

DELTA Theater Activity

Activity Title: *Creating Setting and Dialogue through Pantomime and Tableau*

Summary: A tableau (pronounced tab-low) is a still image—a frozen created by actors posing their still bodies to communicates an idea, event or in this lesson – a setting. The word ‘tableau’ comes from the French term ‘tableau vivant’ which means living picture.

This creative theater activity is designed to encourage MLs’ speaking and listening skills. The instructor models a common pantomimed activity to suggest a familiar setting. Students then pantomime their own chosen activity in a familiar setting. Then students were asked to freeze and create frozen poses or tableaux. Then, the class generates dialogue for their classmates’ frozen pose or tableau. Finally, students recite the given dialogue, as they share their tableau again.

Objectives: Students will explore the theatre making skill of tableau, creating a silent frozen pose using their faces and bodies. Working in small groups, they will apply this skill in creating theatrical settings and, finally, in collaboratively generating dialogue.

Theatre Skills:

Students will be able to:

- Use the body and face to create and react to imaginary conditions.
- Use the body in a variety of ways to express choices of character and emotion.
- Work collaboratively as a member of an ensemble.
- Collaborate to generate invented dialogue.

Characteristics of Tableau

- Actors are silent.
- Actors’ bodies are frozen.
- The position of the actors’ bodies tells the audience something about who they are, what they are doing or where they are.

Timing: 45 minutes (though if theater making is new to you and/or your class, you may want to allow 2 class periods for the entire activity and save generating dialogue for the second class.

Space: Classroom large enough for all to stand. Performance area of at least 3’ by 6’ feet.

Tools/language supports:

- Large blank “Speech Bubble” visual
- “Stop” and “Go” visuals
- A “Cook in a Kitchen” visual
- “Beach” visual

Activity Steps:

1: MODEL PANTOMINE

Sample Script:

- *Name a place where you wish you were right now. Home? Park?, etc.*
- *Now I'm going to show you one of my favorite places.*
- **Instructor pantomimes** (physically acts out without using words) cooking in kitchen and asks, *"Where am I?"*
- **Students respond and Instructor shows visual** of cook in kitchen and says, *"That's right. How did you know?"*
- **Point out** that students were able to guess where they were by how the instructor used their body and face.

WHOLE GROUP EXPLORATION

Sample script:

- *Now let's all pretend, using just our faces and bodies, that we are cooking in a kitchen. You can cook whatever you like. When I say "Go," (hold up Go sign) you can begin cooking. When I say "Stop," (hold up Stop sign) stop moving and hold a pose."*
- Play "Go and Stop" three times.
- **Third time they "Stop" and freeze, say,** "A frozen pose onstage is a Tableau."
- **Repeat the game** calling out "Go" and to stop them say, "Stop" or "Tableau."

Advanced Option: You may use a [Describing Tool for Physical and Facial Expression](#) to help you to vividly describe how students are using their bodies and faces, layering language on to their actions or poses.

SMALL GROUP EXPLORATION

- Divide the class into groups of no more than 5 students.

Sample script:

- *Now, using just our bodies and faces, let's create another one of my favorite places. Show visual of a beach.*
- **Ask groups to select an activity** to do at the beach. Use their faces and bodies to show that activity in a silent, frozen pose or tableau.
- **Give rules of Go and Stop:** *When I say "Go," (hold up Go sign) you will begin your activity. When I say "Stop," (hold up Stop sign), you must freeze. When you freeze you must be facing the audience, i.e., the sun.*
- Again, use the [Describing Tool for Physical and Facial Expression](#) to describe how students are using their bodies and faces, layering language on to their actions.
- Play "Go and Stop/Tableau" three times.

GENERATING DIALOGUE WITH A MODEL GROUP

- **Select a group to share** whose tableau communicates clear activities and setting.

- **Show students the beach stage area** telling them boundaries and where the sun, and the audience, will be. *When you freeze you must be facing the audience, i.e., the sun.*
- **Have the selected group show their tableau** to the class. Ask the class to guess, *“What are they doing?”* and *“How did we know?”* Encourage students to be specific about how students were using their face and/or body to show their activities and setting.
- **Hold the speech bubble visual** above each student in the tableau one by one. Ask the class, *“What might they be saying?”* Ask the performers to acknowledge and remember dialogue.
- Tell the tableau group, *“When I say go, speak, using the words given to you by the class.”*
- **Repeat the process with each group**, each time having the students in the audience provide the dialogue for the students creating the tableau.

NEXT STEPS

Repeat the process, giving students planning time in their small groups to select one of their favorite places to recreate in a tableau. Another option is to select a setting from a Social Studies lesson or an ELA text to inspire a tableau.

Students might extend their tableaus and the given dialogue to write their own short scenes.