

# Bringing Literature to Life



Theater Strategies and Sample Lesson Plans  
for Middle School Literacy

# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	3-5
<b>Overview</b>	6-16
<b>Unit 1</b>	
Scenery Design	17-26
Directing	27-40
Acting	41-50
Scriptwriting	51-56
<b>Unit 2</b>	
Scenery Design	57-64
Directing	65-76
Acting	77-88
Scriptwriting	89-96
<b>Unit 3</b>	
Scenery Design	97-102
Directing	103-114
Acting	115-124
Scriptwriting	125-136
<b>Strategies</b>	137-166
<b>Appendix</b>	167-195

## Overview of the Project

This handbook is the result of a partnership between the Jersey City Public Schools and the Educational Arts Team during the 2008/9 to 2010/11 school years. The project, Theater Strategies, was implemented to increase literacy learning for middle school students and advance the use of teaching methods that integrate and infuse drama education techniques into the state and national core curriculum content standards in language arts and theater.

During years one and two of the three-year project 28 sixth and seventh grade classes from four randomly selected Jersey City Public schools (MS #4, PS #11, PS#12 and PS#23) received 24 lessons focused on eight novels. The novels used in the sixth-grade classrooms were the following: *A Single Shard*, *The Midwife's Apprentice*, *The View from Saturday*, and *Tuck Everlasting*. The novels used in the seventh grade classrooms included: *Maniac Magee*, *The Cay*, *Johnny Tremain*, and *Animal Farm*. Each lesson explored a piece of text from the novel using theater games, scenery design activities, process drama, improvisation, scriptwriting and enactment.

The project is being assessed by an independent team of evaluators from Seton Hall University. Utilizing a randomized design, their findings are being documented and will be published to add to the growing body of evidence that points to the efficacy of the arts to improve academic performance. The project evaluation focuses on the impact of the workshops on the writing and oral presentation skills of the 600 treatment students, as well as measuring student motivation and engagement. The findings from the intervention students are being compared with a control group of 600 students from four additional schools.

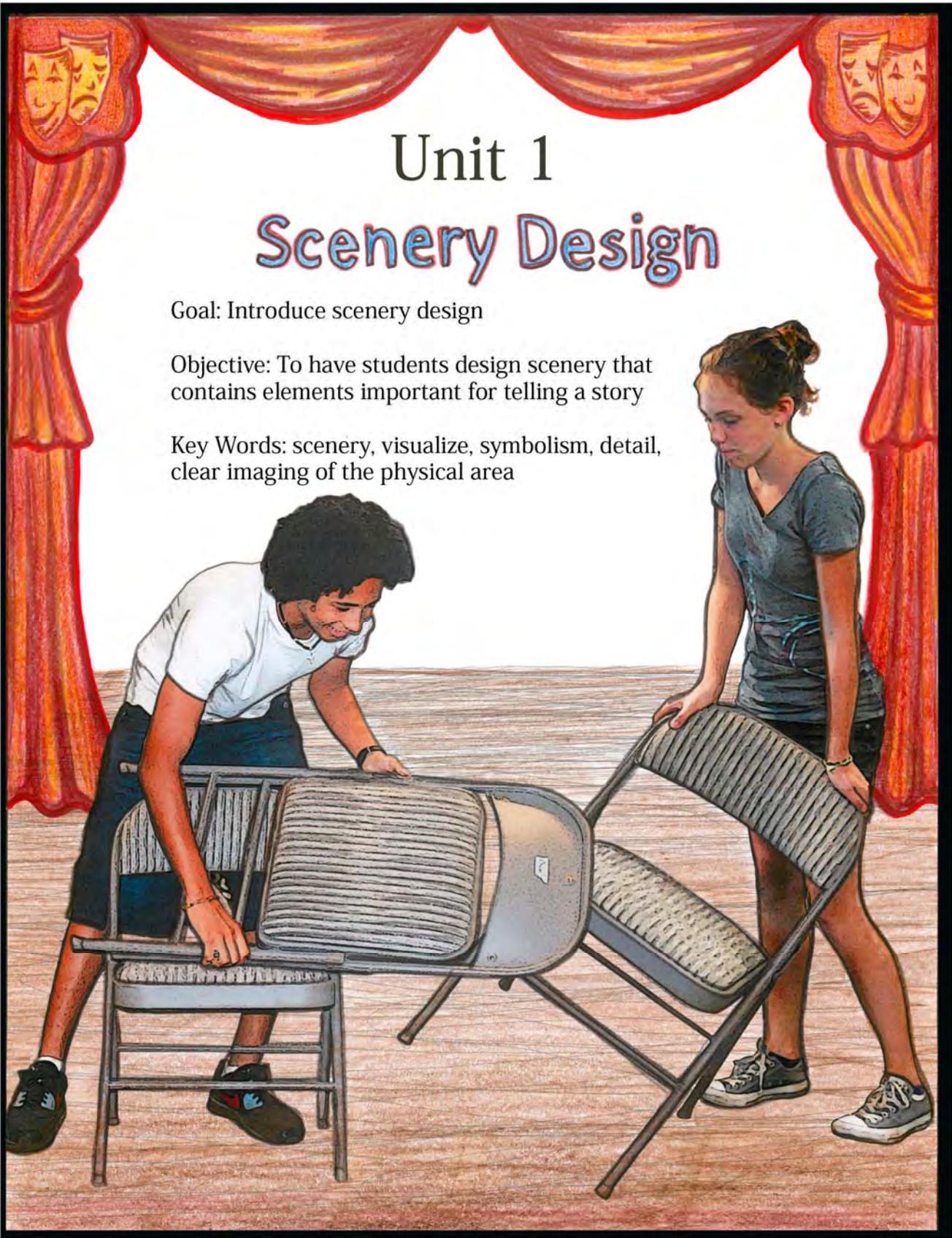
# Unit 1

## Scenery Design

Goal: Introduce scenery design

Objective: To have students design scenery that contains elements important for telling a story

Key Words: scenery, visualize, symbolism, detail, clear imaging of the physical area



## Setting the Context

Explain that the first three lessons of the handbook are focused on learning how to create scenery for a play. Future units will be on acting, directing, and writing scripts, as well as on improving abilities to create scenery.

## Lesson One

**Materials:** Handout: Designing the Scenery for a Play (located in the Appendix)

### Discussion

What do you think theater is? What is directing? What is acting? What is playwriting? What is designing?

### Pretest: Text Reading and Designing Environments

Read a passage from the novel in which the author creates a good description of a setting. The following is an example from *Maniac Magee* (p. 116):

The funeral, such as it was, took place on the third day of the new Year. Maniac had at last gone to tell someone, the zookeeper, and from then on he pretty much stayed out of the way.

Grayson came to the cemetery in a wooden box. The pallbearers were unknown to Maniac. They were members of the town's trash collecting corps, and as they huffed and bent to lay the box over the hole, they smelled vaguely of pine and rotten fruit.

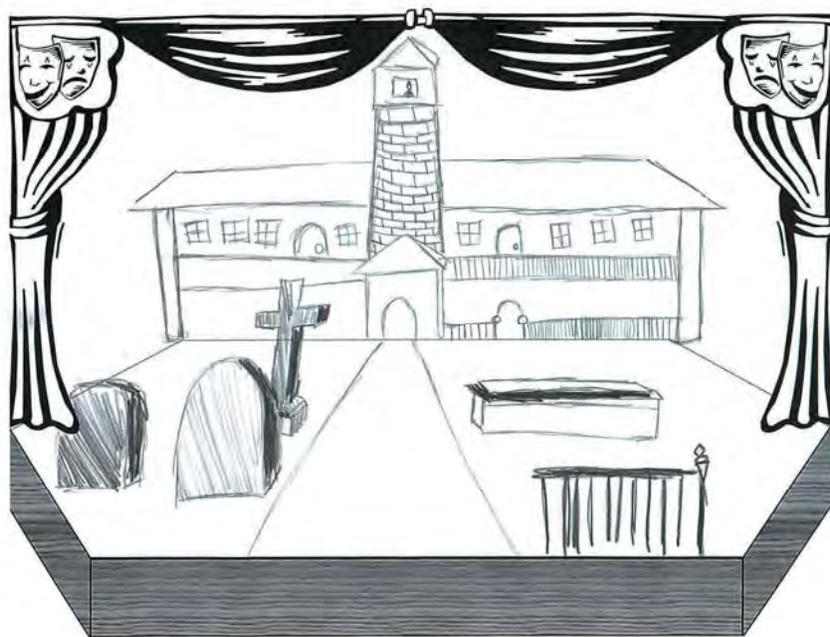
Maniac was the only mourner. He had thought the park Superintendent might show. Or the attendant at the Y locker room. Or maybe the lady who ran the park food stand in the summer. None were there. Only Maniac and the man from the funeral home and the six pallbearers and two men off to the side, smoking cigarettes and leaning on the little hole-digging tractor that made Maniac think of something. He

smiled inwardly: Hey, Grayson, look – *Mike Mulligan’s steam shovel had a baby!* High above, a silver plane crossed the sky, silent as a spider.

**Give out the Designing the Scenery for a Play handout (Pretest).**

**Teacher:** You may complete the handout in any order you choose. Please explain what you have imagined as you heard the reading. Please draw what you have seen as if it were a design for the scenery of a play. Think about what colors you would use and why. What props do you think might be important for this scenery? Where would you position the important elements of the scenery? You have ten minutes to do this.

**Collect the Designing the Scenery for a Play handout (Pretest) and place in student portfolios.**



Student work depicting a scene from *Maniac Magee*

“The funeral, such as it was, took place on the third day of the New Year. Grayson came to the cemetery in a wooden box. Maniac was the only mourner.” (p. 116)

## Discussion

How do you know where you are? What if you were in the school cafeteria and there were no people around? How would you know you were in a school cafeteria? How is a school cafeteria different from the kitchen in your home? How would you describe the difference between being in a city park or in the backyard of somebody's house?

## Guided Tour

**Teacher:** Theater takes place on a stage. One of the key elements of staging a play is seeing and knowing “where” the action is taking place.

Guide the discussion so that students begin to think about a place defined by the objects seen and found there.

With a volunteer give a virtual tour of a place very familiar to you (usually your own home). As you demonstrate, use as much detail, color and commentary as possible.

**Teacher:** What might I have missed? What else would you like to know more about? Where might I have added more detail? What elements really stood out for you?

Divide students into pairs and ask them to decide who is A or B. Instruct the As to lead the Bs on a virtual tour of their familiar place. Then Bs lead As on a virtual tour of their familiar place.

**Teacher:** Take your partner to a place with which you are familiar. Be ready to describe the place in great detail. Some examples of places might be as follows: your neighborhood, home, a park you like, and so on.

Partners, you are going to be “Nosey Neighbors.” Ask your tour guide all kinds of questions about the place that they are taking you to.

### **Classification Box**

The students and teacher classify how places can be described. The teacher fills in the classification box by category and specific detail.

As students give suggestions about how to describe their guided tour, sort the descriptions on to a classification table as follows:

landmark	museum, church, school
directions	right, left, straight
texture	soft , smooth, bumpy
colors	yellow, blue, red
rooms	kitchen, bedroom, bathroom

There might be other categories and descriptions. When a student gives a description, the teacher creates the category. For example, if a student says that the place they saw was a church, the teacher categorizes it by calling it a landmark and asks the group for other landmarks that might have been seen. Work back and forth between the categories and descriptions to create as rich a classification box as possible.

### **Writing**

Ask the students to create an expository/informational piece of writing based upon the tour on which they took their partners. Encourage them to expand the details in their writing by side coaching as you read their pieces while they are writing. For example, you might say, "What other landmarks did you see? Do you think you can explain that with more detail? What kind of texture did you notice? What were the colors of the walls in the bedroom?"

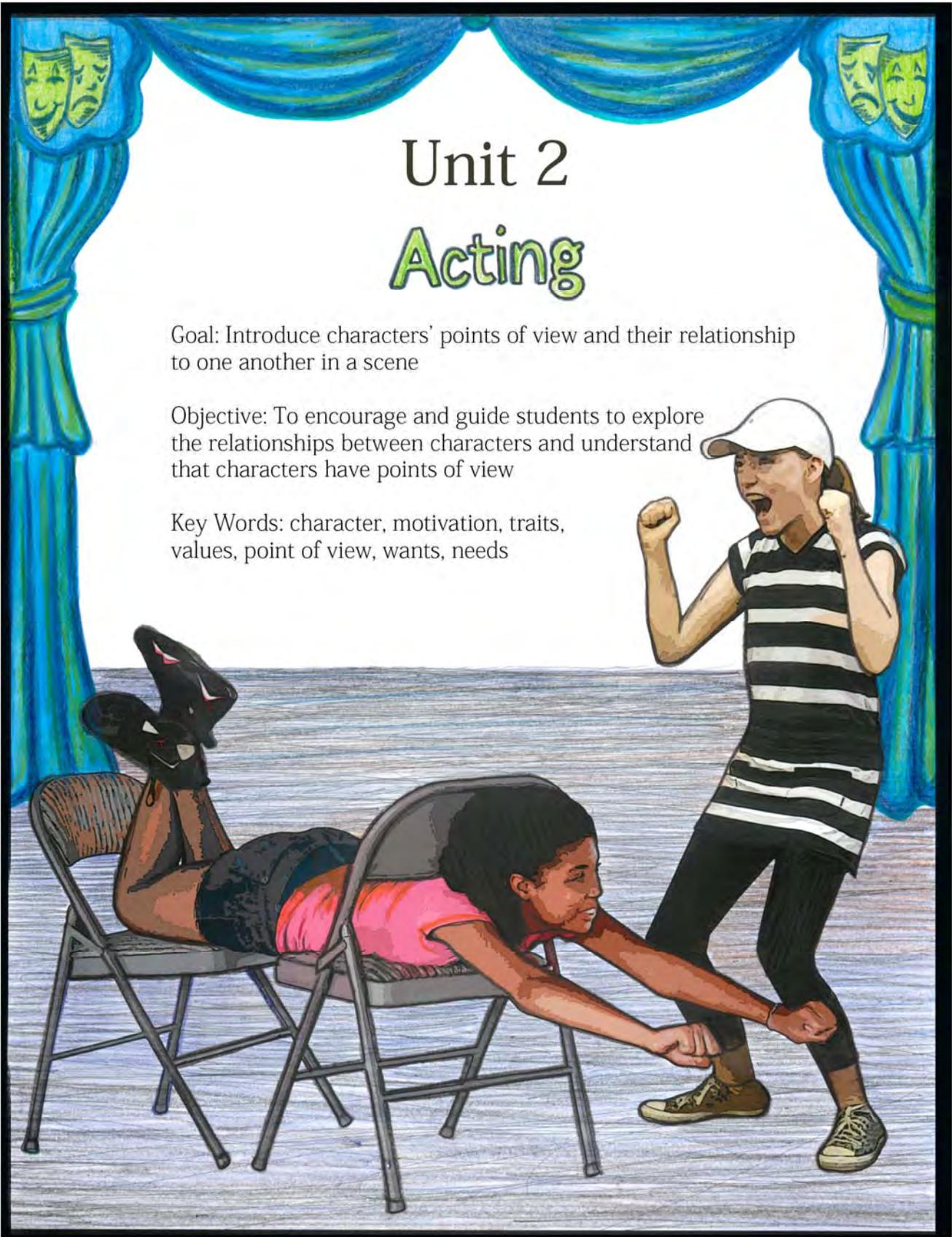
# Unit 2

## Acting

Goal: Introduce characters' points of view and their relationship to one another in a scene

Objective: To encourage and guide students to explore the relationships between characters and understand that characters have points of view

Key Words: character, motivation, traits, values, point of view, wants, needs



## Setting the Context

Explain that the next four lessons are focused on learning how to be able to understand and identify that characters in novels have relationships with other characters, needs and wants (character motivation) and points of view.

## Lesson Fifteen

**Materials:** Handout: Scriptwriting (located in the Appendix)

**Teacher:** Today you are going to use an acting technique called improvisation. Everyone is going to get a turn. Does anyone know what improvisation is?

Improvisation is an acting technique in which actors portray characters in a situation without a script. Actors make up the spontaneous dialogue as they act out the scene with a partner. Some things to remember when you improvise are the following:

- Each character wants or needs something.
- Work with, not against, what your partner gives you.

For example, if your partner says to you: “Do you like my red hat?” your response could be something like “Nice hat, where did you get it?” You shouldn’t respond by saying something like: “You don’t have a red hat.” This blocks the progression of the improvisation and confuses the audience.

**Teacher:** Please observe carefully the improvisation that I am going to model with a volunteer. Notice what each character demonstrates as their needs and what each character wants to achieve.

## **Improvisation with a Volunteer**

Ask for a volunteer to improvise the following with you (*explain to the volunteer their role, in such a way that the rest of the class cannot hear what the improvisation will be about*):

- Two friends are walking along a road and find a package, one is suspicious and one is trusting.

*The main focus here is on creating dialogue. Do not be too concerned about miming a package or the acting. The objective is to understand that characters have different points of view and wants.*

The following is an example of how the improvisation could go:

Friend #1: Oh Look there's a package just sitting on the road!

Friend #2: I wonder who it could belong to. Let's open it.

Friend #1: Open it? Are you kidding? There could be a bomb in there!

Friend #2: Oh, you watch too much television. That stuff never really happens.

Friend #1: No. My mother told me never to open strange boxes and packages.

Friend #2: There could be something really cool in there. We have to open it.

Friend #1: I can't do it, I'm sorry. I'm going home. You do whatever you want.

Friend #2: (Picks up the box and shakes it as he carries it off stage.)

## **Partner Improvisations**

Divide the class into pairs so students can try an improvisation with a partner.

Explain that the improvisation should have some kind of conclusion/solution. One might win and the other might lose; or they might come up with a compromise.

Some other ground rules are as follows: Actors cannot touch each other as part of the improvisation; Actors have to persuade each other with words and come to some kind of conclusion.

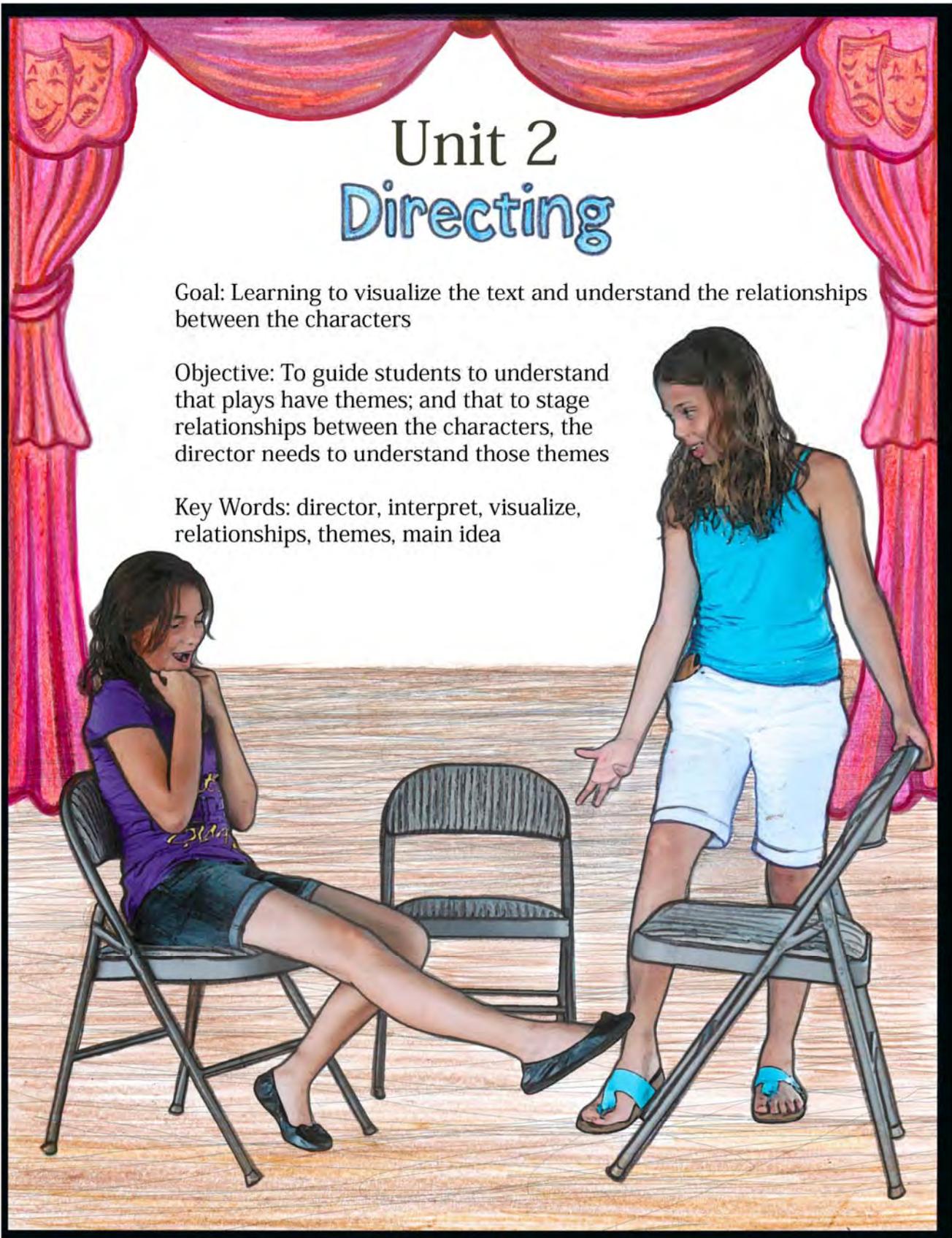
# Unit 2

## Directing

Goal: Learning to visualize the text and understand the relationships between the characters

Objective: To guide students to understand that plays have themes; and that to stage relationships between the characters, the director needs to understand those themes

Key Words: director, interpret, visualize, relationships, themes, main idea



## Lesson Nineteen

**Materials:** Lined paper

**Teacher:** In this lesson you will have the opportunity to explore different points of view that can be taken on various topics.

### **Voting from Your Seat**

The teacher makes a series of statements and the students respond to the statements by doing one of the following: remaining in their seats to convey disagreement; remaining in their seats with their hand raised to relay uncertainty; standing up to show agreement; or standing up with their hand in the air to express strong agreement.

### **Possible Statements:**

- Students should pay for their school books.
- Schools should not bother teaching history.
- Cell phones should be allowed in school.
- School uniforms should be mandatory.
- Parents should be required to volunteer at school for one day a week.
- Summer vacation should be shortened to two weeks.

*As you play this activity, ask individual students why they have chosen their particular point of view. Students should be allowed to express their opinions without judgment.*

*It is important for the teacher to be neutral and play the role of facilitator as you do this activity. You should help students extend their thinking regardless of their position on the topic.*

## Unit 2

# Scriptwriting

Goal: Learning to incorporate the story elements of plot, conflict, and predicting into scriptwriting work

Objective: To encourage students to use their imagination to write scripts based on a two-person tableau exercise

Key Words: script, dialogue, character, setting, problem, conflict, resolution



## Lesson Twenty-Two

**Materials:** Lined paper

### Discussion

**Teacher:** Today you will be working on scriptwriting. A completed script tells a story. What elements do you need to have a story? In the first activity in today's lesson you are going to examine one moment in a story and build around that moment to create a story and a script.

### What's the Story Tableau

Ask for two volunteers. The first volunteer should stand with hands on hips looking away from the second volunteer. The second volunteer should stand 5 to 6 feet away from the first with his or her head lowered.

*These poses are optional and you can certainly create other ones.*

### Teacher Models Story Making with the Whole Class

**Teacher:** Based on the image you are looking at, what do you think the story might be that is taking place between these two people?

### Creating a New Pose with Two Other Volunteers

*As you are doing this, try putting the students in different positions using different levels, facing various directions and adjusting body parts. It is not necessary that you try to create a story or situation with your poses. The story making exists in the viewer's imagination.*

### Creating a Story in Pairs

Divide the class into pairs to create a story based on the pose they have just viewed.

# Strategies

## **ABC Graffiti**

Small groups of students create a word or phrase collage on a large sheet of newsprint around various themes, such as reading, learning, propaganda, justice, and government.

This activity can extend into a voice collage of differing voices around a theme.

## **Blind Pairs**

Divide the class into pairs or ask the class to find a partner who they can work seriously with. Ask the students to decide who is going to be A and who is going to be B. With a volunteer, demonstrate how to do this activity. Ask the volunteer to close their eyes. Guide them carefully around the room for about 15 to 30 seconds. Explain to the class that the leader of the blind person has the responsibility for the person with their eyes closed and cannot let them get hurt.

Give everyone in the class a chance to be both the leader and the eyes-closed person. Discuss with the class what it was like being the leader and what it was like walking around with their eyes closed. Ask the students to write down their ideas.

## Rubric to Assess Theater Standards Proficiency for Theater Strategies Project

**CONTENT STANDARD 1:** Scriptwriting by planning and recording improvisations based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.

### Achievement Standards:

- Collaborate to select interrelated characters, environments, and situations for classroom dramatizations
- Improvise dialogue to tell stories, and formalize improvisation by writing or recording the dialogue

### **3 Advanced Proficient**

- Student writing reflects creativity and inventive thinking.
- Student writing demonstrates strong sequencing with clear a beginning, middle, and end.
- Characters are clearly developed and differentiated.
- Script shows clear connection to content.
- Script demonstrates excellent form.

### **2 Proficient**

- Student writing shows signs of creativity and inventive thinking.
- Student writing shows potential for sequencing with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Characters are starting to be developed and somewhat differentiated.
- Script shows some connection to content.
- Script demonstrates an understanding of form.

### **1 Not Proficient**

- Student writing shows no evidence of creativity or inventive thinking.

## References

- Beach, R., Campano, G., Edmiston, B., & Borgman, M. (2010). *Literacy Tools in the Classroom: Teaching through Critical Inquiry, Grades 5-12*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. D., (Eds.) (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. National Research Council. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Catterall, J. S. (2002). Research on drama and theater in education. Found in R. Deasy (Ed.) *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic Social Development*. Washington, D.C., Arts Education Partnership.
- Catterall, J. S. & Waldorf, L. "Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education: Summary Evaluation." Found in E. Fiske, (Ed.) (1999). *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (pp. 1-18). Washington, DC: The Arts Education Partnership and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.
- Finkelstein, M. & Walker, E. (2008). "Student performance in the arts: How Educational Arts Team's arts infusion project has positively impacted student achievement in Jersey City." Evaluation report to USDOE. South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall University Department of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy & Sametric Research.
- Grumet, M. (2004). "No one learns alone." In R. Rabkin and R. Redmond (Eds.). *Putting the Arts in the Picture: Reframing Education in the 21st Century* (p. 67). Chicago: Columbia College.

Heathcote, D. & Bolton, G. (1995) *Drama for Learning: The Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

New Jersey Department of Education. New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. (October 2004). Trenton, NJ.

O'Neill, C. (1995). *Drama Worlds: A Framework for Process Drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

O'Toole, J. (1997). *The Process of Drama: Negotiating Art and Meaning*. London: Routledge.

Perkins, D. (1992). *Smart Schools: Better Thinking and Learning for Every Child*. New York: The Free Press.

Stevenson, L. M. & Deasy, R. J., (2005). *Third Space: When Learning Matters*. Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership.

Tabone, C. (2004). An evaluation assessment of "Pop-up Puppet Theater": A project aimed at improving the oral presentation and writing skills of third graders. *Youth Theatre Journal*, 18.

Wilhelm, J. and Edmiston, B. (1998). *Imagining to Learn: Inquiry, Ethics and Integration through Drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## Literature Referenced and Used in the Lesson Plans

Cushman, K. (1995). *The Midwife's Apprentice*. New York: HarperCollins.

Forbes, E. (1943). *Johnny Tremain*. New York: Random House.

Konigsburg, E.L. (1998) *A View from Saturday*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks.

Orwell, G. (1946). *Animal Farm*. New York: New American Library.

Park, L.. (2001). *A Single Shard*. New York: Random House.

Spinelli, J. (1990). *Maniac Magee*. New York: Little, Brown & Company.

Taylor, T. (1969). *The Cay*. New York: Random House.

## Resources

Arts Education Partnership

<http://www.aep-arts.org>

American Alliance for Theater and Education

[www.aate.com](http://www.aate.com)

Young Playwrights Inc.

<http://www.youngplaywrights.org>