Brecht

Political theatre

Duration: 2 weeks

Driving question

Who is Bertolt Brecht and what are the conventions of Epic Theatre?

Overview

Students define political theatre and understand theatre as a powerful vehicle for communicating social, political, cultural and historical messages. They learn to adjust self-devised performances based on the theatrical conventions and techniques of Epic theatre and analyse how the Verfremdungseffekt changes the audience’s experience of a theatrical work.

| Stage 4 outcomes | Stage 5 outcomes |
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| A student: | A student: |
| 4.1.2 improvises and playbuilds through group-devised processes | 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 |
| 4.3.2 recognises the function of drama and theatre in reflecting social and cultural aspects of human experience | 5.3.2 analyses the contemporary and historical contexts of drama |

[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

Political theatre is a term that has been used to refer to different forms, theatrical styles or performances that comments on political/social/cultural issues, political action or protest that has a theatrical quality to it. Within this lesson sequence student’s learn about Bertolt Brecht’s notion of Epic theatre. They learn about the Verfremdungseffekt and act as practitioners to explore ways of balance between disengagement and distancing.

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| Cross-curriculum content and key competencies |
| Civics and citizenship |
| Difference and diversity |
| Literacy |
| Information and communications technology |

Embedded elements of drama

* Structure
* Symbol
* Tension
* Dramatic Meaning
* 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.

Connect and Predict

Within this task, students predict the content of this sequence.

Students will:

* form a semi-circle in front of the whiteboard/projector.
* watch the [Protest Montage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7Tv_HbCvcY) on YouTube.
* as they are watching students are to use their logbooks to predict what the content of this lesson sequence will involve. Common responses include:
  + protest
  + socio-political issues
  + political issues
  + inequity
  + war
  + social unrest
* introduce students to the concept of foreshadowing and highlight how this video highlights the style of theatre they will be exploring.

Defining political theatre

1. Review the definition of political theatre provided on slide 3 of the KASCA Political Theatre – Brecht PowerPoint.
2. Monitor students’ understanding of key words by defining any unfamiliar words and recording definitions in their logbooks.

Finding issues

Remind students that political theatre is good political theatre reflects current social, cultural or historical issues as it makes the performance more engaging and relevant for the audience.

Students will:

* brainstorm social and political issues individually
* share their findings with a partner and add to any new findings to their brainstorm
* share their findings with the class and add any new findings to their brainstorm
* review and interpret a range of images and ask students to interpret the social, cultural and political issue being explored. Examples might include:
  + political posters
  + images of war
  + images of poverty
  + images of homelessness
* after students have a varied list of political issues to choose from, divide them into groups of three to six and ask them to select one issue, research it and devise a short one-minute performance that has a linear narrative using this issue as a stimulus.

Understanding Brecht

Students will:

* use their devices to access [Bite Size – Epic Theatre and Brecht](https://www.bbc.co.uk/education/guides/zwmvd2p/revision) study guide
* students are to summarise the information presented by completing the Epic theatre – conventions handout.

Non-linear narrative performance task

Students will:

* re-structure the work they devised at the beginning of this sequence, converting it from a linear narrative into a non-linear narrative
* while watching each other’s work students will reflect on the impact a non-linear narrative has on the audience
* reflect and record their findings in their logbook.

Conventions performance task

Students will:

* adjust the work they devised at the beginning of the sequence by selecting up to four conventions listed on the Epic theatre – conventions handout and applying them to their performance
* watch each other’s work and reflect on the impact these conventions have on audience engagement
* reflect and record their findings in their logbook.

Reflection

Students will:

* write a letter to a friend describing what political theatre is. Ensuring they use the conventions of a letter, which include:
  + a postal address followed by date in top right corner
  + a greeting which is typically 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam' or their full title if they have met, spoken, or written before. For example, 'Dear Mr Brown' or 'Dear Dr Jones'
  + ending is always 'Yours faithfully' if you have opened with 'Sir' or 'Madam' or 'Yours sincerely' if you have used a name
* in their response include an example of how/why/when they might use political theatre
* use examples from the workshop as evidence.

Differentiation

Extension

Students could:

* research the socio-cultural and political context that led to the development of Epic theatre
* stage scenes from plays by Brecht and discuss the themes and issues communicated within the text.

Life skills

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| Life skills outcomes |
| A student: |
| LS. 1.2 a student explores a variety of playbuilding activities. |
| LS 2.1 a student explores dramatic forms and theatrical conventions. |
| LS. 3.2 identifies and responds to the elements of drama or theatre in performances |
| LS 3.3 recognises that drama and theatre performances can communicate meaning and ideas. |

[Drama 7-10 Syllabus](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/drama_710_syllabus.pdf) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2003.

Students could:

* identify current issues in the news and media
* create a linear narrative using tableaux of a current social, cultural and political issue. Create a montage performance using the tableaux created ad music.

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.

Handout: Epic theatre – conventions handout

Presentation: Political theatre - Brecht

Youtube Clip: [Protest Montage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7Tv_HbCvcY)