**Creating a Character *by Cali Wilkes***

**Lesson One- Types of Characters (Stock Characters)**

Learning Objective: The students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of stock characters by participating in content-less scenes.

Materials Needed: Pictures of different types of people, content-less scene, different combinations of stock characters.

Hook:

As students enter the room, have pictures of different types of people on the whiteboard. (make sure the pictures show a range of ages, ethnicities, and body shapes—can be from plays, television, anything) Once the class is settled down have them come up and look at these pictures. As they look at them take notice of the different types of people represented. Give the students 2-3 minutes to look at the pictures.

Step One: Transition

Ask the class what different types of people did you see represented in these pictures? Ask for a volunteer to come up to the white board and write down what the class throws out. Once the students have thrown out several different examples, ask the class who has heard the term stock character? Define what a stock character is as a class. (A fictional character based on a common literary or social stereotype, influenced by culture)

Step Two: Instruction

Have each person get with a partner from the class and have them pick one stock character. Once that is picked have them write down distinguishing indicators that make their stock character unique. Prepare a short improvised scene showcasing the stock character.

Step Three: Practice

Give the students 5-7 minutes to prepare the improvised scene. Check with the class after five minutes to see where they stand. As they are working encourage them to add as much detail as they can to create a convincing character.

Step Four: Performance

Gather the students together. Ask for a volunteer to go first. Tell the whole class as well as the performers that we as the audience will guess what stock character you are playing. Spend 10-15 minutes letting people perform their scenes.

Step Five: Discussion

What choices or moments stuck out to you? Where do you see stock characters today? How do stock characters apply to you as theater practitioners today? How do stock characters affect casting in theater? Do people see you as a stock character?

Step Six: Instruction

Hand out a content-less scene to each person in the class. Have them get with a different partner then who they were previously working with. We are going to test our knowledge of the differences between different stock characters. I am going to yell out a two different stock characters and you and your partner decide which one is which and then act through the scene in your own place in the room. Once you have performed it in those characters I will yell out a different combination. (hero and damsel in distress, villain and side kick, hero and villain, and etc) Ask for combinations from the class. We will do this several times.

Step Seven: Practice

Have the students practice taking on different types of characters. Spend a total of 10-15 minutes max on this activity.

Step Eight: Performance

Ask for a volunteer to come up in front of the class and perform their content-less scene for the class. If enough time have as many people as they would like perform. Tell the students that these do not need to be polished or perfect it is just an exercise.

Step Nine: Discussion

Gather all the students together and ask them what things did notice while doing this content-less scene? As an actor what was it like to switch from character to character quickly? What did you use to help distinguish a difference between each time you performed it? What was difficult? Looking at Beauty and the Beast what stock characters do you see within that show?

ASSESSMENT: Students will show knowledge of stock characters by performing a content-less scene.

SUPPLEMENTS: Copies of different people’s pictures and copies of content-less scenes.

**Lesson Two- Researching a Character**

Learning Objective: Students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge of character research by completing a character background worksheet and drawing a character portrait.

Materials Needed: Character background sheet, statement about Johnny Depp, markers, white paper.

Hook:

Give out a worksheet that has different character on one side and the descriptions on the other side. Give the students 3 minutes to complete it.

Step One: Instruction

Today we are going to be talking about the process an actor needs to go through to truly understand their character. The first step is to do research. The more specific you can make your character the more interesting it will be to watch you on stage.

Step Two: Modeling

Show a short clip of Johnny Depp from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Edward Scissorhands*. Before you begin tell the class to take notice of how Johnny Depp uses his voice and body to create three completely different people. Pay attention to the details.

Step Three: Discussion

Ask the class what did you observe? How did Johnny Depp use his voice and body to create three completely different characters? If I didn’t know very much about film I would think that these three roles were played by three different people.

Step Four: Instruction

Each actor creates a character in a different way. Ask the class how do you go about creating a character? What is the first thing you do? No process is superior then another if they all create believable character. I want to share one example of how Johnny Depp prepares to play a role, have a student read the passage. This passage shows us that research is NECESSARY!!! And the importance of asking questions.

Step Five:

Give each student their scene assignments. Have them get with their partner and take a few minutes to read it through. When you are reading it through write down different questions you have about your own character as well as the people in their life. Share those questions with your partner and discuss possible answers.

Step Six:

Bring the class together. Hand out a character background worksheet. Give them three minutes to fill it out.

Step Seven: Instruction

Take your character background sheet and the list of questions you have about your character and come up to the front of the classroom and get a piece of paper and some coloring utensils and lets do what Johnny Depp does when he prepares. Draw a portrait of your character. Each choice you make should have a purpose behind it. We are going to present these to a partner.

Step Eight:

Give them 10 minutes to draw their portraits. Walk around the room and see how they are doing.

Step Nine: Partner Work

Once they are done with their portraits have them turn to a person near them. Have partner A share with partner B their character. The person who is listening is allowed to ask any questions they have. Each partner has 2 minutes to share. If you finish before time is up give more detail about your character and explain WHY! Once time is up have them switch.

Step Ten: Assessment

Ask for volunteers who would like to share their portraits with the whole class and the reasoning behind their decisions. Invite the class to ask them any questions they like.

Step Eleven: Discussion

Research is extremely important. Take all of your questions that you are still unsure about and go find the answers. Read the play that your scene is from. Research the context of the play. Tell them to turn in their character background worksheets.

ASSESSMENT: Student will demonstrate their knowledge of character research by completing a character background worksheet and drawing a character portrait.

SUPPLEMENTS: Printed statement about Johnny Depp, white paper, markers, copies of character background worksheet.

**Lesson Three-Physicality of a Character**

Learning Objective: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of character physicality by participating in classroom activities and discussion.

Materials Needed: White board and a marker.

Hook:

When the students enter the room, have written on the board, “Look at the character you are playing in the scene and think about the following questions

-Is your face expressive or dead pan?

-Do you have any physical mannerisms?

-Do you walk fast or slowly?

-Do you carry any character prop or accessory?

-What part of your body do you lead with?

-Is you voice high pitched or low pitched?

-Do you speak rapidly or slowly?

-Do you have an accent?

-Do your clothes match or are they mismatched?

Give the students 3 minutes to reflect on these questions and write down their responses.

Step One: Transition

Have students turn in their character background sheet into the basket. Then invite them to follow you to the auditorium—tell them to not touch any of the play props or set pieces.

Step Two: Instruction

Tell them to find a place on the stage. Once everyone is their have them walk around normally—how they walk every day. After they have been walking around neutral for a while call out a specific part of the body to lead with. Demonstrate for them—walk in an exaggerated manner. Lead with your forehead, knees, hips, stomach, chest, toes, and heels.

Step Three: Practice

Go through multiple different body parts leading. Spend about 10 minutes on this activity.

Step Four: Discussion

What was that experience like? Leading with what body part felt the most natural and which felt the most uncomfortable? What body part do you lead with naturally? Which body part would your character lead with and why?

Step Five: Transition/Instruction

We are going to be focusing on the physical nature of each of your scenes today. Get with your partner and read over the script to understand the basic outline of the conversation. Now find a place in the room where you have enough space to act out your scene. I want you to run through the scene without using any words. Only focus on the actions and the physical nature of the scene.

Step Six: Group Practice

Give the students 5 minutes to run through their scenes without using words.

Step Seven: Partner Discussion

Share with your partner what that experience was like? What did you learn about the physical nature of your scene? What worked? What didn’t work? Is there a lot of movement within your scene?

Step Eight: Instruction

We are going to do another exercise to have you focus on the physical nature of your scene and the character you are playing. This time when you go through your scene I want each of you to pick an animal you think represents your character and run your scene as that animal. You can talk but your physical nature should be that animal.

Step Nine: Group Practice

Give them 5 minutes to run their scenes as an animal.

Step Ten: Performance

Ask for one group to come up and share their scene with the class with their animal interpretations.

Step Eleven: Discussion

What did you learn about your character from this animal exercise? Where your physical choices stronger because you were acting like an animal? How can we transfer that willingness to make big physical choices to our scenes?

Step Twelve: Instruction/Practice

For the rest of the period you have time to work on blocking your scene. Think about the things you just learned/experienced about your character. Think about the physical choices you can make to make your character honest and believable.

ASSESSMENT: Each student will participate in scene work activities with their partner.

SUPPLEMENTS: None.

**Lesson Four-Characterization**

Learning Objective: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of characterization by writing a personal monologue.

Materials Needed: An open performing space, student journals.

Hook:

Play a clip from “Wait Until Dark”—have the students look for different things Audrey Hepburn does to create a believable character—respond in their journals.

Step One- Discussion

Discuss what stood out in Audrey Hepburn’s performance. How did she physicalize her character? What made you interested in watching her? (believable)

Step Two- Transition

Define what a believable character is as a class. (To be a believable character you have to take on every action and task as if it were your own). This next activity will challenge us to uncover the details of our characters life so we can be more believable with our acting.

Step Three- Instruction

Split the class up into small groups (5-6 people). Have them find their own place in the room and sit in a circle facing each other. We are going to share things about the character we are playing. Our answers will be from the characters perspective not the actors. We will go around the circle several times and each time around each person has 1 minute to do one of the following (in this order): introduce themselves, talk about someone they love, talk about why they also hate that same person, and then talk about an object that has significance to them.

Step Four-Group Sharing

Tell the group once a minute is up and that they should switch to the next person. Encourage the students that if they finish sharing before their minute is up to go back and add more detail until time is up. Do not move on until the minute is up. Go around the circle four times.

Step Five- Individual Practice

Once each group is done have the students go back to their seats and pull out a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Write a short monologue as their character where they include all the stuff they talked about in the circle.

Step Six- Performance in Groups

Have the students get back into their groups and perform their monologues with one another. Each student should perform their monologues with one another. Once everyone is shared have each group nominate a student to share their monologue with the whole class.

Step Seven- Instruction

Before the nominated people perform tell the class, to take notice of things that stick out to them, what choices were powerful, what made a choice powerful, what connection did you make with this character?

Step Eight- Performance

Have the students perform back to back. If there is enough time ask for more students to perform.

Step Nine- Discussion

Ask the students to respond to the performances. Think about the questions I asked before they began and share your insights.

Step Ten- Partner Work Time

If enough time is left in class have the students get with their scene partner and work on their scene. Have the students reflect upon the things they learned about their character. How can that help influence the scene? Work on memorization.

ASSESSMENT: Students will demonstrate a deep understanding of their character by writing a personal monologue.

SUPPLEMENTS: None.

**Lesson Five- Looking the Part**

Learning Objective: Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of their character by developing the look of their character through costumes and accessories.

Materials Needed: Access to costumes, coloring supplies (optional)

Welcome the class. Today we are going to be previewing in groups. Your scene does not have to be performance ready but you have to show evidence of character development.

Hook-

Have each student take out a piece of paper and draw a picture of their character in a place that they love. Have them include details of clothing and accessories. You could even have them color them in with crayon or colored pencils.

Step One-Transition/Instruction

Pull out your picture that you drew of your character and look at the clothes you put them in. Get with your partner and discuss the clothing choices you see your characters in.

Step Two- Partner Discussion

Give the students 3-4 minutes to discuss their characters costumes. As students are discussing tell the students to take into consideration the characters status, time period, occupation in some cases, and what props you would need to make your scene believable.

Step Three-Instruction

Gather all the class together and tell them they have 20 minutes to run through and practice their scenes. They can work in the classroom or the student area across the hall. Tell the students to work the entire time.

Step Four-Practice

Students rehearse their pieces for 20 minutes. Concentrating on believable characters, what they are fighting for, set needs, and being aware of the audience. While the groups are working give each group a number and tell them to remember it.

Step Five- Instruction

Gather all the groups together and tell them that the first half of the numbers will pick out costumes while the other half previews for each other. If you are previewing get with another group and perform for each other. Once one group has performed have the other group give feedback on their attention to character, believability, and overall observations. Then once that is done switch and repeat the same process.

Step Six- Performance

Half the class will be picking out costume pieces while the other half is previewing for each other. Make sure to walk around the classroom to make sure everyone is on task.

Step Seven- Transition

Once the groups are done previewing for each other have the class switch. Those who were picking out costumes now preview for one another.

Step Eight- Discussion

Gather the whole class together and ask the class how they feel about their scenes? Are you making progress with your character? Did you see believable characters? What things do you still need to work on? How is your memorization? Are half of you ready to perform? Make a decision as a class when the final scene performance will be.

ASSESSMENT: Students will demonstrate understanding of their character by previewing for a group of students

SUPPLEMENTS: None.

**Lesson Six –Rehearsal & Preview (2 days)**

Learning Objective: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of character research, characterization, physicality, and stock characters by previewing their scene in front of the class.

Materials Needed: Costumes, Copy of a rubric

Hook-

Ask a student to model a correct way to slate for the whole class.

Step One- Instruction

Review with the class the different parts of a slate.

Step Two- Transition

Give each of the groups their costume pieces. Have them take them and try them on. If students need alterations or a different option tell them to notify you before the end of the class period.

Step Three-Instruction

Have each of the students get with their scene partner and do a speed through of lines. If someone hesitates a tiny bit you have to start from the beginning.

Step Four- Practice

Have student do a speed through for about 8 minutes.

Step Five- Instruction

Tell the class they will be evaluated on a rubric. Have an example of the rubric they will be evaluated on. During moments when you are not rehearsing or waiting for your partner to get changed come to the front of the classroom and look at the requirements you will be graded on.

Step Six- Practice

Get with your partner and rehearse your scene. Spend the rest of the class period running and working the piece.

Step Seven- Wrap-up

Gather all the students back together and ask how the progress is going? Have the students turn to their partners and make one goal for themselves of something they want to improve upon before next rehearsal and or performance.

ASSESSMENT: Students will be assessed on their attendance and participation in rehearsing their piece.

SUPPLEMENTS: Example of the Rubric.

**Lesson Seven- Performance (2 days)**

Learning Objective: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the process of creating a character by performing a 2-3 minute scene with a partner for the class.

Materials Needed- Rubrics

Hook-

Have the students leave their bags and phones in the classroom.  Go to the auditorium.   There will be a table with audition forms on it.  The students will fill them out.  When finished with their forms, the students will give them to the teachers overseeing their auditions.

Step One-Instruction

Hand out rubrics to each student so that they may review their peers as they watch them.  This will allow each student to have notes from both their peers and professors.

Step Two-Transition

The students will observe all the auditions.  The teachers will choose what order the students audition by randomly picking an audition form.

Step Three-Performance

Begin the scene performances.

Step Four- Analysis

Students and teachers will fill rubric with notes and thoughts as students perform.

Step Five- Discussion

What were some characteristics of the best scenes?  What were you pleased with in your scene performance?  What will you do differently next time? How and what would you do to continue to develop your character?

Step Six-Wrap-up

Gather rubrics/ notes from peer-students.

Step Seven-Unit Discussion

What did you learn from this unit?  When will this knowledge be used?  Is it applicable to real life?  If so, how?  How can an actor apply, in real life, the empathy and knowledge gained from portraying and studying characters? What tools or techniques that you learned while acting can be applied to everyday life and other classes?

ASSESSMENT: Students will showcase the skills learned over the past unit on creating character in a scene performance—have to be present.

SUPPLEMENTS: Rubrics.