

COVID ADAPTATION: VERBATIM THEATRE

Secondary Drama Senior Public

COVID ADAPTATION: Lesson 2: Defining the Genre

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 be introduced to the concept of Verbatim Theatre by broadly defining the term verbatim as it applies to theatre. Students will differentiate between verbatim theatre and docudrama by investigating and presenting a newspaper article in the style of each genre. Students will build on their experience with dramatic forms by incorporating tableau, choral speaking and movement into each presentation.

Guiding Questions

What is Verbatim Theatre?

How is different from docudrama or documentary theatre?

Why is it a socially important style of theatre?

What are the artistic challenges of Verbatim Theatre? What did you learn about media bias by examining the same story reported through different news sources?

Curriculum Expectations

A1.2 select and use a variety of drama forms to present original drama works

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

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

C3.3 demonstrate an understanding of correct theatre worker and audience etiquette in classroom drama activities and formal performance contexts

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

Learning Goals

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

- explain the word verbatim and how it applies to theatre
- distinguish between documentary and verbatim theatre
- create and present a newspaper article in the style of verbatim and documentary theatre
- suggest some reasons why this is a socially important style of theatre

Instructional Components

Readiness

This lesson builds on the previous storytelling lesson by making explicit the genre and techniques of Verbatim Theatre. The dramatic work draws on their knowledge of dramatic forms (such as docudrama) from previous courses. The case study of Matthew Shepard and the Laramie Project contains sensitive material, and so issues of trust and respect must be established in the classroom prior to this lesson, and should be revisited before delving into the material.

Terminology

Docudrama

Documentary Theatre

Verbatim Theatre

Mind Map

Anchor Chart

Homophobia

Materials

Chart Paper or a Blackboard

Variety of newspaper articles on the same topics from different sources

Background information on Matthew Shepard

Film of *The Laramie Project* (if copyright permits)

[BLM #1 Newspaper Article Instructions](#)

[BLM #2 Creative Process Observation Checklist](#)

[BLM #3 The Overheard Conversation Assignment](#)

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 15 minutes

Pairs > Mind Map

Write the terms Verbatim Theatre and docudrama in writing on opposite sides of the board. Using dictionaries and/or the Internet, ask students to work in pairs to come up with definitions for the two genres and write them on sticky notes then post the notes near each word on the board to create a mind map surrounding each word. *This could also be done virtually via Jamboard. Please ensure that students remain 2 metres apart while collaborating, have only one student record the information, and have each sticky note put up one at a time to maintain physical distancing.*

Whole Class > Defining the Genre

Ask one student to read the set of definitions aloud to the class. Ask students to think about the similarities and differences as they listen to the definitions. Stickies can be grouped on the Jamboard. As a class, come up with a clear definition for each term and post it on an anchor chart for students to reference throughout the unit.

Action: Approximately 40 minutes

Small Groups > News in Different Genres

Number students into groups of 3-4. *Remind the small groups to maintain physical distancing at all times during the collaborative process.* Provide each group with articles on the same topic from different current newspapers. Select articles with quotes from a variety of people in the story. Direct half of the groups to recreate the newspaper article in the style of Verbatim Theatre and the other half to present in the style of a docudrama. See attached instructions ([BLM #1 Newspaper Article Instructions](#)) for

more detailed instructions. During the planning process one student can be asked to record for the others. Technology may be used by students for recording if they have access. Virtual performances in groups could be created at home and shared during class time in the school.

Give students 20-30 minutes to create and rehearse their presentations. Class presentations need to be planned and blocked in a way that allows for safe physical distancing for the group and their classmates. In smaller spaces, students may have to take turns.

Whole Class > Presenting News in Different Genres

Direct the students to present the articles to the class in each of the styles.

Debrief the presentations. Students are asked to maintain social distancing during performances.

Key Questions for Discussion:

Which style was more interesting to watch? Why?

Which style is more challenging for the artist to work with? Why?

What differences did you notice about how the event/issue was reported in different newspapers?

What kind of bias does this reveal about the different newspapers?

Return to the earlier T-Chart and anchor chart and ask students to add new understandings to the list of differences between the two genres based on their work on the articles.

Whole Class > Viewing of *The Laramie Project*

If possible, show students the film version of *The Laramie Project* as an example of Verbatim Theatre. If copyright does not permit, then read excerpts of the play together. Before showing the film, familiarize students with the background on Matthew Shepard's death and the creation of The Laramie Project using background research.

Students are also asked to maintain physical distancing during the viewing of performances.

While viewing the film, ask students to consider why Verbatim Theatre is a powerful medium to tell the story of Mathew Shepard. Challenge them to think about why this kind of storytelling may have a greater impact on how people view and think about the issue of homophobia in our society.

Consolidation: Approximately 175 minutes

Whole Class > Post-Viewing Reflection

After viewing the film, ask students to brainstorm a list of reasons why *The Laramie Project* (and Verbatim Theatre in general) is a socially important form of theatre. Record their answers on the board. Some answers might be related to issues like *community participation, the audience feeling closer to and more emotionally affected by the truth, giving voice to the marginalized, keeping a historical record, combating homophobia*. Engage students in a discussion about the context for the film.

Key Questions for Discussion:

Do you think homophobia was the reason behind Matthew Shepard's death? Why or why not?

Why did the media become so interested in Matthew's story?

Do you think Laramie was more homophobic than other places in the United States? In the world? Why or why not?

What different experiences might someone have being being gay in a small town versus a big city?

Do you think people's attitudes toward homosexuality have changed? Why or why not?

Do you have any personal stories that you can share about someone dealing with homophobia or coming out?

Why do you think homophobia exists?

Invite comments about how the actors and the director made the interviews dramatically engaging for the audience. Prompt students to think about elements like *music*, *juxtaposition of interviews*, *visual images that accompany the monologues*, *character choices*, *setting*.

Whole Class > Homework Assignment

Give students [BLM #3 The Overheard Conversation Assignment](#) to complete for homework. Read the assignment aloud and take questions from the students about the details.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Observe the words and definitions that students add to the anchor chart to monitor their developing understanding of Verbatim Theatre.

Use student questions about the Overheard Conversation script to gauge the group's level of understanding about the assignment

Assessment as Learning (AaL)

Use [BLM #2 Creative Process Observation Checklist](#) to monitor the rehearsal process throughout this unit. Share the checklist with students so that they understand and internalize the teamwork skills being observed.

At the end of the rehearsal, give each group the checklist and ask them to self-evaluate their group's creation process.

Differentiation (DI)

Numbering students into groups is a more equitable way of forming groups so that students do not exclude others. Consider playing a game like Atom to get students to form random groups.

Quick Tip

Post the definitions for the duration of the unit and invite students to return to the definitions adding their new understandings and learning.

Choose newspaper articles that are relevant and current to students in your particular community. Consider choosing articles on same topic but from different newspapers or magazines to discuss how events get reported differently in the media.

Consider giving students the [The Overheard Conversation Assignment](#) before you watch *The Laramie Project* so you can give them a few days to complete it.

Link and Layer

When introducing the concept of Verbatim Theatre make links to the theatre form of collective creation, including *The Farm Show*, in which actors from Theatre Passe Muraille lived with farmers in Clinton, Ontario and created a performance on their lives and experiences.

Encourage students to observe the differences in the way the media reports on one event.

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

Hyperlinks in the Lesson

[BLM #1 Newspaper Article Instructions](#)

[BLM #2 Creative Process Observation Checklist](#)

[BLM #3 The Overheard Conversation Assignment](#)