

Teaching Theatre

Length: 30 minutes

Featured Schools

School:	Lusher Alternative Elementary School
Location:	New Orleans, Louisiana
In this program:	Amanda Newberry, theatre teacher Eve Gitlin, third-grade teacher
School:	Barney Ford Elementary School
Location:	Denver, Colorado
In this program:	George E. Jackson, III, drama teacher

About This Program

This program examines how two specialist teachers work on basic theatre skills with children of various ages and how they use theatre education as a gateway to other kinds of learning.

At **Lusher Alternative Elementary School** in New Orleans, Louisiana, theatre teacher Amanda Newberry teams with third-grade teacher Eve Gitlin to engage children in theatre exercises that also develop their creative listening and thinking skills:

- In the first exercise, similar to the classic television show “What’s My Line?,” each child is assigned an occupation but is not told what it is. Working in pairs, students zero in on the occupation by asking questions about how the person would do the job. Through the exercise, students learn to ask effective questions and use questioning techniques to create detailed characters.
- In the improvisation exercise “Sorry, I Must Be Leaving,” students rotate through a scene, devising appropriate plot and dialogue to move the scene forward and account for their actions. They compare the exercise to creative writing techniques and explore the notion that improvisation is like “writing in our heads.”

At **Barney Ford Elementary School** in Denver, Colorado, drama specialist George E. Jackson, III, applies a variety of strategies to achieve learning goals for different age and grade levels:

- With a first-grade class, he stresses basic physical coordination, using activities in rhythm, movement, and stretching to help students develop essential motor skills and learn to work together as a team.
- With a fourth-grade class, Jackson rehearses an original play about Barney Ford, the former slave for whom the school is named, who became a successful business and political figure. Jackson uses “reader’s theatre,” which focuses on dialogue rather than stagecraft to establish character and move the plot forward. Through this exercise, children polish their skills in reading, projection, and stage presence along with basic proficiencies like paying attention and sitting still.
- Fifth-graders work with Jackson to create original masks, inspired by the work of Harlem Renaissance poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. On the inside of the mask, students paste words that describe their inner characters. Then they paint the outside to reflect what they believe the world sees. Variety in techniques and approaches is important to Jackson. “I want to expose them to different things so they can decide what they like,” he says.

About This Program, cont'd.

Arts Education Standards Addressed in This Program

Theatre

- **Content Standard 1**—Script writing by planning and recording improvisations based on personal experiences and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Collaborate to select interrelated characters, environments, and situations for classroom dramatizations
- **Content Standard 2**—Acting by assuming roles and interacting in improvisation

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Use variations of locomotor and nonlocomotor movement and vocal pitch, tempo, and tone for different characters
- Assume roles that exhibit concentration and contribute to the action of classroom dramatizations based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history

- **Content Standard 3**—Designing by visualizing and arranging environments for classroom dramatizations

Achievement Standards for Grades K–4:

- Collaborate to establish playing spaces for classroom dramatizations and to select and safely organize available materials that suggest scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup

Source: *National Standards for Arts Education*, published by Music Educators National Conference (MENC). Copyright 1994 by MENC. Used by permission. The complete National Arts Standards and additional materials relating to the Standards are available from MENC, The National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191, telephone 800-336-3768.

Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Program

“Teaching Theatre” explores a number of different techniques for teaching this art form and extending the resulting skills and knowledge across the curriculum. The program can be effectively incorporated into a professional development course or workshop for theatre specialists. It also could be used to show classroom teachers how they can incorporate theatre techniques to enhance learning in their classrooms.

Other audiences for this program might include:

- mixed groups of classroom teachers and theatre specialists, to build effective collaborations;
- curriculum or arts project planners, to help expand their ideas about how theatre techniques contribute to learning in other subject areas;
- teachers, administrators, and policymakers, to demonstrate how arts specialists apply standards to their curriculum and communicate standards to students; and
- visiting artists or artists-in-residence, to give them ideas about classroom practices and teaching techniques.

Before Watching

Identify ways the teachers in this program use both improvisational and text-based techniques to develop creative-thinking skills:

- How can teachers use improvisation to promote creative writing?
- How can they use text to encourage creative thinking?
- What are the benefits of each approach?
- What would be the product of each approach?

Amanda Newberry and George Jackson incorporate movement into many of their theatre exercises. How does movement enhance their students’ learning? Consider ways that movement-based techniques could be used to engage students in reading, math, or other academic subjects.

Theatre does not require a stage—in fact, performances in tents, churches, and even on the street are all long-standing theatre traditions. Look at the settings used by the teachers in this program. How could you incorporate theatre activities in your classroom?

Watching the Program

Watch “Teaching Theatre” (30 minutes).

Viewing Suggestions, cont'd.

Suggested Activities and Discussion

Consider the following questions for reflection:

- How can you adapt the “Sorry, I Must Be Leaving” lesson within your classroom and for other subject areas?
- How can theatre be incorporated into the curriculum to teach other subject areas?
- How can you encourage students to recognize the importance of asking questions to extend their learning?
- How does theatre provide a forum for student inquiry that can enhance learning?

Below are some additional ways you can build on the ideas in this program in a variety of school and community settings.

Professional Development Sessions for Teachers

- Consider ways you can incorporate theatre-based lessons in your class. How would you plan the material? What resources would you use? How do you think the students would benefit?
- Think of ways that you can use theatre to help make your teaching more effective, for example, to bridge language barriers or developmental gaps.
- Consider how theatre might encourage students to express their ideas or feelings. What would be necessary to develop a basic expression of feelings into a complete work of art?
- Attend a play as a group. Reflect on how the experience affected you. How was the experience different from watching a movie?

Curriculum-Planning Sessions

- Include a theatre specialist teacher in your planning session. Invite the specialist to help develop a themed unit that includes theatre education.
- Invite an actor, a playwright, or a director to a curriculum-planning session. Together, identify theatre-based activities that would make the curriculum unit stronger.
- Explore educational outreach opportunities offered by a local theatre company. Do they provide visiting artists or special programs to schools?

School Board, Parent–Teacher, or Local Government Meetings

- Invite a theatre specialist teacher from your district to talk about how he or she teaches theatre.
- Invite a representative of a theatre organization that provides outreach programs to explain how theatre can enhance learning at your school.
- Invite community members to attend a theatre performance by students.
- Present reflections by older students on how working with theatre has enhanced their readiness to learn or their academic achievement.
- Invite parents or board members to reflect on their own experiences with theatre. How did these experiences enhance their learning?

Additional Resources

Related Video Library Programs

Watch these programs for more information on ideas explored in “Teaching Theatre”:

- Expanding the Role of the Arts Specialist
- Teaching Music
- Teaching Dance
- Teaching Visual Art
- Developing an Arts-Based Unit
- Bringing Artists to Your Community
- Students Create a Multi-Arts Performance

Web Resources

The Arts in Every Classroom video library Web site: www.learner.org/channel/libraries/artsineveryclassroom

The Arts in Every Classroom workshop Web site: www.learner.org/channel/workshops/artsineveryclassroom

Standards for the Arts

National Standards for Arts Education: www.ed.gov/pubs/ArtsStandards.html

State Standards for the Arts: [www.ncsl.org/programs/arts/artsed/artedhom.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/arts/artsted/artedhom.htm)

Related Organizations and Resources

American Alliance for Theatre & Education: www.aate.com/welcome.htm

Information on Paul Laurence Dunbar: www.plethoreum.org/dunbar/

Information on the Harlem Renaissance: www.poets.org/exh/Exhibit.cfm?prmlID=7

Recommended by Amanda Newberry

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts: Arts Education Resources: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org>

Ibiblio, The Public’s Library and Digital ArchiveL: www.ibiblio.org

World Wide Arts Resources: Web Arts Gateway: www.wwar.com

Recommended by George Jackson

Encarta Schoolhouse: <http://encarta.msn.com/schoolhouse/default.asp>

Visual Arts and the Harlem Renaissance: www.fatherryan.org/harlemrenaissance/visual.htm