

IMAGE THEATER # 1

(Time Maximum)

Performing History: World History via People Sculptures

Lesson Sketch

Skills: Students *read* articles on the histories of countries around the world; *select* key points to share with classmates; *choose* roles as silent actors and/or narrators; *choreograph* 10–15 silent body sculptures (tableaux), to express their key points; *compose* captions for their tableaux to be performed by the narrator/s; *rehearse* their pieces; *perform* tableaux with captions for the class; and *reflect* in writing about their collaborative strategies and their communication strategies.

Grades: 8–9

Time: Three 90-minute classes

Featured Resources: AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com articles on Country Snapshot, Cultural Overview, Demographics, The People, Government (read the first few sections, skim the rest), Maps, and Climate and Geography.

Inspirations

"All theater is necessarily political, because all the activities of [humans] are political and theater is one of them." ~Augusto Boal

"Theater is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it." ~Augusto Boal

Lesson Overview

Students improve reading comprehension, expand cultural understanding, expand their understanding of world history, and work collaboratively within small groups to create performances that teach classmates about the histories of countries around the world. In an exercise based on Brazilian artist/activist Dr. Augusto Boal's Image Theatre exercises, students will form themselves into human sculptures, or tableaux, that tell the historical stories of the countries they have read about. Some students will be silent physical performers, while others will narrate and explicate the tableaux. When students reflect in writing about their collaborative strategies, their performance tactics, and the history of their own nation, they turn the lens of historical awareness on themselves and their group's inner workings, completing the conceptual circle of the exercise. By exploring the intersections of historical forces, text, and performance, by working with the relationships between physical expression, visual expression, and verbal expression, and by developing greater awareness of their own historically influenced cultural tendencies, students become more sophisticated global citizens.

Lesson Steps

With small groups, students make a list of countries they are curious about. Students briefly skim articles on those countries to narrow down the list and choose one country to focus on. Students read a series of articles about a country of interest, and identify the major history-relevant points of the articles that they would like to share with classmates. Students choose roles as actors and/or narrators. Students plan how to arrange themselves into a series of 10–15 human sculptures (tableaux) that physically illustrate what they've identified as key points of the country's history. Students write a series of 10–15 tableaux "captions" to be spoken by the narrator/s. Students rehearse and perform their tableaux with captions for the class. Students perform a reflective writing exercise not only to parse out successful and unsuccessful presentation strategies, but to bring historical and cultural awareness to their own group's interactions.

Standards Met

- 1. Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
 - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
 - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
 - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
- 2. Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
 - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2, 3
 - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
 - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9
 - d. Range of Writing 10
- 3. Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
 - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
 - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
 - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
- 4. Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
 - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2, 3
 - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
 - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7,8,9
 - d. Range of Writing 10
- 5. Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Speaking and Listening**
 - a. Comprehension and Collaboration 1, 2
 - b. Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas 4, 5, 6
- 6. Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Language**
 - a. Conventions of Standard English 1, 2
 - b. Knowledge of Language 3
 - c. Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4, 6
- 7. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards for the English Language Arts: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8**

8. National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies:
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Supplies:

- AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com
- Computer access so that there is at least one computer per every two students
- Microsoft Word
- Printer
- Basic office supplies: notebooks, pens, pencils

Instructional Plan

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Improve reading comprehension skills, research skills, and speaking/writing skills.
- Increase global awareness by working with texts on world cultures and world history.
- Improve skills in understanding and presenting complex sequences.
- Collaborate with classmates, encountering and bridging cultural differences within their own groups.
- Encounter the arts as a force for social change through improving global and multicultural awareness.
- Write reflectively about their experience, considering group collaboration strategies, presentation strategies, and how the history of their own nation and their own cultural values impacted the process and the performance.
- Become more sophisticated global citizens.

Session One

Teacher introduction

- Introduce the concept of Image Theater, and provide any context or connections to existing class curriculum.
- Divide class into groups of 4.
- Move groups to shared work stations.

Student Directions

Which country would you like to visit? Select a country

- Go to AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com.
- Peruse list of countries.
- Identify three countries you are curious about. Skim materials for these countries: get a quick sense of where the country is, who lives there, and whether you are curious about the place.

- Choose one country to mentally visit for this exercise.

Learn about your chosen country: Read & take preliminary notes

- Go to Maps—understand where country is.
- Read the articles Country Snapshot, Cultural Overview, Demographics, The People, Government (read the first few sections, skim the rest), Maps, and Climate and Geography. Return to Country Snapshot and take a closer look at the "History" section.
- Take notes as you read regarding possible key points. Questions your notes should address include:
 - Where is this country?
 - What groups of people live there?
 - Where do they come from originally? Sketch out a timeline of which groups came to the country and when—nothing fancy, just a basic timeline for your reference in preparing your performance piece.
 - What languages do people speak? Do people speak different languages in different parts of the country? What other nations/groups in the world speak these same languages? Did different language communities arrive during different eras?
 - How do the different groups living in the country get along? Have there been times when they've cohabited more or less peacefully than they do now?
 - What are the country's major regions? Are those regions defined by landscape differences, or cultural differences, both, or by other factors? Have the country's regions shifted over time?
 - What kinds of religions do people practice? Do the different religious groups intermingle, or live mostly separately? Have the religions practiced in the country changed over time?
 - What do people in this country think is important? Has this changed over time?
 - What kinds of things do people do for work? Are people's occupations different region by region? Are people's occupations now different than they used to be?
 - What do people eat? Does the cuisine vary by region? Has the cuisine changed over time?
 - What kinds of environmental changes or pressures is the country experiencing? How are these environmental pressures interacting with economic pressures to impact people's daily lives? How are these environmental and economic pressures different than the pressures of the past?
 - In what ways do people in this country have it made?
 - What are their struggles?
- When you have finished reading and taking notes, review your notes and, in a different color ink or with a highlighter, circle the ideas that now strike you as most important for a person new to this culture to get a sense of it.

S e s s i o n T w o

Teacher introduction

- Review ground rules for brainstorming and collaboration: recognizing validity in others' viewpoints, even if you don't agree; fair debate strategies; giving all group members a chance to speak; strategies for either achieving consensus or coming to a vote, etc.

- Throughout class, check in with student groups to keep groups moving mostly on pace with each other. Brainstorming/planning/composing groups will be seated for discussion, whereas the choreography process will have students up and moving around, so chaos will be reduced and productivity increased if student groups stay roughly on pace together.

Student Directions

What stands out to you? Reflection, note taking, brainstorming

- Each member of the group presents what s/he feels are the key points. As group members present key points, listen for areas of overlap/agreement. What are the common themes? Also, as you hear your teammates' notes, notice: what did they highlight that you missed?
- Knowing you need to assemble 10–15 human sculptures (tableaux) and captions, start zeroing in on pieces of information that you'll include in your performance. Make a list of those pieces of information that seem both most essential and most possible to act out.

Planning the performance: What will intrigue your audience?

- Choose roles. Who will be a silent physical performer, and who will be a narrator? Options include: three physical performers and one narrator for all tableaux; three physical performers and one narrator each tableaux, but rotating who's playing which role; all physical performers also narrate each tableaux by splitting the caption up into parts; or . . . what other possibilities can you imagine?
- Plan your 10–15 tableaux. Undertake the following steps in the order that makes sense to you and your teammates:
- Decide what concepts should be expressed in the tableaux. Consider organizing these concepts with titles you invent, such as, for Belgium: "Celtic Origins," "Roman Occupation," "Germanic Invasion," and "HQ of the European Union. You could also organize your tableaux by naming general categories, such as Origins, Invasions, Migrations, Recent Changes, etc.
- Create an outline of your presentation, deciding which tableaux you'll present in what order.

Choreograph Tableaux

- Experiment physically with how to create tableaux that illustrate your key concepts.
- Appoint a recorder to make choreography notes as you go.
- If you get stuck, or if you want to improve on an initial idea, consider the following aspects of movement and expression:
- The power of the gaze: How would your tableau change if actors looked at each other / past each other / away from each other? If some looked up, some down, etc.?
- Opposing tensions: Could you generate energy in your tableau, and possibly expressive power, by having performers lean away from each other, or lean in the same direction away from some shared concern?
- Vertical space and horizontal space: How can you vary the shapes of your tableaux, and use those shapes to direct the viewers' attention to the concepts you want to express, by varying how shapes are arranged not only side to side, but also up and down? Should some performers go low, while others go high? Is there furniture in the room you could (safely, cleanly, courteously) incorporate into a tableau?
- Angles vs. curves: How could you vary your tableaux, or create dynamic tension within one tableau, by using more angular shapes and more curved shapes together? Can performers

experiment with using their arms and legs to create more angular shapes, vs. more curved shapes?

- Audience incorporation: Are there times when a concept could be expressed more clearly if actors gestured toward the audience somehow, vs. at each other or at objects?

Compose Captions

- After shaping your tableaux—or while shaping them, if that works for your group—compose the captions to accompany each image.
- Compose your captions in the form of complete sentences, vs. fragments.
- Use active verbs in your captions—move, charge, range, change, eat, rise, collapse, share—rather than being verbs (is, are, were, etc.).
- Questions to consider as you compose your captions include:
 - What information does your audience need to understand this picture that they can't get from the picture itself?
 - How does this picture relate to the picture before it and the picture after it?
 - Why should your audience care about this image?
 - How does the image relate to your audience's experience? How can the image be explicated in terms of things your audience is already familiar with?

Rehearse

As time allows, run through all your tableaux in sequence, start to finish, making improvements as you go.

Session Three

Teacher introduction

- Set ground rules for audience members and performers.
- Remind students that performances will be followed by a reflective writing exercise, including questions about the experience of watching the performances. Direct students to take notes throughout the performances. Students might be asked to note what they think are the best parts of each performance, as well as which countries they feel more or less inclined to travel to themselves, and why.

Student Directions

Perform

Time to share your tableaux with the group. There's no business like show business.

Enjoy

While you are watching the other groups' performances, take notes as directed by your teacher—you'll use these notes for the reflective writing exercise to follow.

Reflect and Write

Time to turn the focus around. Here is your chance to reflect on the cultural tendencies manifested in your classroom and in your own group.

- What was the most effective element of your group's collaboration process? Use one or more concrete examples.

- What was the least effective element of your group's collaboration process? Use one or more concrete examples.
- How effective did you find Image Theater as a medium for conveying historical information?
- If you could do this Image Theater exercise again, what would you change?
- What was your favorite of the other groups' performances? Your least favorite? Why?
- Having created and seen these Image Theater performances, which of the countries that you learned about would you most like to visit, and why? Which would you least like to visit, and why?
- Read the Country Snapshot article for the United States, paying special attention to the "History" and "Current Conditions" sections.
- How do you see the forces that have shaped the United States playing out in your group's interactions and in your performance?