

Pre and Post Reading Lesson Plans:

Coraline by David Greenspan and Stephin Merritt

Pre-Reading Physical Theatre Lesson Plan

Warm-ups - 15 minutes

Circle Dash: Students form a large circle with one student in the middle. At any point, two students in the circle should make eye contact, making a “silent agreement” through their eye contact to switch places. Then, they run to try to switch. The student in the middle will try to steal one of their spots. Whoever is left without a spot is in the middle. Many pairs may switch at one time - the only rule is to switch with someone specific, and to try not to crash into each other!

12345 Bradford: Students get in pairs. They start by counting back and forth to 5 as fast as they can - ie: student A says “1”, student B says “2”, student A says “3”, student B says “4”, student A says “5”, student B says “1”, etc. Then give them a theme. The theme is creepy animals. Tell students to replace the number “2” with a creepy animal sound and movement. Maybe they howl like a wolf and show their claws. So student A says “1”, student B howls like a wolf and shows his claws, student A says “3” and so on and so forth. After 30 seconds of this call out “replace the number 3 with a totally different creepy animal sound and movement!!” So now student A says “1”, student B howls like a wolf and shows his claws, student A barks and bares her teeth like a rabid dog, student B says “4”, etc. Keep going until you have gotten to 5! This is a great game for silliness, but also focus, getting students to integrate movement and sound and memory very quickly!

Conveyor Belt: Students stand in two equal lines facing each other just a few feet apart. Every student should be looking directly across from another student. Tell one line they are A and the other line is B. You stand at the end of the lines and call out “A, B, Shift” over and over again. When you say A, everyone in line A strikes a pose. When you say B every one in line B makes a mirror copy of the person directly across from them. When you say “shift” Line A shifts one person in one direction, line B in the other direction. The people at the ends switch over from line A to B or B to A (like a conveyor belt!). You repeat the process “A, B, shift” or “B, A, shift” until people are back in the same position. To make things fun, start off slow “A (one Mississippi, two Mississippi), B (ditto), Shift (ditto)” and then slowly speed up so students are scrambling to keep up. Note: if students get confused with where they are point out that when you do the shift you don’t end up facing the next person in line - you end up facing the person two people down. This will help the shifting. Now things really start to get fun. Repeat the process again, but this time students must strike a pose and make a noise. Give them different themes: haunted house, bad mother, crazy neighbor, disgusting rats. For the final round, tell students to make a repeating motion and sound, still with the themes. Hopefully kids will be getting outrageously ridiculous and giddy.

Content with Debriefs - 35 minutes

Mirror: Students in pairs. Have one student start to move very very slowly - the other student follows their movement as if they are the mirror. So if the leader moves their left hand back, the follower would move their right hand back. They can never touch, as there is “glass” between them. This is a silent activity. Switch leaders after a couple of minutes. Then tell the students to try with NO leader! See if they can sense what they want to do

and lead together! For the last part of this activity, have student try to make a distorted image of each other – whoever leads start to move slowly. The follower mirrors their movements, but adding a creepy feel – maybe their hands are clawed, maybe their eyes are slitted, maybe their mouths a little twisted...be the evil alter-ego in the mirror!!

I Have I Want: Students in a circle. Each student must (silently, in their head) come up with something they have, and something they wish they had instead to replace it. Then, one student at a time will call out, “I have (whatever they have)” and everyone in the circle hits a quick sculpture to represent whatever they said. Hold for a few seconds. Then student says “I wish I had (whatever they wish for)” and the students shift to a new sculpture representing the wish! Go all the way around the circle.

Examples: I have an apartment. I wish I had a castle! I have curly hair. I wish I had straight hair! I have a cat. I wish I had three big dogs! I have a bike. I wish I had a motorcycle!

the Expert: Students sit in a circle. One at a time, each student will have to talk for a minute about a topic you give them – they are the expert! They cannot stop talking for that whole minute – have another student time it – then go right to the next student! Here are the topics you should use – if you have fewer than 15 kids, just pick your favorites!

1. Cats
2. Wells
3. Buttons
4. Brick walls
5. Boredom
6. Magic amulets or talismans (define this if necessary!)
7. Leading ladies (in the theater!)
8. Neighbors
9. Mirrors
10. Fingernails
11. Snow globes
12. Rats
13. Tiny dogs
14. Chocolate
15. Circus

Storytelling: Students in pairs. Have them close their eyes and remember a time they went exploring and discovered something new. Let them think about it for a minute. Then, tell to decide who is student A and who is student B. After they decide, say student B is going to tell their story first – for 3 minutes – while student A listens. If B finishes before the 3 minutes are up, A should ask questions to get more detail. Teacher keeps time. Give 1 minute warning and 30 second warning. When time is up go right to the next student – 3 minutes for student A to storytell and student B to listen –etc. After 6 minutes is up, tell students they have 1 minute to write 1 sentence that represents the core of their partner’s story. Get in a circle and have each person share the sentence they wrote about their partner’s story.

Final Debrief – 10 minutes

Discuss the following:

- Those of you who have read the novel Coraline or seen the film, give a brief summary for others who are unfamiliar with the plot.
- How do you think the play might be different from the film or book? What scenes do you think might be particularly challenging to stage?

Post-Reading Questions for Discussion and Exploration:

- There are many props and devices, like puppets, the well, the buttons, the rotating door, the hand, etc, to handle the “other world” scenes – what are some ways you might creatively create props?
- Various characters are animals. Discuss some of the strategies actors could use to portray an animal character.
- Who is your favorite character – why?
- What would you describe as one of the funniest moments in the play? Why?
- If you have read the novel Coraline or seen the film, in what ways did the play meet your expectations – and in what ways did the play surprise you? If you have no prior experience with this show in any form, are you now interested in the movie or novel? Why or why not?
- If you have read other plays, how does “Coraline” compare? If this is your first play, how was it different from what you expected?