

DUFFLEBAG THEATRE

PRESENTS:

SHAKESPEARE



Study Guide

Discussions - Background information - Classroom Activities

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ABOUT THE SHOW

The “nearly world-famous” DuffleBag Theatre performs well-known stories but in a new and fun way. They take the stories and make them come alive through improvisation. In improvisation there is no script. The performers have a rough idea of the storyline and then they make up or adjust the story as they go along. They also invite audience members to come up and take part in the play. During the show, all of the students become involved by having to listen for certain ‘clue’ words or phrases to which they must respond. (e.g. “When I say “Montague’ everyone says “Mama Mia!””)

ABOUT THE COMPANY

DuffleBag Theatre specializes in improvisational story theatre for young audiences. They formed in 1992 for the London International Children's Festival but are now based in Toronto. The theatre company performs extensively throughout Ontario, all across Canada, into the United States, and overseas in countries like Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Because they travel so much that's why they call themselves the "nearly world-famous" DuffleBag Theatre.



APPROACHES TO DUFFLEBAG THEATRE'S SHAKESPEARE

Besides being an entertaining show, DuffleBag's adaptations of Shakespeare shows can be a fun and creative way to explore the stories of Shakespeare as well a vehicle for introducing Improvisation and Participatory Theatre to students in grades 7-10.

To follow up on one of these performances you can add a new dimension to your Shakespeare unit by considering the following:

- Story adaptation
- Satire,
- Humour (*sight gags, puns, slapstick, parody, anachronisms*)
- Audience participation
- Improvisation
- Creating and playing multiple characters

Learning Goal

You will be able to create improvisation and participatory theatre to share with younger students.

Success Criteria

- you will create characters by changing body language and voice.
- you will demonstrate how to improvise.
- you will retell familiar stories through characterization.
- you will use simple props and costumes.
- You will involve an audience in a theatre piece.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

Minds On:
Assessing Prior
Knowledge:

DISCUSSION

- What Shakespearean plays can they name?
- Which Shakespearean characters do they know
- Do they know any famous phrases from Shakespeare?
- What are some challenges presented in Shakespearean stories?
- What are some of the universal themes that Shakespeare dealt with in his plays?
- Have you ever seen an improvised performance? How was it different from a scripted performance?

ACTIVITIES

- Choose and write out famous lines from the DuffleBag Shakespeare adaptations that they are going to see.
- Cut out the lines and give one line to each student.
- Students begin walking around the room and saying the line aloud.
- Following instructions from the teacher students read the line as a whisper, shout, singsong, or in a specific genre (*western, soap opera, talk show*)
- On a stop signal, students say the line to the person closest to them.
- Students then stand in a circle. One person enters the circle and says a line and strikes a pose. Anyone else in the circle can join in when they think their line fits until there are 5 students in the centre of the circle. Dissolve the tableau and begin again. Repeat until all students have participated.
- In pairs: Decide on setting and characters and situation. Create a short scene in which each person's line is either the opening or closing line. (*The first person says "What light through yonder window breaks" The scene continues until the other person ends it with "is this a dagger I see before me?"*).

POST- PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing with DuffleBag Theatre

DuffleBag Theatre adapts the story through improvisation using their actors and members of the audience.

DISCUSSION

- What are some of the changes that were made to the story through improvisation?
- How did this adaptation differ from other versions? (e.g. *book, movie, musical*)
- Were there any characters added or excluded from the original story?
- In what way did they change the personalities of the characters?
- Why might the playwrights have members of the audience playing some of the parts?
- How did props or costumes help to create the characters and tell the story?
- What other ways did the audience get involved?
(e.g. *Having the audience shout specific words or phrases when certain characters are mentioned*)
- How did having a Narrator help to move the story along?
(e.g. *Keeps the scenes short and to the point; the audience members, who take parts, don't have to worry about dialogue, or where to go, what to do.*)
- Although the Shakespearean plays that DuffleBag has chosen are tragedies, the plays are performed as comedies. List the types of humour shown in the play (visual and verbal puns, sight gags, parody, slapstick, anachronisms such as an iPhone, contemporary music references)
- Extension: research one of the types of humour listed above and present and demonstrate. (*suggested topics: definition, origin, who is a famous practitioner of that particular type of humour*)

Activities

- Take a word from the original text and tell what it means in modern language
- In pairs, take a short scene from the original play and rewrite the scene in modern language.
- Take a tragic scene and find a way to make it funny, modeled on the types of humour seen in the DuffleBag version.

POST- PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

Activities

Genre Freeze

- Students, in pairs or small groups, are given or choose a scene from the Shakespeare they have just seen.
- They choose roles and play out the scene.
- Anytime during the scene, the teacher or another student calls “freeze” and a new genre (*farce, soap opera, reality show, talk show*)
- Students must continue the scene but in the new genre

Extension: Students write a graphic novel version of a Shakespearean play.



**POST-
PERFORMANCE
DISCUSSION
AND
ACTIVITIES**

“Play”-ing with Props and costumes

The DuffleBag Theatre performers often use props and costumes to help them create the characters and to tell the story (e.g. a crown, a bowl, a shoe). The prop/costume helps the imagination of the audience as well as the actor to create the character and the action on stage. Sometimes the same prop/costume can be used to represent more than one object. (E.g. a saucepan can be for cooking, but then placed on a head for a helmet.) This is part of the magic of theatre. Things are not always what they seem.

ACTIVITIES

PASS THE OBJECT: whole group

The class sits in a circle. The Teacher begins by using an object, such as a marker, as something completely different. (E.g. uses it as if it is a toothbrush.) The class guesses what the teacher is miming. The teacher then passes the marker to the student on the left, who uses the marker as if it is something else. Each time the class guesses what it is. The second time around the circle, change the original object (a scarf, a pot, a pointer) and use it to represent the items in a folk/fairy tale.

Hint: Tell children that it is okay to do the same object as someone else, since they might do it differently. Also tell them it is okay to pass if they are stuck for an idea-this way the game doesn't get bogged down by the shy or reluctant student.

PASS THE OBJECT CHALLENGE: small groups

Each group is given a different object/costume and asked to use it in as many different ways as possible in one minute. This can be done by children taking turns in order, or by anyone on the team running to centre to demonstrate an object. One team at a time takes the challenge while the other teams watch and listen.

COSTUMES TELL A STORY: in pairs, small groups

A set of non-related costume pieces is placed in the middle of the circle. One student selects a piece and starts the Shakespeare story, using it as a jumping-off point. Each student adds to the story, by continuing the storyline and including another of the costume pieces from the pile (e.g. a slipper, a hat, scarf, piece of material, mask, etc.)

AN OBJECT LESSON: in pairs

Objects used in a particular setting are placed on a table. (e.g. kitchen objects, beauty parlour items) One person narrates the activity, such as baking a cake, or giving a shampoo, using the heightened language of Shakespeare. (E.g. *Pourest thou, the golden liquid over the tresses of the damsel*)

The other person must listen to the narrator and perform the action and use any items mentioned by the narrator. As in 'Pass The Object', items may be used for other than their real purpose (e.g. a pot can be a hat etc.)

POST-
PERFORMANCE
DISCUSSION
AND
ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing with the Characters

Characters are a major part of Shakespearean plays. They always have reasons for doing what they do, but don't always get to explain themselves.

ACTIVITIES

INTERVIEWS: whole group

The teacher takes the role of one of the characters, (*E.g. the nurse in Romeo and Juliet*). The students interview the Nurse to hear the other side of the story.

Or

The teacher takes the role of the interviewer and each student takes on the role of a character from any of Shakespeare's plays. The teacher can go around the circle and ask them questions. The teacher models asking open-ended questions.

INTERVIEWS: in pairs

One student is the interviewer; the other is a character from a story. The interviewer asks open-ended questions. At the end, the interviewer can summarize the answers for the class. The rehearsed interview can be presented to the class or written up as a newspaper article.

WRITING IN ROLE: individually

Students choose a character from the story and write in role as the character, using humour to change the story.

- Write a letter from one character to another.
- Write a letter to the editor, explaining the main problem of the story from the character's point of view. (*e.g. A citizen of Verona talks about the teenagers fighting in the streets*)
- Write a day in the life of the character.
- Write a Dear Diary entry from the point of view of the character.

POST-
PERFORMANCE
DISCUSSION
AND
ACTIVITIES

MEETING IN THE MARKET PLACE: small group or whole group

Improvise a scene where characters from many stories meet together in a familiar setting.

(E.g. Lady Macbeth and Juliet complain about their menfolk.)

Characterization

Choose a character.

List some of the personality and physical traits of the character (*Romeo is romantic, Hamlet is melancholy, Lady Macbeth is ambitious*)

Decide what you could do to make these traits humorous (*exaggerate the trait, play the opposite, have the audience react to the character accordingly etc.*)

Present this character to the class, using acting techniques (*and costume pieces*) along with improvised dialogue. Have the audience call out a line or sound every time the character says a specific word or phrase.



POST- PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

“Play”-ing for an Audience

Performing for an audience is the best way to see if you can convey the images and ideas from a story. After exploring the students are ready to create their own play to present to a younger audience. For this they should choose a story familiar to primary or junior students.

STAGING THE TABLEAU ACTIVITIES

Have the students sit or stand in a neutral position. On a signal, such as a tambourine, they take their positions for the first picture. While they are frozen, one of the members narrates that part of the story, or the characters speak in role, from their frozen positions. After each tableau, the students go into neutral position, wait for the signal and form the next tableau. Lower the overhead lights and add some music and some light from an overhead projector and you have instant theatre.

STAGING THE INTERVIEWS

You could use a Person-on-the-Street or a Talk Show format. Have an announcer, the interviewers and the “guests”. The audience could even be invited to ask questions of the characters.

STAGING AN IMPROVISED STORY: *(small groups or as a whole group)*

Students choose a story that they would like to adapt and perform. Combining all the activities above, dealing with creating characters, improvising dialogue, and using props and costumes, they develop an outline of the play using a story map or a storyboard. Add humour to the story using the techniques from DuffleBag Theatre.

Make a list of the characters in the story and assign the roles.

(To begin, you might want to tell the story in mime, or tableau, with a narrator to move the story along).

Add or change a character to make the story more modern.

Collect the costumes and props.

Decide how the audience will participate based on examples from DuffleBag Theatre.

Rehearse.

Present to a younger audience.