EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
LESSON PLAN
Scene Study/Introduction for Student Matinee Series

Recommended Age Level: Students Grade 2 - 12

Recommended Experience Level: Any

Duration: Three to Four 55-minute class periods

Materials: Copies of scenes for classroom students, copies of ATC Play Guide for students, Chalk or White Board

Materials: Resources:
The Practical Handbook for the Actor, Melissa Bruder, Lee Michael Cohn, Madeleine Olnek, Nathaniel Pollack, Robert Previto, and Scott Zigler
Acting Onstage and Off, Robert Barton

This lesson can be done with or without an ATC teaching artist. You can do this lesson all by yourself, but as a bonus for attending our Student Matinee Series, ATC can bring teaching artists to your classroom to help facilitate a part of this lesson.

Procedure:

Step One: Introduction to Thematic Material
Time: 10 Minutes

It is the hope of ATC education staff and teaching artists that upon our arrival at your school that students are familiar with the plot and characters of the show they are coming to see as a part of the Student Matinee Series. In today’s lesson, this is probably an easy task because many of your students are probably familiar with To Kill a Mockingbird. For shows that are not taught in the Language Arts classrooms of almost every high school in the country, you can familiarize your students with the play in many ways. You can always ask ATC for a copy of the script and have your students read the play aloud or on their own. You can also use our free Play Guides, which are available on our website, to get a synopsis of the plot and other helpful background information. Alternately, you can find a film or video version of the show to watch in your classroom. It is preferable to read the script for the most information.

Upon our arrival in your classroom, ATC teaching artists will review the plot and characters with the class.

1. What is the very first thing that happens in the play?
2. What do you think happened just before the action on stage begins? What are the characters doing before the play opens?
3. Who can tell me what happens during the rising action of this play?
4. What is the major conflict? Which characters are involved in this conflict?
5. Where is the climax? What do you think pushes these characters to this point?
6. How is the climax resolved?
7. Do you agree with the end of the play? Is it resolved as you would like?

You have an option here. If the play is one where you would like the students to discover the “surprise” ending during the matinee performance, you can just have the students read to a point in the play where they are familiar with all the characters and can describe the characters’ motivations. That will be sufficient for this acting lesson.

**Step 2: The Door Exercise and G.O.T.E.**
*(Motivation, Objective, Tactics)*

Time: 1 hour and 15 minutes

The Door Exercise is an exercise about the difference between Objective and Motivation, a concept that they need to understand before they begin to work on specific scenes. All action is driven by Motivation, or the WHY that makes characters act. For example, in the movie, Cast Away, Tom Hanks’ motivation is to get back to his wife played by Helen Hunt, not to get off the island. Objective is what puts our characters into action, or the pursuance of a specific goal. I use this memory devise to help students to remember how to help students obtain their character’s objectives.

**G.O.T.E.**

1. What is my character’s Goal?
2. What obstacle is standing in the way of obtaining that goal?
3. What tactics do I use to overcome my obstacle to reach that goal?
4. What are my Expectations (the pot of goal at the end of the rainbow, the trophy at the finish line) once I have reached that goal?

All of these things together play a part in the objective. Here are the steps to follow when helping students to use the Door Exercise.

1. Pair you students in groups of two.
2. Student 1’s objective is to walk through a “door.” Student 2, who serves as an obstacle, has the objective to keep Student 1 from getting through the “door”.
3. Give the students 10 minutes to arrive at their circumstance. Where are they? What has happened? Why? What is their relation? (This should be discussed)
4. Why does Student 1 want to get through that door? What is his/her motivation? What tactics is he/she going to employ to get through the door? (student 1 should keep this information to him/herself)
5. Why does Student number 2 need to stop Student number 1 from getting through the door? What is his/her motivation? What tactics is he/she going to use to cause obstacles? (Student 2 should keep this information to him/herself)
6. From these decisions, dialogue will arise.
7. Have the students perform these improvised scenes for the class. Allow the scene to continue as long as the action dictates.
8. As the leader, help to pull these scenes apart. Ask students to really dig down to find out why their decisions are so important. It is important to coach these scenes; you as the leader will help them to really develop these characters. Ask the students how they felt about the scene, what worked and what did not, and then ask the audience for moments of truth in the performance.
Example: Student 1 is a teacher who needs to leave the school immediately. He has just gotten word that his wife has gone into labor and wants to get the hospital as fast as possible. Student 2 is standing in front of his car. She cannot let him get in his car because she knows that when he drives away, his car will explode. Her boyfriend, who received a failing grade from the teacher, has rigged the car with explosives. She feels extremely guilty and does not want the teacher to get in the car, but also doesn’t want to betray her boyfriend.

The only thing both students should know is that he is a teacher, she is a student and he needs to get into his car and she must keep him out. At first, these scenes may be crude and be very repetitious. With time, these scenes will flush themselves out. It is very important they DO NOT have a pre-conceived ending or try to make it dramatic, it needs to be in the moment and completely based on impulse.

Step 3: Scene study from a Student Matinee Series Play
Time: 2 55-minute periods

At this time, your students should be ready to use the character work on motivation and objective and apply it to their selected scenes from the play. Assign scenes to your students and have them read the scenes in their assigned groups. Once this has been accomplished, follow this simple formula to lead to a performance action in line with the playwright’s intentions. Have your students answer these three questions:

1. In this scene, what is the character literally doing? The actor’s task is to find one specific thing he is doing that encompasses every line. Here is an example: A man enters his kitchen, opens the fridge, searches through the vegetable drawer for veggies, takes out lettuce, tomatoes, and cucumbers from the fridge, chops the veggies, puts the veggies into a big salad bowl, and pours salad dressing over the salad. What the character is literally doing is preparing to eat his salad.

2. What is the objective of the character in this scene? By getting to the objective of what the character is doing, the actor has stripped away the emotional connotations that might be suggested by the given circumstances of the play. For example, in Golden Boy, Joe is in love with Lorna, but his objective is getting her to take a chance. By concentrating on getting her to do something, and not on trying to be in love for the duration of the scene, the actor will find himself in the world of the concretely doable, not the nebulous world of feelings outside the actor’s control. The objective is what exists in the scene when you eliminate all ideas about what you think the author is saying the character feels at any given moment in favor of what he is trying to accomplish.

3. What is this objective like to me? It’s as if… By stating it’s as if, the actor creates a tangible, personal stake in the action the actor has chosen. The means of bringing the action home to you is the as-if. It requires the actor to use his/her imagination. The as-if is purely a memory devise; under no circumstances should the as-if ever be played out onstage.

Example:
   a. What is the actor literally doing? Screaming for Stella to come home to him.
   b. What is the objective of the character in this scene? To beg a loved one’s forgiveness.
c. *What is the action like to me?* It’s as if I broke my mother’s prized family heirloom and she threw me out of the house. To be allowed back into my house, I must *beg her forgiveness.*

Now that students understand these necessary tools with which to analyze a scene, have them try it out on their scenes from the Student Matinee Series play. Have them take their time, have fun, and come up with several different analyses. The more they do this, the better they will become at it. Have students write down in clear form their different analyses.

Once students have completed the analysis of their scene and feel like they understand the characters physical action on stage, objective, and motivational emotion have the students begin to block their scenes. Please leave adequate time for performance and feedback from other class members. If time permits, give the students the opportunity to rehearse and revise their scene based on the feedback received from the group. Then have them perform their scenes a second time.