

**Title:** *Radio Gaga: How to Use Your Voice in Acting*

**How can this lesson’s inherent content be based on a wide range of resources so that our students of color, students with disabilities, and other marginalized students are integral to the content?**

This lesson is about student voice, and it should represent all definitions of voice, including these from the OED: “1b. the distinctive tone or style of a literary work or author. 2. a particular opinion or attitude expressed.” This lesson allows students to express themselves through choice of material and how they use their voice/method of communication. Students are given the choice of using material they wrote or materials provided. Provided texts should be from a variety of sources that reflect your community. (I offer suggestions below.) Non-verbal students may use the manner they communicate through to perform their piece, which might make it a visual, rather than aural radio play.

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**Description:**

In this acting lesson, students will learn what radio plays are and the basics of how to perform in one. They will work on different vocal techniques, exploring pace, pitch, tone, and volume to create different characters in a short radio play.

**Learning Outcomes:** (objectives)

Students will be able to:

- utilize different vocal techniques to show differentiation of character and help convey a story
- reflect on their work
- compare their self-assessment to peer and teacher assessments
- revise their work based on self, peer, and teacher assessments
- Record a final performance of a short radio play to demonstrate use of voice to create a character

**SEL Competencies Taught:**

*Self-awareness*, which is the ability to recognize one’s emotions and know one’s strengths and limitations

*Self-management*, which is the ability to regulate and control one’s emotions and behaviors, particularly in stressful situations

*Social awareness*, which is the ability to take the perspective of others, demonstrate empathy, acknowledge and appreciate similarities and differences, and understand how one’s actions influence and are influenced by others

*Relationship skills*, which refers to one’s ability to demonstrate prosocial skills and behaviors in order to develop meaningful relationships and resolve interpersonal conflicts

\_\_\_ *Responsible decision-making*, which refers to the ability to use multiple pieces of information to make ethical and responsible decisions.

**Grade Level(s):** 7

**2014 National Core Theatre Standards:**

TH:Cr3.1.7.b. Develop effective physical and vocal traits of characters in an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work

TH:Pr6.1.7.a. Participate in rehearsals for a drama/theatre work that will be shared with an audience.

TH:Re7.1.7.a. Compare recorded personal and peer reactions to artistic choices in a drama/ theatre work

**Time to Teach:** *(number of class periods and number of minutes per class period)*

Six 45-minute lessons

**Materials Required for Instruction:**

- Handouts
- Scripts
- A recording device (computer, phone, tablet, etc.) (if you can have one per student that is ideal)
- A device to play radio plays (some links to free samples below)

**Opening:** (hook)

“Voice-Over” (based on several different warm up games)

Student A will be blindfolded in the center of a circle (or they can close their eyes).

Student B will disguise their voice and say “Student A, Student A, who am I?” (They will say the name of the blindfolded student, not “Student A.”) NOTE: They can say any line you want, as long as it ends in who am I? Great chance to practice lines from a script or try out some new lines.

The blindfolded student will try to guess who Student B is. If Student A gets it right, they get to pick who is blindfolded next. If Student B is able to trick them, Student B either gets to be blindfolded or pick who is blindfolded next.

Repeat until all students have a chance to go in both roles or as time allows.

At the end, have students reflect on the following questions (either aloud, in a notebook, with a partner, or on a post-it. I recommend Think-Pair-Share.):

- How did you feel about changing your voice?
- What, if anything, excited you about the game (changing your voice, watching others, trying to guess, etc.)?
- What, if anything, made you nervous about the game (changing your voice, watching others, trying to guess, etc.)?
- Think about the students who were able to successfully disguise their voices. What did they do so that the blindfolded student didn't know who they were?
- When you were blindfolded, what did you listen for to help you figure out who was talking?

Bring everyone back together and have them share what their partner said. After the sharing, asking these questions:

- How was it checking in with your feelings? (self awareness)
- How was it listening to your partner's feelings? (social awareness)
- How did it feel sharing your partner's thoughts and ideas? (both)

### **Instructional Procedures:**

#### **Day 1:**

1. Check in: On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel today? (1 - horrible to 5 - amazing)
  - a. SEL Note: This is a time for students to take a moment and reflect on themselves and how they are (self-awareness)
  - b. A good idea is to use visuals such as the pain scale in a pediatric office or smiley faces (or Google "on a scale of how do you feel today" and a bunch of fun options come up. Ask the following questions after the check in:
  - c. How was it checking in with your feelings?
  - d. Why do you think we, as actors, check in with our feelings?

Have them journal their answers or share with a partner.

Have a few students share their thoughts.

If no one mentions it, say "Recognizing your own emotions helps as an actor since an actor's job is to portray the emotions of another person and knowing your own emotions can help with that. You can relate to that character if you remember a time you felt the same way. (social awareness) I've observed that being aware of my emotions has helped me as an actor and even in my own life, has anyone had that experience?"

2. Do opening and discussion
  - a. SEL Note: This is a great time for students to demonstrate self awareness when reflecting what they did for the game and social awareness when giving their thoughts about what others did in the game
3. After discussion, talk about times when stories are told just with voices. If they cannot think of any, you can bring up the following:
  - a. Podcasts
  - b. Bedtime stories (eyes could be closed for the stories)
  - c. Campfire stories

4. introduce the idea of radio plays.
  - a. Ask students if they know what radio plays are (or what they think they are)
  - b. Share the definition “Radio drama (or audio drama, audio play, radio play, radio theatre) is a dramatized, purely acoustic performance, broadcast on radio or published on audio media, such as tape or CD. With no visual component, radio drama depends on dialogue, music and sound effects to help the listener imagine the characters and story.” (from: <https://www.theatre crafts.com/pages/home/topics/sound/radio-drama/>)
5. Bring back what you talked about for the two discussion questions about how voices were changed to disguise the person (or they took on a different character)
  - a. If they do not bring it up, mention Pace (how fast or slow someone speaks), Pitch (how high or low the sound of the voice is), Tone (the emotion in the voice), and Volume (how loud or quiet the voice is).
  - b. Note: Write or have a student write the words Pace, Pitch, Tone, and Volume on the board with their definitions. Have students copy the words into their Drama notebooks (or have them displayed in the classroom depending on what works best for your students)
6. Play Voice-Over again. Ask students to try a new strategy they heard in the discussion or to try changing their Pace, Pitch, Tone, or Volume to see if they can trick the blindfolded student.
7. Exit slip: Have students answer (on paper or aloud or in pairs):
  - a. How did you feel playing the game a second time after the discussion? (Was it easier, more difficult, more fun, less fun, etc.)
  - b. Why do you think actors change their voices to help tell a story?

## Day 2:

1. Check in: On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel today? (1 - horrible to 5 - amazing)
  - a. SEL Note: This is a time for students to take a moment and reflect on themselves and how they are (self-awareness)
2. Ask: why do you think we check in every day?
  - a. Have students write in journals or share with a partner.
  - b. Share out responses. (Sample responses could include: we feel different some days. Our friends might feel different some days. It’s good to know how we feel in the moment.)
3. Do a vocal warm up.

Suggested warm up: Wizard of Oz Resonators (common, but I learned from Ugochukwu Anyanwu via New Victory Theatre) (It is recommended to do each voice at least twice.) NOTE: You could show images from the Wizard of Oz or the Wiz

- a. Cowardly Lion (diaphragm): put hands up as if you’re going to fight and say using your diaphragm “Put ‘em up! Put ‘em up! Put ‘em up!”
- b. Wizard of Oz (chest voice): put hands on chest and open your arms wide as you say (using your chest voice) “I am the Great and Powerful Oz!”
- c. Dorothy (throat): put hands under chin and say “There is no place like home.”
- d. Wicked Witch (nasal): point with both hands, put those fingers by your nose, and point from your nose (while speaking from your nose) and say “I’ll get you my pretty and your little dog too!”

- e. Glinda (head voice): put your hand on top of your head and lift it up and point while saying "Follow the yellow brick road!"
4. Turn and Talk:
- a. Have students turn and talk with a partner about:
    - i. how it felt placing their voices in different resonators.
    - ii. how the vocal choices showed what the characters were feeling
  - b. Bring them back to the whole class. Have volunteers share what their partner said. Spend time connecting voice choices with emotions and feelings.
  - c. If time (and they are not too anxious to get started with the activity), ask students to give an example when their voice changes due to emotion
    - i. Examples: getting louder or softer when really mad, talking really quickly when excited, talking in a higher pitch when really excited, talking more slowly when sad, etc.
      - 1. I talk about how my dad would get really loud and gruff in tone when he was mad, but my mom would get really quiet and extra articulate when angry.

Note: SEL Social Awareness by sharing what their partner said (listening and sharing what their partner said)

- 5. Have students pick a radio script to work on. (This ideally would be a short script they wrote, but it could be any script that is entirely (or almost entirely) dialogue. There is a sample ten lines of dialogue that works well for young radio play actors attached below Day 5. Between 10 and 20 lines of dialogue is ideal with only two characters.)
- 6. Have students record themselves. (They should spread out around the room as much as possible or if possible, go behind a curtain or in the hall if you are able to safely supervise).
- 7. Exit slip:
  - a. What did you observe about your voice when recording it?
  - b. Did your voice sound differently than you hear it in your head? If it did, explain what was different. If it didn't, why do you think it sounded the same?
  - c. Would you rather listen to the recording yourself or have a friend listen to it? Explain your answer.

### Day 3:

- 1. Check in: On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel today? (1 - horrible to 5 - amazing)
  - a. SEL Note: This is a time for students to take a moment and reflect on themselves and how they are (self-awareness)
- 2. Ask: why do you think we check in every day?
  - a. Have students write in journals or share with a partner.
  - b. Share out responses. (Sample responses could include: we feel different some days. Our friends might feel different some days. It's good to know how we feel in the moment.)
- 3. Do a vocal warm up. (See above for suggestion)
- 4. Tell students they are going to listen to their recording from the day before.
  - a. There will be some students who will be really nervous about this. I always tell them that I don't like listening to myself, but it really helps me be a better performer because

I can hear what I do well and what I need to work on. Also let them know it's really great that they recognize that nervousness within themselves! It means they are very self aware! (And those who feel confident are also self aware!)

5. Share the rubric (or the part of the rubric you are using)
  - a. Tell students to focus on the section of the rubric you picked (or that they choose). I recommend focusing on one or two sections for beginners, but more advanced actors might want to try and work on all four parts.
  - b. Note: Pace and Volume are easy for beginning actors to hear the differences between.
6. Partner students up.
  - a. Have students do an exercise where they perform their scene for their partner, but **THEY MUST USE JIBBERISH**. Sample script:  

A: Gaga baba goo?

B: Baba yadda goo!

A: Tada tada tada!

B: Do be do be do!
  - b. Have the partner see if they can explain who each character is and what the story is. If they can't, try again!
7. Have students reflect (either written or verbally) on what they noticed about doing the gibberish. Have them think about (or preferably write) what they will use in their next performance to help differentiate the characters.
8. Have students record themselves again.
9. Exit slip: What did you observe about your voice in your second recording yourself? How are you using your voice to tell the story?

#### **Day 4:**

1. Check in: On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel today? (1 - horrible to 5 - amazing)
  - a. SEL Note: This is a time for students to take a moment and reflect on themselves and how they are (self-awareness)
2. Ask: why do you think we check in every day?
  - a. Have students write in journals or share with a partner.
  - b. Share out responses. (Sample responses could include: we feel different some days. Our friends might feel different some days. It's good to know how we feel in the moment.)
3. Do a vocal warm up.
4. Have students pair up and do the following (simultaneously)
  - a. Tell them you are going to put a phrase on the board.
  - b. Then you are going to have them say the phrase with different emotions.
  - c. They will take turns each saying the phrase with the different emotions. (Feel free to change the emotions and phrases!)
  - d. After, have student volunteers come up and say one of the phrases with an emotion and have the audience guess the emotion.

NOTE: Punctuation intentionally left off of the phrases.

Phrase 1:

I'm so happy to see you

(Emotion 1: Happy, Emotion 2: Sarcastic, Emotion 3: Sad, Emotion 4: Angry)

Phrase 2:

You're late

(Emotion 1: Mad, Emotion 2: Indifferent, Emotion 3: Sad, Emotion 4: Choice)

Phrase 3:

What can I do now

(Emotion 1: Frantic/Nervous, Emotion 2: Angry, Emotion 3: Excited, Emotion 4: Choice)

5. Bring all students back together. Have them journal or pair and share the answers to the following questions.
  - a. How did you know what the emotion was when the words didn't change?
  - b. What did you observe about changing your voice to match the emotion, but not change the words?
  - c. How did you know what someone else's emotion was even when they were saying the same words?
6. Have a few volunteers share their answers. Remind students that this is another important reason why we reflect on our feelings and the feelings of others (self and social awareness).
7. Vocabulary!
  - a. Write the word subtext on the board. Feel free to write your own definition or use this one from New York Film Academy: "In a play or film, subtext is the underlying message being conveyed by a piece of dialogue."
  - b. Talk about how subtext can help with meaning in a scene and help convey what a character means and feels.
8. Have students write the subtext of each line on their script.
9. Have them partner up and just read the subtext to each other.
  - a. Have the partner respond to this question after listening:
    - i. Does the story still make sense with just the subtext? Why or why not?
10. Have students record themselves performing the script as written, keeping in mind the subtext they worked on and still thinking about pitch, tone, pacing, and volume.

**Day 5:**

1. Check in: On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel today? (1 - horrible to 5 - amazing)

- a. SEL Note: This is a time for students to take a moment and reflect on themselves and how they are (self-awareness)
2. Do a vocal warm up.
3. Review the rubric again.
4. Have students write what the story of their play is in one or two sentences.
5. Have them partner up and listen to their recording and grade themselves (and their partner) using the rubric (or part of the rubric that was chosen). Make sure they share their sentences with each other so the partner can know if the performer told the story they were trying to tell.
6. Have students record themselves again.
7. Exit slip:
  - a. What was it like having someone else listen to your acting?
  - b. What is the most useful piece of feedback your partner gave you or that you noticed for yourself before your final recording?

### Day 6:

1. Check in: On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel today? (1 - horrible to 5 - amazing)
  - a. SEL Note: This is a time for students to take a moment and reflect on themselves and how they are (self-awareness)
2. Final Presentations! Either play the recordings or if a recording was not possible have the audience close their eyes and listen to the radio play.
3. Leave time for positive comments from the audience and celebration!
4. End with the closing (below)

### Sample Script: "Get Out of My Seat" by Erin Moughon

NOTE: Playwright gives permission for script to be rewritten however needed for class purposes. Pronouns should be changed to best suit the performers.

A: Get up.  
 B: What?  
 A: You're in my seat.  
 B: Your seat?  
 A: Yeah, I always sit there. Now move.  
 B: Not always, 'cause I'm sitting here now.  
 A: Get up or I'll...  
 B: What?  
 A: I'll...  
 B: OW! Miss! Miss! She punched me in the nose!  
 A: Snitch. Get up.  
 B: NO! OW! You hit me again?!?! What is wrong with you? Miss! Miss! She hit me again!  
 A: Ah! She's coming. Bye!  
 B: That's what you get!

**Assessment:** (please describe the assessment tools and attach any rubrics)

|   | Superior  | Excellent  | Good but could be better   | Consider Re-doing  |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <b>CREATING CHARACTER</b><br>standards:<br>TH:Cr3.1.7.b.<br>Develop effective physical and vocal traits of characters in an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work | Uses pitch, tone, pacing, and volume to create two characters and endow each character with a unique personality.   | Uses pitch, tone, pacing, and volume to create two distinct character voices.  | Pitch, tone, pacing, and volume are starting to be developed, but they are not creating two distinct characters yet.   | There is no change in pitch, tone, pacing, and volume for either character.                  |
| Evidence:   |   |  |  |  |
| <b>REHEARSAL</b><br>TH:Pr6.1.7.a.<br>Participate in rehearsals for a drama/theatre work that will be shared with an audience.   | Experiments with a wide range of bold vocal choices in recorded rehearsals to discover expanded ways to use pitch, tone, pacing and volume to communicate meaning and subtext.  | Experiments in recorded rehearsals with varied use of pitch, tone, pacing, and volume to animate the text.   | Experiments in recorded rehearsals with varied use of pitch, tone, pacing, and volume, but the choices do not match the text.  | Makes the same vocal choices for pitch, tone, pacing, and volume for each rehearsal.         |
| Evidence:   |   |  |  |  |
| <b>REFLECTING</b><br>standards:<br>TH:Re7.1.7.a.<br>Compare recorded personal and peer reactions to artistic choices in a drama/theatre work                          | Reflects on their own performance by analyzing use of pitch, tone, pacing, and volume and makes changes in their performance based on their reflection.<br><br>Incorporates feedback from others when reflecting on their work. | Reflects on their own performance by analyzing use of pitch, tone, pacing, and volume.<br><br>Incorporates feedback from others when reflecting on their work. | Reflects on their own performance by analyzing use of pitch, tone, pacing, and volume.<br><br>Does not incorporate feedback from others when reflecting on their work. | Does not reflect on their performance or incorporate feedback when reflecting on their work. |
| Evidence:   |   |  |  |  |

## Closing:

1. Celebrate the boldness to try a new medium!
2. Exit slip: Have students complete the following questions:
  - a. What was something you did with radio play work that you are proud of?
  - b. How do you think voice can be used to help tell a story?
  - c. Did you like acting with just your voice? If yes, explain why you liked it. If no, what would have made it more enjoyable for you? (If nothing would have made it more enjoyable, explain why!)
  - d. Is there anything in the unit that could have been done differently to make it more enjoyable? Explain.

Note: If a student says nothing made it enjoyable, think about reaching out one-on-one. Some students might just not be all that into acting or using their voice, but see if there is anything that might have helped them (or that they think could help future students) in this unit. Also you know your students, so do not feel like you need to push.

## Learning for all:

- Suggestions for non-verbal students:
  - if they use a device to communicate, allow them to use their bodies along with the device to convey the story
  - Allow them to interpret the script visually, using body and possible drawings (this can be with another student reading the script or without the script and only using the visual language)
  - Allow them to perform the script in ASL or another visual language
- Suggestion for neuro-diverse students:
  - Allow students who cannot perform in front of others to record themselves in a separate space or at home
  - Allow them to choose the audience they share it with (which may just be the adults)
- Suggestion for students who vocalize differently
  - Allow them to vocalize as they would in class and use their bodies, another's voice, and/or visuals to go along with their vocalizations

## Works Cited:

- <https://www.theatrecrafts.com/pages/home/topics/sound/radio-drama/>
- <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/the-importance-of-subtext-for-actors/#:~:text=In%20a%20play%20or%20film,to%20scenes%20and%20their%20characters.>
- "Get out of my seat!" by Erin Moughon, included with permission

## Additional Tools & Resources:

### Radio plays (recorded):

- In Your Dreams (made by two high school students):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TA76801ncl>
- Check Mate: A short radio play <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5W5JnbAcenU>
- Richard II (produced by the Public Theatre for Radio):  
<https://publictheater.org/productions/season/1920/richard-ii/>
- The Great Escapism (10 short radio plays) <https://newambassadorstheatre.com/the-great-escapism>
  - Note: Several of these plays contain adult language and scenarios. Please listen before sharing with your students.

### Radio Play Scripts:

- Radio Play for the Drama Class for Middle School: <https://www.dramanotebook.com/drama-curriculum/scripts-for-kids/radio-plays-for-kids/>
- Playscripts Radio Plays: <https://www.playscripts.com/radio-plays>