



Gifts from the Heart: New Year NARRADRAMA Activity

Mimi Savage MA, RDT, PhD Student

Registered Drama Therapist and Doctoral student in Expressive Therapies, Mimi Savage, provides a Narradrama activity aimed at inviting preferred possibilities and outcomes into one's life. This can be done individually or with family and friends. The activity demonstrates how the process of creative expression can be used to bring meaning, self-understanding, empathy, connection to others and other benefits.

Often in the New Year we try to initiate fresh starts, resolutions, plans for self-improvements with the best intentions. We make wish lists. However as the months progress we often discover that our staying power or desire to follow through on our intentions wane. Our lists remain on paper. The result of that can mean further disappointment in our abilities. How do we fulfill our wishes with action? I suggest a mixture of visual art and role-playing as a means of separating you from a problem or unfulfilled desire. Narradrama (Dunne, 2006) invites you to re-story certain life experiences and possible fixed internal narratives with creative action. You know those old internal tapes that repeat: "You can't get what you want!" What about exploring a self-improvement idea you may have this year by actually experiencing alternative and possible choices?

Drama therapist, Dunne's (2006) possibility extension exercise of creating a fantasy house asks us to imagine a house as a "metaphor for life"(p.269). Houses come in all shapes and sizes. Preferences are unique to individual needs, life styles, and dreams. What if each room in the house represents something you really want in your life such as a special moment, a specific type of relationship, or a dream come true?

Visual Art: Build the house.

Gather blank paper, pastels, paints, colored pencils, crayons, scissors, glue stick, tissue paper— even found objects and create a preferred story for the New Year.

- In your mind's eye, go on a visual tour of your ideal house. The keys are yours! You are in your fantasy house and you get to decide what to put into each room and what each room will become. The house or room can have a name or title as if it is its own entity.
- Draw and color the fantasy house and/or use scraps of magazine images and create a collage of succinct images that represent each room. Maybe, create a 3-D version! Make certain you show the outside and inside of your house. Be specific with detail. You may put meaningful objects or colors or even people (individuals you know or do not know) in those rooms.
- Take the time during this activity to reflect on what your really want and not on what you do not have. Enjoy having your preferences in your fantasy home now. It does not

matter if in reality you actually live in an ideal home or not. This is a metaphor to help you get what you want in life.

Role Play: Speak to the house.

- You may decide to hone in on an object you placed in one of the rooms that really means something to you. You may feel connected to a color you used that appeals to your spirit. Create *imaginal dialogue* (McNiff, 2008) and *role play* with the overall house itself, or the object in the room, the specific room, the color of a room, a person placed in the environment. In other words, as you focus on the object or entity that you placed there, you can say anything you want. Perhaps there is gratitude or a partnership to relish. Do this once or go room to room.
- Maybe that object or person can respond and support you for acknowledging them or placing them there too! *Role reversal* occurs when you experience being the object or person you spoke to. This is about a healthy freeing up to *play* and using the imagination, which is applicable for all ages.
- Perhaps your art work, dialogue, or monologue from role playing can be kept in your journal or perhaps your fantasy house can be placed somewhere visible as testimony. **Can this very real experience open up new possibilities for you on what you want in your life?** This marks a very real beginning to a New Year.

Adaptation for family and friends:

- Children can draw and color their fantasy house and rooms and are allowed to put anything in the rooms that they want. They can create *pretend* dialogue. Please guide their freedom to express with things that are good for them and not harmful.
- Friends or other adult family members may want to delve into designing rooms in their house that represent a healthy relationship or that symbolize internal peace or forgiveness, for example. They may even create a village with personal, symbolic representations. **What does that look like for each person? Who would be there? What are the values of the family or citizens who live there? Where does the creator of the image fit in the picture?** Perhaps each person designs a room of their own in a shared house or a house of their own in a village as a group project.
- Your *imaginal dialogues* can be brief and done alone or in a family. They can be one word or a few sentences. Discussion with your family or friends can ensue from this exercise. **Have you learned anything new about each other? Do you have similar ideas or can you help one another in making any of your thoughts a reality?** In essence, something tangible and real has begun in the New Year that can offer you a foothold for future possibilities.

References

Dunne, P.(2006). *The narrative therapist and the arts: 2nd edition*. Los Angeles, CA: Possibilities Press.

McNiff, S. (2008). Arts-based research & the spectrum of possibilities. In J.G. Knowles & A.L. Coles (Eds.), *Handbook of the arts in qualitative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Mimi Savage MA, RDT, PhD student is a registered drama therapist, an instructor, and presenter in the field of drama therapy. She is completing her dissertation in Expressive

Therapies on foster youth, Narradrama, and digital media this year at Lesley University. She is an instructor for the [UCLArts and Healing Social Emotional Arts \(SEA\) Certificate Program](#) and is the SoCal Chapter President of the [North American Drama Therapy Association \(NADTA\)](#). Contact socalchapter@nadta.org. A previous teaching artist of various populations including special needs and rehab, she created drama therapy programs for children and adults for four years in acute in-patient psychiatric units. She implements drama therapy in group homes for adolescent girls and is facilitating a documentary using Narradrama with women who live on skid row.

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