

The Elements of Tableaux

Tableaux, or frozen images, are an excellent way of framing a significant moment that the students want to highlight from their reading, writing, viewing, or from discussions. While the elements listed below are key to an effective tableau presentation, they are only part of the equation. As the students work in groups to discuss and select images that represent key parts of the Irish and/or immigrant story, encourage them to focus on recreating scenes that are more than just a *moment* in time, but will also represent a *problem* in time, and will lead to some analysis and discussion from their classmates as they view them. Also encourage the actors to *inhabit* their characters in the tableaux. This can be done by extending the exercise to include *thought-tracking* (see below*), in which you will challenge the actors to respond in role by *tapping in* and asking them questions.

Shape: What is your body doing in the tableau?

- Are you using all different levels?
- How does your body relate to others in the tableau?
 - Are you reaching toward/turning away from others in the group?
 - Is it isolated from/included with others in the group?
- Does your body shape contribute to the meaning of the tableau?
 - Is it connected to / touching other bodies?
 -twisted, stretched, or curved
 -symmetrical /asymmetrical?

Space: How are you using the space in your tableau?

- What is your relationship to others in the tableau?
- Do your choices communicate information about these relationships?
- Have you planned/blocked your tableau taking your audience's position into account?

Time: How are you expressing time in your tableau?

- Are you completely still?
- Are you holding your tableau for a set amount of time?
- Are you making smooth transitions between tableaux?

Energy/Dynamics: How is your energy expressed?

- Do you have a focal point within your tableau?
- Do your facial expressions match the character and the situations?
- Are you using tension in your body (arms, fingers, hands, etc.) to convey dramatic meanings?

Thought-Tracking: As an extension of their tableau work, you can ask the actors to imagine what the character they have chosen to represent might either be saying or thinking at that frozen moment in time. This can be shared with the audience by **tapping in**, where either the teacher or a student volunteer can gently tap the actor on the shoulder, at which point they say aloud the thought or speech. This can be extended by challenging the actors to respond in role to questions put to them by either the teacher or the audience(e.g. How does your character feel at this moment in time? What do you think they will do next?)

Note: Before the tableaux are shared, remind both the performers and the audience that there are many possible interpretations of any given tableau. There is the intended message of the actors in the piece, but there is also what the audience "sees" as they view it. When time permits, encourage the audience to share these different interpretations to deepen understanding.