

Prime Stage Theatre

Bringing Literature to Life

“Living Art That Transcends Our Expectations: Using Creative Dramatics to Teach Dickens’ *Great Expectations*”

Objectives:

- Students will be able to pull from the text of *Great Expectations* key ideas of the first stage of the novel.
- Students will be able to present Stage 1 of *Great Expectations* as a piece of Living Art.
- Students will be able to analyze the living art presentations and determine how they think the novel should progress.
- Students will be able to analyze the feedback on the progress the novel should take and determine what are valid points.
- Students will be able to express themselves both verbally and physically.

Prerequisites:

- Students will have read up through Stage 1 of *Great Expectations* (the end of Chapter 19).
- Students will have been given some brief information on Charles Dickens and the serial installments of his novels.

Materials:

- *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (full class set)
 - Props and Costumes for the presentation *A note about costumes and props-Although costumes and props add a depth to the activity, allowing the students to immerse themselves in the activity and become the characters that they are playing, this activity can be done successfully without any costumes or props.*
 - Stools, chair, tables
 - Bowls, glasses, fake food (or real), money, fake handcuffs or rope
 - Candle, walking stick, deck of cards
 - Newspaper, suitcase
 - Cloaks, prison outfit, hats, gowns
- Rubric (see below)

Lesson Description

This lesson will get students on their feet to creatively present Stage 1 of *Great Expectations*. It will ask the students to first challenge themselves to analyze the text and then to choose key points to present a living art piece. Other students will then analyze the presentation and determine how the novel should progress. All students will be actively and creatively involved with the text.

Lesson Procedure:

Anticipatory Set:

Picking Apples-Have students arrange themselves into a circle, facing away from one another. Students will “pick apples” from an apple tree in front of them while the teacher calls out emotions. As the teacher calls out an emotion, students will change their physical behavior of picking apples to reflect the emotion. Explain to students that they must really work to pick the apples, using the muscles to stretch to reach high into the tree. Ask them to feel the emotion the teacher is calling out and to react as honestly as possible. How would an angry person pick an apple? How would a jubilant person pick apples? Suggested emotions: anger, joy, sorrow, jubilation, horror, guilt, depression, disgust, surprise, love, pity, envy, apprehension, courage, timidity, repentance, and patience. (10 minutes)

Instruction:

- Break students into three groups, two audience or “the public” groups and one “living art” group.
- “Living Art” group: This group is to present a living art piece summarizing the first stage in Pip’s expectations. The goal here is for students to present a vignette that showcases the first stage of the expectations in an artistic way, using as many resources as possible. (*see above for suggested list of costume/props*). This art piece should not be a tableau; since it is “living” art, the piece should move and group members should interact with one another, but without talking. The presentation they prepare should last 5-7 minutes. While the Living Art group prepares their presentations (15 minutes), the Public groups should be reviewing Stage 1 of *Great Expectations*.
- After the presentation, the “Public” groups will meet to discuss, based on the presentation, what they would like to see happen in Stages 2 and 3 of the novel. Their ideas need to be based on what has already been presented and what the general public would probably want to see. Each “Public” group should express their opinions to “Living Art” group. (10 minutes)
- The “Living Art” group will then prepare the next installment of their piece based on what has already happened, what public opinion is, and what they, as the artists, would like to see (10 minutes). They will then present this. (5 minutes)
- After the presentation: Discussion should center on the following list of questions:
 - How drastically did the public opinion change your own ideas?
 - How did incorporating public opinion into your own creativity make you feel as an artist? How do you think it made Dickens feel?
 - How did your understanding of the text change as you presented it/watched it?

Closure: Journal: How did performing Stage 1 or seeing it performed help you in understanding the text? Why do you think that is? (5 minutes)

Some Tips for the Reluctant Teacher and Learner:

- Provide a comfortable classroom setting where students can express their creativity and be vulnerable.
- Chances are, students will have an easier time at creative dramatics than the teacher will.
- As the teacher, challenge yourself to get actively involved in the presentation. Take a small role, sit in on the preparation/analysis, offer suggestions.
- Familiarize yourself with some theater improvisations games-students really enjoy these and they are great ice breakers/warm-ups. (Viola Spolin)
- Students like to see their teachers be “silly”, even though they act like they think it’s “uncool.” Although it may be uncomfortable at first, always try to do what you are asking them to do.
- Playing music during creative dramatics provides background noise that reduces tension.
- Using props/costumes will help students to “get into” the creativity.
- When students seem inhibited, make the entire class close their eyes or turn their back to one another-not seeing or being seen reduces fear in many students.
- If students are extremely reluctant to do live theater, have them prepare a videotape of their presentation. This requires more planning on the teacher’s part, but it may encourage more creativity.
- Have students write out their scripts to avoid forgetting lines.
- Make expectations clear to the students before the activity begins by the showing them the rubric for the activity. (See attached rubric as an example.)