

Developing Theater Literacy

Benchmarks

- **Students develop an understanding of dramatic structure and theater traditions.**

Understanding Dramatic Texts

Student will be able to:

- Differentiate between two or more characters and their corresponding character traits.
- Recognize similarities in dramatic themes and characters in stories, plays and films from different cultures and historical eras.
- Demonstrate both in writing and in group sharings an understanding of:
 - sequence and plot
 - action and climax
 - character traits including the primary emotional quality
 - differences between real and fantasy settings
 - the conflict or problem of a story or play
- Understand the playwright's purpose, such as the lessons of the story.
- Identify standard script format, including:
 - character list
 - characters' names
 - characters' lines
 - blocking and stage directions

Theater vocabulary should be used in all theater activities and exercises in which students are engaged. The particular terminology will be introduced within the context of the classroom activities and student learning. Please see the Theater Glossary/ Appendix C for selected theater vocabulary and definitions.

Suggested Activities

- Dramatize a narrative text.
- Read a narrative and/or dramatic text and identify the "5 W's" for individual scenes and for the whole story.
- Respond to the following questions in class discussions:
 - How is acting a story different from telling a story?
 - How do we use our imagination differently in the telling of a story and acting out a story?
 - What is the role of the audience in storytelling, live theater and film?
 - How is the audience's role different in responding to storytelling, film and theater?



Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Benchmarks

- **Students develop an understanding of dramatic structure and theater traditions.**

Understanding Theater History

Students will be able to:

- Connect storytelling and drama, and recognize how oral traditions are related to the written word.
- Recognize the relationship between theater and community, and between theater and culture(s).
- Understand that theater comes from a desire to pretend and act things out.
- Distinguish between Western and non-Western storytelling and theater traditions.

Suggested Activities

- Explore stories that are thematically or dramatically similar appearing in a variety of cultures (e.g., animal myths, hero or Cinderella stories).
- Passing stories on: Read a story and retell it verbally. Then act out key sections of the story, share it with another class, and have that class pass it on to another class. The last class may share the story as a performed play.
- Take part in a variety of storytelling traditions and activities, including:
 - String stories, puppetry and masks, using various techniques to activate storytelling.
 - Sand stories, which are inspired by the sand paintings of the Native Americans and by the Australian Aboriginal dreamings. A sand tray is used to help tell the story and then erased, making the listener the keeper of the story.
- Use diverse images from a photo resource such as the New York Public Library Photo Collection, the Library of Congress or the National Archives to gather a group of images to demonstrate the historical and cultural aspects of storytelling.

Suggested Reading

- Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China*, retold by Ai-Ling Louie
- Smoky Mountain Rose: An Appalachian Cinderella* by Alan Schroeder
- Nomi and the Magic Fish: A Story from Africa* by Phumla
- Teaching With Cinderella Stories From Around the World* by Kathleen M. Hollenbeck
- Animal Fables from Aesop*, adapted by Barbara McClintock
- Native American Animal Stories (Myths and Legends)* by Joseph Bruchac and Michael J. Caduto
- String Stories: A Creative, Hands On Approach for Engaging Children in Literature* by Belinda Holbrook

Suggested Resources

- New York Public Library Picture Collection Online:
<http://digital.nypl.org/mmpco/>
- Library of Congress Memory Collection:
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>
- Collection of historical pictures:
<http://history.acusd.edu/gen/documents/clipsources.html>

Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Benchmarks

■ Students articulate responses to theater performance.

Students will be able to:

- Describe elements of the sets, costumes, lights, props and sound.
- Recognize and communicate observations about the actors, such as use of body, face and voice.
- Articulate an understanding of theater performance by retelling or re-creating favorite moments from a performance.
- Understand how acting a story is different from telling a story or reading it silently.
- Recognize and articulate the difference between theater and film/video.

Responding to Theater Performance

Responding to Theater Performance - Suggested Guided Questions and Inquiry

Character and Choice

What did character X want? What did the actor say or do to show us that? What obstacles prevented the character from getting what he or she wanted?

How did the characters' behavior change during the course of the play? Why did those changes occur?

Which characters were you able to relate to the most? Why?

If you could ask one of the characters a question, what would it be? Why? Why did you choose that character to ask a question?

Describing

Describe and demonstrate how the character you were observing moved on stage. What is the quality of that movement? Is it fast or slow, smooth or choppy? What does this movement tell us about the character?

Can someone show us a character gesture or movement you remember from the performance? Which character used the gesture? What was the actor trying to say with the gesture or movement?

Describe one of the actor's voices. Does anyone remember a specific word or phrase that one of the actor's said? What do we notice about the character or the character's voice when we say it in the same way?

Describe the music that you heard in the piece. What did the music tell us about the characters? How did the music tell us about the action?

Describe the dance(s) that we saw in the play. Demonstrate with a partner. What did the dance tell us about the characters?

Describe one costume that you saw. What did the costume tell you about the character? Was the character young or old? Was the character a boy or a girl? How do you know?

Describe one of the sets in the play. What did the set tell you about the play? What reaction did you have to the set? Why?

Was there any film, video or slides in the production? Why do you think that the film was added to the production? What images would you choose to add this production?

Which moment do you remember most from the performance? What was happening at that moment? Draw a picture of that moment and include all the characters.

Extended Inquiry

What questions would we like to ask the creative team (playwright, designers, director, etc.)?

If you were going to tell a friend about the performance, how would you describe the main idea of the play in one sentence?

Suggested Activities

■ Prior to a performance, students pick one character in the piece, such as the hero or heroine, and note his/her actions based on the following:

- vocal pitch, volume and tempo
- use of body, posture and gesture
- facial expression
- quality and tempo of physical movement

Additionally, each student is assigned to notice something about one aspect of the physical production as listed below:

- scenery
- costumes
- lights
- props
- sound and music

After viewing a performance, engage in a classroom discussion. Use the Suggested Guided Questions and Inquiry/Grade 2 on page 14 to frame the activity.

Developing Theater Literacy

Benchmark

- Students refine their knowledge of dramatic literature through an examination of a range of scripts.

Suggested Activities

- Predict endings or outcomes for a particular scene or an entire work based on an understanding of character intent and conflict.
- Reading a dramatic text, students will identify:
 - monologues and/or dialogue
 - narrative
 - indications of accent and dialect
 - setting including environment, time and place
 - scenic elements
 - props
 - required costumes

Discuss how these elements combine to create mood in a particular scene.

- Reading a variety of dramatic works, students will identify and write about similar themes.

See Elementary Suggested Reading and Repertoire/Appendix B.

Understanding Dramatic Texts

Students will be able to:

- Differentiate between stage directions and spoken text notation on a printed page.
- Answer the “5 Ws” (Who? What? When? Where? Why?) related to a particular scene or script.
- Differentiate the status of different characters including when characters function as archetypes such as hero, villain, and maiden.
- Discuss and write about dramatic themes.
- Discuss and write about the cultural and historical context of a dramatic work.
- Recognize the environment of a play through an examination of scenic, costume, sound and prop needs as stated in the script.
- Compare character intent for various characters in the script.
- Identify an example of foreshadowing from a dramatic work.



Hero



Villain



Maiden

Theater vocabulary should be used in all theater activities and exercises in which students are engaged. The particular terminology will be introduced within the context of the classroom activities and student learning. Please see the Theater Glossary/Appendix A for selected theater vocabulary and definitions.

Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Benchmark

- **Students examine theater history to further understand its social and cultural context.**

Understanding Theater History

Students will be able to:

- Identify and understand the principal types of theater and performance spaces.
- Identify and understand the purposes of theater in various eras and cultures.
- Understand the role of theater in various communities.
- Identify major historical periods of theater.
- Recognize that theater has a distinct history reflecting the society and culture of its time.

Benchmark

- **Students practice constructive responses to theater performance using observable evidence to support opinion.**

Responding to Theater Performance

Students will be able to:

- Review a theater event based on observed elements in theater performance and production.
- Understand theater as a shared communal experience between audience and actor.
- Develop an understanding of personal aesthetic and choice as related to production intent.
- Recognize the various purposes of theater, among others, to be:
 - social change
 - entertainment
 - education
 - communication
 - ritual

Suggested Activities

- In preparation for attending a performance, students are instructed observe the principal characters, their actions, choices and relationships. Following the performance, engage in a teacher-guided group discussion presenting evidence from the production to support their statements. Use the Suggested Guided Questions and Inquiry/Grade 5 on page 29 to frame the discussion.
- Write letters to individual cast members or members of the production team, expressing observations and understanding of the production intent.
- Compare in writing or in student panels excerpts of three versions of *Carmen* through aesthetic and cultural lenses. Examine and critique the works through:
 - historical and social setting
 - character intent
 - use of music
 - language as a reflection of the time
 - intended audience
 - production intent and the clarity of the intent in the production

Suggested Video Resources

Opera- *Carmen* by Georges Bizet (Maazel, Migenes, Domingo -1984), Columbia/Tristar Studios

Musical Theater-*Carmen Jones* by Georges Bizet and Oscar Hammerstein (Dandrich, Belefonte-1954), Fox Home Video.

Carmen: A Hip Hopera (Knowles, Phifer-2001), New Line Home Video.

Suggested Activities

- Explore local and community theaters in your neighborhood, identifying the areas of the theater, the type of theater space and the intended audience. State the principal purpose of this theater and the types of performance(s) for which it was created.
- Contrast and compare one major Western and one non-Western type of theater, recognizing similarities in intended purpose and performance style), such as an ancient Greek arena and Vietnamese water puppets.
- Create a simple timeline with graphics and text illustrating the major eras of theater history, from antiquity to contemporary times.
- Explore theater history through an examination of festivals from ancient Greece and Rome through medieval Europe up to contemporary festival events. Resources can include film and video, online websites, and photographs.

Suggested Reading:

American Theatre Magazine

The New York Times theater listings

Play by Play

Theater World

Time Out New York

The Village Voice

www.ArtNY.com

www.broadway.com

www.playbill.com

www.theatremania.com

Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Responding to Theater Performance Guided Questions and Inquiry/Grade 5

Character and Choice

What choices did the principal characters make? Describe them. How were these choices revealed in the action of the play?

What did you think that character X wanted? What did the actor say or do to show us that? What particular actions or situation showed us that the character was challenged?

Describe any change in the characters' behavior during the course of the play? Why did those changes occur?

Which characters did you relate to or understand the most? Why?

If you could ask one of the characters a question, what would it be?

Describing

Describe the actor's movements. What do the movements tell us about the character? Give an example.

Can someone show us a character gesture or movement you remember from the performance? Which character used the gesture? What was the actor trying to say with the gesture or movement?

Can you describe one of the actor's voices? Does anyone remember a specific word or phrase that one of the actors said? What do we notice about the character or the character voice when we say it in the same way?

Describe one costume that you saw. What did the costume tell you about the character?

Describe one of the sets in the play. What did the set tell you about the play? What reaction did you have to the set? Why?

If you were going to tell a friend about the performance, how would you describe the main idea or theme of the play?

Extended Inquiry

What specific choice(s) did the scenic, costume, lighting or sound designer make? Give an example.

What point do you think that the director and playwright were trying to make in presenting this work? What main idea were they trying to communicate to the audience? Did they want to entertain, educate, or change the audience in any way?

From your own personal perspective, give your opinion of the production or performances? Present evidence to support your opinion. What choices would you make to change the intention, look or mood of the production?

What questions would you ask the creative team (playwright, designers, director, etc.)?

Developing Theater Literacy

Benchmark

- **Students apply an understanding of dramatic text and theater history in their critical responses as they enhance their skills to critique live performance.**
- **Students use vocabulary that is authentic and integral to theater.**

Understanding Dramatic Texts

Students will be able to:

- Read and respond to dramatic literature in preparation for producing a script.
- Recognize patterns of meaning in a dramatic text by identifying various elements of a script, including:
 - plot
 - time, place, setting
 - characters and relationships among characters
 - stage directions
 - scene breaks
 - production elements, such as costumes, set, lights and props
 - major themes
 - playwright's intention
 - moral and ethical conflicts
 - language usage, such as style, speech patterns, accents and dialects
 - dramatic structures such as narrative, dialogue and monologue

Theater vocabulary should be used in all theater activities and exercises in which students are engaged. The particular terminology will be introduced within the context of the classroom activities and student learning. Please see the Theater Glossary/Appendix A for selected theater vocabulary and definitions.

Suggested Activities

- Read a dramatic text such as a play, scene, book of a musical, or opera libretto. Write a synopsis of the text, including:
 - plot
 - theme
 - relationships among characters
 - exposition
 - climax
- Moderate and take part in small group discussions about a dramatic text and how it might be realized as a performance.
- Using a variety of resources such as libraries, the Internet, video, and recordings, students will create a response to a dramatic text that addresses the facts (historical and social context, performance history, etc.) and themes of the text. Suggested projects include:
 - making a visual arts collage
 - creating a CD with selections of music and songs
 - writing an essay or report
 - creating a PowerPoint presentation that incorporates music, text and images

Suggested Readings and Dramatic Texts:

A Cultural History of Theatre by Jack Watson and Grant McKernie
History of the Theatre by Oscar Gross Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy



Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Benchmark

- **Students develop an appreciation of the role of theater in various cultures by exploring eras and personages in theater history and, in particular, New York City theater.**

Understanding Theater History

Students will be able to:

- Identify the origins and historical uses of theater as popular entertainment and ritual within Western and non-Western cultures.
- Recognize the importance of New York City as a focal point of North American theater history in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Identify major periods and movements in theater history, recognizing that theater reflects the society and culture of its time.
- Describe and discuss a written text or live performance in terms its social, historical, cultural and political context.

Suggested Activities

- Compare and contrast early theatrical texts to contemporary performances.
- Read one example of Greek or Roman theater and one example of early non-Western theater, examining the origins and uses of theater.
- Use online and video resources to research and guide the creation of a project that examines Greek, Roman or early non-Western theater, such as Noh Theater or Peking Opera. Suggested projects include:
 - setting models
 - performing scenes
 - writing and essay on the historical overview of time period
- Research and write a biography of a New York City theater professional (living or dead), noting biographical facts and how this person's life and career impacted theater history.
- Research and write a profile of a New York City theater, including the performance history, architecture, and the historical, social and political context of when the theater was built.

(Note: Both of the above research report activities may take a variety of forms, including essays, scrapbooks, and PowerPoint presentations.)

- Use New York City as a "living museum" to conduct small group research projects about pivotal events and periods in the city's theater history. Possible sites and events include:
 - theater on Nassau Street and actor-managers Walter Murray and Thomas Kean
 - the Astor Place riots
 - Union Square and the rise of vaudeville
 - Times Square and the evolution of the American Musical Theater
 - the Yiddish Theater movement
 - theater and immigrant/slave cultures
 - Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Playhouse
 - the Federal Theater Project
 - political/radical theater of the 1960s

Suggested Reading and Resources:

Curtain Rises: A History of Theatre from Its Origins in Greek and Roman Times through the English Restoration, Vol. 1 by Paula Gaj Sitarz and William-Alan Landes

The Empty Space by Peter Brook

At This Theatre: 100 Years of Broadway Shows, Stories, and Stars by Louis Botto (ed.)

Broadway: The American Musical by Michael Kantor and Laurence Maslon

The Encyclopedia of New York City by Kenneth T. Jackson (ed.)

New York Times Book of Broadway: On the Aisle for the Unforgettable Plays of the Last Century by Ben Brantley (ed.)

History of the Theatre by Oscar Gross Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy

Broadway: The American Musical, WNET/Channel 13 DVD-Video

Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Benchmark

- **Students enhance their ability to critique live performance, and they apply an understanding of dramatic text and theater history in their critical responses.**
- **Students use vocabulary that is authentic and integral to theater.**

Responding to Theater Performance

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to critique and review live performance by identifying elements of dramatic text including:
 - plot
 - time, place, setting
 - characters and relationships among characters
 - stage directions
 - scene breaks
 - production elements, such as costumes, set, lights and props
 - major themes
 - playwright's intention
 - moral and ethical conflicts
 - language usage, such as style, speech patterns, accents and dialects
 - dramatic structures, such as narrative, dialogue and monologue
- Use theater vocabulary to:
 - differentiate between actor and character
 - describe and discuss the temporal nature of live theatre as compared to film and video
 - describe the conventions of a specific performance
 - identify artistic choices

Suggested Activities

- View and respond to a variety of live performances representing a range of styles (classical, contemporary, non-Western, musical theater, puppetry, etc.) and venues (Broadway, off-Broadway, college, high school, etc.).
- Write a review of a performance that includes:
 - short synopsis
 - information about the theater
 - production/design description
 - casting
 - production intent and success/failure of intention

- Read and analyze published reviews discussing theater critics' writing as it incorporates the following criteria:
 - short synopsis
 - information about the theater
 - production/design description
 - casting and characterization
 - production intent and success/failure of intention
- Contrast and compare monologues from two productions of the same work (live, film or video) to discuss:
 - theater space
 - scenery, costume, lighting, and sound
 - timing and pacing

- casting and characterization
- artistic choices

Suggested Reading:

How to Write about Theatre and Drama by Suzanne Hudson

The New York Times theatre reviews

Hot Seat: Theatre Criticism for The New York Times, 1980 to 1993 by Frank Rich

Developing Theater Literacy

Benchmark

- Students integrate an understanding of dramatic text and theater history in their responses to live performance.
- Students engage in research and analysis as dramaturges to distinguish similarities and differences in diverse theater forms.

Understanding Dramatic Text

Students will be able to:

- Recognize the basic elements of dramatic action, including:
 - exposition
 - rising action
 - inciting incident
 - climax
 - falling action
 - denouement
- Compare and contrast examples of dramatic literature from different periods and/or cultures.
- Examine dramatic literature through analysis and research in preparation for producing a script.

Theater vocabulary should be used in all theater activities and exercises in which students are engaged. The particular terminology will be introduced within the context of the classroom activities and student learning. Please see the Theater Glossary/ Appendix A for selected theater vocabulary and definitions.

Suggested Activities

- Read a variety of plays, musical libretti and dramatic works. Students will identify and understand the following:
 - plot
 - exposition
 - rising action
 - inciting incident
 - climax
 - falling action
 - denouement
 - relationships among characters
 - theme
 - form
 - genre and style
- Create a dramaturgical casebook to aid director and designers. Incorporate various points of inspiration and research (poetry, song, lyrics, newspaper articles, reviews and other original documents), and visual documents (period photographs, artwork).
- Using the casebook, students will prepare a presentation communicating dramatic theme, performance and production history to various members of a theatrical team, including actors, designers, production personnel, press and marketing.
- Using the research gathered above, students will create either a study guide or program notes for a dramatic production.

Suggested Reading:

The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel by Daniel Gerould (ed.)
The Empty Space by Peter Brook
Creating Theatre by Lee Alan Morrow



Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Benchmark

- **Students integrate an understanding of dramatic text and theater history in their responses to live performance.**
- **Students engage in research and analysis as dramatuges to distinguish similarities and differences in diverse theater forms.**

Understanding Theater History

Students will be able to:

- Identify the distinguishing characteristics of major periods in Western theatrical innovation.
- Recognize the distinguishing characteristics of theater from diverse cultures.

Suggested Activities

- Read at least one play from any three of the following eras:
 - Ancient Greece
 - Medieval Europe
 - Elizabethan England
 - The Golden Age of Spain
 - 17th century France
 - 18th century Germany
 - 19th century Russia and Scandinavia
- Create an annotated chronological chart that displays the seven eras of Western theater listed above aligning with the three cultural forms studied.
- Students will experience at least three of the following cultural forms through live performances, video, exhibitions or presentations:
 - Japanese Theater
 - Peking Opera
 - American Musical Theater

- Asian Dance Drama of India and Bali
- 20th century African Theater
- International Puppet Theater
- Latino Theater
- Commedia dell'Arte
- Opera

- Read three plays by 20th century, American playwrights, representing a diverse selection of writers by gender and race.
- Using online and video resources, research one of the selected eras of theatrical innovation or cultural forms to complete a project. Projects might include:
 - Designing a set model
 - Making a prompt book
 - Performing scenes
 - Writing a biographical essay on a dramatist
 - Writing a historical overview essay of a time period

Suggested reading:

History of the Theatre by Oscar G. Brockett with Franklin J. Hildy

The Oxford Companion to American Theatre by Gerald Martin Bordman and Thomas Hishak

Theatre Matters: Performance and Culture on the World Stage (Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre) by Richard Boon (ed.) and Jane Plastow (ed.)

A Chronological Outline of World Theatre by Walter J. Meserve and Mollie Ann Meserve

Show Time: A Chronology of Broadway and the Theatre, From Its Beginnings to the Present by Gene Brown

Developing Theater Literacy *continued*

Benchmark

- **Students integrate an understanding of dramatic text and theater history in their responses to live performance.**
- **Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.**

Responding to Theater Performance

Students will be able to:

- Analyze, critique and review performance from a range of styles and genres in live venues, film and video by identifying production and dramatic elements, including:
 - plot
 - time, place, setting
 - characters and relationships among characters
 - stage directions
 - scene breaks
 - production elements such as costumes, set, lights and props
 - major themes
 - playwright's intention
 - moral and ethical conflicts
 - language usage such as style, speech patterns, accents and dialects
 - dramatic structures such as narrative, dialogue and monologue
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze the critiques and reviews of others.

Suggested Activities

- View and respond to a variety of live performances representing a range of styles (classical, contemporary, non-Western, music theater, puppetry, etc.) and venues (Broadway, off-Broadway, college, high school, etc.).
- In class discussions, use theater vocabulary to demonstrate an understanding of elements of performance, including:
 - theater performance space
 - theater house and lobby
 - scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound
 - timing and pacing
 - casting and characterization
 - acting choices
 - directorial choices
 - specific theatrical choices that create meaning

- Write reviews or a comparative essay of two viewed performances, contrasting performance elements, including:
 - theater performance space
 - theater house and lobby
 - scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound
 - timing and pacing
 - casting and characterization
 - acting choices
 - directorial choices
 - specific theatrical choices that create meaning

- Students create and perform monologues, scenes and other performance pieces in response to performances they have seen. They explore existing characters or create sequels or prequels.

Suggested Reading and Online Resources:

American Theatre Magazine

The New York Times theater listings and reviews

Time Out New York

Play By Play

The Village Voice

www.ArtNY.com

www.broadway.com

www.theatremania.com

www.playbill.com

Creating Theatre by Lee Alan Morrow

How to Write about Theatre and Drama by Suzanne Hudson

Hot Seat: Theatre Criticism for The New York Times, 1980 to 1993 by Frank Rich