

AARON F. BRATEMAN

Drama with Special Populations

UNIT OUTLINE

GRADE LEVEL/AGE: High School

CONTEXTUAL DETAILS: Drama Class

LENGTH OF UNIT: 6 Lessons

UNIT OF STUDY TITLE: Improvising Characters

GOALS:

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1.B

Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate

Blueprint/NYS Arts Standards:

TH: Cr3.1.HSI: Refine and complete artistic work.

1. Theatre artists refine their work and practice their craft through rehearsal.
 - b. Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theatre work.

TH: Pr5.1.HSI: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

1. Theatre artists develop personal processes and skills for a performance or design.
 - a. Practice various acting techniques to expand skills in a rehearsal or drama/theatre performance.

Theater Making: Acting: Imagination, Analysis, and Process Skill

- Maintain consistent focus and concentration in improvisations, scene work and performances.

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- Respond imaginatively and expressively to imaginary and scripted circumstances in improvisations, scene work and performances.
- Contribute positively and responsibly to ensemble efforts.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the emotional and physical safety of self and others.
- Sustain consistent focus on and commitment to group activities and goals.
- Use voice and body expressively in improvisations, scene work and performances.
- Use learned physical and vocal skills to create a variety of vivid, idiosyncratic characters in improvisations, scene work, plays and musicals.

Other Artistic Skills:

Students will learn to function as a cohesive ensemble, and learn to be an engaged and respectful audience.

Other Learning Goals:

Students will develop a deeper attunement to the needs and desires of their peers.

Students will be able to expand their focus to a large group.

Students will be able to use personal experiences to inform their artistic work.

<p>UNDERSTANDINGS/BIG IDEAS: Students will know the basics of improv scene work and character creation.</p>	<p>OUTCOMES: Students will be able to embody original characters in improvised scene work.</p>
<p>ESSENTIAL QUESTION: How do we create and play original characters in an improv scene?</p>	<p>KEY IDEAS: Yes and, listening, collaboration, activation, WRECK (Wants, Relationships, Environments, Keep them consistent), gifts, vocal quality, physicality</p>

ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE:

For a diagnostic assessment, students will be asked to create a series of tableaux together that represent different shapes and images. The teacher will take brief notes on this, noting how well students worked as a cohesive unit, whether they brought clear characters/points of view into the tableaux, and how clear their images were.

As part of their formative assessment, students will write a journal entry after each lesson reflecting on their ongoing learning. This should be a genuine response to the day’s activities that highlights new insights, frustrations, questions, reactions, etc. The teacher will give feedback on these entries, and other students should comment on at least one of their peer’s entries each day.

For their Summative Assessment, students will perform scenes in which they “gift” character traits and are “gifted” character traits by other students. This will be documented on a rubric along with teacher comments. Other students will also complete the rubric as they watch each scene, as a means of peer assessment.

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LESSON TITLES/BENCHMARKS:

Week 1: I'll Support You, If You Support Me- Working as One

Week 2: You Say Tomato, and I'll Say Tomato- Agreeing to Agree

Week 3: Where Am I and How Did I Get Here?!- Location, Location, Location

Week 4: What Are You Doing?- Keeping Our Scenes Going with Action

Week 5: Who Am I Anyway?- Creating Lenses to the World Around Us

Week 6: Opening Good Gifts- Playing Games

CONSIDERATIONS:

This unit is designed for a general education theater class. Modifications have been made throughout the lesson to provide choice and supports when appropriate—this includes giving students options for ways in which they can provide necessary input into the activities, like with inspiration cards. Some of the earlier activities in the unit ask students to be physical and make contact with each other. The teacher should provide alternate paths into these activities if students are reluctant, while making sure to present these alternatives as equally viable ways in. This should include explaining the contact and physical requirements of the activity, and creating a viable “stand in” for making physical contact, ie. Placing a hand “floating” over the spot the student would otherwise be touching. Any physical limitations that students may have can easily be incorporated into these exercises—they should not be seen as barriers to completion, but rather an inspiration for more interesting creation. Improvisation will often require on the spot discovery, which can lead to some students freezing up. The teacher may provide support, like the inspiration cards, when needed, but should find a way to slowly remove that support as well, eventually providing a question rather than an answer to help students with that discovery.

OTHER INFORMATION:

Improv can be challenging and scary. Encourage students to follow the fear to lead them to exciting choices, but also that if they have made a choice that they do not think is fun, they should make a new choice.

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UNIT NAME: Improvising
Characters

LESSON NAME: Opening Good
Gifts

Artistic Goal: Filtering a text through a strong point of view, characters, physicality, vocal choices, monologues, scene work.

Academic Goal: Character analysis, how point of view affects action, story structure, collaboration

Lesson Objectives: Students will be able to endow and embody active offers in an improv scene.

Essential Question: How do you give and receive gifts in an improv scene?

Key Ideas: Character, point of view, physicality, vocal choice, gifts

Instructional Outline:

1. Boom Chicka Boom (5 Minutes)

- a. The students stand (or sit if this is better) in a circle, which is marked out by dots on the floor, and the teacher introduces a chant, pointing out that students may follow along with the words on the board.
 - i. *Repeat after me: I said a BOOM-chicka-boom.*
 - ii. Students repeat.
 - iii. *I said a boom-CHICKA-boom.*
 - iv. Students repeat.
 - v. *I said a boom-chicka-rocka-chicka-rocka-chicka-boom.*
 - vi. Students repeat.
- b. The teacher then leads the students through the chant in a few styles, for instance, Darth Vader style or cow style, making adjustments to the chant based on how that character might perform the chant. In addition to naming the style, they show a picture of the inspiration for the style.
- c. The teacher then asks students to think about some of the celebrity or fictional characters they portrayed in yesterday's lesson and to think about the different vocal, physical, and emotional qualities those characters had and how they might affect how those characters would perform the chant.
- d. The teacher then gets some student volunteers to lead the chant in the style of a celebrity/fictional character the child is thinking of. The teacher will also have a selection of inspiration cards which feature a celebrity/character and their picture. Students may choose to pick one of these cards instead of thinking of one of their

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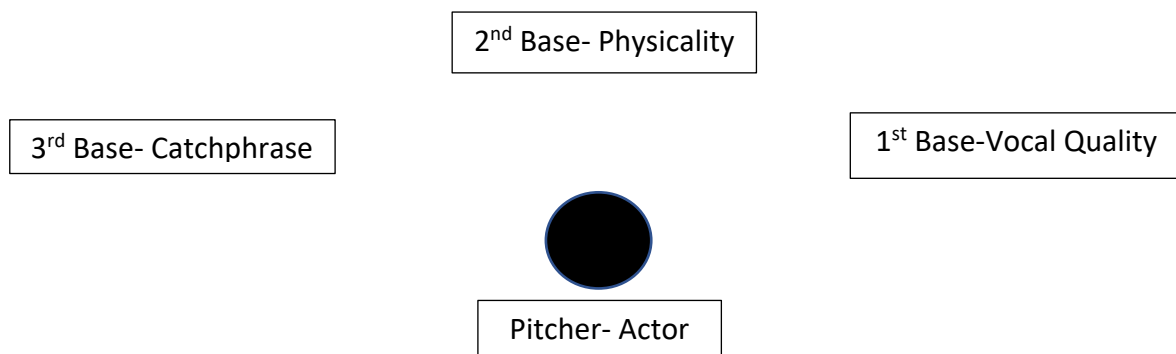
own. After each round, the teacher asks the student what qualities they highlighted in changing the chant, and if the student would like to repeat the chant to make any of those choices clearer.

2. Transition (3 Minutes)

- a. The teacher asks the students to take a seat in their circle, and asks, *What do you know about giving gifts? What does that mean in the context of improv? And how do we receive gifts?*
- b. The teacher then engages in a brief discussion with the students about what giving and receiving gifts means in an improv scene, and then introduces Character Baseball as an exercise in which students will practice giving gifts to each other and receiving them.

3. Character Baseball (18 Minutes)

- a. The teacher selects four students, and positions them in the shape of a baseball diamond, with students on “1st base, 2nd base, 3rd base” and the “pitcher’s mound”.
- b. The teacher explains how the exercise works and what each role will be required to do, and demonstrates possible choices the students might make, by demonstrating a few vocal qualities, a few physical choices, and a few catchphrases, and reminding students of the ones they explored in the warm up. They also explain how the “pitcher” might try to match what they are seeing the other students do.



- c. The “pitcher” turns to face “1st base”, and the student on “1st base” gives the “pitcher” a vocal quality by demonstrating how they would like the character to sound. The student can do this through either noises alone or gibberish. The “pitcher” matches the vocal quality they are given by repeating what they hear. If the “1st base” student feels like the “pitcher” has not matched, they can repeat the vocal quality they made, helping the “pitcher” find the right quality.
- d. The pitcher then turns to face “2nd base” keeping the vocal quality they have received by making some noises or speaking in gibberish, and the student on “2nd base” gives the “pitcher” a physicality by demonstrating with their own body how they would like the “pitcher” to stand. The “pitcher” tries to match their body to what they see, and if necessary, the “2nd base” student can make adjustments/ suggestions to the “pitcher”

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- to help them. The “2nd base” student may also choose to “sculpt” the pitcher’s body to create the physicality.
- e. The “pitcher” then turns to face “3rd base”, keeping the physicality they have been given and the vocal quality. The “3rd base” student then supplies a one-sentence catch phrase, ie. “I’m the happiest person in the world!” or “Whenever I leave my house, I know it’s gonna be time to start being angry.” This catchphrase can either work with or against the other ideas that have been given to the “pitcher”. The “pitcher” repeats the catchphrase back to the “3rd base” student, and any adjustments can be made as needed. The teacher writes the catchphrase on the board, so that the “pitcher” can reference it in the future, if needed.
 - f. The “pitcher” then turns to the audience, keeping the vocal quality and physicality and performs a brief monologue as the character that has been created. The monologue should start and end with the catch phrase, and provide insight into the character’s life and point of view. The teacher will have some neutral pre-written monologues on hand for students to use if they are really struggling to improvise.
 - g. After the monologue is complete, the students rotate positions, counter clockwise, and a new character is created by the group. The teacher rotates positions until all students have participated in all positions. Alternatively, the teacher can rotate a student out of the game, and rotate a new student in, if they feel their group would participate better in this way.
 - h. If they would like, instead of providing their own suggestion, students may choose to take an inspiration card, which will have suggestions for vocal quality, physicality, and catch phrase.
- 4. Gossip (15 Minutes)**
- a. The teacher explains that students will perform a three-person scene, in which one student starts offstage.
 - b. In the scene, two of the students sit onstage, acting as if they are hanging out in the cafeteria waiting for the rest of their friends. The two students are instructed to “gossip” about another person at school who they do not like. The teacher stresses to the students that they should not be talking about a real person who exists, and leads a brief discussion on how this behavior would be considered bullying in real life.
 - c. The students are instructed that during the course of their gossip, they must give a name to the other character, ie. “Stinky Sam” or “Pig-Carrying Paul”, and identify three qualities or behaviors of the other character, ie. They wear a Dr. Seuss hat, they are always covered in birds, they terribly sing everything they say. The teacher fields some possible suggestions from the students for “gifts” they might use in a scene, and demonstrates how a student might introduce those ideas into a scene, ie. “Ughh I can’t stand how stinky Sam is! Like whenever he comes in the room I feel like I want to pass out!” Students are reminded to embrace the ideas that their scene partner contributes, and expand upon them, ie. “Yeah! He’s so smelly! He smells like baby diapers!” The teacher then demonstrates how a student might activate some of those ideas in a scene, reminding the students of how they activated those ideas in the character baseball exercise. The teacher introduces the concept of *showing* vs. *telling* and demonstrates how a student might *show* they are using a gift rather than just

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telling about it. For instance, if the gift is having an accent the teacher would talk in that accent rather than just saying they have one.

- d. The teacher then reviews some principles of good improv scene work, by asking the students for some reminders of what an actor should keep in mind when they do an improv scene.
- e. The teacher then picks students to perform the scene. Once the first two students have identified the qualities of the third student, the third student will enter into the scene playing the character that was created. They should embody all the “gifts” that have been given to them by their scene partners, playing with them by *showing* rather than *telling*, and interact with the other students in the scene.
- f. The teacher lets the scene play out, giving the students opportunities to play with the “gifts” and react to them, before calling “Scene!”
- g. The teacher assesses the students’ performances in these scenes using the Rubric.

5. Reflection (4 Minutes)

- a. The teacher asks questions like, *What do you walk away thinking about today? How do we give gifts in an improv scene? How do we receive gifts? What do you need to do to activate a gift? When was it most fun to watch someone play one of the characters today? What made playing those characters easy or hard? How did your scene partners help you or hinder you with the gifts they gave?*
- b. The teacher engages the students in a discussion of the day’s activities based on their responses.

Teacher’s Role: N/A

Paraprofessional’s Role: The paraprofessional will participate in the group warm up, and then assist the teacher in helping students move through the *Character Baseball* exercise. They can help remind students of choices as needed, provide suggestions as required, etc.

Classroom Management Strategies: Students may participate in the warm up, in any spot in the room if they choose, and participate in the conversations from the same places. During the *Character Baseball*, students are welcome to participate as a “spectator” anywhere in the room, and may create a character who is “watching” the baseball game quietly. If appropriate, students will be given a break before moving into the *Gossip* activity. During the *Gossip* activity, the teacher will delineate a clear audience space and go over audience expectations before beginning.

Assessment Plan: Students will perform scenes in which they “gift” character traits and are “gifted” character traits by other students. Students will be assessed on a rubric using the following criteria: Uses all gifts specifically, Activation of gifts, Demonstrates improv skills (as laid out in the rubric), Supplies gifts to other students.

Materials Needed: Chairs, Board, Writing Utensil, Circle Dots, Prompt Cards, Monologues, Rubrics

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Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

Gift Scene Rubric

Learning Objective: Drama-Based Objective: Students will be able to perform a character based on gifts given to them by another student.

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Uses All Gifts Specifically	Student uses all the gifts they were given.	Student uses two of the gifts they were given	Student uses one of the gifts they were given.	Student ignores the gifts they were given and creates an unrelated character.
Activation of Gifts	Student plays with gifts by <i>showing</i> them.	Student sometimes plays with gifts by <i>showing</i> them, but sometimes only plays with gifts by <i>telling</i> about them.	Student plays with gifts only by <i>telling</i> about them.	Student ignores the gifts they were given and creates an unrelated character.
Demonstrates Improv Skills	Student demonstrates strong use of improv skills by yes and-ing, listening and responding, committing to their performance, and sharing the space.	Student demonstrates moderate use of improv skills by only sometimes yes and-ing, listening and responding, committing to their performance, or sharing the space.	Student demonstrates weak use of improv skills by rarely yes and-ing, listening and responding, committing to their performance, or sharing the space.	Student ignores their scene partners and does not participate in the scene.
Supplies Gifts to Other Students	Student provides exciting and playable gifts to other students.	Student provides either exciting <i>or</i> playable gifts to other students, but not both.	Student provides difficult and unplayable gifts to other students.	Student does not provide gifts.

Total: /12

Comments: