

Elijah McCoy (1844-1929)

Drama Activities

National Core Arts Standards

Objectives

TH:CR2-8

a. Articulate and apply critical analysis, background knowledge, research, and historical and cultural context to the development of original ideas for a drama/theatre work.

TH:PR5-8

b. Use a variety of technical elements to create a design for a rehearsal or drama/theatre work.

TH:RE7-8

a. Apply criteria to the evaluation of artistic choices in a drama/theatre work.

TH:RE8-8

a. Recognize and share artistic choices when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work.

TH:RE8-8

b. Analyze how cultural perspectives influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

TH:CN11-8

b. Identify and use artifacts from a time period and place to develop performance and design choices in a drama/theatre work.

Enduring Understanding(s)

Theatre artists work to discover different ways of communicating meaning.

Theatre artists develop personal processes and skills for a performance or design.

Theatre artists reflect to understand the impact of drama processes and theatre experiences.

Theatre artists' interpretations of drama/theatre work are influenced by personal



experiences and aesthetics.

Theatre artists critically inquire into the ways others have thought about and created drama processes and productions as a way to inform their own work.

Essential Questions

How do theatre artists transform and edit their initial ideas?

Why are strong choices essential to interpreting a drama or theatre piece?

How do theatre artists comprehend the essence of drama processes and theatre experiences?

How can the same work of art communicate different messages to different people?

In what ways can research into theatre histories, theories, literature and performances alter the way a drama process of production is understood?

What can I do to fully prepare a performance or technical design?

What happens when theatre artists use their imaginations and/or learned theatre skills while engaging in creative exploration and inquiry?

Theatre Literacy

- Listen and watch a presentation attentively demonstrating whole body listening.
- Improvise scenes using dialogue, body language, facial expressions, projection, pantomime, and sounds.
- Create tableaux, voices in the head, improvised scenes, and playwriting.
- Consistently maintain concentration.
- Develop empathy.
- Embody a variety of characters through individual interpretation.
- Work collaboratively and flexibility to create an imagined world
- Investigate and incorporate historical context

Time / Materials

1 class period for each drama lesson.



Playwriting

1. As Elijah, write a journal entry the night before you leave for an apprenticeship in Scotland? What are you excited about? What are your goals? What trepidations do you have about the journey, being in a boarding school, and the students and/or professors?
2. After becoming a certified mechanic, Elijah was unable to secure an engineering position. Write a monologue from Elijah's perspective describing the experience of being rejected for jobs due to racial discrimination.
3. Write a scene between Elijah and his parents when they first learn that Elijah has been accepted for a mechanical engineering apprenticeship in Scotland. As parents, what are their concerns? How do they feel about their son leaving the US for a foreign country? Are they supportive? Does Elijah have any reservations about leaving home?
4. Write a scene between a manager from Michigan Central Railroad and Elijah when he learns that he has been hired as a fireman and an oiler rather than an engineer.

Playwriting Extension

Present the monologue to the class.

Video record the monologue.



Pairs and Small Groups Activities

Elijah's Parents (pairs)

Overview

When Elijah was a child, his parents noticed that he frequently disassembled and assembled his toys.

Over dinner, Elijah's parents are discussing their observations about Elijah playing with his toys.

Process

1. Organize students into pairs and assign them a designated area in the room to work.
2. Give the groups 10 minutes to choose their parts (Elijah's mother and father) and rehearse their scenes.
3. The scenes should be approximately 3 minutes in length and all of the members of the group must take a speaking role.
4. Because the scenes are not scripted and there are no props, students use **creative dialogue** (the words spoken by two or more actors) and **pantomime** objects (communicate an idea through movement and gestures). For example, the scene takes place in the dining room. The actors playing Elijah's parents can pantomiming using a fork, knife, cup, napkin, serving pieces, etc. while eating.
5. Each group will present their scene from their designated area for the class.
6. The facilitator will say, "3, 2, 1, action" and the scene begins.
7. When the scene is over, the facilitator will say, "Scene."
8. The students and facilitator will applaud the scene.

Discussion

1. Did Elijah's parents understand the depth of his intelligence at a young age?
2. What types of programs do we have today to foster learning that Elijah's parents did not have at the time?



Talk Show (small group)

Overview

Elijah patented the first automatic lubricating cup which oiled a locomotive while it operated. Additionally, he had 60 patents for lubrication systems and designed the ironing board and lawn sprinkler.

In the present day, a talk show host will introduce Elijah and ask him questions about his inventions and patents, how he got started in mechanical engineering, how long it takes him to complete an invention, and where he gets his ideas. The talk show host will take questions from the audience.

Process

1. Organize students into small groups and assign them a designated area in the room to work.
2. Give the groups 10 minutes to choose their parts (Elijah, talk show host, and audience members) and rehearse their scenes.
3. The scenes should be approximately 3 minutes in length and all of the members of the group must take a speaking role.
4. Because the scenes are not scripted and there are no props, students use **creative dialogue** (the words spoken by two or more actors) and **pantomime** objects (communicate an idea through movement and gestures). For example, the scene takes place in a studio. The imaginary objects in the studio might include a microphone, coffee cup, paper and pen, etc.
5. Each group will present their scene from their designated area for the class.
6. The facilitator will say, "3, 2, 1, action" and the scene begins.
7. When the scene is over, the facilitator will say, "Scene."
8. The students and facilitator will applaud the scene.

Discussion

1. Which of Elijah's inventions have directly impacted you? Explain.
2. If you could talk to Elijah today, what would you ask him?



Special Needs Drama Activity

Machine

Overview

In Elijah's automatic lubricating cup invention, his machine was composed of multiple parts that work together.

In this exercise, the class will make a human [machine](#).

Procedure

1. The class will be seated in a circle.
2. One person goes into the center of the circle and begins a movement. The movement is repeated without pause.
3. A second person enters the circle and connects (touching is unnecessary) to the first movement with a new movement.
4. At this point in the exercise, there are two actors making two movements.
5. One at a time, students join the machine, each connecting and adding a new movement until there are multiple 4-5 students making a machine.
6. The machine can speed up, slow down, sound can be added to each part of the machine, the machine can break, etc.
7. Repeat steps 2-6 with 4-5 new students.
8. Repeats steps 2-6 with the entire class participating in making a part of the machine.

Discussions

1. What part of the machine did you imagine you made in Elijah's lubricating machine?
2. Why was your part of the machine important?



If I Was You... (Whole group)

Overview

Although Elijah was a licensed mechanical engineer, he had a difficult time trying to secure a position because of discrimination. The Michigan Central Railroad offered Elijah the positions of a fireman and an oiler. He was responsible for fueling the steam engine with wood and/or coal and lubricating the engine's moving parts.

Elijah was confronted with a dilemma. Should he accept inferior employment or continue to face discrimination while seeking employment?

Process

1. Select one person to be Elijah. The other students will line up in two separate, equal lines facing one another. The two lines/rows should be approximately four feet apart and the students should be spaced about five feet apart, if possible.
2. While the student playing Elijah slowly walks down the aisle, each student Elijah passes will offer him advice or comment on his dilemma.
3. When the student playing Elijah gets to the end of the aisle, he should get into a row and another student will play Elijah.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 until every student has had a chance to play Elijah.

Discussion

1. When you played the part of Elijah, what advice did you receive that was valuable? Why?
2. As a commentator, did you change your advice? Explain.
3. After listening to all of the commentary, what opinion(s) have you formulated about Elijah's dilemma?

Student Accommodations

Groups encompass heterogeneous/flexible groupings.

Shy and English Language Learners write their discussion response.

Autistic and shy students take pantomimed parts and/or smaller speaking roles.

Gifted students model the scenes for visual learners.



Discussion topics are given orally and written on the board.

Seating accommodations are made for visually and hearing-impaired students.

A student can shadow (follow the actor around and simultaneously do the things that they do) a shy student.

Students draw a picture in lieu of making a verbal comment.

Students self-cast and differentiate themselves by the size of their selected role.

Special needs students can play scenes in the last group so they can watch others first.

Gifted students can play multiple parts and/or participate in multiple scenes

The sequence of the scene is written on the board/projected on a white board.

Facilitator side coaches those who need extra assistance.