Melodrama

Part 2 – Stock characters

Duration: 2 weeks

Overview

Students will explore and express a range of stock characters using vocal dynamics, exaggerated movement and gestures in the style of traditional Melodrama. They will focus on developing skills in developing and sustaining engaging characters through theoretical and experiential tasks.

| Stage 4 outcomes | Stage 5 outcomes |
| --- | --- |
| A student: | A student: |
| 4.1.1 identifies and explores the elements of drama to develop belief and clarity in character, role, situation and action  4.1.2 improvises and playbuilds through group-devised processes | 5.1.1 manipulates the elements of drama to create belief, clarity and tension in character, role, situation and action  5.1.2 contributes, selects, develops and structures ideas in improvisation and playbuilding |
| 4.1.3 devises and enacts drama using scripted and unscripted material | 5.1.3 devises, interprets and enacts drama using scripted and unscripted material or text |
| 4.2.3 explores and uses aspects of dramatic forms, performance styles, theatrical conventions and technologies to create dramatic meaning | 5.2.3 employs a variety of dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques, theatrical conventions and technologies to create dramatic meaning |

[Drama 7-10 Syllabus](http://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/drama-7-10-syllabus) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003.

Content

Melodrama developed as a theatrical form in the 19th century in France and quickly became the dominant theatre form in Western culture for the next century. Its primary purpose was to entertain and enabled form escapism for the middle and lower class people who were experiencing long working hours and poor conditions. They used simple plot-lines, exaggerated characters, music and spectacular effects to heighten emotional impact on the audience. As time has progressed, contemporary melodramas have emerged through superhero films such as Batman, Superman and Catwoman. While the acting style is subtler and the narratives are seemingly more complicated, the stock character continues to be exaggerated and, at times, clichéd.

The stock characters with Melodrama are a reflection of clearly defined and socially constructed gender roles. Through participation in workshop experiences and reflection, students are encouraged to embody the physical traits of these characters and question whether the female to male gender roles has changed over time.

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| Cross-curriculum content and key competencies |
| Gender |
| Information and communications technology |

Embedded elements of drama

* Movement
* Role & Character
* Language
* Sound
* Audience Engagement

Assessment

All activities require students to demonstrate their learning and are all assessment for learning activities.

Teaching and learning activities

The following learning experiences are structured to provide students with a practical and theoretical understanding of Political theatre.

Snap search

Students will:

* use the internet to research and note in their logbooks, the physical attributes of each stock character in traditional melodrama
* write a reflection in their logbook as to how this would effect the way this character would move on stage and when interacting with others.

Walk like a….

This activity requires students to walk around the room and embody the various stock characters in Melodrama.

1. Students will walk around the room from a neutral position.
2. At different points, the teacher will announce a character-type and students respond physically and begin to walk as this character. Examples include
   1. Hero
   2. Villain
   3. Hero’s sidekick
   4. Villain’s sidekick
   5. Heroine and/or damsel in distress.
3. Encourage students to experiment with:
   1. the speed of their walk
   2. the part of the body they lead with
   3. the weight (light/heavy) of their movement.
4. After experimentation, students can discuss their findings as a class using the following questions:
   1. What did the character types all have in common?
   2. How did the hero move differently to the villain?
   3. What was the difference between a hero and a sidekick?
   4. As actor’s, why is important to ensure our characters are physically clear for the audience?
5. To extend students skills, you might encourage them to research and experiment with Laban’s efforts when creating stock characters.

Watch & learn

Watch the YouTube clip [Muppet Melodrama](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw-W48n06Lw) (00:03:09).

Students will:

* identify the characters present in the clip
* record and describe the movement, action, voice of each character
* discuss the impact using these characters has on audience engagement.

Typical responses to this video might include:

* heroes, villains, damsel in distress are evident.
* exaggerated voice and movement
* easily identifiable characters that the audience.

Fakebook profile

Provide students with a copy of the **Stock characters in melodrama handout.**

Students will:

* read through the information and highlight key points
* select one character and create a character profile for one stock character using either the resource provided or by using [Classtools.com’s Fakebook profile creator.](https://www.classtools.net/FB/home-page)

To extend students’ skills, you may ask them to begin to physically embody their character and, as a class, hot seat (interview) the character.

Building character

Introduce students to the concept of stance and remind them that each person, stands and moves differently according to a range of factors, including age, gender, status, strength and emotion

Students will:

* find a space in the room and adopt a neutral position
* think of one character and slowly internalise this character by following their teacher’s prompting questions below
  + What is this character thinking about?
  + What is their breathing pattern like?
  + Where is their eye-level/focus?
  + Are there any parts of their body that feel different to the rest?
* be guided to move and adjust their physical stance by following their teacher’s prompting questions below
  + How does this character stand when they are relaxed?
  + How does this character stand when they are afraid?
  + How does this character stand when they fearless?
  + How does this character stand when they are oppressed?
* cycle through these stances and store them in their muscle memory
* develop a specific character walk by following their teacher’s prompting questions below
  + How big are the steps your character takes?
  + How heavy/light are their steps?
  + What part of their body breaks the space first?
  + Where is their focus as they walk?
  + How do your limbs move as you walk?
* experiment with how their character walk changing accordingly to reflect the emotions and situations guided by the questions below
  + How does your character walk change when happy?
  + How does your character walk change when panicked?
  + How does your character walk change when afraid?
  + How does your character walk change when defeated?
  + How does your character walk change when triumphant?
* experiment with how their character interacts with other characters when walking around the space.

Reflection

Students will:

* discuss if the gender norms used in melodrama reflect contemporary culture and the impacts it might have if the gender roles were reversed
* write a creative writing piece that swaps the male and female gender roles using a simple narrative and employing stock characters often evident in melodrama
* read their writing aloud and discuss how the change in the character’s gender influences the audience’s journey.

Differentiation

Extension

Students could:

* identify and discuss how the stock characters of Commedia dell’arte are evident in the television series The Simpsons. What is the connection between Commedia Dell’arte and Melodrama?
* research and use Laban’s effort analysis to assist in the creation and physicalisation of their stock characters
* hot seat stock characters created using the Fakebook resource provided
* develop short improvised scenes that utilise the stock characters of melodrama.

Life skills

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| Life skills outcomes |
| A student: |
| LS. 1.1 explores characters, roles, situations and actions through drama activities |
| LS 1.3 participates in drama experiences in which role-taking is used to enhance their understanding of ideas and feelings. |

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Students could:

* create a list of heroes, villains and damsel’s in distress in popular media and entertainment and embody these characters
* step into the ‘shoes’ of a stock character by using costumes and props.

Evaluate

Feedback is formative during the lessons.

Reference list and resources

[Drama 7-10 Syllabus](http://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/creative-arts/drama-7-10-syllabus) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003.

Fakebook profile creator <https://www.classtools.net/FB/home-page> , date accessed 05/04/2018.

**Handout: Stock characters in Melodrama**

Melodrama cue cards, <http://www.heroandvillain.com/pdf/CueCards.pdf> date accessed 05/04/2018.

Muppet melodrama, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw-W48n06Lw>, date accessed 05/04/2018.