

Discovering the Performing Arts

Behind the Scenes

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 4–8

Curriculum Focus: Theater Arts

Lesson Duration: 3–4 class periods

Program Description

Behind the Scenes – Directors, prop supervisors, lighting, sound, and set designers all work together to create live theater productions.

Discussion Questions

- What are some differences between a live stage production and a movie? What are some similarities?
 - What does a director do?
 - What are some tasks of the lighting and sound designers?
 - What do set designers think about when creating a set for a play? Where do they draw their inspiration?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Identify considerations set designers keep in mind when creating sets for plays.
- Describe the process a set designer goes through in creating a set (discussions, research, drawings, and then models).
- Create models of sets for specific scenes from different plays.

Materials

- *Discovering the Performing Arts: Behind the Scenes* video
- Copies of well-known or familiar scenes from plays, one per group, plus copies of one scene for the whole class. (Appropriate scenes can be found in *Childsplay: A Collection of Scenes and Monologues for Children*, by Kerry Muir (Limelight Editions, 2004) and *Great Scenes and Monologues for Children (Young Actors Series)*, edited by Craig Slight and Jack Sharrar (Smith & Kraus Books for Kids, 2003).)
- Cardboard boxes, 1 per student group
- Crayons, markers, and colored pencils

- Glue or tape
- Scissors
- Scrap pieces of fabric
- Modeling clay or plasticine
- Popsicle sticks
- Other materials for building dioramas

Procedures

1. Have the class watch "Behind the Scenes," a segment of *Discovering the Performing Arts*. Then discuss the work of a set designer. Ask students: Who does a set designer discuss sets with? Why? What do set designers do before setting to work? How do drawings help them? What factors must they consider during the creative process? What sources they use for inspiration and research?
2. Distribute a copy of a scene from a play and have volunteers read parts aloud. Then discuss the scene. Ask students: What is taking place in this scene? Who is in it? Do we know when it is taking place, such as during a particular time in history, during the day? What is the setting? Is it a particular kind of room or building? What should a set look like? Why? Talk about the props that might be included and discuss some reference tools students might use to research ideas for a set.
3. Once students have a solid understanding of how a set designer goes about creating a set, divide the class into groups of three to five students and give each group copies of a scene from a well-known or familiar play (each group should have a unique scene). Tell the groups that they will use cardboard boxes and markers, fabrics, and clay to create diorama models of a set for their scene. Then they will share with the class.
4. Before creating their models Tell students to make sure they understand their scene before they begin creating the models. Have them make sketches or drawings of possible set ideas so that everyone in the group agrees. Each student should participate in discussing the scene, presenting the models to the class, and creating the model (either by drawing sketches, researching period architecture or furnishings, or creating pieces for the final set, or all tasks). When students have decided on the appearance of the final sets, give them a cardboard box and let them use the creative supplies to create it. Allow enough time to work in class or as a homework assignment.
5. Once students have finished their models, have them present their scenes and models to the rest of the class. They must discuss what happens in the scene, where they got their ideas for the set, and why they designed it as such.

6. After presenting, have students write a paragraph describing the role they played in their group and what they learned about set design. Display the finished models in the classroom alongside a copy of the scene so students and visitors can look at them.

Extension Activity

If students have theatrical experience, allow them to bring in props from a play they were in or pictures of theatrical sets to discuss with the class. For a prop, have them prepare a short presentation on what the prop is and its function in the performance. For pictures of a production, have them prepare a short presentation on the set's appearance and why it was designed that way.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students accurately identified several considerations of set designers; clearly described and used the set-designing process (discussions, research, drawings, then models); and created unique, creative, and well-crafted set models that accurately and appropriately reflected their scene.
- **2 points:** Students somewhat accurately identified a few considerations of set designers; adequately described and used the set-designing process (discussions, research, drawings, and then models); and created somewhat unique, creative, and well-crafted set models that generally reflected their scene.
- **1 point:** Students were unable to identify any considerations of set designers; inadequately described and used the set-designing process (discussions, research, drawings, and then models); and created incomplete or inappropriate set models that did not reflect their scene.

Vocabulary

collaborate

Definition: To work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort

Context: The theater is a place to collaborate; a director does not arbitrarily make hacks and cuts and toss things away.

inspire

Definition: To fill with enlivening or exalting emotion; to affect, guide, or arouse emotion

Context: A set designer looks for things that inspire, such as paintings or photos of period architecture.

prop

Definition: Short for a theatrical property

Context: A prop should contribute to the audience's experience at the theater.

set

Definition: The scenery constructed for a theatrical performance

Context: A set design helps tell a story on stage in a finite amount of space.

theater

Definition: Dramatic literature or its performance; drama

Context: Theater is all about telling stories in a variety of ways.

visualize

Definition: To form a mental image of; envisage

Context: Often a director or set designer will visualize a script at its first reading.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Arts: Theater – Understands how formal and informal theater, film, television, and electronic media productions create and communicate meaning; Understands the context in which theater, film, television, and electronic media are performed today as well as in the past; Designs and produces informal and formal productions
- Arts: Art Connections – Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines
- Arts: Visual Arts – Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>



This lesson plan addresses the following English standards:

- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities
 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video—This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index—Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units—These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.



Teacher Resources— This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Behind the Scenes

Take a look inside theatrical productions to see how directors, set designers, prop supervisors, and sound and lighting designers work together to create a show.

II. Center Stage

Learn about the creative process that goes into writing for the stage and discover how actors make a story come alive for their audience.

III. Making Music

Discover how songs for musicals are developed and explore the way they can convey emotions and tell stories in a different way from dialogue.

IV. Let's Dance

Follow several choreographers to see how they create the movements of actors on stage, which is an important part of a theatrical production.

Curriculum Units

1. Set Design and Directing the Story

Pre-viewing question

Q: What responsibilities does a theater director have?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are the first things set designers do?

A: Each set begins as a drawing with a ground plan. The designers make models of their sets to see how they work to tell the story. If satisfied, they discuss the designs with the director and others involved in the production before building the set. If not they make revisions or start over and draw a new plan.

2. Lighting and Sound Design

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why are sound and lighting important parts of a production?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are the responsibilities of a lighting designer?

A: A lighting designer specifies the types of lights, colors, placement, and when they will be turned used to create the different looks and cues throughout the show.



3. Props: Bringing a Story to Life

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever been involved in a stage production?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What are the most impressive sets and props that you have seen in a stage production?

A: Answers will vary.

4. Writing for the Stage

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some differences between movies and stage productions?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: If you could write a play, what story would you tell?

A: Answers will vary.

5. The Job of an Actor

Pre-viewing question

Q: Describe what you think makes an actor good at the job.

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What is the job of an actor?

A: It is an actor's job to bring out the feeling behind the words and to make an audience believe in a character. It takes a tremendous amount of concentration, hard work, and dedication. Actors must think consider the personality of a character and think and act like the character on stage.

6. Costume Design

Pre-viewing question

Q: What kinds of costumes are worn in your favorite movie, TV show, or play?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What factors go into designing costumes for a play?

A: If the play takes place during a specific time in history, the costumes must reflect what people wore then. Costumes must also reflect a person's wealth or poverty, and their colors should help display a character's personality. Costumes must be made sturdy enough to be packed and unpacked many times on tour and to last a long time even if worn only for a few minutes during each performance. They must be easy for the actors to put on and take off quickly between scenes.



7. The Meaning of Songs

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you like or dislike about musicals?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What role do songs play in a musical?

A: When a scene in a musical comes becomes emotional, characters usually sing. Good musicals build seamlessly to a song; the characters begin singing before you realize it because the emotion has carried them. Song lyrics allow characters to say things that might sound odd in dialogue.

8. Writing Songs: Creating a Mood

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do you feel when you hear your favorite song?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How does a song help set the mood of a scene?

A: Songs affect the mood of an audience. Songwriters may decide to speed up a scene to make a point or slow one down to build tension. Major and minor chords and instrument choices also help set moods.

9. Writing Lyrics: Telling a Story

Pre-viewing question

Q: What songs from movies or plays do you know?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Would it be more difficult to write song lyrics or spoken dialogue?

A: Answers will vary.

10. The Impact of Live Music

Pre-viewing question

Q: What skills or traits make a singer good?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How might a singer and a songwriter work together?

A: Answers will vary.



11. Choreography and Dance

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about choreography?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How do choreographers plan the movements for a scene?

A: Choreographers plan movements, gestures, and dances that fit the time period of a story and the characters' personalities. When choreographing a play that has been produced before, they consider previous productions. They try to keep the movements in line with the emotions and actions of the play and base them on the actors themselves, making sure to create movements that are believable and possible to do.

12. The Elements of Dance

Pre-viewing question

Q: What might be the difficult about dancing in a stage production?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why are repetition and unison seen in choreography?

A: Choreographers rely on repetition so the audience will remember a movement and associate it with something specific in the story. They rely on unison when they really want the audience to notice something.