



THEATRICAL ARGUMENTS: PURSUING OBJECTIVES, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT

By RACHEL ATKINS

In this middle school unit by Rachel Atkins, students will explore how to strengthen a theatrical argument through objectives, communication, and conflict: What characters do, what they say, and how they say it when they make an argument or try to achieve an objective. To do this, students will use tableaux, dialogue, and improv. There are presentations and post-lesson writing assignments that you can use for assessment.

How do characters, actors and writers use a variety of actions to achieve an objective or support an argument? How do they enhance their communication by word choice and emotion? How do they develop and strengthen their own arguments by understanding other points of view?

1 - Persuasive Actions & Objectives

In this lesson, students explore character objectives: They will use facial expression and physical gestures to make statues of different actions that characters might take to get what they want. Students will work with a partner to create tableaux (frozen stage pictures) to show a specific action and response. They will write an argument in which they identify a specific action – and then support that claim with evidence from the statues and tableaux.

2 - Persuasive Actions With Vocal Expression

In this lesson, students explore word choice, emotion, and vocal expression in communication. They will select an objective or argument and actions to support it. They will write lines of dialogue to match different actions. They will choose an emotion that correspond with the line and action, and practice speaking their lines with emotion and vocal expression. Finally, they will write an argument explaining how a line expresses a specific action – and support it with evidence.

3 - Improvised Arguments

In this final lesson, students explore two different characters whose opposing points of view or arguments create a conflict. They will identify the objectives or arguments for each character. They will act out a scene between those two characters multiple times, playing both characters. Finally, they will write an argument from one character's point of view – and support it with evidence.

Standards Connections

National Core Arts Standards

Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation - Grade 7

TH:Pr4.1.7.b - Use various character objectives 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.

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work - Grade 8

TH:Cr1.1.8.c - Develop a scripted or improvised character by articulating the character's inner thoughts, objectives, and motivations in a drama/theatre work.

Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation - Grade 6

TH:Pr5.1.6.a - Recognize how acting exercises and techniques can be applied to a drama/theatre work.

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work - Grade 7

TH:Cr2.1.7.a - Examine and justify original ideas and artistic choices in a drama/theatre work based on critical analysis, background knowledge, and historical and cultural context.

Refine new work through play, drama processes and theatre experiences using critical analysis and experimentation - Grade 6

TH:Cr3.1.6.a - Articulate and examine choices to refine a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

Refine new work through play, drama processes and theatre experiences using critical analysis and experimentation - Grade 7

TH:Cr3.1.7.b - Develop effective physical and vocal traits of characters in an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work

Refine new work through play, drama processes and theatre experiences using critical analysis and experimentation - Grade HS Accomplished

TH:Cr3.1.HSII.b - Use research and script analysis to revise physical, vocal, and physiological choices impacting the believability and relevance of a drama/ theatre work.

Common Core

Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4 - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

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.

Reading: Literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1 - Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.3 - Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1 - Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

California VAPA Standards (2019)

7.TH:Pr4 Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

7.TH:Pr4.b - Use various character objectives 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.

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

8.TH:Cr1.b - Develop a scripted or improvised character by articulating the character's inner thoughts, objectives, and motivations in a drama/theatre work.

6.TH:Pr5 Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

6.TH:Pr5.a - Recognize how acting exercises and techniques can be applied to a drama/theatre work.

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

7.TH:Cr2.a - Examine and justify original ideas and artistic choices in a drama/theatre work based on critical analysis, personal experience, and historical and cultural context.

6.TH:Cr3 Refine and complete artistic work.

6.TH:Cr3.a - Receive and incorporate feedback to refine a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.

7.TH:Cr3 Refine and complete artistic work.

7.TH:Cr3.b - Develop effective physical and vocal traits of characters in an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work.

Acc.TH:Cr3 Refine and complete artistic work.

Acc.TH:Cr3.b - Use research and script analysis to revise physical, vocal, and physiological choices impacting the believability and relevance of a drama/ theatre work.

Florida Sunshine State Standards

Critical Thinking & Reflection

TH.912.C.1.3 - Justify a response to a theatrical experience through oral or written analysis, using correct theatre terminology.

Innovation, Technology & the Future

TH.912.F.1.1 - Synthesize research, analysis, and imagination to create believable characters and settings.

TH.912.F.1.2 - Solve short conflict-driven scenarios through improvisation.

TH.912.F.1.3 - Stimulate imagination, quick thinking, and creative risk-taking through improvisation to create written scenes or plays.

Organizational Structure

TH.912.O.1.4 - Write an original script or a dramatic adaptation of a literary work to demonstrate knowledge of theatrical conventions.

Skills, Techniques & Processes

TH.912.S.2.8 - Strengthen acting skills by engaging in theatre games and improvisations.

Georgia Performance Standards 2017 - 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.

TA6.CR.2 - Develop scripts through theatrical techniques., a. Identify the elements of a story., b. Identify the theme and structure of a play., c. Articulate creative ideas in oral and written forms., d. Use the dramatic writing process to generate a script., e. Demonstrate the conventions of dialogue and stage directions.

Grade 6 - Performing

TA6.PR.1 - Act by communicating and sustaining roles in formal and informal environments., a. Demonstrate effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills (e.g. rate, pitch, volume, inflection, posture, facial expression, physical movement), b. Execute character creation in a performance., c. Demonstrate a variety of types of theatre performances.

Grade 7 - Creating

TA7.CR.1 - Organize, design, and refine theatrical work., a. Identify and rehearse effective communication skills., b. Compare and contrast character types and relationships by analyzing character motivations, objectives, and goals., c. Compare the physical, emotional, vocal, and social dimensions of a character., d. Investigate the role and responsibility of the cast and crew., e. Identify and model ensemble skills in the rehearsal process., f. Utilize staging and blocking choices to enhance the performance., g. Compare, contrast, and design elements of technical theatre., h. Utilize theatre vocabulary throughout the rehearsal process.

TA7.CR.2 - Develop scripts through theatrical techniques., a. Create ideas for stories., b. Analyze the theme and structure of a play., c. Use the dramatic writing process to generate a script., d. Utilize dramatic conventions in the scriptwriting process (e.g. stage directions, dialogue, scenes).

Grade 7 - Performing

TA7.PR.1 - Act by communicating and sustaining roles in formal and informal environments., a. Execute effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills in performance (e.g. rate, pitch, volume, inflection, posture, facial expression, physical movement), b. Participate in a variety of acting exercises and techniques that can be applied in a rehearsal or theatre performance., c. Engage in various performance

styles.

Grade 8 - Performing

TA8.PR.1 - Act by communicating and sustaining roles in formal and informal environments., a. Demonstrate the physical, emotional, vocal, and social dimensions of a character in different types of theatre performances (e.g. rate, pitch, volume, inflection, posture, facial expression, motivation, physical movement), b. Demonstrate appropriate ensemble skills throughout a performance., c. Use appropriate listening and response skills during performances.

Grades 9-12 - FUNDAMENTALS OF THEATRE LEVELS I-IV - Creating

TAHSFT.CR.1 - Organize, design, and refine theatrical work., a. Recognize and/or employ realistic and conventional speech patterns within dialogue or dramatic verse., b. Incorporate dramatic elements through improvisation., c. Recognize and interpret artistic choices in performance.

North Carolina Essential Standards

Beginning High School Standards - Communication

B.C.1.1 - Use non-verbal expression to illustrate how human emotion affects the body and is conveyed through the body.

B.C.1.2 - Apply vocal elements of volume, pitch, rate, tone, articulation, and vocal expression.

B.C.2.1 - Use improvisation and acting skills, such as observation, concentration, and characterization in a variety of theatre exercises.

Intermediate High School Standards - Communication

I.C.1.1 - Use non-verbal expression to illustrate how human motivations are prompted by physical and emotional needs.

Proficient High School Standards - Communication

P.C.1.1 - Use non-verbal expression and physical self-awareness to communicate movement elements and characterization, including size, weight, and rate of movement.

P.C.1.2 - Apply vocal elements of volume, pitch, rate, tone, articulation, and vocal expression to develop characters.

Advanced High School Standards - Communication

A.C.1.1 - Use non-verbal expression and physical self-awareness to communicate movement elements and characterization, including differentiation between multiple characters.

Tennessee Theatre Curriculum Standards

GRADES 6-8

1.0 Script Writing - Students will write scripts through improvising, drafting, and refining scripts based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.

7.0 Scene Comprehensions - Students will analyze, evaluate, and construct meanings from improvised and scripted scenes and from theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions

GRADES 9-12

1.0 Script Writing - Students will write scripts through improvising, drafting, and refining scripts based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.

7.0 Scene Comprehensions - Students will analyze, critique, and construct meanings from informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Theatre Arts

MS 117.211 LI - Creative Expression: performance

C.2.B - imagine and clearly describe characters, their relationships, and their surroundings.

C.2.E - express emotions and ideas using interpretive movements and dialogue.

MS 117.211 LII - Creative Expression: production

C.3.C - collaborate to plan brief dramatizations.

MS 117.212 LII - Creative Expression: performance

B.2.C - select movements and dialogue to portray a character appropriately.

MS 117.213 LIII - Foundations: Inquiry and Understanding

B.1.E - apply knowledge of theatrical vocabulary and terminology.

MS 117.213 LIII - Creative Expression: performance

B.2.B - portray characters through familiar movements and dialogue.

B.2.D - express thoughts and feelings using effective voice and diction.

HS 117.315 LI - Foundations: Inquiry and Understanding

C.1.F - demonstrate a working knowledge of the language of theatre such as stage terminology, elements of theatre, or theatrical conventions.

HS 117.316 LII - Foundations: Inquiry and Understanding

C.1.C - demonstrate effective voice and diction.

HS 117.316 LII - Creative Expression: performance

C.2.C - demonstrate effective voice and diction to express thoughts and feelings.

HS 117.318 LIV - Creative Expression: production

C.3.B - analyze and evaluate dramatic texts and direct brief scenes.

Alberta, Canada

Speech Drama 20

18 - demonstrate that spoken interpretation is affected by characterization

Speech Drama 30

23 - use vocal variety in character development

Acting Drama 30

18 - use various vocal skills to enhance characterization

Playwriting - Drama 20

11 - construct a conflict between two characters (protagonist and antagonist)

Junior Goal III Objectives

develop the ability to analyze and assess the process and the art

Junior Orientation

listen effectively

share ideas confidently with others

Speech Level III - Advanced

15 - demonstrate the effect of character on oral interpretation

16 - use movement and gesture to clarify and enhance speech and character

Junior Goal I Objectives

develop the ability to interact effectively and constructively in a group process

extend the ability to think imaginatively and creatively

Senior Goal I Objectives

demonstrate the ability to initiate, organize and present a project within a given set of guidelines

Senior Goal II Objectives

develop the ability to select appropriate physical and vocal expression for feelings, ideas and images

Orientation Drama 10

make effective decisions or choices

share ideas confidently

British Columbia (2018)

GRADE 6 - ARTS - Reasoning and reflecting

Research, describe, interpret and evaluate how artists (dancers, actors, musicians, and visual artists) use processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments in the arts

GRADE 6 - ARTS - Communicating and documenting

Adapt learned skills, understandings, and processes for use in new contexts and for different purposes and audiences

Describe, interpret and respond to works of art and explore artists' intent

Express, feelings, ideas, and experiences through the arts

Interpret and communicate ideas using symbols and elements to express meaning through the arts

Take creative risks to express feelings, ideas, and experiences

GRADE 7 - ARTS - Reasoning and reflecting

Interpret works of art using knowledge and skills from various areas of learning

Reflect on works of art and creative processes to understand artists' intentions

Research, describe, interpret and evaluate how artists (dancers, actors, musicians, and visual artists) use processes, materials, movements, technologies, tools, techniques, and environments in the arts

GRADE 7 - ARTS - Communicating and documenting

Adapt learned skills, understandings, and processes for use in new contexts and for different purposes and audiences

GRADE 8 - ARTS - Exploring and creating

Intentionally select and apply materials, movements, technologies, environments, tools, and techniques by combining and arranging artistic elements, processes, and principles in art making

GRADE 8 - ARTS - Reasoning and reflecting

Reflect on works of art and creative processes to understand artists motivations and meanings

GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Explore and Create

Improvise and take creative risks to express meaning

Intentionally select and combine drama conventions

GRADE 10 - DRAMA - Reason and reflect

Describe, analyze, and respond using drama-specific language

Reflect on dramatic experiences and how they relate to a specific place, time, and context

GRADE 11 - DRAMA - Explore and Create

Improvise and take creative risks using imagination,

exploration, and inquiry

Purposefully select and combine dramatic elements and conventions

GRADE 12 - DRAMA - Explore and Create

Improvise and take creative risks using imagination, exploration, and inquiry

Intentionally select and combine dramatic elements and conventions

Ontario, Canada

Grades 9 & 10 - Foundations - Concepts and Terminology

C.1.1 - identify the drama forms, elements, conventions, and techniques used in their own and others' drama works, and explain how the various components are used, or can be used, to achieve specific effects, with a focus on ensemble drama works (e.g., how a comic drama form can be used to convey a serious message, how setting and time period can be used to sharpen the focus on a moral dilemma, how characters can be used to vary the mood within a drama)

C.1.2 - demonstrate an understanding of and use correct terminology to refer to the forms, elements, conventions, and techniques of drama, with a focus on ensemble drama works (e.g., chorus, protagonist, ingénue, supporting role, act, scene, climax, resolution, improvisation, mask, freeze-frame image)