

FORUM THEATRE

Guide, 2017



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Introduction

M. is a 10th grade student. M. lives close to school, he only needs 15 minute to get home from school. Every day, M. stops for 10 minute in the park, to meet his childhood friend, S. and catch up. Back home, M. meets his siblings, they take lunch together and play for at least 1 h. His brother and sister are 6 years younger, sometimes M. feels childish playing hide and seek, but he loves them too much to say 'No!'. In the evenings, if both of his parents come in time, they have dinner together and talk about school. By that time, M. has finished most of his homework. In the last weeks, he needed a bit more time to finish his homework, his parents' didn't notice and M. didn't say anything about it. Only S., his childhood friend knows that M. is doing the math homework, both, for him and one for J. J. is M.'s classmate, he likes school and has a good relationship with his teachers. One wouldn't say J. is a bully, but J. found out that M. likes a girl and threatens him to reveal his secret if M. doesn't do his math homework. One day, M. didn't manage to do J.'s homework, but J. threatened to beat him up and took M.'s own homework. That day, the teacher told M. that next time he doesn't have his homework, he will get a D. What is next for M.?

This is a story of oppression, it may be common, it may be hidden from the parents' or teachers' eyes, but it is not less abusive: J. uses his power to control M.'s behavior and gain benefits from it, M.'s school performance could decrease and his emotional state is threatened.

In real life, abuse of power may be more or less visible, perpetrators may use their power for different reasons, it can last for days or years, friends or family may be aware or not about it. In Boal and Freire's understanding, oppression should not be seen as something abstract. Oppression happens at the individual level, it can be spotted in our everyday life, but it has social roots, most often, the oppressed are part of groups that are socially marginalized or exploited on economic, sexual, gender, religious, ethnic etc. grounds.

Forum Theater is meant to fight oppression. At individual level, Forum Theater empowers people to speak up, take an attitude, in the end, to overcome oppression. At social level, Forum Theater and critical pedagogy is meant to rebalance power between the powerful (the colonialists, white people, men, big owners, 1% etc.) and the powerless (the colonized, people of color, women, workers, poor people etc.).

This guide is aiming to introduce professionals working in formal and non-formal education into Forum Theatre methodology. This guide can't replace a proper training on the subject (experienced trainers, 3-5 days, practice, mentoring/coaching/being part of a community of practice) and we recommend practitioners to undertake one before using the methodology.



This guide aims to help the reader answer the following questions:

- ***What is Forum Theatre?***
- ***Is Forum Theatre suited for my youth work?***
- ***How does one do Forum Theatre? What are the key elements and steps?***
- ***What resources do I need in order to do Forum Theatre?***

The guide was developed as a product of the Connector 2017, an Erasmus+ project. A lot of the information was collected during the activities included in the event (observations and unstructured interviews). Connector 2017 aimed to bring together professionals from formal and non-formal education, interested in creating an interactive learning environment for their learners.

Over the course of a week, 84 teachers, trainers, youth workers and other similar professionals from 18 European countries were split in 8 roughly equal groups to learn about and test a particular educational method in order to implement it further into their professional context.

The Forum Theatre workshops were facilitated by Ana Maria Grădinariu, an experienced trainer in the method, who was part of A.R.T Fusion organization, one of the pioneering NGOs promoting this method in Romania. The author of the guide took notes during all the sessions, as a non-participating observer in order to gather insights from the preparation and test implementation.

“Any situation in which some men prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence;... to alienate humans from their own decision making is to change them into objects.” – **Paulo Freire**

What is Forum theatre?

Forum theatre is a social intervention method aiming to empower people to free themselves from situations of oppression and take action. Forum theatre plays stage real experiences of oppression based on class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, etc. Uncommonly for theatre, *the spectators* aren't passive witnesses or receivers; they can stop the performance, propose change and join the stage to demonstrate their ideas.

*“Music is the organization of sound in time; plastic arts, the organization of colors and lines in the space; theatre, the organization of human actions in time and space. Theatre is a representation and not a reproduction of social reality. FORUM-THEATRE presents a scene or a play that must necessarily show a situation of oppression that the Protagonist does not know how to fight against, and fails. The spect-actors are invited to replace this Protagonist, and act out – on stage and not from the audience – all possible solutions, ideas, strategies. The other actors improvise the reactions of their characters facing each new intervention, so as to allow a sincere analysis of the real possibilities of using those suggestions in real life. All spect-actors have the same right to intervene and play their ideas. FORUM-THEATRE is a collective rehearsal for reality.”*¹ Augusto Boal, Rio de Janeiro 2004

The history of Forum theatre

Forum theatre together with image theatre, invisible theatre, newspaper theatre, rainbow of desire and legislative theatre are the major theatrical forms of Theatre of the Oppressed. Theatre of the Oppressed as a concept was coined by Augusto Boal (1931-2009), a Brazilian theatre director, inspired by Paulo Freire (1921-1997), founder of the critical pedagogy movement.²

In the 60` and 70` Brazil, Argentina, Peru and other Latin America countries were dealing with poverty, dictatorship and conflicts. Augusto Boal dedicated his work to the oppressed, aiming to raise their consciousness. In 1971, Augusto Boal himself was exiled in Argentina by the Brazilian military regime because of his cultural activism. In exile, he published his first book on Theatre of the Oppressed (1973, Argentina) and founded the first companies and centers of Theatre of the Oppressed (Peru, Ecuador, Argentina) with workers, poor or imprisoned people. He founded the Center of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro only after he returned to Brazil in 1986³. Nowadays, Theatre of the Oppressed is known worldwide and many adaptations have been created by Boal`s followers.

The educational philosophy

¹<http://jsirri.org/theatre-of-the-oppressed/techniques/forum-theatre/>

²<http://jsirri.org/theatre-of-the-oppressed/>

³<http://ptoweb.org/aboutpto/a-brief-biography-of-augusto-boal/>

Boal admits that its work on Theatre of the Oppressed was greatly influenced by the educational philosopher Paulo Freire⁴. Paulo Freire`s work is known as the pedagogy of the oppressed or critical pedagogy. In Freire`s view, education should empower students to engage critically and creatively with the world (the current social order). Critical pedagogy includes learning methods and strategies aiming to liberate the students` consciousness, to help them name their reality and engage in its transformation.⁵ Dialog is a central concept and preoccupation of Freire, considering that, only through dialog (opposed to monolog) learning could empower not subjugate students.

What are the differences and similarities between theatre and forum theatre?

| Theatre | Forum theatre |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Going to a theatre play may cost you money; - The spectators may be involved in the play but most of the time they just watch; - The play is staged by professional actors; - The play has a director coordinating and overseeing the play production; - The screenplay is fictive or inspired from the reality; - A theatre play has rich, sometimes exuberant sets; - In a theatre play it is common to hear the applauses at the end of the play; - The play is meant to build catharsis. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forum theatre is free of charge; - The spectators are named and seen as spect-ACTORS, because they join the stage and change the play. - People with no professional training can play in Forum Theater, they are named non-ACTORS; - FT doesn`t have a director, but it can have a facilitator (youth worker, teacher, social assistant etc.) who guides the non-actors in building the play; - The screenplay is a real situation, observed or lived by the non-actors; - A FT play has little or no sets, in accordance with real life; - spect-ACTORS are encouraged to applaud whenever they feel; - The play is meant to build catharsis. |

⁴<http://ptoweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/PTO-Zine-on-screen.pdf>

⁵Freire (1996)

Learning contexts and learning objectives

As far as our sources show, Forum Theater could be used in schools, universities, non-profit organizations, churches, theater companies, institutions ensuring social work, unions, groups of activism, prisons and other formal/informal groups. Forum Theater representations could be held on the streets, in theaters and any other spaces suitable for the audience. Teachers, youth workers, theaters directors, community facilitators, activists or others could be involved in setting the play, preparing the non-actors and being the Joker.

Forum Theater plays could involve or be addressed to youth (older than 14 years old) and adults who have experienced situations of oppression based on their social, political, cultural, religious, economic, sexual, gender choice/background: bully victims, poor people, peasants, workers, marginalized ethnicities or religions, LGBTQ+, rape victims, prisoners, orphans and so on.

In a broad sense, Forum Theater is aiming to liberate the consciousness of those being oppressed, to empower them to (re)gain dignity, to speak up their voice, to take attitude, to come together or in a few words, to become actors in their own lives.

“The basic aim of the Theatre of the Oppressed is to humanize Humanity.”
(Declaration of principles, The International Theatre of the Oppressed Organisation⁶)

As a youth facilitator, one should know that Forum Theater method is useful to develop socio-emotional skills mainly among the spect-actors, but it may happen that the non-actors themselves develop new skills and attitudes.

Among spect-actors, the Forum Theater method is useful to develop an accurate self-perception, self-confidence, empathy and respect for others (in CASEL, 2017 understanding).

Setting up a Forum Theater show may also help non-actors to develop their capacity to identify emotions, their self-confidence, self-discipline, perspective-taking, empathy, respect for others, teamwork and communication (in CASEL, 2017 understanding).

Learning results differ depending on the size of the audience, the spect-actors` experience, the subject of the play, the non-actors` experience and so on.

⁶<http://jsirri.org/wp-content/uploads/Declaration-English.pdf>

Resources: people, time, materials

Each Forum Theatre show needs different resources, it depends on the context, the non-actors' experience, the topic, the audience and so on. Because Forum Theatre plays show real life situations, they should not require complex (or expensive) stage sets. On the contrary, people and time are vital resources for Forum Theatre shows.

Firstly, in order to use Forum Theatre, one needs a trained facilitator and Joker; it may happen that the same person plays both roles. The facilitator is responsible of preparing the non-actors, choosing the theme and co-creating the play. The Joker facilitates the debate and the forum parts of Forum Theatre. Both, the facilitator and the Joker need socio-emotional skills (e.g communication, empathy), specific skills in Forum Theatre, but also a very good understanding of the philosophy of oppression and the theme in question. In short, if you are planning to be a Forum Theatre facilitator, make sure:

- You are trained in Forum theatre;
- You are trained to play the Joker (if no Joker is available);
- You acknowledge your own understanding of power and bias;
- You are a firm believer in social justice, equality, dialog, consensus;
- You are inclusive and respectful of differences;
- You can facilitate group decision and mediate conflicts;
- You can be friendly, but also firm with small or large groups.

Secondly, setting up a Forum Theatre show requires time to prepare the non-actors, to choose the theme, to research on the theme, to co-create the play, to rehearse and to debrief. Depending on the facilitator's and non-actors' experience, setting up a Forum Theatre show takes from 2 weeks to 3 months (1 or 2 weekly meetings, 90 minutes).

Finally, Forum Theatre requires space – on one hand, for non-actors to prepare, on the other, for the audience to see the show. Both spaces (if not the same) should be accessible, safe and respectful for non-actors or the target group (e.g not all spaces are accessible for poor youth or safe for LGBTQ+ youth).



Resources: trained facilitator, trained Joker, safe space, 2 weeks to 3 months

Forum Theatre methodology

Setting up a Forum Theatre implies the following steps:

- 1) Preparing the non-actors:
 - a) Getting to know each other;
 - b) Building trust;
 - c) Learning about power and oppression;
 - d) Developing improvisation skills.
- 2) Preparing the play;
- 3) Rehearsal;
- 4) The performance:
 - a) The play;
 - b) The debate;
 - c) The forum.
- 5) Stepping out of the role;
- 6) Evaluation and follow-up activities with the audience.

PREPARING THE NON-ACTORS

Setting up a Forum Theatre play involves the non-actors in a complex process implying creativity, collaboration, reflecting upon implications of power inequalities, overcoming personal vulnerabilities and working with one's emotions. Therefore, preparing the non-actors is very important, but the activities will be different depending on the actors' age, group dynamic, experience with Forum theatre, and experience with oppression.

If the non-actors don't know each other...

The facilitator should support the non-actors to find out each other's **names**, **backgrounds**, **dreams**, talents, hopes and fears. The facilitator can use any games and activities suited for the group (age, size, experience, cultural belonging, personal preferences etc.). The facilitator may need 1-2 working session (90-120 minutes) for this stage. The reader could look for resources [here](#).

Of course, this is also the time when the facilitator makes sure that non-actors have basic information about Forum Theatre and the implication of their role.

If the non-actors have never worked together...

The facilitator should support the non-actors build **trust** between each other, feel part of the **group**, overcome conflicts, agree on **group norms** and **take consensual decisions**. Because Forum Theatre aims to confront oppression, the process of preparing the non-actors and the play, itself should be inclusive, democratic, supportive, respectful of differences and consensual. The facilitator can use any games and activities suited for the group (age, size, experience, cultural baggage, personal preferences etc.), followed by debriefs. The facilitator may need 2-3 working session (90-120 minutes/ session) for this stage. The reader could look for resources [here](#).

As a result of the teambuilding games, the group may easily reach a working level of trust and collaboration, but the facilitator should carefully observe how do they take decisions and if anybody is being marginalized or oppressed. If so, the facilitator should problematize consensual decisions-making and challenge the non-actors to solve even more difficult tasks by involving everybody.

If conflicts arise between non-actors, the facilitator should not worry. This is a normal stage; the non-actors are just discovering their differences. The facilitator should allow time to openly discuss conflictual opinions and find common grounds. The reader should remember that solved conflicts strengthen the group norms.

At this stage is also the time to define the group norms through consensual decision-making. The facilitator can come up with a proposal that is discussed and validated with the non-actors (e.g be kind, no judgment, be present, tolerance, empathy, open minded). Remember, group norms will become effective in time and only if the facilitator uses them to overcome conflicts and difficulties.

If the non-actors aren't familiar with issues of power and oppression

The facilitator should help non-actors explore the concepts of power and oppression. Forum theater practitioners have created various activities useful in this stage; the facilitator should choose what is best suited for the group (age, size, experience, cultural baggage, personal preferences, etc.). Facilitators should encourage non-actors to relate oppression to their own experiences or deep research. The facilitator should encourage non-actors to think critically about their experience and overcome preconceptions. The facilitator may need 3-4 working session (90-120 minutes/ session) for this stage. The reader could look for resources [here](#).

When working with Forum Theater, youth should understand 3 key concepts:

Power⁷ – In the context of Forum Theatre power should be understood as one's possibility to think, express and act for him/herself, but also to

⁷ ART Fusion Guide, 2014 - [link](#)

influence others. Power in itself is not good/bad, but the way one use power can be questionable.

Oppression⁸ - In the context of Forum Theatre oppression should be understood as abuse of power, a relation of domination in which an oppressed` thoughts, speech and acts are conditioned by an oppressor. Forum Theatre addresses concrete relations of oppression, involving individuals not systems or organizations. Forum Theatre exposes situations where some people use their power abusively and others suffer emotional or physical abuse.

Preconceptions⁹ are beliefs associated with a particular person based on their belonging to certain categories (nationality, ethnicity, religion, political orientation, sexual orientation etc.).

Next, the reader will find the description of an activity useful in helping youth to explore power and oppression.

GAME on power and oppression

Objectives: At the end of the activity, the non-actors should be able (a) to explain the concepts of power and oppression; (b) to give real life examples of situations of oppression.

Activity, Part I: The non-actors will be asked to place 4 objects (a chair, a marker, a scissors and a piece of paper) so that at least one object is dominating and one other object is being dominated. The non-actors will voluntary take turns in placing the objects. By turn, the facilitator will invite the group to interpret the objects` placement:

- What do you see? Who agrees, who disagrees and why?
- What object is being oppressed? What object is being oppressive? What object is its ally? Why do you think the chair is an ally or neutral? Are there any other opinions?
- If you were to choose only one oppressed what object would you chose? *Please focus on direct, not indirect oppression.*
- Let`s hear what the volunteer thought about when he/she proposed the image. Why? What was your idea?



⁸ ART Fusion Guide, 2014 - [link](#)

⁹ ART Fusion Guide, 2014 - [link](#)

Good to know: At first, the non-actors may be reluctant. It may be difficult for them to associate or interpret relationships of power between objects, but this will change after the first example. Also, the participants may have contradictory interpretations, the facilitator shouldn't worry, but discuss openly about it.



Activity, Part II: The non-actors will be asked to do something similar using their bodies. Firstly, the facilitator will ask one volunteer to stand up in a position of power and freeze. The rest of the group will be asked to reflect starting from the following questions: *What do you see? Is he/she showing power? Why and how? Who agrees, who disagrees and why?* Forwards, the facilitator will ask a second volunteer to take a position that shows greater power than the first one and freeze. The rest of the group will be asked to reflect upon what they see. By turn, the facilitator will ask other volunteers to join the scene and freeze. The facilitator can also ask volunteers to unfreeze and leave the scene – each move is followed by a discussions.

Activity, Part III: In the third part, the non-actors will organize in pairs. By turn, each pair will simulate a duel scene: after sitting back to back, for 10 seconds, at a distance of 5 meters, the non-actors will turn face to face, move close to each other, take an oppressive pose and freeze. The rest of the group is allowed to move around, look at the pair and discuss. Non-actors will step out of their role (unfreeze) at the facilitators' clap.

The facilitator will stimulate small reflections:

While the pair is frozen: *What do you see? What do you think about J.'s pose, what about A.'s? Who is the oppressor? Who agrees, who disagrees and why?*

After unfreezing: *How did you feel, oppressed or oppressive? You both were supposed to be oppressors; did anything change on the way?*

Good to know: The volunteer/pair may find it difficult to step in an oppressive role, remind them that the game is a convention and that you, as a facilitator had created the situation of oppression; they are not to be held accountable. Also, advise them that taking a deep breath before taking the pose is helpful. On the other side, the observers may be tempted to laugh, invite them to keep focus out of respect for the volunteers simulating the duel.

At the end of part III, invite the non-actors to have a short discussion starting from the following *debriefing questions*:

- What did you experience during the exercises?

- How did you feel? What did you discover about yourself and the others?
- Please tell me a word related to oppression.
- What do you think is the difference between power and oppression? (the facilitator should clarify and explain the differences)
- Could you give examples of situations of oppression? Who is involved? How is each person contributing to the situation? (the facilitator should help participants come with concrete examples, define them in terms of oppression/power and identify different people contributing or not to the situation - allies and neutral person)
- Is this example a situation of oppression or just our own preconceptions? How could we check?
- Could you share an experience when you have experienced being oppressed or oppressive? (the facilitator should ensure the non-actors that their group is a safe space and appreciate any type of contributions)
- Do you think these situations should always evolve and end this way? What could be done to change them? (the facilitator should remind/explain the participant the aim and power of Forum Theatre)

If the non-actors aren't skilled in improvisation...

The facilitator should reserve time for developing improvisation skills among non-actors. Forum Theatre challenges non-actors to appear on stage and remain loyal to their character, even when the public makes realistic changes in the play. The facilitator can use any games and activities suited for the group (age, size, experience, cultural baggage, personal preferences etc.), followed by debriefs. The facilitator may need 2-3 working session (90-120 minutes/ session) for this stage. The reader could look for resources [here](#).

PREPARING THE PLAY

As stated above, a Forum Theatre play isn't fiction and depicts a real life situation. At this stage, the facilitator and non-actors decide upon a problem they want to focus on. In order to find the problem, the facilitator can invite non-actors to brainstorm and discuss starting from questions such as: *What situations do you know when you have been discriminated? // What situations do you know when someone in particular (e.g. LGBTQ+ community) have been discriminated?*

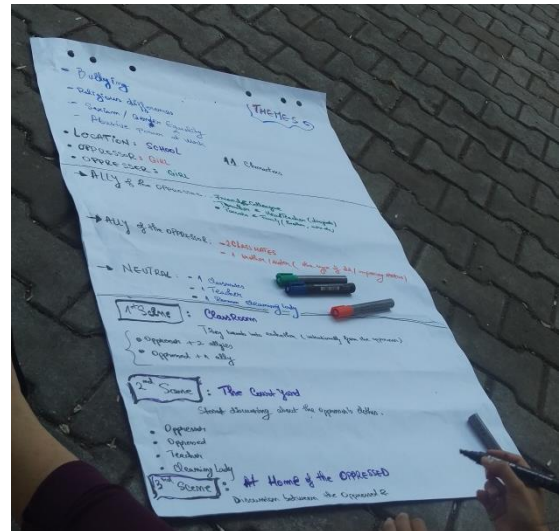


Co-creating a Forum Theatre play requires a profound understanding of the selected problem. The non-actors should be able to build a scenario and characters that are very close to reality. Thereby, if the non-actors don't have a profound understanding

of the problem, the facilitator should accompany them on the field: to meet, observe and talk with oppressors and victims of oppression. The facilitator should also encourage non-actors to read, reflect and discuss on the topic until they overcome their preconceptions. The facilitator may need 1-2 working session (90-120 minutes/session) for this stage.

The scenario will be co-created by the non-actors and facilitator. In order to facilitate the process, the following questions could be used:

- What is the most common, real situation of oppression related to the chosen problem?
- Where is this situation happening? At what moment in time (day, week, month or whatever is relevant)?
- Who is the oppressor? Who is the oppressed?
- Who are the allies of the oppressor? Who are the allies of the oppressed?
- Let`s name each characters.
- Let`s build each character: status, preferences, habits, social roles, cultural background, occupation.
- What happens in act 1? Act 2? Act 3?
- What is each character doing in each act?



In Forum Theatre plays is very important to gradually raise the intensity of oppression and to plan a high stake situation in the final act (the play should bring the audience on the verge of taking action or confronting oppression). Also, in Forum theatre is important to assign concrete actions for each character, during their stage appearance; it should be easy for the audience to differentiate the characters` stand towards oppression. Finally, the play should have as many characters, as non-actors, but not more than 5-8.

Forum theatre plays can have 5 type of character: the oppressed (not more than one), the oppressor (not more than one), the allies of the oppressor, the allies of the oppressed, and the neutral characters. The oppressed is the character suffering from repeated abuse of power. The oppressor is the abusive character and uses its power to control the oppressed character. The allies of the oppressor are characters that encourage oppression either by validating the victim (praising, laughing etc.) or by discouraging the victim („you are exaggerating”, „he/she is just joking”, „is your fault”). The allies of the oppressed are characters that support the victim by encouraging him/her to ask for help or confront the oppressor. Neutral characters may witness or find out about the oppression but they choose to ignore it.

Once the scenario was co-created, the facilitator should help non-actors get into their characters and rehearse. The facilitator may need 3-6 working session (90-120 minutes/ session) for this stage. Look for resources [here](#) and [here](#).

FORUM THEATER PERFORMANCE

The play – the forum – the replay

The PLAY:



The performance starts as a conventional play. The Joker welcomes the audience and arouses their curiosity without disclosing any important elements of the play or the forum. The audience witnesses a situation where the protagonist experiences oppression. The non-actors are determined to express as best as possible their characters` ideology, status, work, preoccupations etc.

The DEBATE:

By the end of the performance, **the Joker informs** the spect-actors that the play will run again, but this time, they will have the option to intervene and try to influence the course of actions. Next, **the Joker challenges** the spect-actors:

- a) to describe the play with their own words/from their point of view;
- b) to define as a group what is problematic in the play and needs change/action;
- c) to recall and share real life situations similar to what happened in the play;
- d) to debate and decide as group if they want to change the reality of the play;
- e) to analyze each character and decide as a group which character is an oppressor, an oppressed, an ally of the oppressed, an ally of the oppressor or neutral - the Joker shouldn`t disclose the intended scenario, it may happen that the audience identifies one character differently than it was planned, (e.g. as an ally instead of a neutral), the Joker should validate their interpretation and continue the show in the logic of the spect-actors. The Joker should adopt the vocabulary of the audience – e.g. victim, aggressor, bully etc.

This is a time when **the Joker asks open, non-suggestive and non-judgmental questions**. Useful questions for *the debate*:

- What happened in the play?
- What did you see and think about it?

- Did you notice any problems in the play?
- In your opinion, what is the main problem in the play? Any other opinions?
- As far as I understand, the problems you see in the play are *x* and *y*. I would like to find out how do you feel as a group about this, so please raise your hand if you think *x* is the main problem [...] please raise your hand if you think *y* is

the main problem [...] Oh, there is a tie, let`s discuss more/ Because most of you identified problem x, if the rest is comfortable, we should go on the discussion trying to understand better the problem x.

- Is this problem real?
- Have you ever experienced, observed or heard about similar problems in real life? Could you share some?
- How does our play evolve and end?
- Is it similar in real life? Could you justify your answer and give examples?
- Do you think this kind of situations always have to evolve and end in this way?
- Do you want trying to change the evolution and end of the play?
- Which character is most affected in the play? What is he/she doing in the play? What is the last thing he/she does?
The character is called on the stage and named (A.).
Which character is making A. suffer most?
The character is called on the stage and named (B.).
- Which character is on A.`s side?
The character(s) is called on the stage, placed on A.`s side and named (C., D.).
- Which character is on B.`s side?
The character(s) is called on the stage, placed on B.`s side and named (E., F.)
- Who is left in the play and what is their attitude?
The character(s) is called on the stage, placed neutrally or in relation to A/B and named (G.,H .)



At the end of the play, the Joker will call each character on the stage and ask the following questions: *What is he/she doing in the play? What is the last thing he/she does?, Could you share with us stories of people behaving in a similar way?, Do you think he/she can he change his behavior in any way so that*

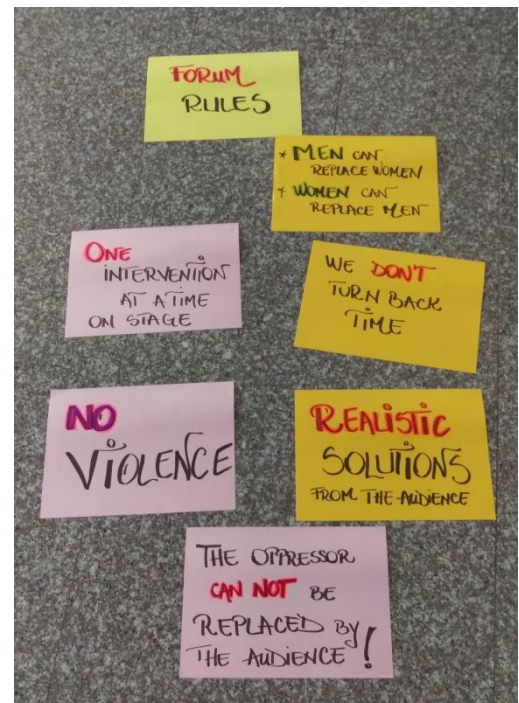
the play evolves and ends differently?. In the case of the oppressor, the joker shouldn`t ask the final question.

The FORUM:

In the FORUM stage, the spect-actors will witness a rerun of the play, but this time, they will be given the chance to interfere. **The Joker** will explain to the spect-actors that their solutions will change the play, but similar to the reality, they should expect non-actors to remain loyal to their characters view of the world - just as them, as spect-actors will try to change the piece, the non-actors will try to bring the piece to the same end.

The FORUM has the following rules:

- Whenever a spect-actor wants to propose a change in the play, he/she should clap, the non-actors will freeze;
- The spect-actors can change the behavior of any character except the oppressor's (in real life, the oppressor's behavior is the least likely to become positive);
- Realistic (not miraculous) solutions are welcomed;
- By turn, the spect-actors must join the stage and demonstrate their proposal;
- The solutions proposed by the spect-actors will be integrated in the play only if the audience votes them as realistic;
- It will not be possible to go back time or run the play the third time, the spect-actors should act whenever they disagree with the course of actions in the play;
- Violent behaviors are not accepted;



As soon as he/she feels everybody is ready, the Joker starts the rerunning. The spect-actors can stop the play and intervene. Every time a spect-actors stops the play, non-actors freeze and the Joker invites the spect-actor to join the stage, take the role of the character he wants to change and demonstrate his/ her ideas. The solution is incorporated in the play (the non-actor behave as shown by the spect-actor) only after the Joker obtains the audience's consent:

- *to the spect-actor*: What did you wish to accomplish with your intervention? What was the effect of your intervention?
- *to the audience*: What was the effect of this intervention? Is this change realistic – do you think it can happen in real life? Who agrees with this change

(raise your hand)? Why do you agree/disagree? Let`s vote if we keep or not this solution, raise your hand if...!

After each intervention, according to the audience`s vote, the non-actors keep running the scene with no changes or according to the spect-actors` wishes. Before starting the rerun, the Joker should make sure that no one else doesn`t want to propose other interventions in the scene – spect-actors could propose changes for more than one character in the scene. By the end, as long as the audience decides is realistic, the play could change significantly.

What happens if no spect-actor stops the play to propose changes?

The Joker can stop the play and challenge spect-actors to analyze the scenes and propose changes. Also, you could have a volunteer among the spect-actors who can break the ice and intervene in the play.

At the end of the play the **Joker challenges the audience to apply in their lives** anything that inspired them during the show. To achieve this, in his last intervention, the Joker narrates the initial scenario of the play, then asks spect-actors to recall all the changes they have made and share their feeling about it and finally, the Joker challenge the audience to think and share what would they do differently in their own lives following the show. Forum theatre closes with a big round of applause for the non-actors.

The JOKER:

During *the debate* and *the forum* the attitude, the phrasing and the body language of the Joker are crucial to create a safe and encouraging space for spect-actors to empathize with the characters, confront oppression, come up with interventions, demonstrate their ideas and share feelings, hopes or real life experiences.

The Joker:

- Is able to follow the structure of Forum Theatre;
- Is familiar with the oppression showed in the play and the realities of the audience;
- Should never be judgmental with the audience` beliefs, opinions and interventions;
- Engages the audience and involves as many spect-actors as possible;
- Struggles to be as neutral as possible, asks questions, doesn`t express his/her opinion (it is normal to have an opinion, is just important to not disclose it);



- Encourages the audience to take action without appraising their solutions, but by encouraging critical thinking;
- Is comfortable with public speaking and moments of silence – spect-actors may need some time before being ready to intervene in the play or speak their mind;
- Keeps calm and enforces the rules of Forum Theatre even when spect-actors get overly enthusiastic (don't listen to each other, get distracted from the main problem, monopolize the debate etc.);
- Picks up and uses the spect-actors' language and logic;
- Repeats the spect-actors' proposals so that everybody hears them;
- Gives clear directions;
- Speaks loudly;
- Is flexible and creative;
- Manages time wisely.

Sometimes Jokers use short games and energizers for icebreaking and attention; it is up to their experience, style and preferences.

STEPPING OUT OF THE ROLE



Playing Forum Theatre is a powerful experience for non-actors. The facilitator should also help non-actors to step out of their role. Thereby, the facilitator could set up a group reflection. It is important to remain calm, to create a safe space for everybody to share their thoughts and feelings, to encourage non-actors to speak up, to remind them their group norms (e.g. listen to each other) and to ensure that no one is judging.

Good to know: The non-actors may give similar answers, it is ok, ask for patience and respect. The oppressed and oppressor may talk less or very much, because for them the tension was very high, listen and be empathic. The non-actors may express deep or contrary feelings (“I felt like I want to cry”, “I was afraid, I didn't know how to act”, “I just trusted the team and tried to be as real as possible”, “I feel well, I was born to be an actor.”), listen and patiently discuss what do they think these feelings mean, what did they learn and what do they want to remember for the future.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES and EVALUATION

According to the initiators` agenda, a Forum Theater show could be followed by other activities aiming to help the audience confront oppression. Public meetings, community projects, legislative theatre, street demonstration are just some activities that could be organized following the play.

Finally, the initiators could evaluate the impact of the Forum Theater show either related to the non-actors or the audience. According to the available resources, one could choose between different evaluation instruments that can be used together or alone: observation (especially in the case of non-actors), focus groups, individual interviews or questionnaires (most common in the case of the audience).

In the case of spect-actors, the observation, focus groups, individual interviews or questionnaires should evaluate to what degree they are willing:

- To accept/ recognize that the Forum Theater show was about a situation of oppression that he/she has experienced or witnessed;
- To discuss about the situation of oppression showed in the play;
- To devote time for reaching a better understanding the situation of oppression showed in the play (dialog, investigations, reading etc.);
- To display their disagreement with the situation of oppression showed in the play;
- To initiate action aiming to undermine the situation of oppression showed in the play.

Regardless of the chosen instruments, in the case of the audience, the initiators could collect information (e.g. apply the questionnaire) before and after the play. In the case of the non-actors the initiators should collect also between starting and finish working on the play (1-2 times, depending on how long the group works together).

Tips and tricks

Forum theatre will challenge facilitators, the Joker, non-actors and spect-actors to act together, to overcome their preconceptions and to challenge power. No matter your role in Forum Theater remember:

- Learn from each other;
- Be patient and gentle to each other, change takes time;
- Explore each other`s privileges and rights;
- Take time to understand the situation of oppression that you want to depict;
- Create a clear-cut scenario and characters, sometimes less is more;
- Empower specta-actors, trust their opinion and the debate;
- Take time to debrief and celebrate.

References:

- A brief Biography of Augusto Boal. Pedagogy and theatre of the oppressed – [link](#).
- ART Fusion Association (2013). Methods for social change Image and Forum Theatre. Bucharest
- Boal, Augusto (2002). Games for Actors and Non-Actors. Second Edition. London and New York: Routledge
- Boal, Augusto (1979). Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Urizen Books.
- Declaration of principles, International Theatre of the oppressed - [link](#).
- International Theatre of the oppressed - [link](#).
- Freire, Paulo (1996). Pedagogy of the oppressed. London: Penguin.

Resources and communities of practice:

- <https://www.cardboardcitizens.org.uk>
- <http://jsirri.org/yellow-pages/>
- <http://artfusion.ro/>
- <https://institutoaugustoboal.org/>