

4. Lesson/Activity Redesign

DEI - INFORMED DIALOGIC LESSON PLAN EXAMPLE

Class: Upper Level Undergraduate Course, Playwriting

Week 1: How Playwrights Reveal Character

Lesson Focus and Goals:

- To introduce the work of Suzan-Lori Parks
- To demonstrate how playwrights use dialogue to show action and character

Materials Needed:

- “Start Here,” short play from *365 Days / 365 Plays* by Suzan-Lori Parks
- Index cards
- Pens, pencils, and paper

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify character traits and relationships, as well as moments of action, from the dialogue in a scene
- Students will practice writing their own scenes in which they use dialogue to reveal character traits.

Structure/ Activity:

1. I will give a brief introduction to Suzan-Lori Parks, her work, and the 365 project.
2. Everyone will get an index card. I'll ask two volunteers to read the characters in Parks's short play, “Start Here,” which is the first one she wrote for the project. As they are reading, I'll pause them a few times and invite students to share anything they notice. For example: what do they notice about Parks's stylistic choices? With no stage directions, what can we tell about what the characters are doing physically? What clues do we get about their relationship to each other?
3. After the play ends (it takes about 2-3 minutes to read), I'll ask students to take a moment to write on the index card a description of one of the characters, Arjuna or Krishna. Then, I'll ask them to get into groups with the other students who wrote about the same character. Each group will have several minutes to discuss the character traits they wrote down, and to find clues in the play that support those traits.
4. Next, we'll come back together as a class and each group will share what they discussed.
5. Then, students will each try writing their own scene, in which they create two characters with contrasting personalities. They'll practice revealing these character traits entirely through the way the characters speak to each other.
6. Finally, each student will have an opportunity to share their scene with the class, and to hear their classmates' observations about the characters they have created.

Assessment:**Formative Assessment:**

- From the index cards, I will be able to assess students' understanding of the techniques Parks is using to reveal character traits, relationships, and actions.
- Students will also be able to assess their own creative work by reflecting on how their peers interpret the characters they have created in their scenes. If there is anything they have intended to convey about their characters which their classmates haven't picked up on or have misinterpreted, they'll have an opportunity to continue working on their scenes for the next class.

DEI - INFORMED ACTIVITY STRUCTURE ASSIGNMENT

Topic: How to Read a Play

Lesson Focus and Goals:

- To build students' skills in reading and understanding plays
- To introduce *Trifles*, by Susan Glaspell

General Outline of Dialogue Activity/Sketch of Facilitation Plan:

Many students, particularly non theatre majors, find reading plays challenging at first. In this activity, students will work together to develop strategies for reading and understanding dramatic writing.

Dialogic practices will enable students to bring their own perspectives and experiences to the conversation, which will enrich their learning and help build a sense of community.

Structure/ Activity:

Because students come to the classroom with differing levels of experience in reading plays, as well as insights and perspectives from various other disciplines, they can learn a lot from each other. I will use dialogic practice protocols and facilitator moves to guide them through a process of sharing their knowledge and strategies. We'll begin by reflecting on strategies for reading plays. Then we'll read the opening pages of *Trifles*, a 1916 play by Susan Glaspell in which two women notice "trivial" details at the scene of a murder—details which are overlooked by the men investigating the crime, and which turn out to be important clues. This is a particularly useful play for this exercise, because it's ultimately about the way people's lived experiences shape the things they notice or disregard, an apt analogy for how a class discussion is stronger when lots of different voices contribute to it.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF DIALOGIC PRACTICES

Protocol 1: Individual Writing

Before we begin reading, students will take a few minutes reflecting on the differences between reading a play and reading other kinds of writing, such as a novel or an article.

Justification:

- To prepare students to engage critically with their own reading practices; to provide time for students to reflect on any concerns or questions they have.

Advantages:

- Offers a moment to think
- Gives an opportunity for private self-reflection without the pressure to share

Pitfalls:

- Students may feel uncertain about what to write

Protocol 2: Carousel Brainstorm

On large sheets of paper placed around the room, I'll put questions such as: 1) What are some challenges of reading a play as opposed to seeing a production of it? 2) What are some strategies you can use when reading a play? And 3) What kinds of plays do you find most engaging?

Students will move around the space and have an opportunity to write their answers and see what others have written.

Justification:

- To engage students in thinking about their own learning strategies; to spark their curiosity in their peers' ideas and interests

Advantages:

- Enables students to share ideas in a low-stakes way
- Embodied activity gets people moving around

Pitfalls:

- Students may be intimidated by seeing others' ideas or by writing something others will read

Protocol 3: Jigsaw

After we read the first few pages of the play, we'll pause, and students will break into groups. Each group will focus on one of the characters in the play and will spend a few moments deepening their understanding of that character. Then, students will move around so that each new group has one person from each of the previous groups; they'll "teach" the new group about the character they've just discussed.

Justification:

- Students will develop their expertise on a particular character and will then have the opportunity to share it with others.

Advantages:

- Students often find it easier to share their ideas in small groups
- Students can begin to put into practice some of the play reading strategies
- Students will learn from their peers about what they have observed from the play so far

Pitfalls:

- Some may find it intimidating to "teach" what they've discussed to a new group

Protocol #: Open Discussion

After the Jigsaw exercise, we will move into a larger discussion about what we have observed in the play so far. I will ask students to share out highlights from their discussions of the individual characters and to make predictions about what will happen in the rest of the play. I'll invite them to reflect on how any moments in the play have reminded them of experiences from their own lives. I'll also guide us into a discussion about play reading strategies for the semester.

Justification:

- A class discussion allows students to hear more voices and come back together again as a group. It will enable us to all get back on the same page.

Advantages:

- Students who prefer to listen have the opportunity to do so in a larger discussion
- Everyone in the class is able to share ideas all together

Pitfalls:

- Fewer people are able to speak.
- The more confident students might dominate the conversation, and some ideas may be lost or overlooked.

Facilitator Move #: Balancing

I'll use the facilitator move of Balancing to help offset some of the pitfalls of open discussion.

Justification:

- To invite perspectives that haven't been shared yet.

Implementation:

- Periodically, I'll pause the conversation and explicitly invite alternative views or perspectives.