

Unit Plan #1: *Romeo and Juliet*

This unit plan is designed for a seventh and eighth grade drama class at The Field School, a small - 160 students 7-12 -- private school in Washington, D.C. The class can range in size from 6-20 students. The students are of mixed educational background and ability; furthermore, their interest in acting generally varies tremendously. Because the class is actually a music/drama class they only have drama two to three times a week. For this reason, I have planned day-by-day rather than week-by-week. Periods are 35-40 minutes long, but one day a week we have a double period, this is what I refer to as "long period." They will not, unfortunately, fall where I have planned them, but I will adjust later. The course is just one semester, thus this unit plan is designed to make up the majority of the semester.

My overall objective with this class is to provide an introduction to acting -- especially through theater games and improvisation, give them the opportunity to express themselves in a comfortable setting, and let them know how much fun it is to be on stage. In the past I have had an entire year and have introduced Shakespeare in the second semester. This coming year, however, I plan to use Shakespeare, primarily this play, as the vehicle to achieve my overall objectives. The only outside requirement I have is to put on a performance at the end of the semester. Conveniently this fits right into the plan.

Evaluation, as with all studio courses at Field, is based on participation, attitude, cooperation, and improvement.

Introduction

The first 2-3 days of the class is devoted to getting to know each other activities, some basic theater games, and a brief introduction to improvisation. During this period I will incorporate a number of Walsh/Tolaydo activities, some of which will be used throughout as parts of daily warm-ups.

Day 1

"Prereading Shakespeare" -- an activity designed to get kids familiar with Shakespeare's language. (Notes Plus April 1991)

Days 2+3

"Exercises in Making Words Mean" (Paul Cartier)

Days 4+5

Realizing the rhythm in language (adapted from Donna Denize)

Students begin with Dr. Seuss's Green Eggs and Ham. They read a section of it aloud paying attention to the rhythm in it. Then one student who plays a drum or some other percussion instrument beats out the rhythm while the rest of the class marches around the room reciting lines.

They then move on to a sonnet. (I've used "Let not to the marriage of true minds.") The students stand in a circle and recite the sonnet with each one reading only one word. Once they have this down, they move on to reading one sentence each. They then recite the sonnet in unison: word-by-word then sentence-by-sentence. *If time permits we'll move on to Romeo + Juliet's sonnet.*

Day 6 (long period)

Getting on your feet with a random scene -- aka: The Tolaydo/Walsh Method

Day 7

Journal Writing/Putting yourself in the character's shoes

Students will spend the entire period freewriting on situations that in some way relate to the plot of *R+J*, but they won't necessarily know this.

Possible Topics:

-Your parents have forbidden you to associate with one of your very close friends because this person is considered a "bad influence."

-You've fallen madly in love with someone, and this person has fallen in love right back. You then discover that she/he is HIV positive.

-Your younger brother/sister starts going out with someone you absolutely hate.

-You are at your best friend's party, and your worst enemy shows up - uninvited.

Day 8

Discuss and do improv based on freewriting issues.

Day 9

Read aloud and discuss plot summary of *R+J*.

Day 10

Opening Scene with scarves and swords (Louisa Newlin)

{Fill in the blanks with language if time permits. (Louisa also)}

Days 11-15 (approximately)

Read the play aloud using the "Hat Trick" (Louisa again).

Also, we will do some word identification and go over some of Skip's great language stuff along the way.

Day 16

Students will spend the period writing a complete synopsis of the play in their journals. They will be encouraged to work together, but each of them must have a copy. These will be incorporated later as prologues for their scenes.

Day 17 (long period)

"Tableaux Vivants Out of the Bag" (Louisa and Andrea)

*Photos will be taken of each tableaux and used later for programs or posters.

Day 18

Form Acting Companies (I will assign groups.)

Each company will choose 2-3 scenes from the play they would like to perform and rank them in order of preference. Each scene must have enough parts for everyone in the group.

Day 19 (long period)

Scenes will be assigned, and scripts will be handed out.

Each company will cast ^{its} ~~their~~ scene, read it aloud, paraphrase it, and vocalize the inner monologue(Walsh). This will be done before the entire group.

Day 20

Each company will perform contemporary improvs based on their scene. (Walsh)

Day 21

Memorization Workshop

This gets us about to the beginning of November, if we're lucky. We generally have a short assembly around this time in which the kids perform "works in progress" or improvs. Hopefully the kids will be prepared to do "period improvs" (Walsh) of their scenes in this assembly.

The remaining 4-5 weeks of the semester will be devoted to rehearsing the scenes. During this process I plan to incorporate a modified Prompt Book assignment(Newlin), a scene-cutting workshop, a character analysis paper, a blocking workshop, and set and costume designing activities(Walsh).

The unit will culminate in two performances -- one for the school and one for parents and friends. The class will then have a final class during which they will view the video of their performance, write a self-evaluation in their journals, and eat too many oatmeal chocolate-chip cookies.

**Once classes are over we go into 1 week of finals. I plan to show a film of R+J during this period*