Introduction to Puppetry & Theater (Five Session Unit - 35 minutes per session)

(Performing Arts - Theater) Strand 3.1 & 4.1

**By the end of this unit the student will be able to:**

Identify elements of theater including plot, theme, character, language, sound and spectacle.

Create images or express ideas through the use of movement, sound and language

Interpret and perform a variety of characters using voice, movement and props.

Session 1 (What is theater?)

Start the lesson by asking students what they think of when they hear the word “Theater”. Their responses can be recorded on a Smart Board or classroom white board. Show students pictures of different kinds of theater such as a movie theater, a Greek tragedy, a musical, a puppet show and a medical theater.

Show a definition of theater as being “a place to watch”. Explain to students that you can watch a movie in a movie theater. Work with students on differentiating live theater performances and seeing a movie at a movie theater. Share a brief clip from a movie then share a clip from a live theater performance (preferably one with audience reactions).

Ask students **what are similarities and differences between live theater and watching a movie in a movie theater?** Record student responses on the board.

Explain that the word theater means “to watch” and that this unit will be about different kinds of live theater and the different aspects of a theatrical experience - plot, theme, character, language, sound and spectacle (more on those later).

Show students pictures of “Comedy” and “Tragedy” masks and get their own interpretations of what those masks represent and how they may have been worn during plays performed a long time ago. Share pictures of Greek theaters and tell students that theater as we know it began in Greece when people would act out stories about Greek Gods. The actors would wear masks to show their emotions and play different characters during certain scenes. These masks usually had happy or sad faces.

Ask students if they have seen movies or plays that are mostly sad or mostly happy - those would be considered tragedies or comedies. The majority of live theater performances can be classified as a comedy or tragedy. Emphasize that there can be funny things in a tragedy and sad things in a comedy as well.

Ask students if they have heard of William Shakespeare or least “Romeo and Juliet”. Explain Shakespeare is probably the most famous playwright who ever lived and that he wrote both comedies and tragedies. Show students pictures or clips from a Shakespeare tragedy (Romeo & Juliet). Then show students pictures or clips from a modern tragedy (Death of a Salesman/Glass Menagerie). Tell students that the plot of tragedies tend to put characters in challenging situations and the characters struggle overcome those challenges. D*epending on the age level of the students, one could go into more or less details about character deaths/suicides/etcs.*

Students are more likely to be familiar with comedies. Ask students what makes a movie, TV show or play funny. Theatrical shows can be funny as well. The plot of these shows usually put characters in odd or unusual situations and show people’s silly reactions to those situations. Show pictures or clips from a Shakespearean comedy (Midsummer’s Night Dream would be a good choice) as a comparison to the Shakespearean drama shown previously. Compare the difference between the mood of the tragedy and comedy scenes played and how that may affect the audience that is watching the show. If time, also show a clip from a modern comedy play - “Noises Off” would be a good example. *Teachers may decide to go into more detail about different kinds of comedies - farce, satire, slapstick*.

After completing that discussion, play a clip from a Disney musical such as “Aladdin” or “Frozen”. Ask students what they can tell you about the music they heard. Ask how it helps tell the story of that movie. Explain that plays and movies that have songs such as these are called musicals. Musicals use music to advance the plot of the story and to share character feelings and thoughts. Like plays, musicals can be tragedies and comedies. Show students clips from both kinds of shows. *Some suggested examples are “Next to Normal” and “The Producers” - both shows have clips on Youtube, but preview ahead of time to determine if they are appropriate for your class.*

If there is time you can briefly share about other kinds of theater.

Medical Theater - used to teach medical students and doctors about surgery and bodies. People would watch surgeries in a big room.

Dance Theater - tells stories and shares emotions without words through dance - ballet/hip hop/other kinds of dancing

End the lesson by having students create their own Comedy/Tragedy masks. Have them complete the following writing prompt. *Feel free to change the writing prompts to match your students’ ability levels.*

A tragedy is a type of play that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. My mask is sad/upset because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

A comedy is a type of play that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. My mask is happy/glad because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

reflect on a recent theater performance they may have seen.