

Classroom Lesson Plan 6

Tableaux With a Twist

Teacher: Dr. Janis Currence, Stephen Decatur Middle School, Berlin, Maryland

Grade Level: Seventh

Topic: Using drama to engage students in meaningful responses to literature, with a focus on character development

Materials Needed:

- Student copies of the novel: *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- Student props
- Tambourine or other sound-making device for teacher
- Student Activity Sheet:
 - Dramatic Tableaux
- Teacher Tool:
 - Dramatic Tableaux Activities

Background Information:

Students in Dr. Currence's class are studying a historical fiction unit, examining the nuances of the genre and how actual events in history affect the lives of fictitious characters in significant ways. Here, students read a significant portion of the book *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* so that they could begin to examine the characters' actions and motives. In addition to reading this book, students were required to select another historical fiction novel to read on their own.

Students interacted with the novel through a variety of classroom experiences designed to help them access the text and interact with it in meaningful ways to increase their understanding of the text. These activities included:

- **Read Alouds:** The teachers and students shared the experience of reading aloud the novel.
- **KWL Graphic Organizers:** KWL organizers are charts that ask students to list what they **Know**, what they **Want** to know, and what they have **Learned** as the read a text.
- **Open-Minded Graphic Organizers:** Students collect or draw pictures or symbols to identify what a protagonist or antagonist in a text may have thought. Dr. Currence provided students with a silhouette figure into which they drew or pasted symbols, pictures, and words that represented the interior thoughts of characters in the novel.
- **Double-Column Book Logs:** In this form of journaling, students note their personal reaction to a particular part of the text in one column, and cite the page of the book that provoked their reaction in the other.

In order to assist students with understanding the fictitious characters, their motivations, and how historical events influence their actions and reactions, this lesson provides an opportunity to participate in a dramatic activity called Tableaux With a Twist.

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Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- explore and demonstrate the ways authors reveal characters in a text through dramatic tableaux.
- write for personal expression, focusing on insight gained from the tableaux experience.

Expected Products From Lesson:

- Dramatic scene, based on a chapter of the novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*
- Student reflection on the activity and their analysis of their own learning as they participated in dramatic tableaux, examining how it enhanced their own learning and understanding of the literature

Instructional Strategies Implemented:

- Collaborative learning
- Dramatic tableaux
- Independent writing/reflection

Collaborative Structures of Class:

Students are placed in groups of four to five each.

Lesson Procedures/Activities:

Day 1: 10 Minutes To Model Tableaux With a Twist

- Introduce the activity Tableaux With a Twist. Tell students that they will be forming dramatic groups in which they will create frozen scenes from significant events in the novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* for the next day's activity.
- Select four students and identify a scene from the book for modeling Tableaux with a Twist.
- Ask students to form a frozen scene representing the event from the novel. Encourage the students to prepare the scene in a corner of the classroom where classmates cannot see or hear what they are doing. Allow students three to five minutes to formulate their scene. Tell them that the audience will be allowed to tap characters in the scene and hear what they have to say about their situation and actions.
- Once the model group is ready to present, ask students to put their heads down. Explain to them that as long as they hear the shaking of the tambourine, they are to keep their eyes closed. Meanwhile, the group is forming its scene.
- Once the group is in position, stop the tambourine with a single, loud hit, and invite students in the audience to take a look at the frozen scene.
- Teacher will lead audience participation by calling on students from the class to identify the scene and its importance in the novel. Teacher can also invite students to tap a character to hear what they have to say about what they are doing in the scene and their thoughts about it.

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Day 1: 20 Minutes for Preparation

- Form groups of four to five students each. Distribute the Student Activity Sheet “Dramatic Tableaux” to each group. Ask students to select a group leader for the purpose of organizing the scene and for communicating readiness to the teacher. Groups should also select a recorder to fill in the Student Activity Sheet as they progress through the activity.
- Assign a specific chapter in the novel to each group. Allow students to choose one significant scene from their chapter.
- Ask students to meet in their groups for the purpose of selecting their scene, identifying the significance of the scene, the roles the characters play, and how to form the tableau with the group members and props (allow up to two props per group).
- Allow students to meet in their groups for 15 minutes. Students will present their scenes the following day in class, after they have had time to gather their props.

Day 2: Performance of Scenes

- Allow groups to meet for five minutes to work out last-minute details of their scene.
- Present scenes and allow time for audience reaction and tapping of characters.
- Once students get comfortable with the activity, teacher may select a student class leader to shake the tambourine and call upon classmates.
- Once groups have concluded their presentations, direct students to complete Student Activity Sheets.

Homework and Follow-Up Activity

- Ask students to write a reaction to the tableaux activity. Ask students to consider: What did you like about participating in the activity? What went well for you? In what ways did the activity help you to understand the characters, their actions, motives, and relationship to the plot in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*?
- See “Dramatic Tableaux Activities” for suggestions for directing this reaction and other activities that can be used to assess students’ understanding of the characters and scenes they presented.

Follow-Up or Culminating Activities:

- As a culminating activity, ask students to complete a project that illustrates an important historical event that impacts either the protagonist or antagonist in a historical fiction book. Encourage students to select creative media for constructing their projects, such as original chapters or one-act plays, drawings, dioramas, games, or posters. Provide several weeks for students to work on the project outside of class. Students may also present the project orally, offering the class an opportunity to ask questions about the book and give the student feedback. Consider creating a project scoring system in collaboration with your students, either individually (as in student contracts for each project) or as a whole class.
- **Text-to-Text Connections:** Use the following Web sites to explore articles related to the church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963:

In the Memory of Four Little Girls

<http://www.useekufind.com/peace/articles.htm>

Six Dead After Church Bombing, Washington Post

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-rv/national/longterm/churches/archives1.htm>

Provide copies of these articles for students if they will not have access to computers during this activity.

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List these symbols on the board, or make a bookmark for each student with them on it:

- L Learning something new
- S Something that surprised you
- T-T Information in the text that connects to information you have read in another text
- R Reminds you of something else you read
- * Interesting
- C Confusing information
- I Important information
- W Wondering about why something occurred

Ask students to be active readers, thinking about what the text means to them and what connections they are making between the nonfiction articles and the novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. Students should use sticky notes to add their thoughts to the text, using the symbols listed above to highlight their experience.

Provide time for class discussion after students have completed a chapter of the book. Encourage them to use their notes to guide the discussion. You may want to focus on the ways in which the nonfiction articles underscore the message of the text.

Assessment:

Students' successful participation in the tableaux activity is assessed through teacher observation. Students are also required to submit a reflection on the activity.

Some suggested criteria for evaluating their presentations include:

- knowledge and attention to audience,
- project creativity,
- student's self-evaluation of project, and
- a brief oral presentation, including:
 - a summary of the main events in the story and the historical context in which the story is set, and
 - a brief discussion of the ways the main character(s) was (were) affected by the historical events, and the student's opinion about the historical accuracy of the book, offering non-fiction evidence to support the opinion.