

a beat**by**beat book

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Teaching Drama

The Essential
Handbook



16 Ready-to-Go Lesson Plans
to Build a Better Actor

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All lesson plans are designed for a 60-minute session for kids age 7-16. Level (1) is generally geared toward kids at the lower range of the 7-16 age spectrum, while Level (2) is geared toward kids at the higher range of the 7-16 age spectrum. Mixing and matching to best suit your students' abilities is absolutely encouraged. The lessons do not need to be followed in order.

Introduction

The goal of this eBook is to provide you with specific tools and lesson plans to help you develop the growth of the young actors in your drama program.

When I first started teaching theatre, I know the thing that was most helpful to me was to watch other teachers in action. I sat in with dozens of incredible teaching artists of all different styles absorbing every tool and technique I could. Sure I read all the books on theory and theatre education, but nothing could replace the experience of being in the classroom and seeing what worked and what didn't.

This eBook is designed to recreate that experience. After you've read through all the lessons, you should feel like you've sat in on an entire semester of observing an expert drama teacher introduce the basics of drama to a classroom of students. That's why these lessons are quite a bit more detailed than your typical lesson plan. It's up to you to choose how you want to implement the lessons. Feel free to try them out exactly as is, or adapt using your own toolbox you've developed over the years. As you progress you'll learn what works best with your specific group.

These 16 lessons represent what I think are the strongest (and most fun) ways to introduce kids to the art of acting.

About the Author

For nearly a decade **DENVER CASADO** has worked as an arts educator with New York City's leading theatre organizations including *Disney Theatricals*, *New York City Center* and *Young Audiences New York*. Denver's innovative approach to exploring theatre with kids has earned him invitations to speak at the national conferences of the *American Association of Community Theatre* and the *American Alliance for Theatre Education*. In 2011 he was honored with the All Stars Projects' Phyllis Hyman award, in recognition of his important contribution to the creative growth and development of over 20,000 young people in the NYC public school system. Denver's a graduate of New York University's Steinhardt School of Education.



Lesson Activity Overview

Lesson 1

Stop, Go, Jump!
What is Theatre?
Mirror Activity
Quick Change
Slow Motion Emotion

Lesson 2

Lesson 3

Lesson 4

Lesson 5

Lesson 6

Lesson 7

Lesson 8

Lesson 9

Lesson 10

Lesson 11

Lesson 12

Lesson 13

Lesson 14

Lesson 15

Lesson 16

The purchased version shows
every activity in every lesson =)



Lesson 1: What is Theatre?/Observation

OBJECTIVE: Students will demonstrate the understanding that theatre is the art of telling stories through acting, and how observing the world around you is a first step to becoming a great actor.

MATERIALS:

- Large writing surface (dry erase board/chart paper)
- A bowl with slips of paper that have different emotions written on them (see list on page 7)

GREETING: Greet the students, introduce a little bit about yourself, then immediately begin the warm-up.

I recommend beginning each session with a few words about what the goal/plan is for the day, then immediately jumping into a warm-up activity. Especially with young kids, it's important to get them moving and engaged as soon as possible.

WARM-UP: Drama Game: Stop, Go, Jump!

- Tell the students to take the stage. (From this point on “stage” will refer to any open playing area.)
- When you say *GO*, they are to walk around the stage trying to fill up all the space, not leaving any gaps.
- When you say *STOP* they should stop. Try this out a few times.
- When you say *CLAP* they should clap, when you say *JUMP* they should jump. Try this out a few times, then mix it in with *GO* and *STOP*.
- When you say *KNEES* they should bend to put their hands on their knees, when you say *SKY* they should reach up toward the sky. Try this out, mixing it in with the previous commands.
- After they've gotten the hang of this, kick it up to Level 2. They are now to do everything in exact opposite. *STOP* means *GO*, *GO* means *STOP*, *CLAP* means *JUMP*, *JUMP* means *CLAP*, *KNEES* means *SKY*, *SKY* means *KNEES*.
- Try out this new level for awhile, slowly at first, then getting increasingly faster.
- Finally, kick it up to Level 3. You, the instructor, will be doing the actions literally as you say them, however the students should continue doing the exact opposite.
- Gather the students into a circle to reflect:
 - *Why do you think we played this game? What skills were we working on?*
 - *As an actor, you're going to be required to do things that sometimes feels unnatural, to step outside your comfort zone, and to always be focused and listening for direction. This helps prepare us for that.*

EXPLORATION: What is theatre? What makes a good actor?

- Ask the students if they can describe what theatre is.
 - *How is it different than reading a book?*
 - *How is it different than watching a movie?*

Have the students seated for this next activity. The best time to have the students seated to explore a new concept or idea is immediately following the warm-up activity.

- *Theatre is the art of telling stories through live acting.*
- *We train to be good actors because we want to be the best we can at connecting with an audience to tell stories.*
- Draw a picture of a large stick figure on a dry erase board or chart paper.
- Ask the students to list what they think makes a good actor.
- As you receive suggestions, write them as arrows coming from the stick figure.
- Some of the suggestions you should receive:
 - Can play different characters, can speak loudly, works together well, funny, can take directions, doesn't goof off (focused), etc.
 - Add any items they missed.
- *Our work from here on out will be on exploring and developing the skills necessary to be a great actor; to best act out stories and connect with an audience.*

Too often I feel like drama classes (or any classes, really) jump into lessons without taking a moment to explore why we're doing what we're doing. If every lesson stems from the central goal of "connecting with an audience to tell stories", it's much easier to stay focused and motivated when doing various activities, many of them very silly. If things ever get out of hand in the classroom, take a moment to pause and remind the students of what theatre is really all about.

ACTIVITY: Drama Game: The Mirror Activity

- *In order to play different characters and act out different situations we need to be aware of what's around us, and notice the details; Observation.*
- Pair the students up and have them assign one person an "A" and another a "B". Tell the pairs to face each other.
- When you say "action", A is to move very slowly, and B is to closely "reflect" every movement.
- Encourage the "reflection" to notice not only body movements, but facial expressions as well.
- After awhile have the partners switch.
- *The goal is to have an outside observer not be able to tell who is the leader and who is the follower.*
- Walk around the room and say you're going to choose two pairs who you think are the best "reflections".
- Have everyone sit and focus on these two pairs. Allow them to guess who is leading and who is following.
- For older groups, consider adding [Mirror: 4 Person Variation](#).

The "Mirror Activity" is so common in drama classes because it works. It's just as effective with 1st graders as it is with 8th graders.

Consider playing calming, instrumental music after you say "Action" to enhance the focus and experience.

ACTIVITY: Drama Game: Quick Change

- Have the students seated in a circle.
- Choose one student to be the "changer". Let the class study his/her appearance for 1 second. Ask the "changer" to leave the room out of sight.

- While out of sight the “changer” must change three things about his/her appearance (pull a sock down, change watch from one wrist to another, unbutton a button, etc.)
- When the student enters, the class must figure out what three things changed.
- Continue this for several rounds.
- *We must train ourselves to notice the little things. These little things will add up to help us create unique characters.*

ACTIVITY: Drama Game: Slow Motion Emotion

- Ask three students to take the stage.
- Have the students draw an emotion from the bowl.
- As you slowly count down from 10 to 1, they are to gradually put that emotion in their bodies and their faces.
- Have the class guess which emotion they chose and reflect on what gave away that emotion.

REFLECTION:

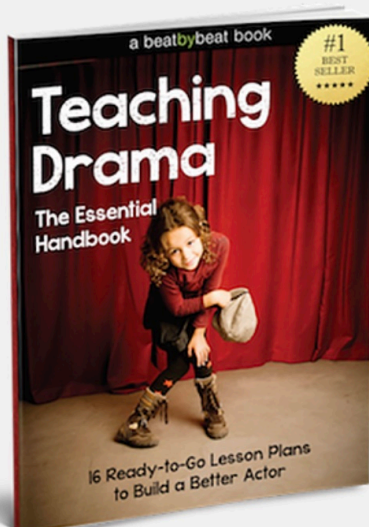
- *What is theatre? Why are we trying to be better actors?*
- *Drama Journal*: This week, observe the people around you, family, friends, teachers, strangers. Choose one interesting person and write three sentences describing them in your journal.*

* Before your classes begin, instruct every student to bring an empty notebook that will become their “drama journal”. (Or provide one for them.) These will be used after every class to explore the content further. Encourage the students to use these notebooks however they feel inspired as your semester progresses. (I’ve had many students bring in full scenes they’ve written because they get excited about an idea :)

List of emotions:

Angry
Sad
Embarrassed
Frustrated
Annoyed
Eager
Shy
Nervous
Loving
Confident
Proud
Curious
Fascinated
Excited
Energetic
Surprised
Grateful
Touched
Hopeful
Happy
Peaceful

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