

Actions Speak Louder than Words

Aisha Y. Ussery
Alexander Hamilton Middle School

INTRODUCTION

Black and white movies with no sound, a coy, female ingénue with a pearl laced bouffant, men with funny hats, thick eyebrows and moustaches, and oversized shoes do not create a recipe for capturing the attention of the middle school student. Literature comprised of vocabulary that they promise never to use underscored by classical and baroque music quickens them to a state of terminal ennui. A dance class in middle school typically means that the girls will flounce around in pink leotards and ballet shoes and the boys will die an early death, if they get the notion they may be asked to wear tights and a fitted tank top. Theatre arts with its haughty stigma, its brilliant playwrights and their extensive vocabulary, which to some is akin to a foreign language, can deter a student from ever stepping foot into a theater, thus depriving a young person of the joyous experience of life epitomized on stage.

The average middle school student is in favor of popular culture that lends itself to color media and reality television. There is, however, always a correlation and common thread between the past and the present. The past and its obstacles and accomplishments greatly influence the present and the future. It is important that today's children are able to bring the past forward. Teachers have a great responsibility in guiding children's learning and attempting to bridge the gap amidst eras, thus making the past current and relevant and fostering a multi-dimensional, educative foundation for our children.

Actions Speak Louder than Words is created to share my passion for fine arts – theatre, music, and dance – with vanguard, special education, regular and at-risk 6th, 7th and 8th grade students who function together in heterogeneous groups. This lesson will teach children how to intellectually perceive, discuss, and evaluate the artistic media of yesteryear and today. The analysis of the structural components of literature, film, dance and theatre will broaden the mind, explain and dissect preconceived notions about what is or is not comical, socially acceptable, or offensive and simultaneously teach age-appropriate artistic techniques that students may use in other scholastic disciplines.

OBJECTIVES

TEKS: Theatre 6, 7, and 8

The students will:

Perception

- create expressive movement and pantomime to define space and characters
- express thoughts and feelings using effective voice and diction
- create setting, character, and plot in improvised and scripted scenes

Creative Expression/Performance

- analyze life interactions, choices, and responses to describe character motivation
- portray characters through familiar movements and dialogue

- create, improvise, and record individually and collaboratively characters, setting, dialogue, and actions that have tension and suspense and that reflect a beginning (exposition), middle (climax), and ending (denouement, resolution)
- plan, direct, and interact cooperatively with others in brief dramatizations
- select movements and dialogue to portray a character appropriately
- imagine and clearly describe characters, their relationships, and their surroundings

Historical/Cultural Heritage

- demonstrate knowledge of theatre as a reflection of life in particular times, places, and cultures
- explain the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in American society

Response/Evaluation

- analyze and practice appropriate audience behavior at various types of live performances.
- compare character, setting, and action in art, music, dance, and theatre
- develop simple oral and written observations about visual, aural, oral, and kinesthetic aspects of informal play-making and formal theatre and describe these components in art, dance, and music

RATIONALE

My ambition for every theatre student is to build character while creating characters. The purpose of theatre arts is to teach students to be critical thinkers who observe their surroundings in search of motives to write, debate, and create life's truths on stage. Each student will leave my class a more confident being and a more confident public speaker aware of the folkways and mores in various societies. I understand my students' needs in their critical pre-adolescent and adolescent stage and the importance for all students to be successful, have a sense of pride and confidence and acquire skills that will help them in life. So, I meet my students where they are and consider their interests. I also consider the psychosocial behaviors and maturation stage of my students and understand that my students want to learn while enjoying their middle school experience.

I have chosen to focus on both verbal and non-verbal communication and the role of both in comedic settings and in everyday occurrences which will promote the examination of one's self, simultaneously creating a non-threatening environment, allowing self-image, injustice, and human error a deeper exploration. *Actions Speak Louder than Words* will navigate through commedia' dell arte, slapstick, silent film, talkies, theatre, music, and dance. Throughout the examination of this topic, students will use higher order thinking skills to investigate and learn about historical events, various musical genres, literary devices, kinesthetic awareness and techniques used by professional artists – actors, comedians, dancers, composers, and playwrights.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Is it possible to understand what one is saying without hearing them speak? One can watch an entire movie with the volume on mute and follow the storyline. Many people have driven by a car accident and discovered that by the look of the situation, it is clear who was at fault and could "hear" the colorful choice words one driver was sharing with the other by simply reading their body language and observing the exchange of facial expressions.

A cliché comes to mind when I consider the aforementioned questions: *Actions speak louder than words*. My middle school students oftentimes come to me, distraught, expressing disgust because another classmate was talking about them behind their back and was looking at them as if they were looking to start a fight. I ask the student, "What did he say about you and how was he looking at you?" All student responses have been similar in that, in fact, they did not hear what

the person actually said, but assumed via the reading of body language that the comments were not pleasant and, also, were directed towards them. Unfortunately, I have found that the students were accurate. The antagonist in question *was* verbalizing distaste towards the other student.

Prosecutors decide, based on how a suspect fidgets or looks away when asked certain questions, whether the suspect is truthful about a said night in question. Teachers decide whether a child really needs to use the restroom or wants to cut class by monitoring a child's grimace and/or the infamous "pee-pee" dance. Many prefer to discuss important information face to face as opposed to e-mails or over the telephone because there is a need to "see" what the person is saying. The average person judges a person's persona by looking for a sneaky smirk, cunning grin, wink of the eye, lack of eye contact, the flaring of one's nostrils, folded arms, the tapping of an impatient foot, and other gestures. It is evident that we greatly depend on non-verbal communication as much as verbal communication to get insight into the world and understand others around us.

Let's Get Real

The essence of the art of acting is to have the ability to wholeheartedly understand the psyche and nature of a person, animal, or inanimate object and cleverly recreate with the body and voice this newfound knowledge and understanding obtained. An actor must mentally embody the emotions of the character he is portraying, understand the life in which the character lives, and be willing to walk more than a mile in that character's shoes. An actor must consider how the character will react in any given situation. When a performer becomes one with the mental behaviors and idiosyncrasies of the character he is portraying, he then will strategically layer, whether realistically or stylistically, the physical attributes and movement qualities necessary to share with an audience the character's story.

Ultimately, the actor's job is to successfully tell a story. He must convince the audience that what he is saying and doing is, in fact, his reality and his truth for that moment. However, students must understand that the characters' truths may oftentimes conflict with the actor's personal beliefs and truths. There will be scenes that may suggest that a character is a conniving FBI agent, a 45-year-old surgeon in 1891, or a tree violently swaying in a windstorm. Certainly, students have not had any of these experiences, however, they must be able to use personal resources – prior knowledge, images, literature, television and/or any tool that will help them gain an understanding about another person or object – to analyze, imitate and execute specific behaviors. Attempting to understand one's belief system and thoughts is necessary. My truth may not be your truth, as it is okay to agree to disagree. However, an actor must go a step further, urging the audience to believe that he and the actor are one and the same.

A problem, however, arises when working with school-aged children. My experience with 11-16 year olds has been challenging when trying to encourage them to participate and emote. Breaking down the barriers of peer pressure and the need to please their friends can be a daunting task. Through trial and error, I have learned it is necessary to meet them where they are, talk about topics that are relevant to them and the subculture in which they exist. You must find commonalities with your students. The same concept applies for the professional actor. A cast, actors in a play, find a common thread agreeing that they are going to work individually to prepare for rehearsals and performances and as a unit with other actors in one accord to present an outstanding presentation of the play night after night while maintaining the integrity of a show. The performing arts are a great example of teamwork. Most actors have a desire to gel, have chemistry, and make an audience believe the quasi-reality that is being executed on stage with the help of their fellow cast mates.

It is important to relate school aged students' everyday life to that of the stage. Students should begin by taking inventory of their own lives. They should investigate what makes them

tick. What angers them? What excites them? What frightens them? What confuses them? What makes them feel uncomfortable, *et cetera*? As students begin to recall events from their personal database, they will begin to share, in their own words, their experiences and feelings about memorable moments in their lives. This is when the magic begins. Effortlessly and convincingly, they will have just performed their first monologue full of emotion, full of dialogue, filled with expressive gestures and facial expressions. There will be a level of intensity and passion because they are telling a story they have had a first account with because it is a part of their being. This is one of the best teachable moments for young actors. This opportunity will allow barriers to be broken and verbal praise to catapult student confidence and interest in the arts, which is based on fragments of their own lives. They will, from those moments, experience the creative and artistic process, perhaps creating a desire to create short stories and/or full-length works of their own.

The teacher's job is to ignite the fire and sow the seed to build the foundation for student actors while simultaneously providing opportunities to introduce technical aspects of theatre and vocabulary. "You will begin by recognizing that THE BODY is the outer manifestation of the actor, the most visible of his tools, capable of communicating the slightest nuance of thought and feeling, of regal bearing and Olympian carriage as well as the physical frailties and distortions that may be demanded by a given role, and you will know that years of dogged determination are needed to perfect it" (Hagen 37). The beauty of theatre lies when an actor is honest.

The Choice Is Yours

Adolescents make bold choices and take dangerous risks daily due to their lack of fear and feeling of invincibility while exploring the colorful possibilities of who they are and/or could be. They learn that a choice they make can yield a positive response from their peers and, simultaneously, invoke shame and ridicule in the eyes of their parents and elders. This situation may lure them to create two identities depending upon their environment and the people who are present. The process of discovering social mores due to consequences, stigma, and social indignation deems itself just as valuable a lesson as receiving respect and admiration.

An actor recalls, relives, and reenacts choices, the cause and effects of events, the feelings that were felt by him and others and discovers how to apply this study to the work on stage. An actor always observes his surroundings and is aware of the minute details in life. Environmental, spatial, sensory, and emotional awareness gives the actor colors, shapes, and dimensions in which to apply to a canvas called the script. Uta Hagan states that you should:

Alert yourself to the objects which you deal with in daily routines: the textures and smells of soap, cleaning equipment, cologne, leather, wood; the smells and taste of food, both raw and cooked, of liquor, sodas, juices, etc. The sound of your doorbell, buzzer, street noises, pigeons cooing on the windowsill. Observe how you respond to these stimuli. Observe your physical and psychological responses to the weather, the light, the humidity when you open or shut the window last night or in the morning. Note how strongly they can influence your ensuing behavior. *Anything* dormant that can be awakened by attention to the sensory process will help give meaning to what you are capable of receiving. How you deal with the reception of sensory stimuli can be stored in a treasure chest to be recalled and transferred selectively to a particular character's stage life. (76)

Imagine opening a window at two o'clock in the afternoon. What is your response? Do you open the window, smile, acknowledge the birds chirping, and take a big whiff of the beautiful spring day, and sigh at the thought of being in love? Do you open the window, begin to cough as a result of the pollution, realize there is a peeping tom looking at you, causing you to shut the window and violently snatch the curtains closed? Do you open the window and holler out, "Hey,

you down there, cut your music down, we're trying to sleep," while dumping a bucket of water onto the street near the partygoers? All of these are choices that give information about the character/s, locale, and the people that are surrounding him. A beneficial tool used in the theatre classroom is allowing students the opportunity to find what works through trial and error. Encourage students to take risks in scene work with the literature that they read and with the physical choices accompanying the reading. Consider that the author's point of view is simply the author's point of view. The *vivre de theatre* – joy of theatre – is that all can read the same piece of literature and all have different points of view independent of the author's point of view, and this is completely acceptable and encouraged. This is called perception and interpretation, which is influenced by one's truths, experiences, prior knowledge or lack thereof.

Consider the passage from "The Path of True Love" by Barry Grantham from his book *Commedia Plays: Senarios, Scripts, Lazzi*:

LELIO (*in soliloquy style*): But a moment ago she ran from me in a game, now she seems to run from me in earnest. I seek but no longer do I find. Why is she doing this to me? And why does she not stand up to her father? And why should he reject me anyway? Am not I of good birth? My family as noble as the house of Bisognosi?...I am plagued by an excess of why; not wise of wisdom, but question marks as numerous as the stars. I ask the immortal gods, why, why, why? (*Beats his chest dramatically and strikes a heroic pose.*)

There can be various interpretations of this soliloquy. Assuming this passage was meant to suggest a serious tone, an actor could choose to portray Lelio as passionate and brokenhearted, standing center stage speaking directly to the audience pouring his heart out, while clutching his heart in anguish admitting that all hope seems to be lost in his mission to marry his one true love. Asking the gods for understanding, he gestures with outstretched arms and looks up as tears roll down his left cheek. One may read this passage and interpret it to be comical. Where the actor is center stage and cries uncontrollably in a high pitched squeal mimicking a female, while asking the gods why, he removes his dagger from his sheath, he stabs himself in the heart and peeks at the audience to see if they believe his shenanigans. He drops to his knees and reaches for the stars and begins to stab himself while saying why, gurgling sounds of blood and gasping for his last breath. Then, suddenly, he springs to his feet to accept the applause he was so longing to receive. One could interpret this piece as heroic in nature, with Lelio standing with a strong stance feet slightly apart, his masculine hands on either hip and he begins to speak heroically not allowing the audience to see his pain. The gestures for the time period may suggest that these choices are inaccurate; yet, these choices are based on personal and aesthetic perception. Remember, a luxury in theatre is to 1) think inside the box, 2) outside the box and 3) consider that there is not box in which to think.

Validating and valuing student choices can create a positive classroom environment where everyone benefits. Empowerment leads to confidence. Hand over the power and allow them to create and self-assess. The message being sent is that you as a teacher trust your students and as a result they are encouraged to take ownership of their learning. The result will be an actor trusting himself to make wise choices and problem solve during the initial stages of scene work. One cannot reach his full acting potential if he does not take risks. Challenge your students and yourself to try something different and move out of that place of comfort. Teach kids how not to be intimidated by creating a positive supportive environment where the teacher can make mistakes and discuss how to correct them. The teacher will also act as a model to ensure student progress.

You Move Me

Dance has the ability to speak to the masses, fight against discrimination, teach a valuable lesson,

raise awareness and make you laugh aloud hysterically. Modern dance, jazz, tap, hip-hop, ballet and other dance forms help us to understand the world around us and help bring together ideas, traditions, and people who are or were so far apart. The process of creating a dance (choreography) allows one to express his thoughts via the body. A choreographed dance does not have to be an intricate work comprised of pirouettes and leaps. It could be as simple as hopping to the center of the stage, clapping your hands three times, jumping and walking violently off the stage and into the wings, leaving the audience with various interpretations of what they believe the choreographer's intent was. There are various approaches and techniques on how to choreograph a dance, but there is no right or wrong when one is creating from his soul. "The process of creation is principally the same for everybody. You have an idea in your head, like a blueprint and you've seen a vision and your duty is to reconstruct that vision that you've seen in the material world" (King).

In the classroom, you will find that some students have had prior dance training. Some are social dancers and some hate dancing. Most students will take pleasure in activities that will allow them to get away from the desk and the paper and pencils. Approaching dance as an outlet, a tool for communicating ideas, and as a way for students to have creative freedom will allow you to reach all individuals in the class.

It is important for students not to be frightened by the word dance. Approaching dance from an intellectual standpoint will give students tools to use before physically moving in the space. The elements of dance are an intellectual approach to dance. The elements of dance refer to how body parts move in space considering time and force. The body consists of the bones, tendons, muscles, lungs, and the heart support the head, shoulders, arms, hands, legs feet, rib cage, hips, and back. The body stretches, twists, rises, collapses, sways, shakes, and bends. Lead by the feet: we walk, leap, hop, jump, run, skip, gallop, and slide. These steps are called locomotor movements.

The body moves within space and the way the body is positioned in the space is called shape or body design. Body shapes are designed in high, middle, and low levels. As the body moves through space, it travels in various directions and pathways. One can move on the spot or throughout the space traveling backward, sideways, forward, and turning in a straight, curved, zigzag, and circular pathway, while simultaneously using large or small movements in the space. Dance, synonymous with body language and gestures, relies on the force and time in which a movement is executed. Carrying the body tight, heavy, sharp, and bound can create a look of tension; however, light, fluid, smooth, and loose movement can create a sense of calmness. Considering time, the focus is how a particular movement responds to rhythm, speed, or beat. A movement combination can take place over time, for example, in eight counts or thirty-two counts, depending upon the speed used to execute the movement.

When students are creating and performing their movement sequences, ensure that they receive affirmations. Use the art of choreography to help children transition through the awkward and difficult stages of adolescence. Share that quirky is often considered avant-garde. Less is more and boys, too, can be great dancers. Encourage dancing in silence and the use of live instruments. There are endless possibilities when creating dance. Having the ability to manipulate the body is beneficial to the actor as well as the middle school student.

Do you see what I hear?

As one enters a theatre, whether to view an on-screen production or stage play, he sits, listens to the dialogue, watches the actors at play, and is subconsciously influenced by the music (underscore and incidental music) that heightens the mood of each scene. Underscore and incidental music consists of sound effects and sound bites and is often heard beneath dialogue, during transitions and in commercials, libraries, soap operas, cartoons and restaurants.

When asked about various genres of music and specific song titles, a group of my 6th grade theatre students shared that underscore has the ability to surprise, frighten, sadden, and take you on an emotional roller coaster. When introduced to the four-note motif of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, students suddenly became alert, sensed tension and foresaw a suspenseful event waiting to unfold. The theme music of *Mission Impossible* sent them to the edge of their seats, visualizing spies in black leather coats who stealthily jump into electric blue convertible Porsches. Heavy Metal created the image of people with torn clothing and trendy jet-black hairstyles in the midst of fighting or in mental turmoil. Opera revealed a rocky romance destined to result in tragedy, allowing its audience to witness, in slow motion, the death of a beautiful girl as she falls to the floor, taking her last breath with eyes opened blankly staring into the eyes of her lover.

Music incites creativity and evokes emotion. Underscore and incidental music should be a tool used frequently. Create a music library that is accessible for student use and be not opposed to teachable moments sparked by student ingenuity.

Quiet Riot

Silent film encompasses each of the aforementioned art forms – acting, dance, and music – and thrives on its actors' ability to tell stories through embellished grimaces and gesticulation. Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, Jean Harlow, and others used silent film to popularize slapstick comedy. Comedians of silent film found themselves in dangerous situations that would result in a chase and occasionally public humiliation. Comedic bits and methods of the silent film era were greatly influenced by the techniques of Commedia dell' Arte. In both silent film and commedia dell' arte, even characterized actors' choices are exaggerated. "If a character is in a hurry he will move four times faster than a straight actor, and if someone gets in his way he would more likely jump over them than go round them. If the character is stupid, he could spend an entire scene on one leg staring at the audience... If he is afraid, his knees will visibly knock together" (Grantham, *Playing Commedia* 10).

Techniques of the silent film era can be viewed in the works of successful actors such as Lucille Ball, Bill Cosby, Jim Carrey, Raven Simone and other great physical comedians. Homage has been paid to silent greats as comedic antics of the 1920s stunts were infused into today's television and movies of popular culture.

Antiquated Antics

Commedia dell' Arte, or Commedia, is an improvised art that began in Italy and reached its height of popularity in the 16th century. Commedia required its professional actors to have poise, master their bodies as a tool in which to communicate non-verbally, and possess vocal elements necessary to perform and recreate plays. Commedia actors were professionals who perfected the skills necessary to realize dramatic play and comical stories including, but not limited to, dance, acrobatics, music, mime, spoken word, and storytelling. Commedia's non-naturalistic and slapstick comedy greatly relied on the actors' ability to improvise and encourage audience participation. Although improvised, all characters were required to rehearse and memorize the basis of each scenario so that the improvised segments were emotionally supported.

Playing Commedia refers to two distinct views on improvisation. *Impro* refers to an ensemble beginning to rehearse without a prewritten script. The actors agree on a scenario until a play has been organically created. This acts as the brainstorming process that becomes the foundation of a scripted play created by an ensemble opposed to an individual author. In *Performance Impro*, a scene is created the moment the actors enter the stage. Through this manner of improvisation the audience is entertained by a comedic performance that will never be performed quite the same a second time. Each performance is a new unplanned occurrence and is

unlikely to be repeated.

The masks, language, comedy, movement vocabulary, quasi love stories, history and loose structure of Commedia dell'Arte will enthrall students of various learning styles and skill level.

The Red Shoes

The Red Shoes is a tragic fairy tale originated by Hans Christian Anderson. However, Robin Short cleverly produced a two-act play version of *The Red Shoes* that has a delightful happy ending and is recommended, by the University Interscholastic League, for middle and high school One-Act Play competitions.

The story takes place one hundred years ago in Denmark with a gypsy montebank, Snogg, accompanied by his mute clown, Jemmo, searching to find someone to perfectly fit and wear a magic pair of red shoes that will successfully complete a lucrative entertainment scheme. Snogg cunningly finds a pretty young orphan girl, Karen, with cumbersome wooden shoes to be his puppet. She opts to trade in her awkward wooden shoes for the dancing possessed red shoes and finds that she cannot stop dancing nor can she remove the shoes. Snogg has succeeded in his scheme to find a young girl that he can control with his magical shoes. He kidnaps Karen, with the help of Jemmo, and the fiasco begins.

The characters and the tone of the *The Red Shoes* have Commedia dell'Arte attributes and portray characters that fit cleverly into the scheme of commedia. The work has a classic lovers' tale including an Inamorato (the male lover/hero) and Inamorata (the female lover/heroine), a mime resembling Arlecchino (a commedia stock character), exaggerated movement, and music from the period. This and other similar works can be transformed into commedia style plays.

Conclusion

A student who experiences the world of fine arts, in addition to academic disciplines, is considered a well-rounded student. Students are challenged to transition from concrete thinking to abstract thinking in a non-threatening, oftentimes entertaining, setting. Viewing the world within the realm of the stage offers students the freedom to be an individual, to respect what motivates the psyche of others and encounter worlds that, prior to entering the theater, may only exist in the mind.

During this lesson and thereafter, the teacher carries the responsibility of exposing his students to live theatre, dance concerts, poetry workshops, the symphony, and the museum. The student is the seed that will bloom into a beautiful flower when shown a world that exists beyond the classroom and primetime television.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Do you see what I hear? – Underscore Music

Objectives:

TEKS: 117.40 (1) Perception. The student develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment, using elements of drama and conventions of theatre. The student is expected to: (A) improvise, using emotional and sensory recall; (C) create expressive movement and pantomime to define space and characters; (E) compare dramatic performances to life; and (F) create setting, character, and plot in improvised and scripted scenes.

Materials: CD and DVD player, television, paper, map colors, crayons, movie soundtracks and movies (See song and movie examples below.)

Procedures:

Step 1

Create a relaxed, non-threatening environment. Allow students to lie on the floor, lie on a pillow, take off their shoes and/or put their head on the desk. Give each student scratch paper, map colors or crayons.

Step 2

Students will listen to selected songs from the soundtracks of movies. Students are to imagine and visualize what is taking place while the selected song is playing. Students will take notes, draw, create a journal, list adjectives, and/or create semantic maps that will be used to recall information about selected songs to be discussed.

Example A:

Song List 1

“I Wanna Be with You” by Mandy Moore

(Find additional songs and accompanying movie scenes to compile a list for your class)

Movie List 1

Center Stage

Step 3

Students will share their notes, drawings, journals, adjectives, and/or semantic maps with group members. Replay songs upon student request. Groups should consist of 4-5 members. Allow at least 15 minutes for discussion.

Step 4

Teacher will define underscore music and discuss how it is used in film, stage, and in other environments.

Step 5

Show selected movie scenes from which songs (Example A) were played.

Give additional paper, if needed before activity starts.

Students will write short answers to questions on scratch paper as they view movies.

Questions:

Does the music drive the plot?

How does the song heighten the mood of the selected scene?

Would you have chosen a different song to describe the scene?

Did you visualize a similar scene?

What was the mood?

Step 6

Students will share their notes, drawings, journals, adjectives, and/or semantic maps with group members. Replay songs upon student request. Groups should consist of 4-5 members. Allow at least 15 minutes for discussion.

Step 7

Students will create short scenes using song list 2. Scenes should last 1-3 minutes. Students will choose classmates to act in their scenes or act as a solo artist.

Example B:

Song List 2

“Wunderkind” by Alanis Morissette

(Find additional songs and accompanying movie scenes to compile a list for your class)

Movie List 2

Narnia

Step 8

Students will create comedic scenes using songs from song lists 1 and 2.

Assessment: Students will be graded holistically based on the application of underscore in the performed scenes.

Lesson 2: What's Going On? – Acting

Objectives:

TEKS: 117.40 (2) Creative expression/performance. The student interprets characters, using the voice and body expressively, and creates dramatizations. The student is expected to: (A) demonstrate safe use of the voice and body; (B) analyze life interactions, choices, and responses to describe character motivation; (C) portray characters through familiar movements and dialogue; and (D) create, improvise, and record individually and collaboratively characters, setting, dialogue, and actions that have tension and suspense and that reflect a beginning (exposition), middle (climax), and ending (denouement, resolution).

Materials: Music – “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye and musical works from various genres. Props – television, telephone, lamp, radio, vacuum, rug, coffee table, candles, flower vase, iron and ironing board, couch, and clothing that will lie across the couch. (Items can be purchased at a thrift store or can be made. For example, a couch can be created with two chairs covered by a printed bed sheet).

Supplemental Reading – Uta Hagan’s: *A Challenge for the Actor*.

Procedures:

Step 1

Create a realistic acting space that resembles a messy living room. The living room should include a television, telephone, lamps, radio, vacuum, rug, coffee table with candles and flower vase, iron and ironing board, couch, and clothing that will lie across the couch.

Step 2

Teacher will model the activity for the students by acting in the acting space. Begin by going to the radio and starting the music that will accompany the scene “What’s Going On.” The task is to clean the living room by ironing and folding clothes, dusting, and vacuuming. While cleaning, acknowledge the music by dancing and/or singing. Add comedic elements by dancing with the vacuum cleaner, singing into the flower vase. Speaking aloud while completing the tasks is an option.

Step 3

Students will work in the space created in step 2. Students will make acting choices that motivate them. During the whole class discussion, guide students to discuss facial expressions, gestures, realism, and comedic aspects that occurred within the scenes.

Step 4

Students will repeat step 1-2 and add obstacles to raise the stakes. Obstacles, listed below, are presented to create a challenge. Through improvisation, students will work in the space and do what comes naturally. Allow students the opportunity to work alone or with a partner.

Obstacles:

You learn a visitor is scheduled to arrive in 15 minutes.

The President of the United States is visiting your home.

MTV has chosen your home to film a reality show. The camera crew will arrive in 2 hours.

Parents are coming home early from vacation and you have thrown a wild party.

Step 5

Students will create an acting space that resembles a room of their choice (bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, game room, etc). Students should use the props in the classroom as well as bring specialty items from home. Each student will choose a task to complete and a musical selection that will best describe what is taking place in his or her acting space. Example: Cindy Lauper's "Girls Just Want to Have Fun" will accompany a girl preparing for her first school dance. Students should have a prop list and a set design drawing. Students should practice at home and will have one week to rehearse. Create a rehearsal schedule in class. Allow students 15 minutes to work in the space. This will include setting up and rehearsing. If possible, create two acting spaces to allow more students to rehearse.

Step 6

During discussion, encourage students to suggest other musical works that may work well with other scenes. Ask students, how does underscore influence physical actions.

Step 7

Create comedic chaos by adding comedic obstacles listed below to Step 5.

Obstacles:

- Stump your toe
- Bump your knee
- Hit your head
- Burn your finger on the iron
- Fold clothes and all the clothes fall over
- Vacuum does not work
- Slam finger in a window
- A spider runs across your foot
- Spray starch in your eye

Step 8

Listen to sound effects from CD, *101 Sound Effects*. Discuss where these sound effects could be inserted into the previous scenes to further comedy. To guide students toward slapstick comedy add sound effects to step 7. For instance, when one stomps his toe we hear a loud scream. If someone hits his or her head, we hear a loud metal thump.

Assessment: Students will be graded based on the management of obstacles, and the actor's ability to choose and execute facial expressions, gestures, and realism.

Lesson Plan 3: You Move Me-Dance

Objectives:

TEKS 117.40 (1) Perception. The student develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment, using elements of drama and conventions of theatre. The student is expected to: (A) improvise, using emotional and sensory recall; (C) create expressive movement and pantomime to define space and characters; (E) compare dramatic performances to life; and (F) create setting, character, and plot in improvised and scripted scenes.

Materials: Five large visual aids (listed below), video of movement, combinations music videos, dance programs, circus acts, and sports footage.

A football play diagram – (Football play diagrams can be found on www.football-plays.com)

A list of locomotor movements – (walk, run, skip, walk, gallop, run,)

A list of body parts – (leg, foot, shoulder, wrist, torso, head torso, back)

A combination from a line dance – (right foot stomp, left foot stomp, cha cha to the left, cha cha to the right)

A diagram of pictures – (red light, green light, red light, green light, yellow light red light)

Procedures:

Step 1

Post five large visual aids in various areas of the room. Students will walk around the classroom studying each visual aid. Students will discuss what each visual aid has in common. How does each diagram relate to the dance?

Step 2

Students will gather in groups of 4-5 to physically decode each diagram. Students will create a movement sequence (dance) based on the information from the visual aid. Allow for abstract thinking. Allow 20-35 minutes for activity.

Step 3

Students will perform choreographed works. After each performance students will affirm each presentation using positive responses.

Step 3

Define choreography. Discuss the elements of dance. Use a football video game to show how football plays are made. Show *Dance Composition Basics: Capturing the Choreographer's Craft* to demonstrate how choreography is created. Describe the necessities of kinesthetic awareness in dance and football, where both dancers and football players gracefully move past each other without colliding unless that is the choreographer or coach's aim. Explain how both are considered choreographed sequences of movement.

Step 4

Show videos of movement combinations using music videos, dance programs, circus acts, sports footage, and films. Encourage students to bring in movement video footage.

Step 5

Read the passage below aloud to students; thereafter, students will write a journal about their experience with dance.

Think back to the earliest age you can remember dancing. Where were you? What were you doing? Were you turning in circles with your arms outstretched only stopping because you fell to the floor as a result of dizziness? Were you watching someone vacuum the living room floor while listening to music which moved you to shake your hips, clap your hands, and move your head from side to side? Were you standing in front of the bathroom mirror having your own private concert with your brush as the microphone singing and creating movement to the words of your favorite song only to be startled when you realized your family was watching you the entire time? Each scenario represents dance and choreography at its purest form. You were dancing because it made you feel good. It was your instinct. You danced with no restrictions. Whether you were a good dancer or one rhythmically challenged, you were a dancer who was allowing your body to speak. Choreography lends itself to the non-dancer and the trained dancer. Choreography acts as the voice without sound.

Step 6

Write a short story entitled "The Nagging Bumblebee." Teacher will read the short story aloud.

This reading will be the inspiration for a choreographed dance the teacher will perform before the students. Teacher will model “The Nagging Bumblebee” dance that will begin with the teacher sitting in a chair reading a book. The sound of a nagging bumblebee is heard. The teacher searches the area for the bee, sees it, points at it and simultaneously cues the song “Flight of the Bumblebee.” The dance will end when teacher successfully destroys the bee. The aim of this dance is to infuse acting, slapstick comedy and dance.

Step 7

Students will write a humorous short story titled “The Funniest Thing that has Ever Happened to me.” The stories may be fiction or non-fiction. Students will pass around stories for others to read. Individuals or groups of students will choose a story that will be the inspiration for a funny dance. Students will repeat steps modeled by the teacher in step 6.

Assessment: Students will be graded on their ability to translate their written short stories into a choreographed movement.

Lesson 4: Silence is Golden – Silent Film

Objectives:

TEKS: 117.40 (2) Creative expression/performance. The student interprets characters, using the voice and body expressively, and creates dramatizations. The student is expected to: (A) demonstrate safe use of the voice and body; (B) analyze life interactions, choices, and responses to describe character motivation; (C) portray characters through familiar movements and dialogue; and (D) create, improvise, and record individually and collaboratively characters, setting, dialogue, and actions that have tension and suspense and that reflect a beginning (exposition), middle (climax), and ending (denouement, resolution).

Materials: Fairy tales, map pencils, paper, eraser, music, radio, CD player.

Procedures:

Step 1

Create a relaxed, non-threatening environment. Allow students to lie on the floor, lie on a pillow, take off their shoes and/or put their head on the desk. Give each student scratch paper, map colors or crayons.

Step 2

Teacher will read aloud fairy tales to students. Students will create a storyboard for the fairy tales read aloud. Suggested stories: “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” and “The Three Little Pigs.”

Example Storyboard Captions:

1. Meet the Pigs
2. Meet the Wolf
3. Wolf, Pig 1 and the straw house.
4. Wolf, Pig 2 and the stick house.
5. Wolf, Pig 3 and the brick house.
6. Pigs Celebrate

Step 3

Students will create, rehearse, and perform a short play based on the information from the storyboard. During the performance students may not speak. Students must rely on gestures, facial expressions and music to tell the story.

Step 4

Students will view a muted (no audible sound), selected scene from *Ace Ventura's Pet Detective*. Students will study the scene to determine the storyline, facial expression, physical movement qualities, character traits, and dialogue.

After viewing the scene, students will write and discuss their ideas.

Step 5

Students will review film to create specific dialogue for each character. Created dialogue does not have to coincide with the plot. Students may give characters an accent, outlandish tasks, and comedic lines. Allow students to review selected scene to ensure that the dialogue is synchronized with actor gestures and movement of lips.

Step 6

Students will perform the dialogue that has been created behind a screen or curtain while the selected scene is being played. The audience members will focus on the television that will play the movie as the actors speak the dialogue.

Additional step: Record the scene with student voices and play back and watch new movie.

Step 7

Students will choose movies from home, the school library or class library. Repeat steps 5-6.

Step 8

Teacher will teach a mini lesson on the golden era of silent film and slapstick comedy. Show silent film commentary movie. Discuss gestures, movement quality, eye movement and facial expressions of silent film actors.

Allow students 15-20 minutes to research the silent film era. Students will write key facts on post it notes and attach the facts to the wall. Each fact will be reviewed during whole class discussion.

Step 9

Students will view Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid*. In groups of 7, each group will recreate the physical aspects of the scene as well as add dialogue to the fight scene. Students will have a master class on gestures and facial qualities, body posture.

Step 10

Students, in groups (4-7) will choose a silent film clip from the class library or the Internet. Dissect the silent film scene selection using the storyboard technique and repeat steps 4-6.

Step 11

Students will create an original silent film. To prepare, students will develop a written script with dialogue that will aid in creating motivation for the movement or physical gestures.

Assessment: Students will be graded on successful completion of a written script and silent film.

Lesson Plan 5: Antiquated Antics Commedia-Commedia dell' Arte/The Red Shoes

Objectives:

TEKS: 117.40. (4) Historical/cultural heritage. The student relates theatre to history, society, and culture. The student is expected to: (A) demonstrate knowledge of theatre as a reflection of life in particular times, places, and cultures; and (B) define theatre heritage as it is preserved in dramatic text, traditions, and conventions and describe the roles of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in American society.

Materials: *The Red Shoes*, *Playing Commedia*, *Commedia Plays*, and music from the Italian Renaissance period, song: “Vogue” by Madonna

Procedures:

Step 1

Students will divide into six groups. Assign a specific element to each group to research. Commedia dell’Arte elements include stock characters, masks, physical and slapstick comedy, mime, speech and dialogue, and improvisation.

Step 2

Groups will present their findings in a 3-5 minute presentation and students will write down important facts learned from each presentation. Students must retrieve at least 10 borrowed facts.

Step 3

Teacher will continue exploring commedia with students. Refer to the book *Playing Commedia*, pp. 3-16. Show pictures and books from the period.

Step 4

Students will learn Commedia character postures (pp. 19-41, *Playing Commedia*). Create a dance using learned postures accompanied by an instrumental version of Madonna’s “Vogue.” Take pictures of students in still poses to be used later.

Step 5

Students will read selected commedia plays to become more familiarized with the style and structure of the commedia play. Refer to the book *Commedia Plays*.

Step 6

Students will create commedia storybooks or storyboards using still photos taken in step 4. Each photo must have a caption and/or dialogue and properly sequenced to create a complete story.

Step 7

Students will read *The Red Shoes* and complete a character analysis of the characters, comparing stock commedia characters to those of *The Red Shoes*. For example, Jemmo in *The Red Shoes* is similar to Arlecchino (Harlequin of Commedia dell’Arte).

Step 8

Students will perform excerpts from *The Red Shoes* in the style of commedia.

Assessment: Students will be graded based on successful completion of storybooks/storyboards and performances of *The Red Shoes*, and the inclusion of commedia elements in their final projects.

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