

# TACTIC FORUM THEATRE

Forum theatre is a tool for exploring and rehearsing possible actions that people can take to transform their world. It's often used both in preparation to taking action and in anti-oppression workshops.

## CONTRIBUTED BY

### Levana Saxon

Levana Saxon is an organizer and educator with Practicing Freedom who has worked with groups such as the Paulo Freire Institute, Rainforest Action Network, Center for Political Education, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Youth In Focus, El Teatro Campesino, and multiple Oakland Public Schools. She currently co-coordinates the Ruckus Society's Arts Core and facilitates trainings and dialogues with the White Noise Collective, which she co-founded.

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**"THE POINT IS NOT TO SHOW WHAT WE THINK OTHER PEOPLE SHOULD DO — IT IS NOT THEATRE OF ADVICE. THE POINT IS TO DISCOVER WHAT WE CAN DO."**

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"Don't ask God to guide your footsteps if you're not willing to move your feet."

—Unknown.

Forum theatre is a commonly used tool from Theatre of the Oppressed framework. It begins with crafting and performing a short play that dramatizes real situations faced by the participants, and that ends with the protagonist(s) being oppressed. After the first performance, the play or scene is repeated with one crucial difference: The spectators become "spect-actors" and can at any point yell "freeze" and take the place of an actor to attempt to transform the situation or the outcome. Forum theatre is an exercise in democracy in which anyone can speak and [anyone can act]Anyone can act).

One of the first things that spect-actors realize is that, as in life, if they don't intervene, nothing will change. The next thing spect-actors find is that doing "something" is not enough, it must be strategic (see: PRINCIPLE: Choose tactics that support your strategy). The people acting as oppressors on stage will maintain their oppression until they are authentically stopped — and just like in life, stopping them isn't easy. Forum theatre thus becomes a laboratory to experiment with different courses of action.

The protagonists should be characters that all or most of the people

## POTENTIAL RISKS

The role of the Joker is a tricky one. It is easy to leave the group with false optimism about what can work, or to run out of time before everyone is satisfied with what has been attempted. The Joker must make many small decisions in every moment, such as whether or not to allow the introduction of additional characters, whether or not to add interventions upon other interventions, how many interventions to allow, when to stop an intervention when it's not going anywhere, and so on.

Another pitfall is to use forum theatre to generate ideas for solutions but then fail to act on, or implement, them. Forum theatre works to the extent that

in the room can identify with, so that when they intervene, they are rehearsing their own action. The point is not to show what we think other people should do — it is not theatre of advice. The point is to discover what we can do.

Forum theatre is facilitated by someone called a Joker, who engages the spect-actors both on and off stage in dialogue throughout the process. After an intervention, the Joker may ask, "Did this work? Was this realistic? Can you do this in real life?"

Forum theatre was developed in a context where oppression, the oppressed, and the oppressors were clearly defined. Its originator, Augusto Boal, was living in exile from the Brazilian military dictatorship, and social movements across the continent were struggling against harsh military repression. Since then, the technique has been adapted to countless other contexts around the world, as practitioners seek to grapple with the complicated power relationships of more diverse groups of people. Often interventions will uncover multiple layers of power, dramatizing characters who are simultaneously oppressed and oppressing others.

Forum theatre is an effective tool of creative activism, useful for generating interventions, as an intervention itself, and for building common strategic frameworks for movements.

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## LEARN MORE

Forum Theatre  
Drama Resource, 2014  
<https://dramaresource.com/forum-theatre/>

Forum Theatre for Community Empowerment  
Educational Tools Portal, 2016  
<http://educationaltoolsportal.eu/en/tools/forum-theatre-community-empowerment>

Theatre of the Oppressed  
Augusto Boal, 1979  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=2PrIAQAACAAJ&dq>

Games for Actors and Non-Actors  
Augusto Boal, 2002  
[https://books.google.com/books/about/Games\\_for\\_Actors\\_and\\_Non\\_actors.html?id=AE2aBAQZKKYC](https://books.google.com/books/about/Games_for_Actors_and_Non_actors.html?id=AE2aBAQZKKYC)

it prepares participants to actually intervene critically in their own lives and the world around them.

## RELATED TOOLS

### Tactics

- Guerrilla theatre
- Image theatre
- Invisible theatre
- Lamentation
- Legislative theatre
- Storytelling

### Principles

- Anyone can act
- Change is the only constant
- Choose tactics that support your strategy
- Lead with sympathetic characters
- Praxis makes perfect
- We are all leaders

### Theories

- Alienation effect
- Anti-oppression
- Artivism
- Critical multiculturalism
- Decolonization
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed
- The Global South
- Theatre of the Oppressed

### Methodologies

- Artstorm
- Battle of the story
- Peel the onion

## TAGS

Art, Campaign strategy