



Heart of America Shakespeare Festival

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SHAKESPEARE OFF THE CUFF TEACHER GUIDE

Shakespeare in Education

At the Heart of America Shakespeare Festival we present education programs that nurture an early appreciation for the art of theatre and the work of William Shakespeare. Shakespeare Off the Cuff is an introduction to the world of improvisation. Every student will get on their feet and work with their classmates to learn the basics of creating characters, gaining self-confidence and utilizing their creativity. Students will participate in acting games that do not rely on any scripts, the magic lies in their own imaginations.

“You may do it
extempore, for it is
nothing but roaring”
Peter Quince, *A
Midsummer Night’s
Dream*

“Suit the action to the word, the word to the action” Hamlet

Pre-Class Activities

Eye contact is crucial in all elements of theatre! Here are a couple of exercises that help establish good eye contact and trust.

- **Mirror Exercise**
Divide the class into pairs and have them face one another and let each pair decide who will lead first. The leader then does a series of slow, controlled movements while the other person follows. The key to the success of this exercise is to direct students to look INTO EACH OTHER’S EYES AND NOT AT THE HANDS! Have students begin by just doing arm motions. You may allow them to use their legs and feet if they seem ready.
- **Group Mirror Exercise**
Have students sit in a circle. Have one student leave the room. Select a leader. Everyone in the class must follow one leader. Bring the student back into the room and have him or her see if they can determine who is leading the group. Hint: Only allow two students to watch the leader directly. Everyone else should watch someone else in the circle. Again, encourage them to keep the movements slow and controlled.
- **Zip, Zap, Zop**
The group stands in a circle. The player who starts points across the circle to another player, makes eye contact, and says, ‘Zip’. The receiving player points to another person, makes eye contact, and says, ‘Zap’. The new receiving player points across the circle and says, ‘Zop’. The game continues with the words passed in this order. Players should try to pass the proper word smoothly.

Post-Class Activities

- Repeat games and exercises done in your Shakespeare Off the Cuff session. Repetition builds teamwork and creativity. Do these exercises whenever embarking upon a group activity in class or when additional focus is required.
- Story Circle-Make a ball of yarn with different lengths of yarn tied together. While students sit in a circle, have one student hold the ball of yarn and begin a story while unraveling the ball of yarn. When the first student gets to the next piece of yarn, he or she passes the yarn ball to the next person and that person continues with the story where the other left off. This continues until every student has contributed to the story. The last person is responsible for wrapping up the story.
- Extended Improvisation- Divide the students into groups and give them a conflict or problem. Have them create a scene with a beginning, middle and end that resolves this conflict in some way. Have groups share their scenes with the class. Have students write the story as well. Students could contribute alternate endings to the story when writing.
- Have students act out the scenes they have written. Discuss what would make their story more effective. This could also spark a discussion on playwriting versus writing a story. Talk about dialogue in plays and descriptive paragraphs in stories.

Questions for Discussion

- Many acting classes begin with improvisation. Why do you think improvisation is important for all acting?
- Discuss how improvisation skills might come in handy if an actor forgot his or her lines in a play.
- How does improvisation help in everyday life? What are some examples?

“All the world’s a stage,
and all the men and
women merely players”
Jacques, *As You Like It*

Online Resources

www.kcshakes.org
artsedge.kennedy-center.org
www.nosweatshakespeare.edu
nfs.sparknotes.com
www.folger.edu

For further questions or activities contact the Director of Education for HASF at 816-531-7728