

Pre-Performance Lesson Plan: Power and Revolution - Exploring Ethics through Embodied Play

Lesson Overview: *Matilda the Musical* is about a determined and wise little girl who discovers her own power, dares to challenge authority, and stands up for what is “right.” But not everyone has the same ideas about what makes something “right” or “wrong,” “good” or “bad.” This pre-show lesson plan is designed to spark discussions about ethics and foster empathy among students.

This lesson uses activating dialogue and embodied play exploring the themes of power and revolution that are in *Matilda the Musical*.

Grade Level: 4-8, Length 45 minutes

Materials: Half sheet of paper with the words “strongly agree,” Half sheet of paper with the words “strongly disagree,” chair, ring of keys or similar, blindfold (optional), Activities: Exploding Atom and Keeper of the Keys

Massachusetts State Education Standards:

- Grades 4-8 History and Social Sciences:
 - Standards for History and Social Science Practice: Argue or explain conclusions using valid reasoning and evidence. [PS.6]
 - Speaking and Listening in the Content Areas: Comprehension and Collaboration [SL]
- Grade 8 History and Social Sciences:
 - Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens [8.T4]

Exploding Atom (Embodied Discussion)

1. Have students gather in a standing circle. In the middle of the circle, place the “strongly agree” card. Just outside the circle, place the “strongly disagree” card.
2. Explain that you will be reading statements. Students should move their bodies (like spokes on a bike wheel) to show how much they agree or disagree with each statement. Make sure to read each statement twice and let students move after the second reading.
3. Practice round: Read the statement “Movies are better than books.” After students have moved, ask them to describe the distribution/notice the patterns of where people are standing. Then, allow a few students to share why they chose to stand where they are.
4. Have everyone return to the standing circle. For each of the following statements: read it twice before having students move, ask students to observe the distribution, reflect on why students are standing where they are (you call on specific students, have them talk to a neighbor or in small groups, etc.) It is okay if students change their mind and want to move based on the discussions. Make sure to return to the large circle before starting a new question.
 - *It is okay to tell a lie if it means protecting someone’s feelings.*
 - *It is never okay to break the rules.*

- *Young people are capable of changing things in their world that aren't fair.*
5. After reading through all the statements discuss with your class:
 - *Were there any statements where most of the group felt the same way?*
 - *Were there any statements where we saw a lot of different opinions?*
 - *What might this activity have to do with a musical about a young person who challenges people with power?*

Keeper of the Keys

1. After the discussion, tell students they'll be playing a game called "Keeper of the Keys." Again, ask students to stand in a circle. In the middle of the circle, place a chair and put the ring of keys under the chair.
2. Ask one student to volunteer to be "The Keeper." They will need to sit blindfolded (or close their eyes) and protect the keys from being stolen by the rest of the class. The Keeper protects the keys by pointing in the direction of anyone they think is trying to steal the keys.
3. The rest of the class has to work together to sneak the keys out from under the chair and back to the outside of the circle without the keeper pointing at them.
4. Once someone successfully gets the keys, everyone returns to the circle with their hands behind their back. The Keeper gets 3 guesses to figure out who stole the keys. Play as many rounds as you have time for.
5. After the game, reflect on the following questions with your students:
 - *What strategies did the class use to get the keys?*
 - *What strategies did The Keepers use to protect the keys?*
 - *How might this game be a metaphor for who does and doesn't have power in our society?*
 - *What does this game teach us about teamwork?*

Post-Performance Lesson Plan: Problem-Solver Players - Exploring Problem Solving through Drama

Lesson Overview: In *Matilda the Musical*, our heroine and her friends discover there's a lot about the adult world that's "not right!" This post-show lesson is designed to create dialogue and discover solutions to problems and by putting students in the driver's seat. This lesson uses activating dialogue and tableaux to practice problem solving and elevates student voices

Grade Level: 4-8, Length 45 minutes

Materials: quarter sheets of paper, markers, large open space

Massachusetts State Education Standards:

- History and Social Science Grades 3-5: Determine next steps and take informed action, as appropriate. [PS.7]
 - Engage in academic discussions respectfully with diverse peers.
 - Explain different strategies and approaches students and others could take in working alone and together to address local, regional, and global problems, and predict possible results of these actions.

Snowball and Visual Mapping

1. Gather students in a circle and hand each a slip of paper (a quarter sheet will do) and a marker (preferably markers of the same color to allow anonymity).
2. Tell students that Matilda notices a lot of things that aren't "right" in her world, which are often problems she or her friends face. Ask students to think about a problem that people often face, or something they see that isn't "right" in the world. Ask them to write this idea on their slip of paper.
3. Have students crumple their paper into a "snowball", and on the count of three, gently toss the ball somewhere into the middle of the circle. Students should grab a slip other than their own, and go around the circle reading them aloud so that the whole group can hear the responses.
4. Lay the slips on the floor so that all students can see them. Give students the task to visually map the slips, grouping similar ones and creating clusters. Encourage students to talk out loud their reasons for placing slips where they do.
5. Once the slips are arranged, reflect with the whole group:
 - *What types of problems seem to stand out to us?*
 - *Why are these things problems?*
 - *How might the world be better if these problems were fixed?*

Real and Ideal Images

1. Gather students into a circle and let them know that they will be practicing “frozen images”, which is where they use their bodies and faces to create a picture of an image or idea. You may practice by grouping students by threes and asking to make frozen pictures together of things such as:

- Summer
- Friends
- School

Encourage students to use their whole bodies, faces, levels, energy, etc.

2. Next, remind students of the most important problems that surfaced in their discussion from the previous activity, and let them know they will be creating frozen images of these problems. Place students into groups of 4-6, and give them a few minutes to decide together which problem they would like to explore and then create their image (it can be just fine if multiple groups choose the same problem!). Share the images with the whole class. Prompt viewers to reflect on what they see by asking questions such as:

- *What do you see happening in the image? What does it remind you of?*
- *How does this image make you feel?*
- *What are the group members doing with their bodies to create the feeling?*

3. Ask the students: *what would it look like if we could use powers (maybe like Matilda’s) to magically solve the problems in our images?* Students should work to create an image where their real problem has transformed into an ideal solution.

4. Finally, ask students *how do we move from the real problem to the ideal solution?* Invite the groups to create a series of 3-5 images that begins with their “real” image and ends with their “ideal” image, and transition images in between. Share the full sequence of images with the class.

5. Reflect with the whole class with questions such as:

- *What issues did we explore today?*
- *What forces help to create the problems people face today? What bigger issues impact or shape these problems?*
- *How does change happen in our world? Who are the “Matildas” of the world and what skills or abilities do they use to make change? Who else makes change?*