**Design Sets like the Pros** by Kris Holley

**Objective**: Students will demonstrate their ability to design a set by compiling and presenting a set design project for a scene.

**Class Level:** Beginning for a 48 minute class period

**Main Concepts**: Stage Terminology, Color, Floor Plans, Script Analysis

**1994 National Standards**:

Theatre Foundations III: Standard 3, Objective A and B; Standard 4, Objective A

**Lesson Plans**

1. A Designer's Duties

The students will demonstrate their understanding of a designer’s tasks by taking a short quiz.

2. Analyze Like a Designer

The students will demonstrate their ability to think like a designer by analyzing a chosen script.

3. Investigating the Possibilities

The students will demonstrate effective research technique by compiling all pictorial research for their chosen scene.

4. Stage Lingo

The students will demonstrate their understanding of stages, sets and terminology by participating in educational activities.

5. Coloring Your World

The students will demonstrate their ability to use color design effectively in their scene by creating a paint chip breakdown.

6. Lines and Patterns and Textures, Oh My!

The students will demonstrate their ability to make appropriate line, pattern and texture choices for their scene by completing a design sampler.

7. Arranging Furniture

The students will demonstrate their ability to cluster furniture and set dressings by completing a cluster assignment.

8. Fashioning Floor Plans

The students will learn how to create a floor plan by measuring and sketching out the stage for their scenes.

9. Desired Design Board

The students will demonstrate their ability to compile all their design information by creating and presenting a design board.

**1. A Designer's Duties**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their understanding of a designer’s tasks by taking a short quiz.

**Materials Needed**

Props that refer to things a designer needs (i.e. color swatches, graph paper, pencil, ruler, fabric swatches, stage diagrams, toy furniture, etc.)

Designer Quiz

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have different props sitting on a table in front of the class that would identify different aspects of a designer’s duties.  Have some students come up and grab a prop each.  Then they have to say what they think it would be used for.  The class then has to decide what order they think the tasks would go in.

**Instruction**

Step 1: What are the basic steps of a set designer? Write these on the board.

* Read the script
* Talk to the Director about the concept
* Do research
* Consider the budget and available stock
* Choose colors, fabrics, patterns and furniture
* Measure the space and furniture
* Create a rough sketch floor plan
* Talk to the director again
* Make changes
* Do final design

Explain to the students that this is similar to what they will be doing throughout this unit.

Step 2: What are things the designer needs to know before they can design a set?

* Size/shape of Auditorium
* Space
* Available stock
* Special units needed
* Lighting

Step 3: Ask the class the following questions: Why do we use scenery? What are the purposes of scenery? What can scenery illustrate to the audience? Some possible answers may be the following:

* To help the actors
* To help the audience know the time period, genre, location, and about the characters
* To create a mood, etc.

Any logical answers referring to how scenery may be used are valid.

**Assessment**

Erase the board, review the above information and then hand out a quiz.  This quiz should be used as an assessment of what the students just learned.  Their score does not have to be put on their grade.

1. **Analyze Like a Designer**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their ability to think like a designer by analyzing a chosen script.

**Materials Needed**

Enough different scene scripts for a class (i.e. 15 for a class of 30), 3 x 5 cards with the genres of the scripts written on one side and the title on the other, “Set Design Analysis” handout, Play List for Scenes

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Give a couple of students a script and tell them they need to analyze and design it in 10 minutes. Based on the students’ responses, ask them why it was scary?  What obstacles would they face?  Why do they feel they couldn’t do it in the given time? For the smart alecks who think they could design it in the allotted time, ask them how they would be able to pull it off.  The idea is to show the students that more goes into a design than looking at a script and putting it on the stage.

**Instruction**

Step 1: Tell the students that when analyzing a script, it is important to question everything.  What does analyze mean?  What sorts of questions should you ask when analyzing a scene?  The following are things the students could list on the board.

* Read between the lines
* Look for clues that could help develop the scene
* Read and take note of what is in the italics and parenthesis
* What is the physical environment like?
* Where does the scene take place?
* In what year, season, and time of day does the scene occur?
* Take note of any changes in the setting during the scene.
* What is the socioeconomic status of the characters who inhabit the scene?
* What do the characters do for a living?
* What is the climate like in and out of the scene?
* Is the scene indoors or outdoors?
* Does the scene take place in a rural or urban atmosphere?
* Is the scene realistic or imaginary?
* What is the genre of the scene? (i.e. comedy, drama, romance, musical, etc)

The students may come up with other questions as well.  These are only examples.

Step 2: Now that the students know what types of questions to ask, it’s time for them to choose a partner to work with.  Let them know that they will be working with this person for the entire unit so they should choose wisely.  Once the students have chosen their partner or decided to work alone, they need to consider what genre of scene they would like to design.

Step 3: Put the 3 x 5 cards with the genres/titles on a table in the front of the class. Have the groupings grab a card.

Step 4: Once everyone has their cards, explain the analysis handout that will be attached to the scripts.  Explain that they need to fill out the analysis page as they read the script.

Step 5: Hand out the scripts as you collect the genre/title cards.

**Assessment**

Step 6: Students will read through the script and fill out the “Set Design List” analysis form.

1. **Investigating the Possibilities**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate effective research technique by compiling all pictorial research for their chosen scene.

**Materials Needed**

Pictures of rooms from different time periods, computer lab, library

Related Documents

* Composite Design Websites
* Research Info Worksheet
* What to Look For Handout

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Put pictures around the room that generate emotions from many different time periods.  The students need to choose a picture and they need to ask questions about that picture.  Let them know that this is one aspect of research.

**Instruction**

Step 1: Discuss what kind of research is necessary for set design. (historical background, setting, furniture, set dressings, production needs, etc.)

Step 2: Ask the students where they can go to get the needed research. (Internet, magazines, books, recordings, paintings, photos, previous performances, etc.)

Step 3: Explain how to search for information on the internet.  Hand out a list of possible websites where the students can get information and pictures of furniture.

Step 3: Hand out the “Research Information” handout and go to the library/computer lab so students may research their chosen scenes.

**Assessment**

Step 4: Once the students have finished gathering research information and pictures, they need to fill out the “Research Information” handout.  These should be turned in.

**Author's Notes**

While I had a document prepared with different interior pictures, it would not allow me to upload it.  You will have to find your own interior pictures for the hook.

1. **Stage Lingo**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their understanding of stages, sets and terminology by participating in educational activities.

**Materials Needed**

“Crossword” handout, model/pictorial examples of different sets

Related Documents

* Set Designs
* Stage Directions Handout
* Crossword Key
* Stage Terms Crossword Puzzle
* Types of Sets Handout
* Types of Stages Handout

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Pass out a crossword puzzle with the definitions of stage terminology and have the students discover the answers.  They can use textbooks and ask questions of anyone but the teacher.  Make it a competition by timing it and giving some reward to the winner.

**Instruction**

Step 1:  What made it difficult to finish the crossword quickly?  What would make it easier to do?  Knowing the information is important.

Step 2: Take the students into the theatre and point out the different stage items. (Apron, Traps, Revolve, Wings, Fly System, Grand Drape, Legs, Cyc, Teasers, Scrim, etc.) Then go over the stage directions (D, R, L, C, U) with them.

Step 3: Have the students stand on the stage.  Explain to them that you are going to call out stage directions or stage items.  If it is a stage direction, they should go to that location on the stage.  If it is a stage item, they need to go to the area and point to it.  Use the crossword clues and answers to call out the stage items.

Step 4: Once you have seen that the students know the basic directions and terms, have them sit at the front of the stage and discuss the different types of stages.

Step 5: Grab some students to help you demonstrate the location of audience members in a theatre.  For an arena theatre, have students stand in a circle.  For a thrust stage, have the students create three connecting lines as if they are sitting around the stage.  If you call out Proscenium, have the students stand in a line facing one direction.

Step 6: Once the instructions have been given, have the whole class participate.  Call out the different types of stages.

Step 7: Once the students have demonstrated their understanding, have them re-convene in the classroom.  Ask the students what types of shows those stage would work the best for.

**Assessment**

Step 8: Hand out the “Pictorial Examples of Various Sets” paper.  Talk about what is on the paper.  Ask the students what sets would work on what stages.  Ask them what sets would work for different types of shows.

1. **Coloring Your World**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their ability to use color design effectively in their scene by creating a paint chip breakdown.

**Materials Needed**

paint chips, “Color Breakdown” handout, the 1995 version of “A Little Princess” movie, stapler

Related Documents

* Color Breakdown Worksheet
* Color Prompter Handout

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Show a clip from “A Little Princess” that shows the green of her everyday life and the vibrant colors of her dreams.  Ask the students what kind of emotions they felt in the different areas.  Why did they feel that way?  How can color affect our emotions?

**Instruction**

Step 1: Draw a wheel on the board separated into 6 segments.  Have the students identify the primary colors (red, yellow, blue) and the secondary colors (green, purple, orange) on the wheel.  If there are any students who know where the colors should go on the wheel, have them write them in.

Step 2: Explain to the students that each major color helps create a mood.  Besides the primary and secondary colors, we also have white, black, brown, gray, and pink that help create moods.

Step 3: Ask the students what they believe the colors mean.  A color prompter can be found in the textbook, The Stage and the School, 8th edition, page 422.  Examples are listed below:

* red-evil/passionate
* pink-feminine/romantic
* blue-truthful/calm
* brown-poor/common
* black-evil/mysterious
* green-jealous/ natural
* orange-energy/cheerful
* purple-royal/mystery
* yellow-happy/cowardly
* gray-neutral/depressing
* white-pure/peaceful

 Step 4: Ask the students what type of mood they think their already analyzed scenes generate.  Pass out the Color Breakdown paper.  Have the students fill out the breakdown form listing the title of the play and scene and the colors they think they should use to create a mood.  Remember to consider the personalities of the characters that live in the acting space.

Step 5: Lie out paint chips on a table in the front of the class and have the students go through them and choose the colors they would like to use for their scene.  The students should choose the main wall, furniture, and accessory colors.

Step 6: The students need to cut and staple the colors to the breakdown form in the appropriate places.  If the students can’t find the right colors for the mood they want to showcase, have them take home the breakdown and find their own colors.

**Assessment**

Step 7: The students need to turn in the breakdown.

1. **Lines and Patterns and Textures, Oh My!**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their ability to make appropriate line, pattern and texture choices for their scene by completing a design sampler.

**Materials Needed**

various ties sufficient for the class size, wallpaper samples or various scrapbook pages, cuttings from different textures of fabric

Related Documents

* Aesthetic Considerations Handout
* Design Sampler

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Hang many different ties around the room.  They should have different shapes, patterns, and textures.  Each student needs to grab a tie that they like and take it to their desk.  Once they have the ties, ask each student why they chose the tie they did.  What are some of the elements that make the tie interesting?

**Instruction**

Step 1: Explain that lines, patterns/shapes and textures can grab attention in different ways.  They can also help create a mood.

Step 2: Ask the students what moods different lines could create.  These could be listed on the board or just discussed.  There is a handout attached that could be given to the students after the discussion to help them with the breakdown. Some examples would be:

* Straight-masculine, strong, stubborn
* Curved-feminine, soft, comfort
* Jagged-evil, chaos

Step 3: Looking at the ties, what kind of mood could the person wearing it be in? Go over how moods could be affected by using different shapes or patterns on the stage.  It would be good to have additional samples of shapes and patterns.  Wallpaper samples and scrapbook paper are great. Some examples would be:

* Bigger-splashy/attention
* Smaller-conservative/calm
* Floral/Circles/Hearts-feminine
* Plaids/Checks/Stripes-masculine

Step 4: Ask the students what textures their ties have. Discuss the way textures could affect mood as well.  It would help if you had additional fabrics and textures to display in the room as examples. Some examples would be:

* Heavy-oppressive/masculine
* Light-free/feminine
* Sheen-attention/wealth
* Matte-blends/middle-lower class

Step 5: Ask the students what lines, textures and patterns should be used in their chosen scenes to create the appropriate mood?  As they are deciding, put pattern/shape, and texture samples on a table in the front of the class.

Step 6: Once the partnerships have decided on the moods for their scenes, pass out the “Aesthetic Considerations” handout as well as the “Design Sampler” handout.

**Assessment**

Step 7: Explain that the students need to choose pattern and texture samples from those on the front table.  After selecting those they believe would create the appropriate mood, they should take them back to their desks and complete the “Design Sampler” handout.   If students cannot find the patterns and textures they are looking for on the table, they can do their own “finding” outside of class.

1. **Arranging Furniture**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their ability to cluster furniture and set dressings by completing a cluster assignment.

**Materials Needed**

Envelopes with construction paper cut-outs of furniture (enough envelopes for each person or pairs), poster board to act as a studio apartment square or construction paper for each clustered area, crayons/markers

**Related Documents**

* Furniture Cut Out List

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have the stage set up like a room with 4 walls, including furniture facing the back wall.  Gather some some volunteers who are comfortable on stage and ask them to improvise a scene within the stage space.  The rest of the class should sit in the house.  After the improv is completed, ask the students why the set didn’t work for them.  Focus on opening up the furniture to create an invisible fourth wall. Talk to the students about the importance of balance on stage.

**Instruction**

Step 1: Have the students come up with a list of furniture found in their living and dining rooms.  Have a student volunteer write the furniture pieces on the board.

Step 2: Draw a square on the board.  Ask the students where they believe the furniture should be placed in the square from the list on the board. What furniture would you find in a living room?  What would you find in a dining room? You may draw the furniture shapes on the board, or you can have the students who volunteer the information do so.

Step 3: Ask the students why they chose to put the furniture in those locations.  How do the clusters of furniture make sense?

Step 4: Take a wall out from the square on the board and ask how this may change how the furniture would be placed. On a stage, you need to make sure the furniture is facing out toward the audience as well as flowing well together. Make sure the students understand that on a stage, you need to consider the actors’ needs as well as the audience’s sight lines.

Step 5: Allow the students to partner up and get an envelope of furniture cut outs from the teacher.  Explain to the students that they need to arrange the cut outs in the envelope on construction paper or half a poster board.  The clusters need to be logically placed.

Step 6: After the students arrange the furniture, they need to trace and label each furniture piece on their paper. If the students have enough time, they can also decorate the clusters with crayons or markers to give the room(s) personality.

Step 7: Have the students explain to the class why they organized the furniture as they did.

**Assessment**

Step 8: The students need to look at the furniture lists for their scenes and decide how to organize them in clusters.  What are the important furniture pieces in the scenes?  How can you highlight those important pieces?  What are additional things you could add to your stage to “dress” it up?  What do you absolutely have to have or what can you do without?

**Author's Notes**

* List of furniture and sizes for the envelopes (1 foot equals 1 inch when cut out)

1. **Fashioning Floor Plans**

**Objective**

The students will learn how to create a floor plan by measuring and sketching out the stage for their scenes.

**Materials Needed**

rulers, empty graph paper, pencils, furniture pieces on the stage

Related Documents

* Floor Plan Symbols Handout
* Furniture Sizes Handout
* Stage Graph

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

As the students come into the room, give them a ruler.  When they are seated, ask the students if any of them know how to read a ruler.  If there is anyone who can read a ruler, have them draw it on the board and demonstrate for the class how to use it, prompting them if necessary. Why is it important to know how to read a ruler if you’re designing a set?

**Instruction**

Step 1: After the students learn how to read a ruler, take them into the theatre.  Demonstrate for them what measurements are necessary for a floor plan.  Now have the students measure furniture pieces on the stage.  They should write down the measurements on a paper.

Step 2: Hand out empty graph paper to the students. Teach them that one square equals a foot on the graph paper.  The students should transfer the measurements they just took onto the graph paper.

Step 3: Draw an example of a box set on the board.  Draw out the floor plan in the following order: walls, doors, windows, large furniture, small furniture.

Step 4: As you draw, discuss basic stage conventions.  These are the following:

* Almost all furniture faces audience
* Exterior doors are usually SR
* Interior doors are usually SL or US
* Fireplaces tend to be SR
* French doors are usually SL
* Living/dining room furniture are in the same area

Step 5: Have the students sketch a rough drawing of their own previously chosen scenes on a piece of paper.  Have them decide where they want the furniture to be.

**Assessment**

Step 6: Once the students have finished sketching out their floor plan, have them draw out the design on the “Stage Graph Paper” provided.  They should use rulers and the graph squares to draw it to scale. Remind them of the order that they should draw their floor plans (step 3).  This is just a rough draft to be turned in for critique.  They will create a final draft for the design board.

1. **Desired Design Board**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their ability to compile all their design information by creating and presenting a design board.

**Materials Needed**

Poster or display boards (the students could bring their own or they could be supplied by the teacher), extra paint chips, extra fabric swatches, markers, crayons, scissors, rulers, colored pencils, glue sticks, extra scrapbook design papers

Related Documents

* Design Board Example #1
* Design Board Example #2

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Put various colors of poster board on a table in the front of the class.  As the students come in, have them choose a color that they would like for their design board.  Set out mini examples of design boards for the students’ reference.  Have them look over the samples and decide how they want to set up their own design boards.  They can follow the samples or create their own ideas.

**Instruction**

Step 1: The students will get into their partnerships and combine all the elements that have learned to create a design board. They should use paint chips, fabrics, patterns, picture research, set and set dressing list, specialty items, stage choice, set choice, floor plan, and rendering.

Step 2: The students will organize them in a way that best shows their designs to advantage.  All the information must be organized and collaged onto a poster or project board. Remind them that presentation is everything and that they should try to make it look as nice and professional as possible.

**Assessment**

Step 3: Present the design board to the class and explain all the reasons for the choices made.

**Author's Notes**

I did not make a final evaluation/rubric for the design board for this particular unit when I taught it.  However, the teacher may want to create one for their own use based on criteria they have compiled with their students.