version of the portrait up on the white board (see grid template).

Ask your students to look at the portrait and imagine the portrait as a very large grid on the floor of the entire drama space, deciding which sides of the room are the top or the bottom of the painting. Ask for volunteers to demonstrate in the space where the feather is in her left hand in relation to the ship scenes, for example.

Ask your students as a class to walk in the space, imagining the painting and its grid on the floor as a series of straight lines. They are free to walk in any direction, but only walking on the grid areas. You could introduce claps to signal them to pause and/or

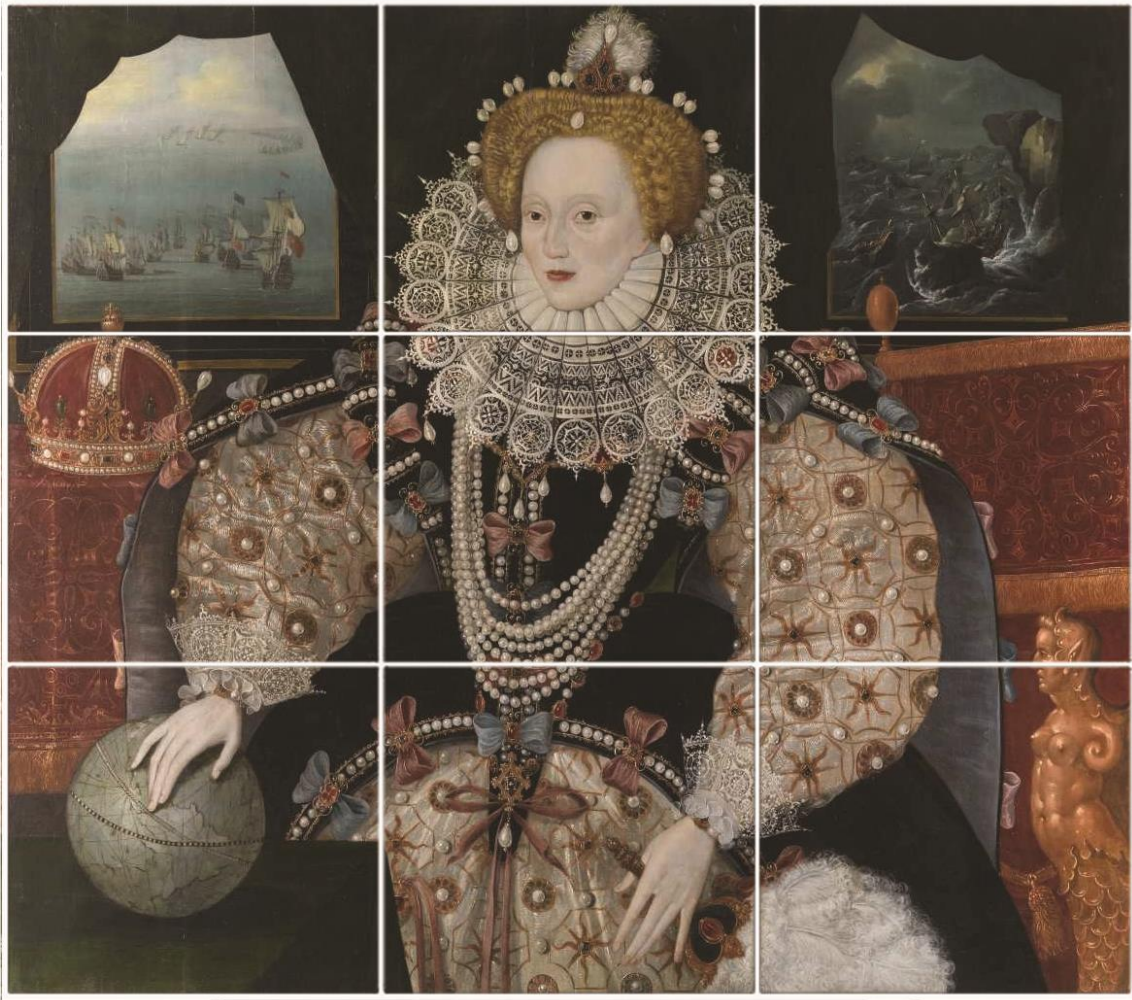
change direction. Gradually introduce switching tempo, stops and starts and add levels so the imaginary grid can be crawled under or jumped over. Encourage them to use their peripheral vision and find the tempo as a group.

Next, repeat the activity but this time when you call out an object, all the students have to try and reach the correct grid square. For example, if you said 'the queen's face', they would need to all try and squeeze into the middle top of the grid.

Next, ask them to repeat the walking on the grid activity, but when you clap, depending on where they are in the space, they need to switch to curves and diagonals to suggest the outline of the shapes in the painting. If for example, a student finds themselves in the bottom left of the grid in the space (after you have given the signal to stop), they need to walk in a circle to represent the outline of the globe. Repeat the exercise, encouraging them to move the around the grid so students can try to outline a range of objects within the painting and therefore try different floor patterns.

Now they are more familiar with where the objects are in the painting, ask the students to form small groups. Name an object within the painting, such as the crown, and ask students as a group to represent it as a frozen image using only their bodies. A human mandala could represent Elizabeth I's ruff, for example. Next, ask the students to stand around the outside of the grid and ask them to travel into the grid one group at a time and make their representations of the object. If you have enough students in the class, all of the nine squares of the painting could be acted out in the space at the same time.

Ask a student to take on the role of director so they can decide if objects need to shift or be modified slightly. If you have access to a camera, stand on a chair or a block to have a higher viewpoint and take a picture so the class can see themselves acting out the portrait. You could develop it into a start of a piece. How does each group move in and move out of the space into their frozen shape and transition into another? What happens if one actor bumps into another? Experiment by mixing up the groups and/or the groups perform in unison and change levels. You could add music or claps as signals and cues. Allow students to take turns to stand outside of the action to see what it looks like and how it can be improved.



The Armada National Outreach project has been a partnership between Royal Museums Greenwich and Speakers Trust to support secondary schools in oracy and public speaking. The starting point and inspiration was the *Armada Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* and her Tilbury speech.

