



Richard Rose - Action, Event, and the Space Between

Lesson Overview

Estimated Time: 1-2 classes 75-150 mins

ADA3M ADA3O ADA4O ADA4M: In this lesson, students experientially explore Richard Rose's concept of *action* as the driving force of theatre: the "movement through time and space" generated by conflicting objectives. Students investigate how events differ from actions, how conflict creates action, how actors contribute to action by pursuing objectives, and how meaning arises in the "space between" performers. The lesson also engages with Rose's warning about the phrase, "I have an idea" and what it reveals about coherence in theatrical storytelling.

Learning Goals

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

- Identify the difference between event (what happens) and action (what drives what happens)
- Use physical and vocal choices to create action in time and space
- Work with conflicting objectives to generate dramatic tension
- Notice and manipulate "the space between actors" to illuminate the story
- Reflect on the challenges of maintaining coherence in an ensemble when "new ideas" emerge
- Apply drama vocabulary such as objective, tactic, action, event, conflict, status, and space

Guiding Questions

- What is the *action* in theatre, and how is it different from an event?
- How do conflicting objectives between characters create dramatic tension?
- How do actors' choices shape the space *between* characters, the place where audience meaning is generated?
- What happens when a "new idea" disrupts the unity of the story?
- How can we, as performers and directors, keep the story at the centre so the work "disappears" and the audience only sees the action?

Readiness

Students should understand basic dramatic conventions (e.g., tableaux, improvisation, objectives) and be able to move safely, comfortably in rehearsal space. Prior to this lesson, they should have had some experience with simple scene work (blocking, stage directions, etc.). Diagnostic warm ups could check their understanding of objective/tactic and their ability to create meaning physically.

Terminology

- Action
- Event
- Objective
- Tactic
- Conflict
- Status
- Space between actors
- Beat
- Impulse

Materials

- Open studio/classroom with tables and chairs pushed to the perimeter.
- Chart Paper and markers
- Cue Cards
- Video Projector (optional)
- Timer
- **PDF #1 Anecdotal Recording Tool**
- **PDF # 2 Exit Slip**
- **PDF #3 Richard Rose Scene Work Rubric**
- **PDF #4 Quick Observation Checklist**

Minds On

Teacher Notes

Reinforce that this lesson deals with internal/external conflict and emotional stakes, but activities should remain non-personal. Students must work with fictional situations only. Offer verbal and movement-based entry points. Be aware of students' comfort with physical proximity and provide alternatives when exploring the space. Try to use universal language where possible (e.g., Travel through the space vs. walk through the space, if you have someone in a wheelchair).

Whole Class > The Walk

Screen the Richard Rose Clip, "[Part 1 of 17: Finding the Action](#)" in the Legends Library on Canada's Theatre Museum website.

Invite students to share initial reactions with each other and then with the whole class. Avoid correcting, or re-phrasing. Allow students to ask questions, and make statements even if they are misguided.



- Ask students to find a spot in the room and to walk through the space, filling in empty pockets as others exit that space. **Prompt:** *Avoid walking in a whirlpool or circle. Walk in neutral (no expression, or contact with others).*
- Introduce an event. **Prompt:** *Imagine someone shouts your name from behind. Ask students to react physically but remain walking.*
- Introduce an Action. **Prompt:** *Your objective is now to avoid being caught by whoever is calling your name. Ask students to adjust movement, gaze, walk based on the action.*
- Try to change the action. **Prompt:** *Your objective is now to be noticed by the person calling your name. Ask students to adjust movement, gaze, walk based on the action.*

Keep offering different actions and see how they change their physical disposition.

Key Questions for Discussion

What changed when the “event” occurred during your walk?

What changed when an action (objective) was introduced?

How did your body and relationship to space shift?

Where did the story live (in you, or in the space between you and the imagined pursuer)?

Extensions

- Show students a clip of the Richard Rose video where he discusses “action in time and space” and ask them to identify key phrases. Found at timestamp 1:05 in the above linked video.
- Create a word wall of student-generated words or phrases.

Differentiation

Provide visual diagrams of space relationships. Allow students who prefer distance to work with gestures rather than full-body movement. Students with mobility needs can adapt using hand movement or seated work, or can describe movement in writing or a recording of their voice.

Assessment for learning

Observation: Note how students distinguish action from event. (See **PDF #1 Anecdotal Reporting Tool**).

Conversation: Ask students to articulate their objective and how it shaped movement. (See **PDF #1 Anecdotal Reporting Tool**).

Diagnostic (Product): Exit slip. Asks students to describe in one sentence the difference between event and action. (See **PDF # 2 Exit Slip**)



Action!

Teacher Notes

Remind students that conflict in drama is fictional, and tension should be created through clear objectives, tactics, and physical choices, not personal emotional triggers. Reiterate that the purpose of today's activities is to explore what Richard Rose calls, "the action in time and space" and to notice how meaning arises in the space between performers. Ensure students know they may opt for non-contact alternatives if needed.

Small Group > Introducing Action Through Improvisation

Divide students into groups of 3-4. Give every group the same event on a cue card (e.g., two people reach for the last muffin at a bakery). Assign each performer a secret objective (their action):

- a. *I must impress the other person.*
- b. *I must avoid conflict at all costs.*
- c. *I must get that muffin to bring home to my stressed-out sibling.*

Ask students to create a 30-40 second improvisation. **Prompt:** *Play the objective, not the idea. Let the action shape the space between you.*

Invite groups to share their improv scenes. After each scene, ask the audience:

- d. What was the event?
- e. What actions did you notice?
- f. How did conflicting objectives shape the space between performers?
- g. When did the story "live" in the space?

Key Questions for Discussion

How were different meanings created even though the event stayed the same?

How did the conflicting objectives produce action?

Where did the audience's attention go? To the actors? Or to the space between?

What happened when someone made a choice that didn't support the central action or story?

Extensions

- Replay one improv scene and introduce the phrase, "I have an idea!" (The big no-no from the video). Give one student a disruptive new idea ("Let's make this a sci-fi robot muffin") and ask the class to observe and report on the following questions:
 - How does it shift focus?
 - Does it serve or derail the action?
- Create a wall chart titled, "Action does not equal Event" with class generated examples.

Differentiation

Offer visual cue cards for objectives for students who benefit from reading rather than listening.

Provide a scripted version of the improvisation for students needing additional structure.

Allow students uncomfortable with performing to act as directors, coaching peers on tactics and spatial choices.

Assessment as and for learning:

Observation Checklist (**PDF #1**):

Is the student identifying an objective?

Is the student making physical/vocal choices that express action?

Does the student adjust behaviour when encountering another's objective?

Conversation:

Ask students to explain the difference between event and action in their own words.

Probe: *What tactic were you using when...?"*

Reflection:

Quick think-pair-share, or journal log: "Where did the action live in my group's improv?"

Small Group > Applying Rose to Scene Work

Explain to students that they will apply their learning from the video and their prior improvised activity to a more structured set up.

Create groups of 3-4. Provide each group with a short neutral script (e.g., 6-8 lines of everyday dialogue). Assign each actor a conflicting objective, such as:

- a. *I need their approval.*
- b. *I must hide something.*
- c. *I need to leave the room as soon as possible.*

Ask groups to rehearse this scene twice:

- d. Round One: Play the script without objectives (event only).
- e. Round Two: Play the script with objectives (action needed).

Invite groups present Round One and Round Two in that order back-to-back.

Key Questions for Discussion

How did the space between actors change when objectives were introduced?

Which choices clarified the story? Which distracted?

What did you notice about how conflict produces action?

How did playing objectives make the event more meaningful?



Extensions

- Students may revise their scene to enhance the clarity of action, focusing on:
 - Stronger tactics.
 - Clearer Stakes.
 - More intentional spatial relationships.
- Students create a floorplan diagram showing how the space changed between Round One and Round Two.

Differentiation

Provide tactile floor markers to help some students visualize spatial relationships such as spike tape, or props, or masking tape, or lighting, or bean bags etc. Place them in spaces to serve as markers (*“Go to the red tape, then to the green tape, then to the blue tape”*).

Allow written objectives for students who need time to process.

Encourage MLL students to focus on physical tactics rather than verbal nuance, and then encourage language choices to follow.

Assessment for learning:

Observation Checklist:

Are students able to adjust objectives mid-scene when encountering resistance?

Are students making choices that support a unified story? (See **PDF #4 - Quick Observation Checklist**)

Conversation:

Define “Action” in your own words.

Give one example of how you used the space between to tell the story. (See **PDF #4 - Quick Observation Checklist**)

Assessment of learning:

Product:

Assess the students’ understanding of the above learning goals through their performance of the Round One and Round Two scenes. Assessment is always individual based on individual evidence of content mastery. See **PDF #3 Richard Rose Scene Work Rubric**

Consolidation

Teacher Notes

Consolidation helps students to articulate what they learned from the explorations and connects their discoveries to Richard Rose's core concepts.

1. Action = movement through time and space.
2. Action arises from conflicting objectives.
3. Meaning is created in the space between.
4. "I have an idea" often disrupts coherence.

Ensure students have vocabulary support available. Perhaps this ends up on a chart on the wall, or marker board, or google classroom space.

The assessment tools provided are not mandatory for use. Please adjust as needed. Provided are enough tools for each assessment type, however, not all assessments offered in this lesson are necessary to collect comprehensive assessment data.

Whole Class > Guided Viewing and Analysis

Explain to students that they will review the Richard Rose interview and explore how their understanding has evolved since engaging in activities for exploration on the subject of Finding the Action. Specifically, they are to tune in to the following moment in the video when Rose speaks of the following:

- Action is what is happening in time and space.
- The audience reads the space between actors.
- "I have an idea" is the most dangerous phrase in theatre because it disrupts the unity of the story.

Ask student to take notes using three headings:

1. Action
2. Space Between
3. Ideas and Story

Key Questions for Discussion

How does Richard Rose describe "The Action" and why is it so difficult to define?

What does he say about the audience's relationship to the space between actors?

Why does, "I have an idea" sometimes cause problems in rehearsal?

What connections did you notice between the improvers and what Richard Rose describes?

End of lesson



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



Exit Slip

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. **In one clear sentence:**

What is the difference between an **event** and an **action** in theatre?

2. During *The Walk*, when the **action (objective)** changed, what changed first in **your body or use of space**?

☐ Movement ☐ Gaze ☐ Distance from others ☐ Pace ☐ Energy

3. Briefly explain:

4. Where did the story feel strongest today?

- ☐ Inside you
☐ In the space between you and others
☐ Both

Why?



Richard Rose Scene Work Rubric

Richard Rose – Action, Event & the Space Between

Student: _____ Date: _____

Action vs. Event

- ☐ Distinguishes event (*what happens*) from action (*what drives behaviour*)
- ☐ Behaviour changes when objective is introduced
- ☐ Can explain the difference when prompted

Objective & Conflict

- ☐ Pursues a clear objective
- ☐ Maintains objective through resistance
- ☐ Adjusts behaviour in response to others' objectives
- ☐ Allows conflict to generate action (doesn't rush resolution)

Physical & Spatial Choices

- ☐ Uses movement, gaze, pace, or proximity intentionally
- ☐ Space between actors reflects relationship/tension
- ☐ Physical choices motivated by action, not random

Ensemble Awareness

- ☐ Listens and responds moment-to-moment
- ☐ Choices support the shared story/action
- ☐ Avoids disruptive "new ideas" that derail coherence

Vocabulary (Emerging Use)

- ☐ Uses terms accurately (action, event, objective, conflict, space)
- ☐ Can name their own objective

Overall Snapshot (circle):



Action Understanding	Emerging	Developing	Clear
----------------------	----------	------------	-------

Spatial Storytelling	Emerging	Developing	Clear
----------------------	----------	------------	-------

Ensemble Coherence	Emerging	Developing	Clear
--------------------	----------	------------	-------

Notes / Next Steps:

Quick Observation Checklist

Richard Rose – Action, Event & the Space Between

Student: _____ Date: _____

Action vs. Event

- ☐ Distinguishes event (*what happens*) from action (*what drives behaviour*)
- ☐ Behaviour changes when objective is introduced
- ☐ Can explain the difference when prompted

Objective & Conflict

- ☐ Pursues a clear objective
- ☐ Maintains objective through resistance
- ☐ Adjusts behaviour in response to others' objectives
- ☐ Allows conflict to generate action (doesn't rush resolution)

Physical & Spatial Choices

- ☐ Uses movement, gaze, pace, or proximity intentionally
- ☐ Space between actors reflects relationship/tension
- ☐ Physical choices motivated by action, not random

Ensemble Awareness

- ☐ Listens and responds moment-to-moment
- ☐ Choices support the shared story/action
- ☐ Avoids disruptive "new ideas" that derail coherence

Vocabulary (Emerging Use)

- ☐ Uses terms accurately (action, event, objective, conflict, space)
- ☐ Can name their own objective

Overall Snapshot (circle):



Action Understanding	Emerging	Developing	Clear
----------------------	----------	------------	-------

Spatial Storytelling	Emerging	Developing	Clear
----------------------	----------	------------	-------

Ensemble Coherence	Emerging	Developing	Clear
--------------------	----------	------------	-------

Notes / Next Steps:
