

COVID ADAPTATION: VERBATIM THEATRE

Secondary Drama Senior Public

Lesson 1: Telling Other People's Stories

Physical Distancing Adaptations

When conducting these warm-ups and conventions, it is important to adhere to the Physical Distancing guidelines from your school board. Students should remain 2m apart at all times. Students in grades 4 - 12 are required to wear a mask. Although the government allows students with masks to work 1 metre apart, CODE recommends that all dance and drama work be done with 2 metres of social distancing in effect. Think about using alternate learning spaces such as the gymnasium, library or school yard.

Whole Class Instruction: With floor tape, demark areas where students can stand in the classroom with a metre grid or a peripheral circle so that they can participate in drama/dance conventions at a safe distance from one another. Floor tape that is slip-resistant and made of vinyl to prevent wear and tear during cleaning is recommended.

Partner work: Students can face a partner 2m across from each other. When face to face, outstretched hands should not touch one another. Refer back to personal-space warm-ups.

Small Group work: No more than 3 or 4 students per group to allow for recommended spacing of 2m between students.

If you must move your desks to create space, please ensure that each student is moving only their own desk and chair and then retrieving their own desk and chair in order to avoid contact with others belongings.

Refer to *General Tips for Safety in our Classrooms* in the overview.

Safety adaptations specific to the instructional strategies and drama conventions in this lesson are embedded in green throughout it.

Critical Learning

In this lesson, students will experience and reflect on the process that lies at the heart of Verbatim Theatre: telling other people's stories. Beginning with their own stories, students will learn to make respectful observations about their classmates and re-tell a classmate's story in role.

Guiding Questions

How can we share and re-tell our stories in a way that feels safe and respected?

What verbal and non-verbal cues should we pay attention to when observing others tell stories? Whose stories in our society get told? Whose stories do not get told?

How can theatre tell other people's stories without exploiting or appropriating them?

Curriculum Expectations

A1.3 create and interpret a wide range of characters using a variety of acting approaches

A3.1 demonstrate an understanding of how different acting and staging techniques reflect and support different purposes in drama

C3.1 identify and follow safe and ethical practices in all drama activities

B1.2 analyse a variety of contemporary and historical drama works to explain and evaluate how they communicate themes and dramatize issues

B2.1 demonstrate an understanding of how drama questions social and cultural conditions in a variety of Canadian and global drama sources and traditions

B2.2 describe ways in which their personal experiences in drama have influenced their attitudes to others and their world view.

B2.3 describe ways in which drama can support or influence school and/or local community affairs

Learning Goals

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify physical and vocal nuances that can be observed by the actor and recreated from real life
- respectfully recreate the speech and physical patterns of another person
- capture the essence of another person in the re-telling of their story

Instructional Components

Readiness

Students should be familiar with voice and movement exercises and the experience of building a character both physically and vocally. Students should have built trust and respect for each other through various ensemble building activities at the beginning of the year.

Terminology

Shadowing

Inside-Outside Circle

T-Chart

Pivotal Moment

In role

Materials and BLMs

Clip from Anna Deavere Smith's filed play *Twilight Los Angeles* (if copyright permits)

Chart Paper and Markers

Equity Considerations:

When inviting students to create something at home to bring to the classroom for personal use, teachers need to be aware of possible equity issues for students without the resources or ability to do this without support; teachers may choose to have craft materials in their original packaging available to distribute to those who need them.

When deciding if technology and online applications or software is the best route for your adaptation to physically distanced learning, you must be aware of the technological needs, internet capability and capacity of your students. The utilization of technology to substitute in person collaboration can create equity issues related to the socio-economic status of the household, or access to the internet (e.g., rural versus urban internet capacity). Please take into account the differentiations and adaptations that meet the needs of your students.

How to use Materials and BLMs during Physical Distancing

In a classroom following physical distancing guidelines it is important to reduce the amount of paper and other materials distributed in class. Many Dance & Drama experiences include source images and text which can be projected safely instead of distributed to students. To avoid the use of hand-held manipulatives and artifacts, take photos of them and project the images to students.

Often *Black Line Masters* (BLMs) are given to students to generate ideas, report, self-assess, peer assess, reflect, and to use as final exit cards. BLMs in our resources are all PDFs. Some can be projected, however others will need to be converted for independent or group use.

A few ways to do this include:

1. Convert the PDF to a Word or Google Doc and assign it to individuals or groups of students via Google Classroom:
 - Download the PDF onto your hard drive
 - Upload the PDF into your Google Drive
 - Open *file as a* Google Doc
 - Reformat as needed
 - Share copies with students
2. Create slides and assign them to individuals or groups. The slides have the original document as a background and add a text box on top of it so that students can type into it.
3. Put the questions on a Jamboard or other collaborative interactive program and assign a board to each group.

Minds On Approximately 30 minutes

Whole Group > Physical Distance Gesture

With the class develop and agree upon a gesture that can remind each other in a respectful way about maintaining physical distancing.

Whole Group > Walk in Space > Observation

Invite students to walk around the room at a normal speed. Every ten seconds, ask them to change directions so as not to fall into any pattern of walking around the room. For physical distancing please be sure to use large space so that the students can maintain 2 metre distance from each other while walking around the room and changing direction, or, if the space is not large enough, split the class into smaller groups and run the activity in shifts. This can be done outside if there is an appropriate space at your school. Ask the students to speed up, slow down and walk backwards and sideways, change levels etc. During this exercise the students can practice using their physical distance reminder gesture to help normalize and reinforce its use.

Instruct students to observe one student in the room without letting them know they are being observed. Coach them to notice the speed at which they walk, the shape of their body when they walk, if they are holding any tension, etc. Ask students to notice another person without letting the first person out of their peripheral vision. Add a third and then a fourth. Ask students to consider: *how much can you observe about other people at one time?*

Direct students to choose one person to shadow without being obvious about it. All of their movement should now be determined by the person they are shadowing - their rhythm, posture, foot placement, etc. Emphasize that they are not to mock or imitate each other but to capture the essence or 'truth' of how each person moves.

Instruct the students to follow that person for about thirty seconds. Ask the students as they continue to work to consider the following: *Where are their eyes looking-forward, down, to the side or up? Where is their chest and posture? Where are their arms? Pelvis? Knees? Toes? Consider tempo.*

Instruct the students to follow another student and then another, constantly switching subjects to follow them as they move into their field of vision. Ask students to try borrowing movements from two people in the room. They might copy one person's

tempo and the way another person moves their arms. Ask them to gradually try to add more.

Whole Group > Inside-Outside Circle

Have students sit on chairs in two or four lines facing each other so that every student has a partner, leaving 2 meters between the students for physical distancing. Instruct the first line to tell a 30 second story about themselves as a food lover. Instruct the second line to shift one or two students to the right carrying their chair with them to their new place and tell a story about their love for food *in the style* (attempting to capture the gestures and speech patterns) of the previous partner. Now ask the second line to tell a 30 second story about generosity while the first line observes. The first line shifts to the right carrying their chair with them to their new place but tells their story as a generous person but in the style of their partner from the outside circle. Ask the group what they would like the next story to be about. Continue telling stories this way until they have practiced telling stories at least three times. Remind students to only touch their chair when moving and only the first group moves to maintain physical distancing protocols.

Suggested Topics: *Tell a story about selfishness, tell a story about your vision of the future, tell a story about a recurring dream, tell a story about love.*

Whole Group > T-Chart

Direct the students to create a t - chart with the headings voice and body. *In order to avoid contact, have students call out their suggestions and a recorder can write them on the chart.* Invite students to name physical and vocal qualities they observed (i.e. pauses in speech, the words *Um* and *like* or the way a person ends a question in a sentence). Ask the students to examine the list and consider: *What are the most difficult human behaviors to recreate as a performer? Why? NOTE: The wearing of masks may be a challenge for this activity. You may be interested in addressing this challenge by speaking in different ways. Perhaps this is a lesson for synchronized learning over Google Meet where no masks need be worn and students can really observe each other.*

Action: Approximately 75 minutes

Pairs > Storytelling

Invite the students to think about and prepare a two minute story about a pivotal moment in their life (i.e. a turning point) when they went from thinking one way about their life or the world around them to thinking another way. It can be a story about an experience they had, or an inspiration from a book they read, or a speech they heard-- anything that significantly changed their way of thinking. Remind them to be specific in their storytelling. *For teachers not in schools full-time, this could be done as a Flipgrid video and posted.*

Inform them that whatever story they choose to tell will be shared with the class so they should not share anything that will make them feel uncomfortable.

Invite the students to tell the story to a partner. *Remind students to maintain physical distancing at all times when sharing and to not directly face each other when telling the stories.* Instruct the students that the student who is listening to the story must listen to the words carefully while observing *how* the story is being told. Explain that they will share that person's story [in role](#) as that person, attempting to capture the truth or essence of that person but making the story seem like their own.

Allow students to decide who is going first and then time them for two minutes exactly.

After students have told their stories, ask students to sit back to back with their partner, practising telling each other's stories for approximately 5 minutes.

Direct each storyteller to immediately record their partner's story in writing to keep for the Culminating Task. Remind them that the story should be written in the first person.

Whole Class > Storytelling Circle

Invite students to form a *physically distanced circle, or, if the classroom does not afford enough space, a different configuration that allows them to see and hear each other.* In any order, students should tell their partners' stories to the group, attempting to capture the essence of the story and how it was told. Ask partners to sit separately from each other in the circle, and not to tell their stories one after the other. Instruct the students

that they will share all the stories and debrief the stories and the activity when all the students have shared.

Consolidation 20 minutes

Whole Class > Storytelling Debrief Discussion

Engage students in a debrief discussion about the storytelling activity.

Key Questions for Discussion:

How did it feel to watch your story being told by your partner? Did it feel respectful? Why or why not?

Did you recognize any of your classmates in the stories that were told?

Did it feel like the story 'belonged' to the teller even though they were imitating another person? What changed about the story in the re-telling? What is lost and what is gained in the actor's interpretation?

What new understandings do you have about other people in this class?

What makes it feel safe to do this activity? What makes it feel unsafe?

Whose stories get told? Whose stories are hidden?

What are the implications in telling someone else's story when they are a different gender, race or ethnicity from you, the performer?

What is your responsibility when telling someone else's story?

If copyright permits, show clips of difference characters from Anna Deavere Smith's play *Twilight Los Angeles* (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/stageonscreen/twilight/twilight.html>), a play based on interviews from a range of people responding to the Los Angeles riots following the 1992 Rodney King trial. Ask students to comment on the ways she changed her voice and body to indicate creating new characters.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

While students are telling their stories, pause them at anytime and ask students to perform on the spot or circulate and listen in on their stories. Use this to gauge how much they are changing their bodies and voices.

Collect the recorded stories and provide written feedback on any important parts they may have missed.

Assessment as Learning (AaL)

While students are rehearsing their partner's stories, ask them to refer back to the T-chart created to remind themselves of the physical and vocal nuances they might recall about their partner in the re-telling of their stories.

Differentiation (DI)

Assign pairs or allow for student choice depending on the group. Tell them that they will get the most out of the activity if they choose someone they do not know very well.

If you have ELL students in your class, give them the option of telling stories in their own language as a way of beginning the activity and then encourage them to move into English.

Consider doing the debrief as a written reflection first if students have difficulty opening up about their responses to the activity.

Quick Tip

This inner-outer circle activity can be done in a straight line or in pairs but the key is to randomly change partners quickly and many times. This is a warm-up activity and should move very quickly. Limit the stories to 30 seconds or one minute.

Prepare a list of different topics for the inner-outer circle. Think about what this particular group of students might be interested in telling stories about.

Post the T-chart and use it as anchor chart for the lesson. Add to it over the course of the unit.

If you cannot access the link to *Twilight Los Angeles*, use information about the play and the playwright on line or use a copy of the play.

Link and Layer

Link this type of acting to various styles of acting such as the outside-in acting technique that is a variation on the Stanislavski method.

After sharing stories, have the group identify similar themes that emerge as a way of building topic material for a collective creation.

Consider linking Verbatim Theatre to the oral tradition of storytelling where stories were passed on from one generation to the next. *How were stories told so that people could remember them prior to writing being available?*

Hyperlinks in the Lesson

[Twilight](#)