

Elk Grove Unified School District
Visual and Performing Arts Resources
Theatre

Grade 5: Lesson 4

Title: The FTP: Creating a Living Newspaper

Standards Addressed

Artistic Perception

Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Theatre

- 1.1 Use the vocabulary of theatre to describe theatrical experiences, such as *sense memory*, *script*, *cue*, *monologue*, *dialogue*, *protagonist*, and *antagonist*.
- 1.2 Identify the structural elements of plot (exposition, complications, crisis, climax, and resolution) in a script or theatrical experience.

Creative Expression

Creating, Performing, and Participating in Theatre

- 2.1 Participate in improvisational activities to explore complex ideas and universal themes in literature and life.
- 2.3 Collaborate as an actor, director, scriptwriter, or technical artist to create formal or informal theatrical performances.

Historical and Cultural Context

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Theatre

- 3.3 Analyze ways in which theatre, television, and film play a part in our daily lives.
- 3.4 Identify types of early American theatre, such as melodrama and musical theatre.

Aesthetic Valuing

Responding to, Analyzing, and Critiquing Theatrical Experiences

- 4.1 Develop and apply appropriate criteria for critiquing the work of actors, directors, writers, and technical artists in theatre, film, and video.

Connections, Relationships, Applications

Connecting and Applying What is Learned in Theatre, Film/Video, and Electronic Media to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers

- 5.1 Use theatrical skills to dramatize events and concepts from other curriculum areas, such as reenacting the signing of the Declaration of Independence in history/social science.

Time: 50 minutes

Floor Plan: Open classroom area.

Materials Needed:

- Overheads from this lesson
- Short current event articles from the newspaper or one current event that the entire class has studied (It may be helpful to choose a news article that is simple and has a photo.)

Purpose:

The students will create dramatizations from current news events (or historic events) in the tradition of the Living Newspaper productions of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP).

Background:

During the Great Depression, one aspect of the New Deal was the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which established the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) in 1935 to employ professional theatre artists. It flourished for four years as the first and only government sponsored and subsidized theatre program in the United States. In its peak, it employed 10,000 professional theatre artists in 40 states. About 1,000 productions of all types were mounted, 65 percent of them free to the public and schools. Actors earned about \$24.00 a week.

The repertoire of the plays was vast, including revivals of classics as well as new and experimental works like the Living Newspaper. One of the best remembered productions was *Macbeth*, directed by Orson Wells.

The Living Newspaper was one of the most creative forms of the FTP. Each play identified a social problem and called for specific solutions. Newspaper clippings, magazine articles, speeches, and other documents were used to create the dialogue. One of the better known Living Newspapers was "Power" which told the story of how the Tennessee Valley Authority was going to improve life for the "little man" by providing affordable electricity. Other topics of Living Newspapers included slum housing, health, natural resources, labor unions, and civil rights.

Key Questions:

How will the students collaborate to create a performance based on the Living Newspaper of the FTP?

Vocabulary:

- * *Antagonist*—a person, situation, or the protagonist's own inner conflict that is in opposition to the protagonist's goals.
- * *Character*—the role played by an actor as he/she assumes another's identity (physically, mentally, and emotionally).
- * *Dialogue*—the lines or words spoken in a play between two or more characters.
- * *Plot*—the "what happens" in a story. The beginning events, middle events, and the ending in which the problem is resolved.
- * *Protagonist*—the main character of a play and the character with which the audience identifies most strongly.
- * *Playwright*—a person who writes plays.
- * *Rehearsal*—to practice in preparation for a public performance.
- * *Script*—the written dialogue, description, and directions provided by the playwright.

<u>Steps of the Lesson</u>	<u>Thoughts for the Teacher</u>
1 Set up purpose/goals What was the Federal Theatre Project?	How are you making your purpose clear to the students? By presenting historic background and clear directions.
2 Engage students See Step 1 below.	How can I effectively get the students interested in the content of the lesson? Through the use of students' prior knowledge of the Great Depression and interesting historic photos of theatre.
3 Learning Sequence See actual learning sequence below.	What are the BIG idea(s) of your presentation? How will students understand/experience the material that you present? Students will create a Living Newspaper.
4 Assessment See assessment described below.	How will you allow your students to deepen their understanding of content presented? (Reflect, revise, retell, refine, practice) Students will create and perform a news event for peers and teacher. Rubric will be used in scoring.

Actual Lesson Sequence

1. Introduce the general time history period of the Great Depression. Ask questions such as: Have the students heard of the Depression, and what do they already know? Share photos of the Federal Theatre Project and the Living Newspaper with the students. You may require them to take notes.
2. Working in groups of 3-4 students to dramatize a current event or historic event using movement and dialogue. *In your group, write four sentences that explain what happened first, second, third, and how the story is resolved. Improvise dialogue that explains the events of the story. Each person in your group must speak at least four times.*
3. *Rehearse your play and present the play. If time allows, you may write down your script.*
4. Modification: If it is too difficult for the students to create dialogue, have them create tableaux for each plot event instead.

Assessment:

Teacher and peer observation.

Advanced: Student includes, in a complete manner, all the required elements of the assignment, including a clear sequence of events. The presentation clearly communicates the news event and is executed with a high degree of skill in areas of theatre performance, such as projection, articulation, and movement. The piece is very unique, expressive, and entertaining.

Proficient: Student includes, in a complete manner, most of the required elements of the assignment, including a clear sequence of events. The presentation clearly communicates the news event and is executed with a competent level of skill in areas of theatre performance, such as projection, articulation, and movement. The piece is entertaining.

Needs Improvement: Student does not include the required elements in a complete manner. A few required elements, such as a clear sequence of events, may be missing altogether. The presentation does not clearly communicate the news event and may not be executed to an adequate level in all areas. The piece is very interesting to view. The students have difficulty with projection, articulation, and movement.

Needs Major Improvement: Many required elements are missing or poorly executed. Piece is tedious to view. Performance lacks clarity, the students do not move with purpose. Piece demonstrates little understanding of the news event. It may be very short and painful for the audience to view. The students fail to achieve basic performance requirements of projection and articulation.

Other Considerations:

- Use short current events.
- Use current event topics that the students are already familiar with.
- Use current or historical events which have a photo or picture attached.

Possible Extensions:

- Write formal scripts of current events or history events.
- Read Scene 15 from “Power” aloud with the class.
- Divide the class into groups and each group presents one scene from “Power.”
- Historic events could be used in place of current events.
- Short summaries of historic events or short stories would work well.
- A long event could be divided into sections and presented by groups.

Sources:

Brockett, Oscar, History of the Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts, Allyn and Bacon, 1999. ISBN #0-205-28171-0.

Cook, Wayne, Center Stage, New York, Dale Seymour Publications, 1993. ISBN #0-86651-575-5.

<http://www.newdeal.fer.org> “The Great Depression and the Arts”

<http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/fthome.html> Library of Congress

<http://www.gmu.edu/library/specialcollections/federal.html> Federal Theatre Project Materials

SCENE FIFTEEN-A

(Farmer and Wife)

(FARMER seated at cut-out table on which is a lighted kerosene lamp. He is reading; **WIFE** is kneeling, measuring a knitted sock to his foot, carrying out the action as seen in the last movie flash.)

WIFE: [Fictional character] Beats me how you see to read in that light.

FARMER: What's the matter with it?

WIFE: What's the matter with it? You're squinting down your nose like you had a bug on the end of it!

FARMER: Same light I been usin' for the last twenty years.

WIFE: Yeah, and look at you now. Them glasses are thick enough to fry eggs under if we ever got any sun in this dump!

FARMER *(quietly)*: Andy Jackson used a lamp like this, Nora.

WIFE: Then it was just too bad for Andy. Besides, they didn't have electricity in them days.

FARMER *(folding paper and putting it down)*: Maybe I better read durin' the day.

WIFE: How?

FARMER: What d'you mean, how?

WIFE: How you gonna read when you're out there plowin' from sunup to dark?

FARMER: Maybe I better quit readin'.

WIFE: That's right. Don't do nothing about it. Just give in and don't make no fuss, and everybody'll love you.

FARMER: What you want me to do, Nora? The wick's up as high as it'll go.

WIFE: Never mind the wick! How about a couple of nice little electric lights around here?

FARMER: Now, we been all over that before. And there ain't nothin' I can do about it.

WIFE: Ain't there?

FARMER: You heard what Joe Frank said. His farm's bigger'n mine. He can use more lights, and the company told him, nothin' doin'.

WIFE: So, you and Joe are gettin' up a little club to read in the daytime, eh? *(She rises)* Suppose they told you you couldn't have any air, would you stop breathin'?

FARMER: What's that got to do with it?

WIFE: Light's just as important as air.

FARMER: Sure it is, but...

WIFE: Don't "but" me! Why don't you go out and do somethin' about it?

FARMER: Nora, if they don't want to string lights out to my farm I can't make 'em. **(FARMER rises.)**

WIFE: Who said you can't? Who says you can't go up there and raise holy blazes until they give 'em to you! Tell 'em you're an American citizen! Tell 'em you're sick and tired of lookin' at fans and heaters and vacuums and dish-washin' machines in catalogues, that you'd like to *use* 'em for a change! Tell 'em... *(She stops)*... What do you think Andy Jackson you're always talkin' about would do in a case like this! *(As he stands, convinced, she claps his hat on his head, and gives him a push)* Now go on out and tell 'em somethin'!

(FARMER exits.)

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-B

(City Man and Wife)

LOUDSPEAKER: In nearby Chattanooga. *(Lights come up on HUSBAND and WIFE. City dwellers are seated at table on which is an electric lamp. He reads and she peels potatoes.)*

HUSBAND: Well, here it is. First of the month. *(Picks up envelope from table, reads bill, emits a long whistle)* Six ninety-two! Say, what do you do with the juice around here, eat it?

WIFE *(Flippantly)*: No, darling. We burn it.

HUSBAND: But good Lord, I only pay thirty-five dollars a month rent for this whole house!

WIFE: What's that got to do with it?

HUSBAND: It seems all out of proportion, one-fifth for electricity. If this keeps up I'll have to cut down my life insurance.

WIFE: That'll be nice.

HUSBAND: Of course, if I had the kind of wife who turned the lights off when she walked out of a room I wouldn't have to. *(Rises, stands left of table.)*

WIFE: I did that once and you almost broke your leg going back into it.

HUSBAND: Well, we've got to cut down. Our bills shouldn't be more than three dollars a month.

WIFE: That's what I say.

HUSBAND: Don't say anything, do something about it!

WIFE: All right, let's throw out the radio.

HUSBAND: How can I hear any football games if you do that? Let's stop using the vacuum.

WIFE: And me get down on my hands and knees? Not on your life!

HUSBAND: How about the washing machine? You used to send the stuff out.

WIFE: Yeah, and your shirts came back without cuffs. Remember?

HUSBAND: Well, we've got to do something. You got any ideas?

WIFE: I got one.

HUSBAND: What is it?

WIFE: Did it ever occur to you that maybe those electric companies are charging too much?

HUSBAND: Sure it did. But what can I do about it? Bump my head against the wall?

WIFE: No, but you can complain to the State Electric Commission.

HUSBAND: Look, dear. I'm just one little consumer. How can I fight a utility?

WIFE: Tell the Commission. That's what they're there for.

HUSBAND: Why, they won't even listen to me.

WIFE *(rises)*: Make 'em. Tell 'em that your taxes are paying their salaries. Tell 'em that that's what they're there for, to regulate things. Tell 'em you're sick and tired of making dividends for somebody else and it's about time the little fellow got a look-in some place. And tell 'em... *(She stops)*... tell 'em you won't give up listening to those football games on Saturday afternoon! *(She thrusts hat at him)* Now get goin'! *(He does.)*

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-C

(Farmer and Electric Company Manager)

(Lights come up on desk. MANAGER of Electric Company is seated at desk. FARMER, left of desk, stands.)

FARMER: [Fictional character] My God, I've got to have lights, I tell you!

MANAGER: [Ibid.] Certainly, Mr. Parker. You can have all the lights you want. All you've got to do is pay for the cost of poles and wires.

FARMER: But I haven't got four hundred dollars! And my farm's mortgaged up to the hilt already. (*Desperately*) Can't you see? If I could only get juice I could get me an electric churn and make enough money to pay for the poles!

MANAGER: I'm sorry, Mr. Parker, but that's the way we operate. I'm afraid I can't do a thing for you.

FARMER: And I got to go on livin' the rest of my life with a kerosene lamp and a hand churn like my grandfather did when he came here?

MANAGER: Until you can raise the cost of the equipment.

FARMER (*desperately*): Isn't there anybody else I can talk to?

MANAGER: I'm the manager here. There's nobody else.

FARMER: Isn't there any other company I can go to?

MANAGER: We're the only one in this part of the State.

FARMER: Then when you turn me down I'm finished?

MANAGER: That's right. (*A pause.*)

FARMER: By God, the Government ought to do something about this!

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-D

(*City Man and Commissioner*)

(*Lights up on desk. COMMISSIONER seated, MAN standing, right of desk.*)

MAN: [Fictional character] Mr. Commissioner, my electric bills are too high!

COMMISSIONER: [Ibid.] Have you had your meter tested?

MAN: Yes, I've had it tested twice. The meter's all right, but the bills are too high just the same.

COMMISSIONER: Mr. Clark, you're not paying one cent more for your electricity than anybody else.

MAN: I know that! That's what the trouble is, we're *all* paying too much!

COMMISSIONER: Mr. Clark, the company that sells you is working on a margin of seven to eight per cent. We consider that a fair profit. And so will you, if you're a business man.

MAN: Look, Mr. Commissioner. I'm not asking you to argue with me on behalf of the utilities. I am a taxpayer! I'm paying your salary I want you to go and argue with them! What's the Commission for, if it's not to help guys like me?

COMMISSIONER: Mr. Clark, the law permits any private enterprise to make a fair return on its investment.

MAN: It does, eh?

COMMISSIONER: And the law permits any company to charge any rate so long as that fair profit is maintained.

MAN: It does, eh? Well, tell me this: If laws like that are made for utilities, why aren't laws made to help people like me?

(*General lighting on entire stage reveals FARMER, his WIFE, and CITY WIFE in their former positions.*)

FARMER'S WIFE: *And me!*

CITY WIFE: *And me!*

FARMER: *And me!*

Blackout

SCENE FIFTEEN-E

(Parade and TVA Song)

LOUDSPEAKER: May 18th, 1933. The United States Government answers. [*New York Times*, May 19, 1933.]

(Lights pick up CLERK of Senate.)

CLERK *(reads):* The Tennessee Valley Authority is created for the purpose of: one, flood control of the Tennessee River Basin; two, elimination of soil erosion, and three, the social and economic rehabilitation of the swampland and hill people of this district; four, *the generation and distribution of cheap electric power and the establishment of a cost yardstick.* *(As the CLERK reaches the words "the social and economic rehabilitation" orchestra plays the TVA song very softly. When the CLERK reaches the words "cost yardstick" lights fade on him. A motion picture of TVA activities and water flowing over the Norris Dam appears on the scrim, and through the scrim and on projection curtain upstage. A parade of men and women comes on stage behind scrim, singing the TVA song. Many of them carry lanterns. Red, yellow and amber side lights pick up the parade. They circle the stage and continue the song until act curtain falls, which comes down on movie of second large waterfall.)*

THE TVA SONG: [Used with permission of copyright owner, Jean Thomas.]

My name is William Edwards,
I live down Cove Creek Way;
I'm working on the project
They call the TVA.
The Government begun it
When I was but a child,
And now they are in earnest
And Tennessee's gone wild.

All up and down the valley
They heard the glad alarm;
The Government means business-
It's working like a charm.
Oh, see them boys a-comin',
Their Government they trust,
Just hear their hammers ringin',
They'll build that dam or bust!

For things are surely movin',
Down here in Tennessee;
Good times for all the Valley,
For Sally and for me.

Curtain

Movie continues on front curtain until end of film.