**Memory and a “Memory play”**

**Engage**

The "memory" play is a very successful non-linear structural pattern in modern American drama. The following activity is designed to help students understand the use of and appreciate the power of memory to build structure in drama.

**1. Ask students to close their eyes and call up the memory of one of the following:**

* A happy event
* A traumatic event
* A "panoramic" account of a particular summer
* A return to a favorite place of one's childhood
* A weekend afternoon spent with family members
* An intense conversation with a parent
* The encounter of meeting someone you knew in the past

**2. Ask students, with their eyes still closed, to scan their specific memory from the following points of view:**

* What are the sensory experiences embedded in the memory? i.e., Is your chosen memory mainly visual? Are you experiencing any audio recall? Tactile? Olfactory? Sense of taste?
* What dominates the memory? Is it the details of the environment? Could it be the personalities of a person or people? The dialogue? The impact of the experience on you at the time it occurred?
* Is your mind making cross-current connections simultaneously from past to present? For instance, are you weighing what kind of a person you were or how you looked then in relation to the person you are now and how you look in the present?
* Are all faces in your memory equally dominant? Or are one or two faces the main center of the recall - almost larger than life—and others subordinated in the background?
* Do you remember all the names of people surfacing in the memory? Or do the names of just one or two who appear in your mind stream?
* Is your memory in color or black and white? If in color, are some colors more vibrant than others are?
* Is there any special focus in your memory on a real object; for instance, a painting, a sofa, a car, a swing on a playground?
* Does something in the initial memory kick you off into a whole new memory? What do you think is the trigger?

**3. Ask students now to open their eyes and record, in free-style writing, specifics from their memory based on the above scan and from any other aspect in their recall.**

Encourage students to share some of their memories and points of analysis of their scan. Ask the students whether or not any immediate thoughts or outside sounds from the present environment intruded or were simultaneously operating in their consciousness during the memory. *Note: You may wish to contrive a distraction during the exercise, such as dropping a book, to interrupt the stream of the students' memory.*

**4. Arrange students in small collaborative groups and ask each group to initiate an open-ended discussion about the processes of the mind**, drawing from their individual scans to negotiate some conclusions about the following:

* Does the mind operate with simultaneous threads of experience - threads of memory pulsating at the same time the mind is processing extrinsic experience, weighing options, anticipating and/or conjecturing future experience?
* During intense concentration - evoked perhaps by coping with strong emotional response, facing a difficult decision, or dealing with a traumatic situation - does the mind become more one-dimensional, shutting out other forces and compulsively concentrating on one thing or problem?
* How "selective" is memory? Are only the good things remembered? -Is memory built on illusions about what has happened in the past? Or does it recall things exactly the way they happened?
* What are some of the effects of memory? (Does it disturb? Support? Reaffirm? etc.)

**5. Have the students share their ideas in a large group discussion.**