

Title: “Keepin’ It Real: Reality Theatre In The Classroom”**Lead Arts Facilitator:** Enza Giannone Hosig**School/Location:** Long Wharf Theatre Educators’ Laboratories**Length of Lesson:** Two hours**Lesson Overview:**

This session design provides an introduction to different styles of reality theatre, with an emphasis placed on the documentary theatre genre. The history of U.S. American documentary theatre is firmly rooted in dramatic representations of research such as true stories gathered from interviews and secondary sources such as those found in the media and historical documents. Participants will discuss how people are empowered by the creative problem-solving and decision-making necessary for devising this type of theatre and will explore how this process offers a comprehensive approach to critical analysis of various phenomena. Through discussion and hands-on activities, this lesson demonstrates how participants can utilize documentary theatremaking tools to meet CT’s Common Core standards in various subject areas while developing self-awareness and empathy. Participants will pose a research question, gather sources around a topic or event, and transform data into performed texts.

Common Core Standards:**ELA: WRITING**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

ELA: SPEAKING/LISTENING

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners.

ELA: HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

ELA: WRITING

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

ELA: SCIENCE/TECHNOLOGY:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.8: Distinguish among facts, reasoned judgment based on research findings, and speculation in a text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.9-10.9: Compare and contrast findings presented in a text to those from other

sources (including their own experiments), noting when the findings support or contradict previous explanations or accounts.

Core Theatre Standards:

- TH:Cr1.1.II. a. Investigate historical and cultural conventions and their impact on the visual composition of a drama/theatre work.
- TH:Cr2-6. a. Use critical analysis to improve, refine, and evolve original ideas and artistic choices in a devised or scripted drama/theatre work.
- TH:Pr4.1.6. b. Identify effective physical and vocal traits of characters in an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work.

Key vocabulary:

research, reality theatre, documentary theatre, interviews and consent forms, “golden moments,” transcriptions, primary and secondary sources, character-building, monologue, scene, storytelling and story-sharing

Instructional Objectives:

This lesson will assess a participants’ ability to:

- Define the genre and styles of reality theatre.
- Describe the genre of documentary theatre and its core theatremaking techniques.
- Transform a transcribed interview or secondary research sources into a performed text.
- Consider ways of building and performing nonfictional characters.
- Imagine ways to integrate documentary theatre-making techniques with other subjects or skill-sets.

Materials:

- Projector and screen for PowerPoint
- Chart paper & markers
- Lined paper & pens/pencils

Instructional Plan:

Framing (The “hook”):

- 1) After introductions, explain to participants that this session will begin with exercises that explore the heart of reality theatre: performing research and representing people’s stories.
- 2) *Follow the leader:*
 - Invite participants to walk around the room at a normal speed. Every ten seconds, ask them to change directions so as not to fall into any pattern of walking around the room. Ask them to speed up, slow down and walk backwards and sideways, change levels etc. Instruct students to take on

the role of investigators to observe one student in the room without letting them know she is being observed. Once they have chosen that person and observed for a moment, they should begin to take on her movements, her rhythm, posture, foot placement, etc. They should not mock or caricature the person they are observing but rather pay attention to the inner forces that influence her movements so they can copy her as truthful as possible (*Is she tired? Is she having a good day? Is she nervous?*). Instruct the students to follow the person for about thirty seconds and coach them to consider the following: *Where are her eyes looking? Where is their chest and posture? Where are their arms? Pelvis? Knees? Toes? What is her tempo? Can you identify one or two movements she makes often and rehearse them in detail?* End this activity by giving everyone a few moments to see if they can find who is following/observing them.

3) *Story Wheels:*

- Have participants form two circles facing each other so that everyone has a partner. Instruct the inside circle to tell a 30 second story about themselves around a given topic while the outside listens. Instruct the outside circle to shift two students to the right and *retell his/her partner's story in their style of telling* (attempting to capture the gestures and speech patterns). For the next revolution, repeat with the outside circle beginning the storytelling and the inside circle moving to retell. Continue telling stories this way until you have practiced telling stories at least three times. Suggested Topics: *Tell a story about teaching, tell a story about your vision of the future, tell a story about a recurring dream, tell a story about love.*

Reflect: *What was it like to be observed so closely? What was it like to take on the role of an investigator to observe? What are the most difficult human behaviors to recreate? Why? How did you feel sharing your story? Watching/hearing someone tell someone else's story? What verbal and non-verbal cues should we pay attention to when observing others tell stories? What are the qualities of a "good" listener?*

Main Activity

Part I: Introductions

- 4) Next, ask participants sit in a circle as you provide background and explanation of reality theatre in general and documentary theatre in particular; tie in to the exercises above (researching, gathering, recreating, performing) and share the "Spectrum of Reality Theatre" PowerPoint.
- 5) During this time make connections between docutheatre-making and Common Core standards and ask for participants' questions.

Reflect: *Review the difference between documentary theatre and other forms of reality theatre to make sure participants are clear on the definitions before you move on.*

Part II: Choosing a research question or topic

- 6) Discuss how to choose a research topic for the documentary script or performance.

- 7) Ask participants to quickly brainstorm events, historical figures, and/or topics that are found in school curriculums that might lend themselves to this type of research-informed theatremaking.
- 8) At this point you may choose a topic that was brought up in discussion. For this short introductory session, I suggest that you have a topic chosen ahead of time so that you can be prepared with secondary sources related to the topic (images, newspaper articles, songs, etc.). You can then ask for ideas about what the topic might be or what might be interesting or relevant about the topic.
- 9) Formulate a central research question that will guide the group's interrogation of the topic.

Part III: Research (Interviews and Secondary sources)

- 10) Next briefly discuss the docutheatre interview process: interviewing best practices, consent forms, development of open-ended questions, and "golden moments."
- 11) Give everyone a few strips of paper and ask participants to individually brainstorm two questions they might want to ask someone about the chosen topic and to write them own on the strips. Collect the strips for a communal question pile.
- 12) Everyone is then divided into pairs to practice the interview process and draws a couple of questions from the pile. Participants are reminded of listening for "golden moments" and the earlier character-building activities: ask everyone to be aware of important "dramatizable" information, to observe the person being interviewed, and to take down notes about one or two physical traits, gestures, habits, etc. they might be able to recreate truthfully in a short span of time.

Reflect: *What did you notice about the interview process? What was most challenging or rewarding about interviewing someone about the chosen topic? How might this process be useful in the classroom?*

EXTENSIONS: *Role-playing is also an excellent option for interviewing at this point. For example, if living people intimately connected with an event or topic cannot be contacted for interviews, artist-researchers can take on a researched and rehearsed role of a once living historical figures that can be "interviewed" by other artist-researchers in the group).*

Part IV: "Research from page to stage"

- 13) In this section, discuss how to transcribe and edit interviews into interesting and "performable" monologues (or scenes depending on the material discovered during interviews). Show examples of "before" and "after" interviews-turned-monologues.
- 14) Briefly review the secondary sources you presented earlier and brainstorm how these might be included in the participants first draft monologues or developed into scenes.
- 15) Give participants time to edit, write, and rehearse. Participants can work alone to create four to six line monologues using research or with a partner to write a four to six line scene. Emphasize authentic character creation of interviewees as part of the process.

- 16) Volunteers share work. Depending on time there can be a couple of options for sharing: individual presentations or Choral Speak where participants work together to present pieces of each of his/her work in the style of a chorus or choral reading using sound, song, repetition, emphasis, and a variety of voices. Facilitator works as conductor to help this process.

Reflect: *What was it like to edit someone else's words? What was it like to see yourself performed by someone else? What are some ethical considerations associated with making this type of theatre? What are some challenges or positives? Ask participants to review a definition of documentary theatre, as they understand it after this session. How might this type of work might enhance or support traditional classroom objectives? Make a list of how this might be used in the classroom, especially those that are not obvious (science for example). Address clarifying questions if any are still left unanswered.*

Assessment

- * Observe and record any important points made during reflection (particularly those that identify the applicability of documentary theatre in the classroom.
- * Take note of the depth of each person's monologue and/or scene and his/her commitment to performing preliminary work.

Resources:

Brown, P. (Ed.). (2010). *Verbatim: Staging memory & community*. Australia: Currency Press.

Hammond, W., & Steward, D. (Eds.) (2008). *Verbatim: Contemporary documentary theatre*. London: Oberon Books.

Kaufman, M., & Members of the Tectonic Theater Project. (2001). *The Laramie project*. New York: Vintage Books.

Kelin, D. A., II. (2005). *To feel as our ancestors did: Collecting and performing oral histories*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Saldaña, J. (2011a). *Ethnotheatre: Research from page to stage*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Sun, N. (2008). *No child . . . (acting edition)*. New York: Dramatists Play Service.