

ARTS IMPACT LESSON PLAN

Teaching Flexible Thinking through Theater

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Enduring Understanding

Accessing the spontaneous flow of intuitive thought can lead to more flexibility in the creative process.

Lesson Description (Use for family communication and displaying student art)

Through theater games that call on fundamental improvisational skills, students will explore and develop the capacity to be spontaneous in their creative choices. The concept of "intuitive creative flow" will be further developed through improvisational dialogue and playwriting. The 21st Century Skills of communication and collaboration will be used throughout the lesson.

Learning Targets and Assessment Criteria

Target: Thinks creatively.

Criteria: Gathers ideas; tries multiple solutions; and makes artistic choices.

Target: Collaborates with others.

Criteria: Communicates ideas to others; makes compromises; incorporates input/feedback.

Vocabulary

Arts:
Action
Cause & Effect
Communication
Cooperation
Expression
Extemporaneous
Speaking
Dialogue
Focus
Game
Gesture
Improvisation
Interaction
Intuition
Movement Quality
Playwriting
Prop
Sense Memory
Spontaneity
Tableau
Voice

Materials

Museum Artworks or Performance Seattle, WA

Seattle Children's Theatre

Tacoma, WA

Broadway Center for the Performing Arts

Materials

Small prop (e.g. a wooden spoon); Flip chart and markers; Generic Dialogue Chart; Paper; Pens/pencils

Resources

Improvisation for the Theater by Viola Spolin, Northwestern University Press 1983

Learning Standards

WA Arts State Grade Level Expectations

For the full description of each WA State Arts Grade Level Expectation, see:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/Arts/Standards>

- 1.1.1 Concepts: Character, Conflict
- 1.2.1 Skills and Techniques: Movement/Stance, Gesture, Facial Expression
- 1.2.2 Skills and Techniques: Voice
- 1.2.6 Skills and Techniques: Improvisation
- 1.4.1 Audience Skills
- 2.1.1 Creative Process
- 2.2.1 Performance Process
- 2.3.1 Responding Process
- 3.1.1 Communicates through the Arts
- 4.2.1 Connects Theater and Writing

Early Learning Guidelines, if applicable

For a full description of Washington State Early Learning and Child Development Guidelines see:

<http://www.del.wa.gov/development/guidelines/>

- (Age 4-5) 3. Touching, seeing, hearing and moving around: Using the large muscles (gross motor skills): move with purpose from one place to another using the whole body; enjoy challenging self to try new and increasingly difficult activities.
- (Age 4-5) 6. Learning about my world: Arts: show creativity and imagination.

Steps in the Creative Process

PART ONE (first 90 minutes) GROUNDWORK

1. Creative Flexibility = intuitive action & spontaneity.

Creative flexibility in the theater can best be expressed by the concept of the “free flow of spontaneous thought.”

VIOLA SPOLIN: *Intuition is often thought to be an endowment or a mystical force enjoyed by the gifted alone. Yet all of us have known moments when the right answer “just came” or we did “exactly the right thing without thinking.” The average person has been known to transcend the limitations of the familiar, courageously enter the area of the unknown, and release momentary genius within him/her self. When response to experience takes place at this intuitive level, when a person functions beyond a constricted intellectual plane, his intelligence is freed. The intuitive can only respond in immediacy – right now. It comes bearing its gifts in the moments of spontaneity, the moment when we are freed to relate and act, involving ourselves in the moving, changing world around us. Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom... it is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of creative expression.*

One of the tried and true methods of developing the skills of creative flexibility in the theater is through what we call “theater games.” Most of these games are explorations of improvisational acting skills. These skills form the foundation of what could be called the “actors toolkit.”

2. WARM-UP: Memory of touch.

GAME: Sense Memory

- Students find a space. Through prompts, each student will explore the memory of how a familiar object feels in their hands. The task is to recreate the sensation through expression, gesture, and action.
(OBJECTS: soap, a flower, a book, a kitten)

3. INTUITION: Following the imagination’s lead.

GAME: Passing the Imaginary Ball/Object

- In a large circle, students explore passing imaginary objects from person to person. The task is to create the object through expression, gesture, and action.
- Use COLLABORATION/COMMUNICATION with the persons each student receives the object from and passes it off to.

4. SPONTANEITY 1: Following another actor’s lead.

GAME: What is it?

- In a large circle, an actual object (a hand prop) is passed from person to person.
- The **initiator** begins to use the object in a way that it is not meant to be used (for example, the object is a wooden spoon, the leader begins using it as a hairbrush).
- The **observer** of the action asks, “What is it?”
- The **initiator** responds, “It’s a hairbrush. Try it.”
- The **initiator** then hands the object to the **observer** and he/she begins to repeat the action of the wooden spoon as hairbrush.
- The next person in the circle becomes the new **observer** and asks, “What is it?”
- The new **initiator** (still using the object as a hairbrush) using the action that he/she is already using, spontaneously transforms the object into something new (for example, a back scratcher) and passes it off to the observer with, “It’s a backscratcher. Try it.”
- Repeat the sequence through the circle.

- Use COLLABORATION/COMMUNICATION with the persons each student receives the object from and passes it off to.
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5. SPONTANEITY 2: Verbal stream of consciousness.

GAME: Gabba Jabba

- Entire class stands (or sits) in a circle.
 - Explain the term EXTEMPORANEOUS SPEAKING.
 - *When one is asked to speak on a subject without any time to practice or rehearse, we call that "Extemporaneous speaking."*
 - Teacher stands in the middle of the circle and one-by-one goes around the circle.
 - Teacher chooses a topic and tells each student "Tell me everything in the world there is to know about _____."
 - Each student will then have 20 seconds to be "The Master" of this topic. Teacher should use a wristwatch or stopwatch to time the students if possible.
 - Each student gets a different topic to talk about. The topics can be ANYTHING (soup, balloons, pants, winter, music, ice cream, flowers, you name it!!). If you aren't sure you can come with 20-28 topics on the fly, make a list before you do this warm-up.
 - Students can say absolutely ANYTHING they want to about their topic—remember they are the master of their topic (remind them of this often). The point is not the content of what they say but how many words they can pack into those 20 seconds.
 - Use COMMUNICATION of thought through extemporaneous speaking.
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6. INTUITIVE & SPONTANEOUS ACTING: Adapting to shifting situations.

GAME: Generic Dialogue

- Divide into pairs. Decide who is "A" and who is "B."
- Teacher projects the sample of GENERIC DIALOGUE (at end of lesson).
- Pairs begin acting out dialogue in whatever manner seems appropriate to the dialogue.
- Teacher assigns new situations and/or contexts in which the students act out the dialogue.

SITUATIONS:

1. "A" is a parent. "B" is a defiant teen.
 2. "A" is a speeding driver. "B" is the cop who pulled you over.
 3. A romantic breakup.
 4. Kids on a playground.
 5. Individuals very suspicious of each other.
 6. Competitive athletes.
- Use COLLABORATION/COMMUNICATION with partners in creating a scene.
 - Share out and reflect on observations and experiences.
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PART TWO (second 90 minutes) APPLICATION

1. ROUND ROBIN IMPROVISATION of DIALOGUE.

From lesson "Improvise Arguments" – 6th Grade TA-Infused Writing Lesson 3

<http://arts-impact.org/lesson-plans/curricula/>

- *In an improvisation, actors act out a scene without a script. You figure out what to say as you go, just like in real life. You'll communicate your own character's argument and reasons, but you'll also listen and respond to a different point of view.*
 - Students create two circles, one inside the other, so they are facing their partners. Call "Freeze" after the scene has run for about 1 minute. Rotate the inner circle one partner while the outer circle stands still. Repeat scene, then freeze and rotate again.
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2. CAUSE AND EFFECT TABLEAUX

From lesson "Cause and Effect Tableaux" – 7th grade Theater & Writing Infused Lesson 1

<http://arts-impact.org/lesson-plans/curricula/>

- Students define the conflict, identify when and where it took place, and brainstorm who was involved.
 - They create a tableau showing the conflict's effect from their characters' points of view.
 - Students create a second tableau showing the cause from their characters' points of view.
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3. PASS THE PAPER PLAYWRITING

From lesson "Pass the Paper Playwriting" – 7th grade Theater & Writing Infused Lesson 2

<http://arts-impact.org/lesson-plans/curricula/>

- Students compare and contrast different characters involved in a conflict from Social Studies.
 - They contribute to writing multiple scenes with small groups through a process called Pass the Paper Playwriting.
 - They write lines from one character's point of view, and read a scene aloud with vocal expression.
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4. REFLECTIONS

- Analyze how to use flexible thinking in theater and other subject areas. Reflect on and share your collaborative and creative process. Explore how this process could be used in the classroom.

GENERIC DIALOGUE

A: How are you doing today?

B: I'm just fine, thank you.

A: Nice weather we're having.

B: I think it's going to rain.

A: I hate the rain.

B: I kind of like it.