**Director's Concept in Directing** by Christina Swiss

**Objective**: Students will demonstrate their ability to follow through with a directing concept by staging a two to three minute silent scene with music, costumes, and color to support their concept.

**Class Level:** Advanced

**Main Concepts:** Directing concept, collaboration, analyze

**1994 National Standards:**

CONTENT STANDARD 4: Directing by interpreting dramatic texts and organizing and conducting rehearsals for informal or formal productions.

CONTENT STANDARD 7: Analyzing, critiquing, and constructing meanings from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.

**Lesson Plans**

Lesson 1: Qualities of a Good Director

Students will demonstrate the skills necessary for collaboration by choosing and beginning to interpret a poem in groups of three.

Lesson 2: Developing Story (in Directing)

Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze a text and develop a central story by choosing a genre for their poem and by writing a storyline or narrative for their poem.

Lesson 3: Developing a Concept

Students will demonstrate an ability to interpret a text by choosing a concept for their project and by using the concept to make movement and style choices for the staging of their poem.

Lesson 4: Blocking: Creating Focus through Stage Pictures

Students will demonstrate an ability to create focus and interesting stage pictures by generating four tableaus that represent the emotion and story of their poem.

Lesson 5: Preparation for Final Performance

Students will demonstrate an ability to follow through with a directing concept by staging a two to three minute silent scene with music, costumes, and color to support their concept.

**Lesson 1: Qualities of a Good Director**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate the skills necessary for collaboration by choosing and beginning to interpret a poem in groups of three.

**Materials Needed**

Ten to fifteen different poems (with different, moods and emotions: some simple, some funny, some serious)

Poem Sheet

Interpretation worksheet

Supplemental poems

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have students clear the desks away. Have students get a partner. They are to face this partner and silently without talking, copy all the motions of their partner. No one person is to be the leader, students need to work together to create the movement.

**Instruction**

Step 1 (Group Practice): Break the class into two groups, creating two circles. Let the students know that this is a silent activity that requires group cooperation. Have the circles face the front of the classroom. Tell the students that they are to copy the movements very carefully of the person who is at the head of the circle (most far front). The person in the lead is to go slowly so that the rest of their group mates can follow them. As that person shifts to the right or left, someone new will be at the head of the circle. That person now takes control over the movement and the rest of the group copies them, always following the person at the head of the circle.

Step 2 (Discussion): Have students put the desks back and return to their assigned seats. What kinds of movements did you create with your partner at the beginning? At what times did you feel only one person was in control? Were there times you able to move completely together? What happened? Tell the students that the second group activity they did is called “Flocking”. Why do you think it is called flocking? How long do you think it took you for your group to get in sync?  How did it feel to work as a whole group? Did you prefer to lead or to be led? How does this relate to our relationships with people in theatre? (Lead the discussion so that students talk about working with other people, other actors and the director).

Step 3 (Transition): Let students know that the new unit they will be working on is Directing. Ask students: What is the director’s role? Can a director be a leader and a follower? How?

Step 4 (Group Discussion): Have students form groups of three with students close to their desks. Have each student share a best and worst experience with a director, teacher or leader with their group mates. Give each student three minutes to share their stories. Then have the group chose one best and one worst story to share with the rest of the class. Discuss what made the experiences of the students positive or negative. After students are done sharing their stories, with students’ help, write a list of the qualities of a good director/leader on the board.

Ex Traits:

            Gives Choices

            Patient

            Gives Guidelines or Structures: You know what they expect

            Communities what they think, feel and want effectively

            Informed

            Enthusiastic

            Inspiring.

Ask students to try to develop these traits as they work with their classmates and as they begin the directing process, to be kind to one another, to listen and to work as a group.

Step 5 (Instruction): In this directing unit you will be split into groups of three. We will be doing activities and having discussions to learn Directing skills, and then we will apply these skills to a specific project. We are going to choose poems, interpret the poems to create stories and characters and then stage our interpretation for the class. Later on you will get a chance to direct your fellow students in a scene.

Step 6 (Modeling): Put up an example (short) poem on an overhead. Have a student read it out loud for the class with feeling. Then have the students help you analyze the poem. What is this poem about? What message is the poem trying to get across? What is the mood or emotion of the poem? Is there a real life story you can relate to this poem or an experience? When have you felt this way? Have students help you create an interesting story or plot line that incorporates these things.

Step 7 (Instruction): Tell students that this is what they will be doing with the poems they choose. They will analyze it and then decide on a basic story outline that uses the mood and the message of the poem. There is no right way to interpret the poem. Students can use whatever creative license they want. Their goal is to work together with a group and take turns being the leader. Use the skills you learned in flocking to “collaborate” and create a work of art.

**Assessment**

Assign students into groups of three. Give each group copies of the poems. Allow students time to choose a poem, read it out loud as a group.  Have students fill out the first impressions of the poem worksheet. If there is not enough time, have them at least put down their group names and the title of their poem.

**Lesson 2: Developing Story (in Directing)**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an ability to analyze a text and develop a central story by choosing a genre for their poem and by writing a storyline or narrative for their poem.

**Materials Needed**

Several film clips from different genres

Interpretation worksheet

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Name that genre! Prepare a ten to fifteen minute presentation for students with several different genres. Ask the students to quietly write down on their paper what genre they think the performance is. (Options: Read a portion from a text, describe a play story that you saw and how it was staged, show 2-3 short film clips.)

Genres: Tragedy, Comedy, Farce, melodrama, Drama,

Black Comedy: Have a student read a short excerpt from “On Vacation”.

Tragedy: King Lear (video clip)

Comedy: The Importance of Being Earnest, Much Ado about Nothing (film).

Drama: All my sons (film clip)

Melodrama: Spiderman

Farce: Around the World in 80 days (film)

**Instruction**

Step 1 (Guided Practice): Go through the clips and performances and have students share what genre’s they thought the film clips were. Discuss that it is very important to know what genre you are working with. What are different types of genres? Knowing the genre of your text will help you make an interpretation that makes sense to the audience and unifies your performance. Genre becomes as important as the story itself.

Step 2 (Instructions) Instruct the students that they will be writing a story for their poem this class period. The students need to “collaborate” on this project and seek to get each person’s input. Students are to use the mood and message of the poem they decided upon from the last class period to pick a genre or type of performance.

Then students can begin writing a storyline for their poem.

The story needs to have specific characters, and each person in the group needs to be a part of the play.

Ask students: What makes a story interesting? (Characters, conflict, specific location). How can they develop a story that other people want to see? (Relevant to the audience).

**Assessment**

Give students the Interpretation worksheet as a guide. They will turn this in at the end of the class period. Give students as much time as they need to finish this assignment. If students are off task, or finish their story early, move on to the next lesson.

**Lesson 3: Developing a Concept**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an ability to interpret a text by choosing a concept for their project and by using the concept to make movement and style choices for the staging of their poem.

**Materials Needed**

PowerPoint about directing concept with pictures from other performances that demonstrate concept, Director's Concept Worksheet

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

**Author's Notes:** I will show students a power point with pictures and text from the play I directed *The Wrestling Season*, to show them the process I went through in directing the play.  I will share a little bit about the play and its story line, and show students the theme I developed.Power point and presentation of experience depicts *author's*experience. Using the principle of the lesson plan, apply *own*experiences for that portion.

**Instruction**

Step 1 (Instruction/Discussion):  What helped me direct this play and really unify my cast was that we had a common goal or *vision*. (idea of how the play will look, what the purpose of the play is). What is a vision? (How you “see” the play, your specific interpretation, how your production will be unique. What colors do you see? What emotions? What themes?) All the things we worked on last class period with our poems. *Why is it important that everyone working on the play has the same vision?* How does having a specific interpretation help your audience understand the play? *How can you share your vision with your collaborators? How can you communicate what you want visually to your team and to your audience members?*

Step 2 (Modeling): As a director, from the theme (that judgment and abuse are destructive) I came up with a vision, or a **concept**. The concept is the driving idea behind the play that a director chooses, a way to communicate that message of the play. **How** will you tell the story?  What colors, sounds, styles, and the mood of your piece rolled into a single statement. Show students the slide of the PowerPoint with the concept statement on it. The physical struggles in wrestling represented the internal struggles and heartaches of the characters. Wrestling = a metaphor for life. I attempted to show the negative effects of judgment in all of my staging. I used stylized wrestling (dance like all counted out), a very specific choice, to show that the outward struggle represented an inward struggle. Afterwards we had an audience discussion and there were comments made about how this really helped the audience understand what I was trying to say with my interpretation.

Step 3 (Modeling): Show various pictures on the PowerPoint from other shows and ask students what the possible concepts were depending on the colors and the style of costumes and set. Show students how exciting it is to be able to interpret a play and make your own decisions. The exciting thing about directing is that there are so many choices to make. As long as your ideas are supported by the text and help you tell the story you can be as creative or simple as you want. It is your creation.

Step 4 (Modeling/Guided Practice): Once again (on an overhead or on the PowerPoint) exhibit the text of the poem “I Can Still See You”, by Paul Celan. Ask students to remember what moods and ideas they had gleaned from it during an earlier read. Guide students to decide a basic storyline and theme that could be used for the poem.

For example:

**Theme Statement:** Hope propels us through times of loss and despair to discover identity and embrace ourselves

**Story Synopsis:** Maggie and Collin are very much in love with each other and have been together for a significant period of time. Maggie’s whole world revolves around Collin and their relationship-she depends on him for her happiness. Eventually, Collin leaves Maggie, feeling that he must discover himself. Maggie is devastated, she struggles to cope with daily existence. With the passage of time and self-discovery, Maggie begins to realize her own intrinsic worth and identity.

Step 5 (Modeling/Guided Practice):Then ask students what a concept statement could be for this poem and this story.

Explain more specifically how to write a concept statement. Remind students that the concept statement *summarizes* what you plan to *focus* on and how you will *interpret* the piece. concept statements can be complex and symbolic like the one I create for *The Wrestling Season*, or they can be as simple as interpreting Charlie Brown as a cartoon.

A concept statement often has these three components

1.      **Mood**: what is the emotion or atmosphere of the piece.

2.      *Message*: what do you want to communicate with the piece?

3.      Image: what is your central image or symbol?

An example Concept Statement:

*Maggie and Collin’s relationship together is seen as a montage (short clips and images) of emotions and events that linger in Maggie’s memory providing pain and comfort.*

How the concept will be used:

            -While Maggie is in the present in a walk through a park, her world is in black and white (showing the pain of her loss) (**Mood**)

            -Maggie’s memories of Collin are in bright colors, often reds, representing the joy and passion she had for life when she was with him. (**Mood**)

            -At the end of the walk she comes to a river where she tosses in a necklace Collin gave her and watches the water go under the bridge. (Image)

            -As the camera turns back to Maggie, She then moves on from the river and walks towards a hill.

            -As she walk over the hill, her world becomes colored, representing her hope in life, freedom from emotional pain, and her new identity. (*Message*)

**Assessment**

Give students time to work on their projects. Their first assignment is to write a concept statement for their storyline. They need to decide how they plan on telling their story. After they write down their concept, students can list what colors they see using in their story, what type of music or sounds they would want for underscoring, the style of movement they want to use, what type of props, and how they will stage their story in general. Students can begin to flesh out their story, actually find a piece of music they want to underscore their piece, decide on what costumes they will wear, make assignments for props, and begin physically practicing how they would stage their story.

**Lesson 4: Blocking: Creating Focus through Stage Pictures**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an ability to create focus and interesting stage pictures by generating four tableaus that represent the emotion and story of their poem.

**Materials Needed**

Two different film versions of *Hamlet*

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Show students a film clip (The scene between Ophelia and Hamlet) from two different versions of *Hamlet* back to back (the same scene).

**Instruction**

Step 1: (Discussion): Ask the students to compare the versions of the same scene. What was different about these scenes? How were the colors different? The acting styles/moods? The style of the show? How is it possible to have such widely different interpretations from one text with the exact same wording?  This is what makes a director so important. If a play was interpreted the same way over and over again what would be the point? A directors’ job is to create an interpretation.

Step 2 (Transition): One of the largest decisions you make as a director after a concept is how you will physically stage the show… the blocking!!! The audience sees the actors before it hears them, we are more interested in what is visually going on.  The movement should really tell the story and communicate your concept.

Step 3 (Guided Practice): How will you tell your story with stage pictures? Each image onstage communicates to the audience as loudly if not more loudly than the words.

Let’s Practice with stage pictures. Have students get into groups of three and stand in different locations around the room, in view of everyone else. Assign each group a topic to portray: Injustice, Celebration at the birth of a child, Loneliness, Friendship, Leadership, etc… Tell students that they are to communicate these ideas through a frozen picture or tableau. Give students 3-5 minutes to discuss their topic and create a frozen picture. When they are done each group will show their pose for the class.

Step 4 (Discussion): Ask students specific questions about the tableaus. What emotion are they portraying? Who is the central character? Who is in control, who is powerless? Where is the focus? What story might be behind this picture? Have students return to their desks once they have finished showing the class their tableaus so that they do not distract from other groups.

Step 5: Gather the class back together and notice the reoccurring themes from the Tableaus. The most important thing in blocking is that your actors are visible. Once all of your actors can be seen, You as a director must decide **where** you want the audience to look. You do not have a camera lens to do it for you. You need to deliberately create focus

            What creates Focus on stage or draws our attention (demonstrate these with students acting as models on the stage):

1. A character who is isolated

2. A character who is down stage or at a lower level (The audience focuses on what is closer to them or on a lower level) (not a hard fast rule).

3. Characters who have more light on them, colorful costumes,

4. A character who is facing the audience

5. A character who is being pointed at

6. A character who is moving, or moving in a different pattern from the other characters.

7. Characters who have stronger objectives

8. A character who upstages (BAD).= Ask the students to explain upstaging to you. If they cannot have students come up as volunteers and give them scenarios to act out which demonstrate the concepts.

Step 6 (Instruction/Group Practice): Inform students that they will be making up a presentation for the class with their stories and directing concepts. They are to take the story and characters they created to:

1. Create a frozen picture that represents the overall essence/ mood/emotion of your piece

2. 3 Tableaus that capture the Beginning, Middle and End of the story, incorporating color.

3. Use of color, Bring costumes or wear the colors you chose for your concept- choose a color that represents your character, or use color to create focus.

\*\*Remind students to use the principles discussed in class: How do you create focus in your stage picture? What do you want your stage picture to communicate to the audience?

**Assessment**

Students will begin to perform these presentations at the beginning of the next class.

**Lesson 5: Preparation for Final Performance**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an ability to follow through with a directing concept by staging a two to three minute silent scene with music, costumes, and color to support their concept.

**Materials Needed**

Classical music for students to listen to, CD player, performance rubric handout

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have the stage lights set up and turned on the class stage so that when the students enter the room they know that they will be performing.

**Instruction**

Step 1: Give students five minutes to review their tableaus, gather costumes, and then each group will perform for the class.

Step 2 (Discussion): After each performance have the class talk about what they think the story was about. Afterwards have the performing group talk a little bit about their process and why they chose the frozen pictures they did.

Step 3 (Transition): You now have the basics of performance: you have created a concept, a story, and stage pictures. Now we are going to turn these into silent movement performances. These are not pantomime: Really act out what is going on and if you need a prop bring it and use it. The point of this exercise is to show your emotion with your physicality. You will be creating the movement and letting us know what is going on without words. This is a VISUAL representation of your story.

Step 4 (Assignment Instructions) Here is what the requirements are for your final project:

1. 2-3 minutes long movement sequence that demonstrates your story and characters (does not have to be a literal interpretation).

2. Musical Underscoring- you have already brainstormed a piece, you can decide to change it or use the same music.

3. Use of costuming and props, using color for focus and concept.

(Students may use neutral masks)

**Assessment**

Give students the rest of the class period to work on this project. Have them write down what music they chose and colors for the performance. Bring music and have a boom box for students to use during the class periods. Students will be performing these scenes during the next class period.