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Improv Comedy Lesson Plan – *Shhhh! Let's Make a Silent Movie!*

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Grades 3-5 (can also be modified for grades 1-2)

Standards Fulfilled by this Lesson:

- Grades K-4 National Standards for Theatre Education Content Standard 1.a
 - *Script writing by planning and recording improvisations based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history*
 - Students collaborate to select interrelated characters, environments, and situations for classroom dramatizations
- Grades K-4 National Standards for Theatre Education Content Standard 2.b,c
 - *Acting by assuming roles and interacting in improvisations*
 - (b) Students use variations of locomotor and nonlocomotor movement and vocal pitch, tempo, and tone for different characters
 - (c) Students assume roles that exhibit concentration and contribute to the action of classroom dramatizations based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.
- Grades 5-8 National Standards for Theatre Education Content Standard 1.a
 - *Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history*
 - Students individually and in groups, create characters, environments, and actions that create tension and suspense
- Grades 5-8 National Standards for Theatre Education Content Standard 2.a,b,c
 - *Acting by developing basic acting skills to portray characters who interact in improvised and scripted scenes*
 - (a) Students analyze descriptions, dialogue, and actions to discover, articulate, and justify character motivation and invent character behaviors based on the observation of interactions, ethical choices, and emotional responses of people
 - (b) Students demonstrate acting skills (such as sensory recall, concentration, breath control, diction, body alignment, control of isolated body parts) to develop characterizations that suggest artistic choices
 - (c) Students in an ensemble, interact as the invented characters
- Grade 6 Virginia Public Schools Theatre Arts Standards of Learning:
 - 6.4 The student will improvise responses to creative prompts.
 - 6.7 The student will demonstrate theatre as dramatized storytelling by creating and presenting short scenes that include characters, setting, conflict, and a progressive chain of events.

- 6.8 The student will portray invented characters.

Objectives:

The Learner will create and tell stories based on lesson prompts.

TLW discuss how to tell a story without sound.

TLW present a story using only their bodies.

Set-Up

- Arrange the classroom, if possible. Remove distractions and clear a playing space, physically distinct from audience space (chairs, tape line on floor, mat, etc)
- It is helpful to have a way to playback a few “silent movie” sound cues, depending on what genre of film you focus on!

Introduction/Warm-Up

- Intro-has anyone seen a silent film? What is a silent film?
 - Elicit from students: a story with no talking
- How can we tell a story with no talking?
 - Elicit: we have to communicate where we are and who we are
- Let's focus on how we show where we are!
 - **Play Dissolve**--Each student must step into the circle, take the shape of something or someone that would be in a specific location, say what they are, and freeze. Example: a farm: (walk in, take shape of a tree, say, "I'm a tree." freeze) If two students enter together, talk over one another, can't stay frozen or successfully complete the task (everyone is in the picture) say, "Dissolve" and everyone returns to the circle to start again. Encourage students to listen, take turns and build on what other students are doing: example--if one student says, "I'm a trough full of food." Another person could join and say, "I'm a pig eating dinner."
 - **Guess the location**--someone starts an action. Students must observe and think. When they know what the location is, join in doing a similar activity or add to the picture. Great discussion ensues when students thought they were in two different locations. Encourage the original student to go back and change one thing to make their action more clear for the rest of the students (patience, observation, analyzing, communication)
- Now we've see all the different things that could be in a place--let's look at some of the characters we would see in a silent western movie!
 - **Walk and Take** – “When I say walk, you walk in a random pattern. When I say take, you freeze in an active pose.”
 - Ask students to take, encourage big poses. Ask students to "Take Happy," "Take Sad," "Take Power," "Take Powerless." etc.



- Building on this, ask students to Walk and Take characters-- hero, villain, innocent, saloon owner, best friend, cactus, rock, tumbleweed--whatever facilitates the location/characters you want them to enact.
- **Creating a whole scene** – This game builds on Walk and Take and can be seen as the next logical step. “When I call shootout, everyone wearing red becomes a cactus, everyone wearing green becomes a cowboy, everyone wearing yellow becomes and tumbleweed.” (This is for the Western silent movie lesson, though you can always change it to fit the genre you want to do!) Try to avoid "boys become this and girls become this," but rather focus on something that students are wearing (color, type of shoe, etc.) or even on grade levels if your class has different grades involved.

Instruction

- Now that we've enacted some of the characters we would find in a silent film, let's talk about typical plots.
 - Tell a fill-in-the-blank story. For older grades (5th, maybe 4th), you can discuss the variety of available genres with the students and have them help you make-up a story. For younger grades, it is helpful to have a story ready to go. Like this one:
 - *Once upon a time in the wild, wild west there were two heroes named ___ and ___. The heroes had some friends, three innocent townspeople, named _____, _____ and _____.* There were also two evil villains named _____ and - _____.
 - *The heroes roamed the world doing good with only the help of their trusty animal friend named _____ who was a _____.*
 - *The heroes had an amazing weapon that they used to defeat those who were doing wrong but, it wasn't a gun it was a _____.*
 - *Back home, in the town of _____ the two evil villains ran the town. Their job was _____ and they did all sorts of awful things like _____ and _____.*
 - *The townspeople felt _____ and _____!*
 - *One day, the villains decided that they would do something really terrible to the heroes innocent friends, _____ and _____.*
 - *They _____!!!*
 - *The townspeople couldn't believe it. They were so shocked that they cried, they _____ and they _____.*
 - *But the Villains did it any way. They wanted to _____.* (What was the villains' goal in doing this evil thing?)
 - *The best friends _____.* (What did the best friends do in response?)
 - *When the heroes found out, they rushed back to town and tried to save their friends.*



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- *It ended in a dramatic fight. In the wild west, it's known as a _____-out.*
- *The heroes managed to rescue their friends by _____.*
- *The villains were put in jail.*
- *And the townspeople lived happily ever after and they _____ to celebrate (What did they do to celebrate?)*

Wrap-Up

- Get all students ready to present the story you've just created! Choose characters and assign one to each student. Teacher should narrate the story and students act it out. Encourage them to come up with a signature pose for their character that they can do, every time the teacher says their character's name.

Back Pocket Games: Story one word at a time, Party Quirks, Fortunately/Unfortunately, Museum.