

LESSON PLAN

By Jennifer Ridgway

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Title: Improvisation: Who and the Character Profile			
Course: Winter	Week: 6	Session: 3	Time: 40 minutes
Standards: TH:Cr1.1c Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grade 6c. Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work. ● Grade 7c. Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character’s inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work. ● Grade 8c. Develop a scripted or improvised character by articulating the character’s inner thoughts, objectives, and motivations in a drama/theatre work. 			
Essential Question: What questions can you answer to create a character?			
Theatre Elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Storytelling/Communication ● Exploration/Research/Improvisation ● Conflict/Relationship 		Theatre Principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acting ● Writing 	
Vocabulary to be Introduced in Lesson: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relationship ● Character Profile 		Prior Knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tableau ● Transformation ● Pantomime ● Participated in “Mirrors” 	
Materials and Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Freeing the Natural Voice by Kristin Linklater ● Improvisation for the Theater by Viola Spolin ● Theatre Games for the Classroom by Viola Spolin ● “Who Am I?”, Spolin Games: https://spolingamesonline.org/who-am-i-group-game/ 			

PROCEDURE
CLASS AND SPACE PREPARATION
Stage Manager Name(s) listed. Chart paper and 5 markers in each corner of the room with a piece of painters’ tape for posting the Rules of Improvisation on the wall. Clipboards are prepped for each student to take Player Feedback, which will be collected at the end of class. Prepare a box of hats, gloves, scarves, robes and other clothing accessories for each corner of the room. About ten objects in each box.
SPARKING INTEREST (5 minutes)
(1-5 minutes) OPENING RITUAL – JOURNAL WRITING: Make a list of "who's" for improvisations. Five occupations. Five relationships. Five emotions. How unique and unusual can your lists be.
WARM UPS (5-15 minutes)
(1-3 minutes) BODY – GROUP JUMPS: Students stand in a circle and jump at the same time. SAY: Now it is time to open and develop our proprioception, our senses of force, effort and heaviness. Stand on the balls of your feet. Here we will be awake, aware and alert. We can call this Leqoc’s Alert

state. But we are also present and, in the moment, or in the game. “Dans le Jeu!” Thinking about our team. Without talking or anyone indicating or leading, simultaneously we will execute a high jump. We will jump as high as possible, tucking our feet under our buttocks, and then land in the same instant, bending our knees on the balls of our feet, with as little noise as possible. Let’s begin.

SIDECOACH: Breathe. Awake, aware and alert. Stay present. Dans le jeu.

ACTION: Repeat several times inviting the group to tune and hone.

(2-3 minutes) VOICE – THROAT:

Looking at Chapter 9 of Kristin Linklater’s *Freeing the Natural Voice*, invite students to open up the highway or channel for breath and sound to escape the throat.

SAY: We know the breath and voice travels up the spine, and today we will open up the throat. There is a hard turn that the breath and voice in the throat must make before the sound can enter the mouth.

ACTION: Flip between modeling and narrating this next section.

SAY: First let me model. Lengthen the front of your neck. Keeping the back of your neck lifted and engaged. Glide your shoulders down your back. Open your mouth having a loose jaw. Your tongue and lower jaw forward, and the soft palate and skull are on the back of the body. There is now a straight highway for the breath or sound to exit. Engaging the solar plexus to release the breath or sound. Sigh out a whispered “haaaa.” It should feel good. Imagine this sound is like a geyser exploding onto the ceiling.

Lifting your head with the back of your neck, your head floats on top of your spine. Lower jaw and tongue are dropped, and relaxed, and soft palate and skull lifted. Visualize that highway for breath and sound to exit. Engage the solar plexus to release the breath or sound. Sign out a whispered “huuuuh.”

SIDE COACH: It may help to visualize a color. Paint the ceiling the color blue with your geyser. Paint the opposing wall blue. Paint the person standing across from you blue.

ACTION: Have students experiment with this exercise on their own several times.

(3-5 minutes) IMAGINATION – LEQOC 7 LEVELS OF TENSION:

ACTION: Display the 7 Levels of Tension in the space.

SAY: Find a space of your own to work through Jacques Leqoc’s 7 Levels of Tension. Find a space of your own without talking or making eye contact with others. Settle into the space. Roll your shoulders. Do a few arm circles. Find yourself in actor’s neutral and notice your breathe.

SAY: Now starting with Catatonic. You are exhausted. There is no tension in your body. Everything is immobile. Muscles are loose and controlled movement is difficult. You are like a jellyfish.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

SIDECOACH: What can you do with no muscle tension?

SAY: Next level is Laid Back or Relaxed. Start walking around the room using your own pathway. Walk cool like Californian style. Give little energy.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

SIDECOACH: Remember you are not talking or contacting others.

SAY: Now moving into Neutral. Here you exert the right amount of energy for each task. You are not concerned by the past or future. You are efficient in your movements. Stay present. Stay aware. But don’t respond. You have no emotional connection or history. No past disappointments or future worries. It is. You are as blank as a piece of paper in all your movements.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

SAY: Now we move into being Alert. Here you notice. You are curious, but indecisive.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

SAY: Now let’s move into Suspense. Here you have tension throughout the body and voice, and you are reactive. You are ready to respond to something. But what? You are full of questions. Where is it? What is it? When is it? Why? Who? A bomb in the room? There is a crisis. We can tell we see it all over your face

and body. You breathe heavily. You don't have full awareness as your body is tense and tuned out to awareness.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

SAY: Now move into Passionate. Something happened. An explosion. A mouse in the cupboard. An unexpected and loud knock at the door. You respond to the action with explosive emotions. Your body is extremely tense. You are angry because you didn't like it. Now fearful, what will happen next. Now confused, how, why did this happen? Then sad, then maybe even gleeful.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

SIDECOACH: Remember to stay within our space. Stay in your own space. No talking.

SAY: Let's move onto the final level, Tragic. Here you are petrified. There is a bomb and no time to overcome the many obstacles in your way. The body is in solid tension.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

SAY: Let's return to level 4, alert. You are on the balls on your feet, curious and noticing. Arrive to a standing circle. Notice your group.

ACTION: Allow students about 10-40 seconds to experiment.

ALTERNATE OR SUPPLEMENTARY WARM UP (1-3 minutes)

FLOCKING: Students face the same direction and stand in a clump/group. Students should be able to move without touching a neighbor. Begin with you as the leader.

SAY: I will move at a pace that is easy for you to follow me. As in mirrors, repeat my movements as closely as possible. We are now in a clump so you may not always see my movement, and you must now begin to rely on everyone in the group to inform each other of the movements and changes.

ACTION: Lead the group and then shift the group to a new leader by turning to your right or left. The person who is at the head of that line of vision takes on the leadership role.

SIDE-COACH: Leader, follow your impulses. How are you saying, "Yes, and" as you participate in this exercise? Mirror as closely as possible. Stay with the leader and the group. Consider different levels – low, medium, high. Play with different rhythms. Play with different shapes. There is a new leader as you change directions. Seamless transitions between leaders. Find yourself in the middle and find yourself on the outside of the group. Challenge yourself to change your position. Keep your eyes up. Focus on the change that is happening.

CHALLENGE: Introduce music to underscore the exercise and/or half the class can participate while the other class is audience.

TRANSITION (1 minute)

MAKING GROUPS OF 10:

ACTION: Turn of the music.

SAY: Now leave the group and walk around the space finding your own pathway. In a moment, I will call out a number. When you hear the number, everyone responds by standing in a group of that size. This is a silent activity.

SIDECOACH: Stay alert. Always present. If you are not needed to create a group, stand boldly in your own space. Minimize the response time to create the group. How can you speed up the task of creating groups?

ACTION: Try this several times. 5, 2, 7, 6. After each formation, return to walking the space. End in groups of 5 (or appropriate number for your class size).

REVIEW IMPROVISATION RULES: (5 minutes)

ACTION: Provide each group a piece of paper and pencil.

SAY: We've explored the rules of improvisation. This is a silent activity. When I say go, your group will move to the corner that is closest to your group. You will sit in a circle. Each group member will write two rules on the chart paper located in the corner. Be patient. Work together. You can use your bodies to physicalize rules, if your team members need support. When you have all 10 on paper, post them on the wall with the painters' tape. Ready, set, go!

DEEPENING INQUIRY AND CONSTRUCTING UNDERSTANDINGS (15 minutes)

(3-5 minutes) NEW YORK (LEMONADE) - SPOLIN: Create two simultaneous games with four teams.
SAY: You may have played this game before. The two teams on this side of the room will each decide on an occupation to act out. Then announce their selves to their opposing team with, "Here we come." The opposing team will respond, "Where from?" First team responds, "New York." Opposing team, "What's your trade?" First team, "Lemonade." Second team, "Give us some." As the lines are said the first team walks as close as they desire or dare to the other group, and then begins to act out their occupation. The opposing team calls out what they see and guess the trade. When the job is guessed correctly, the first team runs home before they are tagged. All who are captured join the other team. Then it is the other team's turn.
SIDECOACH: Show, don't tell.
ACTION: Have students practice the dialogue a few times before they begin. The dialogue should be energized and set flight to the game.
REFLECTION: What helped you to understand the occupation the other team was acting out?

(5 minutes) CHARACTER MUSICAL CHAIRS:

SAY: Let's consider how clothing and objects help us to identify character. When I say go without talking, your group will return to their corner and investigate the box of clothing accessories there. Each member will identify one piece and put it on and return to our group circle as the character who wears it. As you arrive to the circle, consider who you are, where you are going and what you do. These things make you tick! How does the costume piece change the way you use your body and demonstrate your energy? You will have 30 seconds to complete this task. Questions? Ready, set, go!
SIDECOACH: Follow your impulses. Choose an object without much thinking. Own the object as you discover this new character.
ACTION: Choose 3-5 characters to share three facts about themselves. One fact should be their name.
SIDECOACH: Stay committed to your character.
ACTION: Have students turn to a partner. Partners should share three facts with each other. Next, standing in a circle, have students take off their selected clothing accessory and set it on the floor. Participants move to items to their right. Everyone is to pick up the accessory now in front of them. Put on the accessory and discover this new character. This character will have a new identify, completely different from the identity the person who originally selected the accessory. Choose 3-5 characters to share three facts about themselves. Then have students turn to a partner.
REFLECT: What kind of information was revealed in the facts that were shared about the characters? How might that information help an audience understand who a character is? What other information might be useful to create a character?

(3 minutes) PLAYWRIGHTING:

SAY: These facts of information help us to understand and reveal character. We are going create lists of questions to help build Character Profiles quickly in the future. When I say go, return your costume pieces back to the boxes in your group corners. In your groups, think like a playwright and an actor. Using the back of the improvisation rules chart, write as many questions you can think of that a playwright and an actor should answer to create a character. Label the questions Character Profile! Ready, set, go?
ACTION: Post these questions in the space for future improvisation classes. Students can continue to add to the charts and use the charts to more fully realize characters in scenes.

ACKNOWLEDGING AND ASSESSING UNDERSTANDINGS

(1 minute) CLOSING RITUAL – PASS THE BAH:

This exercise is similar to pass a clap. Students stand in a circle in actor's neutral.
SAY: We will pass a bah. I will turn to the person on my right and say "bah."

ACTION: As you say “bah,” simultaneously move hands from shoulders to fronts of legs by bending the elbow.

SAY: S/he will then turn to their neighbor and pass the word and motion of “bah.” It will continue around the circle in a rhythmic, fast pulse.

SAY: When “bah” goes around the circle several times, the leader will turn to the inside of the circle, breathe, everyone follows. Then a final closing “bah” is completed in unison into the circle.

SIDECOACH: Eye contact! Listen and respond. An action leads to a reaction.

CHALLENGE: As sessions continue and students grasp the exercise, add on one new challenge per class.

Bah can go both directions depending on the decision of the receiver as s/he sends it off.

The receiver can decide to have a shining moment by performing a half turn as they “bah,” followed by another half turn “bah” before turning to either neighbor with a sending “bah.”

The receiver can decide to engage the community by turning into the circle with a “bah.” The circle responds by turning into the circle and executing a “bah” in unison with a small jump/bounce.

ASSESSMENT: Using a prepared clipboard, students will take feedback notes like a director and give the feedback to peers, at appropriate times. This feedback sheet is collected at the end of class.

STUDENT REFLECTION: Students complete an artistic habit of the mind reflection starter of their choice.

TEACHER REFLECTION: Describe student progress. Was theatre vocabulary used? What evidence is there that the students enjoyed the lesson? What modifications were made, or challenges were noticed? What would you do differently next time?

Player Feedback Form
By Jennifer Ridgway

Student Name:

Date:

Were the characters audible? If not, what might you say?

What information did you learn about each character playing?

When was the moment you realized the player understood who they were?

How did all players stay engaged in what was happening in the scene?

When were clues given? How might you encourage players to not drop clues?