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The pretending that you did when you were younger was the first step you took toward learning characterization.

retending to be someone else is a game that most of us have played. Perhaps you have seen your younger brothers or sisters act out characters as they play with their action figures or dolls. Most of us have participated in this form of characterization we call pretending. In the theatre, however, <mark>characterization</mark> involves more than just pretending to be a character in a scene or play. It also involves making others believe that you are someone else. Whether you have created your own original character or are portraying a role written by a playwright, your job as an actor is to make the character real for the audience.

One of the most exciting parts of theatre is to have the opportunity to "try on" and experiment with different characters. Professional actors know that there are techniques they can use to make the characters they play seem real. These trained actors know that their inner thoughts and outward actions work together to develop a character that the audience believes is real. Actors find it is enjoyable, yet challenging, to use the mind, face, body, and voice to think, talk, act, and react like someone else.

Improvisation activities have given you a foundation for portraying different characters. Now you will participate in activities that will help you understand how to develop a believable character. The characters that you create in this chapter will be based not only on your imagination but on all the characters you have ever met—in books, in movies, on television, and in real life.

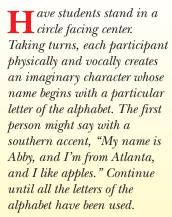# LESSON 1

Stock Characters and Stereotypical Characters

LESSON OBJECTIVES

◆ Understand the process of characterization.
◆ Begin to create stock and stereotypical characters.

Warm Up

Have students stand in a circle facing center. Taking turns, each participant physically and vocally creates an imaginary character whose name begins with a particular letter of the alphabet. The first person might say with a southern accent, "My name is Abby, and I'm from Atlanta, and I like apples." Continue until all the letters of the alphabet have been used.

Sometimes when you watch a play, movie, or television program, you recognize a character type and automatically know how that character will act. Many of the popular 30-minute situation comedies on television have character types that are easy to recognize. These character types are known as stock characters and stereotypical characters.
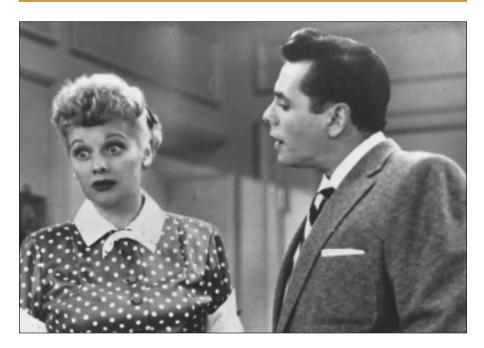
Stock Characters

A <mark>stock character</mark> is a familiar character who is the same type of character in every play. Stock characters were an important part of the commedia dell'arte style of theatre. The audiences of the 1500s quickly identified each character based on what they had seen the character do or say in previous plays. Characters such as the villain, the hero, the

clever servant, the fool, and the heroine were expected to appear in play after play, always looking and acting the same way.

Stereotypical Characters

stereotypical character
a familiar character identified by an oversimplified pattern of behavior that typically labels the character as being part of a group of people.

Another type of character we often see played by beginning actors is the stereotypical character. A **stereotypical character** is a familiar type of character whose tag, or label, identifies a particular group or segment of society. If the labels "politician," "cheerleader," "television evangelist," and "jock" automatically bring to mind visual images, then those particular character types have probably become stereotyped for you. The stereotypical picture that many of us have of a grandmother is a gray-haired old lady wearing sturdy shoes and a knitted shawl. But how many grandmothers do you know who fit this picture?

When creating characters, it is important to avoid negative ideas concerning occupation, race, gender, age, ethnic heritage, or religion. Negative stereotypes result when groups of people or individuals are misrepresented in a discriminatory or prejudicial way.

Beginning actors find stock and stereotypical characters an easy starting point, choosing to portray characters from books, plays, and movies. If you re-create the role of the class clown, the helpful policeman, the spoiled brat, or the teenage bully, you have an idea of what to do and how to act, because you have seen these characters played many times before.

Think of the way you would use your body and face to physically create a frozen statue of these modern stock and stereotypical characters:

psychiatrist	secret agent
handsome movie star	clumsy waiter
cowboy/hero	photographer
rich socialite	district attorney
miserly businessman	traffic cop

secretary	bellhop
nanny	cab driver
baby-sitter	butler
newspaper reporter	flight attendant
writer/poet	mad scientist
gangster	stern teacher
dentist	surgeon
short-order cook	rock star
gorgeous fashion model	snoopy neighbor
strict school principal	nurse
private detective	clown
military officer	librarian

ACT*ION*

1. Trying on Characters

a. Take turns moving around a chair or walking around the room as your teacher calls out the various character types from the preceding list. Notice how you and your classmates change physically and mentally each time a new character is assigned.

b. Select one of the characters from the list. Write down the way you would walk, talk, and act as that character. Give yourself a name, occupation, hometown, and reason for visiting the classroom. Become the character as you walk to the front of the classroom or to the center of the acting area. In character, introduce yourself to the class.

c. Working with a partner, improvise the meeting of two of the characters from the list. Talk and act as if the characters were meeting in one of the following places:

at the grocery store	at a laundromat
in a shopping mall	on another planet
in the school cafeteria	in a haunted house
on an airplane	on a television talk show
on a desert island	at a trial
at an amusement park	at the beauty/barber shop
in the principal's office	