

## Unit: Theater Making

# Acting

## Overview

Grades:

9th - 12th

Class Sessions:

20 weeks/daily

Teacher:

Ira Rosenberg-

School:

Frank Sinatra  
School of the  
Arts

### Benchmarks:

- Students increase their range of expression as playwrights through the use of vocabulary and dramatic structure, and by exploring various theatrical styles and forms.
- Students apply elements of research, imagination and revision in their dramatic writing.
- Working alone and in groups, students begin to recognize and articulate their personal vision and the cultural context of their work.

### Big Idea(s) of this Unit

- Actors being in action is critical in creating dynamic theatre
- What we do and what we say can be radically different
- Generality is the enemy of art

### Project Description

- Students will analyze dramatic texts so that they can act them effectively.

### Instructional Goal

- To provide the students with one specific method that they can apply to any dramatic text so that they can illuminate the text with dynamism and dramatic power.

### Indicators of Student Learning

#### Students will know:

- The primacy of the character's want or objective
- The six criteria that make an action stage worthy
- The three essential components of an action
- What a beat is

#### Students will be able to:

- Analyze several scenes and formulate an objective and actions for their characters
- Test and evaluate their choices in the rehearsal process
- Work collaboratively with a partner to maximize the dramatic potential of the scene
- Evaluate their peers' performances based on the criteria used in creating the work

#### Students will understand that:

- The reality of doing is the foundation of acting
- The actor must truly affect his partner through action and allow himself to be affected through his partner's actions
- Seeking a specific desired response is essential to keeping the actor alive and in the moment

## Unit: Theater Making

# Acting continued

## Overview continued

### Pre-Assessment/Planning

- Have I taught these students before?

*I have taught the Freshman only since the beginning of this school year.*

- What do students already know and understand about this area of Theater Making?

*The importance of doing as opposed to emoting/indicating for the actor*

*That theatre has a long and developed tradition, and that there is an established craft for the actor*

*The importance of relaxation and concentration for the actor*

- What skills related to this unit have students already developed?

*Ability to sustain concentration and focus while on stage*

*Ability to have a sense of ease while on stage*

*Ability to participate as ensemble members to achieve a shared goal*

- What activity might I use as a pre-assessment tool?

*I had students participate in many exercises that develop and test the skills listed above*

- How will the students' needs be addressed?

*By continuing to have them participate in specifically designed exercises to further develop and nurture these prerequisite skills.*

### Unit Assessment Strategies: What is the evidence of student learning?

#### Self-Assessment

- Through substantial classroom discussion focusing on the rubrics (teacher and student created) used to evaluate scenes
- Through the use of reflective writing and journaling

#### Peer Assessment

- Through observation of the rehearsal and presentation process, making use of rubrics, and a debriefing with scene partner

#### Teacher Assessment

- Review of student written work
- Observation of rehearsal and presentation process using teacher/student created rubric

### Teacher Self-Assessment

- What is working well? How do I know this?
- What should be changed? How do I know this?

# Unit: Theater Making

## Acting continued

### Overview continued

Learning Experiences	Theater Strands				
	<i>making</i>	<i>literacy</i>	<i>connec- tions</i>	<i>resources</i>	<i>careers</i>
Daily warm up that includes work on alignment, breathing, concentration, and ensemble work	◆	◆			◆
Reading of various sources to get a background in the Stanislavski technique, and the context in which this technique evolved	◆	◆	◆		
Exercises and improvisations that focus on the distinction between just saying words and using words to affect someone else, and get something done.	◆	◆	◆		
Read and reflect on Objectives chapter in William Ball's A Sense of Direction to introduce students to the importance of the objective, and the method of formulating actions to achieve the objective	◆	◆	◆		
Explore list of "actable" verbs, and have students physicalize each of these verbs	◆	◆	◆		
Have students determine character objectives and create actions for a short scene	◆	◆	◆		
Scene partners rehearse scenes to test objectives and actions using various rehearsal techniques	◆	◆	◆		◆
Students present scenes and are evaluated by teacher and peers	◆	◆	◆		

## Unit: Theater Making

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## Assessment: Rehearsal Guide for Stage II of Rehearsal Process for Freshman Presentation

You are now ready to embark on the next stage of rehearsal. You will be working independently with your partner to further bring your scene to life. Use the following questions to help you focus your work and make it as productive and stimulating as possible:

1. Each time you rehearse, are you committed to being fully concentrated?
2. Are you working with a sense of ease?
3. For every second that you are “on stage” do you have an object of attention? Is this object external or internal?
4. Are you fully aware for every second you are on stage of what it is you WANT, and have you made that WANT significant to YOU?
5. Are you fully aware of the specific obstacles that are preventing you from getting what you want?
6. For every second that you are “on stage,” are you working to get a specific response from the receiver? Are you checking to see if what you say has affected your partner, and if you are getting your desired response?
7. Are you actively listening to your partner, and responding specifically to what you have been given? (Meisner: Don't do anything until something makes you do it, and what you do has to do with the other person.)
8. Are you doing something to get what you want for every second that you are on stage? Are you specifically acting upon your partner in each beat of the scene to get what you want? (Meisner: The foundation of acting is the reality of doing.)
9. Are you putting the obstacle in yourself or the other person? You must always believe that you are going to get what you want.
10. Are you choosing what to say, or are you just saying lines?
11. Are you “pushing against” your partner as much as you possibly can? Are you really working to affect your partner, or are you faking it?
12. Are you physicalizing your actions as much as possible?
13. Have you fully justified your blocking? Is the blocking accurate?
14. Are you at any time upstaging yourself or your partner? Are you in the right body positions?
15. Are you projecting so that the audience can hear you?
16. Have you carefully worked out any stage combat?
17. Have you carefully worked out any “business” or activities with props, and do they fully support your being in action with your receiver?
18. Are you taking risks? Are you surprising yourself?
19. Are you working in the most disciplined way that you are capable of?

## Unit: Theater Making

# Acting continued

## Assessment: Rehearsal Guide for Stage II of Rehearsal Process for Freshman Presentation continued

### Homework:

1. Have you fully explored all the given circumstances imaginatively with all of your five senses?
2. Have you learned your lines IN CONTEXT?
3. Do you fully understand every word that you are saying, and every word that is being said to you?

# Unit: Theater Making

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### Rubric for Freshman Scene Work

SCORE	4	3	2	1
<b>Actor was really trying to affect partner</b>	Desired response was clear, and actor was fully acting upon partner to achieve it, and was seeing if partner was responding to the pressure.	Desired Response was less clear, and actor was not as fully acting upon partner to achieve it; actor was checking less to see if other actor was responding.	Desired response was unclear and actor was not really acting upon other actor to achieve it; there was little checking in to see if other actor was responding.	No desired response, and actor was not acting upon other actor; there was no interest in how other actor was responding.
<b>Actor physicalized actions</b>	Actor used her or his entire body in expressing his or her actions.	Actor mostly used her or his entire body in expressing his or her actions	Actor did not use most of his or her body in expressing his or her actions	Actor did not make use of his or her body at all to express his or her actions
<b>Actor was fully committed to actions and objective</b>	Actor was fully going after his or her wants and actions. Actions adhered to the six criteria.	Actor was mostly going after his or her wants and actions. Actions mostly adhered to the six criteria.	Actor was not really going after his or her wants and actions. Actions did not really adhere to the six criteria.	Actor did not go after his or her wants and actions. Actions did not adhere to any of the six criteria.
<b>Actor was listening to partner</b>	Actor's focus was on partner, not on him or herself.	Actor's focus was mostly on partner, not on him or herself	Actor's focus was not really on partner, and focused more on him or herself	Actor's focus was not on partner at all, and all on him or herself
<b>Actor was open and responsive to partner</b>	Actor let other actor determine what he or she did; actor did not manufacture responses.	Actor mostly let other actor determine what he or she did; actor did not manufacture responses.	Actor rarely let other actor determine what he or she did; actor mostly manufactured responses.	Actor did not let other actor determine what he or she did; actor manufactured all responses.
<b>Actor was breathing and speaking from first breath center and was audible</b>	Actor was breathing and speaking from first breath center and was audible	Actor was mostly breathing and speaking from first breath center and was mostly audible	Actor was rarely breathing and speaking from first breath center and was rarely audible	Actor was never breathing and speaking from first breath center and was not audible
<b>Actor did not break</b>	Actor did not break for entire scene			Actor broke
<b>Actor had lines memorized</b>	Actor has lines memorized accurately and completely			Lines were not memorized
<b>Audience Focus</b>	Actor, while in audience, focused and supported performers on stage.			Actor, while in audience, did not focus and support performers on stage.

Actor's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Score \_\_\_\_\_

## Ira Rosenberg, Theater Teacher Observations

The learning activities and materials in this unit are used to introduce students to the concept of being in action. Stanislavski's work is discussed and read, as well as a chapter on objectives and actions from William Ball's *A Sense of Direction*. Simple one-page scenes are scored for objectives, beats, and actions and are then performed in class. Scenes are evaluated using a rubric. After this process is complete, students move on to much more complex and longer scenes that are eventually performed for the public.

Learning outcomes, of course, vary with each student. At the conclusion of the unit, however, most students have a much different understanding of what it means to act on stage. In class discussions, it is evident that there has been a shift from thinking that acting is emoting while saying lines to a sense that acting has more to do with doing. I think students begin to see that they cannot simply think of the lines as lines, but must embody the language they are given to accomplish what they must accomplish. An unexpected outcome of this work is that, occasionally, some student actors will have a breakthrough; it comes as quite a surprise to them that by committing to their objectives and actions, emotions can be evoked. One student this year wanted to "recreate" the wonderful results she achieved in one scene, and came to me in tears after a second presentation of the scene. She realized that she could not "recreate" the results of the previous presentation, and simply had to trust to her doing each action in the moment.

On reflecting on the efficacy of my teaching of this unit, I realize that there was one particular learning activity that I think had a major impact. I have struggled with activities that make explicit what being in action is for the actor. The learning activity that I think made this clearer is one where I have partners go up on the stage with a very specific objective: each wants to push the other off the stage. The students were very committed to this exercise, and the audience's attention was always riveted. Throughout the unit, I kept referring back to this exercise; when working on the scenes, I would often say that the actors were not pushing hard enough against each other, and that this resulted in a lack of dramatic tension. The students immediately understood what I was saying, and often made instant adjustments that immeasurably improved the scenes. In going forward with this unit, I want to come up with more exercises like this one that so concisely demonstrate what being in action is.

