Foundations of Acting

# Unit Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of acting foundations by application to an informal performance of a contemporary scene with a partner.

## Class Level: Beginning theatre—80-minute class periods

# Learning Plan:

### Honesty

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: *Students will show their ability to synthesize confidence, creativity, and honesty by reading a short, original poem to their classmates*.

ASSESSMENT: Students can be assessed by their group members on performance and participation through a peer evaluation rubric.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Video clips from *Friends*, chalk/dry erase markers for writing on the board, visual or audio examples of “I am From” poetry, individual copies of *Almost, Maine* scenes for each student.

* Step One—Hook

Ask students to watch for qualities of good acting and bad acting as they watch the following video clips: *Friends* Season 2 Episode 13: Joey overacting in the end credits, Season 3 Episode 7: Joey becomes a lecturer for Soap Opera acting

*Transition*: Draw a line down the center of the board and label one side “good acting” and one side “bad acting.” Invite the students to come up to the board and write down their ideas.

* Step Two— Graffiti Wall Discussion:

Brainstorm as a class the qualities of good and bad acting. Discuss with the students the general trends shown on the graffiti wall. Guide the discussion so it narrows in on a focus of honest acting:

* + Good acting: honest, sincere, relatable, practiced, believable, well-rehearsed, genuine, open to constructive criticism, not overdone
  + Bad acting: fake, hamming, craves attention, overacting, seeks spotlight, detracts from others in the scene, misses the big picture, overly dramatic, trite and expected rather than creative, defensive
* Step Three— Directions

Explain that the goal for the day is to practice qualities of honest acting. Tell the students that this exercise will better prepare them for future performances. They will be writing short, original poems and then reading them to their classmates.

Introduce the “I am from” poem by displaying projected examples, listening/watching performances, or distributing printed copies:

* + [Basic poem template](http://www.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/t/Target_I_am_from%20poem.pdf)
  + [George Ella Lyon reading her poem (audio)](http://www.georgeellalyon.com/audio/where.mp3)
  + [Where I'm From poetry examples](http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html)
* Step Four— Discussion

Use the poetry examples to spark a class discussion about confidence, creativity, comfort, and honesty:

* + What qualities about these performances demonstrate honesty? (creative, original, sincere, not showy, relatable, personal details and stories)
  + How can we imitate those qualities in our own performances? (brainstorm personal stories, add thoughts, feelings, and opinions, be confident, say it in your own words, do it in your own way, don’t try to be something/someone else, do what makes you comfortable, be honest with yourself)

Challenge the students to pick 2 or 3 specific qualities from the graffiti wall that they are going to try to incorporate into their poetry performance. Iterate that this is a low-risk activity.

* Step Five—Independent Practice

Give the students individual practice time to compose their short “I am from” poems and rehearse reading them out loud. Make sure the students are aware of how much time they have remaining by periodically checking in and announcing the time they have left. Assist the students who are struggling to write or practice. Consider leaving examples available for the students to look to for guidance. Or generate ideas of what to write about as a class, writing down the answers on the board for the students to reference later.

* Step Six—Group Practice

After the students are done composing and rehearsing, play a few short warm-ups altogether to bolster confidence and comfort: (tongue twisters, ghost giggle, send a hand squeeze around the circle, etc.). Explain that acting warm-ups are a great way to battle nerves and make room for confident, creative, and honest performances.

Divide students into groups (about 4 students each) for poetry readings. Pass out copies of the peer review rubric to the students, giving each student enough to evaluate each of the other students in his or her group. Encourage the students to give positive feedback about the qualities of good performance that they observe after each student presents his or her poem. As the students share their poetry, move around the room observing every group.

* Step Seven—Checking for Understanding

Gather students back together as class and ask if anyone saw some qualities of honest performance they want to share. Be prepared to share success stories that you observed as a teacher as needed.

* + Did you have a favorite poem you heard someone else read?
  + How did it feel to read your poem out loud?
  + Were you successful in incorporating the qualities of honest performance?
* Step Eight—Directions

Having predetermined partnerships and scenes from John Cariani’s *Almost, Maine*, explain the parameters of the upcoming final performance for the unit—contemporary scenes with partners. Tell the students that the future lesson topics will help to prepare them for their scenes but encourage them to begin memorizing right away. Distribute the assignments for scenes and partners. Give them the remaining class time to meet with their partners, read their scenes, and brainstorm ideas. Ask the students to think about how they will apply the qualities of good, honest acting into their performances.

Possible *Almost, Maine* scenes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Scene | Characters |
| Prologue | Pete and Ginette |
| Sad and Glad | Jimmy, Sandrine, and Waitress |
| Getting it Back | Lendall and Gayle |
| Where it Went | Phil and Marci |
| Story of Hope | Man and Hope |

### Movement

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: *Students will demonstrate their understanding of stage directions and blocking by writing basic blocking into a short scene.*

ASSESSMENT: Students can be assessed by effectively blocking meaningful movement into their scenes and communicating with their partners.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Blindfold, stage directions worksheet, chalk/markers to write on the board, masking tape, overhead of the scene between East and Glory on pages 20-21 of *Almost, Maine*

* Step One—Hook

Create an obstacle course by flipping the desks and chairs onto their sides and laying them out in a maze-like pattern on the floor. Ask for two student volunteers to navigate the course. One student will attempt to walk through the maze blindfolded while the other student gives him or her directions on which way to move. Ask the rest of the class to act as “spotters” on the sides of the obstacle course to make sure the blindfolded student doesn’t stumble over the desks and chairs.

*Transition*: Explain to students that like the obstacle course example, directors give their actors directions about how they would like the actors to move on stage.

Tell the students that directors and actors use a special language to communicate directional movement on stage called **blocking**. Tell the students that you will teach them today how to communicate in this language.

* Step Two—Instruction

Distribute the stage directions worksheet to every member of the class. Draw a similar 3x3 grid on the board and encourage the students to help you fill in the nine squares with the proper names of stage directions (center stage, stage right, stage left, up stage, down stage, up stage right, up stage left, down stage right, down stage left).

* + Everyone should label the bottom of the grid with “audience” to show where the audience members will be seated.
  + Ask for students who know what one of the squares should be labeled to come up and write it on the appropriate square on the board. Walk the students through filling in any of the remaining squares that were not completed by student volunteers.
  + In every square, write out the full name and the appropriate acronym for each stage direction. For example, “down stage right” and “DR.”
* Step Three—Check for Understanding

With a 3x3 grid taped to the carpet (large enough for groups of students to stand in), students will pick a stage direction to stand in and wait for a stage direction to be called out. You can either use a random system (like a die) to determine which box to call out, or generate the answers on your own with your back turned. Each round, any students standing in the stage direction that was called are out. The “safe” students pick a new square to stand in and hope to survive another round. The last student remaining wins.

* + Encourage eliminated students to participate as referees on the sidelines or they can take turns choosing the next stage direction to be called.
  + The students should all be practicing their identification of stage directions.
  + As students get more comfortable with the stage directions, begin to speed up the game after a few rounds, making it a bigger challenge for the players to move quickly and for the student “referees” to determine who should be out.
* Step Four—Instruction

Have the students return to their desks. Explain to them the shorthand method of writing blocking into scripts using the acronyms of the stage directions and an ‘X’ to signify “cross.”

* For example, the directive to move from up stage left to center stage would look like: “UL X C.”
* As practice, ask for two volunteers to play the roles of actor and director. The director should write a blocking command on the board and the actor should demonstrate this blocking by moving through the appropriate tape grids on the floor.
* Ask the other members of the class if the volunteers played their roles correctly. Validate student involvement for both correct and incorrect answers.
* Step Five—Guided Practice

Ask the students to divide into their assigned partnerships and get out their copies of their scenes from *Almost, Maine*. Project the overhead for the class to see and explain to the students that performers write blocking into their scripts with specific intentions for movement in mind.

* + What would too much movement look like on stage? (messy, uncoordinated, chaotic, unrehearsed, busy, confusing, purposeless)
  + What would too little movement look like on stage? (stiff, tense, unnatural, boring)
  + So how do we decide when to move in our scenes? Explain that there’s an easy trick for deciding where and when to move: finding **beats**. Beats are little moments of conflict that can be found by looking for a change of subject, when somebody enters or exits, when the power/upper hand changes between characters, etc.
  + Together as a class, look for beats in the overhead scene. At each beat, write in an example of blocking using stage directions.
* Step Six—Group Practice

The students should now spend this portion of class to block their scripts. Tell the students that their scripts will be collected and graded on the final performance day according to the following rubric. Check in with each of the groups to evaluate their understanding and progress.

* + Students should identify multiple beats and write in blocking at each of them.
  + All movements should have meaning.
  + Blocking should be written on speaking lines, rather than in moments of silence.
  + Encourage the students to make their marks in pencil in case they want to make changes later.

### Character

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: *Students will demonstrate their ability to develop a character by composing a character’s circumstances journal.*

ASSESSMENT: Students can be assessed on their completion of the practice character journal and later on the quality of work in their characters’ circumstances journals.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Collection of character props (more than enough for one per student), jar of Popsicle sticks with students’ names written on them, extra chalk/markers for writing on the board, character journal assignment handout and rubric, sheets of unlined paper, crayons, colored pencils

* Step One—Hook

At the beginning of class, have a variety of household items and props (kitchen utensils, articles of clothing, office items, small trinkets, etc.) displayed on a table at the front of the room. Encourage the students to walk around the table for a few minutes to get a good look at every item and then ask them to return to their seats. Draw the Popsicle sticks one by one. When students’ names are called, they should pick an item from the table and take it back with them to their seat.

*Transition*: Once all of the students have items, direct them to list characteristics about it on a sheet of paper. For example, a leather glove might be described as soft, worn, black, stylish, wrinkled, warm, etc. Move around the room as they do this, offering support and motivation to students who are struggling to generate ideas. Inform the students that the more descriptive words they can come up with about their prop, the better.

* Step Two—Group Practice

Direct the students to get into small groups (of 2 or 3 people) and share their character props and lists with their group members. The group members should offer their own ideas about characteristics they see in each other’s props. Tell the students to expand their list of characteristics as much as possible with the assistance of their classmates.

* Step Three—Discussion
  + What were some of your favorite characteristics you heard listed about others’ items or that you came up with about your item?
  + What are some of the visual, physical traits and circumstances we can use to describe a character?

As they think of these qualities, students should write them on the board as a graffiti wall. Add items from this list to the board as necessary:

* + Height and weight
  + Coloring
  + Age
  + Facial features
  + Clothes they wear
  + Food they eat
  + Occupation
  + Personal Hygiene
  + House they live in
  + Hobbies
  + Education
  + Voice
  + Gestures
  + Posture
* Step Four—Independent Practice

Put the drawing supplies and paper out for the students’ use and instruct them to create a picture of their character from *Almost, Maine* using details from the script and ideas from the graffiti wall. Move around the room and offer advice about how individuals can incorporate characteristics from the class discussion to their illustration.

* Step Five— Directions

As students are finishing up the final details of their artwork, distribute the character journal assignment handout to every student. Tell the students that the journal is due on the final performance day. Each question should be answered in a paragraph with supporting examples from the script.

For now, a shorter version of this same assignment is due the following class period. They should take 10-15 minutes to answer each of the questions about themselves (NOT their character) in 1-3 sentences before next class period. Encourage them to remember the discussion about character traits and circumstances.

### Objectives and Tactics

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: *Students will show their ability to write proper objectives and tactics by completing a basic scoring of objectives and tactics into their scripts.*

ASSESSMENT: Students can be assessed on their participation in the Objective Detective game and the class discussions.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Video clip from *Friends*, envelope containing slips of paper printed with scene objectives, chalk/dry erase markers to write on the board, overhead of the scene between East and Glory on pages 20-21 of *Almost, Maine* from previous class period (to be used as a scored script example)

* Step One— Hook

Direct the students to journal for 4-5 minutes about a time that they wanted to accomplish something important, e.g. extended curfew, allowance raise, job application, etc. Direct the students to answer these questions in their writing:

* + What was their goal (objective)?
  + What steps did they take to accomplish it? (What were their tactics?)
  + Did the other people involved in the situation want the same or a different outcome?
  + What was the outcome? (Did the tactics work?)
  + Would the student do anything different if they were to try this objective again?

*Transition*:Ask for a few volunteers to read their writing out loud.

* Step Two—Discussion
  + What were some of the different outcomes you heard from students’ writing?
  + What were some tactics that they used to accomplish their objective?
  + What are some persuasive devices we use to attain our goals? (bargaining, guilting, begging)

As they list different tactics, write them on the board. Direct the students to pay careful attention to the video clip for how the objectives of different characters affect each other.

* Step Three—Checking for Understanding

Play a video clip from Season 6 Episode 6 of*Friends* (Chandler is wants to give Joey financial help, but Joey won’t accept the “charity” money. So Chandler tries several tactics to get Joey to take the $1500 unwittingly).

* + What do each of the characters want in the scene? (Joey wants to maintain the friendship even though Chandler is moving out and is trying to give Joey money; Chandler wants to give Joey financial help but because Joey won’t accept it, Chandler has to try different ways to trick Joey into taking the money)
  + How do we know what it is that the characters want? What do the characters do to reveal their objectives? (Chandler instigates a bet over foosball, Chandler makes up the gambling game called “Cups,” Joey buys a pizza to celebrate the last night as roommates, Joey rejects the gift money because he thinks it will put a strain on the friendship)

Draw a connection between the video clip and an introduction to objectives and tactics. Chandler and Joey each had an objective and it was apparent because of the different tactics each character tried. Explain that objectives are the goals of a character and tactics are the methods that a character employs to get what they want. As demonstrated by the video clip and the examples of student writing, objectives are affected by the people around us.

* Step Four—Guided Practice

Explain to the students the procedure for playing the Objective Detective game.

* + Give each student a slip of paper with their secret objective printed on it.  Tell them that they will be performing in a small scene with another student and that their goal is to achieve their objective before the end of the scene.
  + Remind them to try tactics from the discussion.
  + Model the game by playing the first round with a student.

After every student has had a turn to play, ask the students:

* + How can you correctly guess some of the players’ objectives?
  + As performers, why do you believe you were successful or not?
  + What makes some objectives stronger or weaker? Easier/harder to achieve?
* Step Five— Instruction

Using examples from the game to help students learn which objectives are more effective, teach students a formula for writing and acting objectives. Write the formulae on the board for students to see.

Acting using objectives and tactics should look like this:

* + Identify the need
  + Try an action/tactic
  + Watch for a reaction
  + Adjust and try again

Write objectives and tactics that go through another person:

* + Objectives should be written as “I want Name to Action, or I want to Action Name” and should cover the length of the scene.
  + Tactics should be written as “to Action” with each beat in the scene.

Explain the difference between acting objectives versus emotions.  Highlight how observation, listening, reacting, and improvising are essential to playing tactics and objectives. Actors have to observe and listen to their partners carefully to determine whether or not their tactic worked to get their objective. If it doesn’t work, characters may have to improvise a new tactic and try again.

* Step Seven—Group Practice

Direct students to practice writing their own objectives with their partner for their scenes from *Almost, Maine*. They should be including how they will know whether or not they accomplished their goal, following the pattern from in-class practice. Show the students the example of a scored script, informing them that they will need to turn in their scripts scored on final performance day. When they feel like their writing is polished, students should write their objectives and tactics in their scripts.  Remind the students to note the evidence that the character needs to know whether or not they achieved the objective.

Scene Objectives for Objective Detective Game

A: I want B to apologize.

B: I want A to offer forgiveness.

A: I want to play a game with B.

B: I want A to leave me alone.

A: I want to make B cry.

B: I want to make A laugh.

A: I want to B to say, “You were right. I was wrong.”

B: I want A to tell me that I am right.

A: I want B to come to the party.

B: I want A to say that the party isn’t important.

A: I want B to do my homework.

B: I want A to do my chores.

A: I want to B to ask my friend out on a date.

B: I want to ask A on out a date.

A: I want to borrow money from B.

B: I want A to loan me the car.

### Rehearsal

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: *Students will demonstrate their understanding of the rehearsal process by completing a peer evaluation.*

ASSESSMENT: Students can be assessed on their participation in the peer review and rehearsal process.

MATERIALS NEEDED: fun-size candy bars, peer review evaluation forms

* Step One—Check for Understanding

Ask for a student volunteer to come scribe for the class on the board. Ask the class to review the elements they need to include in their final performance. Encourage them to consult their rubrics for hints. As the students brainstorm answers, the student scribe should record them on the board. If the class is hesitant to offer ideas, pass out the candy bars to the students who answer. If one of these elements is not mentioned, be sure to bring it up to remind the class about its requirements for their performances. After all of these have been reviewed, give the student scribe a candy bar as well.

* + Creativity, honesty, confidence, sincerity
  + Lines memorized
  + Scored script: blocking, beats, tactics, obstacles, meaningful movement
  + Character journal (make decisions about your character: props, costumes, voice)
  + Effective communication with scene partner
* Step Two—Guided Practice

Instruct the students to meet with their partners to review their scored scripts. Ask the students to identify one area of concern they have regarding their performance and to generate a goal for rehearsal today to achieve it. Visit with each pair to evaluate their progress. Guide them towards a reasonable goal if they are struggling to create one.

* Step Three—Group Practice

Assign student partnerships to be peer-reviewed by other partnerships. Distribute the peer evaluation rubric to be filled out by the students about their group members’ performances. Encourage the students to give valuable, constructive criticism to each other.

Play a warm-up game first altogether as a class (spider, mingle, animal soup) then announce that the partnerships have fifteen minutes to rehearse their scene independently before they will be peer evaluated by another group. Call out timely reminders for the groups as they rehearse, directing them into the peer review portion of rehearsal when the time comes.

* Step Four—Closure

After group members have viewed each others’ performances, ask them to trade peer evaluation forms with feedback. Encourage the students to talk with their scene partners about their rehearsal and the peer review comments to plan the steps they need to take to polish their scenes before final performance day. Ask the students to show by a raise of hands if they thought that they successfully achieved their rehearsal goal for the day.

### Reacting and Listening

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: *Students will demonstrate their ability to react and listen to a scene partner by participating in improvisation exercises and rehearsal.*

ASSESSMENT: Students can be assessed on their participation in the exercise, class discussion, and rehearsal process.

MATERIALS NEEDED: none

* Step One—Hook

Explain to the students how to play the Questions game. Before beginning, ask them to identify what qualities and skills that they have studied up to this point will help them perform well in the game. Model the first few rounds with the students then let them carry the game on their own. Encourage their confidence and creativity.

* + Two players take turns in a conversation that is strictly in questions.
  + The questions must be relevant answers to the preceding question.
  + If a player fails to ask a question, takes more than three seconds to answer, or simply repeats the question posed to them, they are eliminated and the winning player begins a new round with the next challenger.
* Step Two—Discussion

Lead a discussion about the importance of reacting and listening within performance.

* + What skills are needed to play this game well? (listening, reacting, improvisation, thinking ahead)
  + What are specific moments in your scenes that require careful listening and reacting?
* Step Three—Group Practice

Let the students separate into their partnerships for their final class period of rehearsal. Encourage the students to practice listening and reacting in their rehearsal. Visit with each partnership to discuss the feedback they received from their peers. Ask the students how they are using the feedback to improve their performance. Review with them the expectations of the final. Coach and clarify where needed.

Before the end of the class period, remind the students to bring with them their character development journals to the final performance.

### Final Performance

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: *Students will show their ability to apply acting foundations to their performance by presenting their final scenes to the class.*

ASSESSMENT: Students can be assessed following the rubrics for their character journals, scored scripts, and final performance.

MATERIALS NEEDED: rubrics for journals, scripts, and performance

* Step One—Hook

Lead the class in some warm-ups. Encourage them to feel confident, creative, and comfortable. Ask them to tell you what the basic expectations are for their performance today. As a class, walk through the different qualities and skills that the unit has taught about performance.

* Step Two—

The students should perform their scenes for the rest of the class. The scenes can either be performed in narrative order or by volunteer basis.

* Step Three—Closure

Collect the character journals and scored scripts from all of the students. Celebrate their achievement as a class by positive feedback and playing some of their favorite drama games.