**Technical Theatre Introduction** by Bryn Fairclough

**Objective**:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of technical theatre by participating in various projects and activities in the areas of: Lighting, Sound, Props, Publicity, Costumes

**Class Level:**

Beginning

**Main Concepts:**

technical theatre basics

**1994 National Standards:**

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

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

**Description**:

45 minute class period. This unit was originally written for a junior high school Drama Tech class. The school had a strong theatre program with beginning and advanced classes in technical theatre, so this unit allowed the beginning students to really play with these tech areas.

**Lesson Plans**

Lesson 1: Intro to Stage Lighting

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of the 4 functions of light: Visibility, Mood, Focus and Modeling by identifying these elements in freeze frames from movies.

Lesson 2: Sound Effects

Students will demonstrate an ability to choose and execute appropriate sound effects (using their bodies, instruments, or sound effects CD), by creating, planning and performing a skit involving 15 or more sound effects.

Lesson 3: Props

Students will demonstrate an ability to distinguish props from costumes and set dressings, and be able to create a prop table by deciding which items out of a box are props and by creating a prop table from those items.

Lesson 4: Publicity

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of effective publicity by creating a poster advertising the play Arsenic and Old Lace.

Lesson 5: Costumes

Students will demonstrate an understanding of how to create costumes by selecting a fairy tale, and making “costumes” out of newspaper for that story.

**1: Intro to Stage Lighting**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of the 4 functions of light: Visibility, Mood, Focus and Modeling by identifying these elements in freeze frames from movies.

**Materials Needed**

A flashlight, Movie clips: The Saint (Statue part), Westside Story (ending with Tony and Maria in Spotlight), Knights tale (being taught how to dance)

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have students enter with all the lights off except for a flashlight that you will hold. Use the flashlight to take roll, refer to the schedule on the board etc. Explain that the word theater comes from a word meaning “seeing place”. Give a brief history of theater lighting i.e. plays were originally performed at sunrise or sunset, then fire now electricity.

**Instruction**

Instruction: The functions of light have come into play now that we have more control over the light on the stage.

Modeling: Have a volunteer come up and use the flashlight in different positions on his/her face. How does the light affect their features, the mood and what you can see. What is the focus? Etc.

Transition: Turn on the lights again. Refer to a Quote from Jennifer Tipton, Tony award winning lighting designer. “To me, lighting is the audiences guide to the story and to what the production is doing. Light can confuse or clarify the issue.” Ask the students for their opinion on what this quote means and what she is trying to say.

Instruction: Go over the four functions of light and their definitions. Have the students take notes.

Visibility: What you can see

Mood: feelings that the scene evokes

Focus: What your eyes are drawn to

Modeling: Placement of lights to create dimension.

Transition: In film the camera is like the light in a play- your focus is drawn were the camera man wants it to be while light on stage is laced were the director wants you to look.

Guided Practice: Using still frames from movies have students identify with each frame each of the four functions of light in the picture. Talk about each one after you show it. Suggestions for freeze frames: The Saint (Statue part), Westside Story (ending with Tony and Maria in Spotlight), Knights tale (being taught how to dance)

Conclusion: Ask the students what they might notice about lighting in plays or movies that they didn’t before? Remind them that being observant about the light around them, natural and artificial, will help them as they design for plays. Why do they think this is so? Can they think of times/places when the lighting around them was particularly interesting? How could they use that memory/info in the future?

**Assessment**

Students can write their responses to the various film clips.

**2: Sound Effects**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an ability to choose and execute appropriate sound effects (using their bodies, instruments, or sound effects CD), by creating, planning and performing a skit involving 15 or more sound effects.

**Materials Needed**

Sound Effects CD, Instruction handout, Sound Effects Bingo handout

**Related Documents**

* Sound Effects Bingo
* Sound Skit Instructions

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Play several sound effects from a sound effects CD. Ask students to guess what the sound is.

**Instruction**

Instruction: Sounds communicate in a play. Not all sounds that would make the play more realistic or funny or that would communicate the desired setting or mood can be created on stage. What are sound effects? How could you create them? (Actors on stage, prerecorded etc.) Review the advantages and disadvantages of live vs. recorded sound. A major job of a sound designer would be deciding what sounds to use, when to use them and how to make them. Before that can happen a sound designer should become aware of sound in general and how it can enhance the mood and setting. What sounds do you hear every day but don’t think about? How are they created?

Modeling: Play Sound Effects Bingo. (see handout) Students will be required to identify sounds when they hear them. Discuss afterwards which sounds were believable. Which ones were more difficult to understand? Were their some that could be used for more than one different sound?

Checking for understanding: Being able to identify a sound is important why? (answers might be- because the audience will have to and believe it) Being aware of sounds is important why? (can better use sound to enhance a project). Describe what you do in the morning. Get up, yawn etc. Brush teeth take a shower etc. Have students listen as you describe your list of all the sounds that might be associated with morning. Ask them to use their imagination. What do they hear as you describe your morning.

Guided Practice: Have students do the same. Have them describe their morning in a short paragraph. In parenthesis have them put sounds in the appropriate place. Ex: water running, engine starting, clinking of breakfast bowl and spoon, pouring juice in a cup etc.

Checking for understanding: Ask a volunteer to repeat the assignment. Ask what they should put in parenthesis? What should their paragraph include? Etc.

Independent Practice: Pass out the instructions for the Sound Effects Skit. (see handout) Go over the instructions as a class. Have groups get in groups to start working on skits.

Closure: Discuss how Sound enhances a project. Have students turn in for a grade the script for their skit plus the lists they made on their student instruction sheet. (see instruction handout)

**Assessment**

Skit performance

**3: Props**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an ability to distinguish props from costumes and set dressings, and be able to create a prop table by deciding which items out of a box are props and by creating a prop table from those items.

**Materials Needed**

Masking Tape, permanent pens, a box of props (Include purses, a cane, glasses, a lamp, a telephone).

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Bring into the classroom a box of a variety of different items. Include purses, a cane, glasses, a lamp, a telephone and other items that may be categorized as props or set dressings or costumes depending on how they are used. Have students come up and pick out of the box. Make columns on the board labeled “Props”, “Set Dressing” and “Costumes”. Have the students guess under which column the items belong.

**Instruction**

Instruction: One the students have been through all the items in the box. Discuss each one and the correct answers. Give them specific definitions of a prop, a set dressing and a costume. (Prop: an item carried on stage or off stage or handled by an actor. Set Dressing: an item that is part of the set, remains in the same place for the duration of the play, is used to decorate the set, anything that in a normal room would remain attached to the wall or piece of furniture. Costumes: Items worn consistently by the actor.)

Checking for Understanding: Ask for a volunteer to explain the differences between a prop, set dressing and a costume.

Transition: Explain that during a play it can be very confusing to keep track of all the props as they are usually items that come on or offstage and may be used by various different performers.

Instruction: In order to keep track of props we have prop tables. Demonstrate on an actual table how a prop table is created using one of the items from the box. Use masking tape and pens to label each spot for a prop.

Modeling: Then ask for Volunteers to come and create a “home” using masking tape for each of the props in the box.

Instruction: Once a complete prop table has been created for the box of props, explain that a good prop master/ mistress will have a system for keeping track of props. Discuss sign in/out sheets. Explain how you can organize a table based on character, order of the show, or frequency of use.

Transition: the props should be easily retrievable and a good prop mistress will know exactly where a prop goes.

Guided Practice: Break the class up into 2 teams. Empty the props from the prop table you created earlier. Time each team, seeing how quickly they can one by one put the props back in their correct places.

**Assessment**

Participation

**4: Publicity**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of effective publicity by creating a poster advertising the play Arsenic and Old Lace.

**Materials Needed**

Movie Posters or cut outs of movie/ play ads from magazines

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Ask the class what Publicity is? Make a list of all the possible ways to publicize something.

**Instruction**

Instruction: Once you have made a class list of all the ways to publicize. Make a list of all the information needed in an advertisement. Discuss the benefits of particular formats.  
  
Modeling: Explain to the class that they are being hired to publicize the play they have been reading in class (Arsenic and Old Lace). They have been asked to come up with a poster to advertise the play. Ask them which information would be necessary to have on a poster? (make a list) Then make a list of all the things that catch your eye on a poster. Make a list of specific images from the play that they could use on their poster.  
  
Checking for Understanding: Show students several examples from magazines or other media sources of movie or play posters. What do they like or not like? Is there enough information on each why or why not? Which movie would they like to see based on the advertisement. Who do they think the posters most appeal to?  
  
Guided Practice: Instruct students to create a rough draft of a poster advertising the play Arsenic and Old Lace. Have them include all the necessary information and any other info they feel is important. Ask them to gather images that they may want to use.  
  
Independent practice: Schedule the computer lab and once students have completed a rough draft they can transfer their poster to the computer.   
  
Checking for understanding: Using a lap top you may want to do a demonstration of how to gather images from the internet or other sources, how to change and select font etc. to make a poster look professional. You may want to complete a poster getting the opinions of the whole class for another play.  
  
Independent Practice: Have students use the computer to complete a finished product of their poster advertising the play.  
  
Closure: Display the posters in class. You may want to have the class vote on their favorite posters etc. Explain that without good publicity people don’t come to see the play.

**Assessment**

Poster design

**5: Costumes**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of how to create costumes by selecting a fairy tale, and making “costumes” out of newspaper for that story.

**Materials Needed**

Fairy Tale, Newspaper (a whole newspaper for each group), Scissors and tape. Colored construction paper. Costume Design Template

**Related Documents**

* Costume Template

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Read the class a fairytale. As you read ask them to draw one character, deciding what they think the character looks like and what they are wearing. Provide colored pencils for the students to fill in their drawings with.

**Instruction**

Transition: Have students volunteer to show their drawings to the class and explain why they chose the particular clothes and colors and styles.  
  
Instruction: Ask the students what they think a costume designer is? (make a list of their answers) What do they do? Aren’t they costume designers? They decide what is appropriate to wear that day based on weather or the day’s activities. Explain the duties of a costume designer. Ask students to list what they think would be important for a costume designer to know about the show. (style, time period, size/shape of actors, color schemes, lighting, set, movement requirements etc.)  
  
Modeling: You may want to show them actual costume drawings. (Into the woods would be ideal, as it may be related to the fairytale you read). These may be your own or ones from costuming books. What kinds of details do they include?  
  
Guided Practice: Instruct students to get into groups of 3 or 4. Choose a fairytale. Choose 2 characters to costume. As groups they should make drawings of their costume designs. They should include details such as color, style, time period, and the names of the characters and a short explanation of why they made those particular decisions. Pass out 2 costume templates to each group and once they have made their decisions have them fill in each element on the forms you pass out.  
  
Independent Practice: Have them pass off their drawings with you and then give each group newspaper and scissors and tape. Instruct the to create what they drew on their papers as best as they can using the newspaper. They may also use colored construction paper to show what color the costumes should be. They should use two members in their group as models for their costumes.  
  
Modeling: You may want to demonstrate this process of creating a newspaper costume for the class first using a volunteer.  
  
Closure: have each group model their costumes for the class and give an explanation for each of their choices.

**Assessment**

Costume creations, drawings, participation