Theater
Lesson Plan
“Creating a Character”

**Subject:**
- **The Arts:** Theatre Arts - Character Development & Analysis

**Level:**
- Grades 9-12

**Abstract:**
- In this unit, students will be exploring the various elements needed to create a character for a scene or stage role.
- Students will begin by brainstorming all of the different roles that they play in their everyday lives and respond in writing (using Microsoft Word) to two prompts regarding the relationship of their roles in everyday life to creating a character in a play or scene.
- Students will then select a human-interest story out of a newspaper or magazine and create characters and scenes using that story as a starting place. As a group, they will brainstorm answers using the “5 W’s” Worksheet.
- Students will observe three different individuals of varying ages in a public location, such as a shopping mall or park. They will use an observation worksheet to record their observations.
- Students will participate in a character exercise designed to focus on the physical attributes of a character. They will use one of their observations obtained in the public location to further develop that character physically.
- Students will observe a three to five minute scene from a film or television show that has two characters in it. They will complete an observation worksheet and a “5 W’s” Worksheet on that character.
- Students will share their film and television character observations with other students.
- Students will participate in fast talk improvisations based on the film and television characters they have observed.
- Students will observe a demonstration of and then create their own one-word scenes with a focus on characterization. They will complete a character analysis worksheet for the character they have developed for their one word scene.
- Lastly, students will rehearse, memorize, and perform their one-word scenes for other students in the class, with a focus on characterization.
Invitation:

“All the worlds a stage and all the men and women merely players...” As Shakespeare said, we all play many roles throughout our lives. What are the roles we play in our lives and how does each role we play influence the person that we are? What do people do in their lives to get what they want?

The actor’s job is to create a character that satisfies the playwright or scriptwriter’s intentions and that engenders belief to an audience. How do actors do this? What physical, emotional, and intellectual resources do actors use? What skills are required to perform a character well? What do actors do to make their characters believable?

Acting is a lifetime process of observation and study. If an actor makes what he or she does look really simple, you can bet that many, many hours of study have gone into his or her process.

There is no right or wrong in acting, only doing or not doing. Regardless of your background, what you bring from your own experiences into creating a role is valuable. Your knowledge of people and your past experiences will all contribute to providing you with creative inspiration and characterization material. No two actors ever portray a character in exactly the same way. Each of you comes with your own distinctive touch. In acting, as in life, it is the journey that is important. I invite you to relax and enjoy the process of creating characters for your repertoire. They live inside you and are anxiously waiting for you to give them life. Who are these characters?

Situations:

- **Where:** This unit will occur at school, with homework assignments to be completed at home. One homework assignment calls for observing people in a public location, such as a shopping mall or park.

- **When:** This unit is designed to occur during a theatre arts class. It could also be integrated into a language arts block.

- **How Long:** Timing will vary, but this unit should take approximately two to three weeks to complete.
Tasks:

• **Task 1:**
The teacher introduces the unit on character development. (See Invitation.) Students brainstorm in teams of four all of the different roles they play in their everyday lives, and how they “act” in each situation. Each group shares out with the class what these roles are and how they have “acted” them out. (Examples: student, sister, brother, babysitter, soccer player, car mechanic, artist, dancer, employee, friend, and student body officer.)

• **Task 2:**
Students respond to the following prompts using Microsoft Word:

  A. How does performing each of these roles in your everyday life affect the complete person that you are?

  B. What does this tell you about the development of a character in acting?

• **Task 3:** Every person or character is a unique and complete person. The teacher gives the students the homework assignment of selecting a human-interest story from the newspaper or from a magazine.

• **Task 4:** In groups, (three to four), the students select one of the human-interest stories to act out. As a group, they brainstorm the questions given on the 5 W’s Worksheet.

  After answering the questions, the students improvise a scene around the printed story and perform it for the class. Emphasis is placed on showing the details of the characters. Coach students to use their imaginations to supply details that are not necessarily contained in the article. (Note: It is assumed that students have received prior instruction on basic staging techniques, and that they have experience in improvising short scenes/sketches prior to participating in this unit).

• **Task 5:**
How does the physical movement and body language of a person reflect who that person is? Observations of ways that people move their bodies (or their external qualities) can tell a great deal about the internal qualities of that person. Give students the homework assignment of observing three different individuals of varying ages, using the Observation Worksheet. Ask students to write down their observations on the worksheet. One worksheet will
be used for each of the three observations. The individuals being observed should not be aware that they are being observed. An ideal location for observation is a shopping mall or public location where there are many differing kinds of people.

- **Task 6:**
  Students share their three completed observations with each other in groups of three to four.

- **Task 7:**
  The teacher leads the attached Character Exercise. A clear open space is needed to do this exercise.

- **Task 8:**
  Analyzing a character from a film or television program: As a homework assignment, ask students to choose a favorite three to five minute scene from a film or television program that has two characters in it. Ask them to view the scene several times. Ask them to then choose one of the characters and complete the 5 W’s Worksheet and the Observation Worksheet based on that character.

- **Task 9:**
  Sharing film and television observations: Divide students into groups of four to share their character analysis from the film or television program. Ask each group to choose a group leader for this exercise. Provide the group leader with the Reflection Questions attachment.

- **Task 10:**
  One Word Scene Improvisations: Students work through the One Word Scene Improvisation attachment with the teacher leading the exercises.

- **Task 11:**
  Students are asked to complete the Character Analysis Worksheet with their partner for the characters they have developed in the one word scene. After completing the worksheets, ask students to make any changes in the script that will better reflect each character and his or her responses.

- **Task 12:**
  Students rehearse and memorize the one-word scenes, adding blocking, props, or costumes pieces.
• Task 13:
Students perform the one-word scenes for the rest of the class. The class reflects on the scene using the rubric. Each student completes a self-assessment using the rubric.

Interactions:
• Full Class: The teacher leads class discussions and reflections; students participate in a character exercise that involves the entire class.
• Partners: Students participate in fast talk exercises with a partner; students create, edit, write, compose character sketches, and perform one word scenes with a partner.
• Small Group: Students brainstorm the different roles they play in their everyday lives; students brainstorm and act out human interest stories from newspapers and magazines; students share observations; students share character observations from movies/television in groups.
• Individual: Students respond in writing to prompts using Microsoft Word; students observe and record observations of three different people; students analyze a character and scene from a movie or television show and record their observations.

Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve-Proficient
• Theatre: Creative Expression
  Students apply processes and skills in acting, directing, designing, and scriptwriting to create formal and informal theatre, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them.
  Development of Theatre Skills
  2.1 Make acting choices, using script analysis, character research, reflection, and revision through the rehearsal process.
  Creation/Invention in Theatre
  2.3 Design, produce, and/or perform scenes or plays from a variety of theatrical periods and styles.

• Theatre: Aesthetic Valuing
  Students critique and derive meaning from works of theatre and theatre artists on the basis of their aesthetic qualities.
  Derive Meaning from Works of Theatre
  4.2 Report on how a specific actor uses drama to convey meaning in his or her performance.
Assessment:
- **Open-ended Tasks:** Student’s responses in writing to prompts on the roles that we play in our lives, completion of the worksheets, completion of a written one-word scene.

- **Teacher Observations:** The teacher will observe the progress of students in hands-on exercises and adjust as needed.

- **Group Presentations/Performances:** This unit will culminate in a performance task project that consists of a presentation to other students in the class of a one-word scene. The class will reflect on each of the student scenes using a rubric. Each student will complete a self-assessment using the rubric.

- **Rubric:** A rubric will be used for the student’s final performance. It will determine if students can recognize and use the skills needed to develop, create, and perform a character.

Tools:
- Microsoft Word
- Access to video tapes, films, recorded television programs

Project Tip and Alternative:
- This unit is designed to be used after students have participated in basic theatre movement activities and improvisations, and after a sense of group ensemble is established in the class. If it is used before that, it would be extremely important to preface it with theatre games that create safety and a sense of group ensemble for students.

Attachments:
- "5 W’s Worksheet"
- "Observation Worksheet"
- "Sample of a One-Word Scene"
- "Character Analysis Worksheet"
- "Reflection Questions"
- "Character Exercise"
- "One-Word Scene Improvisation Exercise"
- "Rubric for One Word Scene"
- "Step Sheet: Creating a New Document"
Web Resources – Content:
- The California Educational Theatre Association  
  www.CETAweb.org
- The California Arts Project  
  www.ucop.edu/tcap
- Teaching the Arts  
  www.TeachingArts.org

Web Resources – Word:
- A list of linked web resources for Word can be found on the Word Resources page.

Assistive Technology:
- Please refer to the Assistive Technology section for information on methods and devices to help ensure that all students have access to the curricula in the least restrictive environment.