



Judith Thompson - Collective Creativity

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time: 1-2 classes 75-150 mins.

ADA3M ADA3O ADA4O ADA4M: In this lesson, students will explore Judith Thompson's philosophy of collective creation, focusing on authenticity, lived experience, ethical storytelling, and ensemble-authorship. Drawing from the video, students will examine how Thompson gathers stories from her students, honours their voices, identifies emotional and political, and social stakes, and balances authorship with respect. Students will engage in structured collective creation exercises, and will explore tension between individual vs. group needs and reflect on the ethics of representing lived experiences.

Learning Goals

By the end of this lesson, students will [know, understand and/or be able to] ...

- Describe what collective creation is and how Thompson approaches it.
- Generate theatrical material collaboratively from interviews, prompts, or lived experience.
- Use movement, improvisation, and voice to contribute to a shared piece.
- Consider ethical considerations and conflicts when representing other's stories.
- Reflect on how collective creation can be political, community driven, and identity affirming.
- Apply drama vocabulary: collective creation, authenticity, ensemble, improv, ethics, voice, authorship, director, movement-based creation.

Guiding Questions

- What is collective creation and how does Judith Thompson describe it in the video?
- Why is authenticity central to the work?
- How can lived experiences become raw material for theatre while ensuring ethical responsibility?
- How does an ensemble support, not overshadow, the voices in it?
- What does it mean to "midwife" a story instead of authoring it entirely?
- How does collective creation balance messy democracy with artistic vision?

Readiness

Students should have an understanding of basic group work conventions in drama (tableaux, improv, role). Prior to this lesson, students should have some prior experience with respectful collaboration and have practiced physical and vocal warm-ups for ensemble building.

Terminology

- Collective Creation
- Authenticity
- Ethical Storytelling
- Ensemble
- Artistic Vision
- Movement
- Improvisation

Materials

- Open studio space, or classroom with desks/chairs pushed or stacked aside to make space, or gym, or large atrium/hallway space.
- Chart paper and markers
- Cue cards, or notebook
- Speakers for music
- Timer (cell phone works)
- Devices to play the video (projector/individual computers/cell phones)
- **PDF #1 Anecdotal Reporting Tool**
- **PDF #2 Short Scene Rubric**
- **PDF #3 Reflection Assessment Tool**

Minds On

Teacher Notes

Remind students that sharing personal stories is never required. The lesson uses fictional or lightly inspired situations. Encourage students to contribute at a level that feels safe. Offer multiple forms of participation (movement only, writing only, directing only).

Individual > “Listening for Gold”

This activity is inspired by Thompson’s statement in the video about “panning for gold”, listening for what resonates.

View the [Judith Thompson video](#) #11 of 12 on collective creation together in the Legend Library on the Canada’s Theatre Museum website, or assign it for pre-work.

After viewing, ask the students to walk the space neutrally. Call out a variety of story seeds.

Prompt: “A moment that surprised you.” “A moment someone changed your mind.”



Ask students to freeze and create a physical image that captures the emotional tone. Explain that when you clap (or give another cue) they will shift to a new physical interpretation. Ask them to do the same scenario, a different way. Keep at this until variations are no longer working out. **Prompts:** *What changed in your body when you tried to express something authentic? How did you make choices without words?*

Key Questions for Discussion

How did Thompson describe “authenticity” in the video?

Why is authenticity different from invention?

What does it feel like to search for raw emotional truth through movement?

Extensions

Watch the video again, or based on the first screening, have students look for examples of “authenticity” and “stories that only real people can tell” online or in found sources. They can research found art (writing, visual art, music, etc.) that feels authentic. Students share said works, and then they identify phrases that resonate and add them to a word wall creating a collective understanding of the “stink of authenticity”.

Differentiation

- Allow students to create seated or small gesture versions of the images.
- Offer visual prompt cards for students who need more processing time.

Assessment for learning

Document students’ engagement with movement and responsiveness. (See **PDF #1 Anecdotal Reporting Tool**). Ask brief reflective questions:

- What makes something feel “authentic” on stage?
- What moments in your poses felt expressive? Authentic?

Action!

Teacher Notes

This section makes students active participants in a simplified version of Thompson's collective creation process. Maintain a supportive, low-pressure environment. Students may choose how much to share.

Pairs > "Raw Material - Interviews"

Ask each student to choose one fictional personal prompt:

- a. A regret
- b. Something you hope for
- c. A moment of embarrassment
- d. A small victory

Pair students up. One student tells a 30-60 second story; the other listens for images, words, and actions that stand out. Ask the listeners to record the three things they heard that felt "golden" (specific, vivid, surprising, like Thompson's "details you could not make up").

Prompts: *What made that detail feel truthful? What emotional or physical image did it create in your imagination?*

Small Group > "Sewing the Quilt".

Inspired by Thompson's method: movement first, then text lightly stitched in.

Put students in small groups. Ask groups to collectively choose three to five "golden" pieces from the paired work they just completed. Invite them to build a movement sequence that expresses emotional tones (hope, yearning, conflict, surprise, etc.) of their "golden" pieces. As they work, encourage them to add fragments of text (e.g., one person calls out a line, another moves, another adds sound or gesture). Allow them to experiment and rehearse until they have built a 1-2 minute collective creation piece.

Provide additional rehearsal time, as needed. This can take time, and time should be allocated so long as groups are exploring depth and various iterations of their creative pieces. Rehearsal time could extend this from one 75-min period to 2, or 3.

Side coaching with prompting questions to encourage groups to think about their performances in a deeper way should be utilized. **Prompt:** *Let the relationship do all the work, who are you to each other right now, and why is this important? Make one or two more choices clearer with your body before you move to more text. Listen more, something just changed. Let it change you. Whose idea is this moment serving? Yours or the ensemble's? If this were real, what would you **actually** do next?*



Invite students to share their pieces with the class.

Teacher Modelling: Demonstrate how Thompson might take “I hope for...” and pair it with movement and music for the students to see. It can be as abstract or literal as you like. The key is to demonstrate trying something as a process. Teacher modelling is a very effective way to demonstrate risk-taking, and it allows students to feel a sense of permission to follow up with their own performances. It breaks the ice, and models high level role playing.

Key Questions for Discussion

How did the ensemble shape meaning together?

What choices honoured the original storyteller?

Where did artistic “vision” show up? Where did consensus show up?

Did you encounter any ethical or creative dilemmas? How did you resolve them?

Extensions

- Introduce music (as Thompson often does).
- Students integrate an ability or “trick” they can bring (movement type, dance style, instrument, vocal talent, etc...)

Differentiation

Students uncomfortable performing can take a risk, or, can take roles as directors, composers, or dramaturgs. Provide structured movement scores for those who need them.

Assessment for learning

Observe students using anecdotal checklist (See **PDF #1 Anecdotal Reporting Tool**)

- Collaboration.
- Respect for stories.
- Integration of movement and text.
- Creative risk-taking.

Assessment of learning

Use **PDF #2 Short Scene Rubric** to assess presentations of the short collective piece.

Assessment as learning

Use **PDF #3 Reflection Assessment Tool** to assess student reflection of the following questions:

- *What did I contribute to the ensemble?*
- *Where did authenticity appear in our piece?*

Consolidation

Teacher Notes

Encourage students to connect their experience to Thompson's philosophy: that collective creativity is democratic, political, and rooted in dignity.

Individual > "Vision and Democracy"

Invite students to reflect on how Thompson balances:

- Authenticity
- Respect
- Ensemble needs
- Artistic Vision
- Ethical editing ("I choose one story over another... but they must endorse it.")

Key Questions for Discussion

What responsibilities come with using someone else's story?

What moments in the video connected to our own collaborative processes?

Where did conflicts emerge? How were they solved?

Is collective creation inherently political? Why or why not?

Extensions

Students refine their pieces and document their creative process using the Creative Process.

Differentiation

Give students the option to use oral reflections, exit tickets, or voice recordings if they prefer not to write. Allow small groups rather than whole-class reflection for students who need reduced social load.

Assessment as learning:

Students submit a reflection on what they learned about collective creation, referencing ideas from the video. (See **PDF #3 Reflection Assessment Tool**)

Assessment of learning:

Use co-constructed criteria to assess:

- Understanding of collective creation
- Ethical awareness
- Ensemble Collaboration
- Creative Choices (movement + text)
- Ability to connect learning to Thompson's ideas



Anecdotal Reporting Tool

NAME: _____ DATE: _____ ACTIVITY: _____

Question Activity

What is the student doing?

Next Steps/Redirection: _____

- ☐ Improvising ☐ Scripting ☐ Blocking/Staging ☐ Working through text ☐ Brainstorming/Generating Ideas
☐ Ensemble discussion/Participation ☐ Rehearsing movement/vocal/blocking

What is the student saying?

Next Steps/Redirection: _____

- ☐ Generating ☐ Dialoguing ☐ "Panning for Gold" ☐ Imagining ☐ Active Listening ☐ Supporting Others

How is the student demonstrating understanding of the creative/critical process?

- ☐ Reference to steps/process made ☐ Creating next steps/follow through ☐ Using rehearsal planning/ On task/ On schedule

Next Steps/Redirection: _____

Learning Skills Demonstrated:

- ☐ Responsibility ☐ Collaboration ☐ Works Independently ☐ Initiative ☐ Organization ☐ Self-Regulation



Short Piece Rubric

Clarity of Ensemble Communication

Level	Look Fors
4	<i>Ensemble communication is highly clear and intentional. Performers listen and respond to one another with strong focus, timing, and physical/vocal connection. The group functions as a cohesive unit throughout.</i>
3	<i>Ensemble communication is clear and effective most of the time. Performers are generally connected and responsive, with only minor lapses in focus or timing.</i>
2	<i>Ensemble communication is inconsistent. Some moments of connection are evident, but focus, timing, or responsiveness breaks down at times.</i>
1	<i>Ensemble communication is unclear or minimal. Performers work mostly as individuals with little evidence of listening, connection, or shared focus.</i>

2. Use of Found Text

Level	Looks Fors
4	<i>Found text is used creatively and purposefully. The text is clearly transformed through performance choices (voice, movement, structure) to communicate a strong collective meaning.</i>
3	<i>Found text is used effectively. The group demonstrates understanding of the text and makes clear performance choices that support its meaning.</i>
2	<i>Found text is used in a basic or literal way. Some performance choices are present, but the purpose or transformation of the text is not always clear.</i>
1	<i>Use of found text is unclear or ineffective. The text is read or presented with little transformation or understanding of its purpose.</i>



3. Ethical Representation

Level	Look Fors
4	<i>The piece demonstrates a strong awareness of ethical representation. The group handles the source material with care, respect, and thoughtfulness, avoiding stereotypes or harm. Choices are clearly intentional and responsible.</i>
3	<i>The piece shows clear consideration of ethical representation. Most choices are respectful and appropriate, with an awareness of the people, voices, or contexts being represented.</i>
2	<i>Ethical considerations are present but uneven. Some choices may be unclear, underdeveloped, or unintentionally problematic.</i>
1	<i>Little evidence of ethical consideration. The piece includes choices that are careless, stereotypical, or potentially harmful.</i>

Reflection Assessment Tool

Understanding of Collective Creation

Level 4 – Insightful / Thorough

Demonstrates a deep and nuanced understanding of collective creation. Clearly explains how ideas were generated, shaped, and shared within the group, using specific examples from the process.

Level 3 – Clear / Thoughtful

Demonstrates a clear understanding of collective creation. Describes how the group worked together to build the piece, with relevant examples.

Level 2 – Basic / Emerging

Demonstrates a basic understanding of collective creation. Mentions group work but with limited explanation or detail.

Level 1 – Limited / Minimal

Demonstrates little understanding of collective creation. Reflection focuses mainly on individual work or remains vague.

Ethical Awareness

Level 4 – Insightful / Thorough

Shows strong ethical awareness. Thoughtfully analyzes ethical choices related to representation, source material, and impact on others.

Level 3 – Clear / Thoughtful

Shows clear ethical awareness. Identifies ethical considerations and explains how the group acted responsibly.

Level 2 – Basic / Emerging

Shows emerging ethical awareness. Mentions ethics but with limited reflection on responsibility or impact.

Level 1 – Limited / Minimal

Shows little or no ethical awareness. Ethical considerations are not addressed or are misunderstood.

Ensemble Collaboration



Level 4 – Insightful / Thorough

Insightfully reflects on ensemble collaboration, including listening, compromise, leadership, and shared responsibility. Acknowledges strengths and challenges.

Level 3 – Clear / Thoughtful

Clearly reflects on ensemble collaboration and the student's role within the group.

Level 2 – Basic / Emerging

Provides a basic reflection on working with others, with limited detail or self-awareness.

Level 1 – Limited / Minimal

Shows minimal understanding of ensemble collaboration or focuses only on personal experience.

Creative Choices (Movement + Text)**Level 4 – Insightful / Thorough**

Thoughtfully analyzes creative choices involving movement and text. Clearly explains intentions and impact on meaning.

Level 3 – Clear / Thoughtful

Explains creative choices with some connection to purpose or communication.

Level 2 – Basic / Emerging

Describes creative choices in a surface-level way with limited explanation.

Level 1 – Limited / Minimal

Little reflection on creative choices; movement and text are mentioned without clarity.

Ability to Connect Learning to Thompson's Ideas**Level 4 – Insightful / Thorough**

Makes a clear, insightful connection to Thompson's ideas (e.g., care, ethics, responsibility, purpose of theatre) using accurate terminology and meaningful application.

Level 3 – Clear / Thoughtful

Makes a clear connection to Thompson's ideas with appropriate understanding and examples.

Level 2 – Basic / Emerging

Makes a basic or partial connection to Thompson's ideas; understanding may be general or unclear.

Level 1 – Limited / Minimal

Little or no connection to Thompson's ideas, or ideas are inaccurately represented.