**Theatre History for Advanced Theatre** by Mindy Nelsen

**Objective**: Students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of theatre history by participating in various activities, quizzes, and a timeline.

**Class Level:** Advanced

**Main Concepts:** theatre history, theater spaces, director's concepts

**1994 National Standards:**

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

**Description**: Theatre Class with 80-minute long classes. This unit is very extensive but includes detailed lecture notes, worksheets, quizzes, and handouts. Teachers can modify the unit by picking and choosing elements they would like to cover.

**Lesson Plans**

Lesson 1: Purpose and Product

Students will gain a fundamental understanding of the purpose of theatre in an educational setting, how they can utilize it to their full advantage and how theatre is used to communicate a message by reading the included short story and mapping out the plot structure.

Lesson 2: Theatre and Performance, from the beginning

Students will expand their knowledge of the origins of theatre and dramatic performance by creating a timeline portfolio.

Lesson 3: The medieval world of the theatre, creating a Morality Play

Students will demonstrate their understanding of select theatre history practices by producing a mystery play and a morality play.

Lesson 4: Medieval and Moving On

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Medieval Theatre by performing a morality play.

Lesson 5: Finishing up the reformation and moving on down to Shakespeare

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Shakespeare by working on a scene from one of his plays.

Lesson 6: Embracing Shakespeare

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Shakespeare by performing a presentation on one of his plays.

Lesson 7: Shakespeare monologues

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Shakespeare by presenting synopsis, and breaking apart a monologue to memorize.

Lesson 8: 18th and 19th Century Theatre

The students will experiment with the innovations of 17th, 18th, and 19th century theatre by creating their own commedia dell arte piece.

Lesson 9: 19th Century Theatre

Students will demonstrate their understanding of 18th and 19th century theatrical practices by creating and performing a commedia dell arte piece and working on constructing group presentations on 19th century plays and playwrights.

Lesson 10: Theatre from the 20th Century thru today

The students will demonstrate their understanding of 20th Century theatre by participating in a group presentation.

Lesson 11: Application thru the ages

The students will demonstrate their knowledge of theatre history by presenting a timeline and corresponding images.

Lesson 12: Theatre (and Theater) Basics

The students will display their understanding of theatre history and application by taking a quiz and presenting their Shakespearean monologue.

**1: Purpose and Product**

**Objective**

Students will gain a fundamental understanding of the purpose of theatre in an educational setting, how they can utilize it to their full advantage and how theatre is used to communicate a message by reading the included short story and mapping out the plot structure.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Stories

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Theatre emerged similarly out of ritual and dance. It was people using their bodies and movement to tell the story of a myth. It came to be told many many times. They added costumes and masks and went from ritualistic dances to oral stories with participants acting out the different roles. It is still emerging today into the theatre you see in the classroom and in theaters. What are some examples of myths or fables that you know? Aesop’s fables, included. The class needs to divide into 4 groups. One group needs to tell the story of their fable through ritualistic dance, the next through pantomime alone, the next can use sounds and pantomime, even a narrator if desired. The last group can have the actors tell the story through narrators, pantomime, actors speaking roles, etc.

**Instruction**

Instruction: Theatre is all about communication. We just learned how we can communicate with our bodies through pantomime. We will learn soon how we can communicate with our voices in the next unit. But this unit, we will be learning about theatre as a tool to help spread a message and the different basics to spread an effective message and to make what is known as a well made play.

DISCUSSION: Why do you do theatre in High School? Why have the government, the school, your parents, even you deemed it as important enough to take time away from Math and Science? How can you use it to your best advantage during school? What plays have you seen? List on board. What is the message these plays are trying to spread. Look at the commercial on before channel 1 everyday – one is the loneliest number. What does the student government want you to do by showing this commercial? What about other commercials –favorite commercials– they are forms of communication – they are performances that are trying to get you to do something. Why? What works?

Aesop’s fables came a bit before another important individual: Aristotle. Who is Aristotle? – the father of plot structure. What is a plot? Why is it important to have a plot? Modeling: The teacher will draw Aristotle’s concept of the well-made play. The class will discuss what each element is and how it relates to a play: exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax and denouement. The class will further discuss the four elements needed to make theatre: actors, audience, place and light. They will discuss the role of each and variations that can be made. The class will also learn the difference between theatre and theater.

Checking for Understanding: The teacher will give examples and ask the students to identify each element of plot structure, or what message is trying to be communicated. What did we learn from the obstacles encountered in our pantomime workshop? Where was the plot structure there? What did the character what, what was the rising action, now was it resolved? What happens if it is not resolved?

Transition: Using a welknown fairytale, like Cinderella, the class will review the story, picking out the important points. This can reviewed orally from memory or can be read aloud as a class.

Guided Practice: The class will together map out the elements of Aristotle’s well-made play and see if the story fits into the structure. This will be done on the chalk board and the students will copy it into their notes.

Independent Practice: The students will silently read the included short story: The Fox and the Horse, by the Brothers Grimm. Independently and on another piece of paper, they will map out the story using Aristotle’s method. This sheet will be turned in at the end of class and graded. If time is an issue, this assignment can be given as homework and returned the following class period.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: The instructor will erase the board and ask the students to close their notes, they will again map out the elements of Aristotle’s method. Then they will give examples (from plays that they know, movies, stories, etc.) of exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, denouement. The students will turn in their assignment for the day before they leave class for credit.

**2: Theatre and Performance, from the beginning**

**Objective**

Students will expand their knowledge of the origins of theatre and dramatic performance by creating a timeline portfolio.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Ancient Theaters
* Everyman
* Oedipus Rex
* Plot Structure Quiz
* Timeline Assignment

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Aristotle’s plot structure quiz, included

**Instruction**

Instruction: Here, we deal with the development of theatre as an art form consisting of works written for the stage and intended to be performed by actors on a stage. And we will be dealing primarily with the history of theatre in the west. We will be taking a separate look at Asian and African Theatre later on in the unit. We will first be looking at theatre as it grew in Greece and Rome. As we study these plays, students will need to take notes in order to complete their history of theatre timelines that will be due at the end of this unit. The timelines will need to be divided up into sections, with plays, time periods and playwrights clearly identified.  
  
Below is a nice history summary, all or parts of this can be used as instruction for the lesson.  
  
Greek Theatre  
If theatre is to be defined as involving the art of acting a part on stage, that is the dramatic impersonation of another character than yourself, we begin with Thespis. A figure of whom we know very little, he won the play competition in honor of the greek god Dionysus, in 534 B.C. While it is uncertain whether Thespis was a playwright, an actor or a priest, it is his name with which the dramatic arts are associated in our word "Thespian".  
Greek theatre took place in large (the largest ultimately held twenty thousand people) hillside amphitheatres. The players included a chorus and their leader, and the "lines" were more chanted than spoken. The chorus performed in the "orchestra", not on a raised stage. The use of masks to represent characters and high-soled boots worn to add height to the players limited the movement of the actors. Indeed, the concept of "actors" themselves was not originally a part of Greek theatre, but was developed as a consequence of certain playwrights of particular genius.  
Greek drama was dominated by the works and innovations of five playwrights over the 200 years following Thespis. The first three of these were tragedians. Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), who is most famous for his tragic trilogy the Oresteia, introduced the concept of a second actor, expanding the possibilities for plot and histrionics through the interaction of two characters in his dramas. While Aeschylus ultimately used a third actor, it was Sophocles (496-406 B.C.) who actually initiated this innovation. Sophocles is most famous for his trilogy Oedipus Rex, and in his works the role of the chorus in Greek drama diminishes in favor of the interplay between characters and the development of character itself. It was Euripides (480-406 B.C.), however, while winning less competitions than Aeschylus or Sophocles, who foreshadowed the ultimate form of drama as we know it -- employing a far more naturalistic or human approach in his works, in contrast to the remote scale and formalized conventions used by his contemporaries.  
The last two Greek playwrights were the authors of comedies: Aristophanes (448-380 B.C.) and Menander (342-292 B.C.). There was a separate competition for comedy which, while also dedicated to Dionysus, took place at the smaller winter festival, rather than the major spring festival at which the tragedies were presented. As has been true throughout the history of theatre, the comedies, dependent on topical humor and satire for much of their content, have not survived the ages as well as tragedy -- which deals with more universal themes. However, the universal popularity accorded these playwrights during their lifetimes attests to the significance which this dramatic form can have. The popularity of their work, and the diminishing appeal of tragedy to the audiences of the time, can also be interpreted as a comment on the role which theatre plays in society at large. Tragedy was at its height in Greek society when that society was at its height, while comedy -- an outlet for the frustrations of society as well as a diversion for the masses -- was most popular during the decline of Greek government.  
History found at: http://www.tctwebstage.com/ancient.htm  
  
Modeling: The students will have the opportunity to get up and perform Oedipus Rex in 10 minutes or less. The students will play the parts of the characters, acting out the scenes as the instructor and/or the students read the included summary.  
  
Checking for Understanding: The students will discuss the major points of the play and why it could be considered important. Why do we still have this play after so many years? This was the very play that Aristotle based his plot structure on. He considered it the perfect play and since we consider Aristotle (and Sophocles) a great philosopher, we still study his opinion. According to Aristotle, a tragedy must be an imitation of life in the form of a serious story that is complete in itself; in other words, the story must be realistic and narrow in focus. A good tragedy will evoke pity and fear in its viewers, causing the viewers to experience a feeling of catharsis. Catharsis, in Greek, means "purgation" or "purification"; running through the gamut of these strong emotions will leave viewers feeling elated, in the same way we often claim that "a good cry" will make one feel better.  
  
Transition: So the Greeks refined theatre, they set out the plot structure that we still follow to this day. We still study them in history, in math and science, in theatre. And they greatly influenced the next great playwrights and works that we will look at â€“ the Romans.  
  
Guided Practice: Together the class will take a look at Roman Theatre.  
Roman Theatre  
The decline of Greek government and society coincided with the rise of the Roman Republic and subsequent empire. The Romans borrowed extensively from Greek theatre. Although Roman theatre may not be held in the same high esteem as that of the Greeks, we have inherited much from the influence of the Roman Theatre, including the word "play" itself, which derives from a literal translation of the Latin word ludus, which means recreation or play. Roman theatre took two forms: Fabula Palliata and Fabula Togata. Fabula Palliata were primarily translations of Greek plays into Latin, although the term is also applied to the original works of Roman playwrights based upon Greek plays. We are familiar with the latter from the works of Terence (190-159 B.C.), who introduced the concept of a subplot, enabling us to contrast the reactions of different sets of characters to the same events or circumstances. The Fabula Togata were of native origin, and were based on more broadly farcical situations and humor of a physical nature. An author of some of the better examples of this type of drama is Plautus (c.250-184 B.C.).  
Again, perhaps as a reflection of the society itself, performed drama in Rome consisted primarily of Fabula Togata, as well as the spectacles of the gladiators and chariot races made familiar by modern Hollywood treatment of the Roman Empire. Plays of a more serious literary nature continued to be written, but these were not intended to be performed so much as read or recited. Although we have few works by Roman playwrights surviving to us in forms that would lend themselves to revival, the influence of the Roman world on the form of the stage is one which had more lasting effect. The semi-circular orchestra of the Greek theatre came to be eclipsed by the raised stage and the more vigorous style style of acting employed by the performers. However, the greatest impact Rome may have had on the theatre was to lower it in the esteem of the Church -- an impact that was to retard the growth of the dramatic arts for several centuries.  
The bent toward low comedy and its mass appeal -- coupled with its association with the entertainment of the arena (which involved the martyrdom of early Christians) -- almost certainly contributed to its disfavor by officials of the early Christian Church. Plays, or ludii were associated with either comedy of a coarse and scurrilous nature, or with pagan rituals and holidays. It was the latter, however, which may account for the survival of theatre through the Middle Ages.  
History found at: http://www.tctwebstage.com/ancient.htm  
  
Independent Practice: In groups, the students will write down everything they know about gladiator battles and chariot races. They will (as time permits) share these observations with the class. The teacher will show the transparency of the visuals for Roman theaters and the images she has in her possession. The student will write down observations that they see about the space Roman events were performed in.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: In the next class period, we will be moving into medieval theatre, as well as closing out the Greeks and the Romans. In preparation for this, the students need to complete the homework assignment below and the teacher needs to hand out the slips of paper.  
  
Homework: Give each student a slip of paper with their character written on it. They will be divided into two groups to create their own morality play. They are not to share their groups or their character with other students. They are to go home and look up the definition of that characteristic and bring the definition, and start thinking of one costume piece and one prop that will help them to embody their character. This will begin to take shape in the next lesson, but necessarily will take more than one class period to develop.

**Author's Notes**

Note: Likely, this lesson will require more than one 80 minute class period. The teacher should be flexible in deciding what parts are most important to share with the students.

**3: The medieval world of the theatre, Creating a Morality Play**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of select theatre history practices by producing a mystery play and a morality play.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Medieval Lesson Supplements

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

When Rome fell, players had to make their living by performing where they could. They kept theatre alive in Europe during the Dark Ages, though the Catholic Church attempted to silence them in every way possible. Given the church's belief that the end of the world was near, the church contended that people should mortify worldly interests and prepare for the Day of Judgment. Players, consequently, traveled with little more than they could carry. Stages were probably not much more than an improvised trestle stage. As time went on and the world stubbornly refused to end, the church began to see less harm in entertaining diversions, but contended that they should be religious in nature. We have to keep in mind that the people of this time were illiterate and pagan. They couldn’t be given the bible to read, which would have cost way to much to do anyway, so the priests started acting parts of the bible out, to help them understand Christianity. The first plays told of the nativity and the resurrection and then moved down to important events that took place in the bible. Students will now be given the opportunity (in groups of 5-7) to put together their own passion plays. They will each be given one of the following stories, a team leader will be chosen and they will figure out a way to teach the class their bible story and make it simple and interesting. Recreate story of Noah’s ark, recreate the story of Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel, Moses and the red sea, Jonah and the whale, the Good Samaritan, etc.

**Instruction**

Instruction: How many of you have ever acted out the nativity at Christmas time? Well, you were performing a passion play that dates lead back to the middle ages. You were helping your little brothers and sisters, or those who couldn’t read or understand the bible, the story of the birth of Christ. We have just finished talking about the Greeks and the Romans and how they have influences the theatrical practices of today. We mentioned that with the emergence of the Catholic Church, theatre was looked upon poorly and much of its growth was delayed as a result. That is, of course, until it needed theatre to spread its message during the medieval era. Medieval Theatre Theatrical practices up kept by street players, jugglers, acrobats and animal trainers – mostly stock characters. Then the church worked to keep theatre (which it had earlier banned) alive through the middle ages. This resulted from the Church's need to establish itself in the community -- a community still steeped in pagan ritual and superstition which manifested itself in seasonal festivals. The Church ultimately linked its own religious holidays with these seasonal festivals and began to use dramatic form to illustrate the stories underlying these holidays so as to reinforce their religious connotation and to better communicate the stories to an illiterate congregation. At first the parts played in these simple religious re-enactments of the nativity and adoration of the Magi were played by priests in the sanctuary of the church. The priests would stand at various locations throughout the church, acting out different scenes, often with a choir singing, and the audience would move from one scene to another. So the audience changed the scene, along with the priests/actors. (Here several students could go to assigned areas of the room, each one acting out a portion of a biblical story: Mary is visited by an angel, Joseph is visited by an angel, Joseph and very pregnant Mary go to Bethlehem, Three Wisemen see the star and come, Mary gives Birth, the Shepherds see the angels, etc. The rest of the students could move as a class from scene to scene as the play progresses. Many productions that are being written and performed today in less conventional theatre use this method too!) As the repertoire of the Church grew to include the passion and crucifixion of Christ, the Church was confronted with the dilemma of how a priest should portray Herod. While division of opinion in the Church continued as to the worth of dramatic interpretations, the members of the congregation clearly enjoyed and were moved by them. The dramas continued to grow, moving out of the sanctuary and into the open air in front of the Church. Ultimately, the members of town guilds began to contribute to these dramas, which continued to grow more elaborate with time. These plays became super popular, like a new movie coming out, and so to make it more interesting, they started to add subplots and elements of humor. They moved them to Pageant Wagons that they could roll from one town to the other to teach the people. Many of the “mysteries” as they were called, could go traveling around at once. The wagon could story scenery, provide dressing room space, and space for the actors to wait offstage for their next entrance. People would pay more money than they could really afford to see them. Eventually, the tradition of staging religious plays developed to holding the performance in a more permanent location, often with scenes to be dramatized centered around the life of Christ. A single stage with an elevated "heaven" at one end and a "hellmouth" at the other end, usually belching flames and demons. In between were "mansions" that represented various points in the New Testament story. The hellmouth became one of the most popular parts of the mansion stage, because it used a lot of flashy special effects which were favored by the crowds. Known as passion plays, mystery plays, miracle plays and morality plays, they continued their close connection with the Church and church holidays, but began to introduce elements of stock characters that were more contemporary in nature. Eventually, when the protestant reformation took hold and stable government came into Europe, theatre became more secular.

Modeling: The instructor will then share a short synopsis of Everyman.

Morality play: Everyman (late 15th century). Everyman is visited by Death. He is told that he can take one friend with him on his long journey. He approaches Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Goods, Knowledge, Discretion, Strength, Beauty, and Five Wits. All refuse. Only Good Deeds will join him on his journey. The moral is obvious. Checking for Understanding: What is different about the morality play from the passion plays or the mystery plays? This is the morality play, which differs from the miracle (plays about conversion or saints), passion (deals solely with Christ’s passion and crucifixion) or mystery play (a biblical or pseudo-biblical story), dealing with personified abstractions of virtues and vices who struggle for man's soul. Simply put, morality plays dealt with man's search for salvation Morality plays were dramatized allegories of the life of man, his temptation and sinning, his quest for salvation, and his confrontation by death. The morality play, which developed most fully in the 15th century, handled the subjects that were most popular among medieval preachers and drew considerably on preaching technique.

Transition: The instructor will write the tenets of a medieval morality play on the chalkboard. She will excite the students about their opportunity to perform a real medieval morality play (hopefully in a found space or outside). They will take out their slips of paper that they received on Tuesday with their team number and character. They should have come with a definition and examples of the character description. The characteristics of morality plays can be found at: http://athena.english.vt.edu/~jmooney/renmats/drama.htm Key Elements & Themes of Morality Plays

Morality plays held several elements in common: · The hero represents Mankind or Everyman. · Among the other characters are personifications of virtues, vices and Death, as well as angels and demons who battle for the possession of the soul of man. · The psychomachia, the battle for the soul · A character known as the Vice often played the role of the tempter in a fashion both sinister and comic. Certain themes found a home in the morality plays: · The theme of the Seven Deadly Sins · The theme of Mercy and Peace pleading before God for man's soul against Truth and Righteousness; and · The Dance of Death, which focuses on Death as God's messenger come to summon all, high and low.

Guided Practice: The class will divide into group 1 and group 2. A team leader will be chosen to keep each team on task. They will share their “character” that they received, share the objects (props) and costume pieces that they have thought would correspond with their character and share the ideas that they have for their play. The teacher will walk around and observe and assist where needed.

Independent Practice: They then have 10 - 15 or so minutes to put together a 5 minute morality play to share with the class. The teacher will walk around and observe and assist where needed.

**Assessment**

In the last 5 minutes of class, the students need to return to their seats for last minute reminders and discussion. We will be seeing these morality plays at the beginning of class next time. So the students need to be reminded to bring all props and costume pieces then. In the remaining minutes of the class, the 2 individual groups will discuss: What message does their morality play teach? As a class, they will discuss: Why were morality or cycle plays so effective? Why would the clergy choose this way to spread their message instead of some other? What makes theatre such a great way to express a message? Where do we see this today? In the next lessons we will be moving onto Renaissance and Elizabethan Theatre and spend some quality time with our good friend, Will Shakespeare.

**Author's Notes**

Timeline reminder and explanation Vocabulary words for the day: Medieval Era/Middle Ages, Mystery play, Miracle Play, Morality play, Passion play, Everyman, Corpus Christi

**4: Medieval and Moving On**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Medieval Theatre by performing a morality play.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Shakespeare Characters

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Give the students a piece of paper â€“ they should have writing utensils â€“ and ask them to think about the morality play they will be performing today. We have learned that most of this type of theatre took place outside. But really, a morality play could be staged anywhere. Ask the students to draw a quick picture of their idea of the ideal place to do a morality play (ie: a forest, a town square, a field, etc.) Then ask them to draw, on the other side, an image of the space they would use if they had to stage it somewhere in the school, with their fellow schoolmates watching. Ask them to defend their reason for using that space. This should be turned into the instructor for evaluation.

**Instruction**

Instruction: Clarification of the terms we missed in Greek theatre, and what will be expected of them in the timeline. What does it mean for theatre to be successful? It has to be remembered, it has to make a statement, it has to teach us something and it has to move us to action. Keep in mind that the type of theatre we are focusing on right now had little to do with entertainment and more to do with teaching the illiterate masses how to behave. Soon we will see how theatre was secularized and controlled by the government, but still, several playwrights found a way to spread their ideas and comment on society.  
  
Modeling: We have discussed Greek Theatre, which was based largely on the religious beliefs of the society and used as a means to praise the Gods, then we briefly discussed the Romans, and their thirst for entertainment. We again visited religious theatre in the Middle Ages and now, once again, we will see this pattern repeated as we move into the period called the interlude and the Reformation. We will see how entertainment takes the main stage, but educational theatre still makes its way through the red tape to teach its message.  
  
In the first section of our History of Theatre, we looked at the beginnings of theatre in Greece, its migration to Rome, and its decline during the Middle Ages. In this section we'll examine the rebirth of the theatre and its domination by a playwright of genius. It is during this period that theatre re-emerges from the Church and becomes secular theatre -- although it remains largely under the control of the state, be that sovereign King or Republic.  
  
Checking for Understanding: The students are then given about 10 minutes to rehearse their morality plays and then the class will go outside and watch the 2 groups perform. We will talk about what we saw, the choices that each group made and if it was successful, by the terms that we established previously.  
  
Transition: The students will return to the classroom and to their seats. They will take out their notes and copy down the vocabulary words of the day for their timelines and we will move on with the lecture into the Interlude and Reformation.  
  
Guided Practice: Below is some interesting history of the eras about which we will talk. It is important to note that not all of this information is or should be used in the lecture. But the information can be found on the following websites: http://athena.english.vt.edu/~jmooney/renmats/drama.htm#interlude  
http://www.tctwebstage.com/shakspere.htm  
http://www.geocities.com/eedd88/ShakespeareanCharacters.html?200526  
  
The Interlude  
Toward the end of the 15th century, there developed a type of morality play which dealt in the same allegorical way with general moral problems, although with more pronounced realistic and comic elements. This kind of play is known as the interlude.  
The term might originally have denoted a short play or playlet actually performed between the courses of a banquet. It can be applied to a variety of short entertainments. including secular farces and witty dialogues with a religious or political point.  
Although the transition can't be documented adequately because so many texts haven't survived, the term "interlude" is employed by literary historians to denote the plays which mark the transition from medieval religious drama to Tudor secular drama.  
Henry Medwall's Fulgens and Lucres--at the end of the 15th century--is the earliest extant purely secular play in English.   
Medwall was one of a group of early Tudor playwrights that included John Rastell and John Heywood, who ended up being the most important dramatist of them all. Heywood's interludes were often written as part of the evening's entertainment at a nobleman's house and their emphasis is more on amusement than instruction. Heywood's art resembles the modern music-hall or vaudeville sketch. The plots are very basic.  
From the interlude, we see the beginnings of both English comedy â€“ and the emergence of prose in George Gascoigne’comic play Supposes and English Tragedy.  
Renaissance and Reformation  
During the 15th and 16th Centuries, European Society was influenced by the Renaissance -- a "rebirth" or rediscovery of the classical worlds of Rome and Greece -- and by a movement toward nationalism -- the building of coherent nation-states such as England, France and Spain (with Germany and Italy following later). The impact of these changes on the theatre went beyond mere secularization of an artform that had been dominated for centuries by the Church.  
The Renaissance, while having a major impact on the other arts, had less influence on theatre in England than in Italy, where classic Roman plays were revived for performance. Of greater impact was the Protestant Reformation and the movement toward nationalism which accompanied the Reformation. The rediscovery of the classics did influence the development of the stage -- first in Italy, then in France and England and the rest of Europe. It was in Italy that the first steps were taken toward the development of the proscenium, or "picture frame", stage with which we are so familiar today.  
In the England of the 15th and 16th Centuries, however, the proscenium stage was still in the future. The stages on which the works of a growing body of "play-makers" were performed evolved from the use of the enclosed courtyards of inns to stage performances. These "apron stages" were surrounded by galleries and were therefore "open" stages. Indeed, they were so "open" that members of the audience not only sat in the galleries surrounding the stage on three sides, and in the groundspace around the elevated stage, but on the stage itself. The emphasis was on dialogue as opposed to blocking or action, and the plays still had a moralistic tone. The themes of religious virtue were replaced by those of loyalty to government or to a stable society.  
The term "play-maker" refers to the fact that the emphasis was on the performers. Troupes or companies of actors developed a repertory of plays for performance. These companies were still guild-like in their organization, with a group of owner-actors, journeymen and hirelings. The plays that were performed were based on simple plots or previous works, and a writer "made" a play more as a technical than a truly creative process.  
The Protestant Reformation and the break of England from the Catholic Church during the reign of Henry VIII influenced a change in this pattern. England in the 16th Century moved back and forth from Catholicism to Protestantism, back to Catholicism during the reign of Mary, and back again to Protestantism with the accession of Elizabeth I. For intellectuals, including those who "made" plays based on the works of the classic world, the choice between revival of Latin works (associated with the Church in Rome) or Greek works (associated more with Protestantism in the England of the time), could literally be a choice between life and death as a heretic. It's no wonder that playwrights began to avoid a revival of the classics in favor of original, secular works of a general, non-political and non-religious nature.  
Theatre companies were still somewhat beyond the pale of normal society during this time. Fear of plague that might be carried by the traveling companies, as well as the possibility of civil unrest that might be occasioned by patrons who had too much to drink, made civil authorities sometimes ban the performance of plays and even refuse entry into a city or town by the company. Theatres were also associated, in the minds of merchants, with temptation for idle apprentices to while away their time watching entertainment instead of working. In the view of the wives of play-goers, theatres were associated with the women of ill-repute who frequented the areas surrounding the play-houses and public inns where performances took place. Ultimately, these concerns led to the licensing of official companies by the throne, and the domination of theatre by the state.  
The University Wits: The growing popularity and diversity of the drama, its secularization, and the growth of a class of writers who were not members of holy orders led in the 16th century to a new literary phenomenon, the secular professional playwright. The first to exploit this situation was a group of writers known as the University Wits, young men who had graduated at Oxford or Cambridge with no patrons to sponsor their literary efforts and no desire to enter the Church.  
They turned to playwriting to make a living. In doing so they made Elizabethan drama more literary and more dramatic--and they also had an important influence on both private and public theaters because they worked for each. They set the course for later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and they paved the way for Shakespeare.  
The University Wits were  
Â· John Lyly (1554-1606) is best known for court comedies, generally for private theatres, but also wrote mythological and pastoral plays. Endimion & Euphues.   
Â· George Peele (1558-96) began writing courtly mythological pastoral plays   
Â· Robert Greene (1558-92), who founded romantic comedy, wrote plays which combined realistic native backgrounds with an atmosphere of romance, comedies.  
Â· Thomas Lodge (1557-1625) tended toward euphustic prose romances. His Rosalynde provided Shakespeare with the basis for As You Like It..   
Â· Thomas Kyd (155~94), who founded romantic tragedy, wrote plays mingling the themes of love, conspiracy, murder and revenge. Adapted elements of Senecan drama to melodrama. His The Spanish Tragedy (1580s) is the first of the series of revenge plays. In these plays, violence and grossness comes to the stage . One of the characters bites off his tongue and spits it on the stage. And we think Quentin Tarantino movies are wild!   
  
Independent Practice: The students will need time to process all of the information that they have been given today and in the class periods preceding this to put together their time lines. They will do so on their own and the teacher will monitor the classroom, asking questions, clarifying and helping where needs be.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: The instructor will check the progress of their timelines, asking individual questions about the information the students have received up to this point and assign the homework specified below.  
We will now be moving on from the reformation into the Elizabethan and Jacobean age of theatre.   
  
Homework: The students need to choose one Shakespeare character from the list and do a bit of research. They need to find out about the play that this character is from and write a brief summary about the play (which they can easily find online) and a description of the character. They will be presenting their findings before the class on Wednesday. The list of both major and minor Shakespeare characters is included below, but is not by any means comprehensive.

**5: Finishing up the reformation and movin’ on down to Shakespeare**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Shakespeare by working on a scene from one of his plays.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Shakespeare Dialogue

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Film Clip: Tricking Beatrice and Benedick form Much Ado About Nothing.

**Instruction**

Instruction: We will need to finish the Reformation and University Wits before moving onto the next section of theatre history.  
  
Elizabethan Theatre and Shakespeare  
It was in this world that William Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote and acted in his plays in the late 16th and early 17th Centuries. Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre produced a number of notable playwrights, including Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson.   
Shakespeare had the good fortune to be a share-holder in the companies he was associated with, earning him income as a maker of plays, an actor and an investor. Born in Stratford-upon-Avon, he wrote plays that are timeless for their understanding of human nature and character. He was a member of several companies including the Lord Chamberlain's and King James I's own company, and was also a part owner of the Globe and Blackfriars playhouses.  
At this time, the plays written and performed in England were still presented in open-air theatres. Although Hamlet exhorts the actors in the play of that name to be natural in their performance, this would not be "natural" acting in the way that term is understood today. Shakespeare and his contemporaries did encourage a more natural style of speaking, as opposed to the declamatory demagogueing then practiced by some, but was not likely an advocate of the type of realism and natural character portrayal that we see in today's theatres.  
  
Modeling: The class will look at the overhead of the scene provided from Two Gentlemen of Verona. They will discuss what the characters are really saying and how to break apart Shakespeare’language.  
  
Checking for Understanding: The students will break off into partners to study the scene provided from Romeo and Juliet, the balcony scene. They need to read it and figure out what it is talking about. Then they need to put it in today’terms. How does that change how they act, now that they know what it is talking about? They need to use the sides provided and work on how they would stage the play. They can also set it in a different time period and explore what happens there. By the end of the activity, each pair needs to turn in a paragraph telling us what the two characters are talking about.  
  
Transition: Shakespeare is so important to our study of the theatre, that much of the rest of the history of theatre that we study will come back to him. In the next class period, we will further look into his influence and do the presentations we spoke of previously. These presentations will be happening in the next class period. As a reminder, you will give the class a short summary of the play you are reporting on and a brief description of the character from that play and their importance to the plot. Right now, however, we are going to continue with theatre history and see what happened to the rest of Europe during this time. We are going to pay particular attention to France.  
  
The Republic and The Restoration  
In 1642, six years before the execution of Charles I, Parliament closed the theatres in England and, until the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, we have little of theatre in that country. However, it was during this time that the influence of French theatre, and through it, Italian notions of theatre architecture, was experienced by English actors and royalists in exile.  
Theatre in France, and subsequently in England, was beginning to focus more on the mechanics of scenery and spectacle. The plays themselves were often masques in which costume, dance and clever scenery and scene changes were more emphasized than acting and plot. Louis XIV, the "Sun-King" appeared as himself in the Ballet Nuit. Theatres began to display the proscenium style of architecture, although the forestage remained the principal place where the acting took place, and the area behind the proscenium was reserved for the display of scenery changes which were slid into view by means of panels on tracks. It was also during this time, when theatre was designed specifically for the royal pleasure, that theatres began to be roofed in.  
Theatre was also influenced by two French playwrights, Jean Racine (1639-1699) and MoliÃ¨re (1622-1673). MoliÃ¨re (born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin) was the author of some of the best comedies in European history, including Tartuffe, Le Misanthrope, Le Femmes savantes and Le Malade imaginaire. Racine was as great a tragedian as MoliÃ¨re was a playwright of comedies, writing Bajazet, Mithridate, IphigÃ©nie and PhÃ¨dre. Both playwrights had an influence in turning theatre away from classical style into more contemporary subject matter.  
It was at the time of the Restoration of the Crown in England, that women first began to appear on stage (a convention borrowed from the French), instead of female roles being played by boys and young men. Although theatres were again licensed and controlled by the state, with the dawn of the 18th Century approaching, it would not be long before the echoes of the Republican period in England and the influence of similar movements abroad would force a broadening of theatre's appeal -- first to property owners and merchants, and ultimately to the masses.  
  
Guided Practice: The class will discuss how what we have talked about today will fit into their timelines and what additional work they will need to do to put it together. We will together start helping each other build the timelines.  
  
Independent Practice: The students will need some extra time to work on their timelines up to this point. They may have questions that need to be clarified. We will be working on this with the time remaining in the class.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: The students are reminded that their Shakespeare presentations are due on Friday. They will have 5 minutes a piece to tell us about the play and the character. They need to continually work on their timelines so they aren’t saving them for the night before. They will be due as we close up theatre history 2 weeks from today.

**6: Embracing Shakespeare**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Shakespeare by performing a presentation on one of his plays.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Launce Monologue
* Play List

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Shakespeare Insult kit, explanation and trial game.

**Instruction**

Instruction: If we really want to get a taste of Shakespeare, we need do examine his plays. During this period (and possibly the next), we will have the opportunity to explore about 22 of his plays. Each member of the class should have a presentation to do that was given to them last week. You will need to insert at least 3 of these plays, with the dates initially written into your timelines. But let’s start out with one of Shakespeare’s first plays that he wrote when he was quite young, in the year 1592 or 1593 could be his first, and definitely not his most accomplished.  
  
Modeling: Brief Presentation of Two Gentlemen of Verona. The students will be performing their own after the instructor. This is merely an example of how they can present. My personal favorite character is Launce and I will talk a bit about him.  
  
Bosom buddies Valentine and Proteus bid a tearful farewell on a street in Verona. Valentine is off to improve himself, venturing out to see the world, while Proteus stays home in Verona, tied by his love for Julia. After Valentine departs, his servant, Speed, enters. Proteus inquires whether or not Speed delivered a letter to Julia, to which Speed replies affirmatively. Julia, meanwhile, asks her maid, Lucetta, with which man she should fall in love, and Lucetta recommends Proteus. Lucetta admits that she has a letter for Julia from Proteus. After much bickering, Julia tears up the letter, only to regret this act an instant later.  
Antonio decides to send Proteus, his son, to the Duke's court in Milan, a decision with which neither Proteus nor Julia is particularly happy. They exchange rings and promises to keep loving each other. Meanwhile, Valentine has fallen in love with the Duke's feisty daughter, Silvia. When Proteus arrives at court, he too falls in love with Silvia, and vows to do anything he can to win her away from Valentine. When Valentine confesses that he and Silvia plan to elope, Proteus notifies the Duke of their plans, gaining favor for himself and effecting Valentine's banishment from court. Back in Verona, Julia has hatched a plan to disguise herself as a man so that she can journey to Milan to be reunited with Proteus. Upon arriving at court, she witnesses Proteus and Thurio wooing Silvia.  
The banished Valentine, while traveling to Mantua, is apprehended by a group of outlaws. The outlaws, all of whom are banished gentlemen as well, demand Valentine to become their king. Since they threaten to kill him if he refuses, Valentine accepts. Silvia and Julia, who is disguised as the page Sebastian, meet when Julia delivers the ring Proteus had given her to Silvia on behalf of Proteus. Julia does not reveal her identity. Silvia calls on her friend Sir Eglamour to help her escape her father's oppressive will (he wants her to marry Thurio) and to find Valentine. However, while traveling through the forest, she and Eglamour are overtaken by a band of outlaws. Eglamour runs away, leaving Silvia to fend for herself against the outlaws. By this time, the Duke, Proteus, and Thurio, with Sebastian/Julia in tow, have organized a search party for Silvia.  
Proteus wrests Silvia away from the outlaws. Valentine watches the interaction unseen. Proteus demands that Silvia give him some sign of her favor for freeing her, but she refuses. He tries to rape her for her resistance, but Valentine jumps out and stops him. Proteus immediately apologizes, and Valentine offers to give him Silvia as a token of their friendship. At this moment, Sebastian faints and his true identity becomes clear. Proteus decides that he really loves Julia better than Silvia, and takes her instead. The Duke realizes that Thurio is a thug and says that Valentine is far nobler and can marry Silvia. Valentine asks for clemency for the outlaws, and suggests that his marriage to Silvia and Proteus' marriage to Julia should take place on the same day.  
  
This summary was found at: http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/twogentlemen/summary.html  
  
Launce is the servant of Proteus and throughout the play, he interjects little observations along with his dog, Crab. Many have said that he is the first really memorable Shakespearean character, due largely to his comic relief, an example of which is demonstrated in the monologue section below where Launce is telling/demonstrating his family’s reactions as he left Verona. Check out a great video of this at: http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/works/work156.html#  
  
Launce’s monologue, Act 2, scene 3  
Nay, I'll show you the manner of it. This   
shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father:   
no, no, this left shoe is my mother: nay, that   
cannot be so neither: yes, it is so, it is so, it   
hath the worser sole. This shoe, with the hole in   
it, is my mother, and this my father; a vengeance   
on't! there 'tis: now, sit, this staff is my   
sister, for, look you, she is as white as a lily and   
as small as a wand: this hat is Nan, our maid: I   
am the dog: no, the dog is himself, and I am the   
dog--Oh! the dog is me, and I am myself; ay, so,   
so. Now come I to my father; Father, your blessing:   
now should not the shoe speak a word for weeping:   
now should I kiss my father; well, he weeps on. Now   
come I to my mother: O, that she could speak now   
like a wood woman! Well, I kiss her; why, there   
'tis; here's my mother's breath up and down.  
  
Launce also later talks about being in love and describes his dream girl as: “She can fetch, carry, milk, sew, brew good ale, knit, wash and scour. She is not without her detriments: she is toothless, and overly fond of liquor, and has illegitimate children and "... more hair than wit, and more faults than hairs, and more wealth than faults"  
  
Checking for Understanding: What did you like about the story? What parts were interesting to you? What did you like about the character I described? Do you see any plays or movies from today, or the characters in them, that have similarities?  
  
Transition: Now that we are more familiar with the two gentlemen of Verona, it’s time for us to familiarize ourselves with the other works of Shakespeare  
  
Guided Practice: Presentations on Shakespeare’s plays: from the list given, write down what the play is about to remind yourself. Star the ones that appeal to you or characters you might be interested in playing someday. Which ones seemed exciting or interesting to you that you would like to get to know further? This paper will be turned in for credit and returned later for your future use.  
  
Independent Practice: Get together with new groups and talk about your observations. As a group, choose one play you all liked. If you were to change the setting to any other setting in the history of the world, except Shakespeare’s, how would you do it? Why would this be interesting?

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: Group leader from each group needs to share your ideas from the group discussion with the class.

**7: Shakespeare monologues**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their understanding of Shakespeare by presenting synopsis, and breaking apart a monologue to memorize.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Finding interesting characters. Shakespeare had a talent for developing interesting and not so interesting characters. Last time we talked about Richard III, or Gloucester who was so evil he had a growing hump of evil, we talked about Beatrice and Benedick and their love affair that started because of their friends spreading rumors, and we even looked at Hamlet and Ophelia and dipped into their psyche. We started class with a glimpse into Two Gentlemen of Verona and the character of Launce. Let me tell you about his idea of his dream girl.   
  
“she can fetch, carry, milk, sew, brew good ale, knit, wash and scour. She is not without her detriments: she is toothless, and overly fond of liquor, and has illegitimate children and "... more hair than wit, and more faults than hairs, and more wealth than faults"  
  
As we go through the remainder of our presentations, remember, you are writing down summaries of the plays so that you can recall them, but I also want you to be on the lookout for interesting characters that you can draw upon in the future.

**Instruction**

Transition: Now we are going to continue to look at Shakespeare’s characters and plays. Keep in mind you need to write the summaries on the paper you were given.  
  
Guided Practice: Presentations on Shakespeare’s plays: from the list given, write down what the play is about to remind yourself. Star the ones that appeal to you or characters you might be interested in playing someday. Which ones seemed exciting or interesting to you that you would like to get to know further? This paper will be turned in for credit and returned later for your future use.  
  
Independent Practice: Get together with new groups and talk about your observations. As a group, choose one play you all liked. If you were to change the setting to any other setting in the history of the world, except Shakespeare’s, how would you do it? Why would this be interesting? Group leader from each group needs to share your ideas from the group discussion with the class.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: The students will get a monologue sheet, enclosed. They need to each choose a monologue that they will memorize and perform in front of the class. For homework, the students will break apart their monologue and find out what the character is really saying. Then they will memorize it. We will be quizzing them on their memorization on Monday.

**8: 18th and 19th Century Theatre**

**Objective**

The students will experiment with the innovations of 17th, 18th, and 19th century theatre by creating their own commedia dell’arte piece.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Commedia Vocabulary and Characters

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Watch a small biography on William Shakespeare. What new things did you learn from it? What insights did you have into Shakespeare’s life?

**Instruction**

Instruction: We have looked at Shakespeare and Marlow and Jonson and Racine and Moliere. We have covered what was going on during the 16th and 17th centuries France and England. In this next session, as we move into the next 2 centuries, we will see how theatre changed and was influenced by Italy and the Americas.   
  
The History of Theatre in the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries is one of the increasing commercialization of the art, accompanied by technological innovations, the introduction of serious critical review, expansion of the subject matters portrayed to include ordinary people, and an emphasis on more natural forms of acting. Theatre, which had been dominated by the Church for centuries, and then by the tastes of monarchs for more than 200 years, became accessible to merchants, industrialists, the bourgeoise and then the masses. In this section we give a brief sketch of the development of theatre during the last three centuries.  
  
The Eighteenth Century  
Theatre in England during the 18th Century was dominated by an actor of genius, David Garrick (1717-1779), who was also a manager and playwright. Garrick emphasized a more natural form of speaking and acting that mimicked life. His performances had a tremendous impact on the art of acting, from which ultimately grew movements such as realism and naturalism. Garrick finally banished the audience from the stage, which shrunk to behind the proscenium where the actors now performed among the furnishings, scenery and stage settings.  
Plays now dealt with ordinary people as characters, such as in She Stoops to Conquer by Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1734), and The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan. This was the result of the influence of such philosophers as Voltaire and the growing desire for freedom among a populace, both in Europe and North America, which was, with advances in technology, beginning to find the time and means for leisurely occupations such as patronizing commercial theatre. It was also in the 18th Century that commercial theatre began to make its appearance in the colonies of North America.  
  
Most of the theatre that we see in the 18th century in America were English plays, usually using English actors and English staging techniques. We will see as we merge into the 19th century the ways that American theatre started to develop. But we see the emergence and domination of the Italian theatre more readily.   
  
Modeling: We see the influences of commedia in theatre and film today. Clip from A Mighty Wind.  
  
Checking for Understanding: Beginning during the Renaissance and lasting into the eighteenth century, traveling troupes performed the commedia dell' arte, the Italian comedy. Starting in Italy, troupes moved into all of Europe, influencing theatre in Spain, Holland, Germany, Austria, England, and especially, France. The company's ten or more actors each developed a specific type of character, such as the Captain, two old men (Pantaloon and the Doctor), the Zanni (valet-buffoons). Since all wore masks, their roles were eventually called masks. Along with these comic characters were the lovers. Female parts were originally played by men, but later played by females.  
The actors had specific comic business (lazzi) that they developed. Before going on-stage, actors would agree on a basic plot and a general idea of how it should be performed. The improvised performances were never subtle; the humor was often bawdy and coarse.  
  
Transition: So, where else do we see commedia developing today? We have specific characters, comedy, comedic business, improvisation and performance. Live TV like SNL or Mad TV used to follow this until they established scripts and cue cards. Many comedians still follow this. An example story from Comedia can be found here:   
  
As the curtain rises, Harlequin is ill. The Doctor and his servant try to determine what is wrong. The Doctor, after much enticing, gives Harlequin a shot on his backside with a huge syringe. Harlequin is found to be pregnant and delivers three babies, one of which survives. Harlequin nurses and mothers the baby. He teaches the child to walk. Harlequin complains to the Doctor regarding the problems of rearing a child. The child is whipped by Harlequin. The play ends with Harlequin teaching the child to read. Throughout the play, Harlequin is made fun of by his friends.  
  
Characters of the Commedia Dell’Arte  
The characters or masks in spite of changes over the years, retained much of their original flavor.   
Arlecchino, or Harlequin   
Most important character in commedia dell’arte is  the zanni, or servant types. He was an acrobat and a wit, childlike and amorous. He wore a catlike mask and motley colored clothes and carried a bat or wooden sword, the ancestor of the slapstick.   
Brighella  
The Zanni’s crony. Was more roguish and sophisticated, a cowardly villain who would do anything for money. Figaro and Moliere’s Scapin are descendants of this type.   
Pedrolino   
Was a white-faced, moon-struck dreamer; the French Pierrot is his descendant.   
Pagliaccio   
The forerunner of today’s clown, was closely akin to Pedrolino.  
Pulcinella  
Was a dwarfish humpback with a crooked nose, the cruel bachelor who chased pretty girls.   
Pantalone or Pantaloon  
Was a caricature of the Venetian merchant, rich and retired, mean and miserly, with a young wife or an adventurous daughter.   
Il Dottore (the doctor)  
Pantolone’s only friend, was a caricature of learning; pompous and fraudulent; he survives in the works of Moliere.   
Il Capitano (the captain)   
Was a caricature of the professional soldier; bold, swaggering, and cowardly. He was replaced by the more agile Scarramuccia or Scaramouche, who, dressed in black and carrying a pointed sword, was the Robin Hood of his day.  
Inamorato (the lover)  
Handsome. Went by many names. He wore no mask and had to be eloquent in order to speak the love declamations.   
The Inamorata   
Was his female counterpart; Isabella Andreini was the most famous.   
Her servant, usually called Columbine,   
Was the beloved of Harlequin. Witty, bright, and given to intrigue, she developed into such characters as Harlequine and Pierrette.   
La Ruffiana   
Was an old woman, either the mother or a village gossip, who thwarted the lovers. Cantarina and Ballerina   
Often took part in the comedy, but for the most part their job was to sing, dance, or play music. None of the women wore masks.  
  
Guided Practice: So, if we were to put together our own commedia dell’ arte piece, what would we need to do? Establish characters, have a basic story line, make sure it’s funny and involves all the characters, create masks, and rehearse.   
Put the students into 2 groups, have them choose a character and a team captain. Have the groups come up with a story line, on paper to be turned in. They will need time to rehearse and will be performing these on Friday.  
  
Independent Practice: The students will need the rest of the class period to write and rehearse their pieces. The instructor will walk about and observe them.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: Remember, you are performing your commedia pieces on Friday and you will be passing off your Shakespearean monologue on Wednesday. Bring materials to make a mask and an idea of the props and costume pieces you will need.

**Author's Notes**

Vocabulary:  
commercialization of art  
David Garrick (1717-1779)  
Realism  
Naturalism  
She Stoops to Conquer by Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1734)  
The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan  
Commedia Dell’Arte

**9: 19th Century Theatre**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of 18th and 19th century theatrical practices by creating and performing a commedia dell’arte piece and working on constructing group presentations on 19th century plays and playwrights.to

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* 19th Century Worksheet
* Commedia Characters and Vocab
* Lecture Notes

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Physicalizing Commedia: Have students spread around the class, allowing themselves adequate space.   
Using the provided character descriptions, describe the character to the class and ask them to give you an exaggerated pose. Ask them next while still in the pose to talk like the character. Now have them move around as the character. Have them find the character's pattern which will become a 'stylized' walk which will lead to a special 'signature' movement that they will use when entering scenes. Remember that we are working on a high level of energy here to be able to do this kind of theatre, even more than you used for your partner pantomimes.

**Instruction**

Instruction: Let’s review the elements we said were necessary for performing their pieces: Disgraceful romances that are thwarted by an old father; usually Pantaloni or Arccialetto or a gossipy widow, clever tricks to get money, comment on current society and its problems, the outwitting of some simpleton, improve., a hero mistaken for the villain, plotting maids, long lost children, bragging captains, funny moments, song, dance, juggling, father and son fighting over the same woman, for various reasons, etc. The students are given 10 minutes to meet with their groups and group leaders to review what they have planned for their Commedia dell’arte piece.  
  
Modeling: Each group will then be given the time to perform for the class on the stage. Each student should have brought a mask of some sort with them. Those students acting as the audience will make note of the different elements of commedia that they saw manifest in the roll.  
  
Checking for Understanding: After each performance, the class will discuss the notes that they made. The group performing will also talk about the difficulties of doing this type of theatre. What worked, and what didn’t?  
  
Transition: While we have talked about the very important movement of commedia that started in Italy and worked its way through to France, England, Spain and other parts of Europe, we have to remember that the 19th century encompassed so much more than just that.   
  
Guided Practice: Lecture and class discussion taken from the following notes: Timeline Vocabulary: Gaslight, Limelight, melodrama, the method, Dramatic Copyright Act of 1833, star system of the 1840’s, Uncle Tom’s Cabin  
See attached lecture notes on 19th century:  
  
Independent Practice: You should have brought your homework assignments with of the summaries of 19th century playwrights and important works. Each group will pair up, talk about what they learned and share their ideas with the group. Your task is to find a way to present this playwright and his works to us in an interesting way.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: Each group needs to complete the worksheet (enclosed) and turn it into the instructor for grading. They need to gather whatever materials are necessary for their group presentations on Tuesday.

**10: Theatre from the 20th Century thru today**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their understanding of 19th century theatre by participating in a group presentation.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Clips of Sound of Music and Mulon Rouge. How has theatre (also through the medium of film) changed in the last 100 years? In the last 50 or even 10? Examples of different ways of looking at the same thing.

**Instruction**

Instruction: Theatre has emerged over the centuries. It is still a powerful force today, though it has changed considerably from the Greek tragedies, or Roman spectacles of blood and gore, even from the medieval morality plays, the theatre of Shakespeareâ€™s world or that of Oscar Wilde and Gilbert and Sullivan. Itâ€™s our job to see where itâ€™s coming from and where it is today and even think about where it could be moving.  
  
The Twentieth Century  
The 20th Century has witnessed the two greatest wars in history and social upheaval without parallel. The political movements of the "proletariat" were manifested in theatre by such movements as realism, naturalism, symbolism, impressionism and, ultimately, highly stylized anti-realism -- particularly in the early 20th Century -- as society battled to determine the ultimate goals and meaning of political philosophy in the life of the average person.  
  
At the same time, commercial theatre advanced full force, manifesting itself in the development of vastly popular forms of drama such as major musicals beginning with Ziegfield's Follies and developing into full-blown musical plays such as Oklahoma!, Porgy and Bess, and Showboat. Ever greater technological advances permitted spectacular shows such as The Phantom of the Opera and Miss Saigon to offer competition to another new innovation: film. Ultimately, the cost of producing major shows such as these, combined with the organization of actors and technical persons in theatre, have limited what live theatre can do in competing with Hollywood.  
  
Serious drama also advanced in the works of Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) in his trilogy Mourning Becomes Electra and in The Iceman Cometh; Arthur Miller (1915-2005 ), in The Crucible and Death of a Salesman; and Tennessee Williams (1911-1983), whose Glass Menagerie, produced immediately after World War II, arguably changed the manner in which tragic drama is presented. Serious drama was accompanied by serious acting in the form of the Actor's Studio, founded in 1947 by Elia Kazan and others, later including Lee Strasberg. The art of writing comedy was brought to a level of near-perfection (and commercial success) by Neil Simon (1927- ), whose plays such as Rumors, The Odd Couple, and The Prisoner of Second Avenue, are among the favorites for production by community theatres.  
  
Modeling: film, Broadway shows, musicals, high school and educational theatre, dada, performance art, staged sleeping/living in a mall, Improv everywhere â€“ staged chaos â€“ McDonaldâ€™s Bathroom Attendant, U2 Rooftop concert. This is just like commedia dellâ€™arte. Planned Improv. And playwrights are still working today.  
  
Checking for Understanding: What are some of the recent plays that you have seen or read that have been written in the last 100 years? Urinetown, Beauty and the Beast, Lion King Ã  powerpoint of Lion King Images. What innovations are we still making today? Julie Taymore.   
Video (if I can show it: http://www.lionking.net/broadwayinfo.shtml)   
  
Transition: Practice time for presentations  
  
Guided Practice: 19th Century Playwright and Play Group Presentations.  
  
Independent Practice: Candy quiz on the plays and playwrights.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: In the next class period, your time lines will be due. Remember to have one image with each of the eras that we discuss. Remember that this is worth a lot of points, we need to see the plays and playwrights we discussed, the major events, etc. It needs to be typed or in some formal format. You will be presenting the images you have found to the class.

**11: Application thru the ages**

**Objective**

The students will demonstrate their knowledge of theatre history by presenting a timeline and corresponding images.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Related Documents**

* Theatre History Quiz

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

As students enter the classroom, they are asked to write down 5 or so random sentences. (The teacher will likely want to add class specific regulations to what can be written. The class is then divided into groups to perform the scene. At least 4 of the sentence papers are laid down on the ground. As they say a line, they must then read the line given them and try to act from there.  
Ask 2-3 players to play a short scene. One could limit the scene to 8 lines of dialog per player. Then ask the players to replay the scene, based on some audience suggestions for:   
Â· a particular acting style â€“ ritual dance, Greek chorus, facing front presentational, .   
Â· a particular historical era of theatre â€“ Greek, Roman, Medieval, Elizabethan, etc.   
Â· a different location â€“ the globe theater, a pagent wagon, a town square, a lunchroom, etc.   
Â· like a film / reality TV / soap opera style.   
Â· in Gibberish   
You can time the scene to 1 minute, and then replay in 30 seconds, 15 seconds, 7 seconds and 3 seconds.

**Instruction**

Instruction: We have just been learning about theatre history. We have covered all the really important stuff from storytelling through ritual dance, we have spent time with the Greek chorus, the Roman gladiators and Medieval priests. We have looked at Shakespeare and on though Oscar Wilde and Gilbert and Sullivan. We have even looked into early American drama and glimpsed improv and staged chaos. Now we are going to close that up, look into your timelines (that will help you in college) and see where that takes us today and how it helps us to become better actors.  
  
Modeling: The instructor will then share the images that she has for each century, these have been shown throughout the unit and can be found in Theatrical Design and Production, 3rd Edition, by J. Michael Gillette, various pages.  
  
Checking for Understanding: What ideas or techniques can you take from the images you have seen and use them in theatre today? How can you incorporate a Greek chorus â€“ Urinetown? Medieval pagent wagons â€“ performing in found spaces, like â€œImprov everyday.â€ What about commedia dellâ€™Arte â€“ SNL or Comedy Sports? Or Shakespeare that you see in â€œ10 things I hate about you, or even Romeo and Juliet, the modern Baz Lurman version.   
  
Transition: Now we want to see what you have come up with. What images have you found that will remind you of these time periods?  
  
Guided Practice: The students will then share their images and timelines with the class. They will hand the timeline in for credit.   
  
Independent Practice: If there is time, the students should use it to work on their Shakespeare monologues from Much Ado about Nothing or review for the quiz.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: Now we are moving on from theatre history into how we can use this information today. In the next class period, after we take the quiz, we will be taking a tour of the auditorium and learning about the different parts and the important vocab to know as an actor or technician.   
There will be a quiz on the different eras of theatre that we have studied in this unit during the next class period. Please review your notes to prepare for this quiz. If there is time, the teacher can review a bit with the class.   
Also during the next class period, we will be performing our Shakespeare monologues in front of the class. Extra points will be given for those who add character to the monologue.

**12: Theatre (and Theater) Basics**

**Objective**

The students will display their understanding of theatre history and application by taking a quiz and presenting their Shakespearean monologue.

**Materials Needed**

see lesson

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

The students will participate in a free-write about the different performance activities we have done thus far in the unit. They will choose 2 of their favorite performance experiences and write what and why. Then they will write what they are still not clear on in terms of theatre history and hand these papers into the teacher.

**Instruction**

Instruction: We have covered the history of theatre in some depth over the past few weeks, we have had the opportunity to perform in various aspects of the theatre and now it is time for us to really apply what we have learned in a formal quiz and through performing your monologue.  
  
Modeling: Using the student responses from the anticipatory set, the instructor will clarify the terms and/or practices that the students are still not quite clear on. She will highlight important terms and prepare them for the quiz.  
  
Checking for Understanding: The students will now complete the theatre history Quiz, included in the previous lesson.  
  
Transition: Now, before we move completely from theatre history into acting today, we need to take a look at what we as actors can learn from it.   
  
Guided Practice: You have all had adequate time to work on your Shakespeare monologues. You should be memorized and ready to pass it off for the class. Now even though we havenâ€™t spent a lot of time on acting techniques thus far in the class, we need to remember the scansion we worked on with each monologue. We know what each monologue is saying in terms of today, we have discussed what the character wants and why. Now it is time to put these methods into practice in your presentation of the monologues.   
  
Independent Practice: The instructor will then call upon the students to perform their monologues in front of the class.

**Assessment**

Closure and Assessment: The students will be graded on the quiz, their class participation and memorization of their Shakespeare monologue. The instructor will give encouragement as the situation necessitates.