

Lesson Plan Title: Raising the Stakes Through Physicality**Author: Michael Givler****Date: 5/10/20**

Description: Actors discover higher stakes and new character physicality or blocking by exploring their scenes through a series of guided improvisations. It uses the characters and text from a memorized duet scene in rehearsal that are already analyzed, memorized and mostly blocked.

Learning Outcomes:

The learner will explore and develop heightened stakes in memorized scenes.

The learner will analyze acting choices and decide which improve their scene.

The learner will refine newly discovered choices through rehearsal.

The learner will perform 1 minute of duo scene.

Grade Level: High School Proficient**2014 National Core Theatre Standards:**

TH:Cr3.1.1.b. Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic, and relevant to a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr5.1.1.a. Practice various acting techniques to expand skills in a rehearsal or drama/theatre performance.

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

TH:Pr6.1.1.a. Perform a scripted drama/theatre work for a specific audience.

Time to Teach: 120 minutes – 2 classes.**Materials Required for Instruction:**

Note taking materials and 1 marker per group.

Opening:

(12minutes) - Have pairs spread out and run their scenes one or twice. And introduce 1st essential question: *“What do high stakes look like, feel like and sound like?”* in our scene. Then think/ pair/share about the 1st essential question as applied to their scenes. Share out as a class:

“High stakes _____ like _____ in our scene”.

(looks / feels / sounds) (specific descriptor)

Challenge students heighten stakes today by making them look, feel or sound even bolder.

Instructional Procedures:

Day One –

Step 1 – Explain the logic of the exploration -

The approach and logic - Every drama teacher is always saying “raise the stakes,” to intro drama students, but often students don’t or can’t because they don’t know how, feel embarrassed/inhibited, or feel like they need to get it right the first time. Or students often believe they can only use their voice their to raise the stakes in a scene, which leads to very static scenes with two talking heads trying to land zinger lines. The following exercises encourage students to use their intuition and improvisation skills to discover high stakes choices and have fun doing it. The exercises break down the social barriers many kids feel towards bold choices and to being vulnerable in a scene. Students will then make choices about what elements of the explorations they would like to add to their memorized scene. So the **essential questions** actors will return to are:

- 1) *“What do high stakes look like, sound like and feel like?”* (the more specific the better)

AND

- 2) *“Does that choice strengthen the character’s needs in the scene?”* (Explain why?)

This is going to require that students temporarily drop most of their blocking and respond in the moment and in character. By trying to respond naturally and in character, these exercises will help them discover higher stakes. By the end of the day they should have a list of new blocking, tactics or interactions to add to their scene in the next rehearsal.

Step 2 – Play “The Power Game” –

Directions – Using a marker or other small object, you are going to rehearse the scene while arguing over a marker. It’s as if the marker is a physicalized form of your objective. Each actor says their lines while trying to get hold of their objective, which is now the marker. By making the objective physical and literal, you are making it tangible and visceral. (*Everyone has argued over an object before.*) Because each actor tries to get the marker and keep it away from their partner, it ends up looking a lot like a game of keep away with just two people.

Goal – Find new, higher stakes and reactions to physicality serve your objective.

Safety Rules - Clarify questions of Safety – For example, always beware of others, what space is off limits, explain limits of physical touch, no stage combat, etc.

- Ask that one group model for the whole class and coach them through the directions until they are demonstrating it clearly. You may stop and ask for questions if needed.
- Have all groups run the 1st half of their scene. (Teacher should observe all groups and circulate to ensure safety) Then share observations you saw. Student need bold choices reinforced here.
- Have all the groups run the 2nd half of their scenes, but try to go further with the physicality.
- Time to reflect in their pair: Ask them to consider essential questions *“What did high stakes look like, sound like and feel like?”* AND *“Do any of those choice strengthen the character’s needs in the scene?”* If so, make some rehearsal notes.
- (Students may want to repeat in the future to explore more.)

Step 3 – Play “Break the Scene” game.

Directions – In this game, actors must forget their blocking and are given the freedom to move wherever they want too in the room during the scene. They must try to *“break the scene”* by adding bold physicality and therefore drop rehearsed choices. The newness of *“breaking the scene”* makes actors notice choices and respond (listen) naturally. Most importantly, they must: 1) follow their intuition 2) stay in character 3) and boldly physicalize any desire for movement. For example, one actor could cross all the way across the room saying a line or run to another student saying a line. Or, they could block the way of their partner trying to leave. The result should look chaotic, but that energy feeds actors making stronger choices. These bold choices raise the stakes in the scene.

Goal – Find new, higher stakes and blocking that serves your objective and connect those stakes to listening/responding naturally.

Safety Rules - Clarify questions of Safety – For example, always beware of others, what space is off limits, explain limits of physical touch, no stage combat, etc.

- Have all groups run the 1st half of their scene and *“Try to break it”*. (Teacher should observe all groups and circulate to ensure safety) Then share observations you saw. Student need bold choices and great moments of listening **reinforced**.
- Have all the groups run the 2nd half of their scenes, but try to notice what the other person is doing even more. Keep choices bold.
- Ask them to consider essential questions *“What did high stakes look like, sound like and feel like?”* AND *“Do any of those choices strengthen the character’s needs in the scene?”* If so, make some rehearsal notes.
- Ask volunteers, or call on students you noticed, to describe a new stronger moment (**REINFORCE**).
- (Students may want to repeat in the future to explore more.)

Step 4 – Pair up duos into a cooperative learning group of 4.

Roles – Actor/Explorers and Observers/Coaches. For the last two exercises, students will have an audience of 2 to share feedback about what the audience saw/felt vs. what the actors say/felt. Asking “What worked?” and “What didn’t?”

Step 5 – Play - Touch to speak –

Directions - In this game, actors must touch their acting partner every time they speak one line. It can happen before, during or after they speak the line, but must happen before the other actor talks. It could be a shoulder tap or a hand hold or a push (Safely).

Goals –Encourage actors to explore character by making physical contact, noticing contact and proximity and responding to intimacy with their partner. It also encourages actors to respond to touch with touch and to understand touch/proximity as a tactic. Actors should respond in character. Is the character comforted, confused or threatened by the touch and what must the other character do in response. Is there a cross and long pause after a touch or will the other character respond warmly?

Safety rules – Actors can only touch in this improvisation exploration on the hands, arms shoulder. Actors can develop physicality further in future rehearsals, but honor boundaries and safety—it should remain limited in this exercise.

- Because students will forget or resist the required touch, ask that one group model for the whole class and coach them through the directions until they are demonstrating it clearly. They will need reassurance to stay focused if they break. You may stop and ask for questions if needed.
- In the groups of 4, have the 1st group run the 1st half of their scene. (Teacher should observe all groups and circulate to ensure safety) Then have the actors share what they thought were strong moments and then the observers share their thoughts. Both groups should make brief “I” statements only. [This will keep conversation brief and respectful]. The teacher should observe discussions too. Student need bold choices and great moments of listening reinforced.
- Have the 1st group run the 2nd half of their scene. Stay in character and try to naturally justify the choices and responses.
- Now repeat with the 2nd group.
- After both groups performed their whole scene with this exercise, ask them to consider essential questions “*What did high stakes look like, sound like and feel like?*” AND “*Do any of those choice strengthen the character’s needs in the scene?*” If so, make some rehearsal notes.
- (Students may want to repeat in the future to explore more.)

Step 6 - As exit slips , in their duos, students know need to make a plan for how they are moving forward. They should list which explorations they would like to continue to explore AND a list of discovered moments of the scene for further development. At least 1 game and at least 3 moments. Every moment should have a name. For example, “entering far apart” or “standing in silence” so you know what to work on tomorrow.

Day Two –

Opening– (5-10 minutes) (pass back exit slips from yesterday)

Rehearsal plan meeting. Actors will have 30 minutes to continue to develop their scene with an eye towards higher stakes. They should focus on their discoveries from the previous days. They need to use the 30 minutes to further develop their scene and be ready to present 1 minute of the scene with new stronger choices.

Actors will create a rehearsal plan that includes the follow:

What moment are we developing? _____ (name it)

In the 1st 10 minutes we will - _____

In the 2nd 10 minutes we will - _____

In the 1st 10 minutes we will – Finish Solidifying our choices and if time allows _____.

(Rehearsal plans are a great way to redirect distracted or stuck students.)

Step 7 – 30 minutes of rehearsal.

Students will improve scenes by developing choices. Teacher circulates to assist, encourage and redirect. [Use rehearsal plan for improved accountability and academic support]

Step 8 – Present 30min

Students will present 1 minute of the scene to class. See attached high stakes scoring guide.

After each performance – actors from their former paired group from the “Touch to speak” game should be ready to mention 2 successful vocal or physical choices to celebrate the performers work.

Closing: – Reflection exit card –

As an exit card, each actor must write a paragraph (minimum 3 sentences) about what new high stakes looked, sounded and felt like in their scene. [As a means of accommodation and support you could provide the following sentence frame; “ High Stakes looks/sounded/felt like _____ when I/my partner_____.]

Assessment:

Developing High Stakes Evaluation Rubric

Names: 1) _____ 2) _____

Element	Above Standard	At Standard	Developing
Focus (sustained character)	Actors stayed in character with very high stakes from start to finish.	Actors consistently stayed in character.	Actors had several breaks character and/or several moments of low stakes.
Objective (need)	Actions spring naturally from character's needs	Clear strong objectives.	Character objective need clarifications.
Voice / Blocking / Movement (seen or heard)	Actors consistently utilized movement, vocal expression and gesture in realistic ways to heighten the action and raise the stakes providing a dramatic build..	Actors used movement, vocal expressiveness and gesture in realistic ways that fit the scene.	Actors were inconsistent in their use of movement, vocal expressiveness and gesture; sometimes these seemed unconnected with the action of the scene.
Listening (Connection)	Reactions to partner/self are clearly naturally motivated. Tension intuitively develops naturally.	Reactions to partner/self are mostly naturally motivated.	Reactions to partner /self are sometimes missed or aren't always naturally motivated.
Levels (Variety in Stake)	Actors demonstrated a dynamic and unique variety of levels in the scene with natural rising and falling tension.	Actors demonstrated a variety of levels in the scene with natural rising and falling tension.	Actors demonstrated a narrow variety of levels. -transitions in tension feel unnatural at times.

Please use the space below for suggestions for any adaptations or accommodations for inclusion of special needs learners.

- Teacher pairs groups with groups and/or students with students – Allows differentiated grouping. Appropriate scene selection.
- Also engages multiple learning styles – Kinesthetic, analytical, interpersonal and intrapersonal.
- Provide directions and / information in a variety of formats (written, verbal, visual).
- Provide a variety of text complexities or/ or lengths of scenes to accommodate.
- Allow students to access or play games to their ability.
- Allow students to use scripts to accommodate.
- Adjust safety warnings or space to accommodate individual needs.

Please use the space below to list any suggestions for multi-cultural inclusions.

- Teachers should have a variety of scene suggestions that vary in age, identity and perspective including a diverse library of scenes written by and for people of color. Students are best included when they identify with playwrights in script banks.
- The Safety discussion/rules – should be adjusted to accommodate the needs of each unique class.