**What Makes Theatre?** by Heather Burgess

**Objective**: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and positions important to creating theatre by taking a quiz and by participating in various learning activities.

**Class Level**: Beginning

**Main Concepts**: Playwright, producer, director, designers, actors, dramaturg

**1994 National Standards:**

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

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

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

**Lesson Plans**

Lesson 1: What is theatre?

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of theatrical elements by creating a list of theatre “terms” as a group, which will be studied throughout the unit.

Lesson 2: The Playwright, Producer and Director

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of what a Playwright, Producer, and Director are (and their jobs) by helping to create terms/definitions that they will be tested on.

Lesson 3: The Designer

Students will demonstrate an understanding of what goes into being a designer by participating in a set design project and by helping create terms/definitions to be tested on.

Lesson 4: The Dramaturg

Students will demonstrate an understanding of who a Dramaturg is by participating and presenting research done for a film clip.

Lesson 5: The Actors

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of acting by participating in improv games and helping create a definition for their quiz.

Lesson 6: So, You Want a Job in Theatre?

Students will demonstrate a knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for all the roles/jobs in theatre by creating and performing an infomercial, and writing a short response.

Lesson 7: That's a Wrap!

Students will demonstrate their understanding of theatre “jobs” by presenting their project, turning in their written work, and taking a quiz on all the terms/definitions they have created.

**1: What is theatre?**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of theatrical elements by creating a list of theatre “terms” as a group, which will be studied throughout the unit.

**Materials Needed**

Tape, Examples of "Hook" questions, paper, marker

**Related Documents**

* Examples of "Hook" Questions

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

After clearing a large space (i.e. classroom or stage), put a piece of tape down the center of the floor. Tell the students to stand on either side of the taped line on the ground.

Instruct them that as you ask the following questions, if they have experienced what you are asking, or can answer the question "yes", they need to step onto the line; if not, stay where they are. Proceed to ask the questions. (See attachment for examples of questions)

**Instruction**

**Step 1:**

In groups of two have the students come up with 15 things they want to learn, know, or that they like about theatre.  Remind them to think about the questions in the questions game, and what they did and didn’t know about.  After a few minutes, have them combine with another group of two and all together, combine their lists into 10 things.  Give each group a large piece of paper and markers, and have them narrow their list down to 5 things.  Let them know that they will be presenting to the class:

* Five things they want to learn
* Why they want to learn these things
* How they think they are important to theatre/the theatre class

**Step 2:**

After each group has presented and all the lists are visible to all students, in a class discussion, find the common themes in each group’s ideas.  Talk about why these things are important, and in some cases explain the terms being presented.

Pulling from these ideas, explain to the students that in the next few weeks they are going to be learning about these things, and the important aspects of creating theatre.  Create a list of specific things that will be learned in the unit, incorporating ideas from the groups that include at least the following areas/terms:

* Theatre
* Actor/Acting
* Director/Directing
* Producer
* Playwright
* Dramaturg
* Designers
* Techies/Stage Management
* Plays
* Auditions

Once the class has created this list, ask each student to think about three of the jobs, in order, that they are most interested in, and have them write it down on a piece of paper to turn in.

*This will be used in the future for other activities within the unit, where each student gets the chance to model, ‘being’ or ‘doing’, one of the theatre jobs.*

**2: The Playwright, Producer and Director**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of what a Playwright, Producer, and Director are (and their jobs) by helping to create terms/definitions that they will be tested on.

**Materials Needed**

Picture of playwright, producer and director; Variety of resources (internet, textbook, theatre articles, etc), Specific Roles Handout

**Related Documents**

* Specific Roles handout

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have the room split into three distinct areas.  Have a picture and name of a playwright hanging in one section, a producer in another and a director in the last. The students will be split into groups based on wherever they choose to sit when they enter the classroom. In their groups have them use the resources you have placed in their section (i.e. computer with internet access, text book, theatre magazine articles, printed internet articles, etc.) to figure out what type of “title” their person falls under in theatre.  When they figure out what their person is, they need to write it at the top of the picture.  Then, tell the students that it is their job to come up with at least 4 special duties their person might be in charge of in creating theatre.  They are allowed to use any resources they can find and the ideas they come up with to determine a definition for their group’s term.

**Instruction**

**Step 1:**

After checking each group’s definition and making sure they are correct, have students present who their person is, what they do, and why they think they are important parts of theatre. Write notes based on their presentation on the board for the class.

Let the class know that they may want to write down their classmates terms/definitions because they are the terms that will be on their quiz at the end of the unit.

**Step 2:**

Explain to the students that they are going to choose their favorite “fairytale” ex: Little Red Riding Hood, Three Little Pigs, etc. In a group, each of them will get a theatre “job” and together produce a 5-10 minute production of their story.  For each job they will get a paper that explains their specific roles (Specific Roles handout).

Put them into groups based on their preference as to what role they would like to do. (Use the roles created during lesson one).

**Step 3:**

Let them work in their groups for the remainder of the class period.

Tell them that the important things to get done in their groups are:

            Picking a fairytale

            Starting to write their script

            Starting to think of direction ideas (for directors)

            Starting to think of poster/publicity stuff (for producer)

**3: The Designer**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of what goes into being a designer by participating in a set design project and by helping create terms/definitions to be tested on.

**Materials Needed**

Lots of cardboard - boxes and pieces, colored paper, fabric scraps, tin foil, markers

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have a “work space” set up with tons of cardboard board boxes, colored paper, fabric scraps, tin foil, markers, etc. scattered around. Split students into four groups, and have them choose decide on a favorite, play/movie/book. Tell them that as a group it is their job to create a “set” for a scene from whatever story chosen.  The only rules are that they have to use something from each of the things scattered around and then be able to explain their set and how it relates to their play/movie/book to the class.

**Instruction**

**Step 1:**

When the groups are done, have them go around and observe each of the other group's “sets”.  Have each student write down what play/movie/book they think each group’s set is from.  Then as each group presents their set have them first tell what play/movie/book their set is from and have them give background information of their scene.  Then have them explain each part of their set and why they chose to do it that way.

**Step 2:**

After each group has presented, have them get back into their groups and make a list of what they think the design aspects of theatre are.

Then have a group discussion about the aspects, including

§  Costumes/Make-up

§  Set

§  Sound

§  Lighting

As a class create the definition of a designer:

Sets, Lights, Sound, Special Effects, Makeup/hair, Costumes, Props. Meets with director to discuss concept. Makes models, sketches, and makes or creates designs in every aspect above.

Make sure the students write it down with their other notes, to remember for the quiz!

**Step 3:**

Have them get into their fairytale groups and work on their projects. They should focus on:

§  Getting their scripts finished

§  Starting on blocking with the actors

§  Deciding what design element they are going to focus on

Have them work on these, with supervision, for the rest of the class.

**4: The Dramaturg**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of who a Dramaturg is by participating and presenting research done for a film clip.

**Materials Needed**

Clip from *Shakespeare in Love*, reservations for library if needed

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Have the students watch a movie clip from *Shakespeare in Love*: the scene where they are in the theatre, practicing for the play.

**Instruction**

**Step 1:**

Have the students follow you to the library, and find a place where you can sit and have a small discussion.

Ask the students how they think the designers/director/producers of the movie knew how to create a scene that was supposed to be historically like a rehearsal in Shakespeare’s time.  How did the Producer know how to make a poster for the movie that reflected the right historical period?

            General Answer: Someone had to do some type of research to know what things were like in Shakespeare’s time.

**Step 2:**

Have the students get in groups of two and go through the library as if they were researching for the movie Shakespeare in Love.  Tell them they need to find at least three sources of any kind that have to do with the Shakespearian/Elizabethan historical period.  It can be about society, theatre, dress, language, etc.

**Step 3:**

Have the students return back to the discussion area after sufficient time has been given to research, and ask for volunteers to talk about what they found and how they would use it to create the movie’s atmosphere.  Explain and discuss that this is the basic job of a Dramaturg: to be the historical researcher for the production team. Have them write this definition down with the rest of their definitions for the quiz!

**Step 4:**

Work on Fairytale projects with focus on:

A period to set the show in for the Dramaturg to research

Finish Script

Continue directing and blocking, etc.

**5: The Actors**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate a basic knowledge of acting by participating in improv games and helping create a definition for their quiz.

**Related Documents**

* Cube Worksheet

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Take the students into the theatre (when possible) and play some improv games, here are some examples:

            **Question Tag**- Scene that consists entirely of questions. If a player doesn't ask a question, asks a statement-question ("Nice day, isn't it?) or a simplistic question ("Huh?" or "What?") the audience boos, and that player exits to be replaced by another one.

            **Car**- This game involves four or more people driving in a car. Each one of them asks for a suggestion from the audience, like, "What historical site did I visit yesterday? What is my greatest accomplishment? What Greek god do I most resemble?" The players then perform a scene. It is important that the players be going someplace, that each character develop a relationship with all the other characters, and that all the characters be different.

            **Freeze Tag**- Also known as Start and Stop or simply Tag, this game is an old favorite. Two people start a scene. When another player sees a stage picture that he or she likes, he or she says, "freeze" or "stop," at which point the players on-stage freeze in position. The player who said stop then goes out and taps one of the players and the shoulder and assumes the same position in the scene. The new player then starts a completely new and different scene from that position. The objective is not to wait for a position to fit a preconceived scene idea, but instead to pick an interesting stage position and let the scene develop from there.

**Instruction**

NOTE: Depending on how long the games and discussion take, if time permits, a supplementary activity has been provided for further review.

**\*\*\*Supplementary Activity for Review\*\*\***

**THE DRAMA CUBE**

**Objective:**Students will demonstrate an understanding of each theatre "job" by starting on a theatre cube (which will be finished at home).

**Material:**Cube worksheet

**Instruction:**

Pass out cube worksheet. Have students represent each "job" with a written description, picture, etc. one each side of the cube. Inform them that they will need to bring their finished cube back to class so that it can be displayed in the classroom to help others with review.

**6: So, You Want a Job in Theatre?**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate a knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for all the roles/jobs in theatre by creating and performing an infomercial, and writing a short response.

**Materials Needed**

Index cards with the following theatre positions written down: Director, Actor, Costumes/Make-up, Dramaturge, Stage Manager, Techie, Designer (if role has not previously been taught/reviewed, have a brief list of responsibilities on the back of the card); video camera; equipment to watch recorded footage

**Lesson Directions**

**Anticipatory Set/Hook**

Take the students somewhere other than the classroom (outside, on the stage, etc.)  Show them a few clips of some interesting infomercials, then take out your video camera and tell them that today they are going to be making their very own infomercials, and that their goal is to get the most people in the class to want to “become” their product.

**Instruction**

**Step 1:**

Divide the class into 7 Groups.  (Let them pick groups if appropriate.)

**Step 2:**

Once they are in their groups, go around to each group and give them their card.  Tell them that they need to at least go over each job listed on the back of the card within their infomercial, but that they can add more if they think of other things they feel are important to each position.  Explain that when they are ready, you will film their infomercial for them.  They are free to use any space they want, within your given parameters, and that they can use any prop pieces, costumes, etc, that are available.

**Step 3:**

Once they are ready to film, film them.  If they get any information wrong, use it as instructional time to correct them, and then let them re-film that piece.

**Step 4:**

Go back to the classroom and have them gather around the TV/Projector to watch the infomercials.  Tell them to pay attention to their favorite parts about each job, and be ready to vote for which infomercial convinced them the most.

**Step 5:**

After all the infomercials have been watched, have the students write down all the jobs and their favorite part of each one.  Then have them write a paragraph about which job they would like to have, and why.  Make sure they include in their paragraph the responsibilities of that job and why they like them.

**Step 6:**

Have students meet with their fairytale groups to finalize their projects. Remind them that next week,  they will be presenting and turning in their written work.

*(If Supplementary Activity was used from Lesson 5, make sure the drama cubes are turned in today)*

**7: That's a Wrap!**

**Objective**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of theatre “jobs” by presenting their project, turning in their written work, and taking a quiz on all the terms/definitions they have created.

**Materials Needed**

Quiz

**Related Documents**

* What Makes Theatre? Quiz
* Quiz Key

**Lesson Directions**

**Instruction**

**Step 1:**

Have the students come into class and immediately get into their groups to prepare for presentations.

When each group is ready, move into the theatre space (if available) and ask for a group who would like to go first.

**Step 2:**

Have each group perform and then discuss each part of their production, as well as their own individual experience.

As each person in each group presents, go over the official “definition” of each term in preparation for the quiz.

§  Playwrighting

§  Directing

§  Producing

§  Designing

§  Dramaturgy

§  Acting

**Step 3:**

Ask for any questions before the quiz.

Pass out quiz, and let them take it.

**Step 4:**

Have a closing discussion with the class.

Feedback on the projects.

What they learned.

Favorite parts of the Unit, etc.