Peer Theater: Social Issues in Action

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Peer Theater: Social Issues in Action

Created by Shannon Simer

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Philosophy Behind the Unit

“Peer Theater: Social Issues in Action” is designed around several different concepts.

1- Every child has a story

2- Children learn some subjects better from their peers

3- Allowing students the opportunity to be teachers benefits them in many ways

Every child has a story to tell. From the beginning of their school experiences, sharing time or “show and tell” is typically a favorite part of the day. In today’s classroom, where a diverse population of children are served, one should not take common experiences for granted. It is likely there will be students in the classroom who have never been to a baseball game or watched fireworks on the 4th of July. The only common experiences one can be safe in assuming are feelings. No matter what kind of background a child is from, he or she will most likely have experienced feelings of love, joy, anger, and fear many times in his or her life. Each experience of having a feeling has a story behind it. Therefore, every child has a story to tell.

Peer education is an effective way to make lasting impressions on both the performers and the audience. When dealing with social issues this is especially true. The performers must have explored their feelings and experiences to a degree of depth that allows them to have enough perspective to portray it to others who may not have thought about the subject in such detail and depth. The audience often relates more easily to their peers than to a grown up telling them how to behave. Many teachers will attest to how much influence children have on each other. This program combats negative peer pressure by teaching children to influence each other in a positive, constructive way. The
fact that the performers are showing themselves as being introspective, encourages the audience members to reflect on their own experiences.

Allowing students to be their own teachers benefits them in many ways. Student responsibility for a project or outcome that they care about motivates students to give it all they’ve got. It also allows students to take on leadership roles and to an extent to determine their level of learning. By giving an end production, students get positive, public recognition for their efforts. The recognition also can add to student’s self-esteem by getting recognition for telling their stories. This program supports the idea that every child has something of value to share with the world. By combining drama and set building with the curriculum, students who may not typically be successful in the academic areas of school, may find more success in the creative expression allowed by this program. Group interaction, interpersonal communication, and problem solving are all significant aspects of this unit. Students must work together to succeed. Participating in a long term project, such as this, can help to teach students perseverance. The project requires they set a long term goal and follow through until the end.

There is a quote that beautifully sums up the philosophy and mission of this program. “In order to create an authentic connection with others we must first deal with the sources of our own oppression; we must break the silence of our invisibility; but we must speak in our own voice, first to ourselves and then to each other. For in moving beyond our own individual lives we can come to appreciate the connections between us, the continuity and the change, and dispel the fears which keep us apart” (Cryus, 1997 36).

Unit Objective
Students will work both individually and cooperatively to create a play using stories they’ve written and a set they’ve designed to educate and perform for an audience of their peers.

**Prerequisite skills**

This unit is recommended for students in grades 4 and up. The basis of that recommendation comes from the average student’s maturity level and ability to follow through on a long term project. The students should also have adequate writing skills to write their own stories. Modifications for students who have difficulties writing are to allow them to verbally tell the teacher what would be written, to tape or video record their stories, or to have them draw pictures to represent their stories. If students in lower grades have the prerequisite skills to perform these tasks they would also enjoy this unit. It is up to the classroom teacher to decide the level of their students’ abilities.

This unit involves a lot of commitment from the classroom teacher and the students. During the unit as many activities and as many lessons as possible should relate to the production the students are creating. The opportunities for integrating different subject areas are immense. Journal writing, script writing and reading, editing, and revising all focus on language arts skills. Set building and designing develops math and problem solving skills, as well as art skills. Students may be asked to explore their topic in a historical context for social studies by interviewing family or community members of varying ages. Health education can be addressed when topics pertain to social relationships, peer pressure, or healthy living choices. The application and interview process allows the student to build life skills that will help him or her get a job, whether it
is babysitting, a paper route, or working at a store. These possibilities for curricular integration are only a few ways that teachers can expand and build on skills that students will learn throughout this unit.

Program Set-up

A. Roles of the students: - 5-6 individual students will present their monologues
   - The rest of the class acts in the 4-5 group scenarios
   - Interested students (those who want to minimize time on stage), can be in charge of the set and any props needed

B. Application Procedure:

   Students will go through an application procedure as if they were applying for a job or auditioning for a part in a play. Having the students generate a resume' and go through the interview process are useful in preparing them for the job market. It also teaches students about professionalism and how to effectively present themselves and their talents. Creating a resume' requires students to have knowledge of how to use a word processing system. The interview helps children practice their verbal abilities as well as helping them to clarify in their own minds the reasons they are applying for the job they are. Teachers should present lessons on resume' writing and interviewing techniques before the applications are due.

   Students who want to present their monologues should submit a typed resume with their name, address, and phone number, where they attend school, a mission statement (why they want to perform their monologue), a copy of their monologue, why they think their story should be told, any previous acting experience, and any other
special talents that might lend itself to the performance. All students should be encouraged to apply and audition, though there will inevitably be a few students who don’t feel comfortable on stage by themselves. All students who apply for a monologue spot must also apply for either a scene actor or actress and/or a stagehand position because only 5-6 students will be chosen.

Students applying for a part in a scene need to submit a typed resume with their name, address, phone number, where they attend school, a mission statement, any previous acting experience, and any other special talents they think are relevant.

Those students who wish to work primarily on the set or as stagehands need to submit a typed resume with their name, address, phone numbers, where they attend school, and special talents that make them the best choice for these positions (examples might be that they are a good artist or they like building and designing things, etc.).

A panel interview format is ideal for this unit because the group is making casting decisions, not just an individual. The panel could include the classroom teacher, the principal or vice principal, and a student (perhaps the student body president, if he or she isn’t in the participating class). Interviews could be conducted during recess or lunch and should last 5-10 minutes. Students should be encouraged to dress nicely for the interview and to present themselves as if they were applying for a job. The interview questions will vary for each of the three positions. Interviewers can ask questions based on the student’s resume’. The students might expand on what they wrote or give different reasons or talents. The students who are interested in presenting their monologues should read it for the panel. The main purpose of the interview is for students to go through the interview process to get an idea of how it works. The quality of the students answers
shouldn’t be as important as their presentation.

After all of the students have been interviewed the panel must make decisions on which monologues to present. Here are some suggested criteria for choosing monologues.

- the story should be a true story written from the student’s perspective
- it should portray why the writer thinks this story is important to themselves and others
- it should demonstrate that the writer really thought about the topic
- it shouldn’t require elaborate sets - ideally for monologues no set is required beyond one or two props
- it should be a story that the interviewers think other kids would benefit from hearing
- it should be 1-5 minutes in length (when read or spoken)

When choosing scenes to present there are several criteria to consider.

- they should be adaptable from the monologues
- they should only take 2-5 minutes to act out
- the speaking roles per scene should be limited to 4-5 people (too many people talking gets confusing for the audience)
- may require a set, but one that is easily made and moved

When choosing people to work on the set or as stagehands the interviewers should remind students that these positions require a lot of work. Designing a set or building props will probably take up time outside of class for these students. These students must be willing to make that extra commitment and to follow through on it. It is acceptable to choose students who do have special talents in these areas, as artistic endeavors often aren’t encouraged enough in the classroom. This unit provides such students with a different kind of opportunity to meet classroom requirements. There should be a limited number of students working only on the set or on props. The main focus is getting students on stage to act as peer teachers. But as we all know, “behind the scenes” people are a valuable part of the teaching team.
**Timeline**

About a month prior to beginning the unit, the class should begin reading plays to get them familiar with how to read them and the different types of plays. This calendar is an approximate timeline for the unit. More detailed descriptions of the lesson plans and processes are contained in this booklet. The unit should take 7-8 weeks to complete if it is worked on daily for at least 30 minutes. Ten minutes of that time should be devoted to theater games and the other 20 minutes to the daily lesson. More than 30 minutes may be required especially as the performance draws near.

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<td>Intro. to Peer Theater and Journals</td>
<td>Journal about teasing</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
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Role of the Teacher in the Process

The idea is to let students take over as much responsibility for the project as possible. The teacher needs to provide basic instruction and to ensure that the essential skills are present to successfully complete the tasks, but beyond that the teacher should encourage the students to be creative with this artistic endeavor. Kids will get excited about this project and their imaginations will soar. The teacher may need to play the role of "Reality" and gently guide students to goals they can realistically accomplish.
Lessons

This unit can be used to educate students about a wide variety of issues. It is designed to focus on social issues. The topics that are most relevant to your class, obviously depend on the grade level and maturity of the students involved. Sample topics could include: being picked on, lying, stealing, or teasing. For older students topics could include: racism, sexism, homophobia, suicide, etc. The sample lesson plans included here are aimed at a fourth or fifth grade audience. The issue being addressed is teasing.

Everyday before beginning to work on this project, gather the class and do a warm-up/focus activity that gets kids excited about participating in theater. During the first few lessons, before the kid’s stories are shared, it is important to build a sense of trust and group cohesion. When students feel safe (mentally, emotionally, and physically) they are more likely to share more of themselves and of their stories. Group exercises build bridges between individuals by asking them to work together and to interact in non-traditional ways. Warm-up games are also important because they ask students to shake off their everyday concerns and to participate in something that is fun and different. It’s a kind of mental and physical transition. These activities also allow students to free their imagination and to heighten their sensory and physical perception.

Team Building Activities

Thunder and Rain: Everyone sits in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. No talking. The leader starts the activity and each member joins in when they hear the sound the person to their left is making. This continues around the circle until it comes back to the leader who then changes the sound (snap fingers, clap hands, slap thighs, stomp feet, and then everything in reverse order). The sensation created sounds like a rain storm.

Time: 5-10 minutes
Partners Up: Two partners sit back to back with their elbows linked. Without letting go, they try to stand up. It’s harder than it sounds. Variations: Try with 3,4, or more players in a circle back to back.

Time: 5-10 minutes

The Monster: The group must join themselves together to form a single monster that walks with both hands and feet on the ground. The monster must have one more foot than there are people in the group and one less arm. Once the monster is created it must move 5 feet and make a sound.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Balloons: Everyone in the group lays flat on their backs, heads facing inward in a circle. By using only their feet and hands, they attempt to keep several balloons afloat for the longest period of time. Variation: try again using only feet to keep the balloons in the air

Time: 5-10 minutes

Supplies: Balloons

Knot Me: Students stand in a circle. Each person joins their right hand with someone across the circle. Then each person joins their left hand with a different person. The task is for the group to untangle themselves to recreate the original circle without breaking any grips.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Square Off: The object of this challenge is for a group of blindfolded students (5 per team) to work together and form a perfect square with 20 or 30 feet of string. All of the string must be used to make the square. Once the team feels they’ve completed the task, have them remove their blindfolds and look at the results. Students can brainstorm ways to make it more accurate and then try the exercise again.

Time: 10-15 minutes

Supplies: blindfolds and string
Concentration: Group is seated in a circle. The leader begins the rhythm. Slap knees twice, clap hands twice, snap fingers twice. All members join in and practice the rhythm. After the rhythm is established, the leader says their name on the first finger snap and someone else’s name on the second finger snap. This person must do the same thing—say their name and then someone else’s when snapping the next time round.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Mirrors: Choose partners and decide that one person will be the mirror and the other must copy everything his/her partner does. The players must face one another. They can be standing still or moving, as long as they stay together in the “mirror” position.

Time: 5-10 minutes

After the class has had opportunities to work together, the focus should shift to more drama oriented warm-ups.

Choir: The group stands in a circle. Each person introduces themselves. Then, each person takes a turn again, saying only their first name. A facilitator serves as a conductor, asking the group to repeat each first name together—quickly, slowly, loudly, softly, etc. Each person’s name should be “conducting” for 15-30 seconds.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Sound Ball: The group stands in a circle and one player begins by making a spontaneous sound and motion and “passing” to the person on their right. The next player repeats the sound and motion, then creates their own sound and motion before passing it to the person on their right.

Time: 5-10 minutes

Invent a Game: Each group is given a small number of household objects and must invent a game with rules and use all of the objects given to them. They have 10 minutes
to come up with a game. All group members need to have input on the rules of the game, which can be almost anything. Once they have decided on the rules, they must show the large group the game by playing it by the rules they made.

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Storytelling:** The group sits in a circle. One member begins with a single sentence. The person next to him/her adds another sentence. Each student, in turn adds a sentence to what develops into a story (often very imaginative ones). Variations: have students add words one at a time.

**Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Monologue Spots:** Students, one at a time, draw a slip of paper out of a hat. The pieces of paper contain single words (examples: homework, TV, dinner, PE, bicycle, etc.). The student must stand up and say anything about that word they want to in 60 seconds. The hat gets passed around until everyone has had a chance.

**Time:** 10-20 minutes

**Freeze Tag:** Two students begin acting out a scene about anything they want. They keep making up the scene until an audience member shouts “Freeze!” The actors must hold their positions. The audience member takes the place and position of one of the students on stage and begins a scene about a completely different topic. For younger students the teacher may want to provide some suggestions to get kids started.

**Time:** 5-15 minutes

For other suggestions about team builders or theater sports/games for young actors see the reference and additional resources lists.

A. Introduction to the unit

This lesson is an overview of the project on which the students will be embarking. In reading, students are given several different plays to read that illustrate the different
roles of theater (to entertain, to educate, or to make you think). Examples of plays that entertain are *The Wizard of Oz* or *The Rutabaga Stories* by Carl Sandburg. Plays such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr are excellent tools for education. The educational plays especially can be integrated into a history unit in a classroom. Some plays are designed to entertain or to educate, but others do both by making the audience either self-reflect or ponder a moral dilemma, such as in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

For students who are unable to read these plays, the class could read them out loud to ensure that everyone gets the benefit of hearing these plays.

Once students have been introduced through reading to what a play looks like and how they can be used, the concept of peer theater should be introduced. It is important that the teacher give the students an overview of the unit and what doing the unit means to them. It is not necessary to go into detail about the application process or even about how roles will be chosen. It is important that students know they will be writing a play of their own and performing it for their peers. Once students have a grasp on what the unit is, the teacher may introduce the concept of peer theater. A sample lesson plan is provided.

**Topic:** Introduction to Peer Theater  
**Objectives:** Students will verbally identify the 3 criteria for peer theater with 100% accuracy.  
- Students will demonstrate understanding of the 3 criteria by performing a skit and evaluating their work based on all 3 criteria.  
**Anticipatory Set:**  
- draw on prior knowledge by having the students review the purposes of theater based on the plays they've already read
- ask students define peer theater (to gauge prior knowledge)
- students can guess what the 3 main criteria for peer theater are- write guesses on the board and set aside
- state the objective
- state how this lesson relates to the unit they are beginning

**Instruction and Modeling:**
- Teacher tells a short story (ex. what happened them that morning, or their favorite place to eat lunch, etc.)
- presents the criteria for peer theater
  - To educate peers
  - To act as a teacher
  - To develop the script
- Teacher verbally talks through the evaluation process (obviously it won’t quite work because the students are not the teacher’s peers, but that is a perfect time to discuss exactly what peers are). Could answer the questions: “What did I educate my peers about?” “Who taught new information to the audience?” and “Who wrote the script?”
- Teacher asks students to compare and contrast the answers given earlier with the actual criteria.

**Guided Practice:**
I. Teacher tells another short story
- have the students verbally evaluate the teacher’s story to see if it fits the criteria
II. Teacher can give a non-example by reciting a nursery rhyme. That won’t qualify because the teacher did not write the story.

**Independent Practice:**
I. Students write a short story about what they did over the weekend
- share it with a partner by standing and telling it dramatically and enthusiastically
- Teacher directs students to mentally evaluate their piece
- verbally get a few ideas from students how their pieces fit the criteria

**Closing:**
- Students should write a few sentences about why their piece qualified as peer theater using the questions for evaluation that have been used throughout the lesson.

In writing, students should begin keeping daily journals, in which they write personal stories about the daily topics presented. Topics could include helping your neighbor, picking up trash outside, cheating, lying, etc. The point of the journal writing is to get students used to writing stories about their own experiences (or sometimes lack thereof) and to get them thinking about topics that they could use to write their monologues about. It is important to stress that in the stories they write, the students
don’t always have to make the “right” decision. If they want to tell a story about when they lied to their mom, that’s OK because it is real and it is a part of their life experience. The teacher should also emphasize the value of every child’s stories and experiences. When students feel proud of what they have to say, then they will be willing to raise their voices and share with others. The teacher should model the journal writing experience by also keeping a journal with the class to reinforce the importance of writing down your stories.

One to three students a day should read what they wrote to the class. This exercise helps to get students comfortable with the idea of telling their stories to others. It also gives them practice at public speaking. The teacher should also occasionally participate in this practice, again to model the appropriate behavior and presentation.

B. Getting ready to write the big stories

The example topic chosen is teasing. This topic is intentionally broad so that students have a lot of creative freedom with it. They may want to tell a story about being teased or about doing the teasing. It is possible they may have witnessed the effects of teasing on others or been told by others how they have suffered.

I. Talking about teasing

- Have students reflect in their journals on an example of when they were teased and an example of when they have teased somebody else.

- As a group, discuss some of the feelings associated with teasing. Start with “What does teasing mean?” Students can generate ideas.

- Move on to “How does it feel to be teased?” Let students respond.

- “Why do people tease each other?” Students can give answers. Some possible explanations could include:
- they are trying to be cool
- they are trying to get a reaction
- they don't like themselves so they pick on others to feel good

Teacher should acknowledge that everyone has probably teased someone before, including the teacher. The homework is to write a paragraph thinking about the example they wrote in their journal. They should reflect on why they did it and how they think the other person felt. It is important for the teacher to point out, that none of them are "bad" children. Thinking about how our actions affect others is the best way of learning how to act. The teacher could ask "If you knew you could say something to hurt someone's feelings, would you?" Students should answer "No" Then the teacher can explain "Because you knew it would hurt others, you didn't do it. You changed your behavior because you thought about the consequences and put yourself in another's shoes. That is what we are doing with peer theater. You are the teachers for the audience. They will learn from your stories both sides of teasing. Your stories will influence the audience to think about how they act and perhaps to change the way they act. Your stories are powerful. Your stories can teach others what you have had to experience to learn. If you could prevent someone's pain from happening, would you? (Student response: "Yes!") That's what your stories can do."

The following day a classroom discussion to talk about the homework assignment should be held. The goal of the discussion is to allow the students to share their feelings about what they thought about and to guide them towards answering the question "If you could teach others anything about teasing that you learned from your experience, what would it be?" It is important for each student to identify this answer, so it can provide focus when they begin writing their monologues. The discussion also needs to address
the question “How should you deal with teasing?” Even though how the students responded in real life may not have been ideal, it is important for their own knowledge to identify options that could be used in the future. It’s critical they answer this question because to be effective teachers, it is necessary that they understand the topic they are teaching from the beginning (before teasing occurs), to the end (how do you deal with it), even if it goes beyond what they actually teach.

C. Writing the big story

Students will choose one of the stories about teasing they wrote in their journal or a new one if they desire and will expand it into a monologue. The teacher should have a brief discussion of ethics before letting the students begin to write. The main ethics points are (1) to change names so people can’t be identified by others and to protect privacy

(2) be respectful of others and their choices

(3) do not pass judgment on anyone

The monologue is simply a story from the student’s perspective that describes how they felt and maybe what they learned from the situation.

It is important that the stories have a strong voice from the students (Spandel and Culham, 1994). Here is an example of a lesson that will help students improve their voice in their writing.

Topic: Voice Lesson
Objective: Students will revise their writing sample using the rubric for Voice and will earn all 5s on the rubric criteria. (A rubric is included in this booklet)

Anticipatory Set:
- Introduce the topic
- State objective
- Have students secretly write a paragraph about what they look forward to on
summer vacation
- they will turn it in without their name on it
- Teacher will read several of them to the class to see if they can guess who wrote
the paragraph
- If they guess right ask “How do you know? Does the writing have
personality?”
- List the criteria for voice (personality, honesty, reader interaction, and the need
to be read out loud)

**Instruction and Modeling:**
I. Read two versions of “Jack and Jill”
- Recite the normal version - “Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of
water. Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after.”
- Second version - “Do you remember when we were little? Our friends Jack
and Jill climbed Mulberry hill to get some water. They were so hot because it
was 90 degrees that day. Jack slipped and fell all the way down the hill. Then
the same thing happened to Jill. Remember how scared we were? I’m glad
that’s over.”
- Which one did they think was more interesting? Why?
- Which one did they feel more involved in? Why?
II. Show them the rubric for voice
- point out how you want to try for reader interaction, honesty, personality, and
show why the reader needs to read it.
III. Brainstorm ideas and record them on a large piece of paper of how to shoe
honesty, make it personal, demonstrate reader interaction, and make it need to be
read aloud. (the teacher should have examples if the students have difficulty
coming up with ideas).

**Guided Practice:**
- Using the rubric rewrite “Humpty Dumpty” using voice well
- The class will do this together out loud and write down the answers on the board

**Independent practice:**
- Students will write the first paragraph of their story
- students will use the rubric to decide if the sentences have the characteristics of
good voice or if they could be improved.
- students should mark on their draft positive example and explain why they
chose what they did
- after students decide this on their own, they will find a partner and explain to
them why they chose the sentence they did
- have students take turns sharing and revising their work

**Closing set:**
- have students share and explain their examples with the group
- encourage them to continue to think about voice in their stories

D. Revise

Once students have a completed draft, they can begin the process of revisions.
The first draft should be a teacher revision. The teacher can use the included rubric for evaluating voice in writing. The teacher may also provide feedback about the content or presentation of the story.

The second draft can be a group feedback draft. Students break up into small groups and share their stories out loud with the group. The peers will then provide feedback for the reader. It may be necessary to teach the students how to give effective peer feedback. Five recommended steps (Sheridan, 1995-1996. 84.) include:

- Use a nice voice
- Look at the person
- Wait for an appropriate time
- Start by saying something positive (something the person is doing well)
- Provide a suggestion for changing something in particular

The students can then revise their stories before submitting them back to the teacher.

E. Application process

Once students have their stories in a fairly polished state, the teacher may lead the class through the application procedure, as previously described. There should be a review of the different roles need in theater to make a successful performance. Students could reflect back on the plays they read or viewed at the beginning of the unit for ideas. The teacher and the selection committee will assign various role to students and rehearsals may begin.

G. Rehearsals

Twenty to thirty minutes a day should be devoted to rehearsing and making the sets. The actors and actresses in scenes and monologues should be responsible for submitting a small list of desired props and set needs to the stage crew. If there needs to be a small set constructed, the entire class can participate in designing and calculating
how to accomplish that goal. Such opportunities are wonderful and practical math and problem solving exercises. The group of students in each scene need to modify one monologue (chosen by the teacher) so they can all have a role in it.

H. Perform!
Audiences

The product that the students produce would be appropriate for other classes in their grade, other children in the school, and for parents or friends. If the administration is willing to hold an assembly during the day for students and another performance at night for parents and friends, that is ideal. If younger students are watching the performance, it would be advisable for their classroom teacher to teach them how to perform the role of an audience member. Geraldine Brian Siks includes a diagram in her book *Drama With Children* highlighting the different roles of the audience members (Siks, 1977 142).

Knowing when and why to clap during a performance is not a skill that comes naturally to all children. This diagram provides a framework for teaching how to be a good audience member. If the play is performed for students in the school, ask the other
teachers to have their students fill out a quick evaluation form. This information is very useful for making improvements and modifications in the future.

**Getting Administrative Support**

It is ideal to have administrators, such as the principal and vice principal involved in the process from the beginning. If they help during the application process they could watch the play grow from scattered pieces into a unified production. When it is time for the performance, the more publicity, the better. Flyers should go home to all of the parents in your school to invite them to the evening performance. Notifying the local newspaper about the performance is a good idea. Administrators love good publicity for the school. Involving parents during the creative process might also gain administrative favor. Parents could help monitor students during rehearsal times or bring their own special talents to contribute to the project. Parents could also make programs and organize snacks for after the performance. Most likely, the parent’s positive feedback about the performance will make administrators very happy.

**Possible Modifications**

The process of developing a play addressing social issues doesn’t have to take place in a classroom or with an entire class. It is possible to use this unit with both large and small groups. An example of a large group process has been provided, although a small group is favorable. With a group of 5-6 students all of them can share their monologues, act in the scenes, and design a set. The students would get more hands on experience with a smaller group.
This unit could be used as an after school group. Students school wide could form a drama club. The addition of children of varying ages adds an interesting element to the production and would carry a wider appeal to audiences. The more variety of people there are in a cast, the more likely it is that any given audience member will be able to find someone to relate to.

Membership in the group working on a production like this could be used as reward for students. Students may need to fulfill certain expectations to be allowed to participate in this special group. Some students would be highly motivated to participate in a group that teaches the same skills (reading, writing, etc.) in different ways.

If the group of students involved in this unit are highly capable and motivated, the teacher can encourage the students to design and make costumes, use stage makeup, and build more elaborate set. Adding special effects gets kids very excited.

If the group is old and mature enough, the teacher should consider adding an interactive component to the production. The interactive component gives the audience a chance to try out different options of responding to a certain situation in a safe environment. The students perform their play of monologues and skits and then hold a workshop with the audience. The performers ask the audience to discuss their thoughts and feelings about what they just witnessed. Then the audience brainstorms ways to change the scenes presented (since the actors didn't always do the "right" thing). After a list is generated, volunteers come up to the stage and reenact the scene with the performers and change or respond to the conflict in the scene. The audience members then get a chance to express how they felt their intervention worked or didn't work. All of the audience members will remember the performance more vividly because they
actually interact with it (physically, mentally, or emotionally), rather than merely listening.

To summarize the purpose of this unit, peer theater is a unique and powerful educational experience for children of all ages. Drama is a subject that is traditionally viewed as separate from academics. However, this unit proves that drama can be integrated into numerous aspects of a classroom curriculum. The teacher doesn't need to be an expert on drama to teach this unit because acting isn't the focus. The focus is that children get the opportunity to tell their stories in a way that is both positive and educational for themselves and others.
References


Additional Resources


Voice

5  Paper - Really Individual and Powerful
My paper has lots of personality. It sounds different from the way anyone else writes.

- I have put my personal stamp on this paper; it's really me!
- Readers can tell I am talking right to them.
- I write with confidence and sincerity.
- My paper is full of feelings and my reader will feel what I feel.
- I'm not afraid to say what I really think.
- You can tell that I wrote this. No one else sounds like this!

3  Paper - Individuality Fades In and Out
What I truly think and feel only shows up sometimes.

- Although readers will understand what I mean, it won't make them feel like laughing, crying or pounding on the table.
- My writing is right on the edge of being funny, excited, scary or downright honest - but it's not there yet.
- My personality pokes through here and there, but then gets covered up again.
- My writing is pleasant, but a little cautious.
- I've done a lot of telling and not enough showing.

1  Paper - Not Yet Me
I'm not comfortable sharing what I truly think and feel yet.

- If you didn't already know, it might be hard to tell who wrote this paper; you can't really hear my voice in there yet.
- I'm not comfortable taking a risk by telling you what I really think - I've taken the safest route by hiding my true feelings.
- My paper is all telling and no showing at all.
- I've held myself back by using general statements like: 'It was fun.' 'She was nice.' 'I like him a lot.'