EXPLORING THEATRE WITH LORRAINE HANSBERRY’S “A RAISIN IN THE SUN”

YOUR TEACHING ARTIST: AIMEE K. BRYANT

An artist of many trades; a professional actor, singer, songwriter, poet, dancer and choreographer, she approaches creativity from an organic aesthetic. In the classroom, this begins with nurturing the voices of the students by using community building activities to create a safe space in which they can be free to experiment with creative expression, take artistic risks, and explore and share their personal connection to the material. Aimee uses theater games, performance, movement, songwriting, spoken word, creative writing and rhythm to help students find an alternate entrance into academic curriculum. She wants to empower students to use collaboration as a problem-solving tool.

ARTISTIC MODELS INCLUDED IN THIS LESSON:

- A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
- Penumbra Theatre’s Ensemble Based Theatre Aesthetic

Penumbra Theatre has developed an artistic aesthetic that makes the play the star. Emphasis is placed on collaborative storytelling, as opposed to individual acclaim. This, in combination with Lorraine Hansberry’s masterpiece provide rich opportunities to explore the African American experience through theatre. As James Baldwin once wrote of A Raisin in the Sun, “Never before in the entire history of the American theatre had so much of the truth of Black people’s lives been seen on the stage.”

LEARNING GOALS:
Students will experience the historical themes in the play from the perspective of the characters by creating stage pictures (tableaus), and performing scenes. Students will refine their collaborative skills using theatre improvisation and ensemble building games.

MEASURE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BASED ON:
- Students’ ability to work together to create tableaus and scenes reflecting themes of the play
- Students’ ability to meaningfully reflect on the play and the activities they participated in
- Students’ ability to engage with the material in a meaningful discussion of the historical context and ideas presented in the play.

GRADE LEVEL(S):
This lesson plan is designed for students in 9th-12th grade.

COMPAS PRISM PROGRAM
Teaching Artist-designed lesson plans inspired by the work of local and national African American artists
LESSON ACTIVITIES  
(COMplete THESE ACTIVITIES IN THE ORDER LISTED)

• Read Hansberry’s, *Raisin in the Sun* in your class.

• Begin with a discussion about the Actor’s Toolbox: the body, the voice, and imagination. This includes a discussion of what ensemble means in theatre and the importance of collaborative storytelling.

• Then warmup with a game called “Nod, Jump, Change”. One at a time, a student walks up to another student and the two make eye contact, nod, jump, and change places. This process repeats with a different student within the circle, and the final student can finish with the teacher.

• Play the ensemble game “Gangplank,” to play, students are divided into 3 or 4 equal groups. Have each group stand in a line shoulder to shoulder, all facing the same direction. Then, using a strip of tape, tape along the front, sides, and backs of the feet. This creates the gang plank. Assign each student a random number. The goal for each group is to rearrange themselves into numerical order without stepping on or outside of the “gangplank”. Each group gets three tries to win the game. Make sure to remind them that this game is about working together, and that they should come up with a plan before starting. Encourage them to try new tactics with each failure. They are going to want to do the same thing each time, but if it didn’t work the first time it probably won’t work ever.

• Start an activity called “Sculpture Gallery,” students pair up into sculptor and sculpture. Each pair is given two minutes to “shape” the sculpture (using different body arrangements/faces etc.) into an image of what they would do with 10,000 dollars. Once finished, all the other sculptors look around and guess what each sculpture represents. Once finished, switch pairs and repeat.

• After having a brief discussion about how the Younger family is similar/different to the student’s, play “Tableau’s of Home.” Have a small group of 4-7 actors create two tableaus. The first is of the Youngers’ in their Southside Home, the second is of them in their new home in the suburbs. The tableau’s should depict the feelings of the characters in each location.

• After this, start an activity called “Slide Show.” This activity uses the same groups as before. This time, have each group choose 3-5 moments from the play. In 15 minutes, have the groups create tableaus for each of these moments. Then have each group perform a “slide show” of their chosen scenes. One actor says “blackout” and the audience closes their eyes. Once the group has formed their tableau, the actor says “lights up,” this goes on until the audience has seen all of the “slides.”

• The next activity is called “After the Move,” have each group pick a time frame: one month, one year, five years, or ten years after the move. Ask each group to take ten minutes to create a scene about what they imagine life is like for the Youngers’ after the move. This is not a tableau exercise; each scene should include dialogue and movement.

• Finally, invite students to compliment each other on their performances. Have a discussion around the gangplank game. Why was it so difficult? Ask them what they thought about the acting exercises. Ask if their understanding of the characters or the story changed based on the activities of this lesson. Ask them about the collaborative process, what made it easy or difficult?
HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS LESSON:

• Read “A Raisin in the Sun”.
• Divide the class into groups of 5 to 8 students.
• Create groups that are balanced with leaders, creatives, and shy types.
• Try and separate friends and grouping students with others that they don’t usually work with.
• Read the work of other Harlem Renaissance writers: Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, etc.

EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES NEEDED:

• A Raisin in the Sun script
• Painting or masking tape
• Open space

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ADDRESSED IN THIS LESSON PLAN:

ELA Reading Standards 6-12:
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.
- By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9–10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
- Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama.
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem, evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

Theater:
9.1.2.4.1.1 Act by developing, communicating and sustaining character; or design by conceptualizing and realizing artistic interpretations; or direct by interpreting dramatic text and organizing and rehearsing for informal or formal productions.
9.1.3.4.1.1 Analyze how a work of theater influences and is influenced by the personal, social, cultural and historical contexts, including the contributions of Minnesota American Indian tribes and communities.
9.1.3.4.2.2 Synthesize and express an individual view of the meanings and functions of theater.
9.2.1.4.3.3 Justify an artistic statement, including how audience and occasion influence creative choices.

OTHER NOTES FROM YOUR COMPAS TEACHING ARTIST:

This plan can be used with any play, or story being studied.

Terminology:
Tableau: A frozen stage picture.

Extension Activities:
Have the class attend a performance of A Raisin in the Sun, or watch one of the film versions.

Read Lorraine Hansberry’s To Be Young Gifted and Black, and create tableaus and scenes based on that script.

WHAT COULD A COMPAS TEACHING ARTIST HELP YOU ACHIEVE IN YOUR CLASSROOM?

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