

Playwriting: Learning Theme Backwards

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INTRODUCTION

I teach tenth grade English and English as a Second Language at Lee High School, located in the West District of the Houston Independent School District. My school is Title 1 because 91.7 percent of the student body is regarded as low-income (*School Report Card*). Additionally, many of my students maintain jobs that they use to assist their families. Countless students have told me that they are responsible for different utility bills or fractions of rent in their households. The jobs that my students hold often seem more important than school to them because they provide instant gratification. Their jobs take priority over their school work because money is more tangible than intelligence and easier to utilize than education. This attitude has created a culture of apathy that affects a large percentage of the student body. Additionally, my school has struggled for years to achieve a passing level of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) according to the No Child Left Behind Act. A school attains this “passing level” when its students achieve a certain percentage of passing scores on standardized tests. Last year, Lee High School finally attained a passing score according to AYP, but it was a struggle. Now we must maintain it. The key to ensuring that students continue to earn those passing scores is to make certain that they have learned the material. The key to breaking the apathy that hinders learning is to use innovative and engaging strategies in classrooms while maintaining standards that force students to perform at high levels.

My unit is designed for English and English Language Learner sophomores. The purpose of the unit is to engage students in a deeper understanding of the concept of theme in literature by having the students develop a dramatic scene (short play) that focuses on the theme of trust. I hope to engage students by teaching them a new art form: playwriting. The unit aims to improve their reading and writing skills in preparation for writing on standardized tests.

OBJECTIVES/Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

- 1A. **Purposeful Writing:** The student writes in a variety of forms, including literary forms such as poems, plays, and stories.
- 2A. **Writing Process:** The student is expected to use prewriting strategies to generate ideas and plan.
- 2B. **Writing Process:** The student is expected to develop drafts both alone and collaboratively by organizing and reorganizing content and by refining styles to suit occasion, audience, and purpose.
- 2C. **Writing Process:** The student is expected to proofread writing for appropriateness of organization, content, style, and conventions.
- 2E. **Writing Process:** The student is expected to use technology for publishing texts.
- 3B. **Grammar, Usage, and Conventions:** The student is expected to demonstrate control over grammatical elements such as subject-verb agreement and correct usage of prepositions.
- 3D. **Grammar, Usage, and Conventions:** The student is expected to produce error-free writing in a final draft.

- 5B. **Evaluation of Writing:** The student is expected to respond productively to peer-review of his/her own work.
- 7A. **Reading Comprehension:** The student is expected to establish a purpose for reading such as to discover, interpret, and enjoy.
- 7B. **Reading Comprehension:** The student is expected to draw upon his/her own background to provide connection with texts.
- 8A. **Reading a Variety of Texts:** The student is expected to read to be entertained, to be informed, to take action, and to discover models to use in his/her own writing.
- 14B. **Critical Listening and Speaking:** The student is expected to engage in critical, empathetic, appreciative, and reflective listening.
- 15A. **Purposeful Listening and Speaking:** The student is expected to respond appropriately to performances of peers. The student is expected to respond appropriately to group performances of scripts.
- 15D. **Purposeful Listening and Speaking:** The student is expected to evaluate artistic performances of peers.
- 18C. **Listening and Speaking for Literary Interpretations:** The student is expected to present interpretations by performing original works.
- 20D. **Analyzing Information That Is Viewed:** The student is expected to recognize how visual and sound techniques or design convey messages.

("English 2 (One Credit)")

RATIONALE

This unit is an addendum to the Houston Independent School District's prescribed unit that requires students to analyze William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. By the time students finish the unit about *Julius Caesar*, they will have spent multiple class periods being exposed to the format, structure, and purpose of a play. Now it is time for them to deepen their understanding of theme. This unit is designed for students who already have been studying theme. By the time students are in high school, they should have been exposed to the concept of theme and should have had multiple opportunities to practice it. This unit will give students a different approach to reviewing the concept. Instead of analyzing literature and finding the theme, they will take the theme of trust and write a dramatic scene about it. By approaching theme "backwards," they will gain a better understanding of methods they can use to locate it in other pieces of literature. Students will practice and learn multiple strategies while going through this unit: 1) How to understand and identify theme in literature. 2) How to write a play. 3) How to write about a specific theme. 4) How to give a good performance.

The concept of theme is nebulous; to understand it, students must be able to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate literature. These skills also make them good readers overall. This unit will allow students to have firsthand practice with actually developing characters, settings, and conflicts that surround the theme of trust. This experience will allow them easily to identify themes in texts that they read. They can later use these skills to help them succeed on standardized reading tests.

After reviewing theme, students will learn the craft of playwriting. Playwriting will engage students because it is a new form of writing that they are usually not asked to produce. They are very familiar with essays and short stories, but not playwriting. Furthermore, learning the structure of playwriting will discipline their own personal writing style and help them to be more creative with their writing. Last, students do not always make connections between themselves and a text; they often lack appreciation for literature. However, this activity will require them to

develop of piece of literature that is about a theme that they are very familiar with: trust. By actually having to develop something that is read and viewed by others, they will develop more respect for the writing process and, therefore, for the authors they read. By becoming writers, they will learn how to respect writers.

Finally, students will complete group performances. While performing, students will be required to step out of their comfort zone. They will have to think about how they are being perceived by the audience and how they can communicate the theme of trust in their dramatic scenes. They will become more aware of themselves and the people around them.

This unit will enable students to improve themselves personally by giving them applicable life skills and aiding them in becoming self-reflective. They will gain confidence and teamwork experience, ignite their imaginations, and learn how to resolve problems that they face in daily life (Hamlett 1, 3). The confidence students gain can help them not to be peer-pressured into activities that are dangerous to their spirit, mind, and health. Teamwork experience assists students in learning how to get along with others, regardless of their personalities; they will be able to transcend personal differences to make sure that they complete tasks. And the world always can use more imaginative people. These skills will not only benefit students in school, but they will also benefit the students once they complete school and enter the workplace. Students will also gain insight into how they perceive the emotional concept of trust. During adolescence, students are struggling to gain freedom, but are still in desperate need of boundaries. A teen's desire for freedom causes him/her to choose to engage in prohibited activity. This choice naturally lessens how much adults trust them. Adults typically react by creating tighter boundaries that cause the adolescents to feel untrustworthy (Leveton 176-177). When the students write scenes about trust they will have the opportunity to ponder how they view it and how their actions affect others' willingness to trust them.

This unit will help students to become better readers and writers by helping them to see the connection between reading and writing. They can use these skills in their other classes and on standardized tests. These skills will also aid them when they are in college. College students must be good readers and writers because they do not get help developing these skills. The students that experience this unit will have already been given the opportunity to build habits that will help them decipher the complex language that usually appears in texts that college-level students read.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Topics Covered

This unit is divided into six lessons. Each lesson will cover/review different topics. First, students will analyze the format and content of a few dramatic scenes. Second, they will review the meaning of theme and pre-write and draft their dramatic scenes in small groups. Third, students will work with their peers to revise and edit their dramatic scene. Fourth, students will finalize their dramatic scene, learn about performing, rehearse, and design their sets and props. Fifth, students will perform their scenes and the class will evaluate them. Sixth, students will take an assessment.

Concepts and Skills Presented

Three overarching concepts will be presented, and students will be expected to develop skills from those concepts. The concept of theme will be presented in order to help students develop the reading skills they need to identify theme in texts. The concept of playwriting will be presented so that students can develop better writing skills. Finally, the concept of performance will be presented to help students develop the skill of connecting and communicating with an audience.

I chose to concentrate on helping students develop skills rather than focusing on content, because there is overwhelming evidence that students benefit more from learning strategies that they can apply to other assignments than from learning concepts that they are simply expected to regurgitate at a specified point in time. Students also place a higher value on gaining skills, because they are given opportunities throughout the school year to complete activities that require them to use skills that they already possess. Utilizing these skills again and again gives students confidence because they can see themselves becoming more and more successful at practicing the particular skills.

Ruby Payne defines cognitive strategies as “fundamental ways of processing information. They are the infrastructure of the mind” (119). Basically, they are problem-solving skills. Payne says that students are not given enough time to hone their cognitive strategies:

We focus our efforts in pre-K and K on building concepts. We devote first through third grades on building skills. We enhance those skills in grades 4 and 5. And when the students get into sixth grade, and on to 12th grade, we teach content...The truth is that we can no longer pretend this arrangement works – no matter how well or how hard we teach. Increasingly, students, mostly from poverty, are coming to school without concepts, but more importantly, without cognitive strategies. (119-120)

Basically, students go through school learning many facts, but unfortunately, particularly in English and Language Arts, they do not learn strategies. The results are students who do not know what to do first when they read an essay prompt. Another outcome is students have not an inkling of what to do when they read part of a text that they do not understand. Another example is a student who does not know what steps to take when he cannot spell a word. Students are pumped up with information, but have no clue how to process new information independently.

This unit is a vehicle through which to teach reading and writing skills. The students will gain these skills by analyzing and composing dramatic scenes. The unit is designed to help students learn strategies that they can apply to other reading and writing assignments that they encounter in both school and life. In *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*, Kyleen Beers says the following:

For many years in reading education, the emphasis was on the product (i.e., the skill) because comprehension was thought of as a product – the meaning of the text. The move to the word strategy, however, highlights a shift in our understanding about comprehension. Now we view comprehension as a dynamic process, something that requires purposeful, strategic effort on the reader's part. (45)

As Beers highlights, curriculum cannot always focus on content, but sometimes needs to focus on building students' ability to navigate through all types of content and academic situations. In the subject of English, the teacher has the freedom of being able to use any type of text to teach strategies. Almost all pieces of literature can be used to teach reading and writing strategies. My unit uses playwriting.

Research on Topic

The three main topics that students will be focusing on are theme, playwriting, and performance. The textbook *The Language of Literature* offers the following definition of theme: “The theme is the central idea or message in a work of literature. Theme should not be confused with subject, or what the work is about. Rather, theme is a perception about life or human nature shared with the reader” (Applebee, Bermúdez, et al. 1142). Essentially, theme describes any universal truths that can be found in a piece of literature. Those truths are usually broad: man versus nature, man versus himself, man versus man, and love never dies. For this unit, students

will be focusing on the theme of trust because it is prominent in the play *Julius Caesar* that the students will have just completed.

Second, students will learn the craft of playwriting. Stephen Sossaman, in *Writing Your First Play*, discusses theater:

There is an immediacy and vitality about theater. Characters are embodied in living human beings, not conjured in the reader's imagination...Compare this to film, which is a very distancing art form. The greatest techniques of film (such as jump cuts and varying camera angles) differ from our natural perception. (2)

Playwriting will affect the students' writing in two ways: 1) it will make them very aware of how audiences react to their writing, and 2) it will give them new ways to structure their writing. When students perform their writing, they will be able to see if their jokes soar or sink. They will see if their dramatic moments are gut-wrenching or laughable. They will gain a better understanding of audience and how their writing can affect (bore, excite etc.) an audience. Furthermore, students who are audience members will have opportunities to experience good writing versus bad writing and use that knowledge to improve their own writing. Now, the caliber of performance will have some affect on the audience's reaction. But, groups of students who produce strong scripts will be setting themselves up for strong performances that will intrigue the audience.

Finally, students will have an opportunity to practice performing. Not all students are actors, but all students can benefit from learning some of the skills related to acting. This unit specifically focuses on building three skills: projection, memorizing lines, and prop and set design. "Projection is not simply about making your voice loud enough to be heard; it is also about an active communication with the audience" (Friedman 18). Students will go through a few exercises described in *Break a Leg: The Kids' Guide To Acting and Stagecraft*. All of the exercises focus students on connecting to the audience using their voice and finding their diaphragm which helps them to project their voice. *Break a Leg: The Kids' Guide To Acting and Stagecraft* also suggests exercises that can help a person memorize lines and create sets and props.

Teaching Strategies and Student Assignments

One of the main teaching strategies in this unit is differentiation. Differentiation of activities is imperative when trying to reach all types of learners. In preparation for differentiating the unit, I have done some research about multiple intelligences. There are eight different intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Armstrong 4). The primary researcher of multiple intelligences, Howard Gardner, calls them "entities that are too broad to be regarded as specific computational acts, but are more specific than general abilities" (68). They are categories in which particular individuals excel. So, if instructors know what type(s) of intelligence their students possess, they know which assessments will give them the best understanding of student comprehension.

Linguistic intelligence describes individuals who are good at using words effectively. These people are good speakers and writers. They are very sensitive to the sound of language, the structures in language, the meanings of language, and the uses of language. People who possess logical-mathematical intelligence excel when using numbers. They have a good understanding of patterns, cause and effect, categorization, and calculation. Essentially, their strength is problem-solving. Those who are spatially intelligent are good at perceiving, navigating, and transforming the world around them. They are usually in professions like art, guiding, and architecture. They are sensitive to color, line, space, and shape. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence describes the capacity to use the body to express ideas and feelings. People possessing this type of intelligence are actors, athletes, craftsmen, and surgeons. They are coordinated, balanced, flexible, and strong.

Musical intelligence describes people who can perceive, discriminate, transform, and express musical forms. They are sensitive to the rhythm, pitch, melody, and tone of music. Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence are closely related. Interpersonal intelligence describes the ability to perceive the moods and feeling of other people. Intrapersonal intelligence describes that ability to attain a high level of self-knowledge and adapt according to that knowledge. These people are very good at self-correcting. Naturalistic is the final type of intelligence. This describes that ability to be very sensitive to nature and discriminate between living and non-living things (Armstrong 2). The theory of multiple intelligences explains why a student might be very skilled on the basketball court, but a poor reader. This student excels at physical activities because they are agile, quick, and have great eye-hand or eye-foot coordination. However, they are not skilled at predicting, questioning, and monitoring comprehension while reading.

This unit does not appeal to all the intelligences, but it does address the students who are linguistically, spatially, bodily-kinesthetically, interpersonally, and intrapersonally intelligent. The writing appeals to the students who are linguistically intelligent; the spatial students will be able to create strong props and sets for the performance of their dramatic scene. Students with bodily-kinesthetic intelligences will do well when while performing their dramatic scene. Finally, interpersonal and intrapersonal students will be able to excel while working with their small group. By appealing to the different intelligences, I will ensure that all students are engaged and invested in the unit. Additionally, all students will have an opportunity to show their understanding of the strategies taught in ways in which they are most skilled. For example, students who are spatially intelligent will be able to show the theme of trust with the props and sets they create. They might not be able to show that they understand what theme is through the dialogue in the play, but they can do so with props and set designs.

The students will begin with a lesson that will familiarize them with the format of a dramatic scene and how authors focus on a specific theme while they are writing. The first of the six lessons will require students to analyze the format and content of a few dramatic scenes. All of the dramatic scenes will be about the theme of trust. They will analyze a scene from Act 2, Scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. They will read the dramatic scene in which Portia is asking Brutus to tell her what is on his mind, but he refuses. Students will have a T-chart. A T-chart is created by students simply drawing a giant letter "t" on a piece of notebook paper. On the left side of the chart, students will write the quotes and words in the dialogue that tell them the theme is trust. On the right side of the chart, they will write why those clues let them know that the scene is about trust. The T-chart will allow students to see their ideas and explanations, which is very helpful for visual learners. Students will repeat this activity with another dramatic scene from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This scene is located in Act 1. In it, Brick and Margaret discuss Big Daddy's true diagnosis and the fact that Mae and Gooper know Big Daddy is dying of cancer but have not told him the truth. Finally, the students will analyze my original dramatic scene, "A Mother's Hope," for tips on how to format. They will take notes on the dramatic scene about capitalization, spacing, and punctuation.

The second lesson requires students to be assigned into small heterogeneous groups of three or four. The students should be grouped according to ability level and learning style preference. First, students will review their T-charts and note how the dialogue communicates the theme. Once the students are grouped, they will go through a pre-writing exercise created by Stephen Sossaman to outline their original dramatic scene about the theme of trust. On pages 80-84 of *Writing Your First Play*, Sossaman provides a sheet that students can fill out in their groups in order to outline their dramatic scene. The teacher can modify the language of the pre-writing sheet to make it more accessible to high school students and more reflective of the information the students have learned. The teacher will tell students that they need to make sure that they only

have two characters and one conflict. This will limit the number of pages students can create. At the end of the period, groups will turn in their outlines.

Next, students will draft, revise, and edit their dramatic scenes. The teacher will return the outline with comments. Groups will revise the outline if necessary and then use it and their copy of “A Mother’s Hope” to type a draft of their dramatic scene on a computer. The outline will guide them with writing the content and “A Mother’s Hope” will guide them with the format of their dramatic scene.

Students will use the strategy of clocking to revise and edit their dramatic scenes. In clocking, students sit in a circle with copies of their dramatic scenes. The teacher has a pre-determined list of revisions and edits that need to be made to the drafts. Groups pass their drafts to the right and then check the draft in front of them for the first revision or edit on the list. The group that is checking the draft is responsible for suggesting changes, not making changes. Once the groups are finished making suggestions for the first item on the list, they pass the draft to the right again and repeat all actions for the second item on the list (New Jersey Writing Project). The list will be a merging of Dr. Brown-Guillory’s “Playwriting Workshop Questions to Ponder” and basic editing tasks such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Some modifications that teachers can perform to facilitate the process are giving students plastic slip covers in which to put their drafts and have students number the lines of their scenes on the right with pencils. This will ease the process of making suggestions about the parts of the draft that need revision and editing. After clocking, groups will meet with the teacher to conference about their drafts.

The next step is for students to prepare for the final performance. Students will go to the computer lab to create the final draft of their script. Students will also receive a list of tips for preparing for a performance. The list will give tips about improving projection, memorizing lines, and creating sets and props. The list will be created from the tips in the book *Break a Leg: The Kids’ Guide to Acting & Stagecraft*. Two students in the group will use the list of tips to focus on memorizing and projecting their lines, while the last one or two members of the group create a background for the performance and props. Each group will receive a piece of white butcher paper about seven feet long on which to create a background, using paint, markers, pencils, cotton balls, string, glue, etc. They will also use butcher paper to create at least two props. They also have the option of bringing items from home or using items in the classroom as props. Once the actors have learned their lines and the set-designers have created their set, the group will come together for a rehearsal. Costumes are optional.

After preparation is complete, groups will perform their dramatic scenes for the class. The class will evaluate them using a checklist that asks them to analyze performance, clarity of theme, and set design and props. Students will also evaluate the work ethic of their group members. The evaluations will serve as a major grade. Fifty percent of the grade will come from the audience evaluations and fifty percent of the grade will come from the intra-group evaluations.

To end the unit, students will read a dramatic scene that is selected by the teacher. They will use a T-chart (just like in lesson 1) to determine the parts of the scene that give them clues about what the theme is and why. They will also write a sentence that tells what they feel the theme of the dramatic scene is.

Assessment

Lewin and Shoemaker agree, “We hold that [projects] can and should be of one critical form of evaluation – a form in which students ‘pull it all together’” (104). Keeping that in mind, the assessment for this unit will be in two major parts. The first part will be the performance and the dramatic scene that groups produce. These two projects will show how well students tackle the tasks of communicating a specific theme to an audience, and whether or not students have

mastered writing in a play format. The final assessment for the unit will be a short test. Students will read a dramatic scene independently. After reading the scene, they will be required to write what they think the theme of the scene is and give evidence to support that theme. This second assessment asks students to use the strategies they have learned to analyze the writing style and content of a dramatic scene in order to determine the theme of that dramatic scene.

Key Terms and Vocabulary

Students will focus on the following vocabulary throughout the unit:

theme	dialogue	characters	setting	props
script	playwriting	social issues	critique	performance
projection	dramatic scene	conflict	resolution	pre-write
draft	revise	edit	publish	format

By the time the students begin this unit, they would have already been exposed to all of the words in previous units, with the exception of props, critique, projection, script, playwriting, performance, and dramatic scene. Because they have been exposed to the other vocabulary previously, they will not be overwhelmed with memorization of definitions. Instead, they will have time to focus on the theater-specific category and gain a deeper understanding of the remaining vocabulary words. This is important because the goal of the unit is not to teach students content, but rather to build strategies. When students are overwhelmed with lists of words whose definitions they must memorize, they do not focus on really understanding what those words mean. This vocabulary will give students room to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to pre-write, while learning how to design a prop.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson One

Summary and Topic: Students will be able to analyze the themes of two dramatic scenes and the format of one dramatic scene

Key Concepts: themes and formats of dramatic scenes

Key Questions

How do you format a dramatic scene?

How do you determine the theme of a dramatic scene?

Key Terms and Vocabulary

theme dialogue dramatic scene format

Lesson Summary

Students will analyze a scene from Act 2, Scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. They will read the dramatic scene in which Portia is asking Brutus to tell her what is on his mind, but he refuses. Students will need a T-chart and will work in groups of two. A T-chart is created by students drawing a giant letter "t" on a piece of notebook paper. On the left side of the chart, students will write the quotes and words in the dialogue that tell them the theme is trust. On the right side of the chart, they will write why those clues let them know that the scene is about trust. Students will repeat this activity independently with another dramatic scene from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. This scene is located in Act 1. In it, Brick and Margaret discuss Big Daddy's true diagnosis and the fact that Mae and Gooper know Big Daddy is dying of cancer, but have not told him the truth. Finally, they will analyze my original dramatic scene, "A Mother's Hope," for tips

on how to format. Students should actually take notes on the dramatic scene. They should note: 1) spacing 2) capitalization 3) punctuation 4) location of stage directions 5) location of actions.

If students need a second example of dramatic scene formatting, one can be found on pages 108 and 109 of *Writing Your First Play*. This scene is not about the theme of trust.

Assessment: ability to identify theme in dramatic scene from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Objectives

- 7A. Reading Comprehension
- 7B. Reading Comprehension
- 8A. Reading a Variety of Texts

Materials: *Language of Literature* (or a copy of the play *Julius Caesar*, copies of “A Mother’s Hope” (Appendix D), and copies of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

Modifications: English Language Learner and students with special needs can do all the activities in the groups with which they will write their dramatic scenes. The teacher can also locate dramatic scenes that are written on a middle school grade level and substitute those scenes for the ones from *Julius Caesar* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Gifted and talented students can perform all the activities individually.

LESSON 2

Summary and Topic: Pre-writing and Drafting

Key Concepts: pre-writing, theme, drafting, theme, formatting

Key Questions

How do I write an outline of a dramatic scene around the theme of trust?

Does my outline reflect the theme of trust?

Key Terms and Vocabulary

characters	conflict	resolution	setting	theme
pre-write dialogue	setting	playwriting	resolution	dramatic scene

Lesson Summary

Students are assigned into small heterogeneous groups of three or four. The students should be grouped according to ability level and learning style preference. Students will review their T-charts for about five minutes and note how the dialogue communicates the theme. Once the students are grouped, they will pre-write using the outlining document on pages 80-84 of *Writing Your First Play*. The teacher can modify the language of the pre-writing sheet to make it more accessible to high school students and more reflective of the information the students have learned. Dramatic scenes should have two characters and one conflict. At the end of the period, groups will turn in their outline.

Next, students will draft their dramatic scenes. The teacher will return the outline with comments. Groups will revise the outline if necessary and then use it and their copy of “A Mother’s Hope” to type a draft of their dramatic scene on a computer. The outline will guide them with writing the content and “A Mother’s Hope” will guide them with the format of their dramatic scene.

Assessment: outline and draft of dramatic scene

Objectives

- 1A. Purposeful Writing
- 2A. Writing Process
- 2B. Writing Process

Materials: copies of outline, computer lab

Modifications: English Language Learners and students with special needs can complete the pre-writing activity as a class with guidance from the teacher.

Gifted and talented students read sections or all of *Writing Your First Play* beforehand. They can also use the original version of the pre-writing sheet; without the modified language.

LESSON 3

Summary and Topic: Revising and Editing

Key Concepts: revising and editing

Key Questions

How do I fix the ideas in my dramatic scene?

How do I fix the formatting mistakes in my dramatic scene?

Key Terms and Vocabulary

revise	edit	theme	dialogue
characters	setting	format	conflict

Lesson Summary

Students will use the strategy of clocking to revise and edit their dramatic scenes. In clocking, students sit in a circle with copies of their dramatic scenes. The teacher has a pre-determined list of revisions and edits that need to be made to the drafts. Groups will pass their drafts to the right and then check the draft in front of them for the first revision or edit on the list for a specified amount of time (the amount of time can range from one to seven minutes). The group that is checking the draft is responsible for suggesting changes, not making changes, on a separate sheet of paper. Once the groups are finished making suggestions for the first item on the list, they pass the draft to the right again and repeat all actions for the second item on the list (New Jersey Writing Project). Groups do not need to check the entire document for each revision or edit, but they do need to write a note that tells the authors of the dramatic scene where they stopped. After clocking, groups will meet with the teacher to conference about their drafts.

Assessment: conference with teacher

Objectives

- 2C. Writing Process
- 3B. Grammar, Usage, and Conventions
- 5B. Evaluation of Writing

Materials: clocking list (Appendix A)

Modifications: The teacher can practice making some of the modifications beforehand with English Language Learners and students with special needs.

Gifted and talented students can simply exchange dramatic scenes with one other group and complete the items on the revising and editing list. Gifted and talented students can also revise without the list. They can simply write their suggestions.

Teachers can supply plastic slip covers in which students can put their drafts and have students number the lines of their scenes on the right with pencils. This will ease the process of making suggestions about the parts of the draft that need revision and editing.

LESSON 4

Summary and Topic: Publishing and Preparing to Perform

Key Concepts: publishing and performance

Key Questions

What constitutes a good performance?

How do I create good sets and props?

Key Terms and Vocabulary

characters	dialogue	script	publish
performance	theme props	setting	characters
theme	dialogue	script	projection

Lesson Summary

Students will go to the computer lab to create the final draft of their script. Students will receive a list of tips about improving projection, memorizing lines and creating sets and props (Appendix B). The teacher should go through the checklist with the entire class. All students should practice the projection and memorization exercises as a class. After all students have practiced, the teacher should instruct groups to decide which two students in the group will use the list of tips to focus on memorizing and projecting their lines, while the last one or two members of the group create a background for the performance and props. Each group will receive a piece of white butcher paper about seven feet long on which to create a background, using paint, markers, pencils, cotton balls, string, glue, etc. They will also use butcher paper to create at least two props. They also have the option of bringing items from home or using items in the classroom as props. Once the actors have learned their lines and the set-designers have created their set, the group will come together for a rehearsal. Costumes are optional.

Assessment: observe progress during preparation for performance

Objectives

- 2E. Writing Process
- 3D. Grammar, Usage, and Conventions
- 20D. Analyzing Information That Is Viewed

Materials: list of performance tips, handout, butcher paper, scripts, paint, markers, crayons, yarn, ribbon, string, glue, cotton balls

Modifications: English Language Learners and students with special needs can be allowed to use their scripts during their performances.

Gifted and talented students can create more backgrounds and props for their performances.

LESSON 5

Summary and Topic: Performance and Evaluation

Key Concepts: performance and evaluation

Key Questions: same as Lesson 4

Key Terms and Vocabulary

performance	theme	set design	props
characters conflict	critique	projection	resolution

Lesson Summary

Groups will perform their dramatic scenes for the class. The class will evaluate them using a questionnaire that asks them to analyze performance, clarity of theme, and set design and props. Students will also evaluate the work ethic of their group members. The evaluations will serve as a major grade. Fifty percent of the grade will come from the audience evaluations and fifty percent of the grade will come from the intra-group evaluations.

Assessment: performance and evaluation forms

Objectives

- 14B. Critical Listening and Speaking
- 15A. Purposeful Listening and Speaking
- 15D. Purposeful Listening and Speaking
- 18C. Listening and Speaking for Literary Interpretations

Materials: evaluation forms (Appendix C)

Modifications: same as Lesson 4

LESSON 6

Summary and Topic: Test – Identify the Theme

Key Concepts: theme

Key Questions: How do you figure out the theme of a dramatic scene?

Key Terms and Vocabulary: Theme

Lesson Summary

Students take a test that requires them to read a dramatic scene and identify what the theme is. They will complete a T-chart (as they did in Lesson 1) and write a sentence that states what the theme of the dramatic scene is. The teacher is free to select a dramatic scene that is appropriate for the students.

Assessment: test

Objectives

- 7A. Reading Comprehension
- 7B. Reading Comprehension
- 8A. Reading a Variety of Texts

Materials: test

Modifications: English Language Learners and students with special needs can be given a prepared T-chart that has one or two of the indications of the theme already identified and justified. This will give them an example to follow.

Gifted and talented students can write an essay rather than doing a T-chart.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Checklist for Clocking

1. Names, Date, and Class
2. Capitalization
3. Spacing
4. Spelling
5. Punctuation
6. Do the characters desire something? What do they desire?
7. What is the main conflict? Is the conflict interesting?
8. Do the characters behave realistically?
9. What does the dramatic scene reveal about trust? How do you know this?
10. What does this group need to do to improve their dramatic scene?

Appendix B

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____

Projection

Projection is not about having a loud voice; it's about having a full voice. To practice projecting your voice, pick a spot that is about one foot away from you, pick a second spot that is about five feet from you, and a third spot that is about ten feet from you. Now, "place" your voice at each of these spots. Do not yell. Just speak so your voice can be placed in each of the spots.

Memorizing Your Lines

Highlight your lines in the script. Now, come up with an action that you can do each time you have to speak. You will need a different action for each block of dialogue. Performing the actions when you speak will help you remember what to say.

Designing Your Set

Background: Think about what needs to be behind your characters. What is the setting? Does it need to be day or night? Do you need plants, traffic, or buildings in the background?

Props: Props are the items that characters touch or move around on stage. What props do your characters need? Are their things they need to move around or hold?

Note: All information is adapted from *Break a Leg: The Kids' Guide to Acting and Stagecraft* by Lise Friedman.

Appendix C

Intra-group evaluation for _____

Circle one answer for each question.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. This person worked hard on the dramatic scene	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
2. This person worked hard to prepare for the performance	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
3. This person worked well with the other people in the group	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
4. This person came up with creative ideas for the dramatic scene and performance	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
5. This person always had a positive attitude	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points

Inter-group evaluation for _____

Circle one answer for each question.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The theme of this group's dramatic scene is trust	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
2. This group did their best on their dramatic scene and performance	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
3. This group's characters were realistic	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
4. This group's dramatic scene has an interesting conflict	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points
5. This group had a quality background and props	1 point	3 points	7 points	10 points

Appendix D

A MOTHER'S HOPE

A Dramatic Scene

by

Maranda Rushing

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NANCY: NANCY is a black, southern belle in her fifties. Her husband is a successful professor at the university, so she does not work. She does some service work for the community, but spends most of her time at home gossiping with other women. NANCY feels that her gossiping is not that bad of a habit and that it doesn't affect anyone.

CHELSEA: CHELSEA is NANCY'S sixteen-year-old daughter. CHELSEA feels that her parents pay more attention to gossip and work than her. She spends a lot of time with her boyfriend.

AT RISE: NANCY is in her kitchen one weekday morning cleaning. She is wearing a light yellow dress and her hair is pulled back. Her daughter's lunch for school sits on the kitchen table in a brown paper bag. CHELSEA, wearing jeans and a form-fitting t-shirt, walks into kitchen.

NANCY

(smiling and looking up from drying the dishes) Chelsea, baby girl, good morning.

CHELSEA

(solemnly plops into a chair at the kitchen table) Mornin', mama.

NANCY

Baby, you feeling okay?

CHELSEA

(almost whispering) I don't wanna talk about it.

NANCY

I don't know why not. Your friends tell their mothers about everything.

CHELSEA

(sarcastically) Oh really?

NANCY

Yeah. (turning around to face CHELSEA) Ms. Raymond was telling me that Mrs. Johnson told her that Mrs. Johnson's daughter told her that she's not passing her math class. Can you believe that? Mary Johnson's girl can't pass math. All these years people have talked about how smart she is, and she can't even pass a simple class. I have to tell you, I've never thought that girl was nearly as smart as people say she is. You know one night I saw her with this boy, doing God knows what in the back of a car. Can you believe that? Now, what smart girl does something like that? Now, back to what I was originally sayin', what is wrong with you?

CHELSEA

(rolling her eyes) Mama, please. I don't wanna listen to gossip this mornin'.

NANCY

(turning back to the dishes) Baby girl, I'm not gossiping; just having conversation. Gossip is mean. I just tell the truth.

CHELSEA

(irritated) It's gossip to me. Sayin' things about people behind their backs that you wouldn't say to their faces is gossip. Mama, you always talk about people. You ALWAYS do. What if somethin' happened to you and everybody was talkin' about it?

NANCY

(turning back to CHELSEA) You are really blowing this out of proportion, Chelsea. I'm not hurtin' anybody, and all I wanted to know is why you're so down this morning.

CHELSEA

(growling and standing) You know why Yvonne Johnson talks to her mother? 'Cause she can trust her! 'Cause she's not a gossip!

NANCY

(moving toward CHELSEA) Now, you really need to watch your tone, Chelsea Elaine Lewis. Yellin' and name-callin'? Remember yo'self girl.

(CHELSEA sits back in her chair and sighs. She folds her arms and a few tears fall down her face. NANCY calms herself before walking to the table and sitting across from CHELSEA.)

NANCY

(sympathetically enunciating each word) Now, let's have a civilized conversation. What is wrong with you? And don't tell me you don't want to talk about it.

CHELSEA

(hesitantly) Mama...I don't want to say anything because... Well... what if you say something to somebody else?

NANCY

Chelsea, I would never do that. A mother would never do that.

CHELSEA

How can I know that? How can I trust you?

NANCY

Because you know I love you, and I would never hurt you. A mother only hopes for the best for her child. Nothing less. You can trust me.

CHELSEA

I can try, if you can make a promise. No more gossipin'.

NANCY

Baby, I don't ...

CHELSEA

(cutting her mother off) Mama, you **are** hurtin' somebody when you gossip. You hurt me.

(NANCY looks at CHELSEA in amazement. She realizes for the first time her actions have really hurt someone close to her.)

NANCY

(ashamed) Baby, I'm sorry. I didn't know. I- I'm just so sorry.

(CHELSEA feels a sudden rush of compassion. She gets up and puts her arms around her mother.)

CHELSEA

It's okay, Mama. I forgive you.

(NANCY rests her head on CHELSEA'S shoulders.)

THE END

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