

**Arts Advantage:**  
**Using Theater to Open the Eyes as Well as the Mind**  
*William G. Scheuering*  
*Rogers Middle School for the Creative and Performing Arts*

**Contents of Curriculum Unit**

Overview  
Rationale  
Objectives  
Strategies Classroom Activities  
Annotated Bibliography/Resources  
Standards

**Overview**

For the past four years, I have had the pleasure of being the stagecraft teacher at Rogers Middle School for the Creative and Performing Arts (Rogers CAPA). Rogers CAPA is a small magnet middle school set in the eastern section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The school with a strong concentration in the arts serves approximately 300 students. In order for students to be able to attend Rogers CAPA, each student must pass an audition in one of ten art forms. Rogers CAPA provides the children of the Pittsburgh community with a rich blend of arts concentrated curriculum, as well as a strong academic foundation. However, the structure of the program does not allow for much arts interaction. This curriculum unit will address that lack, including students from three of these art forms - Creative Writing, Costume and Stagecraft. The unit will be developed primarily for students at the sixth grade level. The reason for using the youngest students in our program is simple. I would like them to experience how some art forms interact and depend on one another, as early as possible. The sixth grade students from each of these art disciplines will be pulled together and then divided into small work groups.

This curriculum unit will give students exposure to the important benefits that the arts will play in their development. In this unit, the students will explore different dramatic formats. They will learn more about the different careers available in theatre. The unit will also develop an understanding of how these different career disciplines work closely together to produce a quality performance. The curriculum unit addresses the elements of play writing, including plot and character development, as well as conflict development and resolution. It will also explore the importance of costume design. The children will also investigate concepts involved in set design and construction, as well as

how lighting and sound technology can play an important role in setting the mood for a performance.

## **Rationale**

The rationale behind the development of this unit is two-fold. First, this unit will enable me, as a teacher, to have students meet many of the requirements needed for completion of their standard-based portfolios. This curriculum unit will address many of the Pittsburgh Public Schools' Educational Content Standards. The strongest connections will fall under the area of Arts and Humanities. These content standards include:

1. All students describe meanings they find in various works from visual and performing arts and literature on the basis of aesthetic understanding of the art form.
2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand important features of the works.
3. All students relate works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context within which they were created.
4. All students produce, perform or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater and describe the meaning of their work.

This unit will also help students gain the rich rewards that early exposure to the arts has on the overall development of a child. In looking at how my recent exposure to the arts has opened my eyes to a new and exciting work, I am sure that giving children earlier exposure will have an exponential effect on them. In fact, when I used the search engine, Google, to search arts and the educational advantages, I received over 6,000,000 hits. These studies showed improved attendance, increased educational performance and social development advantages.

## **Objectives**

The students participating in this curriculum unit will successfully produce a live puppet show. They will be required to create characters with costumes, a set for the puppet stage they will be using and a script of written text. These

students will be sixth grade creative writing, costume and stagecraft majors. They will be divided into groups of three or four and each group will have at least one student from each of these majors. These groups will work closely together and take advantage of their individual strengths to produce the final project of a one-act puppet show.

The students will use the following strategies and classroom activities to construct a script that includes a strong plot, good character development and meaningful dialogue that will bring resolution to the obstacles created in the story. Each student will produce a hand puppet based on one of the characters from the story and the costume for the hand puppet will be determined by the story they tell and the personality of the character that they develop.

The students will be required to create a set that will fit on the puppet stage. The set will be created by the written story that they tell. The students will investigate the time period in which their story takes place and they will use this information to help them create a meaningful set and props for their puppet show. In the end, each group will be required to perform their show for all of the other groups.

### **Strategies Classroom Activities**

**GOAL:** Students will be able to work in groups of three to write a one-act play employing the elements of story as they apply to playwriting, as well as taking into account all of the stage and costume attributes.

### **PLOT**

The structure of the plot develops through the main character's pursuit of a want and the obstacles barring the way to that want. The play's beginning introduces the audience to the world of the play and especially the main character. The balance of the play's world is introduced here or later, as necessary, if the play begins at the moment of upset. The beginning of the play either brings us to or is set at the introduction of the problem or upset of the balance.

The middle of the play is woven through a series of obstacles of both internal and external complications. The end of the play comes about through the resolution of the conflict, for good or for bad, and gives a glimpse of the new balance in this world.

## ALL CHARACTERS

Characters are drawn with attention to specific details including physical, emotional and historical. The characters talk, look, think and feel their own way. The characters show what their lives were like before the play started and display an idea of what their lives will be like once it is over. The characters have wants and needs that set them to action. The characters support the overall vision of the play and are there for a purpose and the audience will know what that purpose is.

## DIALOGUE

The dialogue creates a distinct voice for each character. It reflects the style of the play including realism, farce and historical and is created with attention to its rhythms. It reveals histories, emotions and wants through showing and not telling. The dialogue moves the action of the play forward. It is not exclusively about sitting around talking and sounding natural or realistic. Dialogues reveal the story and move it forward.

## STAGE WORTHINESS AND ACTIVITIES

The play is written with a stage in mind rather than with movie or television technology. Therefore, there are not numerous scene breaks and actors will have time to get from one scene to the next, especially when costume changes are necessary between scenes. The staging requirements fit the genre of the play. Activities are woven into the scenes and can be done without violating the reality of the play's genre and will be read all the way to the back of the house.

## COSTUME DESIGN AND COLOR LAYOUT

The costume designs represent the time period of each play and will add to overall realistic feel of the performance. The colors of the costumes should be consistent with the characters' personalities.

## WHAT IS THE PLAY ABOUT? DOES IT DISPLAY THE STORY?

By the end of the writing the play, the finished script should demonstrate and communicate the important message.

## THE CHALLENGE: THE OBJECT

There should be a metaphor in the script -- a symbol that represents an idea or an object that conveys the truth of what a character may want or an object

that represents the true personality of a character. This should be important, perhaps even pivotal to the plot.

## DIFFERENT ROLES FOR SECONDARY CHARACTERS

Secondary characters can really make a play come to life. Secondary characters must have their own unique way of speaking, thinking and moving. They must also have their own histories. But more than “*just being themselves,*” secondary characters must serve a function in the design of the play. They must help or hinder the main character (and they can do both) and help to establish the reality of the play.

## THE ANTAGONIST

The antagonist is a character who serves as a major obstacle to the main character (the Protagonist). The antagonist actively works against the main character. Having an antagonist in the play can give the story a chance to create scenes with strong conflict. What does the main character want? How does the antagonist work against this?

## THE CLOSE FRIEND

The main character that has a close friend gives the author an easy way to share his/her inner thoughts, plans or doubts that would otherwise have to be expressed in a soliloquy (a monologue spoken to one’s self). If the main character needs more opportunities to express secrets, feelings and/or thoughts, consider creating a close friend.

## CONTRASTING CHARACTERS

The contrasting character is the opposite of the main character. If the main character stands up for what he/she believes in, this can be emphasized by having a contrasting character who is “wishy washy.” By adding contrasting characters, the qualities of the many characters can help the audience understand him/her better.

## THE SYMBOLIC CHARACTER

What does the main character want? What if there were another character in the play who symbolized this want? If the main character is a shy, lonely girl who wishes she had tons of friends and was popular, a symbolic character could possess these qualities. The shy girl’s relationship with the symbolic character could show (not tell) how the main character feels and what she wishes for.

## THE COLORFUL AND UNCONVENTIONAL

Colorful and unconventional characters can add a lot of surprises and theatricality to the play. They can also help to create the unique reality of the play. Unconventional characters must still come from the action in the play and serve to move the play to its conclusion.

## CREATING THEATRICAL CHARACTERS

Effective theatrical characters are vivid and unique. They have their own “job” to do in the play. Because theatre is the art of emotions, each character must be emotionally involved in the play. Secondary characters have to make sense in the world of the play. If they violate the logic of the world, the audience may not believe them. Theatrical characters must make sense. Unconventional behavior or surprises must still come from who they are. If they violate their own logic, the audience will tend to not believe them. It is important to find a way to let your audience begin to understand the characters immediately. This can often be done through creating a specific voice for each character and/or a point of view.

## KNOWING AND CREATING CHARACTERS

What the writer presents to the audience is only the “tip of the iceberg” of what he/she actually knows about the characters. The play should include lengthy histories about each of the characters. The better the writer knows the characters, the stronger the characters will be. For each character, start by identifying a single dominant characteristic physically, emotionally or intellectually. Build on that foundation by adding other characteristics as they are discovered.

## USE OF COLOR TO ENHANCE MOOD AND PERSONALITY

What are the traits associated with the colors? What are the ideas symbolized by the colors? What are some of the common usages of colors?

Step One: Modeling, exposing the students to written plays so they have a background to pattern their play form. The students will read two short plays. They will look for and identify several of the above-mentioned components.

Step Two: The inspiring idea behind my play is:

The THEME: \_\_\_\_\_  
or

The EVENT: \_\_\_\_\_

or

The CHARACTER or TYPE OF CHARACTER: \_\_\_\_\_

or

The SITUATION: \_\_\_\_\_

or

The QUESTION: \_\_\_\_\_

I have chosen this idea for my play because (why this is important to me):

\_\_\_\_\_

Step Three: Bringing it to life

The MAIN CHARACTER of my play is (who/what they are):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

His/Her name is: \_\_\_\_\_

My main character is \_\_\_\_ years old and looks like:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I would describe my main character's personality as:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My main character WANTS:

\_\_\_\_\_

The OBSTACLES my main character faces are ...

PEOPLE who are getting in the way of his/her want:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SITUATIONS that are getting in the way of his/her want:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

His/her own characteristics/feelings that are getting in the way of his/her want  
(INTERNAL OBSTACLES):

---

---

SECONDARY CHARACTERS:

OTHER CHARACTERS IN MY PLAY ARE (list and described):

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

THE SETTING OF MY PLAY:

The TIME at which my play takes place is:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Examples: The present; the Fall of 1949; the Year 1995, etc.)

The overall setting of my place is (WHERE):

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Examples: New York City, Turtle Creek, PA; the southern coast of England, etc.)

The specific SETTING of my play is (what's on stage):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Examples: a small studio apartment; the lunchroom of a glass factory; a makeshift encampment at the edge of the white cliffs of Dover, etc.)

**ACTIVITIES – THE PHYSICAL LIFE OF MY PLAY**

Types of activities my characters may do during the play are:

---

---

---

**WHAT CAME BEFORE? A BRIEF HISTORY**

Write a brief history of your main character’s life, detailing things that happened BEFORE the play began. Stick to information that affects what will happen in the play.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**WHAT IS THE BALANCE OF THE PLAY AT THE BEGINNING?**

Describe the BALANCE of your play’s world at the beginning – what are people used to? What’s the everyday flow of life?

---

---

---

**WHAT IS YOUR POINT OF ATTACK?**

What happens that upsets the balance to launch the conflict in your story? How and why does this happen? Does this happen at the very beginning of the play or after you who the balance?

---

---

---

**MIDDLE: WHAT DOES YOUR DRAMATIC ACTION LOOK LIKE?**

Remember your obstacles and main character’s wants. From these, can you describe the series of complications that make up for the dramatic action of play?

---

---

---

---

---

---

THE CLIMAX:

What are the results of your main character's struggles to overcome the obstacles? Does he/she succeed? How will you show this to the audience?

---

---

---

THE END

What is the new BALANCE at the end of the play? What is life like now?

---

---

---

---

---

MAIN CHARACTER PROFILE:

Your main character is the heart of your play. You must come to know him or her inside and out. Take this time to write a basic profile of your main character.

Character's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Characteristics

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Height \_\_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_\_

Body type (thin, heavy, average, etc.):

---

Outstanding feature(s):

---

Psychological Characteristics

Personality:

---

Opinion of self:

---

Favorite hobbies:

---

Sociological Characteristics

Economic status:

---

Level of education:

---

Race \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_ Religion \_\_\_\_\_

What is a secret this character hides? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the most important thing that has ever happened to this character so far?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is an important object owned or associated with this character?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## COLOR ASSOCIATION FOR COSTUME DESIGN AND STAGE LIGHTING

**Red:** The color red is associated with the following traits: warmth, advancing, stimulating, strong, eye-catching and aggressive. The ideas that red symbolize are danger, stop, fire, debt (in the red) and anger (see red). Common uses for the color red are red flag, red light, fire truck and buoys.

**Blue:** The color blue is associated with the following traits: cool, receding, aloof, tranquil, passive, organized, harmonious, relaxing, restful and formal. The ideas that blue symbolize are sadness (feeling blue) and spaciousness. Common uses for the color blue are business suits when formal, feeling wanted, restful rooms such as bedrooms, doctor's office and beach house.

**Yellow:** The color yellow is associated with the following traits: warm, advancing, happy, sunny, eye-catching, suggesting activity and flighty. The ideas that yellow symbolize are cowardice (that person is yellow). Common uses for the color yellow are happy faces, police slickers, caution lights and tennis balls.

**Green:** The color green is associated with the following traits: cool, receding, calm, fresh, healthy, growing, orderly and friendly. The ideas that green symbolize are nature, good fortune, jealousy (green with envy) and go. Common uses for the color green are outdoors, garden rooms, four-leaf clovers, green light and go.

**Orange:** The color orange is associated with the following traits: warm, advancing, happy, full of life, vitality and eye-catching. The ideas that orange symbolize are danger and autumn. Common uses for the color orange are hunting equipment, golf balls and buoys.

**Violet:** The color violet is associated with the following traits: cool, receding and aristocratic. The ideas that violet symbolize are

regality, great wealth and high position. Common uses for the color violet are ceremonial dress for royals and religious leaders.

**Black:** The color black is associated with the following traits: warm feeling in that it absorbs light, receding, sophisticated, older, heavy, somber, gloomy and dignified. The ideas that black symbolize are death, wickedness (the dark side), dignity, villain and financially solvent (in the black). Common uses for the color black are mourning attire, judges' robes, graduation robes, limousines, vampires, tuxedos, "Black Knight" and cowboy hats.

**White:** The color white is associated with the following traits: cooling in that it reflects light, advancing, peaceful, youthful, good, clean, virtuous and light. The ideas that which symbolize are peace, purity, innocents, youth and heroism. Common uses for the color white are brides' attire "White Knight," cowboy hats, foods workers and ceremonial dress for youths.

## **Annotated Bibliography/Resources**

Allensworth, Carl. The Complete Play Production Handbook. Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1982.

Beck, Buys, Fleischhacker, Grandstaff, Sill, Nemitz. Play Production Today. National Textbook Company, 1987.

Ingham, Rosemary, Covey, Liz. The Costume Designer's Handbook. Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1992.

Maloney, Henry B. Plays to Remember. Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984.

Schanker, Harry H., Ommanney, Katharine Anne. The Stage and the School. McGraw-Hill, Inc. School Division, 1989.

### Online Resources:

[www.arts.org/cda/files.pdf](http://www.arts.org/cda/files.pdf) This site offers information on the effect arts education has on students' academic and social growth, as well as national standards for arts education.

[www.aep-arts.org/publication.htm-31k](http://www.aep-arts.org/publication.htm-31k) This site offers class lessons from school districts that value arts education.

[www.nga.org/cda/files/050102ARTSED.pdf](http://www.nga.org/cda/files/050102ARTSED.pdf) This site offers information as to the success arts education has in the area of academic performance, reduced absenteeism and better skill-building.

[www.partnershipforlearning.org/article.asp/ArticleId=98-16k](http://www.partnershipforlearning.org/article.asp/ArticleId=98-16k) This site offers information as to the benefit of other art forms like dance, drama and vocal music.

## **Standards**

### Arts and Humanities

1. All students describe meanings they find in various works from visual and performing arts and literature on a basis of aesthetic understanding of the art form.
2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand important features of the works.
3. All students relate works from the visual and performing arts and literature to the historical and cultural context within which they were created.
4. All students produce, perform or exhibit their work in the visual arts, music, dance or theater and describe the meaning their work has for them.