STANISLAVSKI - ‘getting into character’
‘A DAY IN THE LIFE OF’ [THE CHARACTER’S THROUGH-LINE]

Stanislavski felt that you needed to build up a life for your character part. Using the clues in the text you should work out their background in depth. Search out the influences that motivate the character to act in particular ways or react to different circumstances or people. You should therefore build a life off-stage to explain what goes on on-stage.

Alan Ayckbourn said that; ‘The audience must feel that they have been lucky to see the most important events [of a story], as if by chance.’ This therefore suggests that a character has a life; past [before the play begins], present & future [what will happen after the play ends]. Have you ever found yourself wondering what happens next after finishing a book or a film/tv series? If you characterisation is to be convincing you must ‘give it a life’.

The following exercises can be done in private, with your eyes closed. Or you could use them in a practical lesson with the use of hot seating or role-play They can help to build up a clear background to a character’s life -
- childhood
- daily rituals eg. Preparing & eating breakfast or getting up in a morning.
- Moments or events that happened just before a character comes on stage.

EXERCISE 1; CHILDHOOD [AGED 6]
Visualize a photograph of your character as a child of 6. Try to imagine it on its own. Is it content to be so? What is it doing? Imagine it at school in a ‘play’ session. Would it sit on it’s own? Is it shy or confident & chatty? Would it choose to play alone & simply observe others? Or would it actively seek out children to play with? How would it cope if it were rejected? Would it share toys or sweets? Or would it try to keep things to itself?

ROLEPLAY;
Bearing these thoughts in mind start on your own in a space. Choose a toy & start to play. When I signal, you can notice those around you. When comfortable you can integrate with others. How does the character as a child get on with others?

EXERCISE 2; CHILDHOOD [adolescence]; Year 10/11.
Imagine what they are like at school. Don’t slip into your personality.
★ Are they academically strong?
★ Do they struggle but keep trying?
Are they disaffected with learning? Do they skive? Never hand in homework?
What are their relationships with teachers? Cheeky, 'invisible' liked, admired?
Find words to describe their behaviour & personality at school [timid, bored, joker]

AMBITIONS;
★ To leave school asap
★ To gain a particular job
★ Live in a particular place.
★ Marriage/career [What would be the teacher's reaction to this]

ROLEPLAY; Class roleplay;
Pupils line-up outside just before the bell. As it goes they start to enter. Think where you would sit, if you'd be punctual? ROA's discussion follows. Pupils could be asked their personal qualities, skills etc & ambitions. You may decide to have set them a previous homework to resume their career & ambitions.

EXERCISE 3; BREAKFAST / DAILY ROUTINES
Everyone has a morning routine which is individual. By thinking about the little things which are different between your routines & the character's you will build depth.
• Do they generally sleep well & undisturbed? Do they often have dreams or nightmares? Do they sleep alone or share? What side of the bed do they sleep on?
• What kind of bed is it?
• When they wake up is it naturally? by alarm clock? By someone calling?
• What time is it? Do they turn over for a bit more sleep or immediately get up?
• Do they eat first or wash? Is it a shower/bath/quick flannel job?
• Do they spend time on face, make-up, hair etc or is it unimportant?
• Are their clothes already for them laid out or is it a case of difficult choosing or even finding something that doesn't smell too much, possibly lying on the floor?
• Is breakfast a big meal or not? Is it a solitary affair or with others? Is it comfortable or full of minor tensions or arguments?
• Carry on the events until you get out of the door.
• Do you go by car, bus, a lift? Are you on time or rushing because you're late?

ROLEPLAY;
When a morning routine happens before an important event on-stage or will affect one later, it could be role-played with the apt characters.

HOTSEATING
Although you can simply ask questions, by putting the 'questioner' into a frame/context you can help help build reality. Decide which situation might be
useful for developing your character eg. Interview for a job / Career’s interview

IMPROVISE THE SCENE BEFORE; ‘offstage action’
If you are finding it difficult to act out a scene convincingly, it might be because important / dramatic events have happened just before this scene which are not shown to the audience.
Sometimes it is hard to 'come in cold’, ie. enter a scene in a rage if you are feeling relaxed. So imagine what happens before the scene.....
▷ What is their emotional state; are they calm, flustered, angry because of the event?
▷ Are they late for something or have been kept waiting?
▷ Are they nervous because they have betrayed the person they are about to meet?
*Work out what happens just before the scene. Where does it take place? What people are involved? Re-enact this scene.*

BIZ [BUSINESS]
Emotions can be shown through our body language, facial expressions & voice. Employing specific objects can also help convey our feelings or reveal a character’s nervous mannerisms.
Pick an object [personal prop] that is important to the character or is present in the scene. Try handling the prop in various situations eg. an anniversary, waiting for someone, a reunion, a funeral, in a new place, a job interview, on holiday in a relaxed atmosphere.

EMOTION MEMORY;
An actor can use a personal object which helps them remember a time when they had a very strong feeling which is close to how they character feels. This can help you re-create the right emotions for your acting.
You could also create an emotion memory object [personal prop] for your character to remind them of something which drives/or affects their life eg. a wedding ring for a woman who has recently thrown out her husband after finding he has cheated on her.

VOICE WORK  [FOR USE WITH RELAXATION & CHARACTERISATION]
ojective  - Work on voice technique  
Reasons for working on voice?
😊 Clarity
😊 Depth [develop range eg. Pitch]
😊 Characterisation
😊 Conservation [ no losing voice!]
😊 Breathing [control - disguise feelings / make sure you are clear in performance]

MUSIC; Lay down on the floor. Raise legs to bend if uncomfortable.
LISTEN TO THE RELAXING MUSIC - as you do isolate each part of the body, tense & relax. It’s really important to do some exercises to become relaxed as well as warm ups if you are working to a professional standard.

BREATHING; [use & control for performance]
Exercises to help you develop control over your breathing should be regularly practised. Being able to control our breathing is vital when performing. WHY?

😊 You do not want your feelings to interfere with how you speak your lines. For example, if you are nervous, your heart rate quickens and you can sound out of breath & lose vocal projection. If the character you are playing is confident, the voice needs to sound confident.

😊 Being able to change how you breathe can also help you to develop different rhythms and speech patterns and enable you to bring a wider variety of characters to life.

Breathing exercises
1] Yawning [no exaggeration]
2] Sighing
3] Concentrate on sounds; outside the room/inside/inside the body
4] Focus on regulating your breathing so that you become aware.
5] Breathe in deeply through nose, then out through mouth
7] 5 etc.
8] Breathe in slowly for 3 then out quickly
9] Breathe in quickly [gasp] then control release.

SOUNDING;
1] Breathe in for 3, hold 3, exhale humming for 3 [softly not jerkily]
2] Repeat this time opening the mouth to increase projection [ahhh]
3] Repeat varying the volume; hum gets louder then softer. Take care not to lose the steady, unbroken sound. [Fade in & out]
4] Letters; bbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbbb[tune] d, c, l, s, t etc.

TONGUETWISTERS; [aids clarity of enunciation by focusing & exaggeration]
Vary rhymes & emphasis to experiment with speech patterns - characterisation
1] Red lorry, yellow lorry
2] How much wood could a wood chuck chuck, if a woodchuck could chuck wood?
   * Say with clipped precision
   * Roll r’s
   * Slur in a French accent
   * Lengthen vowels / Shorten vowels
   * Slow down
   * Fast pace

Now try rolling your rrrrs like a motorbike revving up.
rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr = small revs
CHARACTERISING YOUR VOICE-
Finding the correct voice to suit a character can be difficult, particularly if he/she is very different to you in personality or age. To help you to experiment choose a nursery rhyme / simple line to use. This will help you focus on how the character speaks without having to worry about what they might say.

Eg ‘That’s what gets you, the fact I’ve made a choice’
1] Sigh / take a breath before each word
2] Sigh at the ends
3] Erm before & after
4] Nervous giggle
5] Emphasise first & last words
6] Speed up at the end of sentences
7] Slow down..
8] Get softer at the end so that it is broken off [sottovoce]

EXERCISE -
Now say the nursery rhyme as if;
1] You are a parent speaking to a young child.
2] You are a 4 year old who has just learned it.
3] You are neighbour spreading some juicy gossip.
4] You are a boring professor giving a lecture.
5] You are a sergeant major telling a soldier off.
6] You are an OAP telling a grandchild about what life used to be like.
7] You are a spy passing on a secret code.

*Notice how you have to change the; volume, speed, tone [emotion], emphasis, rhythm, pitch, accent*