

Title: How to Read a Play: Understanding and Implementing Methods on Script Analysis

Grade: High School

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Lesson Outcomes

After this unit, students will be able to effectively analyze scripts, which is essential to moving forward in understanding theatre. Students will develop an understanding for David Ball's method for analyzing scripts and apply it to 10- minute plays, and, eventually, to plays they read in their acting and technical classes as well. Students will develop their literacy skills through reading a full-length play and 10-minute plays, as well as discussing it with their peers and instructor in the classroom, accurately identifying key points and themes within their given play. Through class discussions, large-group and solo reading, small-group activities, students will cultivate new ideas about how to read a play and that there is a purpose behind every word and moment within a given script. Students will be assessed by their participation in group discussions and their individual performance with analyzing a 10-minute play.

Objectives for Unit:

By the end of this unit, students will be able to effectively analyze scripts. Students will develop an understanding for David Ball's method for analyzing scripts and apply it to 10-minute plays, and, eventually, to plays they read in their acting and technical classes as well. Students will develop their literacy skills through reading a full-length play and 10-minute plays, as well as discussing it with their peers and instructor in the classroom, accurately identifying key points and themes within their given play. Through class discussions, large-group and solo reading, small-group activities, students will cultivate new ideas about how to read a play and that there is a purpose behind every word and moment within a given script. Students will be assessed by their participation in group discussions and their individual performance with analyzing a 10-minute play.

National Theatre Standards:

TH:Pr4.1.1a. Examine how character relationships assist in telling the story of a drama/theatre work.

TH:Re9.1.1a. Examine a drama/theatre work using supporting evidence and criteria, while considering art forms, history, culture and other disciplines.

Lesson 1 – Script Analysis 101: An Introduction to Ball

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will be able to determine how aspects of script analysis benefit areas other than acting.
- Students will be able to identify who David Ball is and his general beliefs about script analysis.

Essential Questions/Global:

- How does paying attention when we read affect what we think of a given piece?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

- Who is David Ball? What are his general beliefs about script analysis?
- How does script analysis assist a variety of theatrical professions?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand how script analysis applies to other areas of theatre, who David Ball is, and what his system for analysis is.

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to determine how aspects of script analysis benefit areas other than acting. Students will be able to approach a play as a qualitative piece of literature.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will relate how reading a piece of writing can relate in other aspects of their lives.

Summative Assessment

At the end of this unit, students will prepare their own short analysis of a ten-minute play.

Reflection

How does understanding a play assist me?

Learning Plan

Activity

Translating “Teacherese”: Bring up the standards for the class period on laptop as they were originally written.

“Hi, everyone! Thanks for coming to class today—I’m excited to get started on our new unit! But before we begin, I need your assistance. See, I need to let you all know what the plan is for today and what we will be doing, but the standards were left in Teacherese, and I don’t know about you, but I’m struggling to figure out exactly what they mean! Would you all be willing to help me translate them into a more understandable phrasing? Listen to my instructions before you move. Notice that the standards are correlated to a color. On your way into class today, you were given a colored paperclip. You will soon find your other group members, and together, you are going to translate these words into something we can all understand. Any questions? You will have about 5 minutes to complete this activity in your group. Please find the other members of your group in 5-4-3-2-1.”

- Allow 6 minutes for students to work.

“If you can hear me, clap once. If you can hear me, clap three times. Great! Let’s walk through these quickly and change these into something we can call understand.”

- Go through standards as students have rewritten them.

“Thank you for helping me translate these from Teacherese—it’s a difficult language that I barely even comprehend, but you all seem to understand it well!”

“Today, we are starting to look at how a script can be read to establish a connection to other aspects of theatre and in our lives.”

Explain the following objectives for the Unit:

- To determine how script analysis benefits other areas of theatre besides acting
- To identify who David Ball is and his general ideas about script analysis
- To start thinking about plays as qualitative literature

Hook

- Draw a Venn diagram on the markerboard, with one section dedicated to English class, one dedicated to scripts, and the last dedicated to the Internet.

“Today I’d like you think about how paying particular attention to a piece of writing can help you in other aspects of the world. I created this Venn diagram to help us think more along this line. So, what do you need to pay attention to in English class with novels?”

- Students will offer suggestions based on prior knowledge.

“Perfect. What about when reading a script?”

- Students will offer suggestions.

“Finally, what do you pay attention to when you’re on the Internet—on Facebook, Wikipedia, and other websites?”

- Students will offer suggestions.

“Great. Let’s draw some parallels between them. What do novels in English class and scripts have in common? What about the Internet and novels? Scripts and the Internet?”

- Students will offer suggestions for each.

“Look at these three together. It’s amazing how something that we are learning in this class alone can apply to other places in our life, right? Most of the time we don’t consider it. Does anyone have any thoughts they’d like to offer?”

- Give students a moment to think. If no one starts, move on.

Direct Instruction

You know, looking at a play involves the same thought processes, if you think about it. Reading a play involves understanding what the playwright meant when he or she puts the words into print, just like the author of the standards did when they wrote their standards in Teacherese. When reading a play, you also have to think about it in a larger context, and how it relates to other ideas and places. You must put the pieces of the puzzle together correctly to fully understand anything you read, including plays.

PowerPoint

"Of course, it's difficult to do so without knowing how to, yeah? Let me introduce you to this man right here. He's a looker, eh? This is David Ball, author of *Backwards and Forwards*, which is the book that we will be referring to as we work toward understanding plays."

Slide 2: "He's a pretty busy guy—professor at Carnegie-Mellon for all sorts of classes, artistic director of the PMSC, and he's a publisher of both plays and books. He's a big fan of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, and he uses that for almost every example of script analysis ever. One might say he's a bit obsessed—but I'm getting ahead of myself."

Slide 3: "Ball believed that plays are a series of actions, reactions, and connections between the two. Tell me, how might this relate to an actor's perspective?"

- Students might offer answers such as actors are acting and reacting in order to get something accomplished; acting is balancing tactics and motivations, which are the connections between them.

"Ball also mentioned that the best way to figure out how a play works is to read through it forwards, and then go backwards throughout the show to uncover its truth. What do you think that means?"

- Students will offer suggestions.

"Impressive! Yes, actors certainly have quite the task of connecting their own actions and the reactions of their scene partners in order to create interesting content."

Slide 4: "So, let's work with this idea for a second..." *read quote on slide*. "What do you think Ball means by "comprehending its works"?"

- Students will offer suggestions.

"You all have very good ideas! Let's use them to brainstorm some more."

Slide 5: "In groups of 4, brainstorm how a director, performer, designer, and stage manager might need to analyze a script properly. Also, list how each will need to use their interpretations in order to create a complete show."

- Give students around 10 minutes to do so.

"If you can hear me, clap once. If you can hear me, clap three times. Thanks! So, what were some of the things you came up with?"

- Students will offer suggestions. Be sure to ask how, why, and their thought process on their choices.

"Great ideas everyone! That is a pretty thorough list—I'm really impressed! For the rest of class, I'd like you to remain in your same groups. On this slide, you will review *Orpheus Descending* with your group. Make sure to jot down these ideas as you talk—we will be using these tomorrow."

- Give students about 10 minutes to do so.

"If you can hear me, clap once. If you can hear me, clap twice. Would anyone like to share what they thought about the play in general?"

Closing

“Awesome. Make sure to keep those notes handy for the next time we meet. Here’s where we’re going: Using Ball’s system of script analysis, we’re going to discuss how a play works, using its parts to determine a theme. We will be discussing ideas such as given circumstances, a play’s shape, character development, and conflict. At the end of this unit, armed with your new knowledge—and plenty of practice, I promise—you will create your own short analysis on a ten-minute play. Great work today—thank you for participating!”

Modifications for Special Needs

Students will be given a note-taking worksheet to use throughout the unit, highlighting important facts and concepts. Students with a writing disability will be presented with a completed worksheet.

Supplemental Materials

PowerPoint

Backwards and Forwards by David Ball

Copies of *Orpheus Descending* for each student (pdf or physical)

Lesson 2 – The World of the Play

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will identify the 7 environmental factors.
- Students will provide evidence from *Orpheus Descending* that supports their ideas about historical background.

Essential Questions/Global:

- What are events that have disturbed the peace in America?
- How can peace be achieved after a considerable tragedy?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

- What is the general plot structure of a play?
- Where does one begin when analyzing a play’s structure?
- What is a central dramatic conflict?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand how to apply Ball’s analysis method to a play’s plot structure. Students will understand central dramatic conflict.

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to identify the beginning stasis, intrusion, and new stasis within *Orpheus Descending* and other stories. Students will be able to use knowledge of plot structure to identify key plot points in a play. Students will be able to categorize *Orpheus Descending* into one of four central dramatic conflict paths.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will make observations about Dr. Seuss’ *The Butter Battle Book*, suggesting plot lines and a protagonist.

Summative Assessment

At the end of this unit, students will prepare their own short analysis of a ten-minute play.

Reflection

What other storylines reflect those in plays?

Learning Plan

Hook

Story time: Gather students in a semi-circle in the room so they can see the marker board. Offer storybook to them.

“Let’s take a breath and imagine the good ol’ days of naptime and no homework— oh, and story time, too! While I am reading this to you, I want you to think about the path that this story takes us on as the readers. Here we go.”

- Read *The Butter Battle Book* to students.

“So, who can give us a quick summary of what happened in the story? Who were the characters? Who was the protagonist? What did each of these characters do?”

- Students will offer suggestions.

“Fantastic. Nice answers, everyone! You successfully identified the storyline—who can tell me what another word of storyline is? Here’s a hint: It’s a word you use in English class.”

- Plot!

“Yes! The plot. Today, we will be re-examining what we already know about plot structure and applying it to Ball’s methodology. Our objectives are:

- To interpret the plot structure of popular stories, as well as in *Orpheus Descending*;
- To create tableaus based on Ball’s theory of plot structure;
- To defend logic and reasoning behind your interpretations of *Orpheus Descending*’s structure.

“I made a guide to help organize your thoughts today. So, let’s start with something a little more familiar to you. You’ll notice on the front page is Freitag’s pyramid—but it’s a little blank. Can someone help fill those in for us?”

- Students will offer suggestions. The parts are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

“Since you are all quite familiar with Freitag’s Pyramid, who can tell me how to use it? Let’s use the story we just read.”

- Students will offer suggestions.

“Very nice work everyone. However, this pyramid isn’t the only way to organize plot. I find it particularly helpful to start here if you are confused about the events happening within a story in which lots of things are happening. Ball has a method of his own— but his ignores any sort of pyramid. Instead he divides it into four parts. The first part Ball says that a play starts with a beginning stasis. Can anyone define the word stasis for me?”

- A state of inactivity or equilibrium.

“Very good. Like the definition suggests, a play’s stasis is how the world within the play existed before the events of the play begin. The biggest part of a stasis that we need to understand is what Ball calls the “balance of forces”— essentially, what structure, elements, or people are in power or are not in power at the time of the exposition. Let’s say (Student A) and I are super great pals and we’re on the cheerleading team and all is fun and games and flower petals sprinkling from the sky. Maybe there is a party coming up and (Student A) and I are both planning on going. That is the beginning stasis. But, of course, how interesting would a play be if the world was... well, inactive? That’s where the intrusion comes in. What does it mean when someone or something intrudes?”

- Someone is interrupted, often rudely.

“Exactly. The intrusion is what starts the events of the play and puts them into motion. Something intrudes upon what was once normal, throwing the stasis off balance. However, the intrusion must be something large enough to throw the world of the play off-balance—two characters having a huge fight when they are used to fighting isn’t considered an intrusion. But if two characters have a huge fight and sever ties completely after being very good friends, it disturbs the world of the stasis, don’t you think? You can think about this like a Jenga tower.”

- Show Jenga tower. “Can I have a volunteer play Jenga with me?” Play Jenga with student.

“This tower is the play, and each piece is an event that happens. Let’s say (Student B) takes a piece out of the fully assembled tower. It doesn’t immediately fall over. Sometimes in plays, characters perform actions and talk to one another, but the intrusion doesn’t necessarily occur immediately. This is often considered exposition in a play, although it can be found anywhere in a play because characters are often talking about their past and what has happened to them, but we’ll talk more about that later. So, if the event is large enough to disturb the peace” —have student pull next Jenga piece, knocking the tower over— “that’s when the rest of the play can truly begin. So in my example, the intrusion could be that when we go to the party I break her beautiful diamond necklace and she vows to exact revenge on me. What other examples might we include for an intrusion?”

- Students will offer suggestions. Answers might include people entering from out of town, people dying from a fatal accident, friends “doing it”, a friendly character getting possessed by evil, etc.

“Very nice suggestions. After the intrusion comes the battle for the new stasis. This is where most of the play happens as characters duke it out for our viewing pleasure. (Student A) and I might attend school as normal but pull pranks on one another every day, or verbally attack each other during cheerleading practice.”

“The final part is the new stasis. As the play occurs, and then reaches the resolution part of the story, the new stasis develops. Just like the beginning stasis, the new stasis is the balance of life that the play is leaving the audience with. In the situation I mentioned beforehand, if these events happened, the new stasis might be that (Student A) and I forgive one another and become friends again, even though we are starting to drift apart because of what happened. Does anyone have any questions about what I’ve just covered? ... Cool. Let’s apply what we’ve just talked about to *Orpheus Descending*. Please divide into groups of three. 3...2...1!”

“Great! In your groups, please describe the beginning and new stases, and the intrusion. Be prepared to defend your arguments. You have 3 minutes!”

- Give students 3 minutes to work. Adjust for time as needed.

“If you can hear me, clap once. Let’s talk about *Orpheus Descending*. What did you think the beginning stasis is? The intrusion? Why? How does the new stasis look like?”

- Guide students through discussion.

“Nicely done, y’all! Now that we’ve discussed the basics of plot structure, I’m going to add conflict into the mix. Who can define conflict for me?”

- Students will offer suggestions. Conflict is a serious disagreement or argument.

“Nice use of your noggins! Yes, conflict is a serious disagreement or struggle for a goal or desire. We often think about conflict when two people are fighting or struggling for their wishes. While the protagonists in different plays have their own vices and conflicts that they must overcome, they all tend to fit into four different categories. Would anyone like to guess which categories these might be?”

- Students will offer suggestions. The four categories are Me vs. Myself, Me vs. Others, Me vs. Society, and Me vs. Fate/the Universe. Direct students on what each of these categories might look like in certain scenarios and plays.

“Me vs. Myself is exactly what it sounds like—it’s the protagonist getting in his or her own way. Me vs. Others is also quite similar to its title, in that it is the protagonist and someone or something else getting in his or her way. Me vs. Society is a bit different. Society includes the constructs of power within the world that the play takes place in, it can be the protagonist struggling to fit in to societal ideas first, it can be the protagonist’s position in a caste system or monetary system getting in their way. Me vs. Fate is perhaps the least common and most difficult to see in a play. It’s literally when the universe conspires to get at the character in ways that no one or nothing can do. So what kind of conflict do you think *Orpheus Descending* would fall under? What about *The Butter Battle Book*? (Insert other titles here.)”

Tableaus Tell Stories: “As a wrap up activity for today, I’d like you to use tableaus to tell a mini story. I have a small packet of commonly known fairy tales that I am passing around. In your group, you must use five tableaus to tell a story. One tableau has to be the beginning stasis, one has to be the intrusion, and the last must be the new stasis, but the other two are your choice. You’ll have 7 minutes to do so. Good luck!”

- Give students 7+ minutes to work. Adjust time accordingly.

“If you can hear me, clap once. Awesome. So here’s how it will go. The audience will close their eyes, and the group performing will have three snaps to get into their tableau. We will do this for each picture. At the end, the audience has to guess which fairy tale it is. Alright team, who would like to show their tableaus first?”

- Watch performances.

Closing

“Wow! I enjoyed how much creativity you put into your tableau stories. So, let’s review. How does understanding the structure of the plot of a play assist our interpretations of it? Does it change how we feel about the story and its characters?”

Modifications for Special Needs

Students with a writing disability will be presented with a completed worksheet.

Students with limited physical capabilities can perform in the tableaus in chairs.

Supplemental Materials

Dr. Seuss’ *The Butter Battle Book*

Note-taking guide/outline

Lesson 3 – Action

Lesson Objectives

- Students will implement tactics on identifying actions versus events.
- Students will analyze dialogue for subtext and intention.

Essential Questions/Global:

- How does acting upon instinct affect a given situation?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

- What is a dramatic action?
- Why does action drive a play forward?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand how action drives a play forward. Students will understand how to differentiate a non-event from an action.

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to determine what an action is. Students will be able to identify actions within *Orpheus Descending*. Students will be able to prove their conclusions by using a text.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will participate in active discussion about what an action is.

Summative Assessment

At the end of this unit, students will prepare their own short analysis of a ten-minute play.

Reflection

What is the different between a non-event and an action?

Learning Plan

Hook

Artistic Dominoes: Possess enough dominoes to allow students to create “domino art”— shapes made out of standing up dominoes. Clear space in the room for them to be able to do so.

“Hello, everyone! I figured you’re all working terribly hard in your classes, so as a reward, I’m going to start class today by letting you play with dominoes. Stand up the dominoes next to each other to create art, so that when you stand above the arrangement of the dominoes, it looks like a shape. The challenge is to create something interesting in 10 minutes without knocking any of them over. Good luck!”

- Allow students 10 minutes to work.

Direct Instruction

"Very beautiful works of art I see here! For now, leave these as they are, and listen up here. We've been talking quite a bit lately about the world of the play and what the playwright allows us to see before anything happens. However, in order to fully understand a play, it's probably a little important to think about what actually happens throughout the play, eh? Who can give me a guess about what drives a play onward?"

-Characters talking to one another. Action. Events. The intrusion.

"All of these are very lovely answers! I'm glad you included the intrusion—shows you were paying good attention! However, the one I'm going to go with today is action—which is the bigger topic that encompasses the other answers you've given. So, let me show you something. [Student A], I'll need you for this. I am going to toss this pen to you, and I want you to catch it, okay?"

- Toss pen to Student A. Student A catches it.

"Now please toss it back to me."

- Student A tosses marker back.

"Ready?"

- Toss pen back to Student A.

"Who can tell me what just happened?"

- You threw the pen to [Student A].

"Right. So, go ahead, [Student A]..."

- Student A tosses pen back to me.

"And what happened there?"

- [Student A] tossed the pen back to you.

"Correct. Once more..."

- Toss pen to Student A, and have Student A toss pen back.

"Who can tell me what happened?"

- You tossed the pen to [Student A], and [Student A] tossed the pen to you.

"Right. This is similar to cause and effect, yeah? I tossed the pen to [Student A] —the cause—which made her toss the pen back to me—the effect. So, let's say I tossed the pen to [Student B] instead..."

- Toss pen to Student B.

"[Student A], what are you doing now that I tossed the pen to [Student B]?"

- Watching the pen being tossed.

“Yes. So, let’s put these two into a cause and effect relationship.”

- On document camera, write “Pen Cause and Effect.”

“So, let’s take the first situation. What happened first? Start it like this: Because...”

- Because your teacher tossed the pen...

“Awesome. Then the effect?”

- [Student A] caught the pen.

“Great. Together, this makes: Because your teacher tossed the pen, [Student A] caught the pen. Now the reverse. What happened next? Because...”

- Because [Student A] tossed the pen, our teacher caught the pen.

“Fabulous. So let’s take the situation with [Student B]. Because I threw the pen, what happened?”

- [Student B] caught the pen, not [Student A].

“Right. Notice how the cause and effect of each action forced [Student A] to take different actions. At one point, [Student A] chose to catch the pen. However, when I tossed it to [Student B], it had a different effect on [Student A], because she chose to watch instead. In this same way, a play moves forward. Characters make choices that force events to happen throughout the play, which creates the intrusion and the juicy awesomeness that is a well-written play. According to Ball—and please write this down in your grids—action is what occurs when something happens that makes or permits something else to happen. So, when I threw the pen to [Student A], she was expected, and permitted, to catch the pen. However, [Student A] could have made the choice to not catch the pen, and let it fall to the ground. The pair of the two events makes a dramatic action. So, let’s look at our domino pieces now. Actions work like dominoes—one after another. Can someone knock this over for me?”

- The person nearest the end knocks the domino art over. Watch the domino art fall. Cheer.

“Like each domino falls, it causes the next one to fall. The one that falls causes the next one to fall. I’d like you to think of dramatic action in this way—one action causes another action, causes another action, causes another action. Does anyone have any questions about what I’ve just covered?”

- Answer questions if need be.

Guided Practice

“Great. Let’s take this to *Orpheus Descending*. If you’ll take out a copy, please... To start, action is typically written like a cause and effect sentence: Because such and such happens, such and such happens. Who can tell me an event in *Orpheus Descending* that occurs after the intrusion?”

- Let’s say a student suggests Lady hiring Val.

“Great. So, our action is ‘Lady hires Val.’” Write this on document camera.

“Because Lady hires Val... what happens?”

- Val starts work at the store.

“Great. Because Lady hires Val, Val starts work at the store. This is the first of one of our actions. Now, here is where it gets tricky: Actions are causally interconnected. Essentially, that means that one effect is the cause of another action. We would write it like this: “Because Lady hires Val, Val starts work at the store. Because Val starts work at the store...” What would be the effect?”

- Val meets Vee Talbott.

“Perfect! Putting these two together creates two events. One dramatic action plus another dramatic action—the cause and effect—makes an event. Keep in mind that the event is often large enough to cause another event. In *The Lion King*, for example, because Scar kills Mufasa in front of Simba, Simba flees Pride Rock. That would be an event in which one dramatic action causes another. There’s a super cool, technical name for “cause” and “effect” here. Cross out “cause” and “effect” and write “trigger” and “heap”, respectively. The trigger is what causes the dramatic action; the “heap” is what effects the trigger has. The heap then becomes the trigger of the action following it. The trigger and the heap together make an event. Does that make sense?”

- Answer questions if there is confusion.

“Cool. There is one more component to consider with action: Dialogue. Sometimes it’s not very clear what is happening when a character says something. That is why we consider subtext in a play. Who can tell me what subtext is?”

- Subtext is what a character really means behind what he or she actually says.

“Yes, that’s absolutely right. Often, subtext is attributed with a verb. Let’s say I tell [Student A] that her hair is purple, but I say it like this: Enunciate it so that it sounds sarcastic. What does my subtext mean there?”

- That it’s not really purple.

“Correct. Let’s think of a verb that goes with me lying to her. What does the fact that I used sarcasm mean about what I am doing to her?”

- You are mocking her.

“Nice verb! When you are writing an action, sometimes what a character says is the trigger. You’d write it like we just did. “Because your teacher mocked [Student A], [Student A] went home and didn’t do her homework.” Sound good?”

- Answer any questions if need be.

Independent Practice

“Let’s practice this a bit further. So, working in groups of four with those around you, I’d like you to create three events using *Orpheus Descending*. Who can remind me what an event is again?”

- A trigger and a heap.

“Perfect. I will be floating around if you need help. You may start anywhere from the play, just make sure that the trigger really causes the heap. Also, please use the quote of dialogue in which the action happens, if applicable. Everyone will be sharing, so make sure to have something written down! I’ll give you 8 minutes to do so.”

- Give students 8 minutes to work.

“If you can hear me, clap once. If you can hear me, clap twice. Which group would like to share what they came up with?”

- Allow all groups to share their ideas.

“Nice work, everyone! I’m very impressed by what you have come up with.”

Closing

Why is action important within a play? How does it drive the plot forward?

Modifications for Special Needs

Students with a writing disability will be presented with a completed worksheet.

Students with limited physical capabilities can perform in scenes in chairs or from the ground.

Lesson 4 – Characters/Relationships

Lesson Objectives

- Students will identify the protagonist in *Orpheus Descending* by identifying the central dramatic conflict.
- Students will describe their chosen protagonist through defining their objective, action what, avowed why, true action why, and inferring qualities of the character’s personality.

Essential Questions/Global:

- Do actions speak louder than words?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

- How do I think about a character according to Ball?
- What does an action say about the qualities of a character?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand what a character is. Students will understand how characters interact with one another onstage through dramatic actions.

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to identify a character’s action what, avowed why, and true action why. Students will be able to infer what a character’s actions say about their moral character.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will complete a worksheet grid exhibiting a character's action.

Summative Assessment

At the end of this unit, students will prepare their own short analysis of a ten-minute play.

Reflection

Why is an action important to a character?

Learning Plan

Hook

Get the Dollar: "Hello everyone! I have here a brand-new dollar bill. I'd like you to convince me to give the dollar to you. You cannot touch me, touch the dollar, or team up with someone else. You can only use your words. Now, who's going to take the dollar?"

- Allow students to attempt to take the dollar. Give it to some if they're good— but take it back, because it's not their hard-earned dollar. After each person attempts, ask the class: What worked/didn't work? Why? How did he/she try to change their tactic to make it work? What did they say versus what did they really mean?

Direct Instruction

"What was the most difficult part about that activity?"

- Sometimes you wouldn't give the dollar. It was difficult to think of a good enough reason to ask for the dollar. It was weird asking a teacher for a dollar. Even if I didn't want the dollar, I was asked to try to get it anyway.

"Interesting. Some of you were struggling with the fact that you had to get the dollar, even if you didn't want to. You were playing a character in a situation you, yourself, necessarily wouldn't be in. Others mentioned that it was weird asking a teacher for a dollar. Why did you say that?"

- Because we normally ask our parents for a dollar. Because you're our teacher, and it's awkward.

"But what about me being a teacher makes it awkward?"

- Because you're in a position of authority. (Or, "it just is!")

"So it was awkward just because I'm a teacher? Or is it because the relationship you have with me makes it awkward? ...Yeah. Interesting to think about, right? You were a character in a scene that tried to complete a task. Just like characters in a play do! However, sometimes they are successful or not because of their relationships with other characters within the play. Who can tell me what a character is?"

- A character is a figure that consists of qualities, traits, and features that separate them from other characters.

"Nicely done. You are all very good at remembering things! It's almost like you're theatre people! Give them a look. Characters are the vessels through which dramatic action occurs. Without characters, we'd have very... un-entertaining plays. According to Ball, characters are the sum of their actions, because actions speak louder than words. Subtext says more than the actual line sometimes. It is important to consider this when thinking about a character. In order to analyze character with Ball's method, we must consider their actions first."

Guided Practice

“Who is the protagonist of *Orpheus Descending*?”

- Lady! / Val!

“Ooh, it’s a toss up! Let’s use Val for the purpose of this exercise. What do you think is Val’s motivation throughout the play? What does he want?”

- He wants love, a new life, money, a home.

“Lovely answers. So, let’s use “a new life” for now. What is standing in his way?”

- Society because his reputation precedes who he is in the play.

“Awesome. Just wanted to see if you remembered anything from a few classes ago! Who can tell me a dramatic action Val performs in the play?”

- Val steals money from the cash box.

“Great. He steals the money. So, Ball divides a character’s action analysis into three parts: The action what, avowed action why, and true action why. The action what is what the action is—so, in this case, the action what would be Val stealing money from the cash box. The avowed action why is what the character says about why they performed the action. In the play, what is the reason Val says he stole the cash?”

- To gamble and win Lady more money.

“Correct. So, the avowed action why would be the quote of dialogue in the play. Finally, we have the true action why, which is the real reason Val stole the money. You can either infer this, or, later on, the character might actually admit the real reason behind it. What could be the real reason Val stole the money?”

- To make enough to escape from town.

“Ooh, that’s a good inference. Boom. So, that’s the basic character action analysis. From here, Ball says you can infer a character’s personality from the actions a character performs. From what we have here about Val, what is he like?”

- He’s dishonest, he’s a thief, he lies to people, he is selfish, he doesn’t care about anyone else but himself.

“Ouch, harsh words, harsh words. Does he change throughout the play, though?”

- Kinda.

“Kinda? I would think so. He does other things throughout the play that would convince me of it!”

Independent Practice

“Now it’s your turn. In groups, do this same thing for Lady. I’ll give you the rest of class to work on this— and everyone will be turning this in as your ticket out the door, so I’d recommend everyone write something down!”

- Give students time to work.

Closing

How does action reveal the personality of a character? Can this opinion change throughout the play? Why or why not?

Modifications for Special Needs

Students with a writing disability will be presented with a completed worksheet.

Students with a reading disability can be given a partner to assist with comprehension of a text.

Lesson 5 – Putting it all Together: Practice with 10-Minute Plays**Lesson Objectives:**

- Students will implement their newfound knowledge to accurately interpret a 10-minute play by discussing and refining their ideas with others.
- Students will support their arguments by using evidence from the play.

Essential Questions/Global:

- How do I work best in a team?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

- What is the most effective way to analyze a play?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand the parts of a script analysis.

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to analyze a text for a theme. Students will be able to identify the parts of a script analysis with their given text.

Assessment**Formative Assessment**

Students will complete a “vo-back-ulary” activity.

Summative Assessment

At the end of this unit, students will prepare their own short analysis of a ten-minute play.

Reflection

What examples from other plays can I use when thinking about my play?

Learning Plan**Hook**

Vo-back-ulary: “Good morning, everyone! Today’s the day—you get to analyze a 10-minute play! It is your opportunity to prove to me that you understand just what the heck is going on in these things we call plays. But first, I propose a contest. We’re playing a game called “Vo-back-ulary” today. Here’s how it works:

One person from each team will come up to the board. Without looking, the instructor will place a card with a vocabulary word on it on the student’s back. Their team, without saying the word, must get the student with the card on their back to guess the vocab word. The player gets three guesses; if their team cannot get their member to guess correctly, the other team has one opportunity to do so.”

- Assign a “captain” from each team to do the talking to avoid chaos. Play until the words run out.

Direct Instruction

“Wow! You all really know your stuff! I am very impressed. It’s a good thing, too, because today you all will be analyzing a 10-minute play on your own! When you walked in today, you were handed a colored sticky note. The other people with your color are your group members for this class. I will assign each of you a 10-minute play. Together, you are going to read and analyze that play for its content, and then decide on its theme. Who can tell me what you need to look for in order to do this?”

- Beginning stasis; intrusion; new stasis; protagonist’s character analysis—action what, avowed why, true why; central dramatic conflict; forwards; historical context.

Independent Practice

“Awesome. You have a lot to accomplish today. During the last 15 minutes of class, you will all present your findings to the rest of us. You will also be turning your own copy in for attendance today, so I recommend that everyone write on a copy. I’ll be floating around if you have questions. Find your group and get started!”

- Allow students to work. At the end of class, allow each group to present what they have concluded about their 10-minute plays.

Closing

What is worrying you about writing your essays? Are there any questions about what you did today that you would like me to address?

Modifications for Special Needs

Students with a writing disability will be presented with a completed worksheet.

Students with a reading disability can be given a partner to assist with comprehension of a text.

***Handouts and Supporting Materials
can be found on the following pages.***

Pre-Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

Script Analysis 101 Pre-Assessment

Choose the best answer. (2 points each)

1. What does David Ball believe a play is?
 - a. A summary of how characters interact with one another
 - b. The combination of actions, reactions, and how they are connected
 - c. An excuse for actors, directors, and designers to get together
 - d. How conflict and tactics interact

2. David Ball's book, _____, details how a script can be properly comprehended.
 - a. Respect for Acting
 - b. Script Analysis for Dummies
 - c. Backwards and Forwards
 - d. An Introduction to Hamlet

3. Which play uses Greek myths as a basis for telling the story?
 - a. *Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams
 - b. *Becky Shaw* by Gina Gionfriddo
 - c. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Describe these terms and how they are used in a play. (3 points each)

Character:

Central Dramatic Conflict (and its types):

Forwards (including the types and their functions):

Theme:

Stasis:

Describe what triggers and heaps are, and how they operate in a play. (3 points)

Using your given play, identify and connect three (3) pairs of triggers and heaps. (5 points)

Pre-Assessment Answer Key

Name: _____

Date: _____

Script Analysis 101 Pre-Assessment Key

Choose the best answer. (2 points each)

4. What does David Ball believe a play is?
 - a. A summary of how characters interact with one another
 - b. **The combination of actions, reactions, and how they are connected**
 - c. An excuse for actors, directors, and designers to get together
 - d. How conflict and tactics interact

5. David Ball's book, _____, details how a script can be properly comprehended.
 - a. *Respect for Acting*
 - b. *Script Analysis for Dummies*
 - c. ***Backwards and Forwards***
 - d. *An Introduction to Hamlet*

6. Which play uses Greek myths as a basis for telling the story?
 - a. ***Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams**
 - b. *Becky Shaw* by Gina Gionfriddo
 - c. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Describe these terms and how they are used in a play. (3 points each)

Character:

One who performs action within a given play; played by an actor, a character— particularly the protagonist— drives the play forward.

Central Dramatic Conflict (and its types):

The shape of the play, in which the action develops based on the protagonist's motivation and obstacles interacting with one another.

- Me vs Myself
- Me vs Another
- Me vs Society
- Me vs Fate, the Universe

Forwards (including the types and their functions):

A moment or piece of information that drives the play forward, keeping the audience engaged and the characters interesting.

- Plant – A tidbit of information that keeps the audience engaged.
- Pointer – A moment in the play that points towards the perception shift.

Theme:

The play's overall meaning as defined by the sum of its parts. The theme is determined through an accurate interpretation of the play's scenarios, historical background, and the play's action. Can be more than one concept.

Stasis:

What exists in the world of the play before the play begins; what exists after the play ends. Can be described as a balance of forces that rule how the world of the play operates.

Describe what triggers and heaps are, and how they operate in a play. (3 points)

Triggers and heaps are actions that are causally interconnected, where one action causes another—the reaction—and the pattern continues.

i.e. Because A happens, B happens; because B happens, C happens.

Using your given play, identify and connect three (3) pairs of triggers and heaps. (5 points)

This answer may vary.

Post-Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

Script Analysis 101 Post-Assessment

Choose the best answer. (2 points each)

7. What does David Ball believe a play is?
 - e. A summary of how characters interact with one another
 - f. The combination of actions, reactions, and how they are connected
 - g. An excuse for actors, directors, and designers to get together
 - h. How conflict and tactics interact

8. David Ball's book, _____, details how a script can be properly comprehended.
 - e. Respect for Acting
 - f. Script Analysis for Dummies
 - g. Backwards and Forwards
 - h. An Introduction to Hamlet

9. Which play uses Greek myths as a basis for telling the story?
 - d. *Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams
 - e. *Becky Shaw* by Gina Gionfriddo
 - f. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Describe these terms and how they are used in a play. (3 points each)

Character:

Central Dramatic Conflict (and its types):

Forwards (including the types and their functions):

Theme:

Stasis:

Describe what triggers and heaps are, and how they operate in a play. (3 points)

Using your given play, identify and connect three (3) pairs of triggers and heaps. (5 points)

What did you learn throughout this unit that you believe will be most beneficial to you as a theatrical artist? (Bonus!)

Pre-Assessment Answer Key

Name: _____

Date: _____

Script Analysis 101 Pre-Assessment Key

Choose the best answer. (2 points each)

10. What does David Ball believe a play is?

- e. A summary of how characters interact with one another
- f. **The combination of actions, reactions, and how they are connected**
- g. An excuse for actors, directors, and designers to get together
- h. How conflict and tactics interact

11. David Ball's book, _____, details how a script can be properly comprehended.

- e. *Respect for Acting*
- f. *Script Analysis for Dummies*
- g. ***Backwards and Forwards***
- h. *An Introduction to Hamlet*

12. Which play uses Greek myths as a basis for telling the story?

- d. ***Orpheus Descending* by Tennessee Williams**
- e. *Becky Shaw* by Gina Gionfriddo
- f. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Describe these terms and how they are used in a play. (3 points each)

Character:

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i.e. Because A happens, B happens; because B happens, C happens.

Using your given play, identify and connect three (3) pairs of triggers and heaps. (5 points)

This answer may vary.

What did you learn throughout this unit that you believe will be most beneficial to you as a theatrical artist? (Bonus!)

This answer may vary.