

# Stage Direction for Plays and Musicals

**A Handbook of activities  
and information for teachers**

Prepared by  
Stephen DiMenna  
Faculty Member, Program in Educational Theatre  
New York University

For The Stratford Shakespeare Festival

## 1. **INTRODUCTION**

1. Purpose of this workshop: to provide practical techniques for producing plays and musicals with young actors in a school setting.

Part 1 - Educational Goals and student skills

Part 2 - The Production Process

Part 3 - Pre-production organization

Part 4 - Pre-production artistic

Part 5 – Preparing student actors for rehearsals

Part 6 – Rehearsals

Part 7 - Approaching a non-musical text

Part 8 – Approaching a musical

Part 9 – Collaborating with a musical director and choreographer

Part 10 – Staging and physicality on plays and musicals

Part 11 - Performance

Part 12 - Post performance/follow-up

### **PART 1: EDUCATIONAL GOALS**

## 2. **DISCUSSION**

1. What are some of the goals you have for your students when you produce a play or musical?

Some answers:

- Provide an after-school activity for social interaction.
- Develop a school acting company
- Teach theatre blueprint and core curriculum through production
- Teach skills related to the theatre

2. Make a list of the skills (theatrical/non-theatrical) that you want to develop in your students.

3. How does play production address these skills?

### **TIPS FOR STARING OUT**

1. Start small: small cast, one set, realistic play or small ensemble musical
2. Pick a play or musical that is close to your student's lives.
3. Keep a journal of your first experience.
4. Develop a sense of community within the group.
5. Recruit adequate support from colleagues and students.
6. Involve parents and the community.
7. Set clear goals for the production.

## **PART 2: THE PRODUCTION PROCESS**

### **1. OVERVIEW OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS FROM START TO FINISH**

1. What are the tasks involved in planning and executing a production?

You are the Artistic Director and Producing Director.

1. Play/musical selection
2. Recruit actors, production team, backstage crews, front of house crews
3. Schedule performances
4. Schedule rehearsal space
5. Schedule and publicize auditions
6. Prepare audition material and criteria for casting
7. Order all materials for designs.
8. Secure rights to the play/musical and order scripts and music
9. Organize a publicity committee:
10. Prepare your prompt book
11. Rehearsal props and costumes
12. Schedule set-strike
13. Order rentals of equipment
14. Parent permission wavers

## **PART 3: PRE-PRODUCTION: ORGANIZATION**

### **1. ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS**

1. Select a play/musical that is appropriate for your students.

When reading a play/musical never read one unless you can finish it it one sitting.

-Keep a pencil with you and makes notes about your first impressions.

2. Secure the rights and order copies

3. SCHEDULING

This is the number one task and can become your number one obstacle in a school setting. Make sure you have exclusive use of performance, shop and rehearsal space.

-Develop a CONFLICT SHEET for your students to fill out indicating their after-school conflicts so you can build rehearsals

around them

-Be aware of other school events (Prom, athletic events etc) that may interfere with rehearsals and performances.

### 3. SCHEDULING (Cont.)

- Schedule at least four technical/dress rehearsals.
- Schedule a short but substantial performance run.
- Four consecutive performances over one weekend
- Four performances over two weekends
- Make sure you schedule a set strike

### 4. Recruit a PRODUCTION TEAM

These may be adult colleagues, guest artists or in some cases students.

1. Scenery and props Designer
2. Technical Director
3. Costume Designer
4. Lighting Designer
5. Sound Designer
6. Stage Manager
7. Choreographer
8. Music Director
9. Publicity Director
10. House Manager
11. Business Manager

### 5. Recruit student crews

1. Scenery construction crew
2. Costume construction crew
3. Props crew
4. Backstage running crew
5. Light and sound board operators
6. Make-up crew
7. Publicity crew
8. Ushers
9. Ticket sales
10. Concessions

### 6. Schedule a pre-production DESIGN MEETING

-This meeting is to brainstorm concept and style for your production

with your designers and to come up with a design plan for all design areas.

-How do you work with a limited budget and design pallet?  
What are the essential physical elements you need? Distill the play down to the bare essentials.

## 7. Schedule a pre-production PUBLICITY MEETING

- This meeting is to set your publicity machine in motion approximately 8 weeks before opening night.

**Note:** Publicity is the one area that cannot wait until the last minute. Deadlines for publicity usually fall long before rehearsals even begin. Find out the copy deadlines for calender listings, feature articles etc. for your local papers and set your publicity deadlines according to them.

Publicity areas include:

- Printing and selling tickets
  - advance sales
  - day of performance sales
- Programs
- Posters
- Press releases
- Photo call for publicity shots
- Photo call for archival photos
- Lobby display
- Concessions
- Graphics and logo

## **PART 4: PRE-PRODUCTION: ARTISTIC**

### **1. THE DIRECTOR'S WORK**

#### 1. Developing your vision and concept and preparing your prompt book

1. Review your initial notes on the play/musical

Ask yourself:

- What draws you to this play/musical?
- What are the central visual and linguistic images in the piece?
- What are the EXTENDED METAPHORS ?
- What does this play/musical have to say about life today?
- What do you think the author(s) are trying to say?

**Note:** These are good questions to ask your cast.

2. Research any background material relevant to the show.

### 1. Developing your vision (Cont)

3. Create your MASTER PROMPT BOOK  
This is your copy of the script with your notes and blocking.

There are several approaches to blocking a play and staging a musical:

1. Pre-blocking
2. Improvised or organic blocking in rehearsal
3. A combination of both

4. Create a scene breakdown  
-Break the play down into units or beats
  1. French scenes
  2. Motivational beats
  3. Action beats

5. Create character profiles

6. Create your REHEARSAL SCHEDULE  
This document is of utmost importance. It is your PLAN OF ACTION or STRATEGY for staging the play/musical.

Rehearsals can be broken down into distinct stages:

1. Developing an ensemble
2. Exploring the text of the play/libretto
3. Pre-staging ground-work on music and choreography
4. Staging the play in layers
  - physical
  - psychological
  - spectacle

### 2. Auditions

Once you have a firm concept and approach to the play/musical for yourself you're ready to begin. The first step is auditioning your actors.

1. Select the cuttings from the play, songs from the musical (or actors can prepare a song) that will show you a range of characters at key moments in the play or demonstrate the vocal qualities you need for the characters.
2. Know what you're looking for in your actors, singers, dancers.
3. Advertise and recruit actors

## **PART 6 : REHEARSALS**

### **1. THE NINE STAGES OF REHEARSALS**

#### **1. Developing an ensemble**

Developing a sense of community within your group is important to the success of any production. You may want to include your backstage crews in these activities.

#### **2. Teaching basic acting skills**

Depending on the level of ability and experience of your students you may want to develop a COMMON VOCABULARY within your ensemble. This will make your rehearsals more economical and effective.

#### **3. Character development**

Helping your actors develop their characters is one of the most profound lessons you can teach in play production. It offers them an opportunity to use their natural skills and instincts.

#### **4. Text Analysis**

Exploring the text of a play can be exciting and challenging. There are many approaches. A useful method to use on a play employs some of the same techniques one would use in a Language Arts class when exploring poetry or literature.

##### **-Paraphrasing and improvisation**

These techniques can help your students relate the play to their own lives and feel more comfortable playing characters who may have experiences in the play far removed from the student's own experiences.

-Help the students discover the ESSENCE of the scene.

### **5. Staging or blocking the play: putting the play/musical on it's feet**

The approach you use in staging a play should draw on your personal strengths and interests. If you're primarily a visual thinker you may focus on the physical aspects of the text. If you tend to be a more literary thinker you may focus more on the language of the play and the psychology of the characters.

Three areas of focus are:

- SPACE
- TIME
- ENERGY

-These are areas of directing all directors should explore:

The mechanics of the production:

1. Use of Space: traffic
2. Movement: individual and group
3. Imagery
  - visual
  - language
  - musical
  - physical
4. Time, pace, rhythm
5. Shaping the ARC of the play

### **6. Exploring the DYNAMICS of your production**

Once your production is on it's feet and your actors are comfortable with the physical and interpretive aspects of the play you can begin to play with the dynamics of the overall production.

-This is the stage of rehearsals that are the most fun for directors. You can take your production and your actors in many directions

and make some great discoveries about the play after the “mechanical work” is done.

- vitality
- fluidity
- economy
- styles

### **7. Exploring the PSYCHOLOGY of the play: digging deeper**

Again once the production is up and running your actors can give more attention to the inner psychology of the play. Many times this cannot be done early in rehearsals and is easier after there is a physical life to the play. Movement can trigger psychology in many instances.

### **8. Creating the SPECTACLE**

Some directors are more effective exploring the inner life of a play and give less time to the outer or physical spectacle of production. Sometimes a sound or light cue can make as strong a statement as a powerful line of dialogue. Bringing the language of the play together with the visual and audio elements can create powerful total theatre.

- bringing all the design elements together to form a unified whole.
- creating atmosphere
  - Scenery
  - Lighting
  - Sound/music
  - Special effects
  - Costumes

### **9. Technical and Dress rehearsals**

These are the most stressful and complex rehearsals. They are often tedious for your actors who have been getting all of your attention for weeks and now must give it up to the technical concerns. Setting the tone for these rehearsals is extremely important.

Some tips:

1. Make sure your actors are ready to let go of you and can live in the world of the play on their own.

2. Do a DRY-TECH without your actors where you execute every sound and light cue with your running crew.
3. Allow enough time to slowly get through the play executing every cue.
4. Repeat difficult cues until actors and crew are in synch.
5. Don't be afraid to make changes or cuts if things aren't working.
6. Maintain an atmosphere of confidence throughout. Never let your actors feel panic.

## **PART 7: APPROACHING ANON-MUSICAL TEXT**

### **1. Text Analysis**

Exploring the text of a play can be exciting and challenging. There are many approaches. A useful method to use on a play employs some of the same techniques one would use in a Language Arts class when exploring poetry or literature.

These techniques can help your students relate the play to their own lives and feel more comfortable playing characters who may have experiences in the play far removed from the student's own experiences.

- Paraphrasing and improvisation
- Help the students discover the ESSENCE of the scene.

### **2. Character development**

Helping your actors develop their characters is one of the most profound lessons you can teach in play production. It offers them an opportunity to use their natural skills and instincts.

### **3. Monologues**

There are many reasons why a character speaks a monologue and various "audiences" they deliver them to.

### **4. Scene Work**

A scene should be treated like an entire play within the play. In other words it has a beginning, middle and end and a small dramatic arc

within it. Finding the intentions, emotional and physical beats within a scene is similar to finding those elements within an entire play.

## **PART 11: PERFORMANCES**

### **1. KEEPING THE MOMENTUM AND SPIRIT UP**

The excitement of an opening can sometimes override the focus and concentration of actors and crew. It is important that everyone stay focused. Be careful not to let go of the reins once rehearsals are over. As the director you and your stage manager are responsible for keeping moral high and focus centered on the “work” of the production.

Some tips:

1. Have a pre-performance COMPANY MEETING before every performance. This is a time for notes and pep talks.
2. Schedule and ACTOR WARM-UP before every performance
3. Schedule a PREVIEW performance before a small audience. Invite one or two classes to your final dress rehearsal.
  
4. Have a short post-performance meeting before you dismiss cast and crew for the night. This will give everyone time to think about any notes or changes for the next day.
5. Have a cast and crew party after opening and closing.

## **PART 12 : POST-PERFORMANCE**

### **1. SET-STRIKE**

-Make sure you schedule a set and costume strike the day after the production and require everyone to attend.

## 2. CLASSROOM FOLLOW-UP

- Now that you and your students have produced a play how do you want to use that experience in your classroom work?

Some activities to consider:

1. Writing student reviews of the performance
2. Student journals of their experience
3. Reading other works by the same author
4. Attend a performance of a play
5. Writing essays/evaluations of the experience.

## NEW LAST NAMES

**AIM:** How do you identify yourself as an artist?

**OBJECTIVE:** To learn the students' names and to begin them on a process of self-exploration and expression.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Say their first names and make up a "new last name" that is based on an attribute they are proud of about themselves.

### PROCEDURE:

- 1) Sitting in a circle ask students to tell you their first name followed by a "new last name" that they make up on the spot. Tell them to pick something about themselves that are proud of (a physical attribute, an activity they do well, or a quality).

Give them an example like "Steve basketball."  
Ask them what they learn about a person with this name. They will respond, "you play basketball" or "you like basketball." Follow-up by asking "and how do I feel about the way I play basketball?" They will say "You're proud of it...so you must be good at it."

Now ask them to go around and tell the group their new name. While they do so, ask follow-up questions when

you get an unusual name like: “Tell us about your name and why you picked it.” This is a great springboard for discussions and create a fun environment for students to begin to disclose information about themselves.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** You have just begun a process of discovering your identity as artists. It is important for artists to know WHO they are and WHAT they want to say through their art.

## **THE ENERGY BALL**

**AIM:** How can we stimulate our minds and bodies?

**OBJECTIVE:** To work together as a group and develop a sense of ensemble and release our inhibitions.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Pass an imaginary ball of energy around a circle.

PROCEDURE:

1. Standing in a circle hold an imaginary ball in front of you and ask them to “see” it as if it were real. Tell them it is a “ball of energy” and we’re going to pass it around the circle until it comes back to you.
2. Tell the students our goal is to make the ball go completely around the circle without dropping it and that everyone is responsible for making the ball move.
3. Make a “swooshing” sound with your voice that sound like wind. Tell the students to make that sound as they pass the ball. Practice making the sound as a group first.
4. Begin by making the sound yourself and passing the ball to the person on your right.

**NOTE:** Students will proceed slowly at first and probably laugh. That's okay. Sidecoach them to keep the ball moving and always remind them to make the "swooshing" sound.

If a student freezes or gets stuck (because they are shy or embarrassed), just encourage them to pass it to the next person however quietly they do so.

5. Once the ball has traveled around the circle once, reward the group for succeed in getting the ball around without dropping it.
6. Repeat it for five or six more rounds and each time tell the group to go faster and to use their entire bodies to pass the ball. Soon you will have a rhythmical wave of energy traveling around the circle.

### **THE ENERGY BALL (CONT.)**

7. Once the group has mastered one energy ball, try passing two. Start the first one as indicated above. When it has reached about halfway around the circle start a second one behind it and keep both of them moving continuously around the circle.

**NOTE:** At this point you will need to tell the students that after they pass the first ball to the right they must immediately turn to their left to receive the second ball and to continue looking left after they pass each ball as it comes around.

8. Keep the warm-up going until you feel the group has succeeded and is sufficiently energized. It's important to end on a success, not when the balls fall or get lost.

### **VARIATIONS:**

1. Change the sound of the energy ball. Any sound will do. Loud explosive sounds, musical sounds, or even words.
2. Use different body parts to pass the ball. Hands, feet, hips, shoulders etc.
3. Juggle the ball or do a special trick with it before you pass it.

This is a deceptively simple warm-up but one that establishes many attributes within the group like teamwork, creativity and risk taking. I am always surprised that students always ask to do the energy ball whenever I announce that it's time for warm-ups. For some reason, they really take to this activity.

## **THE CHAIR GAME**

**AIM:** How can we work together to develop a sense of risk-taking and teamwork?

**OBJECTIVE:** To warm-up our bodies and energize the group and to develop a sense of teamwork.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Run around a circle of chairs switching chairs with partners.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Have the group sit in chairs in a large circle. This activity needs a larger space than a normal classroom.
2. Pick one student to stand in the center of the circle without a chair. Instruct that student to walk around the circle asking each seated student if he/she could have their chair.
3. Instruct the seated students not to give him/her their chair but to move on to the next person and ask them. Everyone refuses to give up their chair.
4. Instruct the seated students to make eye contact with someone

seated on the opposite side of the circle and to signal each other to switch chairs at the same time. The seated students must run across the circle before the student in the center “steals” their chair.

**NOTE:** The goal for each student is to have a chair. This activity is similar to musical chairs in that regard.

5. Several pairs of seated students should be switching chairs at the same time so there will be a lot of bodies running across the circle. The standing person in the center must attempt to get to any empty chair before it's taken.
6. Whomever is left standing after a flurry of running around is the new person in the center who must ask for a chair.

**NOTE:** This activity is always fun and students ask to do it all the time. Be careful to avoid any sense of competition. No one should sit out if they lose a chair, they just become the standing person in the center.

## **THE CONCENTRATION CIRCLE**

**AIM:** How can we develop concentration skills as a group?

**OBJECTIVE:** To work together as a group, develop ensemble and learn the skills of concentration and group focus.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Recite numbers, letters and words around a circle sequentially.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Standing in a circle ask the students to look to the person on their left. Have them count off from number 1 by turning to the person on their right and say their number. The person to their right then turns to their right and recites the next number.
2. After one or two rounds of numbers select another student to begin a round with letters of the alphabet.
3. Now have the students recite numbers and letters simultaneously around the circle. Like the energy ball the group should develop a rhythm.

4. When they have mastered numbers and letters, start a third round of first names.

**NOTE:** This activity is difficult to master at first. Don't give up. Keep restarting when it derails and proceed slowly. It is important that students make eye contact with the persons on either side of them when they are speaking and listening.

**VARIATIONS:**

1. You can substitute any word for the numbers or letters. At first it is wise to use things that can be recited in sequence like numbers or letters. As students become more advanced you can use colors, food, states, or vocabulary words from your lessons.

## **THE NINE WORD PLAY**

**AIM:** How do we create a performance piece using language and staging?

**OBJECTIVE:** To allow students to experience a mini version of the theatrical process of creating performances using language and physical movement.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Select nine words as the text for a performance piece and stage, rehearse and perform them.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Ask the students to partner into groups of three.
2. Tell them that each group will create a Nine word play. Each member of the group is responsible for writing THREE words each giving them a total of NINE words.
3. The FIRST word for each person must be their FIRST NAME. The SECOND and THIRD words must be words that they associate with themselves. Words that tell us something about them.

Example      STEVE    ITALIAN    CHICAGO

JASON BASKETBALL COOL  
ANNE MUSIC PIZZA

4. Now that they have the LANGUAGE or the text for their play as a group they must decide how to stage it. What performance style do they want to use.

Examples: Musical, Classical, Abstract, Realistic dialogue etc.

5. Tell them they must put it on its feet. How do they want to stand? in formation on stage and move as they say their words.
6. They can say the nine words in any way they wish, as many times as they wish. They can say each other's words, repeat them, and break them up, say them together as a chorus etc.
7. Model with two volunteers an example of a nine word play.
8. Give them ten to 15 minutes to work then share each group's presentation.

**SUMMARY:** You have just gone through a mini version of the theatrical process from creation to execution. This is how plays are made; we start with a theme, create the language or the text of the play then stage it physically in a space

## **SOUND AND MOTION**

**AIM:** How can we stimulate our minds and bodies.

**OBJECTIVE:** To work together as a group, develop an ensemble and release our inhibitions.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Make abstract sounds and motions individually and as a group.

**PROCEDURE:**

1. Standing in a circle tell the students we will be making abstract or strange sounds with a motion using our entire bodies that goes with the sound. For example a rough sound with a rough motion, a smooth sound with a smooth motion and so on. Demonstrate a sound and a motion for them. When they laugh tell them that's good because this is a silly activity and we WANT to be silly.
2. Tell them one person makes a sound and motion alone and that the group will imitate it together right afterwards. Make a sound and motion

and tell the group to do exactly what you just did.

3. Tell the person on your right to make one that is completely different than yours and instruct the group to repeat it as a chorus.
4. Keep this going with each person in the circle. Encourage students to use their entire bodies and to change levels going from low (from the floor) to high and to use their arms.
5. Encourage them not to do the same sound and motion that others have done. Students tend to copy from one another in an activity like this and all your sounds and motions could seem too similar.

**NOTE:** It is inevitable that one or two students will freeze up and say “I don’t know what to do”. When this happens tell them not to THINK about it and to do the first sound and motion that comes into their heads on the count of three.

If a student still cannot do something look at their body language and if they shrug their shoulders and say “I can’t” tell them that was their sound and motion and instruct the group to repeat it. The student will see that anything goes and there is no wrong or right answer.

### **SOUND AND MOTION (Cont.)**

#### **VARIATIONS:**

1. Use words or student names for the sound.
2. Do it without the group response with each student doing their own once and the next person does their right away.
3. Use longer phrases or sentences. They could be lines from their plays.

## **TRANSFORMATION WALKS**

**AIM:** What is language and how does an artist use it?  
What is physical/body language?

**OBJECTIVE:** To encourage the students to use their bodies and the vocabulary of dance and movement to express ideas.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Move and dance around the room to music expressing ideas through body movements.

### **PROCEDURE:**

- 1) Ask the students to stand all around the room. (You need a large open space ). Ask them to walk around in the regular

way they walk. Tell them you will call out the word “FREEZE!” and that when you do they should STOP and freeze in whatever position they are in. Tell them each time you “FREEZE” them you will call out a new word and you want them to resume moving expressing that word in their movements.

**NOTE:** You should play music while you do this and every time you “FREEZE” them stop the music. When you resume say “GO” and play the music again. (Classical instrumental music works best, like Bethoven’s 6th symphony because it has many “musical movements” and changes tempo and intensity. This helps the students move.

- 2) Start the music and let them move. Wait about 30 seconds as they loosen up. Then stop the music shout “FREEZE” and give them an image like “move like a wave on the ocean” or “move like the wind” or “move like popcorn popping”.
- 3) Say “GO” and start the music.
- 4) Repeat this about 10 or 15 times with a new word or image each time you stop them.

### *Transformation Walks (cont.)*

**NOTE:** Each time you say “GO” and resume the music make sure you give them enough time to move or dance so they get more comfortable with their bodies as dancers, and they can fully explore the image as movement.

**SIDECOACHING:** As they move encourage them by saying: “Great wave movement” etc. or “wow look at all the different ways you’re making the wind dance”

#### **SUGGESTED IMAGES TO CALL OUT:**

A wave on the ocean  
The wind

The wind in a storm  
Like lightening  
As light as a feather  
As heavy as a rock  
Like a ribbon blowing in the breeze  
Move only in circles  
Move in zig zag lines  
Move smoothly  
Move roughly  
Move with your arms above your heads  
Move like the color red  
Move like a giant  
Move like an animal  
Move like you're excited  
Move like you're mad  
Move like beauty

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** You just danced and expressed ideas and images (pictures) with your body. That is what artists/dancers do. You can tell a story using your body only by making movements that express ideas.

## **SUPPORT DANCE**

**AIM:** What is language and how does an artist use it?  
What is physical body language?

**OBJECTIVE:** To encourage the students to use their bodies and the vocabulary of dance and movement to express ideas. To give the students a simple format for creating duet dances based on themes.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Create and perform duet dances with a partner based on the theme of "support". They will work cooperatively with their partners and create three shapes and three movements that they will piece together into a movement "phrase".

PROCEDURE:

- 1) Ask the students to pick a partner based on how tall they are. Their partner should be the same height as they are. Ask them to sit with their partner while you give the instructions.
- 2) Ask them to choose who is Partner RED and who is Partner BLUE.
- 3) Tell the students that together with their partner they will create and perform a duet dance based on the theme of “support”. Ask them what physical things can they name that support other things? You will hear: “the legs of the table support the top” “a bridge supports people” “ a tree supports the leaves” etc.
- 4) Tell them they will make 3 SHAPES and that a shape is like the FREEZE in the TRANSFORMATION WALKS. Define a SHAPE as holding your body still for at least 3 seconds. THIS IS IMPORTANT so they understand that a shape is STILL.
- 5) Tell them their shapes will be RISKS they will physically take with their bodies. Demonstrate one by leaning forward on one foot with your arms stretched out.

*Support Dance (cont.)*

- 6) Tell them you cannot FREEZE in this shape for 3 seconds by yourself and that you need a partner to SUPPORT you so that TOGETHER you can make a SHAPE.
- 7) Reverse it so that now your volunteer partner takes a RISK and you SUPPORT his/her shape.
- 8) Then with your partner you EACH take a RISK but you EACH

SUPPORT one another AT THE SAME TIME. You can do this by each leaning forward facing each other and catching each other by hold hands.

- 9) Now tell them that they will make shapes with their partner.  
SHAPE #1 RED takes the RISK and BLUE supports RED.  
SHAPE #2 BLUE takes the RISK and RED supports BLUE.  
SHAPE # 3 they BOTH take a RISK together and SUPPORT each other together.
- 10) Now tell them to make movements around the space IN BETWEEN their shapes. Give them 5 minutes to make their SHAPES and make the movements in between and to practice it ALL TOGETHER at LEAST 3 times.
- 11) When they are done put on slow music (it can have lyrics and it works best if you use a popular song that is slow to medium in tempo and has positive self-esteem building lyrics)
- 12) Have each PARTNERSHIP get up and perform their dance.

**SIDECOACHING:** You will have students who say “I can’t think of anything to do”. Tell them to “let their bodies decide for them” Tell them to start with a simple LEAN forward or backwards, or to the side. Tell the other partner to hold them up or SUPPORT them. Have them FREEZE and tell them that is their first SHAPE and that it’s BEAUTIFUL. Point out how easy it was to make.

**SIDECOACHING:** While they perform tell them if they forget a SHAPE or it isn’t the same as it was when they practiced that that’s OKAY and they should keep going and let their bodies do all the work.

*Support Dance (cont.)*

**SUGGESTED SONGS:**

Whitney Houston: “The Greatest Love of All”  
Maria Carey: “Hero”  
Michael Jackson “Heal the World”

R. Kelly: "I Believe I Can Fly"

R. Kelly: "The World's Greatest" from the soundtrack "Ali"

Brian McKnight : "Win" from the soundtrack "Men of Honor"

Brian McKnight: "When We Were Kings" from the soundtrack  
"When We Were Kings"

Winona: "You Were Loved" from Touched by an Angel

Boyz II Men: "I Will Get There" from the soundtrack to the Disney  
movie "The Prince of Egypt"

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** You just created dances in 5 MINUTES using your bodies working together to express the idea of SUPPORT. You also worked cooperatively with your partner to create something beautiful together. That's what theatre artists do; they work together to express ideas to an audience.

## **CREATING MOVEMENT FROM FORMATIONS/PATTERNS**

**AIM:** How can we use formations and patterns to stage a scene or choreograph a musical number?

**OBJECTIVE:** To help students understand the formations and patterns used in stage blocking and choreography.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Create simple floor patterns and formations

PROCEDURE:

1. Discuss and draw on the board a variety of patterns.  
 Straight lines  
 diagonals  
 Circles  
 semi-circles  
 Zig zags  
 V's  
 staggered lines  
 snakes  
 clumps
2. Break students into small groups.  
 Have each group select 3 formations from the list on the board.
3. Tell them to plan their sequence which will include:
  - \* an opening formation
  - \* a transitional pattern
  - \* a second formation
  - \* a second transitional pattern
  - \* a final formation
4. Ask them to draw their sequence on paper
5. Tell them to “set” their formation on the group and practice it three times.
6. Share the sequences with each group performing to a drumbeat or piano.

**SUMMARY:** You just created formations and movement patterns. This is one way to create movement for a scene or choreography for a musical number.

## **THE BLOCKING GRID**

**AIM:** What are stage directions and the vocabulary of blocking?

**OBJECTIVE:** To help students understanding blocking and stage directions vocabulary.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Move around the stage employing various stage directions.

PROCEDURE:

1. Draw a blocking grid on the board or tape it out on the floor.

Upstage  
Right

Upstage  
Center

Upstage  
Left

Center  
Right

Center

Center  
Left

Downstage  
Right

Downstage  
Center

Downstage  
Left

Audience

2. On index cards write each of the abbreviations for each stage area.
3. Instruct each actor to pick a card and stand in the area that corresponds with the letters on their card.
4. Then ask them to pick two cards and to start in the area indicated by the first card and cross to the area indicated on the second card.
5. Repeat this activity using lines and patterns.  
For example:
  - make your cross on a curved line
  - make your cross diagonally
  - make your cross as a zig zag
6. Review the vocabulary of blocking with your students.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** You just moved on stage following common stage directions used by actors and director in rehearsal. Mark your scripts with the same abbreviations when you keep track of your personal blocking.

**BLOCKING VOCABULARY**

**Blocking**

Refers to all the physical traffic or movement of the actors on stage

<b>Cross</b>	To walk or move across the stage
<b>Cheat out</b>	To turn your body slightly towards the audience so you can be seen.
<b>Re-set</b>	A term used to ask the actors to go back to their original places because you want to run the scene or moment again.
<b>Cue</b>	The line or moment of action that “cues” an actor to begin.
<b>Upstaging</b>	To stand with your back to the audience facing upstage.
<b>Focus</b>	Where the actor looks during a moment on stage
<b>Mask it</b>	To block or cover up something onstage
<b>Entrance</b>	The point at which the actor enters the stage
<b>Exit</b>	The point at which the actor exits the scene
<b>Wings</b>	The areas off-stage on the right and left
<b>Backstage</b>	All areas behind the scenery out of sight of the audience
<b>Apron</b>	The area on stage furthest downstage, closest to the audience. Usually in front of the curtain.
<b>Props</b>	Any small object that the actor holds, uses or is on the set.
<b>Set pieces</b>	Large architectural objects on the set. Examples: stairs, platforms, cubes, pillars etc.
<b>Practical</b>	An electronic object that actually works on stage Examples: lamps, coffee pots, telephone
<b>Non-practical</b>	And electronic object used only for decoration that does not function

## **LIVING PICTURES**

**AIM:** How can we create movement and stage pictures for a scene?

**OBJECTIVE:** To help student actors begin to explore the physical life of a play and scene and to use their bodies to tell a story.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Create living pictures with their bodies and tell the story of a scene through movement only.

PROCEDURE:

1. Divide the actors into small groups. Groups can be made according to characters in a scene.
2. Instruct each group to make a tableaux or sculpted picture that tells us something about the scene like:
  - it's a comedy
  - it's tragic
  - it's melodramatic
  - it's a farce
3. Have each group show their frozen picture
4. Then instruct them to back up the story and create all the movements each character goes through that lead to the final picture.
5. Tell them they must tell a story without words, using only movements and actions that end in the original tableaux they created.

**Note:** Impress on the actors that they are striving for VISUAL CLARITY and their work should be as complete and detailed as possible.

6. Do this same activity for each scene of the play, beginning with the final tableaux of the scene then backing p and creating all the movement that leads to the tableaux.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** You have just told the story of the scene through movement and stage pictures. Can we use any of these movements in the staging of the play?

## **MAKING SHAPES**

**AIM:** How can we make shapes and tableaux to use in choreography?

**OBJECTIVE:** To explore the use of shapes and tableaux to create stage pictures.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Create shapes and tableaux to a drumbeat

PROCEDURE:

1. Have the students spread out in a large open space.
2. Beat a steady drumbeat on a small drum  
Instruct the students to strike “frozen poses” or shapes that they hold for 8 counts by the time the drum stops.
3. Tell them to move to a new place for 8 counts while you beat the drum.
4. When the drum stops they freeze in a new shape.
5. Now give them suggestions for each new shape.  
Examples: Low, medium, high  
big, small  
twisted, long, short  
joyful, angry, sad or cool
6. Break into small groups. Have each group choose a setting.  
(A baseball game, a hospital, a party, a dinner table etc.)
7. Ask them to make 3 tableaux that tell a story about the characters in this setting.
8. Perform the shapes to a steady drumbeat, 8 counts to move into the shape and 8 counts to hold the shape.  
NOTE: Encourage them to be creative about the transitions from one shape to the other.

**SUMMARY:** You just used your bodies to make shapes that express ideas and characters to tell a story. This is how choreography is made.

## **MOVING WORDS**

**AIM:** How do we create movement based on lyrics/words?

**OBJECTIVE:** To expand students movement vocabulary and focus on verbs and creating movement to words and choreography to lyrics.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Create movements based on verbs.

PROCEDURE:

1. Have the students make a list of verbs that MOVE.  
(See suggested list on next page)
2. Have each student pick two verbs and create movements that demonstrate their interpretation of the word as it WOULD MOVE.
3. Let students watching guess what the verb is.
4. Now ask them to pick word/verbs from the scene/lyrics of your musical number and create movement for them.
5. Ask them if any of these movements might be useful in staging the scene or song.
6. Put some of the movements together with the lyrics to form a “movement phrase”.

**SUMMARY:** You just made movements based on verbs and words. This is how we approach blocking a scene or choreographing a number.

## **STAGING A SCENE**

**AIM:** How do we make a scene from a play come alive

through staging?

**OBJECTIVE:** To help students understand how a scene makes the transition from page to stage through blocking and acting choices.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Read and act in a scene from a play and make acting and directing choices.

Procedure:

1. Have the students read the scene out loud.
2. Choose the students to be the actors in the scene.

NOTE: If you want all your students to experience this break them into small groups with enough students in each group to play all the roles, and one extra student to be the “director”.

3. Ask the students to discuss “what the scene is about?”  
Some focus questions might be:
  1. Is it comic, sad, romantic etc?
  2. What do each of the characters WANT in the scene?  
Some answers to look for are:  
“Noah wants Lizzie to agree to have File over for dinner”  
“Lizzie wants to be left alone”
  3. What do the characters DO to try to get what they want?
  4. What is the SETTING? Describe the setting.

NOTE: You could ask the students to write a detailed description of the setting THEY would design. Or they could make a sketch of the setting.

5. How would the characters MOVE in this setting based on what they say to each other?
4. Get the students on their feet and set up chairs or whatever furniture available to represent their setting.

5. Ask the students to make choices for BLOCKING for each line or moment in the scene.

**EXAMPLE:**

Lizzie walks to the window and looks out when she says  
“Leave me alone Noah, no man would think I’m pretty”

6. Give them ample time to practice their scenes.
7. Have each group perform their scene for the class,
8. Discuss each scene and the CHOICES the group made.  
Focus questions:  
“Did their BLOCKING make sense in the scene?”  
“What could they do differently to communicate the emotions or ideas of the scene?”  
“Was it believable?”

**SUMMARY:** You just staged a scene from a play. You made the kinds of choices actors and directors make when they rehearse a play.

*Staging a Scene (Cont)***FOCUS QUESTIONS**

What is the physical, historical and cultural setting?

What custom or social norms were popular at the time of this story?

How do the characters' social class and the specific occasion affect the way they might move?

What physical activities might the characters be engaged in?

How might props, costumes, or set pieces inspire or affect their movements?

What is this particular scene about?  
Is it a celebration, a competition, a seduction?

Are the characters:

getting to know each other  
showing off  
falling in love  
sharing secrets  
discovering something about themselves  
making a decision  
telling a story  
plotting something

Are they trying to:

attract  
confront  
avoid  
overpower  
convince  
express a feeling

What part of the story is this scene telling?

Does it set a scene and location?  
Reveal basic information?  
Show a passage of time?  
Depict a characters fantasy, or dreams, goals or wants?  
Make a comment on the action of the play?  
Or just provide an entertaining diversion?

## **TEN LINE ACTIVITY**

**AIM:** What can you learn about your character from the text?

**OBJECTIVE:** To help students identify themes and meaning for their characters derived from the text of a play.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Identify lines of dialogue and stage directions from their script and underline them and discuss them.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Instruct actors to read through their script and underline or highlight 10 lines of either dialogue or stage directions for their character only.
2. Tell them they can pick the lines based on any criteria. They should be lines that for any reason appeal to them. Maybe they like the sound of the line, or particular words within the line. It doesn't matter how they choose the lines. It should be a gut reaction or impulse that leads them.
3. Have the actors read their chosen lines.
4. Observe any patterns or recurring themes in their lines.  
For example:
  - an actor picked lines all about another character
  - an actor picked lines about their character's physical being.
  - an actor picked lines mentioning an image or prop from the play
5. Discuss with the actors if they intended to pick lines relating to the observed themes.
6. Inform the actors that these ten lines may become the "spine" or through-line for their characters since something subconsciously drew them to the lines.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** You just identified important lines and stage directions for your character. What do these lines say about your character and how can you approach your role using these lines as a basis for character development.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURES**

**AIM:** How do we begin to create a physical life for our characters that is based on their psychology?

**OBJECTIVE:** To help actors discover and create a strong physical presence for their characters.

**STUDENTS WILL :** Create walks and physical gestures for their characters while walking around the stage.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Ask the actors to walk around the stage or room as themselves.
2. Now ask them to walk the way they think their character might walk.

**SIDECOACHING:** Ask them questions like:

- how old is your character?
- are they tired or energized ?
- how do they relate to objects and people that come near them?
- do they have any physical idiosyncrasies?
- what is their tempo like?

3. Now instruct them to find ONE GESTURE that their character might do on a regular basis.

Examples:

- a particular wave
- rubbing their hands together
- pulling on their shirt or pants
- brushing their hair/pulling their hair
- wiping their eyes

4. Once they have found one gesture ask them to keep walking using the gesture.
5. Then ask them to speak a line or lines of their dialogue as they walk.
6. Ask them to bring this gesture and walk into the next rehearsal and use it throughout.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:** You just created a walk and one gesture for your character. How can you integrate them into your performance? Are there other gestures or ways of walking for your character that you haven't discovered yet?

## **ROLE PLAYING**

**AIM:** What is role playing and improvisation and how do actors use it to build a dramatic scene?

**OBJECTIVE:** To give the students a basic acting vocabulary and teach the basic elements of drama. To engage students in a physical activity that will allow them an entry point to a scripted play.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Get on their feet and act out improvised scenes based on original ideas and/or scenarios from a script.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Select two student actors
2. Set up a situation for the scene by asking the following questions of the entire class:
  - \* Who are these two CHARACTERS?
  - \* Where are they? SETTING
  - \* What are each of their OBJECTIVES?  
In other words "What do they WANT from each other?"
  - \* What is the central CONFLICT of the scene?
  - \* What ACTIONS do they take to get what they want?
  - \* What are the OBSTACLES that get in their way?
3. Establish the "FREEZE" device.  
The entire class is responsible for contributing ideas and dialogue for the scene. When someone has an idea they shout "FREEZE" and give their suggestion.
4. Ask the class to come up with the FIRST LINE of dialogue. Start the scene by saying "SCENE"
5. Build the scene by freezing it and asking focus questions like:

- \* How badly does character A want this?
- \* What's an action he/she can take to get it (threaten, manipulate, plead, bargain etc.)

### *Role Playing (Cont)*

6. Layer the scene by helping the students:
  - \* Define their character's relationship more fully.
  - \* Make what they want more important or urgent.
  - \* Add to the setting.
  - \* Add another character.
7. When the scene becomes repetitive FREEZE it and ask the class for suggestions for what the characters could say next.
8. If the scene gets stuck end it and start a new one.
9. Ask the class these questions about the scene:
  - \* Was it clear what each person wanted from the other?
  - \* Was it clear why they wanted what they did?
  - \* Was it clear why one character wouldn't do what the other wanted?

**SUMMARY QUESTION:** How did we begin this scene? (With two characters and a conflict)

**SUMMARY:** We just created a scene based on two characters in conflict. This is the basis for all drama. Review the acting vocabulary terms we used.

## **USING PROPS**

**AIM:** How can we use props to help us create choreography and staging for our scene and song?

**OBJECTIVE:** To encourage students to be inventive when using everyday objects in dramatically interesting ways.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Create movement using an prop or object.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Have each student bring in an ordinary household object.  
You can provide the objects also.  
(See list of suggested objects on next page)
2. Instruct them to create a short sequence of SET movements with the object. The movement must be SET and repeated so that it can be taught to someone else. No improvising.
3. Tell them the sequence should last from 30 seconds to one minute.
4. Have them share their sequence. (Music is optional)

**NOTE:** Their movements can be everyday gestures that one would normally do with the object or they can use the object in a new way

**EXAMPLE:** an umbrella used a a cane  
A broom used as a dance partner

A tray used as a shield  
 A feather duster used as flowers  
 A blanket used as a river of water

**SUMMARY:** You just created a sequence of movements with an object. What objects could we use in the staging of our scene and song?

## **VISUAL SHORT STORY**

**AIM:** How can we tell the story of the play visually through a short story format?

**OBJECTIVE:** To help actors discover a visually active way of telling the story of a play.

**STUDENTS WILL:** Write a short story summing up the events of the play in a visually narrative form.

### PROCEDURE:

1. Ask one actor to tell the story of the play making sure to describe all the physical and visual aspects of the play.
2. Now ask each actor to write a “visual short story” that is about two pages in length or about one paragraph for each scene.

**Note:** Encourage them to write what happens in the play and not just the plot. They should describe in a detailed manner the physical and visual aspects of the story.

#### Example # 1 - Non-visual story

“Willie Loman feels depressed about loosing his job and not being able to provide for his family. He pressures his son Biff to get a good job. Biff feels like a loser and can never live up to his father’s expectations. He argues with his father.”

#### Example #2 - Visual story

“Willie is sitting in his favorite chair, which is worn at the arms. The room is dark with only blue moonlight filtering through the window. He slouches in his chair. His son Biff enters the room slowly, with his head down. Willie sits up and talks to Biff about his life and job. Biff begins to pace nervously and screams at his father.”

3. Ask the actors to read their stories and compare each version. Look for similarities and differences.

For example:

- did more than one actor mention the blue moonlight?
- how many actors described Willie's posture in the chair?
- how did each actor show Biff's agitation physically?

4. Try staging the scene according to the description in one actor's story or using a combination of stories.