



# TEACH DRAMA

How to Make a Living as a  
Freelance Drama Teacher

Samantha Marsden

## **About me**

I studied Drama, Applied Theatre and Education at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London. I then worked as a freelance drama teacher for ten years, from Stagecoach academies in leafy suburbia to deprived schools in East London.

I worked for theatre companies, youth theatres, and state, private and special schools. In 2012 I set up my own youth theatre, which quickly grew into one of the largest regional youth theatres in the UK with over 250 students attending each week. And now I'd like to share everything I learned about being a freelance drama teacher with you.

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**Samantha Marsden**

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For actors and  
drama practitioners who  
wish to inspire.

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## **About David Farmer**

David Farmer is a freelance writer, theatre director, drama consultant and founder of the popular website *Drama Resource*. After training as a primary school teacher he founded Tiebreak Theatre Company, which performed plays and workshops to over half a million young people in schools, theatres and festivals across the UK and abroad for a period of twenty-five years. He runs courses in London and delivers training for schools, arts organisations and language schools in the UK and internationally.

# Foreword

If you enjoy drama and working with children and young people, then working as a freelance drama teacher may be a natural career move. This book offers a great deal of down-to-earth practical advice to those starting out in the profession from someone who has proved her worth in many different areas of the field – by teaching in and running academies, schools and clubs and by managing a very successful youth theatre.

The author takes the reader right through the process from deciding which avenues to pursue, who to contact, how much to charge and where to find work. The book is full of solid-gold tips and advice covering interview tips and techniques, lesson-planning, relationships with clients and students, tips for maintaining discipline and legal requirements. There is advice on choosing a show to perform, how to schedule rehearsals and, last but not least, a list of organisations to contact for training needs and work opportunities. The interviews with freelancers and professionals add an extra dimension and invaluable advice from those in the know.

Reading this book will give anyone with the right motivation a head-start by offering advice about becoming a highly-organised and effective freelance drama teacher from someone who has clearly demonstrated their knowledge and success in the field.

—*David Farmer*

I never teach my pupils.  
I only attempt to provide  
the conditions in which  
they can learn.

— *Albert Einstein*

ONE

# Life as a Freelance Drama Teacher

**Could *you* be a freelance drama teacher?**

Maybe you're an actor, or you've just finished a degree in drama. Whether or not you have experience with children, if you have trained—or you're training—in drama, applied theatre or acting, then you *can* be a freelance drama teacher. All you need is an eagerness to learn, lesson ideas and some good classroom management techniques. I'll talk about these later in the book.

## **Why teach drama?**

A well taught drama class gives students confidence, a place to be creative and a platform to let off emotional steam. A drama class is the place where even the most angry, shy, or academically behind children can shine. I've seen drama change lives over and over again.

## **What's it like to work as a freelance drama teacher?**

At 4pm you might be pretending to be a gorilla with five year olds, but two hours later you may be moved to tears by a 16 year old delivering a touching monologue. Your iPod will fill with the playlists you use in class, props will live behind your sofa, and unlike some of your other actor friends who might be waitressing and taking telesales jobs, you will look forward to going to work.

I love the lifestyle that comes from being a freelance drama teacher. I adore the variety, the creativity and the pressure. You will play drama games, improvise and direct shows. There's nothing like watching a cast of children perform something they're proud of. And that buzz after the show—it's electric! But more about how to direct a show later.

If you love drama, directing and children, then being a freelance drama teacher is for you. However, a lot of people want to, and not everyone makes it. To make a living out of this highly rewarding and creative job, you need a killer CV, strong teaching techniques and a good business mind.

In this book I will teach you everything you need to know to be successful.

## **The pay**

Most freelance drama teachers are paid £20 to £30 per teaching hour. You won't be paid for planning lessons, and you will be expected to stay behind for the occasional meeting, rehearsal and performance without pay.

You'll need to find 14 to 25 hours of teaching work per week during term time (32 to 36 weeks a year), plus three to six weeks' worth of school holiday workshops, in order to make a living.

## **The hours**

It's likely that you'll be teaching after-school clubs in the afternoons, youth theatres in the evenings and weekend theatre schools, well, at the weekend! If you are serious about making a living as a freelance drama teacher, you *will* need to work some evenings and weekends. But, on the bright side, you will have time during the week for yourself. For the actor, this is a blessing as it's when auditions tend to be. Other plus sides to working evenings and weekends are that you'll travel during off-peak times, you can get an off-peak gym membership and if you're in a house-share, you get the place to yourself during the week. Unsociable work hours do have their advantages.

You won't be working unsociable hours all year round though, only during term time, which is about 32 to 36 weeks a year. For the other 10–14 weeks a year, during the school holidays, you'll be working sociable hours teaching theatre-themed holiday workshops. Or you *might* even take some time off.

## **Your clients**

Your client is the person who pays you. The client is often the headmaster or mistress of the theatre school or the artistic director of the theatre company you're working for. Your client is your boss, but *not* your employer. Unless your client has set you up under the PAYE tax system (which is very unlikely), then they do not employ you. A freelance drama teacher is self-employed and provides the client with a service. But because you are not employed you don't get sick pay, guaranteed work or holiday pay. Being self-employed means you do your own tax return and you must register as self-employed with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

## **The work**

There are many different types of work you can get. I recommend being as versatile as possible. Try to get experience teaching all age groups and don't be a snob about what type of work you take on. Some teachers turn their nose up at directing something like *Annie*, but if you want to make a living as a freelance drama teach-

er then you need to be willing to do what your client wants, even if it's not quite to your tastes. Let's take a look at the different types of clients you may work for.

## **Franchised children's theatre schools**

Stagecoach, Razzamataz, The Pauline Quirke Academy... the list goes on. These places are a fabulous source of income for the freelance drama teacher. I worked for Stagecoach for eight years and they were an amazing company to work for. They pay well, treat their staff with respect and give you a fair amount of creative freedom. I worked for Stagecoach in Wimbledon, Chiswick, Highgate and Swindon. Every Stagecoach is slightly different, but I had a wonderful experience at all of them. At one point I earned a full time income by working for Stagecoach on Friday evenings, all day on Saturdays and on Sunday mornings. Go to the directory in the back of this book for a full list of franchised children's theatre schools in the UK to contact: these companies are always on the lookout for enthusiastic teachers.

## **Youth theatres and privately owned drama groups**

Most towns and cities will have their own youth theatre, plus several other drama groups run privately by individuals. Often these run during evenings and weekends in school halls, church halls, arts spaces and theatres.

## **Teaching abroad**

Lately more and more drama teaching jobs are coming up abroad, particularly in China. These contracts tend to last for anything from two to twelve months. Often you will have your flights and board paid for, plus you will be paid a little pocket money. Great work for those who want to travel. These jobs are often advertised on online job boards.

## **After-school clubs**

There's two ways you can do this one. You can work for an existing company that runs after-school clubs. Or you can set up your own club. If you work for someone else they'll do all the legwork and you'll get £20 to £40 for teaching an after-school club, which is normally one hour to 90 minutes in length. Alternatively you can set up your own after-school club and earn £50 to £90 per session. I'll show you how to set up your own club in chapter eight.

## **Special needs schools**

Special needs schools get funding for specialised teachers and facilitators to come in and provide workshops. Contact all the special needs schools within travelling distance and offer them a drama workshop. If they like you, you may get invited back on a weekly basis. I worked in several special needs schools, providing one-hour weekly drama workshops.

To start with I felt like an imposter, as I wasn't trained to work with students with special needs. However some special schools have visiting musicians and artists who don't have this specific training. As a freelance drama teacher you will never be left alone with students, and there will always be at least two or three trained members of staff in the room with you. The highlight of my teaching career was when a nine-year-old non-verbal autistic boy spoke for the first time ever in my drama class. People who studied drama at university or drama school tend to be naturally good with people with special needs as confidence and the ability to have fun are essential. Think *Mr Tumble*.

Here are a few tips for working with people with special needs:

- React to the students' needs and be flexible
- Treat the students with respect
- Be confident
- Keep your lessons simple and visually stimulating
- Bring plenty of props, music and enthusiasm
- Don't be patronising
- Sing
- Be yourself
- If you can, learn a little bit of sign language.

## Working in Private Schools

Private schools sometimes have the budget to take on a freelance drama teacher, so it is worth approaching them. They may want you to come in and do a one day workshop on a particular theme: Shakespeare, improv, voice, Roald Dahl, etc. Or they may want you on a more regular basis, maybe to run an after-school club or to help out with an overstretched drama department. I worked for a top private school in Bath for several years, running two after-school clubs and doing freelance directing projects for them.

Freelance directing is good fun, although slightly stressful! For freelance directing I charge per show. You can charge anything between £800 and £2000 for a show. To put on a show you'll need a minimum of two 90-minute sessions every week for ten weeks and then two full days of rehearsals just before the performance.

Another option that private schools like is the 'play in a week'. You can charge anything between £500 and £1400 for the week. This may sound like a lot of money to charge for just one week's work, but you'll spend two weeks working. One week planning the show and the second week rehearsing the show with students.

Putting on a play in a week is both stressful *and* highly rewarding!

## **State schools**

In my experience it's harder to get work in state schools than private schools, as they tend to have less money to spend. However, I have been asked to do one-off workshops in state schools, both primary and secondary. One secondary school I worked for liked to get me in during the lead up to GCSE and A level practical drama exams; I'd help the students with their practical exam pieces. You can write directly to secondary schools offering this service.

Primary schools sometimes like drama workshops too, particularly if you can offer drama workshops that promote literacy. For a one day workshop you can charge anything between £80 and £500. Personally I think £120-160 is about right.

## **LAMDA teaching**

Some people make a full time living out of teaching LAMDA. You get paid less per hour than you would for group teaching. But if teaching large groups isn't your thing, and you prefer doing one-to-one tuition, then LAMDA teaching might be for you. On average you get paid between £10 and £30 per hour to teach LAMDA. Many of the weekend theatre schools like Stagecoach offer LAMDA to their students, and they are often looking for LAMDA teachers.

Private schools are also often keen to take on freelance LAMDA teachers. You can also set yourself up as a pri-

vate LAMDA tutor and hire out a space so the students come directly to you. It's easy to register. Here's what LAMDA say on their website:

You do not require any specific training or qualifications in order to teach learners and prepare them for LAMDA examinations. Similarly, we don't dictate how you approach the teaching, how often you see the learners or in what format you conduct your classes. All the subject requirements are detailed in the individual syllabuses which you can download or purchase online, but we leave the specific teaching approach and timeline up to you and your learners!

We also have a Directory of LAMDA Teachers which represents a list of those wishing to advertise the fact that they are preparing learners for LAMDA examinations. Please note, they are not employed by LAMDA and are therefore not endorsed by us either. If you would like to join the Directory, please visit the Store and purchase a Membership.

## **Theatre companies**

Very few theatre companies offer work to freelance drama teachers. Nevertheless, do send them your CV as very occasionally positions do come up.

## **Government funded projects**

Sometimes the government or charities offer funding for drama projects. Very occasionally there are grants and

funding opportunities that freelance drama teachers can apply for. However, sadly, with cuts in arts funding these opportunities are getting fewer and fewer. And they were rare to start with.

## **Theatre in Education**

There are various Theatre in Education companies who take performers/teachers on. But this is a different job from that of a freelance drama teacher. It's suited to performers who like to travel and don't mind devoting their entire time to a short term contract. Although it can be great fun, TIE is not an area I cover in this book.

# THE INTERVIEW

## **Adam Davenport, Creative Director at The Pauline Quirke Academy of Performing Arts**

### **What do you like to see in a covering letter?**

I like to see evidence that the covering letter has been thought about, and is personal to the Pauline Quirke Academy, and to the position advertised. I have received so many letters from people who haven't taken a few minutes to find out who to address the application to, and on many occasions, the name of our company is spelled incorrectly! Once I received a letter detailing why they would like to work at a different performing arts organisation – it was clearly a template and they'd forgotten to change the names.

Apart from the above, I love to see a genuine enthusiasm and passion for teaching, and an explanation as to why they feel they are suitable for the role and what they can they bring. Two to three paragraphs are often sufficient.

### **How can someone impress you in an interview?**

I am always impressed when a candidate has done their research on the company, and can talk confidently about our creative structure, demonstrating an understanding of what is required from our acting teachers. Somebody who is intelligent, articulate and experienced, but is fun, down to earth and doesn't take themselves too seriously. Somebody who I think would be a role model for the students.

### **What do you think makes a good teacher?**

Somebody who is genuinely passionate about working

with children. Not only developing them as performers, but as individuals. Understanding the ethos that every student has something to offer. It's our job as teachers to find out what that is, and show students that they are valued, encouraging growth and confidence. A good teacher is well prepared, and always looking for exciting and innovative ways to explore actor training. They keep lessons inspiring, introducing as many varied elements of acting as possible, such as mask work, devising, physical theatre, and commedia dell'arte, keeping students hooked. Not to mention different performing opportunities like promenade, in-the-round etc. I love to see a teacher who is charismatic and fun, yet can hold attention and instil respect, discipline and performance etiquette.

### **What advice would you give to someone who wants to be a freelance drama teacher?**

Watch and read as many plays as possible. Keep your knowledge fresh and up to date by attending classes at institutions such as The Actors Centre. If you have no teaching experience, contact your local weekend performing arts academies or vocational institutions, and ask if you can shadow a teacher for work experience. Accept one-off cover or 'dep' sessions to add to your CV. Keep an eye on fantastic websites such as [artsjobs.org.uk](http://artsjobs.org.uk) for the latest teaching vacancies. Ensure you plan your lessons well in order to deliver high quality sessions, and build a reputation for excellence. Word soon gets around and you will start to get booked frequently! Above all, be positive, exciting and passionate, and enjoy watching your students transform as they build their confidence and acting technique.