

Summer 2019

# A Trauma-Informed Devised Theater Curriculum

Christopher Michael

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_cp](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Michael, Christopher, "A Trauma-Informed Devised Theater Curriculum" (2019). *School of Education Student Capstone Projects*. 340.  
[https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_cp/340](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp/340)

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at DigitalCommons@Hamline. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Education Student Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Hamline. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@hamline.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@hamline.edu), [wstraub01@hamline.edu](mailto:wstraub01@hamline.edu), [modea02@hamline.edu](mailto:modea02@hamline.edu).

A TRAUMA-INFORMED CURRICULUM FOR DEvised THEATER

by

Christopher Michael

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

August, 2019

Capstone Project Facilitator(s):  
Content Expert: Crystal Spring  
Peer Reviewer: Hilde DeNoma

## PROJECT SUMMARY

This project was developed to answer the question *how can a high school theater curriculum be designed that is sensitive to the needs of trauma survivors and engages them as resistant learners?* It is a purposefully, loosely designed curriculum that allows a high school theater teacher to adapt it to their approach to pedagogy, but specifically to meet the needs of students who are survivors of trauma. It serves as more of a road map for an eight week exploration of devised theater, which culminates in a final ensemble performance developed by the students.

The curriculum is framed by the Understand by Design (UbD) (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) model of development, wherein the assessments are considered first. UbD provides a logical process to plan for all the seemingly random activities of devised theater. Activities such as mirroring or space walk become more poignant when they are planned in conjunction with a specific outcome, rather than just practicing them to get acquainted with one another or developing focus, which is generally their functions.

Though this curriculum could be used without any frame of reference, it is helpful to have a deep understanding of trauma and its impact on students before applying. The activities and processes were selected to engage these students and doing so without this understanding could prove detrimental to its success. In order to use this curriculum, the

teacher has to be aware that it provides no answers. This is not a one-size-fits-all plan that will result in instant success. The teacher using it has to do some leg work. This design is deliberate because as no two classrooms are the same, neither are any two trauma survivors. The project is a plea to understand and encourages the user to reflect on what is most necessary as they plan their daily lessons.

This curriculum also includes breathing exercises prescribed by experts in the field of healing from trauma. It is essential to be aware when working with survivors of trauma that many of the reflection exercises can trigger negative memories and emotions. The teacher using this curriculum for this purpose should work closely with the school psychologist, case managers, and any other personnel involved with the mental well-being of the participants. This is not dangerous work, but it does require a considerable amount of care to execute correctly.

## **Trauma-Informed Devised Theater Curriculum**

### **Objectives**

Students will be able to (SWBAT) collaborate as an ensemble to create and perform an original theatrical work using vocal and/or physical theater techniques and reflect upon the impact devised theater has on the participants and the audience.

### **Assessments Used**

Prior knowledge assessments are ungraded, but can be used as a marker for measuring student development of concepts and ideas. There are three types of summative assessments that will be used repeatedly throughout the curriculum -- written text, performance evaluation, and reflection. Not all summative assessments need to be graded. There are three types of formative assessments that work well, which include journal entries, self and peer evaluations, and research presentations. Use these assessments to inform you of student understanding.

### **Why this Curriculum?**

The exercises in this curriculum were specifically selected for trauma-informed differentiation. They include breathing, meditation, reflection, and self-expression, and are intended to be slowly scaffolded based on the needs of the students. There is no “one size fits all” approach to working with survivors of trauma. Use this curriculum as a road map, not a mandate. Specific rubrics and worksheets are not included here purposefully.

### **How to Use**

The curriculum is built around the main assessments for each unit. For each assessment, I include the main objective of the unit, what types of summative assessments can be used, the basic processes for completing the assessments, ideas for scaffolding and differentiating the work, and then finally, some suggested activities that fit into the unit. Spread the processes out as necessary for your class. Many of them can be done in one class period, but it might be prudent to spread them out for students who are trauma survivors and are new to theater. Following the assessments is a list of all the recommended activities along with their descriptions and uses. Choose the ones that work for you and build them into your daily lessons. Use some of your own as well. There is no one way to teach this curriculum. This curriculum merely provides guidance for tailoring it to your students’ specific needs and your teaching style.

### **Portfolios and Journals**

Students should keep a portfolio of all written work in the classroom and any rubrics as well. A journal (physical or online) kept in the classroom is also ideal for

formative assessments and their own self-reflection. Give regular writing prompts about the lessons and activities.

### **Attendance**

Students should be able to make up missed assessments in one of three ways: written work can be submitted anytime, performance work can either be reperformed with the group, or a solo performance of the written material (in some cases that might mean reading it aloud), reflection work can be submitted anytime after the written and/or performance work is completed.

### **Guest Artists**

Whenever possible, bring in guest artists to work with the students, particularly those who represent them demographically. Have guest artists who can perform and teach relative to the lessons. The curriculum can be taught without them, but the value of guest artists is priceless and will go a long way toward increasing engagement.

### **Breath Work**

Many of these breathing exercises can be inserted almost anywhere throughout a lesson. The quicker exercises might be great to throw in during partner exercises or before starting a new task. The more complicated exercises are great for starting and ending class, or when the students have lost focus. The goal with this work is to create a habit for the students, so structuring use should have purpose and be meaningful for the students and not just done to do it.

#### **Elevator Breath**

Raise an arm while slowly inhaling. Lower it when exhaling.

#### **Four-for-Four (Irreducible Grace Foundation)**

Inhale for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale for four seconds.

#### **Rose/Candle**

Pantomime smelling a rose, then blowing out a candle.

#### **Sigh**

Deep inhale, vocalize exhale.

#### **Prayer Breath (Irreducible Grace Foundation)**

Place palms together, fingers forward in front of chest, inhale while moving hands forward, exhale while moving them back. Point fingers upward, inhale while raising them overhead, exhale while lowering them.

### **Activities**

The activities listed here were selected based on student-responses in a specific classroom. Others were tried to little or no success. Some of these took several attempts before the students responded to them well. Some of them were successful for a couple of days and then the students lost interest. Use whatever works until it does not. Give some activities a second or even third chance before deciding it does not work. Use activities repeatedly and with variations that work for your students and/or lesson.

Wherever possible, I noted the primary source of the activities. This does not necessarily mean that that person created the exercise, but it is where I learned it, either in

person, indirectly from other instructors, or by reading about it and trying it out. I also included a list of benefits the activities provide. It is not comprehensive, but gives some guidance in purposefully selecting activities.

### **Community-Building/Warm-Up/Games**

**Ask My Neighbor (Spolin variant)** - *eye contact, awareness, energy, non-verbal*

Students stand or sit in a circle. One person is “it” and goes around the circle asking a question of each person while making eye contact. Questions can be anything the person wants, but the answer is always “ask my neighbor.” It continues around the circle in this fashion while the members of the circle silently attempt to switch places with each other. Players should communicate non-verbally before switching. If it gets someone’s spot, then that person becomes the new It.

**Cat and Mouse (Boal)** - *awareness, energy, physical contact*

One student is the cat, another is the mouse. If the cat catches the mouse, the mouse becomes the cat and vice versa. All other students link arms in pairs. The mouse can link arms with one person in the pair. When they do, the other person must unlink and become the mouse.

**Elevens** - *awareness, non-verbal, problem-solving*

Divide students into an even amount of small groups. Designate one student as the caller for each group. The caller gives a one, two, three, shoot count then everyone, without speaking, puts out any number of fingers they wish. The goal is for the entire number of fingers thrown to equal eleven. They keep doing this until they are successful. When two groups are successful, have them join up and designate a new caller. Keep joining groups until the whole class is together. The whole class must throw a total of eleven fingers to be successful.

**Follow the Leader** - *awareness, observation*

One person, the guesser, leaves the room. The rest of the class stands in a circle and designates a leader. The leader starts a movement that everyone copies. The guesser comes back in. The leader secretly changes the movements that everyone copies and the guesser gets three attempts to guess who the leader is.

**Group Juggle** - *memory, awareness, coordination, focus*

Students stand in a circle. One student starts with a ball. They say a person’s name and throw it to them. That person picks a different person and so on until the last person has only the first person to throw it to. Next, they repeat the pattern silently. After a round or two, add a second ball, and then a third. Keep adding as long as the students are successful.

**Keepie-Uppie** - *awareness, cooperation, communication, energy*

Use a ball or balloon and have the students stand in a circle. Working together, they attempt to keep the ball in the air by hitting it with their hand, foot, etc. Keep count of the number of contacts students made with the ball. If it hits the ground, they have to start over. Apply restrictions if necessary, such as they can not hit the ball twice in a row, or they must say their own name before they hit the ball.

**Missiles w/Eye Contact (Frantic Assembly)** - *memory, awareness, eye contact*

Students stand in a circle. Pick one student to start as person A. They make eye contact with someone across the circle (person B) and move toward them. Person B must

say person A's name before breaking eye contact and moving toward another person C. It continues like this until movement is fluid and names can be removed altogether, leaving only eye contact.

**Student Request** - Play any game that is requested by the students.

### **Trust Work**

Guidelines for trust work:

- Sharing is voluntary.
- Give time for thought before sharing.
- Share with a partner first.
- Ask, don't tell.
- Always ungraded.

**3-Part Handshake** - *physical contact, collaboration*

With a partner, create a 3-part handshake to share with the class.

**Eye Contact** - *eye contact, focus*

Students are asked to make eye contact with a partner for a specified period of time. This is a silent activity. Start with 10 seconds the first time you use this, and build over each use. Instruct the students that this is not a staring contest, blinking is okay. Coach them to relax their jaws to prevent laughter, take it seriously, stay focused. Ask for verbal reflections the first few times.

**Partner Share** - *listening, responding*

With a partner, share details about yourself based on a prompt. Example prompts include a time you got in trouble, the best day of your life, a very bad day, your biggest pet peeve. Designate a speaker and a listener. The listener should be able to share what they heard from the speaker. In building trust, the person who shared the story must give permission to share out to the larger group.

**Space Walk** - *listening, responding, awareness*

Students walk around the room, exploring the space in the context of given directions. This could be any variant on speed (slow motion/fast), direction (backward, sideways), level (leading with forehead/crawling, emotion, situation (late for bus/lost in woods)). This is also a good time use more breathing techniques, quiet reflection, and meditation. For an extensive list of space walks check out Boal (1992).

**Storytelling (Rohd)** - *communicating, listening, responding*

Students partner up and tell each other a story. It should be a story they are comfortable with and have a beginning, middle, and end. Discuss the connection between storytelling and theater.

**(Variation)**

Have students choose one of their stories and connect with two other students. Have them decide on one of the chosen stories to act out. The storyteller narrates while the rest of the group performs the actions described.

### **Ensemble-Building**

**Complete the Image (Boal)** - *physical contact, observation, reflection*

Have two students shake hands and freeze mid-shake. Have the rest of the students analyze what the image could mean. Next, have a different student step in for



one of the others and change the image. This could be another handshake or a completely different response, but the image should remain frozen. Have the rest of the students analyze the meaning and relationship of the image. Next have the students pair off and freeze in mid-handshake. Then they alternate changing the image and creating new relationships. If there is an odd number of students, make one the “joker” who can go and add a chair or object to a partnership, be a third person, or switch someone out.

**Copy Freeze/Counter Freeze (Mandell) - *low risk, observation***

Without speaking, students walk the space. Instruct them to freeze in an image at random and wait for someone to copy them. They break away from each other whenever it “feels right.” Coach the students to use facial expressions as well. For counter freeze, have students freeze in a random image the same way, but they stay frozen until someone creates an image that responds to theirs rather than copies it.

**Ensemble Movement (Graczyk) - *nonverbal communication, collaboration, awareness***

Without speaking, students have to form a circle, a triangle, a straight line, a curved line, as called out by the teacher.

**Ensemble Shift (Graczyk) - *nonverbal communication, collaboration, awareness***

Review the different movement qualities. Instruct the students that they have to think of three that they want to do. Introduce this as their Movement Phrase (write it on whiteboard). Have students perform in groups of six, introducing ensemble shift. All students walk actor neutral in unison to downstage then perform their movement in place. Use bell to announce the shift. When they shift again, they walk actor neutral back to the center line. Try adding circle shift, triangle shift, etc.

**Solo/Join (Graczyk) - *nonverbal communication, collaboration, awareness***

Number actors on stage from one to six. Actor one begins their movement phrase. Call two to join, doing their own movement phrase, then three, and so on. Remove actors one at a time starting at one and going to six. Experiment with ensemble shape when all six are acting their phrase.

**Solo/Solo Replay (Graczyk) - *nonverbal communication, collaboration***

Number actors on stage from one to six. Actor one performs their movement phrase solo. When they stop, all other actors perform what they thought they saw actor one do. Repeat the process for all actors on stage. The final assessment here is about the students being clear about their own movements, but also responding to the movements of others.

## **Creating**

**Fill-in-the-Blanks (Mandell) - *brainstorming, introspection, reflection***

Give students some sentence starters and ask them to fill in the blanks for each of them. Some examples are:

*Let me tell you why...*

*Once I saw...*

*If I could...*

*You know what makes me mad?*

*Some people...*

*You have to understand...*

After sharing with partners or the class, students select their favorite (theirs or someone else's) to create a monologue with, using it as the first line. If the students have characters, encourage them to try to think and write like that character. Encourage them to be honest and detailed.

**Objectives/Obstacles Improv (Mandell)** - *low risk, nonverbal communication*

Students create a short, silent moment that includes a character, a clear objective, and an obstacle such as an old man wants to open his pill bottle but his arthritis hurts his hands, or a kid wants to put on shoes that don't fit. Remind students to define their character, objective, and obstacle through specific movement.

**Shift, Through, Round (Frantic Assembly)** - *collaboration, physical contact*

Working in threes, students create a movement piece using three simple commands. Shift-physically moving someone from one place to another, Through-passing through a space created by the other two people, Round-turning someone around or going around them. Give the students a final objective or obstacles to overcome. Have them add facial expressions, emotions, movement qualities, or even characters.

**Slashwrite (Mandell)** - *brainstorming, introspection, reflection*

Use music or images to evoke emotions and ideas, or select a topic. Have the students generate a complete first sentence through some sort of prompt, such as "how did this music make you feel?" Now, using the last word or few words of that sentence, they write a new sentence. They continue on in this manner until they have five or more lines, then have them find a way to end it.

Example: *The music made me feel relaxed/relaxed and comfortable after such a crazy day/a crazy day where everyone had me on edge/on edge because I feel like I can't trust nobody/nobody better mess with me now that I'm relaxed.*

**Somebody Wanted, But, So, Then** - *accessibility, collaboration, problem-solving*

Students tell a story by creating a character "Somebody," their objective "Wanted," the conflict "But," the tactics "So," and then the resolution "Then." This is story structure in its simplest form and is meant to be used as the building blocks for creating more complex story structures. Have students trade stories and revise them by changing any or all of the elements, but keeping the "Wanted" the same. Explore how changing characters will redefine the objective (ie- a drug addict wanting drugs versus a straight A student), which can create interesting variants on the same theme.

**Revelations (Boal)** - *observation, reflection, focus*

Students find a partner and decide on a close relationship to play (parent/child, boss/employee, etc.) Determine who is who, where they will meet, and their ages. The two characters meet and begin a conversation. It helps to give the students a simple situation or topic to start with. Give them a few moments to improvise the conversation then ask one of them to make a shocking revelation (these can be determined before or in the spur of the moment) that the other person now has to react to. Keep the scene going and then have the second person make a shocking revelation. Let the scene continue and then ask for one of the characters to find a natural way to leave the scene.

**(Mandell variant)** - Students are in groups of three. Two of them are adults talking about something important, the third is a child who is being ignored by the

adults. The child keeps trying to get the adults' attention until the time is right for the child to reveal something shocking to them. The adults now have to respond to the child.

## **Revising**

### **Trigger Scripts (Mandell variant) - *collaboration, problem-solving***

A trigger script is a short piece of dialogue between two or three characters that can be spoken by any character in countless situations. For example:

*Character A: So what happened last night?*

*Character B: I don't want to talk about it.*

*Character A: C'mon, you can tell me.*

*Character B: I really don't think I should.*

Hand out several different scripts. Students partner of and determine who, where, when of the scene and rehearse it. Then they perform it for the class. Next, one person rotates from each group to the next, the scripts stay where they are. This time, they add a couple lines of dialogue to the script, rehearse and perform. Continue until everyone has rotated full circle. Reflect on how things changed working with different people. Ask how the scenes changed or had to be revised with each new person.

### **Wake-Up Ritual (Mandell) - *self-reflection, nonverbal communication***

Through some form of meditation, have students visualize their morning routine, recalling everything they have done and felt from the time they woke up until now. Ask some guiding questions throughout the meditation. Students create a starting position that represents the moment they woke up. Give them four minutes to act out their day, trying to focus on the main events and emotions rather than the specific details. Coach students to stay in their own space and move quickly from each activity. Have them do it again, but this time they only have two minutes. Have them replace specific details with symbolic gestures and movements, while maintaining the emotions. Repeat again, but now they have forty-five seconds, and then reduce it all to three representative gestures. Have each student perform for the class, then lead everyone in a group performance of it.

## **Performing**

### **Character Study - *reflection, observation***

Students are asked to identify someone they admire. Without naming them, have them write down traits of this person. What are their strengths and weaknesses? What are their physical traits? Have students visualize that person then ask them to space walk acting out this person based on specific questions. How does this person move through space? How do they sit in a chair, or get up and down from the floor? How do they greet other people? What are they doing when they are at work? What might they be doing at home? Have this person interact with someone else. Without saying who you are, have a conversation. Ask each other questions, but do not try to guess who it is. Just observe.

Next, repeat the entire exercise, but instead, identify someone they despise. Avoid the obvious and choose someone that nobody else might. It is vital that no names are mentioned and that no physical traits are portrayed mockingly. Try to really be this person genuinely, as this is a practice in empathy. Reflect on how you communicated the traits of these people. Which one was more fun to portray? Did you learn anything about yourself or someone else through this exercise?

**Movement Qualities-Abstract (Graczyk) - *nonverbal communication, observation***

Six actors on stage to demonstrate movement qualities from the following list:

- Size:
  - Superhero: You are a superhero. Be as big as you can be
  - Mini-Me: you are the smallest you can be
- Weight:
  - Cement shoes: You are wearing cement shoes, you need help from your hands to move your legs.
  - Moonwalk: You are walking on the moon and nearly weightless
- Shape:
  - Robot: you are a robot and move mechanically
  - Wet Noodle: your bones are wet noodles
- Space:
  - Trapped in a Box: You are stuck inside a box and cannot get out.
  - Top/Bottom Shelf: Everything is just out of reach and you need to grab it.

**Living Sculptures (Mandell) - *physical contact, cooperation, observation***

Students get into groups three to five. One student is the sculptor and is given a topic. The sculptor must create an image using the other group members. They may either show them how they wish them to pose or if they have permission to touch them, they can shape them. The sculptor should also be in the image. Groups take turns viewing each sculpture, during which time, the teacher gently taps on of the performers' shoulders. That performer says one word, or one line of what their character is thinking. Experiment with having them repeating the line or word, adding a movement, turning them on and off like switches.

**Paint the Fence (Mandell) - *awareness, observation, cooperation, empathy***

Four performers take the stage. Each is given a different character or emotion to portray, then they are given a task to pantomime, such as painting a fence. Coach the performers to interact with each other. After about a minute, have them all switch one character or emotion to the right (so that each of them gets a chance to perform each trait) and give them a new activity.

**Park Bench/Bus Stop - *nonverbal communication, improvisation, observation***

Place a bench at center stage. Person A can be given a character, emotion, situation, or all three, and sits on the bench. Person B is something different and enters the scene, sits. Nothing is spoken. The two share a moment in silence, then person A leaves. Continue switching new people in and out. Be creative and determine relationships, recent history, or have the students come up with their own ideas. For example, maybe Person A's mom is sick and person B has been having a great day. How would they interact? Then when person A leaves, person C enters and they were just in a fight. How would they interact with person B? This process should create a series of vignettes that are low risk for the participants.

**Pass the Object - *object permanence, observation***

Students stand in a circle. One person decides on an imaginary object to pass. The students must attempt to maintain object permanence as it is passed along. For example,

if the object is a bowling ball, its size and weight should be apparent from person to person. Likewise if the object is a feather.

### **Assessments**

**Assessment 1 - Safe Space** (1 - 3 days based on how much scaffolding is needed. If this is their very first encounter with theater in general, breaking this down into smaller pieces is a good way to establish the process, practice it at a slow rate, and then eventually place more demands on it.)

**Objective:** SWBAT identify what it means to maintain a positive, safe space in the classroom through the collaborative creation of a short ensemble theatrical piece.

**Assessments:** Written text (5 written thoughts), Performance (present piece as a group), Reflection (orally or written, journal entry).

**Process:** Class discussion to define “Safe Space” and its importance to creating community, building trust, and enabling creativity/communication (Prior Knowledge).

Students individually write five thoughts about safe space and what it means to them (Assessment).

Students select one line as their favorite.

Students get into groups of five (can be varied).

Students share their favorite line with each other, then put them in a logical order to create a “poem” (note on the use of the word “poem”--students tend to hear this word and think they need to have rhyme and meter. Avoid using the term “poem” as much as possible and clarify that rhyming and other poetic devices are welcome, but unnecessary).

Students collaborate to add some group physicality to support each line. This can be quite challenging for students and might require a lot of modeling/coaching.

Students rehearse, then perform (Assessment).

Students do an oral or written reflection on the piece created (Assessment).

#### **Scaffolding/Differentiation:**

Written Text: Some students might require short answer prompts for their thoughts.

Performance: Have students rehearse their one line using a variety of different individual and group exercises. Have students trade lines and develop movements for each other to experience collaborative creation.

Reflection: Turn/talk share, journal prompts, group discussion.

#### **Recommended Activities:**

Trust Work: Space Walk, Partner Share

Community-Building: Keepie-Uppie, Group Juggle (anything with a ball garners more participation early on)

Ensemble-Building: Copy Freeze/Counter Freeze

**Assessment 2 - Movement** (Spend at least a week working with moving in silence. Far too often, students become nothing more than talking heads in created pieces when not enough attention is given to creating movement. Provide opportunity to practice creating smaller movement pieces before having the students build their assessment piece.)

**Objective:** SWBAT create an ensemble piece based solely on communicating through movement.

**Assessments:** Written Work (create a worksheet on qualities of movement), Performance (create a performance rubric), Reflection

**Process:** Using Space Walk, students explore different qualities of movement (abstract) - size, weight, shape, space (Prior Knowledge).

Using Space Walk, students explore different qualities of movement (situational) - late for work, just in a fight, lost in the woods, someone stole your money (Prior Knowledge).

Pair students up and have them each come up with a topic that is meaningful to them and why. Students share with each other, then select one of the topics.

Have the pairs pair up and share the two selected topics.

The four students create a physical image based on each topic. Coach them to use levels (blocks and platforms are helpful).

Create specific movements to shift between topics.

Select a spokesperson for each topic. That person explains the image and the reason for its selection.

Revise the two topics by adding movement to them, creating a living portrait.

Perform the revised piece without words or explanation (assessment).

Have students comment on what they see in each piece. There are no wrong answers.

Write a written reflection on how we communicate through movement (assessment).

**Recommended Activities:**

Trust Work: Space Walk, Partner Share

Community-Building: Cat and Mouse, Follow the Leader

Ensemble-Building: Complete the Image, Ensemble Movement, Ensemble Shift, Solo/Join, Solo//Solo Replay

Creating: Shift-Through-Round, Objectives/Obstacles Improv

Revising: Wake-Up Ritual

Performing: Park Bench/Bus Stop

**Scaffolding/Differentiation:**

Written work: Differentiate the complexity of the worksheet to meet student needs.

Performance: Students with physical impairments can include their impairment in the work since the movement qualities would still affect them in some way. There is opportunity for students to problem-solve for inclusion.

Reflection: Turn/talk share, journal prompts, group discussion. Have students express their reflection through silent movement only.

**Assessment 3 - Character** (Spend a lot of time playing with character. Give the students opportunities to create more than one to choose from. Find activities where they can practice being their character, including doing some of the basic warm-ups this way.)

**Objective:** SWBAT create an original character using movement and voice different from their own.

**Assessments:** Written Text (Character Development Sheet, Performance, Reflection)

**Process:** Have students identify actors they like and the numerous characters they have portrayed (prior knowledge).

Make a short list of a couple examples then discuss the characters' physical and vocal traits versus the actors themselves.

Use the Character Study activity to get the students practicing new character traits.

Students stand in a circle and think of a negative line they hear every day from a parent, a teacher, a boss.

Turn out from the circle and rehearse being this person saying this line with a physical movement.

Turn back in, then each person performs their line. The entire circle repeats each performance in unison.

Students get in pairs or threes and create scenes built around one of their lines. The scene should define who, what, and where.

Students rehearse and perform scenes.

Reflect, then have students think about a character they would like to portray. Encourage them to choose something real (not a superhero or horror villain). Sometimes it is easiest to start with an occupation and then ask a series of questions (create a worksheet for assessment).

Give students a variety of activities to practice their characters before asking for a final assessment.

Use any improvisation activity to assess their performance.

Do a written reflection or a partnered evaluation of each other's work.

**Recommended Activities:**

Trust Work: Space Walk, Partner Share, Storytelling

Community-Building: Ask My Neighbor, Missiles w/Eye Contact (using characters)

Creating - Revelations

Performing - Objectives/Obstacles Improv, Paint the Fence

**Scaffolding/Differentiation:**

Written work: Tailor character sheets to the abilities of your students. Some can do with simple heading prompts such as "Background," while some students might need full questions to answer in order to develop their character.

Performance: Evaluate performance in the context in which they seem most comfortable, such as performing in a scene with others, or doing some solo work. The important thing is to provide opportunities for the students to bring their characters to life in more ways than one.

Reflection: Have students evaluate themselves and each other by commenting on things they noticed, what they know about the character they saw, etc. There are also a number of processes here on which they can reflect.

**Assessment 4 - Monologue** (Take about three week overlapping with Assessment 3.)

**Objective:** SWBAT create and perform a monologue based off previously generated characters.

**Assessments:** Written text (Monologue), Performance, Reflection

**Process:** Define monologue. Introduce objectives/obstacles and tactics.

Show examples of monologues from popular movies and analyze them for objectives/obstacles and tactics.

Give students example monologues to perform and analyze them for objectives/obstacles and tactics as well.

Students brainstorm ideas for monologues based on character background, story ideas, anecdotes--anything they can think of.

Do improvisation games using the characters. Experiment with putting them in different relationships and contexts and ask students to reflect in character about each of them.

Use monologue creation exercises such as Fill-in-the-Blanks and Slashwrite to get students writing.

Students should have a completed written monologue in which they can identify the character's objective, obstacles, and tactics.

Rehearse and perform.

Reflect on things they have learned about their characters.

**Recommended Activities:**

Trust Work: Partner Share

Community-Building: Ask My Neighbor, Elevens

Creating: Fill-in-the-Blanks, Slashwrite

Performing: Park Bench/Bus Stop, Living Sculptures

**Scaffolding/Differentiation:**

Written text: Students who struggle with writing can do voice recordings or use transcription software. Get students talking about their characters if they have trouble being in character or give them a worksheet with a series of questions about the character's life.

Performance: Students can perform privately or be on script if need be, but ideally they should have it memorized and perform in front of their classmates.

Reflection: Make this character a reflection about their character.

**Assessment 5 - Dialogue** (Beginning teaching for this assessment once students start activities that require theatrical dialogue).

**Objective:** SWBAT create and perform a short script of dialogue between two or three characters based on a developed theme.

**Assessments:** Written script, Performance, Reflection

**Process:** Define dialogue.

Introduce blank scripts (see *Trigger Scripts*).

Students get in groups of two or three, each with a Trigger Script. They rehearse and perform the script.

Students switch partners and create line to continue the script. They rehearse and perform. Do this as many times as possible.

Students select any of the trigger scripts to continue and write a two-page scene incorporating (and even changing) the original text.

Students rehearse and perform their scripts.

**Recommended Activities:**



Trust Work: Partner Share, Eye Contact

Community-Building: Cat and Mouse, Ask My Neighbor

Revising: Trigger Scripts

**Scaffolding/Differentiation:**

Written script: Students can create their own scripts from scratch. Reduce the amount of lines required for students who struggle with writing, or pair students with differentiated purpose.

Performance: Scripts can be in hand or memorized (the latter is always recommended).

Reflection: Turn/talk share, journal prompts, group discussion.

**Assessment 6 - Plot/Theme**

**Objective:** SWBAT create a short script for their created characters using story, plot, and message to inform the beginning, middle, and end of the piece.

**Assessments:** Written Text (Objectives/Obstacles Worksheet/Script), Performance, Reflection

**Process:** Students pair up and take turns telling stories. Some good topics are: a time you got in trouble, the best day of your life, the worst day of your life. Have listeners retell the story they heard.

Teach objectives/obstacles, stasis/intrusion.

Have students identify these concepts using a current popular film (recommend *Avengers: End Game*).

Students get into groups of two or three (two works best).

Groups select a topic that is socially relevant (some students purposefully attempt to do the mundane; don't let them).

Using their previously developed characters, they create a simple short scene using the plot mechanism Somebody Wanted, But, So, Then.

Students rehearse and perform their scenes.

Students receive feedback from other students.

Students identify objectives/obstacles, stasis/intrusion in their own work.

Teach theme/variation.

Have students identify these concepts using a current popular film (recommend *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*).

Groups trade scenes and create a variation on the theme (change either the But, So, or Then, or all of them. The Somebody's change with the characters, but the Wanted should always remain the same).

Revise, rehearse, perform.

Students identify theme/variation in their own or others' work.

Final reflection.

**Recommended Activities:**

Creating: Somebody Wanted But So Then, Objectives/Obstacles Improv

Revising: Trigger Scripts

**Scaffolding/Differentiation:**

Written Text: Challenge the students to create a more complicated script by combining groups and having multiple objectives/obstacles.

Performance: Students can have scripts in hand or memorize for their final performance (the latter is always recommended).

Reflection: Turn/talk share, journal prompts, group discussion.

**Assessment 7 - Final Production** (Try to allow for at least two weeks of revision and rehearsal time. Attendance at the end of the school year can prove to be challenging, so it is essential to find ways of getting students committed to the final performance early on. Ensemble members should also be prepared for anything, and with enough practice, they should be able to overcome any situation that arises.)

**Objective:** SWBAT create or revise from previous work, rehearse, and perform an ensemble production for an audience.

**Assessments:** Written script, Performance, Final Reflection

**Process:** Plan to bring in an audience on a specific date. This could be family or friends, classmates or teachers. The students should know about this performance from the very beginning.

By now, students should have characters, monologues, and many scenes they have created and rehearsed. Now it is time to synthesize their work under a unifying theme, or they can create something entirely new. The play should be an ensemble piece or series of vignettes built around a theme.

Spend some time synthesizing pieces starting around Assessment 3. Find ways to put characters together that sparks new and interesting ideas and make sure students record things in their portfolios and journals.

Pay attention to the class and see what topics and themes keep coming up that are relevant to them. During Assessment 4 and on, keep helping students narrow down topics and themes. This should go well if they have been revising previous written works and performances to use for later ones.

Run students through the rehearsal process repeatedly.

Get tech help from technical theater and art classes.

Perform the show.

Reflect.

**Scaffolding/Differentiation:**

Written text: The final script is an entire class effort. Students should be graded according to their contributions as ensemble members. It is quite possible that some students float by without having done any written work, but it can be assumed that any actions or personal lines they speak are part of their contribution to the final piece. Give the benefit of the doubt if the student is actually engaged in the final performance.

Performance: Evaluate on engagement rather than performance qualities, unless a well-structured rubric is provided and the performance qualities on it were taught and reinforced throughout the class.

Reflection: The students should reflect on how the work they created affects them as performers and their audience. They should consider how this work fits into the context of their community. An audience question and answer session and some follow-up group discussion could facilitate this reflection. Have a cast party afterward.

## REFERENCES

- Boal, A. (1992). *Games for actors and non-actors* / Augusto Boal ; translated by Adrian Jackson. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Graczyk, Beth (n.d.). Beth Graczyk. Retrieved from <http://www.bethgraczyk.com/>
- Mandell, J., & Wolf, J. (2003). *Acting, learning and change : Creating original plays with adolescents* / Jan Mandell and Jennifer Lynn Wolf ; foreword by Shirley Brice Heath. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Rohd, M., & Hope is Vital. (1998). *Theatre for community, conflict & dialogue : The hope is vital training manual* / Michael Rohd. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Spolin, V. (1986). *Theater games for the classroom : a teacher's handbook* / Viola Spolin; edited by Arthur Morey, Mary Ann Brandt. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Wiggins, McTighe, & McTighe, Jay. (2011). *The understanding by design guide to creating high-quality units*. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD.