

Developing Voice Through Theatre

Overview: The first quarter of AP Language and Composition consists of lessons and activities around narrative/expressive writing and voice. The following is a series of mini-lessons to supplement the course materials with the goal of developing voice and diving into the intersection between self and culture.

Standards and Essential Questions:

The AP Language and Composition course description states that students will “become skilled readers of prose written in a variety of rhetorical contexts and skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes.” These activities require students to read a unique type of prose in documentary theatre and write for the unique purpose of expressing themselves and their classmates.

In addition, students are taught to “read like writers and write like readers.” When students write their interview answers, they do so as those who have read the UE pieces; when they read their interview partner’s packets, they do so as those who will compose new pieces as a result.

Essential questions include:

- Where are self and culture connected? How do these connections manifest themselves and for what purposes?
- How does documentary theatre provide an avenue for exploring these connections?
- What rhetorical devices are used in documentary theatre and for what purpose?
- What is voice? How does voice in prose differ from voice in documentary theatre? What other avenues can develop and enhance voice?
- How can elements of theatre promote understanding between people, texts, and cultures?

Grade level: 12

Time frame: First day of school, and then 4-5 days several weeks into school.

Context: The AP Language and Composition curriculum emphasizes the link between self and culture, and seeks to develop the writer’s voice as both argument and rhetoric. We devote considerable time to helping students write narrative and expressive essays in order to both understand these genres independently and as a counter to more traditionally academic forms of writing as seen on the AP exam - rhetorical analysis, argument, and synthesis. Over the summer, students were assigned an introductory letter in which they wrote about themselves, their cultures, and their families. After debriefing these letters and reading several essays regarding the writing process, students will engage in this lesson involving *Undesirable Elements*, using theatre to further develop their writer’s voice and the connection between self and culture. After this unit, students will read Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* to analyze these same ideas from another perspective.

Lesson plan:

First day of school: Complete “The River” activity. Identify three memories based on the prompts, “I remember love,” “I remember loss,” and “I remember the first day of school.” Choose one to share with the class and line up according to the timeline. Dramatize by repeating the year and stomping twice after each person shares. This sets up personal writing as well as theatrical techniques in the classroom.

Several weeks later:

DAY ONE: Pass out copies of *Undesirable Elements* and *Inside Out*. Watch a clip of “Secret Histories” to understand the style: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhsHaVuFWbs>. Explain the background of the company, read the original play (assign strong readers a particular part; direct and explain as you go), and discuss using questions such as:

- How are “voices” represented?
- Are there places where you (as reader and/or audience member) felt alienated from the characters? Are there places where the characters seem alienated from one another?
- What types of life situations are used as material for this play?
- What structural elements are set in place in order to dramatize the narrative?
- What rhetorical devices are used, and to what effect?

HOMEWORK: Finish reading Ping Chong + Company’s scripts of “Undesirable Elements” if not finished in class (*Undesirable Elements* pp. 11-24) as well as “Inside Out” (*Undesirable Elements* pp. 111-161) on your own. Annotate. Mark up. Answer the questions above.

DAY TWO: Discuss. Include questions such as... How does the live performance differ from reading the script? How are *names* used? How do these plays handle the intersection between self and culture? If time, begin the interview packet.

HOMEWORK: Complete the traditional interview packet. Note: Some questions might not apply to all students; they should try to answer as many as possible.

DAY THREE: Pair up. Read interview packets. Discuss. Create two short pieces of a dramatized version of parts of their story that stood out to you.

HOMEWORK: Complete dramatized versions of their stories.

DAY FOUR: Pairs share their work with one another. Then choose one to read in small groups.

HOMEWORK: Fix up one of the dramatized stories to turn in for a grade. Also, reflect -- How were elements of voice and narration used in UE and in these dramatized versions? Story for college essay? Narrative elements in drama vs lit?

Assessment:

Formative: Check annotations of reading and verbally assess for understanding; completion check for interview packet and for two dramatized versions of partner's story

Summative: One of the written pieces (dramatized version of their partner's interview) - grade for elements of voice, written expression, authenticity, narrative, cohesion, etc.