Devised Theatre

Prepared for COM/THE 417

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Teaching Speech & Theatre

Missouri State University

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## Unit Plan

### Description of Class and Students

**Course:** Theatre Arts I  
**Grades:** 9-10  
**Length of Class Period:** 50 Minutes  
**Number of Students:** 31

### Diverse Learners & Adaptations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diverse Learners (No.)</th>
<th>Adaptations</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Hispanic Students (5)** | Use examples from Hispanic literature and culture for devised theatre stimuli *(See Appendix G).*  
| | If student is an ELL, print out translated stimulus material. Provide synonyms for challenging words brought up during brainstorming sessions. |
| **Indian American Students (3)** | Use examples from Indian culture as stimuli for devised theatre pieces *(See Appendix H).*  
| | Allow (but do not explicitly recommend) students to explore issues of discrimination and prejudice in devised theatre pieces. |
| **Low Socio-Economic Status (3)** | Give students time during (or outside) of class to research topics using school computers/technology.  
| | Allow (but do not explicitly recommend) students to explore issues of poverty and homelessness in devised theatre pieces. |
| **Hearing Impaired (1)** | Monitor student interaction during group activities. Make sure other students are adapting their communication strategies (writing instead of talking, communicating via gestures) to include hearing impaired student’s ideas.  
| | Provide written instructions for complicated devising activities. |
| **Visually Impaired (1)** | Monitor student interaction during group activities. Make sure other students are providing strong verbal communication when describing blocking ideas for devised pieces.  
<p>| | Provide specific, oral instructions for devising activities. Describe visual stimuli used during |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Instruction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Students (3)</td>
<td>Use examples from Muslim literature and culture as stimuli for devised pieces. (<a href="#">See Appendix C</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow students to explore themes of religious prejudice in devised theatre pieces.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allow time off for religious holidays.</td>
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<tr>
<td>At-Risk Students (1)</td>
<td>Make extra effort to engage students in their academic progress. Provide consistent reinforcement for positive behaviors. Provide detailed instructions for students who do not respond well to open-ended devising assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow at-risk students to explore topics they enjoy during devised theatre pieces, while still encouraging them to embrace the ideas of others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower-level Readers (2)</td>
<td>Read challenging stimuli (complicated poems, passages) as a class.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow students to read challenging material the night before the lesson, so they feel more comfortable with it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gifted (2)</td>
<td>The open-ended nature of the content in this unit gives gifted students many different options for topics to explore when devising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheel Chair User (1)</td>
<td>Emphasize the importance of gesture when discussing composition, as this is the element of composition this student can most easily physically produce.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Monitor student interaction during group activities to ensure students are finding ways to incorporate wheel chair user into piece.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ Students (4)</td>
<td>Use works by LGBTQ authors and artists as stimuli for devised theatre pieces. (<a href="#">See Appendix B</a>)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allow (but do not explicitly recommend) students explore issues of discrimination and bullying in devised theatre piece.</td>
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It is important to emphasize the structured steps involved in devising pieces and do not deviate from it.

Allow students to explore areas of intense interest, but also encourage them to incorporate the ideas of others, as that is an important component of this unit.

Allow (but do not explicitly recommend) students to explore topics relevant to their heritage or religious background.

Introduction/Description

Scope and Rationale:

This unit on devised theatre is focused on student development, rehearsal, and performance of original pieces of theatre and is designed to be taught in a theatre arts class. The unit will detail the different elements of storytelling as they relate to devised theater. This includes choosing a production concept, creating dynamic stage pictures, finding a story structure, and experimenting with pace. By the end of the unit, students will have created an original piece of theater and be able to defend their choices. Students will not only find artistic fulfillment in creating original work, they will also develop life skills. Specifically, this unit helps students to foster creative thinking skills, collaborate well in group settings, and manage time effectively.

This unit is designed to be one of the last units in an introductory theatre arts class. Before starting this unit, students will already have an understanding of the fundamentals of acting and performances. Specifically, they will have experience with monologues, scene work, and improvisation. Students will also have developed the collaborative skills necessary to work together as an inclusive ensemble. At this point in the course, students are ready to build upon their performance knowledge and imaginative skills to create original works.

Lessons:

1. Brainstorming and Conceptualizing
2. Composition
3. Story Structure
4. Pacing, Music, and Mood
5. Assessing and Defending

Unit Goals

Upon completion of this unit students should be able to:

1. Defend production choices, by developing a production concept through analysis of stimulus from a different art form (poem, painting, film clip, etc.) and justifying artistic decisions based upon this production concept. These skills will be important to students as they promote critical thinking and solid argumentation, crucial qualities for success in professional and academic settings.
Show-Me Performance Standards:

- Goal 1: Students in Missouri public schools will acquire the knowledge and skills to gather, analyze and apply information and ideas.

Show-Me Knowledge Standards:

- Fine Arts Goal 3: the vocabulary to explain perceptions about and evaluations of works in dance, music, theater and visual arts
- Fine Arts Goal 4: interrelationships of visual and performing arts and the relationships of the arts to other disciplines
- Communication Arts Goal 5: comprehending and evaluating the content and artistic aspects of oral and visual presentations (such as story-telling, debates, lectures, multi-media productions)

National Theatre Standards:

- Standard 4 - Directing by interpreting dramatic texts and organizing and conducting rehearsals for informal or formal productions
  - ACHIEVEMENT STANDARD: develop multiple interpretations and visual and aural production choices for scripts and production ideas and choose those that are most interesting.
  - ACHIEVEMENT STANDARD: justify selections of text, interpretation, and visual and aural artistic choices.

2. Perform original works of theatre, through incorporating the different elements of performance (composition, character, structure, pacing, etc.) in a creative, experimental manner and creating an inclusive environment which welcomes the ideas of all group members with a collaborative spirit. In meeting this goal, students will develop creative thinking and collaborative skills, both of which will help students to stand out in their future academic and professional pursuits.

Show-Me Performance Standards:

- Goal 2: Students in Missouri public schools will acquire the knowledge and skills to communicate effectively within and beyond the classroom

Show-Me Knowledge Standards:

- Fine Arts Goal 1: process and techniques for the production, exhibition or performance of one or more of the visual or performed arts
- Fine Arts Goal 2: the principles and elements of different art forms

National Theatre Standards:

- Standard 2 - Acting by developing, communicating, and sustaining characters in improvisations and informal or formal productions.
  - ACHIEVEMENT STANDARD: in an ensemble, create and sustain characters that communicate with audiences.
Assessment

*General Assessments:*  
Students will develop one devised theatre piece in-class, write reflections on classwork, and complete hand-outs reinforcing the lesson to determine if they have met the objectives.

*Summative Evaluation:*  
At the conclusion of the unit, students (in groups) will collaborate to develop a new devised theatre piece. The project requirements are as follows:

**PART 1: Group Devised Theatre Performance**  
Each group will be given a stimulus (ex. a painting, poem, passage from a short story, etc.) and will be asked to develop an original theatre piece that is 4-5 minutes in length without dialogue. The group is responsible for incorporating one significant idea from each group member in the final performance. Failure to do so will result in a lower grade. The steps are as follows:

1. Observe the stimulus (See Appendix G) and brainstorm ideas about it based upon the following questions:
   - How does this stimulus make me feel?
   - What is the main idea behind this stimulus?
   - Which elements grab my attention?
   - If I had to describe this stimulus with one adjective, what word would I choose?
   - If I had to name (or re-name) the stimulus, what would I name it?
   - Does this stimulus remind me of a particular person, place, event, or social issue?
2. After brainstorming, start making connections between different ideas. Figure out which elements of the stimulus are most important or which elements your group is most interested in exploring.
3. After making connections, attempt to summarize these connected ideas into a production concept (or central idea). Your production concept should be one sentence in length.  
**Examples:**
   - “Love is a fleeting emotion.”
   - “The past continues to haunt our present.”
   - “Discrimination is a vicious cycle with no end in sight.”
4. After settling on a production concept, immediately get on your feet and experiment with different stage pictures that illustrate your production concept. Be open to ideas from the entire group during this process. Make sure these stage pictures keep in mind the elements of strong composition (levels, proximity, connectedness, relationship, etc.)
5. From your stage pictures, begin to develop a structure for your piece. Your piece must include a clear conflict, as well as a beginning, middle, and end. Keep in mind that this story will only be communicated through movement, no dialogue.
6. After developing a structure, block out the remainder of your piece, while still keeping in mind the elements of strong composition.
7. At some point in the rehearsal process, begin to experiment with music, mood and pacing. Pick one song to underscore part of (or the entirety) of your piece. Let the music affect the pacing and mood of the piece in whatever way your group sees fit.

8. After completing the piece, each group member should write a 1-2 page paper on how the final piece relates back to the production concept. This paper should also detail what element each group member contributed to the final piece. The instructor will compare the papers in each group, so please be honest.

**Part II: Individual Devised Theatre Plan**

In addition to creating a piece as a group, each student will be asked to plan (but not perform) an alternative devised theatre piece.

The procedure for this part of the project is as follows:

After observing a new stimulus, each group member will brainstorm and develop a production concept. Each student will then be asked to complete a series of hand-outs (See Appendix H) which ask them to:

1. Detail their brainstorming and analysis
2. Formulate their production concept
3. Storyboard interesting compositions based upon the production concept
4. Identify the central conflict of the piece
5. Provide list of events in piece with clear beginning, middle, and end
6. Decide on the pacing and mood of the piece, as well as its accompanying music

### Assessment Guide for Part I: Devised Theatre Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to paper, only one student contributed meaningful ideas to the final piece.</td>
<td>0-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only two or three students contributed meaningful ideas to the final piece.</td>
<td>3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All but one student contributed meaningful ideas to the final piece.</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students contributed meaningful ideas to the final piece.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concept</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No connection present between the final performance and production concept.</td>
<td>0-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few moments in the final performance create strong connection to the production concept.</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some moments in the final performance create strong connection to the production concept.</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many moments in the final performance create strong connection to the production concept.</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Incorporated one or none of the following elements of composition: levels, depth, proximity, and gesture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>No beginning, middle or end; conflict unapparent; general lack of structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>Pacing does not remotely match tone, subject matter, and production concept; music insubstantial or not present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Paper fails to relate final piece to production concept; no detail/support; lacking proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>0-12</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Assessment Guide for Part II: Individual Devised Theatre Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
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<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concept</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No brainstorming or analysis present; vague production concept</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Storyboards incorporated one or none of the following elements of composition: level, depth, proximity, and gesture.</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Incomplete outline of beginning, middle and end; no conflict noted</td>
<td>0-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superficial brainstorming and analysis; vague production concept</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Storyboards incorporated two of the following elements of composition: levels, depth, proximity and gesture.</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Unclear outline of beginning, middle and end; Noted conflict lacks detail</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average brainstorming and analysis; clear production concept</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Storyboards incorporated three of the following elements of composition: levels, depth, proximity, and gesture</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Outlines somewhat clear beginning, middle, and end; Notes conflict</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior brainstorming and analysis; clear production concept</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Storyboarding incorporated all four of the following elements of composition: levels, depth, proximity, and gesture</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Outlines clear beginning, middle, and end; Notes conflict.</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pacing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No justification of how chosen pacing matches mood, subject matter, and concept; music choice either not present or completely unrelated to piece</td>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>Superior justification of how chosen pacing matches mood, subject matter, and concept; music choice supports pacing but lacks creativity or originality in incorporation</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>0-8</td>
<td>12-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague justification of how chosen pacing matches mood, subject matter, and concept; music choice is present, but does not support pacing</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Average justification of how chosen pacing matches mood, subject matter, and concept; music choice supports pacing but lacks creativity or originality in incorporation</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>24-32</td>
<td>37-40</td>
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Lesson Plan 1

Descriptive Course Data
Instructor: Mr. John O’Neil  
Course: Theatre Arts I (Grade Level: 9-10)  
Lesson: Brainstorming and Conceptualizing  
Unit: Devised Theatre

Note: This lesson will take place over the course of two days.

Objectives
Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to
1. Recognize the elements of devised theatre in relevant examples (Level 2)
2. Employ brainstorming techniques to developing a production concept. (Level 3)
3. Compare and contrast different topics and ideas after brainstorming. (Level 4)
4. Synthesize related ideas into unified production concept. (Level 5)

Instructional Components

(Day 1: Terminology and Modeling)

Activity 1 (Anticipatory Set: 10 Minutes). Statues. The instructor will gather students in a circle and ask them to all close their eyes. Once they have closed their eyes, the instructor will ask them to form a statue of a specific animal, historical figure, or cartoon character. After each student has finished forming their statue, the instructor will ask them to open their eyes. The instructor will then ask students the following questions:
• How are these statues different from one another?
• How are these statues similar to one another?
• What are some qualities that all these statues have in common?
• What emotions do these statues convey?
• How would you describe this group of statues in a single sentence?

Activity 2 (5 Minutes) Short Lecture. The instructor will define the following terms related to devised theatre and provide examples during a short PowerPoint presentation (See Appendix A).
• Devised Theatre – a work of original theatre that is created by a group of artists, rather than a single author
• Ensemble – a group of artists working together
• Stimulus – any text, visual, movement, sound, piece of art which provides inspiration
• Production Concept – the main idea of a work of art; the central theme the artists are trying to communicate to the audience; needs to be a complete sentence

Activity 3 (30 Minutes). Modeling. The instructor will then transition into a whole class activity in which the instructor will actively model how to brainstorm, connect ideas, and form a production concept. The stimulus for this activity will be a short clip about rabbits from David Lynch’s surrealist film Inland Empire. (Clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1awMW53Vko)

After showing the clip, the instructor will then ask students to raise their hands and share any emotions, thoughts or ideas they got from the film. The teacher will write all of these ideas on
the board using the mind map technique. The instructor should emphasize that there is no wrong answer. If students are struggling to come up with ideas, the instructor may prompt them with following questions:

- What did you see? What did you hear?
- How did it make you feel?
- Which elements grab my attention?
- If I had to describe this stimulus with one adjective, what word would I choose?
- If I had to name (or re-name) the stimulus, what would I call it?
- Does this stimulus remind me of a particular person, place, event, or social issue?

Once the class has gathered a good amount of ideas, the instructor will then point out one or two similarities between the different ideas coming out of the mind map. Once the instructor has modeled finding a connection, students will raise their hands to point out other connections.

Once students have made a few strong connections, the instructor will then ask students to develop a main idea (or production concept) based upon their brainstorming. The production concept must be a complete sentence. The instructor may provide one potential idea for a production concept, before letting students give their suggestions. When forming production concepts, encourage students to ask the following questions:

- Which ideas or connections are most interesting to you?
- What would you want an audience to know or understand about this topic?

**Activity 4 (5 Minutes) Exit Slips.** Students will take out a piece of paper and answer the following questions:

- What was the stimulus for the brainstorming in the previous activity?
- To develop our production concept, we worked together as a group. What is a term for a group of artists working together?
- What was the main idea or central theme we developed in the last activity? What’s another term for this main idea or central theme?

**Materials and Equipment Needed**

Computer, projector
Short Clip from David Lynch’s Inland Empire (YouTube)
Dry Eras Board and Marker for Brainstorming

**(Day 2: Group Work)**

**Activity 5 (5 Minutes).** Quick Review. Instructor will briefly review the major terms involved in devised theatre, as well as the brainstorming process. Instructor will also direct student’s attention to a visual aid that will help them to form a production concept for the next activity. (See Appendix A)

**Activity 6 (10 Minutes).** Solo Brainstorming. Students will now separate into groups and start work on their in-class devising project (**NOTE: This project is different from the summative evaluation. It serves as further practice on devising skills before the final evaluation**). Each group will be given the same stimulus – the poem *A Western Ballad* by Allen Ginsberg (See
Appendix B). Before collaborating with their groups, each student will read the poem individually and highlight/underline the most impactful words or phrases. After reading the poem, each student will then individually write down any emotions, thoughts, or ideas they got from the poem.

Activity 7 (15 Minutes) Listen and Connect. Student will now share their ideas about the poem with the other members of their group. The group members will carefully listen to the ideas of each student. During this process, they will make a mind map with all of the ideas branching off it. After listening, the group will look for distinct similarities and differences between the ideas branching off the mind map. They will make a list of these similarities and differences to provide inspiration for their production concept.

Activity 8 (20 Minutes) Decide Concept. Looking at the list of similarities and differences, each group will form at least three different production concepts. The group must then come to an agreement on which production concept they would like to choose for their in-class devising project. The decision must be unanimous. Once a decision has been reached, each group must turn in all of their paperwork (brainstorming, list of differences/similarities, and production concept options) to the instructor.

- Some groups may take more time than others to reach a final decision. If a group finishes early, give them the Take-Home Activity (see below) to work on until class ends.

Take-Home Activity. Brainstorming Hand-Out. As students leave class, the instructor will give them a hand-out (See Appendix C) which asks students to use the brainstorming process to develop a production concept from a different stimulus, a painting by Simin Kermati.

Materials and Equipment Needed

Copies of handout
Computer, projector

Assessment

1. Activity 4 will show if students have met Objective 1: Recognize the elements of devised theatre in relevant examples.

During Activity 4, students will provide concrete evidence of their comprehension of devised theatre vocabulary through answering questions on an exit slip.

2. Activity 6 will show if students have met Objective 2: Employ brainstorming techniques to developing a production concept.

Instructor will check-in with students during Activity 6 to note their progress. Students will turn in paperwork at the end of the lesson to provide the instructor with solid evidence.

3. Activity 7 will show if students have met Objective 3: Compare and contrast different topics and ideas after brainstorming.
During Activity 7, the instructor will check on groups as they are working. The instructor will check student ability to compare and contrast more thoroughly when reviewing student paperwork.

4. Activity 8 will show if students have met Objective 3: Synthesize related ideas into unified production concept.

During Activity 8, the instructor will check on groups as they are working. The paperwork collected at the end of the lesson will determine whether students’ ability to synthesize ideas into a production concept.

5. Take-Home Activity will show if students have met Objective 2: Employ brainstorming techniques to developing a production concept, Objective 3: Compare and contrast different topics and ideas after brainstorming and Objective 4: Synthesize related ideas into unified production concept.

The Take Home Activity will check on how well students understand the concepts individually. Through reinforcing the brainstorming process experienced twice by students during the lesson, the activity will determine whether students have met Objectives 2, 3, and 4 as an individual.

Lesson 2

Descriptive Course Data
Instructor: Mr. John O’Neil Lesson: Composition
Course: Theatre Arts I (Grade Level: 9-10) Unit: Devised Theatre

Objectives
Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to
1. Identify the elements of strong composition. (Level 2)
2. Apply the elements of composition in creating stage pictures. (Level 3)
3. Create stage pictures that support a production concept. (Level 5)

Instructional Components

Activity 1 (Anticipatory Set: 10 Minutes). Freeze Dance! After clearing desks to the side of the classroom, each student will find a spot in the empty space. The instructor will then start playing music. Students will dance through the space until the instructor pauses the music, at which point they will freeze. Students will start dancing again when the instructor plays the music. For each round, the instructor will give students the following prompts:

- Dance using different levels (low, middle, high, etc.)
- Dance using different depths (close to the audience, far from audience, DS, CS, US, etc.)
- Dance using different proximities (really close [but appropriate] to others, really far away from others)
- Dancing using gestures indicating different emotions (joyous, nervous, demanding, etc.)
Activity 2 (5 Minutes) Short Lecture. The instructor will then present a short PowerPoint lecture (See Appendix A) on the different elements of composition, including the following:

- **Levels** – the actual head level of the actor
- **Depth** – how far or close the actor is to the front of the stage
- **Proximity** – how far or close the actor is in relation to other actors
- **Gestures** – a movement or positioning of the body parts which communicates an idea or emotion

Activity 3 (12 Minutes). Modeling Stage Pictures. The instructor will then ask a group of five students to create a stage picture based upon the following production concept: “War tears families apart.” The instructor will ask students to go up one at a time to create their statues and add to the picture. The instructor may intervene to ensure students are using all of the elements of strong composition. As these students are creating the picture, the rest of the class will be identifying examples of levels, depth, proximity, and gesture on a small piece of paper. Once this picture is complete, the instructor will repeat the process with a new group of students and the following production concept: “Loyalty is the key to friendship.” At the end of the activity, students will turn in their slips of paper to the instructor.

Activity 4 (23 Minutes). Student-Created Stage Pictures. Students will now break into their groups from the previous lesson to develop three stage pictures based upon the production concept they created from the poem *A Western Ballad* by Allen Ginsberg. The instructor will monitor student interaction in the room and offer a few suggestions on how to make the pictures more dynamic.

*Take-Home Activity*. Stage Pictures Hand-Out. Students will be given a hand-out (See Appendix D) with three comic book squares and a production concept. Based upon a given production concept, students will be asked to create three different stage pictures in the comic book squares.

**Materials and Equipment Needed**

- Stereo and CD (or Computer, Speaker, and iTunes) for Freeze Dance!
- Computer, projector
- Copies of hand-outs

**Assessment**

1. *Activity 3* will show if students have met Objective 1: Identify the elements of strong composition. The instructor will check student written responses to see if they properly identified all of the elements of stage composition.

2. *Activity 4* will show if students in groups have met Objective 2: Apply the elements of composition in creating stage pictures and Objective 3: Create stage pictures that support a production concept. The instructor will check-in with all the groups to see if they are applying the different elements of composition and if their stage pictures relate to their production concepts.
3. **Take-Home Activity** will show if students have individually met Objective 2: Apply the elements of composition in creating stage pictures and Objective 3: Create stage pictures that support a production concept. In checking student worksheets, the instructor will see if students are using all the elements of composition and if they are creating a strong link between their stage pictures and the production concept.

**Lesson 3**

**Descriptive Course Data**

*Instructor:* Mr. John O’Neil  
*Lesson:* Story Structure  
*Course:* Theatre Arts I (*Grade Level:* 9-10)  
*Unit:* Devised Theatre

**Objectives**

*Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to*

1. Summarize the story structure of written and performed narratives. (Level 2)
2. Compose an outline for a story with a clear conflict and beginning, middle, and end. (Level 5)
3. Develop blocking for a devised theatre piece based upon an outline. (Level 5)

**Instructional Components**

*Activity 1 (Anticipatory Set: 10 Minutes)* Pearls on a String. The instructor will show the class a stage picture from a theatrical production (*See Appendix A*). The instructor will then ask the class to consider the following questions:

- What conflict do you see in this picture?
- Do you think this picture comes during the beginning, middle, or end of the play?

A group of 5 students will then line up in the front of the room. One student will describe in a single sentence what is happening (the “action”) in the stage picture and note whether it comes at the beginning, middle or end of the story. This student will then move to the beginning, middle, or end of the line based upon their response. Then, starting at the beginning of the line, the group will fill in the gaps of the story from beginning to end with each student describing a single action (in one or two sentences) that drives the plot forward.

*Activity 2 (5 Minutes)* Brief Lecture. The instructor will outline the requirements for strong story structure in a short PowerPoint Presentation (*See Appendix A*). This outline includes the following:

- **Conflict**
  - What’s the problem?
  - What is preventing the characters from getting what they want?
  - Types: Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature, Man vs. Himself

- **Clear Beginning, Middle, and End**
  - Climax: High point of conflict before story resolves
  - Plot
    - Series of “actions” which drive the story forward
    - Cause and effect
Activity 3 (8 Minutes) Fairy Tales. Each student will then pull out a piece of paper and be asked to summarize the story structure of a common fairy tale of their choice (Three Little Pigs, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, etc.). Their summary should include indications of a clear conflict and beginning, middle, and end. Students will turn in their summary to the instructor at the end of the activity.

Activity 4 (27 Minutes). Student-Created Story Structure. Students will return to their groups from the previous two lessons. Based off the stage pictures they created in Lesson 2, students will create a story structure that includes:

- A clear conflict
- Beginning, middle, and end
- Six distinct actions that drive the story to its conclusion
  - Actions must not rely on dialogue, only physical movement

After students have a firm grasp on their story structure, they will begin to block it out as a group, while keeping in mind the elements of strong composition as well as their production concept. The instructor will monitor group interaction during this activity to ensure all groups are collaborating well. At the end of the lesson, each group will turn in their story structure to the instructor.

Take-Home Activity. Story Structure Hand-Out. At the end of the lesson, the instructor will give students a hand-out (See Appendix E) on story structure. This hand-out provides the student with a production concept and still photo from a theatrical production. The student will notate the conflict present in the stage picture and whether the “action” in the pictures takes place at the beginning, middle, or end of the story. At this point, the student will outline the six other “actions” which drive the story to its conclusion.

Materials and Equipment Needed

Computer, projector
Copies of hand-outs

Assessment

1. Activity 3 will show if students have met Objective 1: Summarize the story structure of written and performed narratives. The instructor will check student written summaries to see if they properly identified the conflict and beginning, middle, and end of their chosen fairy tales.

2. Activity 4 will show if students in groups have met Objective 2: Compose an outline for a story with a clear conflict and beginning, middle, and end and Objective 3: Develop blocking for a devised theatre piece based upon an outline. During Activity 4, the instructor will check-in with all the groups to see if they are writing their outlines with proper story structure and using their outlines to make strong blocking choices. The instructor will also collect the story structure outlines at the end of class to further check group work.
3. **Take-Home Activity** will show if students have individually met Objective 2: Compose an outline for a story with a clear conflict and beginning, middle, and end. In checking student worksheets, the instructor will see if students are using strong story structure when creating outlines.

**Lesson 4**

**Descriptive Course Data**

*Instructor:* Mr. John O’Neil  
*Lesson:* Pacing, Music, and Mood  
*Course:* Theatre Arts I *(Grade Level: 9-10)*  
*Unit:* Devised Theatre

**Objectives**

*Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to*  
1. Describe the pacing of a play or scene. (Level 2)  
2. Analyze how pacing and musical choices affect mood and storytelling. (Level 4)  
3. Incorporate music and pacing choices to match mood of devised theatre piece. (Level 5)

**Instructional Components**

**Activity 1 (Anticipatory Set: 10 Minutes)** Environment Walks. The instructor will ask students to stand and spread out across the room. Students will begin walking through the space in a neutral manner. Then the instructor will give them various prompts to change the pace of their movement. These prompts will include the following settings:

- A bustling, frantic city street in Manhattan  
- A breezy, laidback beach in California  
- A haunted house with ghosts lurking around every corner  
- A lively carnival with many exciting attractions

Next, the instructor will prompt students to change the pace of their movement by playing segments (about 1 minute each) of the following songs:

- “Moonlight Sonata” by Beethoven  
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Tr0otuiQuU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Tr0otuiQuU)  
- “Best of My Love” by The Emotions  
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZPFyNuv87Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZPFyNuv87Y)

**Activity 2 (10 Minutes)** Brief Lecture. The instructor will then present a brief PowerPoint presentation on pacing and music *(See Appendix A)*. The instructor will provide examples from the anticipatory set to illustrate each idea. The outline for the presentation includes the following:

- **Pacing:** Rate of movement in a play (fast, medium, slow)  
  - What types of plays use slow pacing?  
  - What types of plays use fast pacing?  
  - Does the pace typically increase or decrease as a play or scene reaches its end?  
- **Mood:** a feeling or emotional quality  
  - How does the pacing of the play make you *feel*?  
- **Music**  
  - Helps establish the pacing and mood of a show.  
    - How does the song make you feel? Is the song fast or slow paced?
• Does the pacing and mood of the song match the play?

Activity 3 (8 Minutes) Clip and Writing. The instructor will show a brief (2 minutes) clip from the film *E.T.* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTVoFCP1BLg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTVoFCP1BLg)) and then ask students to respond to the following prompt on a piece of paper:

- Describe the pacing of the film clip in a few sentences. Be sure to address how the music and the pacing affected the mood of the scene.

Once students have finished writing their answers, they will turn their papers into the instructor.

Activity 4 (22 Minutes). Adding Music and Pacing. Students will return to their in-class devising groups and decide on the appropriate pacing for their show, making sure to keep in mind the mood, subject matter, and production concept. Students will also decide on a school-appropriate song that matches the pacing and mood of their show. Groups may have access during (or outside of) class to look up different songs on classroom computers. Each group must turn in the name of their song (as well as a brief description of their intended pacing) to the instructor by the beginning of the next lesson.

Take-Home Activity. Pacing, Music, and Mood Hand-Out. At the end of the lesson, the instructor will give students a hand-out ([See Appendix F](#)) on pacing, music and mood. This hand-out provides the student with a production concept, story structure, and mood of a devised piece. The student will be asked to decide on the pacing and music for this performance and to justify in writing how it matches the play’s mood and storytelling.

Materials and Equipment Needed

Computer, projector, speakers
Clips of Music and *E.T*
Copies of hand-outs

Assessment

1. *Activity 3* will show if students have met Objective 1: Describe the pacing of a play or scene and Objective 2: Analyze how pacing and musical choices affect mood and storytelling. The instructor will check student written summaries to see if they used detail and appropriate vocabulary in describing the pacing, as well as if they provided solid reasoning as to how the pacing and music affected the mood and storytelling of the film clip.

2. *Activity 4* will show if students in groups have met Objective 2: Analyze how pacing and musical choices affect mood and storytelling and Objective 3: Incorporate music and pacing choices to match mood of devised theatre piece. During *Activity 4*, the instructor will check-in with all the groups to see if they are matching and justifying the pacing and music of their piece with its mood. The instructor will also collect the song title and pacing description from each group to determine how well they applied their knowledge.

3. *Take-Home Activity* will show if students have individually met Objective 2: Analyze how pacing and musical choices affect mood and storytelling and Objective 3: Incorporate music and
pacing choices to match mood of devised theatre piece individually. Student responses on this hand-out will assess their ability to apply and analyze pacing and musical choices.

Lesson 5

Descriptive Course Data

Instructor: Mr. John O’Neil

Lesson: Assessing and Defending

Course: Theatre Arts I (Grade Level: 9-10)

Unit: Devised Theatre

(Note: This lesson will take place over two days)

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to

1. Specify criteria for assessing devised theatre pieces. (Level 1)
2. Synthesize all elements of devised theatre into performance. (Level 5)
3. Assess devised theatre productions based on specific criteria. (Level 6)
4. Defend production choices using specific criteria and supporting details. (Level 6)

Instructional Components

(Day One: Performing and Assessing)

Activity 1 (Anticipatory Set: 5 Minutes) Journaling. The instructor will ask students to answer the following question on a sheet of paper: Based on all of our work so far, what elements do you think are necessary for a strong devised theatre performance?

Activity 2 (10 Minutes) Dry Erase Board List. The instructor will call on students to write their answers to the journaling question on the dry-erase board. If the class does not already include the following elements in their answers, the instructor will add them to the list on the board:

- Central Production Concept or Theme
- Dynamic Composition (Levels, Depth, Proximity, Gesture)
- Clear Beginning, Middle, End and Conflict
- Pacing and Music Matches Mood

Activity 3 (10 Minutes) Performance Prep. In groups, students will rehearse and make last-minute adjustments to their devised theatre performances. Students will also make use of this time to inform the instructor of their music choice. This will allow the instructor to search for the songs on YouTube before students perform during the next activity.

Activity 4 (25 Minutes) Student Performances. Students will perform their devised theatre pieces in groups. When students are not performing, they will be taking notes on the effectiveness of the performance. The notes should include one aspect of the performance the student enjoyed and one aspect they questioned based upon the criteria outlined at the beginning of the lesson (the list will remain on the board for students to view). Students will submit their notes to the instructor before leaving class on this day.
Materials and Equipment Needed

Dry-erase markers

(Day Two: Defending and Reflecting)

Activity 5 (10 Minutes) Self-Rubric. The instructor will hand out Part I of the Summative Evaluation Rubric (See Pages 7-8) and ask each student to look at the criterion and highlight (or circle/underline) the achievement level they believe their group reached for the in-class devised performance.

Activity 6 (10 Minutes) Group Defense. Students will get into their in-class devised performance groups and compare the achievement levels they marked on the rubric. Then, for each criterion, the groups will provide details from their performance that support their chosen achievement level. Once the groups have provided supporting details for each criterion of the rubric, they should have a strong pool of evidence to draw upon to defend their production.

Activity 7 (20 Minutes) Feedback Time! The instructor will now pull out the student notes gathered in Activity 4 and read three responses to each group. Once the instructor has read both the “enjoyed” and “questioned” statements from each response, the members of the group will address the “questioned” statement and defend their production using the supporting details they developed during the previous activity.

Activity 8 (10 Minutes) Self-Assessment. After feedback, students will take out a piece of paper and answer the following questions:

- What was most successful about my group’s process and production for the in-class devising project?
- What aspects of my group’s process could have been stronger?
- Looking at the rubric for the final assessment, what aspect of devising would you most like to focus on improving for your final devising project?

Materials and Equipment Needed
Student Notes from Activity 4

Assessment

1. Activity 2 will show if students have met Objective 1: Specify criteria for assessing devised theatre pieces. The instructor will check student responses to see if they resemble or relate to the instructor’s criteria for the unit.

2. Activity 3 will show if students in groups have met Objective 2: Synthesize all elements of devised theatre into performance. During Activity 3, the instructor will check-in with all the groups to see if they are having any issues getting their piece polished for performance.

3. Activity 4 will show if students have met Objective 2: Synthesize all elements of devised theatre into performance and Objective 3: Assess devised theatre productions based on specific
criteria. In viewing student performance, the instructor will see how well each group combined all of the elements. The instructor will also collect student notes during this activity to check how well students are evaluating each other.

4. Activity 7 will show if students have met Objective 4: Defend production choices using specific criteria and supporting details. The instructor will listen to student responses during this activity to determine if they are able to make a strong case for their artistic choices.

5. Activity 8 will show if students have met Objective 3: Assess devised theatre productions based on specific criteria. Through the written responses of students, the instructor will be able to see how well students evaluate their own group’s strengths and weaknesses.