

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Performance Ideas
Artist/Organization: headRush
Discipline(s): Theater

SECTION I - OVERVIEW	2
SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT	3
SECTION III – RESOURCES	6
SECTION IV – VOCABULARY	9
SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK.....	10



Still image from SPARK story, 2006.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Performance Ideas

SUBJECT

Theater

GRADE RANGES

K-12 and post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Theater, language arts, social studies and visual arts

OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the politically charged work of headRush, as they challenge audiences to create social change with their piece, "The Throwdown."

STORY SYNOPSIS

headRush is an Oakland-based guerrilla performance group that uses Chicano "teatro," a satirical agitprop style made popular by Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino in the 1960's. Their goal is to wake audiences out of passivity and inspire them to act on what they would like see happen in their communities, and their lives. SPARK follows the members of headRush as they perform on the streets, teach politically-based theater classes, and motivate viewers with their piece, "The Throwdown." This Educator Guide introduces students to politically satirical theater, and provides activities to explore status, character, creating short pieces and thinking about social issues.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Individual, partner and group theater-based activities

Partner and group discussions

Individual and group writing

Individual student research

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to the performance group, headRush, and their style of satirical agitprop theater as seen in their piece, "The Throwdown"

To give students hands-on activities exploring different styles of satirical theater

To invite students to create art from issues they see in the world, their communities and their lives

To introduce students to the history of satirical and political theater.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story about "headRush" on DVD or VHS and other related equipment

Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, and a printer

Possibly also: Audio music player such as a CD or MP3 player, cassette deck or record player, a camera and or video recorder and player

MATERIALS NEEDED

Open space for circle and group activities

Pencils, pens and paper

White paper plates

Elastic thread/straps

Scissors, Glue

Markers, pastels, watercolor paints, colored paper, magazines for collage material, feathers, and other decorative items for masks and posters

A deck of playing cards

Current newspapers or news magazines

Examples of political cartoons and propaganda posters

Large pieces of card paper (approx. 11"x14") for posters

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic – control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Interpersonal – awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals and motivations

Intrapersonal – awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals and motivations

Linguistic – the ability to use language masterfully to express oneself rhetorically or poetically. Also allows one to use language as a means to remember information.

Spatial – ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems



See more information on

Multiple Intelligences at

www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

The Oakland-based guerrilla performance group headRush is serious when it comes to taking their message to the streets. You can find them performing their brief but high-energy sketches not only in theaters, festivals and cafés, but also on sidewalks and in parking lots. The group brings its brand of urban poetry and satire to audiences wherever it finds them.

The brainchild of a trio of teacher-actors -- Rosa González, Simón Hanukai and Xago (Luís Juárez) -- headRush debuted at Oakland's Jahva House in September 2003. Calling themselves a "psycho-politico spoken-word theater crew," González, Hanukai and Juárez hoped to exhort and incite their viewers out of passivity using Chicano "teatro," a satirical agitprop style made popular in the 1960s by Luís Valdez and the farmworkers' El Teatro Campesino. Setting up wherever there is space to move, headRush's off-the-cuff improvisations and audience involvement recall the immediacy of Campesino's "actos," or one-act plays, which might have been performed on the back of flatbed truck or on a picket line.

In fact, El Teatro Campesino was where Xago came to be so deeply involved in Chicano theater. Xago was also instrumental in founding community performance group Los Illegals Comedy Clica and the Salinas hip-hop crew Baktun 12. González, an author as well as a performer, is a founding member of Las Man@s, and Hanukai serves as program director of the Destiny Arts Center. Education is a high priority for the three performers, who have all studied theater and taught at middle schools and high schools throughout the Bay Area.

With a focus that promotes making social issues and current events relevant and immediate to a new generation, the dynamic headRush has shown up at colleges, open mic nights, political events and

comedy shows. In "Performance Ideas," Spark follows headRush from a performance of their act "Throwdown" to the workshops they conduct to help kids explore complex issues through theater and movement.

THE BIG PICTURE

History of Satirical Theater

headRush's act, "The Throwdown" reflects a long tradition of creating politically satirical theater to expose the hypocrisy, corruption and bad judgment of those in power, and to challenge everyday people to take action against it.

Defined as using ridicule, caricature, irony and witty derision to uncover the vice and incompetence of others, writers have used satire throughout the ages. As early as 5th century B.C. Greek playwright Aristophanes skewered philosophical debaters like Sophocles in his play "The Clouds," mocked writers of Greek tragedy in "The Frogs" and parodied the folly of going to war in "Lysistrata."

During the middle ages, the Catholic Church sponsored "morality" and "mystery plays" for the religious edification of the general public. Mystery plays depicted biblical stories like Adam and Eve and the Creation, while morality plays taught lessons about Christian virtue, for example, staging a hero's battle with, and ultimate victory over, the Seven Deadly Sins (greed, sloth, lust, envy, gluttony, pride and anger). Soon, secular guilds began to produce and tour these plays, performing them on the scaffold stages of moveable pageant wagons. Free from the church's censure, they began introducing satirical and farcical elements into the plays, making fun of authority figures in the community like judges, physicians, and even priests and monks.

By the mid-16th century, European audiences were flocking to a more professional style of touring show arriving from Italy, which satirized certain Italian “types” to great comic effect. A lively and crowd-pleasing form of theater, Commedia dell’arte (“theater of the professionals”) appealed to rich and poor alike, and regularly included women performers onstage for the first time. Eventually, this theatrical form would greatly influence the development of European theater. For example, the personality types depicted in Commedia dell’arte later evolved into archetypes for many of theater’s comic roles.

Commedia dell’arte focused on the ability of the actor to improvise dialogue and actions within a loosely structured plot. Each actor also honed their own *lazzi* (physical and verbal comic business) and would find opportunities to perform them during the course of each play. While projecting a spirit of anarchy, Commedia dell’arte actually required a high degree of discipline, technical virtuoso and ensemble playing from its performers.

Similar to ancient Greek and Roman Theater, actors wore masks. However, Commedia favored leather half-masks with exaggerated facial characteristics. Each mask embodied a different stock character and unlike the high-minded heroes of the mystery plays, Commedia characters seemed almost to embody the Seven Deadly Sins with their greedy, lustful and gluttonous desires and appetites. Most popular among these were the foolish and miserly shop-keeper Pantalone, the conceited, pedantic Dottore Gratiano, the rascally servant Arlecchino and the boastful but cowardly soldier, Il Capitano. Variations on these characters began to appear in different countries, the mischievous Pedrolino evolved into France’s melancholy Pierrot, and England refashioned crafty Punchinello into the puppet Punch of “Punch and Judy” shows.

By the 18th century, Commedia dell’arte’s popularity was waning; however, the work of successful playwrights like Moliere (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin) took their influence from the Commedia style. Moliere created comedies that reveled in the opposing nature wrestling within each person, the baser animal side versus the civilized façade worn in society. In several of his plays the social mask slips

off, revealing a character riddled with faults. Moliere felt that it was comedy’s job to hold a mirror up to nature, and seeing someone constantly answering to one, then the other of his contradictory natures, was humorous.

While Moliere’s plays regularly exposed qualities like hypocrisy and greed, and even seemed at times to question the existence of a God, he did not intend his plays to have a political or social agenda. His work explored his characters’ follies and vulnerabilities, but he wasn’t espousing particular views in the hope of instructing the audience or changing their behavior.

The Rise of Propagandist and Political Theater

Theater artists consciously and vigorously began using theater as a tool to broadcast information and to move audiences to action in the post-revolutionary Russia of 1917. To spread their political views, the Bolsheviks (members of a wing of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, led by Lenin) recruited performers to create political theater which combined agitation (capitalizing on the public’s discontent around certain issues using easy to remember catch-phrases and simplistic statements) and propaganda (arguments created to influence public opinion) in what came to be called *agitprop*.

Actors performed news stories in “Living Newspaper” skits revolving around controversial issues of the day and various social problems. The Blue Blouses (so named because performers wore the blue workers’ uniforms as their costume) were the most renowned of the agitprop companies. Performing a collection of sketches, monologues, movement and music, they used cartoon-like characterization in satirical skits. The company inspired the creation of other touring agitprop groups from all over the world. Performers took to streets, city squares and outside of government buildings, symbolically reclaiming the power and voice they felt had been taken from them. German groups gave performances in working class neighborhoods on vans equipped with ready-made stages that could be packed up quickly if police came by. In Korea, performers helped fuel the resistance movement against the Japanese occupation. During the Chinese cultural revolution in the 1960’s, the Chinese

government included agitprop in their education programs, a practice continued even today. Performers in both North Vietnam and America staged agitprop productions to protest the Vietnam War. In the 1960's and 70's as more and more young people engaged in political dissent, they turned to agitprop, experimental, and guerrilla theater as valid forms of political debate and consciousness-raising.

Stirred by the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960's and peace campaigns around the Vietnam War, performers from all over the country began forming dynamic, new theater companies and tackling political issues in their work. Some of the most famous companies, who continue to thrive today are the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Bread and Puppet Theater, based in Vermont, and El Teatro Campesino. Anything but silent, the San Francisco Mime Troupe took up commedia dell'arte's broad style, working with different theatrical genres and lampooning political figures in their free public performances.

Luis Valdez borrowed from the carpa's (Mexican traveling tent theater) techniques when creating El Teatro Campesino. Working with Cesar Chavez in the United Farm Workers Union, Valdez realized that theater could galvanize the workers into action. El Teatro Campesino created and performed actos (short agitprop plays) and performed them on the backs of trucks and on picket lines during the California agricultural workers' strikes of the 1960's.

Around the same time, Italian avant-garde playwright and actor Dario Fo developed his own irreverent and bawdy style of commedia-inspired agitprop theater. His company Nuova Scena was connected with the Italian Communist Party and later he started the Collettive Teatrale La Comune to tour factories, parks and gymnasiums. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1997, Fo's most famous plays include "Accidental Death of an Anarchist" and "We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay!"

Engaging the Audience

Used as a way to rouse disenfranchised groups to action, agitprop and other styles of theater principally emerge during times of political dissatisfaction. Where Moliere and Commedia artists wished primarily to entertain their audiences, feeling the

theater wasn't the place to incite societal change, in the 20th century theater artists wanted passive observers of theater to become active participants. A major influence in modern theater, German playwright Bertolt Brecht desired audiences to employ their intellect, instead of their emotions, when watching a play. In his opinion, theater which created the illusion of reality caused audiences to identify emotionally with characters, but didn't challenge them to think about their own lives. Influenced by Marxist principles, German Expressionism and Chinese theater, Brecht posited an "epic theater" (like epic poetry in that it is narrative and non-dramatic), intended to inspire social change. To provoke audiences into thinking about the didactic arguments offered onstage, Brecht created his *Verfremdungs-effekt* ("alienation effect) which employed jarring techniques like harsh stage lighting, few props, and placards with explanatory captions. Characters also interrupt story lines to sing songs or address the audience directly with important messages. Brecht's most famous epic plays include "Mother Courage and Her Children," which focuses on war's effect on civilians, "The Good Woman of Setzuan," a parable play set in prewar China, and "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui," a satire of Hitler's rise to power re-imagined in gangster-era Chicago.

While Brecht asked audiences to participate mentally and actively around ideas of social change, French theater artist Antonin Artaud felt theater should initiate spectators into a primitive and sacred mystery wherein they would experience awe and terror and liberate their subconscious mind from its civilized, logic-bound prison. Performers were challenged to portray madness, perversion and other extreme states of being. Deeply influenced by Surrealism and Balinese theater, Artaud proposed a "Theater of Cruelty," in which the actor serves as a kind of priest or magician violently awakening the audience through performances that stress physicality, gestures, screams and inarticulate cries, instead of relying on dramatic speech. Held in the round (seating the audience on all sides of a stage) to further remove the barrier between performer and spectator, Artaud suggested the use of dissonant sound effects, whirling stage sets and frenzied use of light, among other things, to achieve this sense of disequilibrium.

Artaud's writings inspired many directors, including Jerzy Grotowski, founder of the Polish Laboratory

Theatre. Often referred to as “poor theater,” Grotowski’s approach was a bare bones theater, stripping away props, scenery and costume elements and focusing purely on the actor as these performers engaged and confronted their audience. In 1947, Julian Beck and Judith Malina created The Living Theatre in New York with the goal of directly engaging the audience on a personal and physical level. Stressing their political views of non-violent protest and anarchism, in 1963 they produced Kenneth H. Brown’s “The Brig,” a play that demonstrated the dehumanizing effect of military training. By 1968, they produced works like Paradise Now (1968) where they attempted to shock and confront audiences into discomfort by doing things like performing rituals and goading audience members into arguments.

Emerging in the 1970’s, Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal proposed a “Theatre of the Oppressed.” Wanting to remove the traditional division between actors and audiences, Boal created “Forum Theatre,” where audience members who have ideas about how an issue might be worked out, are encouraged to come onstage and take the place of an actor. Boal’s vision is to see audiences move from passive receivers of ideas to “spect-actors,” who imagine their own ideas of change, and are empowered to make this change happen in their communities. Inspiring non-performers to use theater as a catalyst for grass-roots activism, community activists, teachers and workers, among others, often use Boal’s techniques to grapple with social concerns like racism, sexism, gay rights, rights for the disabled, bullying, and a number of other issues.

RESOURCES – TEXTS

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Alexander, Martha, Atl, Duardo, Campesino, Pilar, del Castillo, Dante, Tenorio, M. Angel, Tenorio, Miguel A. Teatro para ninos (Obras Selectas Del Teatro Mexicano). Mexico: Editorial Pax, 2005.

Daly, Niki. Bravo, Zan Angelo!: A Commedia dell'Arte Tale. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

Halpin, Mikki. It's Your World--If You Don't Like It, Change It: Activism for Teenagers. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

Krull, Kathleen Morales, Yuyi. Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez. New York: Harcourt Children's Books, 2003.

Lewis, Barbara A. Kids With Courage: True Stories About Young People Making a Difference. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1992.

Lewis, Barbara A., Espeland, Pamela, Pernu, Caryn. The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose-And Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 1991.

Moore, Anne Elizabeth, Kelso, Megan. Hey, Kidz! Buy This Book: A Radical Primer on Corporate and Governmental Propaganda and Artistic Activism for Short People. Berkeley: Publishers Group West, 2004.

Seo, Danny. Generation React: Activism for Beginners. New York: Ballantine Books, 1997.

Swope, Sam, Cneut, Carll. Jack and the Seven Deadly Giants. San Francisco: Fog Kids Books, 2004.

SECTION III – Resources

Resource Books

Boal, Augusto. Games for Actors and Non-Actors. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.

Bodek, Richard. Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht. Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1997.

Brook, Peter. The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate. New York: Touchstone, 1968.

Broyles-Gonzalez. El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.

Fisher-Lichte. Theatre, sacrifice, ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre. London: Routledge, 2005.

Nakaya, Andrea C. Examining Issues Through Political Cartoons - Civil Liberties and War. Chicago: Greenhaven Press, 2005.

Orenstein, Claudia. Festive Revolutions: The Politics of Popular Theater and the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

Patterson, Michael. Strategies of Political Theatre. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Piscator, Erwin. The Political Theatre: A History 1914-1929. New York: Avon, 1978.

ARTICLES

Chilcoat, George W. "Flippy Guerrilla Street Theater." The Social Studies: November 1, 2000.

Croyden, Margaret. "Past imperfect (theater of the 1960s)." American Theatre: September 1, 1993.

Marwick, Arthur. "Experimental theatre in the 1960s." History Today: October 1, 1994.

Patterson, Douglas L. "A Brief Introduction to Augusto Boal, Augusto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed," Community Arts Network. Published online at:
www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/1999/12/a_brief_introdu.php

RESOURCES – WEB SITES

headRush
www.headrushcrew.com

Community Arts Network (promoting information exchange, research and critical dialogue within the field of community-based art)
www.communityarts.net

El Teatro Campesino
www.elteatrocampesino.com

San Francisco Mime Troupe
www.sfmt.org

Yahooligans – Around the world: Social and Political Issues
[www.yahooligans.yahoo.com/Around the World/Social and Political Issues](http://www.yahooligans.yahoo.com/Around_the_World/Social_and_Political_Issues)

VIDEO/AUDIO RESOURCES

Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino
Available by contacting Oregon State University:
(541) 737-2538
valley.circ@oregonstate.edu

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

826 Valencia: The Writing Center
Helps students, ages 8–18, to develop their writing skills, offering free drop-in tutoring, workshops, and storytelling. (415) 642-5905 / www.826valencia.org

BAY AREA THEATER COMPANIES

Campo Santo and Intersection for the Arts
Presents new and experimental work in the fields of literature, theater, music, dance and the visual arts.
(415) 626-2787 / www.theintersection.org

El Gato Del Diablo
Presents affordable family productions that reflect, and are relevant to, our diverse community. (415) 664-5276 / www.elgatotheatre.org

San Francisco Mime Troupe
Performs free shows during the summer at public parks and venues all around Northern California. Also offers youth workshops. (415) 285-1717 / www.sfmt.org

Teatro Vision
Produces plays that explore the Chicano/Latino experience. (408) 272-9926 / www.teatrovision.org

CULTURAL CENTERS

Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts
Latino cultural arts organization offering exhibitions, classes, youth, and senior programs. (415) 821.1155 / www.missionculturalcenter.org

MACLA
A contemporary arts space in San Jose offering a variety of visual arts, performance and literary programs with a focus on creating opportunities for interaction between traditional audiences and new art forms and emerging artists.
998-2783 / www.maclaarte.org

La Pena Cultural Center
Presents cultural and educational programs that increase understanding of different cultures and support efforts to build a more just society.
510-849-2568 / www.lapena.org

MUSEUMS

Gallery de la Raza
Offers art exhibitions, multimedia presentations, performances and spoken-word events, screenings, computer-generated murals and educational activities.
415.826.8009 / www.galeriadelaraza.org

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Backstage

The area the audience can't see behind the stage or performing space in a theater, this includes dressing rooms.

“Break the barrier between audience and performer”

In the tradition of “realistic” theater, performers and audiences pretend that an invisible “fourth wall” exists in front of the stage. Actors are careful not to look directly at audience members as this would break the illusion of an enclosed world that audiences are looking into. German playwright Bertolt Brecht, was one of the first to “break the fourth wall” in his plays, having actors interact openly with the audience instead of pretending they weren't there.

Character

A person or being portrayed in a theatrical piece.

Costumes

Clothes, accessories and hairpieces worn by performers and designed by costumers in keeping with the style or era in which the production is set.

Debut

The first public appearance of a production or performer.

Guerrilla Theatre

Plays, skits or improvisations focusing on social and political issues, usually staged in an outdoor public place.

Performance piece

A structured or unstructured theatrical work of any length or genre.

Political Plays

Theatrical writings in which the theme or plot focuses on one specific, or several different, political issues.

Spect-actor

A term created by Brazilian theater director Augusto Boal to refer to an audience member who joins the activity onstage; a spectator who decides to take action.

Theater troupe

A company or group of theater performers, often who tour. Sometimes includes other non-performers who work with the company.

Warming up

Vocal, physical and psychological preparation that the actor engages in before going onstage to perform.

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Activities inspired by Commedia Dell'Arte

LEADING WITH DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BODY (Grades K-12)

- Ask students to walk around the room noticing how they move; is there a certain part of their body they lead with? Hips, knees, head?
- Prompt students to lead with different body parts (chest, stomach, nose, chin, toes, forehead, hands, etc.) as they move around the room

Variation

- Have half the class do this activity and half the class watch. Try playing different kinds of music to vary the tempo, style and energy of the students' movement.
- Have students freeze at various moments (Students observing can also choose a participant and do a quick sketch of them in their pose.)
- Reflect – what did students see others do? What did it feel like to do the activity themselves?

GESTURE EXAGGERATION (Grades 2-12)

This activity is reminiscent of the game "Telephone." Have students stand in a circle, or in a line. The first person starts by making a small, subtle gesture. The next person takes it over and makes it bigger and so on around the circle down the line until the last person makes the most extreme version of the gesture.

Variation

Add sound in the same way. Make sure students keep the original gesture/sound in mind, and that they don't make up a new gesture. We should be able to see the gesture grow organically. (This activity is useful for students to gauge subtle gestures- "1", extreme gestures- "10" and those in between.)

CHARACTER GESTURES

(Grades 3-12 & college)

- Get suggestions of several "types" (based on what they do) and write them on the board, for example: teacher, mother, child, soldier, celebrity, judge, nurse, etc.
- Ask volunteers to come up with gestures for each type that represent in some way what they do. (e.g., a mother might hold her baby, a celebrity might blow kisses to the crowd.)
- Experiment with the exaggeration of the gesture asking students to try the gesture at "1" at "10" and various numbers in between.
- In small groups, have students choose one character type to pretend to be and have them interact with the other characters, using these gestures and a catchphrase for their character, while others watch.

Additions

- Students can come up with characters' desires, emotional moods or qualities and rework their gesture accordingly. (For example, how would you portray a celebrity who is hungry for constant attention waving to fans?)
- In addition to gestures, students can create tableaux (frozen pictures) of their characters, alone or with others, in various situations. (e.g., sad soldier saying goodbye to family.) They can then write short scenarios, skits or stories based on these tableaux.
- Ask students to draw a symbol for their gesture and name it.

PAPER PLATE CHARACTER MASKS

(Grades 2-12)

- Have students choose a character type and that character's quality or qualities.
- On a sheet of paper, ask students to make a "Wanted Poster" for their character. They can draw a picture of the character on the top half of the sheet, and write a description of what their character does on the bottom half. (Older students

may choose to write a biography, case study or psychological profile.)

- Cut white paper plates in half, cut out eyes and make tiny holes or slits at each end of the mask. Thread elastic straps through the slits and make a large knot at each strap end.
- Invite students to decorate the mask, capturing the character's type and qualities. Decorating materials might be as simple as pens or pastels, to collage items, feathers, or even paper maché for more texture.

Variation

Students can also choose people that they'd like to satirize from history or current events and make character masks and wanted posters of them.

RELATED STANDARDS

VISUAL ARTS

Grade 2

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Skills, Processes, Materials, and Tools

2.1 Demonstrate beginning skill in the use of basic tools and art-making processes, such as printing, crayon rubbings, collage, and stencils.

2.2 Demonstrate beginning skill in the use of art media, such as oil pastels, watercolors, and tempera.

THIEF, BOSS & CRUSH IMPROVISATION

(Grades 6-12 & college) Credit: Jeff Raz

- Ask for 4 volunteers. One of them will be the host of a party, and the guests will enter one by one.
- Each of the four needs to secretly decide the relationship they have with the others. One is their boss, who they want to impress and compliment, another is someone they distrust and suspect is a thief, and the last is someone they have a huge crush on. (Hopefully, they won't all choose the same person to be their boss, etc.) They don't tell the person, we find out what each person's relationship is to the other by the way they act with one another. Remind them there are big stakes here! They need their boss to like them, their crush to fall in love with them and their thief to admit they stole.
- Depending on manageability, additional students can join the party one by one, choosing their own boss, crush and thief from among the group.

Variation

Students can do this activity playing their masked characters.

Status Activities

HIGH STATUS / LOW STATUS

(Grades 2-12)

- Divide the students into two groups and have each group line up on opposite sides of the room. Ask the students in the line on the left side of the room to pretend they are powerful and important people. (What this often looks like physically is that they are standing straight and tall, chin up, using expansive and commanding movements, and generally "taking the stage".) Ask students on the right side of the room to pretend that they serve the powerful people, but have no power themselves. (Physically they might show this by hunching over, making themselves and their movements small, quick and nervous gestures, and having little eye contact with others.)
- Have a "powerful" student and a "non-powerful" student from each line walk to the center of the room/stage, greet each other, "Hello" in their status characters, then walk to the other side of the room.
- After everyone in the line has had a turn, have the students shift power roles.
- Reflect on how it felt to be treated as a "high status" person, how it felt to be treated as a "low status" person. (Engaging discussions about class and power can come from this activity.)
- *Variation*—Once they meet in the center, have their roles shift so that they finish walking to the other side of the room in a different power role.

STATUS KINGDOM

(Grades 3-12)

- Have students sit in a circle. In front of each student, place a playing card face down. Each card corresponds to a person's status in the class dominated hierarchy of this "card kingdom," for example, kings, queens & jacks are royalty, numbers 7-10 are lords/knights and ladies that serve the royalty, but are still aristocrats, numbers 4-6 are tradespeople/merchants, numbers 2-3 are servants of the aristocrats, and aces are servants of the tradespeople. Invite students to imagine the number of the card in front of them, (are they queens or servants?) but NOT to pick it up until you give the instruction, and never to look at it during the activity.

- On the count of three, ask students to pick up the card and lift it directly to their foreheads – without looking at the number on the card.
- Have them greet each other with “Good morning,” and accompanying gestures (eg, bowing to royalty, tipping hat to aristocrats, waving hello to merchants, dismissive nod to servants, etc.) keeping in mind the class of the person’s card. Since they don’t know their own card number, students may begin by playing a certain status, however, they should adapt their status based on how others are treating them.
- At the end of this activity, have students line up according to what number they think they are, kings at the head of the line and aces at the end. Then ask them to look at their cards. Did they guess what their number was from how they were treated?
- Ask students to write about this experience. Was there ever a time that they felt treated in a high/low status way in their own lives? Or a time they saw this kind of class hierarchy? After writing, encourage them to share with a classmate whatever they feel comfortable sharing.

Variation

Students can look at their card numbers to play that status accordingly. Also, after working in this imaginary “kingdom”, students can attribute status roles they see in the real world, or in historical situations, to the numbered cards. (This is a great jumping off point to discuss feudalism in Medieval Europe.)

WALKING ON THE GRID

(Grades 3-12 & college) Credit: Jerzy Grotowski

- Invite students to imagine there is an invisible grid on the floor (you might draw one on the board as a visual aid.) When walking on “the grid,” students must follow its vertical and horizontal lines, they cannot move diagonally, backwards, in curving, circular or any other non-linear ways.
- Introduce 2 or 3 students at a time onto “the grid” until they get the feel of it.
- Now break into 4 groups (for example: yellow, orange, purple & green). Purples begin walking on the grid, they take on the role of powerful leaders. They lead the movement patterns on the grid.
- Greens now enter the grid, they are the followers of the purple leaders, copying everything the purples do.

- Yellows now enter - they don’t have to obey the rules! They can walk any way they like on the grid, but they can’t touch anyone, and they can’t leave the grid.
- Oranges are the security guards, they have to obey the rules of the grid, but at the same time it’s their job to “herd” the yellows, getting them back to walking the vertical and horizontal lines. Again, they can’t touch them.
- Rotate roles so students get a chance to play each of these roles.
- Reflect on the exercise afterwards. How did it feel to be a yellow, an orange? What gave the purples the right to lead? Why did the greens have to follow? How did the greens or oranges feel that the yellows got to disobey the grid rules?

Variation

Vary the roles so that, for example, only greens are following the grid rules. Experiment with changing the group dynamics.

Next step

Instead of the colors, have students brainstorm various groups from society or history and play these on the grid, justifying why each plays their specific role. Students can also write about other historical or social parallels they see similar to the “grid world.”

CONFLICT MACHINE

(Grades 3-12 & college) Credit: Augusto Boal

- Each student writes about what conflict means to them and also what conflict feels like and looks like to them. They share (what they feel comfortable sharing) with the class, and the teacher (or a student) can capture these definitions on the board. Then, each student creates a gesture and sound to represent their idea of conflict.
- One by one, students come into the playing area and move around the space repeating their gesture and sound over and over until everyone is simultaneously performing their conflict gesture and sound.
- The teacher, or a chosen leader, approaches one person and places their hand over their head. At this sign, all the participants copy the gesture and sound of the chosen person. When the leader removes her hand everyone goes back to repeating their original gesture and sound, until the leader chooses a new person to follow.
- Touching them lightly on the arm, the leader can also signal each person to freeze in their conflict

pose until one by one all are frozen in a pose. Or, have some freeze while others continue their different conflict gestures, or repeat a single person's gesture.

Addition – students can then create an abstract visual art piece focused around either the conflicts in their own lives, or the conflicts they see in their communities, or in the news.

FORUM ACTIVITY

(Grades 4-12 & college) Credit: Augusto Boal

- Have students participate in a free-write about a couple of important issues in their lives and communities. After sharing some of their ideas with the class, have everyone vote on a couple of issues to act out.
- Several students begin an improvisation about the issue chosen. As they are improvising, other students can add their input on ways to deal with or solve the issues by calling, "Freeze!" and jumping into the action. The participants freeze and the student can either replace someone by tapping them on the shoulder or just join in.
- After jumping in, participants can also call out "Rewind to..." to return to an earlier part of the improvisation.

Variations

- This activity can also be used to replay an issue that comes up in class or on school grounds. For example, if two students had a disagreement they could re-enact it and other students who witnessed it could jump into the roles to play out different ways of dealing with the situation.
- Students can also take issues and situations from current events, locally or internationally, and explore different ways of working these out.

Social studies-focused activities

NEWSPAPER ACTO (Grades 6-12 & college)

- In groups of 6 or so, students should comb through a newspaper or news magazine together and choose a news story that appeals to them both for its content and the characters in it. If there's time, or as homework, have students do background research on this story and the people in it, bring their research in and share it with their group. Discussing the story, they should touch on: Does the writer seem to be favoring one side over another? What are the students' own opinions

about this story, the situation or the people involved?

- For dramatic purposes, the group should decide: Who are the main characters of the story? What do they want? Decide who will play which role. What is each character's significant gesture and catchphrase? What body part do they lead with? What desires, qualities and emotions do they have? Since these are shorthand, cartoon-like sketches of the characters, are their movements, gestures and voices extreme enough?
- Work out the beginning, middle and end scenes and a small amount of dialogue for the act. (Possibly, students can make placards with a title for each scene.)
- Share scenes with each other and reflect on what they saw and the process of creating these pieces. Additionally, students can video these acts to observe and discuss later.

Additions

- Brainstorm different theatrical genres (naturalism, melodrama, farce, silent mime, etc.) and write them on the board. Invite each group to choose one of these styles and present their act in this style. Reflect on how this changes the piece.
- Students can also create their own satirical cartoons about the news events they've chosen.
- After sharing examples of propaganda posters & images from different countries and eras, invite students to think of an issue or situation they feel passionate about (or would like to be an activist for). Using markers, paints, collage or a combination of all three, challenge them to make their own propaganda posters for this issue.

RELATED STANDARDS
THEATRE

Kindergarten

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Development of Theatrical Skills

2.1 Perform imitative movements, rhythmical activities, and theatre games (freeze, statues, and mirrors).

Grade 3

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connections and Applications

5.1 Use problem-solving and cooperative skills to dramatize a story or a current event from another content area, with emphasis on the Five Ws.

Careers and Career-Related Skills

5.2 Develop problem-solving and communication skills by participating collaboratively in theatrical experiences.

Grade 5

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Development of Theatrical Skills

2.1 Participate in improvisational activities to explore complex ideas and universal themes in literature and life.

Grades 9-12 (Advanced)

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Analyze the impact of traditional and nontraditional theatre, film, television, and electronic media on society.

RELATED STANDARDS
HISTORY-SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

Grade 2

2.3 Students explain governmental institutions and practices in the United States and other countries.

Explain how the United States and other countries make laws, carry out laws, determine whether laws have been violated, and punish wrongdoers.

Grade 7

7.6 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Europe.

Understand the development of feudalism, its role in the medieval European economy, the way in which it was influenced by physical geography (the role of the manor and the growth of towns), and how feudal relationships provided the foundation of political order.

RELATED STANDARDS
LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 4

WRITING APPLICATIONS

2.3 Write information reports:

- a) Frame a central question about an issue or situation.
- b) Include facts and details for focus.
- c) Draw from more than one source of information (e.g., speakers, books, newspapers, other media sources).

SPEAKING APPLICATIONS

2.1 Make narrative presentations:

- a) Relate ideas, observations, or recollections about an event or experience.
- b) Provide a context that enables the listener to imagine the circumstances of the event or experience.
- c) Provide insight into why the selected event or experience is memorable.

Grades 9 & 10

WRITING STRATEGIES

1.3 Use clear research questions and suitable research methods (e.g., library, electronic media, personal interview) to elicit and present evidence from primary and secondary sources.

READING COMPREHENSION

2.3 Generate relevant questions about readings on issues that can be researched.

2.5 Extend ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>.