

Pre and Post Reading Lesson Plans:

Sunset Limited by Cormac McCarthy

Pre-Reading Physical Theatre Lesson Plan

Warm-ups - 10 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!

Emotion Circle: Students stand in a circle. One person starts. Leader calls out an emotion - frustration, for example - student makes a gesture and a sound, whole group copies gesture and sound. Leader calls out another emotion - lethargy - next student make gesture and a sound, etc. The 15 emotions you should use for this lesson are:

1. desperation
2. patience
3. condescension
4. faith
5. kindness
6. irritation
7. persistence
8. hunger
9. surrender
10. solitude
11. steadfast
12. humble
13. arrogant
14. skeptical
15. tranquil

Content with Debriefs - 40 minutes

Sculpture: Put students in groups of 3. Give them the phrase “I am my brother’s keeper.” Have them sculpt themselves into a group image representing the phrase. Explain that the qualities of strong sculpture are using your whole body, being on different levels (high, medium and low), have a gazing point so that eyes remain still, and using energy so body looks strong and grounded. Give students 5 minutes to come up with their group sculpture. Then, have each group briefly show what they came up with.

--Debrief - Ask students: what did some of the sculptures have in common? What were some unique images you noticed? Do you personally agree with the phrase? Why or why not? Give a specific example to support your answer. Does American culture believe in this?

Free Association Around the Circle: Actors stand in circle. Leader starts with a word (do two rounds - first white, then black), and student to the right says the first word that comes into their head. A wave of free association goes around the circle.

--Debrief - Ask students: did we go straight to race? If not, what were some other themes you noticed coming up? If so, what stereotypes did you notice yourself fulfilling?

Stream of Consciousness: Actors stand in circle. Leader stands in center and gives one actor a word. That actor must then just empty his/her head in a stream of consciousness that is evoked from that word. Leader will then pick up a word from that student and give it to the next actor to go on stream of consciousness with. Some words to start with for the purpose of this lesson are: professor, bible, suicide, brother, and responsibility

60-30-15: Player A and Player B perform a timed 1-minute scene. They then perform the SAME scene in 30 seconds. They then perform the SAME scene again in 15 seconds. They then perform the SAME scene again in 7 seconds. They then perform the SAME scene again in 3 seconds. They then perform the SAME scene again in 1 second. This is a great way to get students on their feet and doing improv without them worrying about 'floundering'. It also helps students pull out what the most important elements of a scene are and limit the scene to just that.

--Do this activity 3 times

--Scene topics should be:

1. A man is trying to convince another man, a total stranger, not to commit suicide
2. A religious man is trying to convince an atheist that the bible is worth reading
3. One man is trapped in the kitchen of another man, trying to leave, but the owner of the kitchen uses every method he can think of to get him to stay.

Final Debrief - 10 minutes

Discuss the following:

- The names of the two characters in this play are "Black" and "White" - what does that information, combined with the lesson you just participated in, lead you to believe the play is about? Do a circle brainstorm.

Post-Reading Questions for Discussion and Exploration:

- The character "Black" is unable to keep "White" from leaving - has he failed? Explain and defend your answer.
- Black has the key to the door. If he doesn't want White to leave, why does he let him out?
- There are many different rhythms to the play - at different points we laugh, feel teary, or tense...think of one particularly tense moment and share it with your classmates.
- What are some of the funniest moments that stood out to you? Why do you think they were so funny - since this play was clearly not a comedy.
- Why is White so intrigued by Black's "jailhouse stories"?
- Both men, at some point in the play, talk about putting the other in the "trick bag" - what do you think they mean?
- White tells Black that he basically has no friends - Black tells White that pretty much everyone he has ever known is dead. Both men seem lonely - would you characterize their loneliness in the same way? What actions on stage tell you they are each lonely? Try to remember specific moments in the show.
- If you have read other plays, how does "Sunset Limited" compare? If this is your first play, how was it different from what you expected?