

Audition, Assemble, Act: Living *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Background:

Welcome to my second classroom, of juniors in period 3 English. I met these students in October and began teaching them full-time during the last weeks of December. We are currently reading Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, after having just finished *The Kite Runner*. My juniors are engaging with the play, keeping a character and reflection journal, and participating in weekly theatre troupes as a means to close-read the text. Each Friday, this close-reading takes the form of acting out a key scene from the play, complete with actors, directors, videographers, and critics. This is no April Fool: if you checked your calendar, then you know you are here for a show!

The weekly schedule is this: on Mondays and Tuesdays, we read scenes in class. On Wednesdays, we write and come up with casting lists for the show. This week we also introduced prompt books to allow students to better get into their roles. (They audition for roles by writing me a short persuasive response detailing why they think they would be good for a certain role.) On Thursdays, we preview the scene to be performed. Every Friday is a show. The focus this week is on getting into the characters with emotion. Though students have enjoyed the play and like taking one day a week to perform, the performances have been low energy. I want to get students more excited for learning about drama through performance.

Round Focus:

Today is the show, if you didn't already know. Students have been working all week to read some scenes, talk about key ideas and meanings, and begin to try to intuit characters' feelings. The round focus today is all centered on the performance: How are students performing their roles? What do they do well? What advice can peers and audience members offer? How do students support one another?

You will see a wide range of student interests and abilities on stage today. I have a very heterogeneous junior English class (much like my freshmen English group). The junior English class has a similar mixture of English language learners and students on Individualized Educational Plans. Each week, I strive to help students get cast into roles that concurrently push them out of their comfort zones all while not giving them something too unrealistic.

Learning Goals:

- (A) Students will come to class prepared to perform the given scene, either seven or eight depending on their vote the day before.
- (B) Individual students will contribute in their roles in order to help the whole classroom community succeed; they will reflect on how they succeed at accomplishing this and how they could improve.
- (C) Students will verbally comment on work completed in class today in reflection, and will also write a brief reflection on their ideas for improving today's class schema for future weeks.
- (D) Students will continue to show growth in areas of professionalism/performance when in their roles.

Learning-Centered Inquiry:

- (1) During the performance of the scene: Do students on stage seem to be “getting into” their roles? Are they following stage directions and nuances of the characters, or do they simply read the part? For the audience members and those not on stage (who are all supposed to have roles) do they seem engaged with the performance, or do they sit and stare? Record evidence.

- (2) After the performance: Do students seem willing to reflect on what went well and what could be improved? In our third week, do they do so with minimal teacher prompting (on their own), or can they only respond to teacher comments?

Practice-Centered Inquiry:

- (1) I plan to mix up my commentary to students to both *let them struggle if they seem lost* and *step in to offer mid-performance suggestions*. How do students respond to each of these styles? Record evidence of students making adjustments *on their own* or *with teacher prompting*.

- (2) *Now for something different* (Mr. Porcella wants you, my rounds-goer, to be **bold!**)...Talk to one student (or more) who is not on stage. Ask her/him about what value they see in this weekly activity. Do my juniors think that this weekly acting helps promote better understanding of the show, or do they view it as a waste of time?