

*Celebrating Our 52nd Season!*

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### **Lesson Plans: *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing***

These lesson plans are intended to assist teachers and students in making the connection between a good story and the process of making it a stage play. Activities are included in which students will dramatize a situation, emotion or conversation. Doing this will help students become better at comprehending what is happening in a story. The activities are all based on Indiana Standards for Language Arts and Theatre. The standards given are multi-grade level so teachers from more than one grade level can use them or activities can be used in classes where students have varying levels of ability.

The lesson plans are divided into 4 categories. The first category, Mechanics, addresses character, theme, plot, setting, conflict, etc. The second category is called Experience and has activities related to watching the play or dramatizing from the story. The third category of activities deal with Writing, and the fourth category is called Evaluate. In this category, students will respond to, make judgments about, select criteria, speculate on the meaning of the story, its parts, or the dramatization.

Thank you for including Chicago Street Theatre in your activities for your class. Live theatre is one way in which students can better comprehend the story, make connections and draw conclusions about what they read. By attending this performance and studying the theatre alongside the book, they will be touched by the power of this living art form.

I hope you find these activities meaningful to your students as well as helpful in teaching all the standards. I have tried to include enough variety that you can tailor the assignments to meet the needs of your students. As an educator I have found that my experiences in live theatre have made me a better teacher. I hope you will explore live theatre with your students and personally. There is always room for you in community theatre. Enjoy!

Debora Porter

## **Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing: Mechanics**

*Activities in this category will address the following standards:*

Theatre 4.3.1, (3.3.1), (2.3.1): Discuss and classify character, plot, theme and setting in stories.

Theatre 4.3.2, (3.3.2), (2.3.2): Identify and describe the character, plot and setting in classroom dramatizations and/or formal productions.

Language Arts: 4.3.2 Identify main events of the plot, including their causes and effects of each event on future actions and the major theme from the story actions

Language Arts: 4.3.3 Use knowledge of the situation and a characters traits, motivation and feelings to determine causes for characters actions.

Language arts: 3.3.3 Determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author portrays them.

### **Activity 1 (Character)**

In a guided discussion list the characters in the story and have students create an entry for a yearbook for the characters. In this entry, we should be able to learn what is important to the character and get an idea about the type of person this character is. (Think about a Facebook page or an entry in MySpace.)

### **Activity 2 (Plot)**

Make a time line for the story as a group. Remember, Peter is writing about his year in fourth grade, so use the story information to put the events in the story in order and relate them to the school year.

### **Activity 3 (Theme)**

What is this story about? Is it Peter's fourth grade experience? Think about the characters that Peter mentions the most in his story--these will give us clues to what he is writing about. Think about how he feels about these characters--does he give us clues about his emotions? Does he feel angry, sad, unloved, loved, contented, happy? (Ultimately it is a story about Peter and how he relates to his family members.)

### **Activity 4 (Cause and Effect)**

Choose a major event in the story and break down the cause and effect. For instance: Fudge destroys the transportation poster/Peter gets a lock on his door. For students who have trouble with cause and effect have them say it this way: Because Fudge destroyed the transportation poster, Peter got a lock on his door. Divide class into groups and have them create one cause/effect statement for each chapter of the book. Or, divide them into groups and give each group one chapter in which they should find as many cause/effect situations as they can.

### **Activity 5 (Understand causes of a character's actions by knowing the character's personality traits.)**

Create a Dr. Phil type talk show in which one person is Peter, another is Fudge, another is the Mother, etc. Choose events from the story for "Dr. Phil" to ask each character why did you do this or what were you thinking...etc. For instance from the "shoe store" scene, "Dr Phil" may ask these questions:

Peter, why didn't you want to go with your mother to get shoes?

Fudge, why didn't you want to try on the saddle shoes at the shoe store?

Mother, how did you know that having Peter try on saddle shoes would work?

Peter, why were you worried about tricking Fudge?

## **Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing: Experience**

*Activities in this category will address the following standards:*

Language Arts: 4.7.11 Make narrative presentations that:

Relate ideas, observations, or memories about an event or experience.

Provide a context that allows the listener to imagine the circumstances of the event or experience.

Provide insight into why the selected event or experience should be of interest to the audience.

Language Arts 3.7.13 Plan and present dramatic interpretations of experiences, stories, poems or plays.

Language Arts 2.7.12 Recount experiences or present stories that:

move through a logical sequence of events.

describe story elements including characters, plot, and setting.

Theatre 4.6.2 Collaboratively improvise scenes based on relationships and social situations.

Theatre 3.6.2 Collaboratively improvise scenes based on personal experiences.

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Theatre 4.6.4 Explore the use of sounds and the voice to express character feelings and mood.

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Theatre 4.7.1 Conceive, draw and build a simple imagined environment. (or a model of one)

3.7.1 Conceive and draw or write a description of an imagined visual environment.

2.7.1 Conceive and draw an imagined visual environment.

### **Activity 1 (narrative or dramatic presentations)**

Choose an event that happened in your life--it can be a happy or sad event, something that made you feel special, or something unusual that happened to you--any event that you want to share with your classmates. You will have 3 minutes (time flexible) to tell the class about this event. Remember to keep it in order, tell us who was involved, where it happened, and what happened. (For older students: use words that will help us imagine the event and how it happened. Keep in mind that your presentation needs to give us an idea of why this is an important event in your history.) I suggest allowing students the opportunity to write an outline or series of cards to help organize their material--they should not read the information, but use it to help them remember all the parts they need to include.

### **Activity 2 (improvise a scene)**

Create activity cards with events your students may have experienced first-hand or seen someone else experience. Have at least a few more cards than students who will do this. Some possible events: you forgot your lunch money and want to borrow some from a friend, you're inviting people to a party, telling a parent how you broke the living room lamp, going to a fancy restaurant and spilling your water all over the table, lost your pet, forgot to do your homework and are trying to convince your teacher you should not have to stay in for recess, you are eating at someone's house and the food tastes yucky, etc.

Have a pair of students volunteer to choose a card and act out the event. They should keep their dialog (words spoken) in character (for instance a child will sound different than a waiter). This is an activity that could be done anytime you have a couple of minutes. Even if you use the same cards, different students will bring different interpretations of the event to the improvisation.

### **Activity 3 (sounds and voice)**

Choose a sentence (could be a sentence using vocabulary or spelling words) and have students read the sentence as if they were someone else. For instance: a very tired young child, a teacher, a frustrated mother, an angry person, someone who is mad, a Marine Sergeant, a waitress, a bored high school student, etc. It doesn't really matter what the sentence is, but sentences that lend themselves to a variety of interpretations work best. "The brown dog ran away." is less effective than "Really, that only works when the sky is cloudy." (It is okay if the students add words or inflections to the sentence.) After all, a valley girl would say: "Like really, like that only works when the sky is like cloudy."

### **Activity 4 (design a set)**

Hopefully you are doing other things with your class beside this story, so for this event, choose another story, a fairy tale, a folk tale, a legend, tall tale, myth, a setting from your social studies unit, a habitat you are learning about in science...you get the idea.

Students will plan and draw or make a model of the set. They should use written clues from the material (story, unit, etc.) to make sure essential elements are there. In the case of a piece of literature, they need only make one set for one part of the story (For instance, inside the castle or inside the deep, dark forest.) The finished product can be a drawing, model, shoebox diorama, etc. (Use standard for your grade level to determine appropriate finished project.)

## **Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing: Writing**

*Activities in this category will address the following standards:*

Language Arts 4.5.1 Write Narratives that:

Include ideas, observations, or memories of an event or experience.

Provide a context to allow the reader to imagine the world of the event or experience.

Use concrete sensory details.

Language Arts 3.5.1 Write narratives that

Provide a context within which an action takes place.

Include details to develop the plot.

Language Arts 2.5.1 Write narratives that

Move through a logical sequence of events.

Describe the setting, characters, objects, and events in detail.

Theatre 4.6.1 Create a short dramatic scene from narrative literature.

Theatre 3.6.1 Dramatize stories using improvisation and theatre games.

Theatre 2.6.1 Dramatize stories using improvisation and theatre games.

### **Activity 1 (write narrative)**

Using the appropriate grade level standards, have students write a short narrative (story). This should be something that actually happened to them--not a work of fiction. They should use the standard for their grade level and the previous grade level standards to help them create their story.

### **Activity 2 (dramatize stories)**

Choose a story the students have read--choose from folk tales, myths, tall tales, short stories, etc. Have students work in small groups to act out (dramatize) a scene from the story or the whole story.

### ***For your information:***

Improvisation refers to something that is made up as opposed to reading from a script and acting it out. It is okay to practice an improvisation, or to discuss how it will flow--beginning, middle, end. The fact that it is not written out and dictated keeps it an improvisational work. Many comedians have improvisations that they perform over and over--each time changing it to fit the audience, their feelings that moment, or just to try something different.

Theatre Games are tools actors and directors use to warm up, explore acting and expand the repertoire of emotions an actor can perform. There are several books that have theatre games in them, not surprisingly, most have Theatre Games in the title. These activities can easily be used in your classroom to increase brain function, explore body/space, improve your class' cooperative learning, etc. Check out the theatre section of your local bookstore for a selection of titles.

## **Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing: Evaluation**

*Activities in this category will address the following standards:*

Language Arts 4.5.2 Write responses to literature that:

Demonstrate an understanding of a literary work.

Support judgments through references to both text and prior knowledge.

Language Arts 3.5.5 and 2.5.6 Write for different purposes and to a specific audience or person.

Theatre 4.4.1 Develop selected criteria to critique what they see, hear and understand.

Theatre 4.4.3 Articulate what changes they would suggest in a performance.

Theatre 3.4.1 Use selected criteria to critique what they see, hear, and understand.

Theatre 2.4.1 Use age-appropriate theatre vocabulary to critique what they see, hear and understand.

Theatre 4.4.2 Speculate on the meaning of a performance.

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Theatre 2.4.2 Speculate on the meaning of a play or story.

Theatre 4.5.1 Recognize and respond to the unique qualities of the theatre experience.

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Theatre 2.5.1 Respond to stories and plays. What did you think? How did you feel? Should we go see more plays like this one?

### **Activity 1 (write responses or for different purposes)**

Using the appropriate grade level standard, have students write:

a thank you note to the actors/theatre.

A newspaper article describing what they saw, why they liked or disliked the performance, etc. (put standard 4.4.3 here.)

An invitation to a friend to go see this play explaining why the friend will like it.

A critical review of the play.

### **Activity 2 (critique)**

Theatre is another way to tell a story. Create a checklist of the elements of a good story and use it to assess the effectiveness of the performance.

Talk about the elements of theatre: set (what's on the stage), character (including costumes, acting, voice, mannerisms), lighting (this can really help or hurt a performance!) and sound (students may not know that many sounds are on a CD that the sound technician has created for the show.) Create a tool to evaluate how well a performance used these elements to tell the story.

### **Activity 3 (meaning of a performance)**

The meaning of a performance is more than "what is this play about?" It also includes an evaluation of how the characters responded to the situations in which they were placed. For instance, "I think the Farleys were rude to keep mentioning "old fashioned manners" while they were staying with Peter's family." and "If I was Peter, I would have been excited to go to the store and out to lunch." are both statements that reflect meaning. Maybe the clue to understanding what we mean by the meaning of a performance is to think about it as what effect did the characters actions in the play have on me.

For this activity, have the students choose a character from the play and write how this character and the student are the same or different. They could use a graphic organizer, or write it in paragraph form, or choose another way to express this.

#### **Activity 4 (unique qualities of a theatre experience)**

Choose the activity based on students grade level and amount of effort you want them to spend on this activity.

Students will:

Draw a picture illustrating their favorite part of the play.

Write a paragraph describing the part of the play they liked best.

Create a Venn diagram or other graphic organizer to show the differences between attending a play and going to the movies.

Describe either by writing or verbally, which character they would most like to model and why.

Create a list of the benefits of seeing live theatre over going to a movie or watching television.