

Classroom Drama

The Most Fun You'll Ever Have!

A 3-5 week curriculum for classroom drama

by Judy Millar

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About This Resource Book

Here is a complete three to five-week lesson plan resource book including puzzles, activities, guides and goodies for teaching drama to English or beginning drama classes. It teaches basic theatrical history, etiquette, memorization, characterization, theatrical vocabulary and much more. The first section is for your personal use, while the second section (with new page numbers) consists of reproducible worksheets for your students. You may make a complete workbook for each student by copying and stapling all the worksheets together, or you may simply hand out copies of the appropriate worksheet to all the students prior to each lesson. The curriculum culminates in your class being anxious and ready to produce, both onstage and off, their first play!

Table of Contents

Section I – For Teachers.....	Page 3
Section III – For Fun!	Page 19
Section III – Final Exam / Key.....	Page 23
Section IV – Student Worksheets	Page 27 (New page 1)

About the Author

JUDY MILLAR -- was born and raised in Pennsylvania. She received a B.S. Education Degree in English and Communication Arts from Clarion State University. She lived in Southern California for eight years where she worked as a professional actress, a member of Actor's Equity. She received her Master's Equivalent from California State University at San Bernardino. She relocated to Pennsylvania to raise her family, teach and work in Community Theatre. She is listed in Who's Who Among Teachers -- 1996 Edition. She currently teaches high school English and drama and is the drama director at Titusville High School in Pennsylvania.

Section I – For Teachers

Educational Performance Objectives

1. Students will have opportunity to appreciate the roots of the theatre and its evolution.
2. Students will utilize creative thinking skills to become better acquainted with their characters.
3. Students will be required to utilize natural speaking skills in front of an audience of their peers.
4. Some students will enhance formal speaking skills in front of the class.
5. Students' memorization skills will be promoted.
6. Students will use note-taking skills to acquire the necessary vocabulary and historical information for the basis of the unit.
7. Some students will enhance their creativity and writing skills.
8. Students will be required to work together as an entire class/team producing a one-act production in front of an audience as the final outcome.

Preparation

Before you begin, you may want to use this preplanning list.

1. Copy of teacher book
2. Copy of complete student workbook (or appropriate daily worksheet) for each student
3. Copy of films: *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Amadeus*
4. Board
5. Sign out the auditorium
6. You will need a play scripts for the class performance. I've had from 14 to 34 students in my class, making it difficult to find a short script that will include everyone, so I began writing my own. (See my plays at *Eldridge Publishing Company* at www.hiStage.com.) If you wish to try your hand at writing plays for your class, remember to keep simple with very little scenery, just enough props, lights and sound cues to keep the kids busy, but short enough to perform in ½ hour or less. There are also writing scenes in the workbook. These could be completed and used to perform in several small groups instead of one big one, although I never found that worked as well. They need more structure.

Day One

NEEDED: Student workbooks (**worksheet #1**)

The first day of class is used to teach stage directions and body positions. The purpose is to get your students out of their seats and involved. It also raises their level of interest. It should last 20-25 minutes.

Below is a copy of the universal standard for stage directions and body positions. (The student copy on Worksheet #1 is blank.) During the rehearsal of a professional performance, I once witnessed a union actor being terminated because he didn't know where to go on stage when the director gave him a stage direction.

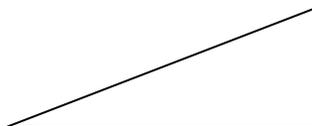
STAGE DIRECTIONS

Up Stage Right (USR)	Up Stage Center (USC)	Up Stage Left (USL)
Center Stage Right (CSR)	Center Stage (CENTER)	Center Stage Left (CSL)
Down Stage Right (DSR)	Down Stage Center (DSC)	Down Stage Left (DSL)

(audience)

Have students turn to Worksheet #1. Explain that in the first European theatres, the stages were built on a rake or slant, so when the actors walked toward the audience, they actually walked down. Next tell them that when they are on stage, they are very important to the audience, so they are to use their own left and right when facing the audience. Draw a blank stage, similar to the one here, on the board. Fill it out as a class, making sure they know where the audience is located on the chart.

historic rake stage (audience at lowest point)

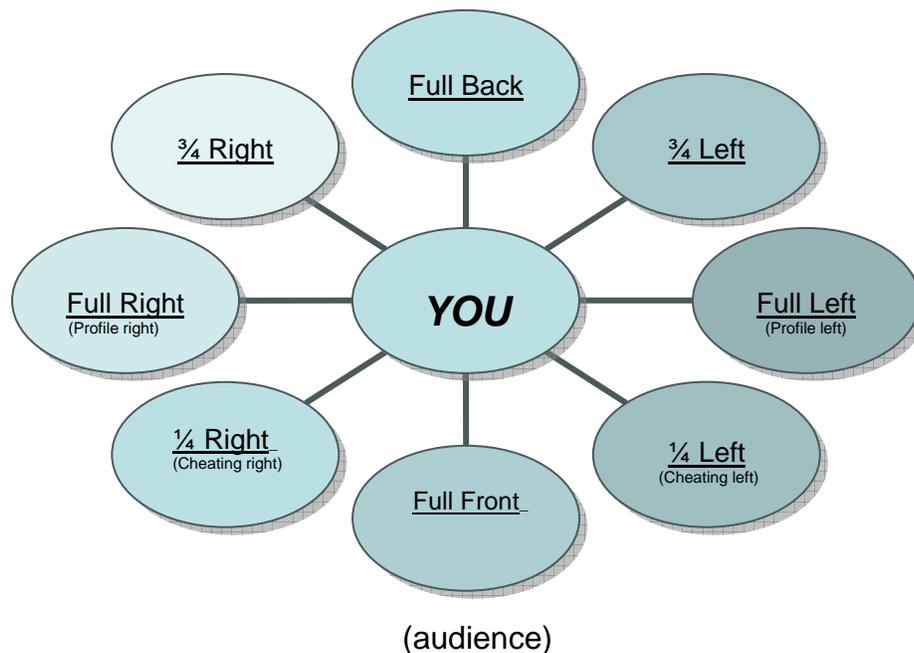


ENTIRE CLASS ACTIVITY

Call a student to the front of the room. Map out the stage and begin calling stage directions to which he/she will move. He/she may then select the next student; allow the previous student to call the directions when you feel they are ready. Do this for a couple of minutes, then move on to body positions.

BODY POSITIONS

Explain that there are not only places to go on stage, but there are ways to face when you get there. Tell them the audience pays to see the front end, so only use 3/4 and full back when the director tells them to. I had a director who used to yell “Nice view” and embarrass us every time we turned our backs. It worked.



CLASS ACTIVITY

Call a student to the front. This time give him a stage direction immediately followed by a body position. Repeat with several students until you think they have a full understanding. I always tell my classes to map out their bedroom floor or the driveway and practice with someone.

End of Day One and Day Two

HISTORY OF THE THEATRE

NEEDED: Student workbooks (**worksheet #2**)

Videos of *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Nights Dream* and *Amadeus* preset to clips.

Before beginning the lecture, be sure to have your videos set for the use of the clips. Below are the suggested spots in the films to enhance the history notes. I've made it clear in the board notes below where to use the films. If you can't secure the videos, the notes are self-explanatory.

HAMLET - Hamlet is pondering the revenge of his father and sees a troupe of actors. He decides to have them present a play for his mother and uncle. Show them the play until the King says, "Give me some light." (Approx. 7 min.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM - The scene to use is nearly at the end of the film. The Mechanicals are presenting a play at the nuptial of Theseus and Hippolyta. Show from the prologue before the play-within-the-play to Puck's epilogue at the end of the movie. (Approx. 11 min.)

AMADEUS - There are many scenes throughout this film that are fabulous examples of candle-lit stages, pit, costuming, intermezzo, and makeup. Use it however you like. It is an excellent example of a proscenium theatre. (Ideal for use with Theatre Terminology.)

Have students take their own "History Notes" in their student handbook as you lecture with board notes.

HISTORY OF THE THEATRE - BOARD NOTES

This list of notes can be used alone, or with any additional knowledge you have about theatre history.

-Rumor has it the theatre started when the caveman returned from his hunt and acted out how his day went. (probably not)

-Another possibility is the Rite to the God Dionysus, ending in a cannibalistic human sacrifice. (not proven)

-The theatre actually began with the Greeks around 480 B.C. at a Festival to the God Dionysus. (no cannibalism)

-One man stood at the bottom of a hill and recited poetry and storytelling. People came to listen and put money in his can.

-Women were not permitted to act. A woman was considered above the job because the only people who became actors were those who couldn't get a job anywhere else. (What a comparison to today when everyone wants to get into the profession, but only a select few get the opportunity.)

-Traveling acting troupes called Chamber Theatre performed wherever they could for whatever people would pay.

-They preferred to work for royalty in the castle because the pay was greater; however, if the ladies of the court were offended by the performance, they would be beheaded or drawn and quartered. (It's fun here, especially before lunch, to explain what happened when being drawn and quartered!)

-In order to escape this death, they wrote a prologue (introduction with an apology for any offence), an intermezzo (musical intermission to keep the audience busy), and an epilogue (thank you). Here is where you can show the clips from A Midsummer Night's Dream and Hamlet.

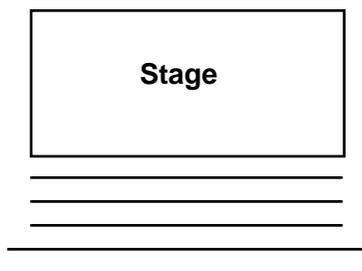
-In 1642, the French Parliament closed the theatres because they believed the material was provoking violence. Figaro is a prime example. Many writers, including Shakespeare, wrote love stories and comedies.

-In 1660 the theatres were reopened.

-Finally, in 1666, women were permitted to enter the acting world (and history was made). Now that theatre is becoming legitimate, they begin to build indoor stages and theatres.

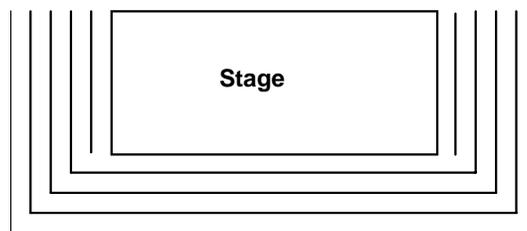
Types of Stages

Proscenium Theatre



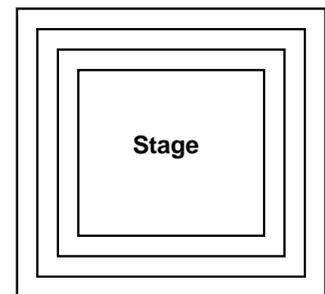
The Audience sits in front

Thrust Stage



Audience is on three sides

Theatre In The Round (Arena)



Audience is on all sides

End of Freeview

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