

Pass the TExES

# Theatre

EC-12

**FOR TEXAS TEACHERS.**  
*A test prep manual for the TExES Theatre  
exam 180 for grades EC-12.*

**First Edition**

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**Domain I:**

**Creating, Performing,  
and Producing Theatre**

**Competencies 1-4**

**(25% of the test)**

**Theatre 8–12 Standard II:**

The theatre teacher understands and applies skills for creating, utilizing, and/or performing dramatic material.

**Theatre 8–12 Standard III:**

The theatre teacher understands and applies skills for producing and directing theatrical productions.





# 1. Process-Centered Drama

## Competency 1:

The teacher demonstrates knowledge of the basic principles, forms, and methods of process-centered drama.

### A. Theatre in Education and Creative Drama

1. Theatre and drama are used as classroom tools to vary the educational experience, offering students additional means of accessing information and receiving assessment. In process-centered theatre experiences, although not precluded, the emphasis is distinctly NOT on production. It is on learning.
2. Akin to ‘hands-on’ practice, lessons from various disciplines are selected and scripted, made human with characters, spoken with movement and given a participatory dimension wherein students give ‘life’ to a lesson. The characters might be puppets or classmates wearing masks and costuming. Often it is scripted by the students, but can be improvisational, pantomimed, live, taped or delivered as a story.
3. The emphasis in creative drama and theatre in the classroom is on the process of accessing content and exploring extended aspects of that content.
  - a. Process-centered
  - b. Content related to classroom curriculum
  - c. Provides alternative method of accessing material
  - d. Reveals extended aspects of the lesson
  - e. Taps diverse skills

### B. Theatre Games and Improvisation

1. Interaction and creativity can thrive only when the group feels comfortable with itself. Theatre games and improvisation are tools to help bring that about. Specially constructed theatre games should precede use of improvisation, helping to ease through apprehensions of performing. Games:
  - a. Specially constructed
  - b. Success based
  - c. Require observation
  - d. Create trust
  - e. Employ NVC
2. Breaking the ice with games is for everyone, whether adults, eighth graders, or anyone in between; for best class and stage work the individuals must achieve trust. Choice of ‘games’ should be success driven and pairing up helps quell nerves.
3. Serve two purposes simultaneously by choosing games that rely on one person ‘reading’ the other. The standard ‘mirror’ exercises are useful, but predictable. Explore other forms of games.
  - a. Example: in pairs, #1 draws a complex set of lines and squiggles on a paper. Without showing each other and without gestures, #1 explains the figure while #2 attempts to recreate the same design. This creates a need for careful listening and watching, use of vocal innuendo, and facial expressions resulting in enjoyment as the results are finally shown. (Instructor can create the drawings ahead of time so that they are relatively equal in difficulty throughout the group.)
4. NVC games do double-duty. Non-verbal communication cannot be overestimated as an actor’s tool, and it is often underused.
  - a. Exhibit how effective and interesting it is to ‘say’ something without speaking. Present phrases: “Come here”, “Wait a minute”, “Quiet”. How many ways can you say that using only NVC? (discussion point - when does NVC become indicating?)
5. Improv is simply creating an unscripted scene on the basis of a ‘prompt’, which could be a word, a

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sentence, a scenario...without (or with absolutely minimal) pre-discussion or rehearsal.

Improvisation:

- a. Demands that the actors listen to each other.
  - b. Requires that participants react spontaneously to situations.
  - c. Enforces ensemble awareness and interaction. Each builds on what the others bring to the table.
  - d. Tests creativity.
  - e. Offers an outlet for exploring emotions and relationships.
  - f. Offers an outlet to experiment with stage movement and character physicality.
  - g. Reminds the student of scene structure.
  - h. Indicates what is effective.
  - i. Indicates what fails.
6. Some will take to improv, and some will shy away. It demands a great deal of spontaneity while in the limelight. Fear of failure in the improv arena is inhibiting for many students.

Move gradually from games to improvisation; have it flow naturally. Start with simple prompts and draw the group into the action with success-based ideas for presentation. An improv can enlist one actor or the whole group. Two is a good starting point.

7. There are many variations on the theme of improvisation, but the basic one is to offer the premise for an interaction, choose the actors and let them go. The teacher might offer a reminder of scene structure (beginning, middle, end) the arc (what are they building to), and that improv actors must listen carefully...but don't stifle them with too much as they begin to experiment.

Note: it would be excellent to comment if NVC was evident in the context of the scene. This is an opportunity to remind the group of how effective it was, how it contributed positively to the scene.

- C. **Professional Source Materials for Improvisation and Dramatic Play are Abundant.** There is no shortage in print. The challenge will be in evaluating each and keeping to your budget!

Sources:

- a. Local library.
  - b. Bookstores and theatre specific bookstores.
  - c. Online booksellers.
  - d. Theatre education organizations.
  - e. University or college libraries offering a theatre studies program.
  - f. Bibliographies from one book will reveal further source materials.
  - g. Local theatre companies with programs for adolescents.
  - h. Networking with other theatre teachers.
1. One author to look for is Viola Spolin, author of Improvisation for the Theatre, and Theatre Games for the Classroom; A Teacher's Handbook. However, ideas are generated also by the teacher's or students' own imaginations. Experiment. Games can be modified and changed to suit your particular group or needs.
  2. Use masks to prompt physicality and explore cultures. Request a scene centered on a period costume piece. A plain white sock as a hand puppet is a blank canvas. Offer a prompt that sets a scene in a courtroom or a foreign country. (discussion: how to avoid 'stereotypes'.)
  3. These exercises are not restricted to younger children with a costume box—the experiences and results are equally purposeful with teens and adults. Remember, the goal is to help free the actor from the constraints of inhibition and fear. Note: It's important to know 'why' an exercise, game or improv is chosen. All choices should have a defined purpose to solve a problem or move toward a goal. Very often, students will ask.

## D. Process-Centered vs. Production-Centered Acting Exercises

1. Although similar techniques, exercises, games and improv might be employed, there is a distinct dif-

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ference in a teacher's focus in the classroom (process-centered), and a director's focus in rehearsal (production-centered). The director will make very specific choices of games and improves targeted to strengthen an actor's weakness, bring clarity or depth to a character, reinforce the structure of a scene, create an ensemble from the individuals, intensify or illuminate a relationship...all directed to perfecting a final result which is, ultimately, a performance for an audience.

2. Within the director's schedule, there is usually little time to experiment broadly, as there is in an acting class. His or her choices are guided by the text, the author's intent, actors' needs and the vision of the production.
  - a. Example: Two characters in a long verbal argument remain on a single plane, lacking varied levels of intensity and missing 'beat' changes. The director gives one a good size cardboard box, and the instructions to toss it to the other character when he makes a point. The second character does the same. Soon, the unrecognized 'beat' change becomes unmistakable. One character must 'catch' what the other has said, adjust, absorb, and fire back. The tossing of the box becomes a physical indication of their intent - a slow and quiet lob, or a gatling gun between them. An interesting classroom exercise (process-centered), but a focused problem solver for the rehearsal stage (production-centered).

## E. Know How to Apply Skills

- a. Read. Explore the masters.
  - b. Participate in adult improv classes.
  - c. Observe exercises critically.
  - d. Monitor and guide.
  - e. Critique with care.
1. There is no substitute for reading. The teacher must have knowledge of what tools are available to achieve certain goals. What have the masters written, tested and honed in their fields? Applying those tools means that the teacher becomes the observer and monitor as the activity is in progress. Success of

the activity often depends on how well it is managed. Insufficiently managed, the game will be nothing more than play. Overly managed, spontaneity will be stifled.

2. If the teacher has never participated in an improv class, it is unlikely he or she will fully understand the demands it makes on the actor. Have the ongoing experience of participating in rigorous improv classes.
3. Critique is important and must be handled gently. This is not judgment, but rather elucidating the elements that worked - and WHY they worked. Important for the actor is the ability to clarify why something worked, so that he or she can repeat that success.
4. As for a process of writing and revising stage pieces, the same tenets hold true. First, the teacher must have a solid knowledge of dramatic literature.
5. The teacher and writer will discuss the basic structure inherent in the piece, noting elements of character, story line, theme, mood, etc. Ask the following questions:
  - a. Is there desired structure (beginning, middle, end)?
  - b. Is there a dramatic arc?
  - c. Does the dialogue benefit the characters as individuals? Does each character speak in 'his own voice'?
  - d. Does each character contribute to the whole piece - are any extraneous?
  - e. Is there powerful subtext?
  - f. Is NVC built in?
  - g. Are some things left unsaid?
  - h. Is the piece historically/culturally accurate? Does the language reflect this also?
  - i. Is the piece tailored for its medium and its audience?  
Note: That which is left 'unsaid' can be very powerful. Avoid 'over-write'. Allow the audience to fill in some of the blanks itself. This leads to discussion and interpretation.

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## F. Introducing Dramatic Literature in 'Script' or 'Playbook' Form

1. Depending on the age of the student, the teacher might offer a few pages of a scene as a handout to everyone, using a projector to illustrate the same. The selection should incorporate several of the formatting elements indicative of a script. ie: distinctive layout, descriptions of characters and sets, Act/Scene designations, stage directions, parts or lines for a few characters, etc. Using the projection, work through each item, and the students will mark their own copies as the parts are identified.
2. Just as working actors do, they can use highlighter to identify the lines of ONE character - leaving everything else without color. This makes the actor's part in his or her own script, easy to spot in a read-through or in early rehearsals. Let students highlight and then read their parts.
3. Identify cues - scripted or silent.
4. For older students, offer an example of 'sides' (discussion on why that would be a form and how it affects the actor) and of a musical script so they can see how lyrics are included. Show them a film script and note the differences. Offer a Shakespeare play to note how little stage direction there is. A copy of the Richard Wilbur translation of Tartuffe will illustrate a play in rhyming couplets.
  - Illustrate how a commedia dell'arte play worked, with just scene designations and no script. Basically, a company performed a 3-hr play in 'improv' style.
  - Demonstrate how an actor writes personal 'blocking' notes in the edges of the script..
  - Produce a 'Master Script' with all the cues present.

## G. Effective Interaction through Exercises and Production

- a. Listening
- b. Eye-contact
- c. Acting: Reacting - Responding
- d. Choices
- e. Text
- f. Subtext

1. First and foremost, there is nothing more important to the craft of acting than the ability to listen. Listening is job-one for the actor. Because acting is not about...acting. Acting (oversimplified) is about reacting to what has come at you, then responding-verbally, or non verbally. Therefore, you have to recognize what has come at you! So the actor must listen with skill, not only to the words, but to the subtext - and must identify it.
  - a. Subtext is what is being 'said' that is not in words - it can even be 'said' in a silence. Every movement, every body position, every pause has subtext inherent just under the text. When the actor identifies, adjusts and responds to the subtext as well as to the text, the performance becomes richer and more interesting than when just speaking the lines. This skill, to whatever degree students in middle and high school acquire it, will certainly serve them in their future lives as actors and also as people. They will have skills to interact more fully, and understand with clarity what makes people tick.
2. Making eye contact with another character is another powerful tool to interacting effectively onstage. Conversely, sometimes not making eye-contact can be even more effective! The capable actor knows this and chooses the most appropriate to support his objective in the scene.
3. In rehearsals, an actor who understands and makes such choices often elicits stronger performances from fellow actors on stage. Expert acting has an energy and intensity that crosses the footlights to the audience and moves them. Such authenticity affects everyone on the stage as well. It is infectious, it sets a bar.

## H. Achieving Successful Collaboration, Creating an Ensemble

### Collaboration

- a. Include participants fully
- b. Define goals - encourage
- c. Designate areas of responsibility to avoid chaos
- d. Welcome all ideas
- e. Visit groups, be accessible

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- f. Reinforce positively
- g. Choose the ideas that support the goal

1. Collaboration thrives when there is inclusion, when everyone involved feels he or she has a valuable contribution to make to the whole. Children thrive on this kind of participation. Participants ‘invest’ in the project and it belongs to each of them.
2. As with most assignments or endeavors where many come together to reach a goal, that goal needs to be defined.
3. Responsibilities can be designated, so there is order to the input. Within each area of responsibility, all ideas are welcome. Teams or groups work together perfecting their portion of the whole project. Their ‘pieces’ fit into and help complete the large puzzle.

Note: Choosing one idea and eliminating another can result in negative feelings or reactions. The process for determining how ideas will be chosen should be made clear right up front, so there are no surprises. Children will be cued to know from the start that ALL ideas will not be the strongest to use. Reinforce efforts by indicating how EXCELLENT the idea is, but ask “Does it move us closer to the goal? Which idea is the one that supports the goal best?” Offer the opportunity for them to help make the difficult choice.

4. It’s important for the teacher to be accessible to each group and answer their questions, but leave the creativity to them! Try answering questions by asking others (when appropriate.) Let them come up with the clarification through their answers rather than yours.

Ensemble and Collaboration: close cousins, but not siblings.

Ensemble

- a. Skilled Teamwork
- b. Trust in each other
- c. Group before self
- d. Illusive, not guaranteed

5. Creation of an Ensemble is directed more towards production-centered than to process-centered work. It’s difficult to define, but falls under the ‘you know it when you see it’ headline. It is akin to the functioning of a team at its apex, when there are no longer individual egos on the court or on the ice, but one entity working seamlessly to achieve its goal.

6. The cast of a production may achieve that status with little effort, or it may be illusive, despite a director’s best efforts. It has much to do with trust, skill and chemistry.

- a. Table read for full cast
- b. Offer interesting information and insight
- c. Use theatre games
- d. Experiment with improvs, relating to the production material
- e. Involve actors with smaller parts
- f. Identify supportive choices
- g. Allow them time to enjoy the process and each other

7. To test the possibilities of bringing about ensemble work, start the rehearsal process with a table read-through of the script. It’s a standard practice and a subtle move toward camaraderie. Offering interesting information on the play or the author’s intent at the table, helps bring the whole cast up to speed, together. Everyone, even the walk-on actor is worthy of having all the information. Everyone is included.

8. Theatre games can be employed, again to break the ice. Follow with some improvs relating to issues of the play—engage some actors with smaller roles as central improv characters.

As rehearsals progress, compliment actors on their work, emphasize how each related well to another or others in the scene. Identify how they have supported each other - don’t assume they will know.

9. Engage in total cast warm-ups before each practice, or special rituals they perform as a whole group on a regular basis. Change leaders - everyone gets a chance.

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10. Very effective also, in building an ensemble atmosphere, is to allow the cast some relaxed time together joking about rehearsal events, flubs. Sharing the joy of the experience will bring them closer together.

## I. Choosing Appropriate Material

1. When it is time for a production, the director might either choose a script or create/write one. There are good reasons to write a play or a presentation from scratch, and to involve the students in the process. The play can say exactly what is desired, and can be tailored in length and complexity to suit the students' capabilities. But to write a piece of literature which will be staged and performed, is a demanding job.

2. Choosing a script from the vast array available can be fully rewarding and supportive to the requirements of actors and staging. There are many exceptional authors who specialize in creating diverse, scripted material for children of all age groups. Anthologies are abundant in the library and bookstores. Read, read, read! Collect the good ones for your future use.

3. Choosing or being assigned material - critical thinking:

- a. Assess that material is appropriate for performer and/or audience.
- b. Is there educational value to the material?
- c. Stretch rather than shrink - choose material slightly above the curve rather than under. A challenge will keep the group on its toes.
- d. Admit to the needs of the performer and the audience. Both can be satisfied.
- e. Will the requirements of this production be achievable - cast, sets, costumes, effects, lighting?
- f. Will it fit my budget?

4. Creating material:

- a. Determine content - What story will you tell - or what is required to tell? What is the educational value?
- b. How will you dramatize it? Will you use vignettes, or a full story-line, involve the audience, use songs and movement?
- c. Will the students work on the creation of the script?
- d. Determine format for the performance that will best illustrate the content of the script. How will your stage help tell the story? Should it be proscenium, thrust, or in the round?
- e. Will a narrator help to introduce scenes or present information? A narrator can gracefully connect vignettes, and can present more information to the audience, economically.
- f. Scale for adequate production time and adequate rehearsal time.
- g. How much creative hands-on can the performer share and not be overburdened while working on writing, props, costumes, sets, etc.?
- h. How can the text be excitingly and effectively illustrated using props, song, dance, staging?
- i. Do I have reliable and responsible crews and adult assistance - how much is needed?



# 2. Acting Methods and Techniques

## Competency 2:

The teacher demonstrates knowledge of acting methods and techniques.

### A. Classical and Contemporary Acting Technique

1. Acting styles and methods largely reflect the society and time from which they emerge. Isolating four points in (western) theatre history illustrates this. Greek Theater circa 500 B.C.; Commedia dell'arte, circa 1400 A.D.; English Renaissance, circa 1600 A.D.; and American acting technique of the 20th century.

- a. Know benchmarks of acting through history
- b. Explore global theatre practices
- c. Read and digest the masters
- d. Read new plays
- e. Read intelligent criticism, historical and modern
- f. See new productions
- g. Seek out experimental theater

- Greek Theater started with one actor. Theaters seated thousands and were constructed to enhance the actor's voice. He was cloaked in massively oversized masks and clothing, elevated to the appearance of a god, encumbered by his costume in movement and physical expression. It was all about the excellence of voice and story. Over time, playwrights added another and then a third actor, thus interaction became possible.

- Commedia emerged in part, because of the many language barriers existing throughout the myriad city-states in Italy at that time. Traveling companies offered slapstick, fall-down, physical comedy, with easily recognized stock characters. This transcended language. Commedia plays were not written, but improvised according to a 'prompt' list of scenes. Acting was broad, visual, physical.

- The English Renaissance revolved around the playwright, and as books had just become avail-

able to the public for the first time en masse, great playwrights emerged. Shakespeare offers a window into prevailing acting styles of his time in Hamlet's instruction to the players...itemizing what was common and what the author preferred to see.

- In 20th Century America, there occurred an explosion in the serious study of acting forms based on the work of Russian actor, Constantin Stanislavsky (Moscow Art Theatre). His work on a 'System' stirred American theatre minds (Meisner, Strasberg, Adler and many others) to adapt, experiment, clarify, extend and impart these new techniques to students as a 'Method'. Because of advances in technical theatre (lighting/sound) and the advent of film acting in the early 1900's, the concept of the 'inner' character could be more fully utilized. In fact, it was required. No more 19th Century declamation and posturing! Significantly, Freud's stunning revelations in human psychology married well to how an actor would now prepare for a role.

### B. Methods for Developing an Actor's Tools

- a. Relaxation
- b. Ability to focus
- c. Patience
- d. Skilled Listening
- e. Observation
- f. Recall

1. The actor needs to aspire to a state of relaxation - physical and mental. Appropriate physical warm-ups address this, targeting the direction and control of his energy.
2. In pair exercises the actors must maintain eye contact. The eyes will be the first to express reaction.
3. Don't rush. Have patience. Work slowly. Do not expect results. Engage only in the process.

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## 2. Acting Methods and Techniques

4. Work through listening exercises. Repetition exercises (see Lee Strasberg, [A Dream of Passion; The Development of The Method](#)) will take patience, but will begin to illustrate minute changes in the reception of stimuli. Suddenly, an ever so slight change in delivery (of a word or phrase that has been delivered 20+ times in repetition) will bring about a change in the recipient and her reaction and response. As Strasberg (and others) suggest, the third person 'observer' is intrinsically a part of the exercise and is responsible for keeping it honest and fruitful. There are strict criteria that make these exercises worthwhile.
5. Sensory recall (aka, sense memory) is a technique employing all five senses in the effort to stimulate more precise memory of past experiences. Sensory recall brings about emotional recall.
  - a. The smell of apple pie brings the actor back to Thanksgiving dinners thirty years ago at grandma's house...of one memorable incident...of the feelings and physicality experienced at that moment. The application - to revive and relive that memory as fully intact as it can be achieved and become equipped to repeat that whenever necessary.
  - b. Have the actor go through his or her house to select five things, each relating to one of the senses. Describe how touching (seeing, smelling etc.) that object recalls a time and place, a person, an incident. This should lead to an emotion. Allow that emotion to manifest itself in laughter, tears, anger, despair, pride....wherever it takes the actor. Observe the physical reaction - describe it. Remember it.

Note: Sense memory is also described as using the five senses to respond to imaginary physical stimuli, such as the sudden noise of a plate breaking, or of feeling extreme heat or cold. These are not as emotionally based as they are meant to accurately recall physical experiences.

6. Keen observation of human physicality, human emotions, human behavior is valuable to creating charac-

ters for the stage. Ask the actor to observe faces on the train or bus, somewhere he might face them for an extended period of time. Take notes of the characteristics and expressions in eyes, mouth, brows, nose etc. Look as closely as one can, notate what is seen. Continue the exercise on a street, observing movement. Notate characteristics of how different people walk - link it to their height, weight, physical differences. Replicate their motions.

- a. Offer the student an object, something small such as a postcard, a quarter, a photograph. The student must observe the object carefully for perhaps five minutes, then put it away. Ten minutes later, ask the actor to write down what she observed. When complete, restore the object and ask the actor to look at it again, more in depth - what else can be noticed? Add to the list. The actor will see details she did not notice or remember the first time. Now the actor starts to take away more than just physical appearance of the object, it starts to gain a subtle history relating to its creases, smudges, wear and tear. This exercise, and similar ones, help to strengthen focus, memory and train the eye to observe carefully and thoroughly.

### C. Focus, Sensory Perception and Characterization

1. Richard Boleslavsky, [Acting: The First Six Lessons](#), is a helpful writing. A student of Stanislavski, he captured the essence of what 'The Method' asks of an actor. Although written in 1933, these are truths that transcend time. He stipulates for his young pupil the three things required of an actor (pp 27-28):
  - a. Education of the Body  
Become a master of your muscles, strength and flexibility. He prescribes a rigorous work out schedule with various disciplines included (gymnastics, dance, fencing, breathing exercises, singing, pantomime...etc.)
  - b. Education of the Mind  
Intellectual and cultural awareness.

The actor must be well read, able to discuss varied playwrights and know of their contributions.

## 2. Acting Methods and Techniques

Know how their plays have been produced. He desires an actor to be versed in art, music, sculpture and design in different periods and styles. Of course knowledge of psychology and human emotions is of great importance, as is physiology and how the body works. The actor will need to call on all of these elements as he or she prepares a role.

### c. Development of the 'soul' of the actor

The ability to endure all that will be asked of him or her to portray another human being, often one in peril or crisis.

The word 'soul' used by Boleslavsky, might be equated with stamina, depth of feeling or courage. In his words, "The actor must have a soul capable of living through any situation demanded by the author." In this area he specifies connection with the five senses in all situations the actor encounters in life, as well as the cultivation of memory to bring forth those experiences when needed.

2. Practice and thoughtful repetition is the key to strengthening the actor's focus. Sense memory exercises are offered in nearly all acting studies books - such as pouring and serving tea without any pot, cups or spoons. How can the muscles be trained to recreate those movements precisely? The repetition of such sense exercises with the intent to perfect them, develops focus in addition to physical skills.
3. Observation is the parent to sense memory exercises. Careful observation of the muscles of the hand, arm, chest, when a real pot of tea, heavy and very hot, is lifted, is the key to recreating the movement. When the student asks "Why do we have to do this....", the answer will be focus, memory, and physicality of the character.

### D. Building Character Relationships

- a. Look to the script for primary information
- b. Absorb biographical material for historical persons
- c. Assess each character in the play - friend or foe
- d. Discern your history with each

- e. Identify outside influences on your relationship
- f. State your objective about each relationship
- g. Plan actions to reach objectives through the other characters' strengths and weaknesses
- h. Be open to change and adjustment
- i. Use improv to bring about unexpected revelations

1. The actor will garner as much information as possible from the script. If he is playing a historical figure, then obviously biographical material will be useful. But for characters of fiction, the challenge is somewhat altered. The first thing to do is discern his relationships with those around him at the present time by asking are they friend or foe. Why are they with or against me? What past history do we have? Has our relationship been manipulated by another character (perhaps absent or deceased)?
2. The actor will find objectives for these relationships. How does he wish to change a relationship or make sure it does not change? How does each character bring you closer to, or further from, your objectives for the play and in each scene? What is the other character's weakness that I might exploit to gain my goals? How can I gain from their strengths?
3. The questions can go on for pages - and a good actor asks them all. When he chooses actions to play, he will choose them in concord with what he expects will work best on the others.
  - a. If a character, my sister, is terribly insecure, I would choose actions such as to praise, to compliment and to reassure her so that she will help me. I might even choose the opposite - to bully, to threaten, to torment her for the same result. But as much as these choices come from the lines, they come from the subtext even more so. Speak the words, but play the subtext!
4. An actor will assess what makes his character all he is, and what contributes to the psychology of every other character. This is far more complex psychologically than we can speak of here. One's affections and allegiances will determine how he or she interacts with stage partners to a great degree.