**Children’s Theatre** by Katherine Gee

**Objective**: Student’s will demonstrate their understanding of the aspects of children’s theatre by writing and performing a small play based on a fairy tale to elementary school children.

**Class Level:** Advanced

**Main Concepts:** The art of the story. Acting in children’s theatre. Writing a fairy tale for children in a unique way, and performing it. The art of performing for children.

**1994 National Standards:**

CONTENT STANDARD 1: Script writing by improvising, writing, and refining scripts based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.

CONTENT STANDARD 2: Acting by developing, communicating, and sustaining characters in improvisations and informal or formal productions.

CONTENT STANDARD 3: Designing and producing by conceptualizing and realizing artistic interpretations for informal or formal productions.

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

CONTENT STANDARD 5: Researching by evaluating and synthesizing cultural and historical information to support artistic choices.

CONTENT STANDARD 6: Comparing and integrating art forms by analyzing traditional theatre, dance, music, and visual arts, and new art forms.

CONTENT STANDARD 8: Understanding context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the past and the present.

**Description:**

These are 90 minute plans. Prior Experience: The Students will… -Have previously performed in an informal and formal setting. -Know basic diction, projection, and voice techniques. -Be familiar with pantomime. -Have memorized and performed both monologues and scene work. -Be familiar with props, setting, and costume elements of a production. -Know the different types of stages and stage directions. -Be familiar with fairy tales, myths, and other famous legends.

**Lesson Plans**

Lesson 1: Intro to Children’s Theatre

Students will demonstrate their understanding of why children need their own theatre by writing a self-reflective journal entry.

Lesson 2: Stories and Storytelling

Students will demonstrate their understanding of children’s stories by writing a story.

Lesson 3: Stories Continued with Playwriting

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the elements of a children’s play by turning in an outline for an original script.

Lesson 4: Becoming Uninhibited: Voice (puppetry) and Body (pantomime)

Students will demonstrate their understanding of characterized voice and mannerism by presenting a puppet show and pantomime.

Lesson 5: Characterization 1: People

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the nature of children’s theatre characters by creating a character and presenting him/her to the class.

Lesson 6: Characterization II: Animals and Inanimate Objects

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the nature of children’s theatre non-human characters by creating non-human characters and by talking about an experience in character.

Lesson 7: Skills and Scene Work

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the overarching concepts of children’s theatre by taking a written test, and by performing their original short plays to the class.

Lesson 8: Performances for Children

Students will demonstrate their understanding of audience reaction to children’s theatre by writing a self-reflective journal entry about their performance at elementary schools.

**Author's Notes**:

This is an extensive unit that could be expanded to cover an entire term. Some lessons will likely take longer than one class period.

**1: Intro to Children’s Theatre**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of why children need their own theatre by writing a self-reflective journal entry.

**Materials Needed**

Theatre for Children by David Wood  
Play dough (Recipe included)  
Slips of paper with: “You are 5 years-old today” (numbers should vary from 5-10)  
Slips of paper with the 11 common characteristics of a children’s audience.

**Related Documents**

* Assignment Handout
* Children Audience Handout
* Children Differ Handout
* Salt Dough Recipe

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

As children enter the classroom hand them the slips of paper telling them how old they are. When they get in their seats, give them each a bit of play dough. As the play dough is being handed out, talk to the students with baby talk. Ask them how their day was, or how they are feeling that day, in a very patronizing tone. Treat them in the way that children hate to be treated. Once the entire class has received some play-dough, tell them to think of their favorite character from a movie or book (make sure to talk slow). Then invite them to take their play-dough and make it into that character. Tell them they get five minutes. While they work, walk around the classroom and baby them, or start to shape their play-dough for them.

**Instruction**

Step Two: When most of the class is finished, or frustrated, break character. Ask them to break character as well. Ask them these questions:  
How were you treated?  
How did it make you feel?  
Have you ever been treated that way before?  
What is it like to be a child?  
Have someone list the attributes of a child on the board as others call them out. When the list has been completed ask them:  
Do you think children are different from adults? How?  
Put up the overhead of “How Children Differ” and encourage them to take notes (they will be tested on this material). Go through each of the 10 characteristics and encourage them to give examples of when they have seen this or felt this.  
  
Step Three: Explain to them that because children differ, performing for them is an entirely different experience as well. Ask them:  
What are some of the proper theatre conduct “rules”?  
In what ways may children bend these rules?  
Tell them that they are going to be split into six groups, and will each get a slip of paper with a common characteristic of a children’s audience. Explain to them that each characteristic describes a response of some kind that children will make to what’s going on onstage. Have them create short skits that show: what is going on onstage, and the reaction of the children. They will want to split their group in two: half will be the actors, and half will be the children. Split them up into six groups, and give each group two of the eleven characteristics (accept for the last group, who will only get one). Go around to each group explaining the procedure in further detail on an individual basis. Use pages 21-29 of Theatre for Children as a guide.  
  
Step Four: Have each group come up in order, and write their characteristic on the overhead. Have them announce their characteristic before they perform their skits. Have them each perform their skits. After each performance discuss how that characteristic may affect the production. Ask them questions like:  
How should actors respond to that behavior?  
Why do you think children behave that way?  
Do you feel the same way as children sometimes when you see that on stage?  
When every group has performed, have them write down the 11 characteristics in their notes. Encourage them to write down the examples if it helps them remember them.  
  
Step Five: Hand out the “Fairy Tale Assignment” and explain to them the project they will be working on over the next few weeks. They will be re-writing or writing their own fairy tale, and then performing them to elementary school children. Explain to them that for each day of class there is an assignment for the Fairy Tale project. Point out today’s and ask them to go home and think of their favorite fairy tale, or famous story. Ask for examples. Ask them these questions:  
What was your favorite story growing up?  
What was your favorite movie?  
How did this affect you when you were young?  
Does it affect you the same way now that you’re older?

**Assessment**

Step Six: Have them take out their reflection journals and write about their favorite movie, book, or story when they were little. How did they react to it? Did they respond in the ways that we discussed in class, or not? How do they respond to it now? What did it make them think? Did they learn something new from it? Did it affect them negatively or positively? When they are finished, collect their journals, and invite them to take the play dough home.

**2: Stories and Storytelling**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of children’s stories by writing a story.

**Materials Needed**

Theatre for Children by David Wood  
Chairs  
Colored paper  
Strips of colored paper  
Page of instructions

**Related Documents**

* Good Children's Theatre
* Stories and Themes
* Story Plot Structure

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Set up the classroom by putting 7-8 (depending on class size) different colored pieces of paper around the room. These will be “stations”. Put a circle of three chairs in each station. Tape these instructions underneath the colored paper:  
Think of something that happened to you today (ex: a test, you ate an apple, you watched a movie, you stepped in gum, etc.). Pick ONE thing. Tell each other what your anecdote. Keep it simple.  
As students enter the classroom hand them slips of paper that have their color on it. There should be three people in each group. Have them follow the instructions in their stations.

**Instruction**

Step Two: When everyone has finished telling his/her story, have them move their chairs out so that they can step on them and around them. Tell them that in children’s theatre, the story is very important, so it’s important to know how a story is constructed. Put up the “A Story” overhead and explain the plot structure (including exposition, rising action, climax, and denouement). Have them stand up and step back from their chairs. Have them do as you do.  
· First, for exposition, walk towards your chair saying “exposition” in an ordinary voice.  
· Second, for rising action, step on to your chair saying “rising action” with a rising intonation.  
· Third, for climax, through your arm out into the air while standing on the chair, saying, “climax” with accented stresses and a loud, booming voice.  
· Fourth, for denouement, step down from the chair slowly, saying “denouement” in a falling intonation.  
  
Step Three: When it appears that everyone can act out plot structure, have them sit in their seats. Using volunteers or students you select, proceed to tell an anecdote about your day, or something that happened to you. Use the students as characters, telling them what to say, and as inanimate objects such as doors, tables, chairs, etc. The story should be simple and incredibly boring. When the story is completed, invite participants back to their seat.  
  
Step Four: Ask them what they thought about the story that you told. Based on the feedback you get, ask them: What could be done for the story to be improved? Put up the overhead on “Ingredients for Good Theatre for Children”. Have them take notes. As you go over each one (using Part 2, pg 38-61 as a guide), ask them how you could add that element into the story that you told to make it more children’s theatre applicable? What ingredients aren’t needed for this particular story? What are some examples of these ingredients in stories you know?  
  
Step Five: Ask them what they think makes a really good story. Put up the overhead of “Stories and Themes that Children Love”. Have them take notes. Talk about each one (using Part 2, 30-38 as a guide) and ask for examples, and explaining that they will have to pick their own story. They will want to pick a story that children will love and that they are able to include all the ingredients in.  
  
Step Six: Have them circle up into their groups and tell their same stories again, expect this time, adding some of the ingredients that were discussed in class. Let them know that they can add anything they want (if appropriate) but it must include at least four of the eighteen ingredients, and one of the themes or stories. Take an informal assessment by listening to each of the groups tell their stories to each other.

**Assessment**

Step Six: Have them write down their stories, and turn them into you. If there is time, let volunteers share theirs if they would like to. Remind them of their assignment for the next day.

**3: Stories Continued with Playwriting**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the elements of a children’s play by turning in an outline for an original script.

**Materials Needed**

Theatre for Children by David Wood Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie Couches, beanbags, chairs Hot cocoa and cookies (optional)

**Related Documents**

* Writing a Synopsis

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Write on the board, “Story Time”. Set up the classroom like a comfortable reading lounge with (if available) couches, beanbags, comfy chairs, etc. If possible, make hot cocoa or tea. Cookies would also be wonderful. As your students come into the classroom invite them to get themselves refreshment and then sit down. Select a section of Peter Pan to read to them, or read them an abridged version of the story.

**Instruction**

Step Two: Talk about the story. What were the exposition, the rising action, the climax, and the denouement? Ask them about what ingredients included in the story? Put up the overhead of “Writing a Synopsis” and explain to them that there is a process to coming up with a story, and certain things that story should contain for children’s theatre. Have them take notes. Go through each on the list, asking for examples from Peter Pan.

Step Three: Tell the students that they will be splitting up into their groups and going to the library to research the story they want to do for their Fairy Tale project. Tell them that once they settle on a story, and have come up with a way on how it is going to be twisted or unique (Old Wine in New Bottles), they will write an outline. The outline should include a basic idea of the story with exposition, rising action, climax, and denouement. It should also draw elements from all that we learned in class previously. Tell them that they should make copies of the outline to take home with them.

Step Four: Split them into their Fairy Tale groups. Take them to the library where they can research. Help them with their outlines and their inevitable artistic differences. Coach them on how they can improve their stories, and make it more fit for children, etc.

**Assessment**

Step Five: Return them to class, and have them turn in their outlines. Remind them of the assignment for that evening.

**4: Becoming Uninhibited: Voice (puppetry) and Body (pantomime)**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of characterized voice and mannerism by presenting a puppet show and pantomime.

**Materials Needed**

Theatre for Children by David Wood Socks, Paper bags, markers, crayons A puppet theatre, or large cloth Top Hat Small slips of paper with emotions or reactions such as: disgusted, frightened, sad, etc. Small slips of paper with the instructions to go under their seat. Slips of paper with their old ideas for scenes (see lessons two and three)

**Related Documents**

* Hook Instructions
* Performance Rubrics

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Place a top hat on a table in the front of the room. Write on the board the instructions, “Look under your desk.” Under each seat tape a small piece of paper that says: - Think of the character you are playing in your fairy tale. What does his/her voice sound like? Is it raspy, gentle, low, or high? Now go pick ONE slip of paper out of the hat on the table and get in a large circle. Sit in the back of the classroom. As the students start to gather in a circle, join them.

**Instruction**

Step Two: When they get into a circle ask them to memorize what’s on their slip of paper (the emotion or reaction). Take the top hat and gather all the slips of paper. Put the hat in the center of the circle and ask the students to focus on the hat or close their eyes. Give them these prompts: Think about your character again. Think about their voice. What would their voice sound like if they felt the emotion you had on your slip of paper? What’s their volume? How high or low does their voice go? Etc. Tell them that in children’s theatre, characters become larger than life. Ask them: What do you think this “larger than life” quality does to the characters voice? In what ways can the voice become more expressive? Etc.

Step Three: Ask them to think of a line from their fairy tale that their character says. Explain that everyone will step forward and say their line with the emotion they drew from the hat. Then the line will travel around the circle with each character saying it with that same emotion. Go first (pick any line or emotion). Encourage the students to be extremely expressive with their voice. When everyone in the class has gone, ask them to sit down.

Step Four: Explain to them that they will perform a small portion (1 minute maximum) of their fairy tale with puppets, focusing on their voice. Give them the option of using socks, paper bags, or their own hands. Invite them to split up into groups to prepare. Give them rubrics. Give them 5-7 minutes. While they are practicing, set up a puppet stage, either by draping the table with cloth, or setting up an actual stage.

Step Five: As each group performs, ask the audience to talk about what they heard. What kind of things did they do with their voice to make it more expressive? What kind of emotions did we hear in this scene?

Step Six: Ask them to sit in a circle. Ask them these questions: What other things must an actor do to be larger than life? Is there something more then the voice that expresses? What can we do with our body to show the emotions we are feeling or our reactions? Pass around the top hat and have them pull out a different slip of paper. Have them stand up and follow the same activity, as before, except this time, there is no sound. Have each of them go around and show their emotion or reaction as large as they can, and everyone in the circle repeats the emotion they see.

Step Seven: Have them split into their fairy tale groups again and explain to them that they will be doing the exact same scene they did before, but silently. Give them rubrics, and then give them 5 minutes to prepare.

Step Eight: As each group performs, ask the audience to talk about what they saw. What kind of things did they do with their body to make it more expressive? What kind of emotions did we see in this scene?

**Assessment**

Step Nine: Discuss with class why it is important to be bigger and more expressive in both body and voice when performing for children. If there is time, have students draw scenarios from “the Magic Hat” and improvise scenes focusing on creating a voice and body language that is larger than life.

**5: Characterization 1: People**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the nature of children’s theatre characters by creating a character and presenting him/her to the class.

**Materials Needed**

Theatre for Children by David Wood  
Pieces of paper with Guest Instructions

**Related Documents**

* Characters Handout

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Place on everyone desk a piece of paper that says, “Observe our guest carefully for voice quality, mannerisms, and character qualities” face down. Have a guest at the front of the room when the students enter the classroom. It is important that the guest have a large personality, and uses lots of movements, and is able to talk a lot. Have the guest introduce him/herself to the class and just talk, telling the students about him/herself, taking questions, etc. When the guest has talked awhile, thank the guest for coming, and let him/her out.

**Instruction**

Step Two: Talk about the guest with the students. Have them reference their answers on the sheets. What were his/her mannerisms? What kind of voice did he/she have? Etc. Put “Characters” on the overhead and have them take notes. Have them glance over the list and place the guest under one of the categories. Go through the list one by one, asking for examples from stories they know. Have a student go to the board and write down these examples.   
Example: Some characters will inject humor. Character: Smee from Peter Pan  
  
Step Three: Have the students take out a piece of paper. Have them brainstorm about a character that they are either playing in the fairy tales, or a new one. Have them create this character and write some of his/her attributes on their piece of paper. Tell them to think of the things we’ve discussed, including voice and body movement.  
  
Step Four: In the performance area set up four chairs. Have four volunteers come sit in the chairs (three boys and one girl, or one boy and three girls). Proceed to play the dating game with three “unknown” bachelors or bachelorettes. Have the person asking the questions ask each person two questions. Have them all play their characters, except the questioner. After each round of the game, have the students describe their character to the class. Make sure everyone gets a chance to show his or her character.

**Assessment**

Step Five: Remind them of their homework for that evening. If there is time, let them meet with their groups and rehearse their play.

**6: Characterization II: Animals and Inanimate Objects**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the nature of children’s theatre non-human characters by creating non-human characters and by talking about an experience in character.

**Materials Needed**

“Toy Story”

Slips of paper with animal names on them

The Top Hat

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have a TV set up when the students enter the classroom. Play a clip of “Toy Story”.

**Instruction**

Step Two: Talk with them why “Toy Story” makes a great story (reference Lesson 2). Discuss children’s theatre use of animals and inanimate objects. How in children’s theatre and media, animals and things obtain human personalities and qualities while still maintaining their common attributes. Have the students give examples of when they have seen this in stories or movies.

Step Three: Ask the students to stand up and tell them to imagine they are in a toy store. Have them pick something in that toy store to become. Encourage them to use their voice and physicality to aid in the transformation. Have five or more students, “go shopping” and talk with the objects, and “buy” them (have one shopper buy at least three, etc. until everyone has been “bought”). Then have the shopper describe and introduce the “object: to the class. Have the “object” talk about him/herself. Do this several times with different locations such as: Grocery store, Antique shop, Abercrombie and Fitch, Barnes and Noble, etc.

Step Four: Have the students sit in their seats. Discuss what they did to convey “what” they were playing. Talk about the emotions that the characters may have. For example: is a toaster naturally happy, or mean? What “larger than life” emotions did their characters have?

Step Five: Split them up into two teams, and explain that they are now going to work on their animal characters by playing charades. They are allowed to make noise, and talk in this one, but it can’t be in English. Have many slips of paper with different types of animals on them, and have them draw from the magic hat.

Step Six: Have them pick their favorite character they played that day, or previously, or come up with one on their own. Have them get into character and announce that they will be taking a campus stroll. Ask them to observe carefully what they see on their walk. Take them on a walk throughout campus, through lots of different places, so the characters will have a chance for many different reactions depending on their likes and dislikes. Return to class.

**Assessment**

Step Seven: Have each student stand up and describe what they saw on the campus stroll, while remaining in character. Take an informal assessment. Remind them of their homework.

**7: Skills and Scene Work**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the overarching concepts of children’s theatre by taking a written test, and by performing their original short plays to the class.

**Materials Needed**

Copies of the test

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Set up the class in a different way than ever before.

**Instruction**

Step Two: When students enter the classroom, give them copies of the test and tell them that they have half an hour to take it. Let them take the test.

Step Three: When all the tests have been turned in, let them split into their groups and practice their Fairy Tales for ten minutes. Go around and observe the students, and give pointers where needed.

Step Four: Pair up the groups and have them perform for each other Have the groups give critiques and pointers to each other, and discuss how they can improve. Emphasize that one person should speak at a time.

**Assessment**

Step Five: Have all the students watch each group perform their story. While watching, have the students write critiques for each group, pointing out what elements they used, or what they could improve on. When each group is finished, open the floor to discussion and positive feedback.

**Author's Notes**

There is no test key provided.

**8: Performances for Children**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of audience reaction to children’s theatre by writing a self-reflective journal entry about their performance at elementary schools.

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Prepare “good show” treats for all the students before they head off to their respective schools.

**Instruction**

Step Two: Go to the elementary school classrooms and have the groups perform their stories.   
  
Step Three: When they return, have a class discussion on what they noticed about the children’s responses. Ask them: what they felt went right and what went wrong, and what could have been better?  
  
Step Four: Have them write in their Self-Evaluation Journals what they gained from their experience, and all that was talked about in discussion. Also have them write what they learned from doing children’s theatre, and how was it different?

**Assessment**

Step Five: Have them turn in their self-evaluation journals and any other assignments.