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Los Angeles Unified School District  
Arts Education Branch, Arts Program  
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## **THEATRE**

### **LESSON ONE: INTRODUCTION / CONTACT**

#### **California State Standards:**

- 1.0 Artistic Perception: Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Theatre
- 2.0 Creative Expression: Creating, Performing, and Participating in Theatre
- 3.0 Historical and Cultural Context
- 4.0 Aesthetic Valuing
- 5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

**Teacher:** To use basic theatre vocabulary and implement methods for introducing theater to students in the classroom. To introduce and practice pantomime with the students.

**Students:** Students theatrically express themselves using body, voice, and imagination. Students learn the concept of pantomime and practice using it in various ways.

#### **Vocabulary:**

voice, body, imagination, pantomime, emotion, comedy, tragedy, articulators, detail, sequence, focus, ensemble

#### **WARM UPS:**

##### **Body:**

Each student creates his or her own imaginary apple tree to stand under. With legs a forearm distance apart, feet parallel, breathe in as you raise both arms from the sides up to the "tree." With both arms in the air, reach for apples hanging just beyond the fingers, first on the right, then left, repeat, then successfully "pick" an apple in each hand, take them down to the sides with straight arms, feeling the weight of the "apples" in both hands. Now, bend both knees slightly, then roll down the spine, head first, and put the apples in an imaginary basket at your feet. Roll up, and repeat. This specifically stretches the sides of the ribcage.

Breathe in as you raise both arms from the sides. When they are straight up in the air, lace the fingers and push up to the ceiling. Then bend knees slightly as you contract and form your body in the shape of a "C." Push forward gently first on the right, then the left, and repeat. This specifically opens and stretches the back of the ribcage. Send the laced fingers up to the ceiling again. Breathe in, and on the exhale open the arms wide and bring them down slowly to the back - this opens and stretches the front of the ribcage. This sequence can be repeated. This can also be done in a seated position in the classroom.

##### **Voice:**

Educational objectives: 1) to enhance students' ability to create and shape sound

2) to increase students' understanding of how sound is created and shaped into language

A good vocal warm-up prepares a student to focus on and improve two elements of vocal communication: volume and articulation. A second grade student summed up these goals by saying, "You have to be heard, and you have to be clear."

**VOLUME (projection):** Creating a context for sound makes it easier for students to raise their voices with conviction. Always set a goal that can be met with the production of sound or speech. Whenever possible, establish whom students are communicating with, how far the sound has to travel to be heard, and why it's important to have the message delivered and received. With few exceptions, these exercises can be done in a sitting position, or standing behind a chair in a classroom.

**Suggestion:** An imaginary friend is across the room walking away. You must stop her to tell her something important. Call out using the sound "Hey" to stop your friend. Try it again, this time prolonging the sound and sending it out to your friend through your arm (first one, then the other, then both together)

**ARTICULATION:** After a physical warm-up and an exercise focusing on vocal production and volume, I tell students it's time to warm up their articulators, *the parts they move inside their mouth to shape the sounds their vocal chords make.*

**Suggestion:** An exercise that focuses on strengthening articulators uses the back of the tongue, the front, or tip, of the tongue, and the lips to create all three voiced plosive sounds. Introduce one sound at a time: guh (back of tongue), duh (front of tongue), buh (lips). Put two together: "guh duh", and then "buh duh". Then, put them all together: "guh duh buh duh" or "buh duh guh duh." Use these sound combinations to deliver messages varying inflection, attitude, and intensity.

Work the articulators in these three positions without the vocal chords. The three unvoiced plosive sounds are kuh (back of tongue), tuh (front of tongue), and puh (lips). Sometimes it is easier for students to experience the movement of their articulators on these sounds, using breath without the vocal chords. Work up to "kuh tuh puh tuh." Remind students that this exercise is to strengthen their awareness and use of articulators, and that they should not try to be loud or use tension to make these unvoiced sounds.

### **Imagination:**

My classroom chalkboard includes a picture of the two masks of drama, with "comedy" and "tragedy" written under them, and the word "emotion" written above. Reference to "virtual masks" grows and changes from class to class. They become a side-coaching tool for reading aloud in the classroom, and creation of character.

Sitting in a circle, I introduce the masks by asking students if they have ever seen this combination of two masks; we briefly discuss their experiences with these masks, and the emotions they represent. Then, with our imaginations open, I ask students to look at the huge pile of imaginary masks in front of each of them. I ask them to "look" for their comedy mask,

and we each begin searching through the pile of imaginary masks in front of us. I say "I found mine!" and soon there is a chorus of "I found mine" and everyone is holding an imaginary comedy mask. I ask what it is made of, what color, what shape. I tell the students that on a count of three, we will put on our comedy mask, and freeze it on our faces. When this is done, I quickly move around the circle, acknowledging their facial mask "creations," and then I ask everyone to take off their masks and hold them in their hands once again. This is repeated with the tragedy mask, and other suggested emotion masks.

Getting rid of the imaginary mask is part of the fun. I use several different methods, including:

- 1) We let the mask grow wings, and on a count of three, it flies away
- 2) We scrunch it up into a very tiny ball, and we throw it out the window, or over our shoulder
- 3) We fold it up, and put it in our pocket
- 4) We turn it into a pile of sand, and put our thumbprint in it
- 5) We turn it into a balloon, carefully blow it up, put a knot in it, and bounce it around the room (This is a great way to move out of the warm-up circle and begin a walkabout)

### **RULES OF THEATRE CLASS:**

Work in space bubbles (no touching, pushing, shoving, or running)  
No pretend weapons or fighting of any kind  
Respect the freeze (always have two solid points of balance)  
Respect each other's ideas  
Always try

### **Creative Expression:**

Introduction of Pantomime:

- Using our bodies and imaginations, but not our voice, to bring stories to life
- Pretending something is there when it's not
- Silent acting

We talk about how pantomime is a very powerful form of storytelling, because the way we move and hold our bodies gives messages all the time, even when we are not using our voices to communicate. We talk about how, sometimes, our body language can give a very different message than our words, and how we use both to relate to others.

We talk about how we used pantomime to search for our masks. We learn that the order of life is LOOK – MOVE – SPEAK. We experience the world through our senses, then because of what we have sensed our body engages, and only then does our body react followed by speech. In pantomime, however, we only have our bodies to tell our tale, so we must be very clear about the order in which we do things (SEQUENCE) and be sure we include lots of believable DETAIL (the tiny truths that tell the tale). The most important place to look on a human being for details is the face, followed by the hands. We talk about how ADJECTIVES and ADVERBS supply the details in stories, whether we are writing them down, visualizing them as we read, or acting them out with our bodies.

While still sitting in a circle on the floor (or at our desks in the classroom) we begin by imagining a wall in front of us close enough to touch, but we can't touch it until we make some decisions: what is it made of, what does it feel like, what is it's purpose, what would it feel like if we touched it (hot rough, cold, sticky, greasy, etc.). When we know what our wall is like, only then do we put one hand on it, then the other, and in silence we feel the entire wall, which turns out to be the inside of a box! But we're in luck – we find a magic door and silently push it open on a count of three, reacting with relief with our bodies and faces to the resolution of the conflict (the heart of any good story). We create, step into, and examine the inside of our space bubbles, and use them to walk around in the magic space (the floor where we cannot touch each other or anything real). We begin a WALKABOUT (moving through the magic space to explore character or setting, visualizing and reacting to our pretend surroundings). Depending on the day, we might move through cherry Jell-O, over hot rocks, through feathers, through giant marshmallows looking for a ping-pong ball, across a squeaky floor trying not to wake the baby, through a narrow tunnel, over sand at the beach, in a parade. We are testing and enhancing our ability to “freeze” and be quiet in our bodies and our voices on two solid feet in an instant; this skill is necessary for transitioning from one activity to another, to be able to benefit from side coaching without breaking focus, and for safety.

#### MY FRIEND HENRY

This is a pretend friend / pantomime game I often use to engage students in the pursuit of realistic sequence and detail through pantomime. It is also a way to “officially” bequeath the gift of pantomime skills to the teacher and the entire classroom. The most common questions I am asked as I walk through schools, by Kindergarteners and sixth graders alike, are about “Henry,” about how my part of “Henry” is doing on any given day, and if he's still eating too many Cheerios.

As we finish our walkabout, and chant back and forth to each other as an ensemble what we have learned about pantomime, I am suddenly interrupted by a whole lot of noise behind the chalkboard (or under the classroom teacher's desk, or in a closet) that nobody can hear but me. I suddenly realize what's going on, and have everybody sit back in a circle criss-cross, or return to their desks. I tell them I'll handle the problem, but when I get to the place where Henry is (out of view of the class) Henry is behaving very badly, tossing pretend Cheerios, standing on his head, pulling me behind the chalkboard, etc.). The class tries to correct the behavior of this unseen nuisance (“Two solid feet” and “No more Cheerios” in unison) and, with everyone on their best behavior to show him how it's done, I finally bring “Henry” out. Everyone says hello, but he's grumpy; he will only cheer up if they turn him into a noun, but not just any kind of noun; Henry wants to be turned into a THING by using him – focusing our eyes, moving our bodies, our fingers and thumbs, responding with our facial expressions as if we had the real thing in our hands and we were using it. I demonstrate, and we pass Henry around without touching (he's very heavy). We take turns turning Henry into a thing, and the rest of the class looks at the details and sequence of the movement so they can guess what thing Henry has turned into. If it's hard to figure out, I ask, “What is Henry in your hands,” and sometimes we all use that “thing” together to find the logical sequence of actions and the details. We always want to know what we are using this thing FOR. When our class time is up, Henry is no longer grumpy; in fact, he wants to do his magic trick of splitting himself in two so that the classroom teacher can proudly

carry him back to the classroom. My part of Henry says good-bye, goes back behind the chalkboard, and gets busy again with the pretend Cheerios.

I always emphasize the fact that "Henry" is a pretend / pantomime GAME we can play to help us identify sequence and detail in the activities of life. Henry has a great time. In some classes he goes home each weekend with a different student, who writes a short essay to share with the class on Monday about his weekend adventures. Henry comes out for vocabulary words, and across the curriculum to help students experience and identify logical sequence and believable, rich detail.

There are other ways of individually exploring detail and sequence through pantomime. Take pretend things out of a magic box or off a magic shelf to use, or out of a pretend pocket with a pretend flap.

#### Pantomime Rubric:

Are my eyes focused? Did I see the details of my pretend objects before I moved my body?  
Does my sequence – the order I'm doing things – make sense?  
Are my pretend things between my audience and myself?  
Do I always have my balance?  
Am I always silent?  
Am I wearing my emotion masks?  
Am I using as many of my five senses as possible to experience my pretend objects and surroundings (settings)?

#### Journal Prompt:

Draw a picture of the thing you turned Henry into, or would like to turn Henry into. Write a paragraph describing what you did with your body to bring this thing to life using pantomime. Be sure to include where your eyes were focused, and what you did with your hands. We will share two or three of these journal entries at the beginning of the next class.

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## **THEATRE: PANTOMIME LESSON TWO**

### California State Standards:

- 1.0 Artistic Perception: Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Theatre
- 2.0 Creative Expression: Creating, Performing, and Participating in Theatre
- 3.0 Historical and Cultural Context
- 4.0 Aesthetic Valuing
- 5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications

### **THREE TOOLS OF THE ACTOR: VOICE, BODY, IMAGINATION**

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

Teacher: To review individual use of pantomime, and begin to tell pantomime stories in pairs and groups in order to illustrate:

- The beginning, middle, and end of stories
- Cause & effect, action & reaction
- The importance of sequence and detail
- Ensemble work (people working together in cooperation)

Students: To use their bodies and imaginations to:

- create a shared reality with one or more people through silent communication
- respond to imaginary details created by themselves and others
- silently accomplish a task one step at a time in an order that makes sense

#### **Story Vocabulary:**

Character, dialogue, objective, motivation, conflict, plot climax, setting

#### **WARM UPS:**

##### **Body:**

Review pantomime skills (silent acting, pretending something is there when it's not) by using the puppet warm-up found in the Warm-Up – Body and Voice document. Practice keeping your balance, and having *two solid feet* on the ground. Pay attention to action / reaction as you move as a result of the pretend marionette strings being pulled.

##### **Voice:**

Review the two things we require whenever we use our voice. We need to be:

- *loud* enough to be *heard*
- *clear* enough to be *understood*

Practice being loud enough using vowel sounds with expression, and moving up and down the range of your voice by trilling your tongue on an "internal elevator." Practice being clear enough using consonant warm-ups. Review the plosive sounds, and, if the class is ready, move on to one or two pairs of fricative sounds.

### **Imagination:**

Review the comedy and tragedy masks, and this time allow the masks to walk you around the room, being careful to stay inside of the individual space bubbles. Try on a variety of emotion masks, and wear them to accomplish the same pantomime task, or speak the same line of dialogue. Notice changes in rhythm, posture, energy, etc. (see Virtual Mask Work document for guidance)

### **CREATIVE EXPRESSION:**

Create an audience and a stage to allow two or three students to share their journal entries from the last lesson. This enables everyone to review that experience together as everyone learns effective ways to present in front of people. We practice keeping the focus on our faces by keeping the rest of the body from making random movements, and moving only to support our message. We learn how to hold a book or paper to read from so that our hands are solid and our face is visible, and we wear our emotion masks to bring expression, enthusiasm, intention, and focus to our work:

#### **AM I:**

- Loud enough to be heard?
- Clear enough to be understood?
- Standing on two solid feet?
- Holding my journal steady?
- Facing the audience?
- Wearing my emotion masks?

Review individual use of pantomime by having everyone pantomime brushing their teeth. What do you do first? Where do your eyes go? Ask everyone to find out if they included the right details in the correct order when they brush their teeth that night, and then to turn away from their sinks, and all the real things they use to brush their teeth, and pantomime brushing their teeth again. Did detail and sequence improve and become closer to life? What changed?

Now divide the class into pairs and explore action / reaction, cause / effect by using pantomime to play ball. Partners must create a shared reality and "keep their eye on the ball" when it's in the air between them in pantomime to keep it alive. Have the pairs pantomime moving a heavy table, folding sheets, playing tug of war (a rope is not a rubber band), etc. Allow some teams to perform for the rest of the class.

Divide the class into four or five groups, and have each group pantomime the story of a shared activity with a beginning, middle, and an end (making dinner or sandwiches, planting a garden, painting a doghouse, etc.) Make sure there is a conflict in the story, and that everyone is working together realistically and in silence.

Have each group perform their stories for the rest of the class. Evaluate the performances together with a rubric appropriate for group pantomime:

- Are my eyes focused? Did I see the details of my pretend objects before I moved my body?
- Is my body language "open to the audience?"
- Are my pretend things between the audience and myself so they can see my face and hands?
- Is my group working in cooperation and successfully using action / reaction to get the job done?
- Has my group created an interesting stage picture with low, middle, and high levels, responsive to each other?
- Are we silent?
- Are we wearing emotion masks as we respond to images?
- Are we using as many of our five senses as possible to experience pretend objects and surroundings?
- Are we fully responding to the conflict in our story?

Try to focus on only three or four aspects of successful pantomime in the beginning, and ask for more specific detail and sequential activity as the students become more confident and sophisticated in their work.

### **RULES OF THEATRE CLASS**

Work in space bubbles      Respect the freeze      Respect each other's ideas      Always try

### **JOURNAL PROMPT:**

**Students can write about the challenges they faced bringing a pantomime story to life in a group, and how those problems were solved. Another choice would be to write a detailed, sequential account of their part in the group story.**

## THEATRE: TABLEAU

### California State Standards:

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### THREE TOOLS OF THE ACTOR: VOICE, BODY, IMAGINATION

#### OBJECTIVES:

Teacher: To introduce and practice tableau with the students. To use tableau to illustrate:

- the beginning, middle, and end of stories
- a sequence of events
- vocabulary words
- what is happening at any given moment in a story

Students: To use their bodies and imaginations to:

- create tableau pictures by themselves and in groups
- create silent shapes caught in the middle of action with expression, or “emotion masks”
- create physical shapes that illustrate captions or dialogue bubbles

#### WARM UPS:

##### Body:

Review pantomime skills (silent acting, pretending something is there when it's not) by climbing a rope hand over hand, touching the ceiling, then climbing down again. Practice always keeping *two solid feet* on the ground. (see Vocal Warm-Up – Body and Voice document for guidance)

##### Voice:

Review the two things we require whenever we use our voice. We need to be:

- *loud* enough to be *heard*
- *clear* enough to be *understood*

Practice being loud enough using vowel sounds with expression. Practice being clear enough using consonant warm-ups, or a line of dialogue using different “emotion masks” (see Vocal Warm-Up – Body and Voice document, and Virtual Mask Work document for guidance)

## CREATIVE EXPRESSION:

Introduce the concept of tableau (French for “silent picture”) as a powerful way to create a message, or a moment in a story. Discuss the power of body language, and the saying “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Talk about metaphor, and the way everything about our physical presence gives messages to others, even when we are not moving. Demonstrate how the smallest change – the bend of a knee, the position of a thumb, the focus of the eyes – delivers a different message.

- Create a tableau *with two solid feet on the ground, in a steady position, with expression, caught in the middle of action* and have the class guess the message in a complete sentence. Ask students to create a tableau and continue the guessing game, and try out each other’s tableau pictures.
- Ask class to spread out in the magic space (where they can’t touch each other or anything real). Have class freeze in tableau illustrating various messages, for example:

Where in the world have you been?

I’m so glad to see you!

Look out, here it comes!

Don’t ever do that again!

Oh, no, not again!

Don’t wake the baby!

Ask students to find a partner, and use improvisation to have the pairs form action / reaction tableau pictures (one partner forms a tableau, and the other partner immediately forms a tableau in response). Perform some of these tableau pictures for the class, and create a caption and dialogue bubbles for them.

- Demonstrate creating a tableau for the beginning, middle and end of a story with the classroom teacher, using the story of *Little Miss Muffet*.
- Divide the class into groups, and assign a nursery rhyme or fairy tale story to each group to bring to life with three tableau pictures, depicting the beginning, middle, and end of the story. The groups can also create tableau pictures to tell the story of the beginning, middle, and end of an activity (don’t forget to include a conflict that must be solved one way or another – the heart of any good story).
- Perform the stories and evaluate together with a rubric appropriate for tableau:
  - Can the audience see my eyes and my face?
  - Is my body language “open to the audience”?

- Am I on two solid feet, or do I have at least two solid points of balance on the floor so I can remain still and focused?
- Am I using an “emotion mask” for each tableau picture?
- Is my tableau picture caught in the middle of action?
- Has my group created an interesting stage picture with low, middle, and high levels, responsive to each other?
- Does my tableau picture give a message that supports the story?

Many tableau pictures that effectively tell a story catch the action at the *moment of response* to a circumstance, or to an image, real or imagined.

### RULES OF THEATRE CLASS

Work in space bubbles      Respect the freeze      Respect each other’s ideas      Always try

### JOURNAL PROMPT:

Draw yourself in each of the three tableau pictures you created to tell your story. Write the message of your tableau in a complete sentence in a dialogue bubble, or as a caption underneath each picture. What did you like best about telling a story through tableau pictures? What was the biggest challenge?

**Tableau can inspire a variety of classroom activities. Research the history of body language in different cultures and different eras in history; compare and contrast with body language in our own cultures, and in contemporary times. Create bulletin boards by taking pictures of classroom tableau pictures illustrating any number of significant moments in a story a class is reading, or in the life of a famous person, or in a scientific process. Display them, in sequence, with captions and / or dialogue bubbles. Remember to use complete sentence to convey your messages.**

**\* Use tableau pictures to begin and end pantomime stories and improvisations. Make connections between the different forms of theatre to more effectively and creatively bring stories to life.**