

THEATRE

An Introduction

Theatre is a collaborative art form which combines words, voice, movement and visual elements to express meaning. The field of theatre encompasses not only live improvised and scripted work, but also dramatic forms such as film, television and other electronic media. Due to the increasingly pervasive influence of contemporary theatrical media, theatre has enormous importance in citizens' lives. It is not possible for students to achieve media literacy without understanding and having hands-on experience with theatre. Theatre is about the examination and resolution of fundamental human issues, and is built on understanding and presenting interactions between people.

Theatre work provides a vehicle for students to reflect on important aspects of life, in the process developing their sensitivity to and deepening their understandings of others' points of view. The broad, worldwide base of theatrical literature or repertoire ranges from classical forms such as Japanese Kabuki and Shakespeare, to folk forms such as traditional puppetry, to contemporary forms such as animated cartoons and movies. Quality theatre education is similarly broad-based, extending beyond the teaching of acting to develop students' abilities in areas ranging from technical theatre to directing, and from researching the cultural and historical context of repertoire to creating their own improvised or scripted works.

Theatre is an integral part of English language arts as well as the performing arts, so the foundation for theatre begins at birth as children develop personal communication skills. Parents and preschool and elementary teachers should encourage imaginative play and role-playing, both for their own sake and as important components of the learning process across the curriculum. All students should study creative writing, improvising and writing scripts; expressive public speaking, media literacy, theatrical production and interpretation; and other key communication skills as part of their basic K-12 language arts curriculum, and should deepen and apply these skills in formal theatre experiences under the guidance of expert theatre teachers. Secondary schools should incorporate theatre courses into their required language arts sequence, and also offer sequential elective courses in areas such as acting, technical theatre, script writing, animation and video/film.

The Artistic Processes in Theatre

CREATING

Creating in drama/theatre is a process in which students use the voice, body, and imagination to express concepts, ideas, and feelings. At its heart creating in drama/theatre involves generating stories and “imagined worlds” that are communicated through words, voice, movement, aural elements, and visual elements. As reflected in the standards, the creative process includes several steps which, though presented in a linear fashion through Anchor Standards 1-3, are sometimes iterative, repeated, or cyclical. Whether stories are scripted or improvised, the creative process in drama/theatre begins with imagination; either individually or collaboratively students pursue an idea through creative exploration and inquiry. The standards for creating emphasize that as ideas are developed, theatre artists make choices. Whether for the development of a script, design or character, students’ experience of the creative process in drama/theatre should include an exploration of the “how, when, and why” choices get made.

The creative processes culminate with rehearsals during which students practice and refine their ideas as well as find solutions to design and technical problems. Exactly what the creative process looks and feels like will vary depending on grade-level and developmental stage. At the earliest stages, creating involves transitioning from reality to an imaginary elsewhere with “guided support.” The unfolding of a guided drama experience will happen in real-time with breaks to help young actors contribute to the story that is unfolding and the human dilemmas it presents. As students mature, creating could involve collaborative processes to devise original theatre, writing plays, or developing designs for sets, costumes, and sound. At more advanced levels, students research, experiment, plan, design, write, rehearse, revise and present their work as playwrights, actors, designers, and directors. Regardless of the level, creating in drama/theatre provides a vehicle for students to reflect on important aspects of life and in the process develop sensitivity to others’ points of view.

PERFORMING

As presented in the Connecticut Arts Standards, the core process of performing in theatre and drama refers to the myriad of choices an actor or technician makes to bring to life a character or visual design and present it to a specific audience. Such choices are at the root of the process component *select*, and are based on analysis and interpretation of a script or design. In lower grades, ‘Selecting’ under Anchor Standard 4 involves making choices primarily about the physical and vocal life of a character. As students develop proficiency through the grades, acting choices are rooted in more sophisticated psychological concepts such as objectives, tactics, and given circumstances. Students may share improvised scripted or devised artistic work to communicate concepts, ideas, and feelings effectively to an audience. The standards recognize that characters are developed through analysis of interconnected elements such as character relationships, pacing, and dramatic structure. Anchor Standard 5 encourages performers to

'prepare' their roles through a variety of exercises and techniques, the ultimate goal of which is to prepare a 'believable performance.' The notion of preparation is applied to technical elements, too. In the lower grades, students experiment with and explore technical elements; in upper grades, students are expected to apply technical elements and justify how they communicate the intent of an overall production concept. In order to successfully perform, students must use self-discipline to analyze, prepare, rehearse, and refine work while demonstrating skills in voice, body, and imagination. Ultimately, performing in theatre has to do with the process of making choices and preparing both the acting and technical elements to clearly communicate stories and ideas to an audience.

RESPONDING

Responding in theatre involves students in perceiving and interpreting drama and theatre work. Responding may include students' reactions to ideas, stories, scripts, designs, artistic choices, performances, and actions of others. Key to this process is the idea that interpretations of and personal reactions to theatre have multiple influences. Students should be able to describe how a theatre work can influence an audience, a community, or the creation of other works through observing, analyzing, evaluating, comparing and contrasting, and justifying their thinking. Cultural perspectives, beliefs, personal aesthetics, and preferences all factor into the process of making meaning from and evaluating theatre. Once again, what this core process will look and feel like will vary depending on the grade level of students. In the early grades, students might simply describe characters or compare personal emotions and choices to the emotions and choices of characters. As students are capable of greater sophistication, expectations for responding include the development and/or application of criteria to critique theatre works, offer constructive criticism to peers, as well as the ability to debate and justify preferences. At the most mature level, students evaluate theatre through the lens of multiple aesthetics. At its core, the process of responding as articulated across grade-level standards aligned with Anchor Standards 7-9 emphasizes the fact that not all individuals will perceive drama/theatre in the same way, that personal reactions will vary based on a variety of factors having to do with culture, beliefs, and prior experiences.

CONNECTING

The core process of connecting in theatre recognizes that drama/theatre work happens in a complex context comprised of societal, personal, and historical forces, all of which have an impact on the other artistic processes of creating, performing, and responding. The standards encompass a broad range of connections that can be made including production histories, personal experience/beliefs, culture, other disciplines, and relevant research. At younger ages, students identify similarities between story, characters, and emotions in a drama to personal experience. At more sophisticated levels, students connect drama to culture and community; students incorporate perspectives in a drama/theatre work and investigate how cultural perspectives and personal beliefs impact the way a drama/theatre work is perceived. Research is

another component of the core process connecting. Depending on grade levels, students might research alternative approaches to the same story as a way to inform creative choices or study a time period in which a drama takes place. At its core, the connecting standards ensure that students explore, recognize, and incorporate the many influences that impact drama/theatre work.