

ACTIVATING BLOCKING CONCEPTS

Turning blocking concepts and vocabulary into an interactive experience

- Grade:** K – 8
Goal(s): The understanding of basic blocking vocabulary and effective large group blocking configurations
Materials: A large open space for movement

DESCRIPTION:

The following 6 activities focus on developing a shared understanding of the terms used when blocking a scene, as well as, exploring several effective blocking configurations that are helpful when staging a Shakespearean scene for a large number of performers.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. A Focus Tool

- Establish that the following activities are all about teamwork and are done using movement with no sounds.
- Explain that whenever the groups hears the statement, “Places please.”, each member of the ensemble should find themselves standing tall, arms at their sides, with no movement or sound.
- Invite the students to move freely around the room. Randomly call out, “Places please.”
- Increase the challenge by attempting to fool the group by stating, “Places” or any other variation that is not “Places please.”
- Invite the group to gather into the center of the room creating one large ameba - “Places Please.”
- Establish that the room will represent a proscenium stage and that the performers are currently standing center stage. Indicated the following locations:
 1. The Audience
 2. Up-stage and down-stage
 3. Stage-right and stage-left
- Instruct the ensemble that you will challenge their ability to work together by calling out a stage direction and then the entire ensemble, moving as one organism, must find the correct place on the stage without talking or gesturing to their fellow team members. Additionally, the ameba must move slowly enough that no one is left behind or knocked over during the challenge.
- Randomly call out stage directions. When necessary, remind the group no sound and no gesturing. Continue using “Places please.” to bring focus to the ensemble before each new stage direction.



- Increase the challenge by calling out more complicated stage direction such as:
 1. Up-stage right and/or up-stage left
 2. Center-stage right and/or center-stage left
 3. Down-stage right and/or down-stage left
- Increase the challenge by tasking the ameba move as a unit when turning or gesturing such as: ask the ameba to point stage-right but all at the same time using their up-stage hand. In 3, 2, 1!
- When necessary, remind the group no sound and no gesturing. Use “Places please.” to re-establish group focus through all of the blocking activities in this resource.
- Invite to the students to sit down, relax, and share their individual reactions to having to move as an ensemble.

2. The Bread Line

- Instruct the ensemble to create a straight line crossing center-stage with no sound and no gestures, on the count of – 3, 2, 1! “Places please.” This may take a few attempts. Use “Place please” to create focus. Remind the ensemble that are working with no sounds or gestures.
- Inform the ensemble that this configuration is sometimes called, The Bread Line. The Bread Line is most successful when each person in the line creates a unique frozen shape with their body and when all of the shapes in the line vary in height and level. Ask the ensemble to maintain their straight line but create a unique frozen shape which varies in height from the shapes on either side of them – 3, 2, 1!
- Increase the challenge by providing a focus along with circumstances:
 1. Everyone’s focus is stage left and everyone is trying to catch a glimpse of the marriage procession of Duke Theseus and Hippolyta.
 2. Everyone’s focus is stage right and everyone is yelling for the execution of Richard II.
 3. Everyone’s focus is down-stage center where Romeo and Juliet are dead.

3. The Bull’s Eye

- Instruct the ensemble to divide in half and create an outer and an inner circle with no sounds or gesturing. In 3, 2, 1! “Places please.” This may take a few attempts. Use “Place please” to create focus. Remind the ensemble that are working with no sounds or gestures.
- Inform the ensemble that this blocking configuration is sometimes called the Bull’s Eye. Ask the outer circle to sit down.
- Instruct the inner circle to turn and face the audience. On the count of “3, 2, 1” the performers will say the following line in unison, “Double, double, toil, and trouble;” In 3, 2, 1! Repeat until the group has the line committed to memory.
- Instruct the inner circle that they now will take on the body and voice of a witch and as ensemble say the line, “Double, double, toil, and trouble;” In 3, 2, 1!
- Ask the inner circle to sit and the outer circle to stand facing the audience. On the count of “3, 2, 1” the performers will say the following line in unison, “Fire burn and cauldron bubble.” In 3, 2, 1! Repeat until the group has the line committed to memory.

- Instruct the outer circle that they now will take on the body and voice of a witch and as ensemble will say the line, “Fire burn and cauldron bubble.” In 3, 2, 1!
- Increase the challenge by calling out inner or outer circle and the corresponding group must sit or stand all together while saying their line.

4. The Forest

- Ask the ensemble to create 2 to 3 lines facing down-stage toward the audience with no sound or gesturing. In 3, 2, 1! “Places please.” This may take a few attempts. Use “Place please” to create focus. Remind the ensemble that they are working with no sounds or gestures.
- Instruct the performers to move slightly stage-right or stage-left so that no one is directly in front of them. 3, 2, 1! “Places please.”
- Inform the ensemble this configuration is called the Forest. And taking a slight step either to the right or left, to open yourself up to the audience, is called finding your window.
- Randomly assign each performer a number 1, 2, or 3. Instruct the ensemble when you call out a number, all performers assigned that number will either sit or stand in unison. In 3, 2, 1! When practicing, remind the ensemble that they are working with no sound or gestures.
- Teach each group one line from the prologue of Henry V:
 1. Group 1 - “Oh, for a muse of fire that would ascend”
 2. Group 2 - “the brightest heaven of Invention,”
 3. Group 3 - “A kingdom for a stage. Princes to act. And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.”
- Challenge the ensemble say their line in unison while standing or sitting as a group when their number is called. Group 2 in 3, 2, 1!
- To increase the challenge add more lines from the speech and assign performers to multiple groups that are either smaller or larger than the original three groups.

5. The Fan

- Instruct the ensemble to divide into 2 groups and create a “V” shape with the point of the “V” located upstage and the opening of the “V” facing down-stage. In 3, 2, 1! This may take a few attempts. Use “Place please” to create focus. Remind the ensemble that they are working with no sound or gestures.
- Inform the ensemble that this configuration is called the fan. Explain this configuration is excellent for creating clear sight lines for the audience allowing them to see the entire ensemble, as well as, the main action of the scene.
- Instruct the performers that on the countdown of “3, 2, 1,” they each create frozen statue reflecting the body and emotions of roman senators reacting to the assassination of Julius Caesar. The assassination is taking place in the center of the “V”. In 3, 2, 1!

6. The Triangle

- Invite the ensemble to create an audience. Explain the blocking concept of “turning out” (cheating out) - performers keeping their body turned toward the audience so that the audience can easily see facial expressions

- and hear lines. Demonstrate turnout while walking and standing in the playing space.
- Explain the blocking concept of the “counter” – a small adjustment a performer makes to either stage-right or to stage-left to avoid blocking a fellow scene partner or themselves from the audience after someone in the scene changes their physical position. Ask for a volunteer to help demonstrate countering a fellow performer’s movement in the performance space.
 - Divide the ensemble into groups of 3 performers and have each group decide who will be assigned A, B, or C. Instruct each group they will have 5 minutes to create a 3 line scene in which each person in their group has one line.
 - Instruct each group to move into the performance space and create a standing triangle in which the character standing at the triangle’s points (A, B, and C) all are turned out toward the audience. In 3, 2, 1! Move around the space helping groups that need adjustments.
 - Instruct each group that when a person in the scene has a line, they cross to either tip of their triangle, turn out and say their line. The performer listening to the line, must counter as the character with the line arrives at the tip of the triangle. There will be 3 crosses and 3 counters. Characters standing at A, B, and C must stay turned out for the entire scene.
 - Ask for one group to volunteer and invite all of the other groups to form an audience. Guide the volunteer group through the activity with side coaching to ensure that they make 3 crosses and 3 counters.
 - Inquire if there are any questions about the exercise and its requirements.
 - Instruct the ensemble that they will have 5 minutes to rehearse the exercise.
 - Invite the ensemble to reform an audience. Have each group perform their scenes demonstrating the skills of turning out and countering.
 - After all groups have performed, inquire what individual performers learned about blocking during today’s activity

SUGGESTED VARIATION(S):

This lesson plan will be easily completed during an extended block class or during an afternoon rehearsal. If the lesson plan is used during a 45-minute period, break the lesson plan into 2 or even 3 sections. End each session with a group discussion about the concepts explored and how they relate to being in an ensemble performance of a Shakespearian scene.