



Expressions Learning Arts Academy

"Academic Excellence Enhanced by the Arts"

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Teaching Elementary Language Arts: A Dramatic Interpretation

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2002-03**

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Overview

Expressions Learning Arts Academy is a charter school in Gainesville, Florida dedicated to the premise that the arts, particularly the “performance arts”, are an integral and necessary component of primary education.

It is our firm belief that drama, music and movement are essential tools for instructing young people in academic subjects as well as promoting positive values and character development. The success of our approach is well documented.

The following unit that is described is an example of many that we use at Expressions. Here, a drama unit is introduced encouraging young students to enhance their reading, writing and math skills. There are, as with any drama experience, important life skills that are emphasized too. Please note also, that this unit can be used to educate a heterogeneous group of students with diverse learning skills.

The Unit

Goals

The ultimate result of this unit should be the performance of the play itself. Along the way this unit will increase vocabulary, enhance reading skills and exercise verbalization and writing skills. Also, graph and grid understanding is strengthened. In addition, the students are encouraged to cooperate, build self-esteem and empathy, develop a work ethic and lay the groundwork for self-discipline.

Objectives

1. Students will be familiarized with script reading, (including stage directions and character list.) Some students may learn phonetically or visually. Others may learn through aural repetition. Still others may learn via visual review after learning the script associated with stage movement.
2. Students will be exposed to and discuss new vocabulary words.
3. Students will develop and refine verbal skills through drama games, improvisation, and scripted rehearsal and performance.

4. Students will gain experience in creative, narrative writing by writing a character sketch.
5. Through the use of stage direction and charting, students will gain skills in interpreting graphs and two-dimensional grids.
6. Students will have the opportunity to experience the gratification of the culmination of cooperative, hard work. This is the performance of the play in front of peers, friends and parents.
7. Students will gain a better understanding of the “process” of theater. This understanding usually helps one appreciate theater throughout life.
8. The student will be encouraged by teachers and peers to develop self-discipline.

Lesson Plans

The first lessons should start with a warm-up and end with a game. There are several of each in the appendix. Later lessons involving run-throughs may not allow enough time for one or the other or both.

Warm-ups help the student to focus the mind and prepare the body and voice. Coordination, balance, awareness, cooperation, self-discipline and awareness are encouraged.

Games are just what they imply; fun. They can be used as rewards and are also intended to strengthen the actors’ specific techniques.

Lesson 1- Introduce Play

Start with an actor’s warm-up. (See appendix.)

The play is introduced to the class. The teacher gives a brief summary of the play then reads the play. The play should be read including stage directions and cast list. Leave time for questions by both teacher and students to ensure that students understand the play.

End with a game.

Words for the day:

Drama

Play

Actor

Audience

Cast

Evaluation:

Teacher observation based on class discussion.

Sunshine State Standards:

LAA.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2 LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, LA.E.1.2, LA.E.2.2

Lesson 2 – Play Process

Start with a warm-up.

Give a general outline of the process of preparing to perform the play and perhaps mention your schedule. Discuss casting, staging, rehearsal and performance.

End with game.

Words for the day:

Performance

Rehearsal

Evaluation:

Teacher evaluation based on Class discussion.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2 LA.D.1.2, LA.D2.2, LA.E1.2, LA.E.2.2

Lesson 3 – Pass Out Script

Start with warm-up.

Distribute copies of the script to each student. Instruct them to write their name on the copies. Assign parts for the reading of the script stressing that these are “reading parts” and are not permanently assigned parts. You may want to switch parts in mid-stream or, (if time permits,) read the script twice and reassign parts for the second reading. Always try to give parts, (in any exercise,) to students that are developmentally appropriate. Also, when any student reads, let them sound out the text before anyone helps. Emphasize in these readings that they are informal auditions and that your final casting decision is based on attitude as well as other criterion.

Collect scripts.

Words for the day:

Audition

Casting

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on class discussion.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.2.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, LA.E.1.2, LA.E.2.2

Lesson 4 – Part Requests

Warm-up.

Remind students that there are “no small parts; only small players,” and that they are all small.

Every actor tends to erroneously gauge their worth based on how many lines they are assigned. Nothing could be further from the truth. In my acting, directing and audience experience, many of the most memorable performances have been short and oh, so sweet.

Describe each character in the play and the duties that are inherent in their performance. Also, list and explain tech, and stage manager as possibilities. List all of the above on the blackboard.

Distribute blank pieces of paper and pencils. Request that each student write their name on the paper and then number 1 through 3 on their paper. The student should then list in order of preference what parts in the play they are most interested in. Give them the option of also writing you a note about any information that they would like to convey to you concerning the play.

Collect paper and scripts.

Drama Game.

Words of the day:

Good sportsmanship

Teamwork

Preference

Tech

Stage manager

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on written material and class discussion.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.B.1.2, LA.B.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.D.2.2, LA.E.1.2, LA.E.2.2

Lesson 5 – Assign Parts

Warm-up.

Distribute scripts.

Assign parts. Parts should be assigned based on teacher evaluation and student preference and performance. Stress the importance of all parts. Every stone in a wall is important and vital.

Instruct students to write the name of their respective character by their own name on the script.

Distribute highlighters. Read through the script. As you read through, instruct students to highlight their own lines.

Collect scripts.

Game.

Words of the day:

Read through

Character

Highlight

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on student participation.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, LA.E.1.2, LA. E.2.2, TH.A.1.2, TH.D.1.2

Lesson 6 - Blocking

Warm-up.

Explain stage direction.

Explain blocking/staging.

Show nine stage positions on board and then have each student demonstrate their understanding of the stage grid.

Game.

Words of the day:

Blocking

Staging
Stage right
Stage left
Center stage
Upstage
Downstage
Wings
Backstage
Off stage
On stage

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, MA.B.1.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.C.1.2, MA.C.3.2, SS.B.1.2

Lessons 7 to 11 - Staging

Warm-up when possible.

Stage the play in chronological increments. Staging should include entrances, exits and movements on stage. Scripts may be held and stage directions penciled in during this process.

Stress to your actors the importance of staying where the director last left them even if that means sitting down where they were last left until further instruction. Actors who are off stage during any part of this process should be provided with puzzles, reading matter or any other quiet individual activity. These activities should be forbidden on stage.

Remember that staging is supposed to inform the actor when to go where. Learning lines and character development come in the run-through process.

Staging is often tedious but is a good lesson in self discipline. Depending on the play, staging may take fewer or more lessons to accomplish. It is best to stage the play in the actual space where you will be performing the play.

Game when time permits.

Words of the day:

Focus
Entrance
Exit
Cross
Face front

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on student participation and discussion.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, MA.B.1.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.C.1.2, MA.C.3.2, SS.B.1.2

Lesson 12 – Run Throughs

Run through play to review blocking. Scripts may still be held.

Words of Day:

Run through.

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on class participation.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, MA.B.1.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.C.1.2, MA.C.3.2, SS.B.1.2

Lesson 13 – Character Sketches

Warm-up.

Instruct each student to write a character sketch about his or her respective character describing the life and experiences of that character prior to the play. The student may also write about what fate befalls the character after the play. Students who will not be on stage should be given the option of writing a character sketch about the play character of their choice.

Game.

Words of the day:

Character sketch

Biography

Evaluation

Written narrative composition.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.B.1.2, LA.B.2.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, LA.E.1.2, LA.E.2.2

Lesson 14 – Line Drills

Warm-up.

Distribute scripts.

Supervise a line drill. Read through script once or twice. Collect scripts.

Teacher stays “on book” for two or three more read-throughs.
(You may repeat this lesson during the rehearsal process as often as necessary to learn lines.)

Game.

Words of the day:

Line drill

Off book

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on class participation.

Sunshine State Standards

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, MA.B.1.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.C.1.2, MA.C.3.2, SS.B.1.2

Lessons 15 to 19 – Run Through with Props

Warm-up.

Run through the play as much as possible using props, sets and costumes. Try to do this with progressively fewer interruptions, closely resembling a performance. Rehearsal rules should be adhered to. No scripts allowed on stage. Director or a prompter should be on book and no other actors. Notes should be given by the director and stage manager after every run through.

Game.

Words of The Day:

Costume

Prop

Set

Stage rules

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on class participation.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, MA.B.1.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.C.1.2, MA.C.3.2, SS.B.1.2, TH.A.1.2, TH.A.2.2, TH.A.3.2, TH.D.1.2, TH.E.1.2

Lesson 20 – Dress Rehearsal

Warm-up.

Conduct a dress rehearsal. It is essential that this rehearsal be done in the

performance space and should resemble a performance in every way. Invite a group of students and teachers to watch. Audiences bring out the best in actors at all levels of experience. If possible, do more than one dress rehearsal.

After audience has left, give notes. Actors sit. Director gives constructive, specific suggestions and general encouragement. Allow time for actors' input.

Words for the day:

Notes

Project

Timing

Stay in character

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on class participation.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, MA.B.1.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.C.1.2, MA.C.3.2, SS.B.1.2, TH.A.1.2, TH.A.2.2, TH.A.3.2, TH.D.1.2, TH.E.1.2

Lesson 21 – Play Performance

Warm-up.

Perform the play.

This performance should take place during a time that is most convenient for parents to attend. More than one performance is preferable but not necessary. Teacher/Director should sit in front row center on book to help actors when they may become lost.

At this point, there is nothing wrong that actors can do on stage. When the play is over, give praise and accolades for a job well done. If a student mentions something that went wrong during a performance, mention how well they covered it. Post performance critique should be limited to positive comments and congratulatory hugs.

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation based on class participation.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.3.2, LA.D.1.2, LA.D.2.2, MA.B.1.2, MA.B.3.2, MA.C.1.2, MA.C.3.2, SS.B.1.2, TH.A.1.2, TH.A.2.2, TH.A.3.2, TH.D.1.2, TH.E.1.2

Appendix

Warm-ups

Relaxation and Focus

Make sure you have lots of room and that the floor is clean. Have the students lie on the floor on their backs and close their eyes. Students should have enough space between each other to move arms and legs without bumping into each other.

In a calm and soothing voice, instruct students to “breathe in slowly” and “breathe out slowly.” Repeat this instruction 6-10 times. Instruct students to continue breathing slowly and deeply. Suggest that when they exhale they are letting out “bad” feelings and thoughts of the day like fear and anger and that when they inhale they are bringing in “good” feelings of happiness and security.

With their eyes still closed, suggest they are on a beach lying in the sand. The temperature is just right. They can feel a nice ocean breeze. They can hear the waves rhythmically coming to shore and the sea gulls. Other children are playing far away on the beach.

Next, suggest that their bodies are hollow shells from the top of the head to the tip of the toes. They are surrounded by yellow. As they breathe in, they fill their hollow bodies with the yellow. The yellow outside next turns to orange. They then exhale all of the yellow and when inhaling replace the yellow with orange. Repeat this progression with red, then purple, then blue, then green then white. Take time with this portion of the exercise. As they fill their “hollow” bodies with new colors give them a few deep breaths to experience each color.

Next, suggest that all of the white air that surrounds them is very thick and heavy. It is so heavy that it is a struggle to move. Suggest that they try to move just a finger. Next, instruct them to move an arm, then a leg.

Then, instruct them to try to get up, even though it is extremely difficult.

Encourage them, telling them that it may be difficult but they are strong enough. When they have finally struggled up, have them reach around and try to move through this heavy space.

Then, have them manipulate this space by reaching all around them with their hands and gathering and compressing the heavy matter in front of them into one compressed block or ball. The ball is very heavy and when it is the size of a baseball is too heavy to hold and must be carefully placed on the ground.

It might be noted at this time, that this is an exercise done frequently with adult

actors. Adults often have a much more difficult time with using their imagination than children naturally do.

When the heavy ball or block has been placed on the floor, suggest that the actor move about the room feeling his or her new found freedom. Imagine they are moving through and on top of clouds.

Next, the floor is tiled with sticky tape. Every time any part of their body touches the floor it is stuck and it takes a great deal of force to move.

Finally, the floor becomes rubber and is very bouncy. Every time one walks or jumps they bounce higher and higher until they are tired and rest on the floor that has returned to normal.

Awakening and Working Together

1. Have everyone make a circle. Actors and leader stand in the circle.
2. Hold your right hand in front of you and instruct everyone else to do the same.
3. Rhythmically shake the hand ten times as everyone counts to ten aloud.
4. Repeat this with the left hand then the right foot then the left foot then the head.
5. Start with the right hand again but this time shake and count only to nine.
6. Shake and count the other hand and feet and head in the same order only taking nine counts.
7. Repeat this pattern again counting and shaking eight beats, then seven, then six and so on until you have counted down to one,

Tongue Twisters

While standing in the circle initiate repetition of tongue twisters such as “toy boat,” “unique New York,” “diaper baby,” “She sells seashells by the seashore.” “If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, how many peppers did Peter Piper pick?” Etc. Give actors a chance to contribute or invent their own tongue twisters and share them with the group.

Games

Group story

Have everyone sit in a circle. The leader stands and starts the first sentence or two of a story. As the leader walks around the circle, she puts her finger on someone's head. That person continues the story until the leader changes the story-teller by putting her finger on someone else's head. No one should contribute more than a few sentences and everyone should get an opportunity to talk. You may want to set guidelines by forbidding the use of certain words or inappropriate subject matter. Usually you wind up with a creative, interesting story.

This game promotes teamwork, verbal communication through projection, self-discipline and improvisational skills.

Grocery Store

1. Place two chairs on one side of the room or stage.
2. Direct all students to sit in the audience. The audience members are all judges. Select two students to begin a round. The two contestants stand on the opposite side of the stage from the chairs which represent shelves in a grocery store.
3. One at a time, the contestants move as quickly as possible, (usually they run,) to the "shelves" of the "grocery store." When they reach the "shelves," they must immediately call out an imaginary item that they are taking off the "shelf," For instance; they might call out, "Potatoes!" The contestants continue alternately taking "items" off of the "shelves" until one of them either repeats an "item" that has already been mentioned or the "item" they call out is not understood by one or more audience members.
4. When an audience member hears an "item" repeated or doesn't understand what a contestant calls out or feels that the contestant hesitated too long when she got to the "shelf," that audience member should immediately make a buzzer sound, (A sound that you might hear in television game shows when you answer a question incorrectly.)
5. When one or more audience members buzz a contestant, the round stops and the buzzer must explain why he buzzed. In case of discrepancies, the teacher is the final judge. If the reason for buzzing is that the audience member did not understand the contestant, then no matter how subjective, the judge's buzz is final.
6. When a contestant is buzzed, he must rejoin the audience and a new challenger is selected from the audience.
7. In each round, the contestants may begin again with "items" so that you may repeat "items" from previous rounds.
8. Then you may decide to play advanced grocery store. In the advanced version, no "item" may be repeated for the whole game.
9. This game emphasizes projection, thinking fast on one's feet, focus, memory and good sportsmanship.

Blank Slate

1. The students sit in the audience.
2. One audience member is selected to come on stage and face the audience. This actor must stand emotionless, motionless, and expressionless with arms at side staring straight ahead.
3. Another actor is selected and goes on stage. The second actor is given one minute, (timed by another audience member,) to make the first actor move or change facial expression. The second actor is not permitted to touch the first actor or make him flinch through the use of threatened bodily harm.
4. If the first actor moves, except for eye blinking, the second successful actor takes her place on stage as the new "blank slate." If the second actor is not successful in moving the "blank slate" in one minute then he must sit and let another audience member try.
5. This game strengthens self control and develops improvisation skills.

Stage Directions

Back of stage

Upstage right	Upstage center	Upstage left
Center right	Center Stage	Center left
Downstage right	Downstage Center	Downstage left

Audience

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