



random

by debbie tucker green



Background Pack

Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| About the production | 2 |
| Inside <i>random</i> | 3 |
| Responses to <i>random</i> | 7 |
| Classroom activities: | |
| Writing activities | 8 |
| Acting exercises | 11 |
| Resources: | |
| Extracts from <i>random</i> | 12 |
| Images from <i>random</i> | 15 |



About the production

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|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Cast | NADINE MARSHALL |
| Director | SACHA WARES |
| Assistant Director | GBOLAHAN OBISESAN |
| Production Manager | PAUL HANDLEY |
| Lighting | PAULE CONSTABLE |
| Stage Manager | SARAH DAVIES |
| Costume Supervisor | IONA KENRICK |
| Audience Development Officer | GEMMA FRAYNE |
| Audience Development Assistant | SUSANNAH OSTROM |
| Outreach Worker | YASMIN FLOYER |

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Inside *random*

A conversation between Director Sacha Wares and Assistant Director Gbolahan Obisesan about the rehearsal process for *random*.

What is the history of the play *random*?

I think debbie tucker green wrote *random* in June last year or just before. Nadine first performed it as a rehearsed reading in the Theatre Upstairs in July for two performances. Following the reading, the play was then programmed for a full production in the main auditorium.

How did you and Nadine approach the play for the rehearsed reading?

We rehearsed for the reading for one week. Because time was short, we concentrated mainly on finding the different voices of the various characters, talking about who the characters were, their ages, backgrounds, jobs, etc. and looking at their different vocal qualities and rhythms.

We also went through the text very carefully, noting when the shifts of character took place, when the locations changed, when the characters realised something new. The script is separated into two parts, but has a fast, fluid pace, and is not divided into different scenes. To make the stages of the narrative easier to follow for ourselves we broke the script down into small chunks or 'units of action' and gave each 'unit' a sequential number and mini-title. This was so that we all had a really clear sense of how the story moved forward moment to moment.

Taking the time to do this really helped us to focus on the details of the story, and meant that when we came to rehearse for the full production this February, a lot of the basic preparation work had already been done.

Can you describe how you helped Nadine build a picture of the environment of the play? Was this process similar to other plays you have directed by debbie tucker green?

I have directed three of debbie's plays and I think Nadine has performed in at least four. Nadine and I worked together on *trade* and in some ways the rehearsal process for *trade* was similar to the *random* rehearsals. On both plays we spent a lot of time working on the rhythm of the writing, concentrating particularly on debbie's individual way of using punctuation and text lay-out. The big difference with *random* is that it is written for just one performer, with the emphasis on storytelling, rather than action and interaction.

Neither Nadine or I have done a one-person storytelling performance before so for both of us *random* presented a new challenge, and the task of building up a picture of the play's physical environment was certainly an important part of the process.



In most plays, the set designer is the person primarily responsible for communicating the physical world of the play. However, when Debbie wrote *random* she had a clear idea in her mind that the stage would be empty and the performer would have only the words to make us imagine the spaces and places the story unfolds in.

For much of the play, Nadine is speaking directly to the audience, but it is important that at every stage of the story she has vivid, real pictures in her mind of the events, people, sounds, and objects she is describing to us. If she isn't seeing the pictures she describes, we probably won't either.

To help achieve this, we spent quite a lot of the rehearsal time creating all the different locations of the play and playing the scenes out as if they were happening in actuality rather than simply being described.

Can you explain how you did this in more detail?

Well, for each scene we created a rough rehearsal set with furniture and incidental props. For example, when we rehearsed the final scene in the Brother's bedroom we had a bed, posters, computer screen, chest of drawers with clothing etc.; for the earlier street shrine scene we collected all the objects the Sister mentions and placed them around an area fenced off with police tape, and so on.

When we enacted the scenes for the first time, myself, the stage manager, and assistant director played the other characters. This was so that Nadine was free to concentrate on only one character at a time. We then swapped roles so that Nadine could play the scene again from each of the characters' point of view. This helped Nadine start to picture the exact physical relationships of the characters to one another, and where her eyeline should be at every moment of the story. It also allowed her to enjoy the feeling of interaction between the characters, and hopefully lessened the loneliness of rehearsing a play with no other actors!

What would you say was the biggest challenge on this production?

If you ask Nadine, I'm sure she'd say the biggest challenge is being asked to hold an audience's attention alone on an empty stage with only the words – no set, no music, no other actors. The other major challenge, of course, is to play so many different characters, to make them each real and distinctive and to have to switch between them so quickly.

How did Nadine work on the physicality of the different characters?

Nadine is an incredibly versatile actress, and I think she finds it quite easy to imagine herself into other peoples' bodies and ways of moving. When we did the reading of the play last year we didn't do any work on the characters' physicality because there wasn't enough time, but even so you could still see the subtle changes in her body when she shifted from character to character. I'm not sure she was even aware she was doing it!

For the final production, we have had a lot more time to explore the different characters' ways of moving, and we used a very simple exercise to do it.



What was the exercise?

Nothing complicated. Nadine just spent some time ‘walking’ each character while I asked her various questions. Even though in the performance she stays almost on the spot, she found it easier to discover the physicality of the characters by ‘walking’ them around the room. As she walked about I’d ask questions like:

- What part of their body does the character lead from? Their head? Their chest? Their groin?
- What is their energy like – fast or slow?
- Are their gestures and movements open or closed? Direct or defensive / protective?
- How does the character sit? Get up? Run? Lie down?
- Where do they hold tension in their body when they are tired or under pressure?
- Which parts of their body do they use to express themselves when talking – their hands? Their eyebrows?
- How do they behave when they are cold? Hot?
- What happens in their body when they are nervous or uncomfortable? How do they hold their body when they are bored or waiting? Angry or frustrated?
- What happens to their mouth, their jaw, their hands, their breathing when they are upset? Nervous?
- How do they laugh?
- What happens when they receive a shock?
- What about when they are trying to hold in or hold back something they want to say?
- How does their physicality change when they are at home with their family? At work? With strangers? With friends?

Often while we were doing the exercise Nadine would improvise a bit of text for the character or use some of the lines from the play in order to link the rhythms of speech to the physicality. For fun, and to help build confidence with the play’s quick transitions, we’d follow this with an exercise where I’d call out a character name and an emotional or physical state and Nadine would inhabit it. I’d then call out another and another and Nadine would make the transitions as quickly as possible. All of this was aimed to make sure that each character was clearly distinguishable with their own particular physical idiosyncrasies.

You mentioned earlier the importance of rhythm in debbie’s writing. Can you explain some of the ways debbie uses punctuation and page layout in her plays?

In each of debbie’s plays I have worked on the ‘code’ contained in the punctuation is ever so slightly different. In *random* for instance:

A ‘–’ (dash) represents an interruption of thought. When a dash is at the end of the line it usually suggests that the next character who speaks has ‘cut in’ and stopped the speaking character from finishing their sentence. When the dashes appear within a single character’s ‘speech’ it is as though that character has had a fresh thought which stops



them from finishing the one they first started. debbie describes this second example as what happens when your brain moves faster than your mouth.

A series of ‘...’ (dots) at the end of a sentence tends to signify that the thought has trailed off, usually because the character’s brain has caught up with their mouth and they realise that they are about to say something they’d rather not. Dots at the beginning of a line are a bit different and on the whole mean the character is thinking, looking for a way to express themselves, or forming a new thought.

A word in *italics* suggests that there is an extra stress.

A **beat** suggests that the character has a moment of private introspection, or a sudden moment of realisation.

Spaces between lines suggest that the pace of thought has slowed down and there is more ‘air’ between the lines.

All of this is a bit like musical notation – instructions on the page that tell the performer when to pause, when to slow down, when to speed up, what to give an accent and so on. It’s quite technical – but the performer’s job is to follow the writer’s instructions and to discover for themselves the emotional or psychological reasons behind the rhythm changes.

Is there anything you would do differently if you could start rehearsals over again?

Oh yes – loads of things. You always realise how you could have done things better just at the point you’ve finished doing them wrong. If I were to pick one main mistake I make over and over again, it is falling into the trap of trying to solve too many things at once. When you have limited time and lots of things to do, the temptation is always to try and address everything using one just one exercise or one rehearsal. Nadine has so much to do in this play, so much to think about, and I often made the mistake of piling up too many different thoughts and questions in her mind. Luckily she has an in-built ‘notes overload’ system which constantly reminds me that it is much more productive to focus on one thing at a time, and to approach the final goal stage by stage, little by little.

You are now in the last few days of rehearsals. What is your main focus at the moment?

In the last week of rehearsals, especially when we moved from the rehearsal room to the theatre, it became clear that our final and most important task was to think about the relationship between the performer and the audience. All the work we’d done in the rehearsal room on the locations and images in the play, the physicality of the characters, and the rhythm of the text was really necessary and useful. However, as soon as we arrived in theatre we realised that while this detailed work had certainly helped Nadine get ‘into’ the play, it was just as essential to spend time thinking about how to connect with the audience and transmit the story to them in the most direct way possible.

So, over the last few days the audience has been our main focus and we have re-rehearsed the play on stage, concentrating less on the private journeys of the characters and more on the task of communicating the story to the people who have come to listen to it. It’s quite hard to do this when the theatre is empty but from Friday, when the play opens, we’ll be able to see if the story we are trying to tell is reaching the audience it has been written for.



Responses to *random*

They're typical parents. Especially the dad: go to work, come back, eat, go to sleep.

Student (Sion Manning School)

It's sad to know that it is actually reality, it's not a fairy tale. It happens today and it's happening all over.

Student (Sion Manning School)

It really opened my eyes and it left me feeling very emotionally attached to the people - I felt like I'd met the characters, like they were talking directly to me.

Student (Sion Manning School)

random for me is about a typical day in a girl's life, and how a tragic event affects her family. What really struck me was the language and the poetry of it, and how everyday it was. There's loads of things that you could easily relate to. If you are from a world where tragic things happen to people, you take it for granted that it won't happen to you or people you know. But when it's been put on stage so vividly, it feels as if it's just happened to you and as if your family has been affected. It makes you want to phone home and check your family are alright and tell them that you're alright too.

Gbolahan Obisesan (Assistant Director)

We hear about it and it's like OK, and then we just forget about it, but it shows that there are people who aren't going to forget because they have to live with it forever.

Student (Sion Manning School)

Every day it seems like every time you turn on the TV or open a newspaper, there's something that relates to the play. A lot of families are affected by it and you rarely get to hear the stories of those families.

Gbolahan Obisesan (Assistant Director)



Writing activities

Kitchen exercise

- Think of something that you have in your kitchen at home that you're fairly sure nobody else has in their kitchen (e.g. tennis racquet, bonsai tree, lizard, map of Norway)
- Find a partner and talk about what the object is, how it came to be yours and why it's in your kitchen
- Then swap places and listen to your partner's story
- Now ask students to find another partner and to retell the story they have just heard to someone new
- Ask the group why being told a story is enjoyable. Which aspects of a story are most enjoyable? What makes a good story?

Writing your family

- Choose a member of your family
- Write down 10 things about them, focussing on the smallest possible details, habits, catchphrases or phobias rather than facts about what they do and where they live
- Discuss what can be learned about people from these tiny details (as opposed to a whole life story)
- Suggest that it's in this every day domestic detail that makes a character 'live' on stage
- Ask the group to pick a second family member who lives in the same house as the first (or who has lived with them in the past)
- Ask them to imagine that these two family members are having a row over breakfast
- What are they rowing about (again, encourage small domestic detail rather than epic conflict)?
- Write a 4 line conversation that these 2 characters might have in this situation
- Read this conversation out to the rest of the group
- Now imagine that as the characters say each of their lines, they are thinking something about the other character that they don't say out loud, their inner thoughts (e.g. 'I wish she'd just shut up' or 'why does he ask questions that he already knows the answer to?')
- Ask the group to intersperse these thoughts with the lines they have already written so that they end up with a dialogue which is a mixture of direct and imagined speech
- Ask the students to perform their pieces



Images from *random*

- Show the group the images from *random*
- Ask the participants to choose a character and to write down 10 things about that character (again, focus on small details)

Making a list

- Get the group into pairs
- Ask one member of the pair to describe everything they did this morning from the moment they got up to the moment they left the house in as much detail as possible
- Ask the second member of the pair to write down the key words of the story with as much economy as possible (e.g. 'alarm, Radio 1, out of bed, cold floor, bathroom, shower, hot tap broken, water everywhere ...')
- Ask the pairs to swap jobs
- Ask some volunteers to read out their lists
- Transform these lists into poems which detail a slice of a character's life

End of day objectives

- Ask students to choose something that they'd like to accomplish by the end of the day
- Ask students to choose something that they'd like to accomplish by the end of 2008
- Ask students to choose something that they'd like to accomplish by the end of their life times
- See if you can get a few people to share their choices in different categories
- Now ask them to pick a character from *random* (based on the images you have shown them) and to give them a specific 'end of day' objective
- Ask them to make a list of all the 'obstacles' that this imaginary character could encounter in the course of a single day that could stop them achieving their objective
- Ask the group to rank the items on this list in order of magnitude (smallest to largest) and to think of this as a 'scene break down' for a play
- Ask them to choose one 'scene' from this unwritten play and to decide:
 - Where the scene should be set?
 - Which other characters are necessary for the scene?
 - What might actually happen in the scene?
- Ask a few participants to share their 'scene plan' with the group



Creating a short play

- Give students a chance to develop any of the previous exercises into a longer piece:
 - A 'list poem' which tells us what a character does in the course of a day
 - A breakfast argument scene in which characters voice their own thoughts as well as their spoken dialogue
 - A monologue in which someone describes the history of the strange object in their kitchen
 - A scene in which a character attempts to achieve their 'end of day' objective

Introduction to *random*

- Share Extract 1 with the group
- Discuss the following:
 - How old are the characters?
 - What do they look like?
 - What time of day is it?
 - What kind of room is BROTHER in?
 - What happens next?
 - What are the differences between the two characters?
 - Why are some parts of the dialogue in speech marks?
- Encourage the group to continue the scene, writing what happens next
- With an older group, use Extract 3
- Discuss the following:
 - Why is the text laid out in this way?
 - Who is SISTER talking to?
 - What does she do for a living?
 - Describe Sally, John and Deepak?
 - What is the office like?
 - What is the state of her relationship with her boyfriend?



Acting exercises

Vocal exercises

- Take the participants through a basic vocal warm up
- Ask them to read out an extract from *random* experimenting with different vocal pitches and rhythms
- Ask them to focus on their nose / tongue / jaw / throat to produce different vocal 'characterisations'
- Look at 3 images from *random*
- Give each character a distinctive 'voice' or vocal characteristic
- Give the group an extract from the play
- Practice saying each of the lines in the script using the vocal 'signature' of that particular character
- How easy is it to 'switch' from one voice to another?

Characterising your family

- Show the group images from *random*
- Using a single physical gesture, try to create each of the characters represented on the images
- Walk around the room leading with one part of your body:
 - Chin
 - Chest
 - Nose
 - Teeth
 - Knees
- Move around the room emulating the walk of one of a family member
- Decide which part of the body they tend to lead with
- What is the tempo of their walk?
- Repeat the exercise with the other two family members
- Now reduce the walk and physical mannerisms of each family member to a single 'gesture'
- Practice switching between these gestures

Acting *random*

- Give the group an extract from *random* which requires transitions between several characters and ask them to work together to separate out the voices
- Help them to put their vocal and physical techniques into practice in performing this extract



Extract 1

SISTER '... You awake?'

Beat

SISTER 'You awake –'

BROTHER this one can't be inna my dream

SISTER 'You awake –'

BROTHER nightmare.

BROTHER kisses his teeth

SISTER 'I can borrow y'phone?'

BROTHER 'I'm sleepin.'

SISTER 'This room stinks –'

BROTHER 'Come outta it then –'

SISTER 'So I can borrow y'phone – an' why you still in bed?
An you ent sleepin – you sleepin? – how come yu sleepin all now?
Mek mi borrow your phone –'

BROTHER You credit-less – your problem.'

SISTER 'Wanna use your sim in it – ennit –'

BROTHER 'Find a next phone – or a next man yeh?'

SISTER '... I'ma 'llow that. Yeh?'

BROTHER kisses his teeth

SISTER 'Thass an answer? Thass your answer?'

BROTHER kisses his teeth

BROTHER 'An close back mi door.'

SISTER Why he
think I wanna –
be in his room that [s]tink.
Why he think I wanna be –
in his room –
with him – that stinkin bwoy longer than mi haf to – ask me.





Extract 2

BROTHER ‘Anythin to eat –’

MUM Like iss hotel.

BROTHER ‘Anythin to eat?’

MUM Like mi favour landlady.

BROTHER ‘What is there to –’

MUM ‘Porridge’

BROTHER ‘That?’

MUM ‘That.’

BROTHER ‘That ent –’

MUM ‘It is.’

BROTHER ‘... Got black bits in.’

MUM ‘Yu late down, porridge ha’ fe bu’n.’
 Heh.
 Him watch the pot
 watches me watchin
 sights the juice – carton done
 draws some milk
 only glasses it
 cah him see me watchin.
 Leaves out the empty glass
 leaves out the still some in it milk
 gives it the kiss on the side a *my* head
 like I used to give it the kiss on the side a *his*
 when him was bout 10 ...
 Even then him wipe it off –
 with a smile –
 thatchu couldn’t.





Extract 3

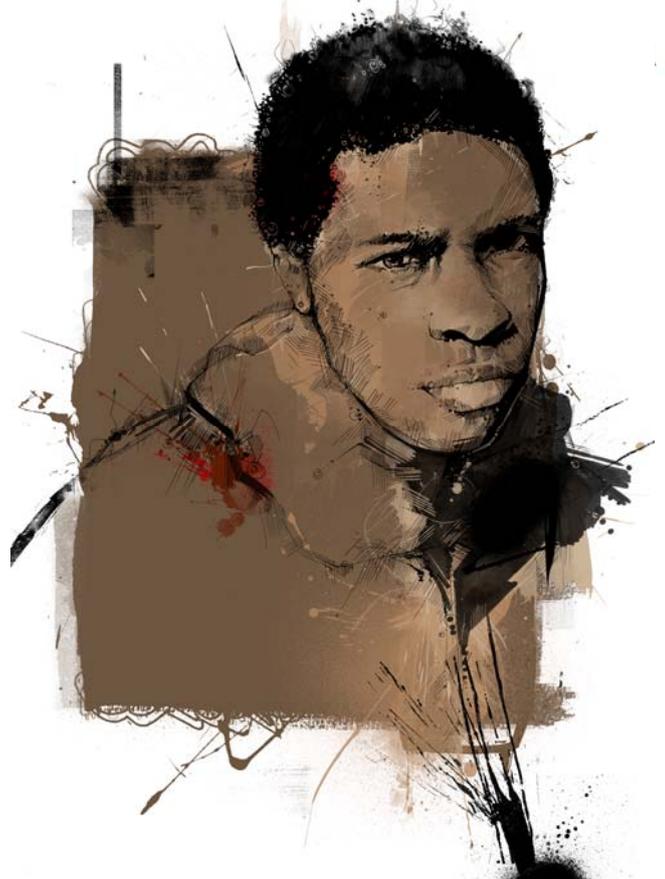
SISTER

How these people come to work?
 How these people come to work –
 but don't wanna work?
 Ask me?!

If you don't wanna work –
 don't come –
nah –
 if you come –
 don't reach cos your only reason is
 to come *by me* and chat *your* shit inna *my* ears
 bout how much you hate it.
 I hate it.
 Hate them.
 Hate hearin –
 Sally's
 John's
 Deepak's
 and Jane's
 business.
 Hate havin to hear it – day in day out –
 why they think I wanna hear that?
 Why they think I care?
 And if Sally flicks that hair of hers
 near my face –
 again ...
 truss –
 mi.
 [They] chat their shit to me –
 [they] sit back
 spectin me to –
 chat *my* shit back to them
 I got friends f' that –
 I got –
 fambily f' that –
 truss mi –
 I got me a *man* fe that ...
 Well.
 Sort of.



Images from *random*





Illustrations by Russ Mills