Voice Work in Podcasts

*By Jessica Stevenson*

Unit Objective:

Students will demonstrate their ability to create a voice for a character by creating podcasts in small groups.

Learning Level:

This unit was created for a high school beginning theatre class.

Student Prior Experience:

Prior to this unit, students have studied pantomime. Students have little to no experience with voice as a tool for actors.

Standards:

* TH: Cr2.II.b. Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work.
* TH: Cr3.1.I.b. Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theatre work.
* TH: Pr6.1.I.a. Perform a scripted drama/theatre work for a specific audience.

Big Ideas:

Character, Voice, Variety, Communication

Essential Questions:

* How does vocal variety create character?
* Where do I use vocal variety in my own life?
* How does the way we use our voices help us communicate?

Key Knowledge and Skills:

Vocal Variety, Projection, Diction, Rate, Pitch, Tone, Emphasis, Accents and Dialects, Communication, Voice to Create Character.

Authentic Performance Tasks:

Creating and performing tongue twisters. Outlining, recording, and editing a podcast.

**Lessons:**

Lesson 1—Diction and Projection

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of diction and projection by creating tongue twisters and performing them for the class.

Lesson 2— Podcasts

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of podcasts by coming up with an outline for their podcast.

Lesson 3— Rate and Pitch

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of rate and pitch by determining their character’s typical rate and pitch, and a moment where that rate and pitch could change.

Lesson 4— Tone and Emphasis

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of tone and emphasis by determining where they will use tone and emphasis in their podcast.

Lesson 5— Accents and Dialects

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of Accents and Dialects by presenting a dialect to the class.

Lesson 6— Recording Podcasts

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of vocal variety by recording their podcasts.

Lesson 7— Editing Podcasts

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of podcasts by editing their podcasts.

Lesson 8— Listening to Podcasts

Objective: Students will demonstrate their understanding of voice by presenting their podcasts and discussing the vocal variety in each podcast.

Lesson 1—Diction and Projection

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of diction and projection by creating tongue twisters and performing them for the class.

Hook:

As the bell rings, have students write in their notebooks a response to the following Bell ringer question: How do you communicate clearly in your daily lives?

Have students write down today’s Vocabulary: Diction and Projection (don’t have them fill out the definitions yet)

1. Breathing exercises

Breathing using the diaphragm: Have the students lie on floor, on their back, legs flat against the floor, hand resting on their stomach. Have them Breathe in for a count of 4 and out for a count of 8. Repeat several times. Breathe down deep; feel the breath in your toes. Have them focus on not moving their shoulders while they breathe, but feeling their stomach rise and fall with every breath.

1. Vocalization exercises

Have the students Breathe in and then breathe out while making an Sssss sound. Support the Sssss sound all the way through until you run out of breathe. Have them really push the Sssss and try to make it as loud as they can. Repeat several times.

1. Projection exercises

Have the students’ breath in and then say HA using their diaphragm and projecting their voice to the celling. Repeat several times. Repeat again, but this time have them say, “Hello my name is\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_” Still projecting to the celling. Introduce the diaphragm. Say “there’s a muscle that runs horizontally across our stomach, just below our ribs, that helps us to breath. Does anyone know what this muscle is called?” Talk about how the diaphragm expands as we breathe in and contracts as we breathe out, and it’s both a voluntary and involuntary muscle. This muscle helps us to project.

* Why do we project using our diaphragm? (so you don’t hurt your voice)
* Why might projecting be important as an actor?
* Why might projecting be important in life?

1. Diction exercises

Tell the students to repeat after you saying, “The lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue. The tip of the tongue, the teeth, the lips.” Articulation is one of the most important aspects of vocal production. Articulators are the parts of our mouth that help us to pronounce words. What are the three articulators? (Lips, teeth, tongue). Not only does this exercise warm up our voice, but it helps to remind us what the articulators are.

* Ask the students for an example of a letter that uses the teeth as an articulator.
* What letters use the tongue as an articulator?
* What letters use the lips as an articulator?

Articulators help us with diction, which is speaking clearly and crisply, so that each consonant and vowel is articulated.

* Why would having clear diction be important when you are speaking on stage?
* What about in life?

1. Tongue twisters together

Have the students practice their diction with the following tongue twisters. Say each tongue twister once for them, and then go stand on the opposite end of the room from them and have them project each tongue twister to you. Point out students who you notice have clear diction and projection.

1. Red leather, yellow leather, red leather, yellow leather.
2. I wish to wash my Irish wristwatch
3. Betty Botter bought some butter  
   But she said the butter’s bitter  
   If I put it in my batter, it will make my batter bitter  
   But a bit of better butter will make my batter better  
   So ‘twas better Betty Botter bought a bit of better butter

Have the students come back to bell ringer and fill out the definitions of diction and projection. Have them as a class come up with the definitions that they will write down in their notebook.

1. Modeling

Tell the class that now they will come up with their own tongue twisters. They will then perform these in front of the class. There are two good way to create a tongue twister. They are by using alliteration and assonance. Remind me, from English class, what is alliteration and what is assonance?

Alliteration— Same sound at the beginning of words

Assonance— Same sound in the middle of words

As a class, come up with a tongue twister that uses alliteration and a tongue twister that uses assonance.

1. Make their own tongue twister

Set the class to work in partnerships to create their tongue twister. Once they have created their tongue twister, have them perform it for the class using good diction and projection. Have the class practice each tongue twister as well.

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their performance of their tongue twister. Students are expected to use strong projection and clear diction in their performance.

Lesson 2— Podcasts

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of podcasts by coming up with an outline for their podcast.

Materials Needed:

Clips from several different podcasts, Podcast outline worksheet

Hook:

Bell ringer question: What podcasts have you listened to or heard of? What are they about?

Vocabulary: Podcast, but don’t have them fill out the definition yet.

1. Discussion of the unit

Last class period, we discussed diction and projection. These are two tools all actors need to know, but they don’t really add to the character an actor is creating. For the rest of this unit, we are going to be focusing on creating character with our voices. In order to do that, we are going to create podcasts. Have a student answer “What is a podcast?” Then have them fill out the definition of podcast on their vocabulary. (Podcast: a digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or portable media player, typically available as a series, new installments of which can be received by subscribers automatically. Etymology: ipod+broadcast)

1. Listening to Podcasts

In order to get a better idea of what podcasts are, we’re going to listen to a variety of clips from podcasts. Have the students listen to a few different podcast clips. Be sure to include podcasts of all different types. Some podcasts clips could be from podcasts like “the truth” “welcome to nightvale” “lore” etc. As students listen, have them focus on not the content of the podcast, but rather the *format* of the podcast. For example, the truth is a storytelling podcast with a host who introduces each story and advertises different products and websites.

1. Discussion of Podcasts

Ask the students about the format of each of the different podcasts. Go through them one at a time. Students could bring up things like the number of host the podcasts has, or that the podcast had commercials, they had a guest on the podcast, the topic of the podcast, the different type of people that were in the podcast, the jingle at the beginning of the podcast, etc. Anything that they want to say about the podcast itself and its format. Write these things on the board for students to reference.

After you’ve gone through each podcast, have the students create a list of what was similar about the podcasts and what was different. For example:

Similar

Host

Commercials

Jingle

Different

Topic of the podcast

Number of hosts

Interview vs. 1 person talking about a topic

1. Creating a rubric

Now that the students have identified some of the things that make up a podcast, have them come up with a list of things that they each need to include in their podcasts. For example: Commercials, a host, guest stars, etc. Write down the things that the class decides needs to be included in their podcast. As a class come up with a time limit for the podcasts (somewhere between 5 and 7 minutes would probably be best, but get the class’s input as well). Tell the class that they need at least 2 people in each group, but not more than 5 (this will ensure that students don’t have to do all the work alone, but they also can’t sit back and let their teammates do the work). The rest of the podcast is up to them. They are free to decide what topic they want their podcast to be about, if they want to have “guest stars” or not, if they want to talk about a certain topic or if they want to do a storytelling type of podcast, etc. Do tell them that the point of creating these podcasts is to show CHARACTER using voice, so they can’t choose to be themselves in their podcast, they have to choose a different character that they would like to play in their podcast.

Let the students know that the type of podcast that they choose to do will determine the work that they need to do. For example, if they decide that their podcast discusses a different type of car each week, then they will need to research the car and figure out what aspects of the car they want to talk about. If their podcast tells a different story each week, then they need to create a script for their story.

1. Brainstorming

As a class, brainstorm an idea for a podcast using the Podcast outline worksheet. This will allow students to understand what’s on the worksheet itself, but will also model how to brainstorm ideas for their podcasts.

1. Working on outline

Have the students get together with their groups and fill out the Podcast outline worksheet. As they are working, go around to each group to ensure that they are on task and that they are coming up with some good ideas for podcasts.

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their podcast outline worksheet.

Supplements:

Note: After teaching this lesson, use the things that the students came up with to create a rubric for their podcasts. Include categories on each of the vocal qualities that you will teach in the coming lessons.

**Podcast Outline Worksheet**

Group Member Names:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is the title of your podcast? What is your podcast about?

What’s the title of this specific episode? What is this episode about?

How many people do you have in your podcast? What character will each person play and will there be people who play more than one character (ex. Abby is the Host, Arnold is the guest star and plays a character in the story, Archie plays a character in the story)?

Outline the different things you are REQUIRED to do for your podcast and decide who is going to be in charge of each thing.

Outline the different things you WANT to include in your podcast. Decide who is going to head up each thing.

Outline what will happen during your podcast. (ex. First we will introduce ourselves as hosts, then we will introduce the topic of the week (cats vs. dogs), then host A will talk about cats, then host B will talk about dogs, then we will have a commercial, then we will have the guest artist decide which is better between cats and dogs).

Podcast sample rubric:

Podcast includes:

A host?

Yes / No 5pt

Music?

Yes / No 5pt

An intro/theme?

Yes / No 5pt

A Specific Topic?

Yes / No 5pt

A Commercial?

Yes / No 5pt

5-7 Minutes?

Yes / No 5pt

**Top Total /30**

Rate:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pitch:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Tone:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Emphasis:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Accents/Dialects:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

**Bottom Total /50**

**GRAND TOTAL /80**

Lesson 3— Rate and Pitch

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of rate and pitch by determining their character’s typical rate and pitch, and a moment where that rate and pitch could change.

Materials Needed:

Long form tongue twister

Hook:

Bell ringer question: Do you typically talk fast or slow? Do speak in a high or low voice?

Vocabulary: Tempo and Pitch (don’t have them define them yet)

1. *Rate Activity*

Tell the students that you have another tongue twister for them, and you want to see who can read it the fastest. Practice the tongue twister once together before you turn it over to the competition. Challenge the students to use good diction and projection during the competition. Give the student who can say it the fastest a prize.

Tongue Twister: When a doctor doctors a doctor, does the doctor doing the doctoring doctor as the doctor being doctored wants to be doctored or does the doctor doing the doctoring doctor as he wants to doctor?

Then have a competition to see who can another tongue twister the slowest. The catch though is that they have to be speaking the entire time. Challenge them to use good breath support so that they can say one words per breath if need be. Again, award the student who can say the tongue twister the slowest with something.

Tongue Twister: She sells seashells by the seashore.

1. Rate Discussion

Tell the students that how fast or slow something is said is referred to as “rate”. Have the students define rate in their bell ringer notebook.

* How might the rate that we say something show character?
* What type of people speak at a fast rate? What type of people speak at a slow rate?
* What about your character in your podcast; what rate do they speak at?
* What about situations outside of this class; when do you speak in a fast rate and when do you speak at a slow rate?

1. Pitch Activity

Have the students do a vocal siren. On a “Ooooo”, start at the lowest note you can, then gradually slide up into the highest note you can, and then gradually slide back down to the lowest note. Do this two or three times.

1. Pitch discussion

Tell the students that how high or low something is said is called pitch. Have the students define pitch in their bell ringer notebook.

* How might the pitch that we say something show character?
* What type of people speak at a high pitch? What type of people speak at a low pitch?
* What about your character in your podcast; what pitch do they speak at?
* What about situations outside of this class; when do you speak in a high pitch and when do you speak at a low pitch?

1. Work on Pitch and Rate in their podcasts

Have the students get together with their podcast groups. As a group, have them determine the pitches and rates that each of their characters uses generally. Then have them discuss moments in their podcast that their character could change their rate or pitch. (like, character speaking faster because they are excited, or character speaking lower because they are being sarcastic). As a group, have them write down each of their characters and the rate/pitch they generally use, and at least one moment per character where the rate/pitch changes and why. They’ll turn this paper in. (Or you could make a worksheet for them to answer these questions on).

1. Work on Podcasts

Give the students time to work on their podcasts. Have them individually create a goal to accomplish by the end of the class. Maybe they are in charge of the commercials, so they can use this time to script them out, or they are in charge of coming up with interview questions for the guest star. Do they need to script out their podcast? Each student should come up with something concrete that they can finish by the end of class. If you notice that students are off task, start handing out rewards to students who are working effectively to motivate the off-task students to work.

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their paper that says the rate/pitch that their character speaks in, plus a moment where the rate/pitch changes.

Lesson 4— Tone and Emphasis

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of tone and emphasis by determining where they will use tone and emphasis in their podcast.

Hook:

Bell ringer question: How do you convey emotion with your voice?

Vocabulary: Tone (don’t have them define it yet)

1. *Tone Activity*

Have the students write down a sentence on 1 slip of paper and an emotion on a different slip of paper. The sentence should be directed at another person, for example: “Hi, how are you doing today?” “Don’t just sit there!” “Who do you think you are?” “You’re such a worry wort!” etc. Place the sentences in one container and the emotions in another. Have each student then draw an emotion and a sentence out of the hat. Give them time to rehearse that sentence with that emotion. Then have students volunteer to come up to the front and perform their sentence while portraying the emotion they drew. Don’t have them share the emotion, it isn’t necessary for students to be able to respond and knowing the emotion could make them focus only on the emotion that was used, not the scenario or the context of the sentence. After a few performances, ask, “What happens when we perform the same sentence with different emotions?” have two students come up and draw 1 sentence and 2 emotions. Have each of them perform their sentence with their different emotions.

1. Tone Discussion

* What happened when we changed the emotion that a sentence was said in?
* What do you think the other (imaginary) characters said to each student to make them respond in different ways?
* What was did each student want from the other characters?
* What do you think the scenarios surrounding these sentences were?
* What meaning was being conveyed with each sentence?

The idea of conveying meaning with our vocal inflection is called “tone”. Have the students define tone in their own words and write it down in their bell ringer notebook for their vocab.

* When your mama says, “Don’t you take that tone with me!” what does she mean?

Tone can also convey “subtext”. What do you think subtext means? Give an example of two or three different tones used with the same sentence and ask the students what you said without actually saying it aloud. For example, “hey” said gently and sweetly as if to say “are you doing ok?” and, “hey” said slightly drawn out and with a “wink” to it as if to say “Dang your fine!” and, “hey” said firmly and harshly as if to say “what you are doing isn’t ok”.

* Where do you see tone used in everyday life?
* How can tone of voice affect your character?
* What tone of voice does your character use? When?

1. Emphasis Activity

There’s one other thing we can do to convey meaning with our vocal variety. Draw a new sentence out of the hat and have 1 student come up per word in the sentence. Assign each student a word and have each of them say the sentence while emphasizing their assigned word. Give them a minute to practice their sentence before performing it for the class.

1. Emphasis Discussion

* How did the meaning of the sentence change when we emphasized different words?
* Go through each version of the sentence and discuss what they thought the sentence meant with the different emphasis.
* What was the subtext of each sentence?
* Where might your character use emphasis in your podcast?
* Where do you see emphasis used in your daily life?

1. Adding tone and emphasis to podcasts

Have the students write down where they will use tone and emphasis in their podcasts. Then have them gather with their group to discuss where they decided their character will use tone and emphasis.

1. Working on podcasts

Have the students create a new goal for their podcasts for the day. The goal should be something that they can complete during this class period and will advance the progress of their podcast.

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their written determination of where they will use tone and emphasis.

Lesson 5— Accents and Dialects

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of Accents and Dialects by presenting a dialect to the class.

Materials Needed:

None

Lesson Prep:

Choose a dialect and find a video to teach it. Do the same activity that you’re asking the class to do later.

Hook:

Bell ringer question: What’s your favorite accent?

Vocabulary: Accent: refers to how words are pronounced. Dialect: includes both accent and the words used, the grammar and sentence structure, etc.

1. *Accents vs. Dialects*

After the students have written down the vocab for accents and dialects, have someone try to explain the difference. Help them out if they’re struggling to put it into words. Have a student provide you with an example of an accent vs. a dialect. For example, a British accent pronounces the u in stupid as “ew” instead of “oo” to make “Stewpid”. A British dialect would include British slang like quid (pound is to dollar as quid is to buck), chap, trousers, cheeky, fancy (instead of want), etc. Since accents are included in dialects, we’re going to focus on dialects for the rest of the class.

1. Dialect Research

Return to the bell ringer question and ask the students to call out their favorite dialects. Put them on the whiteboard as they call out. Divide the class into several small groups and have each group choose a dialect. (It will be easier to focus on dialects that are already spoken in English, rather than a different language). Each group is to use their phones to find a video that teaches us about that dialect. It can either be someone speaking in that dialect or someone teaching you how to speak in that dialect. The goal is to find the BEST videos? What does best look like? After getting a few responses, model the activity by showing them the video you found on a dialect you choose. Give them time to look for their videos.

1. Dialect Presentations

After the students have found a video for their dialect, have them come up with a creative way to introduce the dialect to the rest of the class. They need to show the video to the class and then think of a way that we can practice it a little bit. After giving the students time to decide how they will present their dialect, have the groups present their dialects to the class and have the class practice each dialect.

1. Dialect discussion

* What was your favorite dialect to practice?
* Where in your Podcast might you be able to include a dialect?
* What kinds of character have dialects?
* Where do you see dialects in daily life?

1. Working on podcasts

Have the class work on their podcasts for the rest of the class period. Ask them to think about how they might include dialects in their podcast. By the end of this class period, students should have completed all of their preparation for their podcast so that they can be ready to record their podcast next class period (if they haven’t already started).

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their dialect presentations.

Lesson 6— Recording Podcasts

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of vocal variety by recording their podcasts.

Materials Needed:

Each group will need at least one recording device (their phones will work fine)

Hook:

Bell ringer question: What makes you excited to record your podcast? Is there anything you need to finish quickly before you’re ready to record? No vocab for today.

1. *Work Time*

Give the students time to finish any last minute preparation that they need to for their podcasts.

1. Recording Time

Find as many quiet-ish locations as possible in your space for students to record. Encourage students to do multiple “takes” if they need to in order to get the best audio possible. Remind students that this will be their last opportunity to record audio during class, so to use their time wisely so they will be ready to edit their audio next class period.

1. Discussion

As groups are winding down with their recording and finishing up, hold a discussion with the class.

* What did you enjoy about recording your podcast?
* What was difficult about recording your podcast?
* Where did you include elements of diction and projection?
* What about rate and pitch?
* Tone and emphasis?
* Dialects?
* If you could go back and change one thing about your podcast, what would you change?

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their full participation in recording their podcast.

Lesson 7— Editing Podcasts

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of podcasts by editing their podcasts.

Materials Needed:

Projector, audacity software, Computers lab

Hook:

Bell ringer question: What editing do you need to do for your podcast today?

Vocabulary: Audacity: Audio editing software

1. *Explanation of Audacity*

Ask the students if any of them have ever used audacity before. Gauge the student’s level of knowledge and determine how in-depth of an overview you should give of the program. Have a student who’s used the program before explain how to import audio files as you demonstrate it on the computer/projector. Have another student who’s used the program explain how to cut and re-organize audio clips. For the most part, this is all students will NEED to know how to do, but you could choose to show some of audacity’s more advanced features, too. (Or have a student show off one of their favorite features of Audacity.)

1. Computer Lab Work Time

Bring the students down to the computer lab. At the computer lab, they should sit with their groups. They can decide if they all want to work on one computer together or if they want to divide up the work, and then join their individual files together at the end. Remind the students that this will be the only class period that you give them to edit their audio files, and that we will be presenting our podcasts to the rest of the class next time. Give them the remainder of the class period to work on finalizing their podcasts.

Assessment:

Students can be assessed on their level of participation on editing their audio files.

Lesson 8— Listening to Podcasts

Objective:

Students will demonstrate their understanding of voice by presenting their podcasts and discussing the vocal variety in each podcast.

Materials Needed:

Audio playing equipment, a way for students to access their saved audio file

Hook:

Bell ringer question: What are you most excited about listening to your classmate’s podcasts? No vocab for today.

1. *Listen to Podcasts*

Have groups volunteer to listen to their podcast. After each podcast, have the students discuss the following questions:

* Where did you hear aspects of diction and projection in this podcast?
* Where did you hear rate and pitch?
* Where did you hear tone and emphasis?
* Where did you hear dialects?
* How did those different things affect the way you perceived the character’s in the podcast?

1. Unit Closure

After each group has presented their podcast, have a class discussion on the unit as a whole.

* What did you like about the different podcasts?
* If you were to do this project again, what would you do differently?
* What did you learn about voice during this unit?

Assessment:

Student can be assessed on their podcast, based on the rubric that the students helped you create in lesson 2.