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INDIGENOUS SYMBOLISM IN THE DRAMA CLASSROOM

By ALLISON GREEN

The objective of this unit is for students to be able to engage with Indigenous symbolism in art, and then interpret it in a theatrical context. It begins with an introduction of symbolism through a retelling of an Indigenous story with wolves representing human traits. Students develop a scene that focuses on how to “show and tell” an Indigenous story, clearly showing the symbolic meaning from the oral story. Students will then explore symbols by looking at the characteristics of Canadian Indigenous Art, delving into the symbols and story. Students then share their interpretation of the art by creating and presenting a piece of theatre, followed by reflection and class discussion.

1 - Intro to Indigenous Symbolism

The first day introduces the learning circle format to the class, and the story of The Two Wolves.

2 - Indigenous Symbolism: Art to Drama

This lesson defines symbolism and explores Indigenous art and its characteristics.

3 - Indigenous Symbolism: Art to Drama

Students expand on the previous lesson, working in small groups to begin to create theatre from art.

4 - Indigenous Symbolism: Art to Drama Presentation

Students will share their findings from the previous lessons, and present their interpretation of art in small groups. Options for assessment are included.

Standards Connections

National Core Arts Standards

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - Grade 6

TH:Cr1.1.6.c - Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art - Grade 7

TH:Cn10.1.7.a - Incorporate multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas in a drama/theatre work.

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - Grade 7

TH:Cr1.1.7.c - Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character's inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work.

Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art - Grade HS Proficient

TH:Cn10.1.HS1.a - Investigate how cultural perspectives, community ideas and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - High School Proficient

TH:Cr1.1.HS1.c - Use script analysis to generate ideas about a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - High School Accomplished

TH:Cr1.1.HS11.a - Investigate historical and cultural conventions and their impact on the visual composition of a drama/theatre work.

Perceive and analyze artistic work - Grade HS Advanced

TH:Re7.1.HS111.a - Use historical and cultural context to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade 6

TH:Re8.1.6.b - Identify cultural perspectives that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade 7

TH:Re8.1.7.b - Describe how cultural perspectives can influence the evaluation of drama/theatre work.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work - Grade HS Accomplished

TH:Cr2.1.HS11.a - Refine a dramatic concept to demonstrate a critical understanding of historical and cultural influences of original ideas applied to a drama/theatre work.

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work - Grade HS Advanced

TH:Re8.1.HS111.b - Use new understandings of cultures and contexts to shape personal responses to drama/theatre work.

California VAPA Standards (2019)

6.TH:Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

6.TH:Cr1.b - Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

7.TH:Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

7.TH:Cr1.b - Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character's inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work.

7.TH:Cn10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and

personal experiences to make art.

7.TH:Cn10 - Incorporate multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas in a drama/theatre work.

Prof.TH:Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work

Prof.TH:Cr1.b - Use script analysis to generate ideas about a character that is believable and authentic in a drama/theatre work.

Prof.TH:Cn10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Prof.TH:Cn10 - Investigate how cultural contexts, community ideas, and personal beliefs impact a drama/theatre work.

Acc.TH:Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Acc.TH:Cr1.a - Investigate historical and cultural conventions and their impact on the visual composition of a drama/theatre work.

Adv.TH:Re7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Adv.TH:Re7 - Use historical and cultural context to structure and justify personal responses to a drama/theatre work.

6.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

6.TH:Re8.b - Identify cultural contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

7.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

7.TH:Re8.b - Describe how cultural contexts can influence the evaluation of drama/theatre work.

Prof.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Prof.TH:Re8.b - Identify and compare cultural contexts and contexts that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

Acc.TH:Cr2 Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Acc.TH:Cr2.a - Refine a dramatic concept to demonstrate a critical understanding of historical and cultural influences of original ideas applied to a drama/theatre in western or non-western theatre traditions.

Adv.TH:Re8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

Adv.TH:Re8.b - Use new understandings of cultures and contexts to shape personal responses to drama/theatre work.

Colorado Academic Standards - Drama and Theatre Arts

Sixth Grade

DT.6.1.1.c - Students Can: Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

DT.6.3.2.b - Students Can: Identify cultural perspectives that may influence the evaluation of a drama/theatre work.

Seventh Grade

DT.7.1.1.c - Students Can: Envision and describe a scripted or improvised character's inner thoughts and objectives in a drama/theatre work.

DT.7.1.3.a - Students Can: Consider incorporating multiple perspectives and diverse community ideas in a drama/theatre work.

DT.7.3.2.b - Students Can: Describe how cultural perspectives can influence the evaluation of drama/theatre

work.

High School - Fundamental Pathway

DT.H1.1.1.c - Students Can: Generate ideas about a character that are believable and authentic using script analysis.

High School - Advanced Pathway

DT.H2.1.1.a - Students Can: Investigate historical and cultural conventions and their impact on the visual composition of a drama/theatre work.

DT.H2.1.2.b - Students Can: Cooperate as a creative team to make interpretive choices for a drama/theatre work.

DT.H2.3.1.a - Students Can: Respond to what is seen, felt, and heard in a drama/theatre work to critique artistic choices and justify meaningful feedback based on historical, cultural, and personal context.

High School - Professional Pathway

DT.H3.3.2.b - Students Can: Shape personal responses to drama/theatre work by utilizing new understandings of cultures and contexts.

Common Core

Language

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.2 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Language

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2 - Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Florida Sunshine State Standards

Critical Thinking & Reflection

TH.912.C.1.6 - Respond to theatrical works by identifying and interpreting influences of historical, social, or cultural contexts.

Historical & Global Connections

TH.912.H.1.4 - Interpret a text through different social, cultural, and historical lenses to consider how perspective and context shape a work and its characters.

Georgia Performance Standards - Theatre Arts

Grade 6 - Creating

TA6.CR.1 - Organize, design, and refine theatrical work., a. Identify artistic choices, utilize theatre vocabulary, and demonstrate non-verbal communication skills in the rehearsal process., b. Interpret a character's motivation by understanding the relationship between their background and their behavior., c. Identify the variety of relationships between characters., d. Identify, define, and classify character traits., e. Recognize and demonstrate the roles, responsibilities, and skills associated with collaborative performance., f. Use resources to identify and create technical elements of theatre.

Grade 6 - Connecting

TA6.CN.2 - Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context., a. Describe the origins of theatre., b. Identify and analyze ways in which theatre influences and reflects the culture of a society., c. Utilize a multi-disciplinary approach to research, create, and support artistic choices., d. Examine the relevance of cultural and historical context.

Grade 7 - Connecting

TA7.CN.2 - Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context., a. Examine theatre development throughout history., b. Identify and analyze cultural influences on theatre., c. Utilize multi-disciplinary research skills to obtain cultural and historical information to justify artistic choices (e.g. costuming, make-up, setting of a time period in relation to the play)., d. Draw conclusions about the influence of theatre on society.

Grade 8 - Connecting

TA8.CN.2 - Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context., a. Compare and contrast how theatre evolves through time., b. Examine how culture is defined through theatre and other media., c. Apply advanced research skills to obtain appropriate cultural and historical information to rationalize artistic choices (e.g. costuming, make-up, setting of a time period in relation to the play)., d. Discuss theatre's role in reflecting the culture of a society.

North Carolina Essential Standards 2024

Advanced High School Connect

AD.CN.1.1 - Analyze the impact of theatre throughout the world from the 1900s to the present on trends, styles, and artists, and their future implications.

Advanced High School Respond

AD.RE.1.2 - Evaluate the impact of theatrical works on intended audiences.

North Carolina Essential Standards 2010

Advanced High School Standards - Culture

A.CU.1.1 - Interpret theatre arts from personal, cultural, and historical contexts.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Theatre Arts

HS 117.315 LI - Foundations: Inquiry and Understanding

C.1.E - analyze characters by describing attributes such as physical, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions through reading scripts of published plays.

HS 117.315 LI - Historical and cultural relevance

C.4.B - relate historical and cultural influences on theatre.

HS 117.316 LII - Creative Expression: production

C.3.B - read and analyze cultural, social, and political aspects of a script to determine technical elements.

HS 117.317 LIII - Creative Expression: performance

C.2.C - analyze characters from various genres and styles, describing physical, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions.

HS 117.318 LIV - Creative Expression: performance

C.2.C - analyze and interpret characters from various

genres and styles, describing physical, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions.

Alberta, Canada

Acting Drama 20

1 - analyze a script for explicit character clues

Junior Orientation

listen effectively

recognize that there is an historical and cultural aspect of drama/theatre

share ideas confidently with others

Junior Goal I Objectives

develop a sense of responsibility and commitment

Theatre Studies Level II - Intermediate (Theatre History)

4 - recognize that drama exists in every culture

Senior Goal I Objectives

demonstrate respect for others-their rights, ideas, abilities and differences

sharpen observations of people, situations and the environment

Orientation Drama 10

demonstrate self-discipline, self-direction and a sense of responsibility

display consideration and respect for self and others

listen to self and others

positively support the work of others

share ideas confidently

British Columbia (2018)

GRADE 6 - ARTS - Exploring and creating

Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts

GRADE 7 - ARTS - Exploring and creating

Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts

GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Connect and expand

Explore First Peoples perspectives and knowledge, other ways of knowing, and local cultural knowledge to gain understanding through dramatic works

GRADE 11 - DRAMA - Connect and expand

Explore First Peoples perspectives and knowledge, other ways of knowing, and local cultural knowledge to gain understanding through dramatic works

GRADE 12 - DRAMA - Connect and expand

Analyze the role of story and narrative in expressing First Peoples perspectives, values, and beliefs, including protocols related to ownership of First Peoples oral texts

Ontario, Canada

Grade 6 - Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts

B3.1 - demonstrate an understanding of some drama and theatre themes and traditions from a variety of times, communities, and places

Grades 9 & 10 - Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing - Drama and Society

B.2.2 - explain how dramatic exploration helps develop awareness of different roles and identities people have in society (e.g., explain what they learned through role playing

characters from different socio-economic groups)

Grade 11 - Reflecting, Responding and Analyzing - Drama and Society

B.2.4 - explain how different types of theatre mirror cultural diversity and local or regional concerns in Canadian and global societies from the past and present

Virginia Standards Of Learning (2020)

Grade Six

6.1 - The student will apply creative thinking to theatre.

6.2 - The student will use a creative process to develop solo and collaborative presentations, using body, voice, and imagination.

Grade Six

6.11 - The student will analyze how theatre incorporates other art forms.

Grade Six

6.6 - The student will explain influences of history, culture, and current events on the development of theatrical works.

Grade Six

6.12 - The student will demonstrate how meaning is expressed both physically (through movement, gesture, and other forms of physical expression) and verbally (through vocal choices).

6.13 - The student will identify techniques and skills for actor preparation, including memorization and warm ups for performance.

6.14 - The student will demonstrate theatre as dramatized storytelling by preparing and presenting short scenes that include characters, setting, properties, conflict, and a progressive chain of events.

Grade Six

6.3 - The student will analyze, interpret, and evaluate theatrical works

6.4 - The student will identify connections between personal experience and dramatizations

6.5 - The student will identify communication and collaboration skills for theatre experiences.

Grade Seven

7.3 - The student will analyze, interpret, and evaluate theatre.

7.4 - The student will justify personal responses to theatrical productions.

7.5 - The student will identify and apply communication and collaboration skills for theatre experiences.

Grade Seven

7.6 - The student will explore historical and cultural aspects of theatrical works

7.8 - The student will identify appropriate resources for scripts and materials, with a focus on ethical and legal considerations.

Grade Seven

7.1 - The student will demonstrate creative thinking by improvising scenes from given situations.

7.2 - The student will demonstrate a creative process for theatre.

Grade Seven

7.11 - The student will explain how other fine arts and fields of knowledge are applied in theatre

Grade Seven

7.12 - The student will develop physical and vocal technique for theatre performance.

7.13 - The student will explain techniques and skills for actor preparation, including concentration, discipline, preparation, and imagination for theatrical performance.

7.14 - The student will research, analyze, rehearse, and present a scripted character in a memorized scene and/or monologue.

Grade Eight

8.6 - The student will explore historical and cultural aspects of theatrical works.

Grade Eight

8.11 - The student will synthesize knowledge from other content areas to support theatre arts processes.

Grade Eight

8.1 - The student will refine creative problem-solving, ensemble-building, and improvisational skills by devising and improvising theatrical works.

8.2 - The student will demonstrate a creative process for theatre.

Grade Eight

8.3 - The student will analyze, interpret, and evaluate theatre.

8.4 - The student will explain responses to theatrical productions based on personal background and experience.

8.5 - The student will apply communication and collaboration skills for theatre experiences.

Grade Eight

8.12 - The student will develop physical and vocal technique for theatre performance.

8.13 - The student will use character analysis techniques to research, develop, and present a scripted character.

8.14 - The student will demonstrate the mental and physical discipline necessary for creating and maintaining an imagined reality during performance.

Theatre Arts I: Introduction to Theatre

TI.2 - The student will apply a creative process for theatre.

Theatre Arts I: Introduction to Theatre

TI.5 - The student will apply communication and collaboration skills for theatre experiences.

Theatre Arts I: Introduction to Theatre

TI.6 - The student will explore historical and cultural aspects of theatrical works.