

Theatre of the Absurd

Summary

This is an engaged learning unit designed to introduce and involve students in the Absurd Theatre movement. Students will be introduced to basic characteristics of Abstract art and theatre and then begin training themselves to be better prepared as absurdist performers through theatre games and warm-ups. Students will then collaborate in small groups and create their own Absurd theatre performance project. Daily review and critiques will occur as ongoing assessment. Upon completion of the project, students will perform for the class and engage in an impromptu performance which will be video taped for review and final critique.

Time Frame

10 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Life Skills

Communication

Materials

Visual Examples of Absurd works; Prints of Absurd art; writing materials; Technical materials: stage space; lighting; sound; props; costumes; make-up

Background for Teachers

It will help, with this unit, to have had some experience in theatre improvisation or theatre games and with Engaged Learning Characteristics.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will gain knowledge of what gave rise to the absurdist movement and that it presented a brand new way of looking at the world. Students will use improvisational warm-ups and theatre games to help create group projects that demonstrate their mastery of the abstract concept. 1. Vision of Learning: Students will be responsible to create and perform a final project to the rest of their class, collaborate with others in pairs and small groups, utilize background historical information and keep using the techniques we practice during this unit in a seamless and ongoing manner in all performance work and theatre warm-ups through-out the year. 2. Tasks: The students will participate in several Theatre Improvisations. These are hands-on and authentic tasks that the students will continue to use during the year. Students will also create a final project using technology, challenging topics and sharing their viewpoints which keeps the project relevant and real to them. 3. Assessment: The instructor will do a daily round-up activity to find out where each group is at and do they need any special help or resources. Students will participate in a final evaluation of their project and of the classes and units worth. The unit is generative and ongoing for the rest of the year and each student should gain an appreciation of what abstract art is accomplishing and why it's important to our current and changing society 4. Instructional Model: Student will engage in social interaction during the collaborative process and the improv, use inquiry to delve more deeply into their projects, and use discovery abilities and hands-on techniques to gain a working knowledge of improv and to create their final projects. 5. Learning Context: Students will work as a large group and in pairs during the Theatre games to collaborate information, share ideas, and in small groups to outline their performance piece

script and technical needs and again as a large group for assessments. 6. Grouping: Large groups for research and introduction activities, small groups for collaboration. 7. Teacher Roles: Instructor will take on the role of facilitator and guide in background mind-sets for the unit, as co-learner and tour guide during the creation and exploration of projects. 8. Student Roles: Students will become explorers, cognitive apprentices, teachers, performers and producers of their final projects and daily participation exercises. Students decide their ultimate goal, use and direction of this unit.

Instructional Procedures

A good way to get the students attention and to engage them actively with this unit, is to begin the class and unit with examples of performance art (the more current, the better!) Video clips, Prints or Computer Presentations containing abstract art, and if you feel up to it, a live presentation by yourself. Use these examples to lead into a group discussion and background lecture on the Absurd Theatre movement. Days 1&2: Introduce students to Absurd Theatre: discuss why it developed and why it's important today. View examples and discuss possible interpretations. Begin with theatre game warm-ups: Non-sense speech exercise (students have a 'conversation but are not allowed to use any known language) Pass the Gesture (students react to each other, they pass a movement and sound to each other, getting out if they drop the gesture or blank.) The object of the warm-up exercise is to prepare student to react like an absurdist performer. Each situation demands that the performer alter and reassess the world as it exists on stage. Day 3: Students begin by writing an 'uncomfortable moment' (but perhaps not too personal) they have experienced on paper and putting it in hat to be drawn out at random. Students then play 'Freeze' using the moment as a starting point for improv. Two students start out treating each situation as rationally as possible then other students say 'Freeze' and can continue the scene any way they choose. Have the students recap and confirm what they have working on: stretching their perceptions of the world and looking at situations in new and different ways. Day 4: Have students form small groups at random to begin absurd theatre project. The instructor sets guidelines: 1. No known language or gesturing may be used, only abstract sounds or gestures. 2. Theatrical lighting is allowed and a Technician assigned to each group. 3. No Sets or real props. 4. Music & sound is a must. 5. Only costumes from the 'rag-box' allowed. 6. Piece must run at least 10 minutes long. 7. Group must 'Make a point' about something during their piece. Have students begin to brain-storm on ideas and begin creation of performance art piece. Day 5: Play examples from music they probably don't listen to normally and have them warm-up, improvising a character to go with the music. Try several different short varieties- Jazz, Classical, Modern (Bobby McFerrin is a favorite for this) Allow students to meet and continue brainstorming on their piece. Day 6&7: Get student feedback on where they are on their project now. What can you assist them with? Have they considered the use of Media? Where could they add it in? Is their piece relevant to today's society? Is it relevant to them personally? How can they make it so? Allow students time to write their outline and to plan ahead what they need to create this piece. Some students may need to visit the library or use the computer lab to find things they can use in their project. Days 8&9; Students take turns having technical rehearsals on stage space and running through their project. Day 10: Have students Prepare and then Perform their projects for the other class groups. The instructor should then lead the class in a guided critique of each others work. Have the groups perform on stage together at the same time. This will keep the pieces fresh and real- making the performers respond to new situations and influences. Have students evaluate themselves and the class project as a whole. How will they continue to use this in their work?

Extensions

This unit may lead into: student playwriting, directing an already existing absurdist piece, (Beckett, Ionesco, Sartre) selecting an Absurd piece for Region Competition Performance.

Assessment Plan

The best assessment I have found for this unit, when practiced in class, is the students use and enjoyment of it. I grade this unit on a Pass/Fail basis. As long as students are actively engaged they are gaining from this experience and giving back to the class outcome.

Bibliography

Johnson, Maureen Making Sense from Nonsense (ETA, Spring 2000) 17-19

Authors

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