

Acting Tactics

by Erin McCready

Essential Question

How do actors physically and vocally explore tactics?

Ideal group

Intermediate. Middle/High School. It can be modified for all ages.



Goal/Aim

Students will begin to add layers and variety to their performance. They will understand the steps that need to be made in order to achieve a goal.

Length of Lesson

This would be for a session lasting around 40 minutes to 1 hour.

Materials Needed

Chart paper, large notecards, markers.

Vocabulary Words

Posture: a position of a person's body when standing or sitting.

Gesture: a movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning.

Facial Expression: the feelings expressed on a person's face.

Intention: an aim that guides action; an objective.

Tactic: a plan or action for achieving a goal.

WARM-UP

(5-10 minutes)

Statue activity

Students create statues (individual frozen poses) with verbal prompts from the teachers. Teachers' prompts are familiar character types, personality characteristics and/or emotions. Students focus on expressing the prompt physically, focusing on posture, gesture and facial expressions (or body, hands and face for younger students.)

ACTIVITY 1

(10-15 minutes)

Tactics

An action or strategy carefully planned to achieve a specific end.

1. Brainstorm tactics with your students. I use the question, "What tactics do you use to get your parents to buy you something that they don't want to buy for you?" Suggestions should be verbs, ideally one word and can be expressed physically.

Examples: Beg, Flatter, Cry, Whine, Make a deal, Explain, Throw a tantrum, Be sweet, Demand

2. Write them out on chart paper.
3. Choose the best 5 suggestions and write them on large notecards.

4. Brainstorm tactics for the parents in the same scenario.

Examples: Ignore, Distract, Explain, Tease, Yell, Punish, Give the evil eye, Put your foot down, Threaten

5. Choose the best 5 suggestions and write them on large notecards.
6. Have the class create statues for each tactic. Students focus on expressing the tactic physically, focusing on posture, gesture and facial expressions (or body, hands and face for younger students.) Students should try to remember their statues for the next activity.

ACTIVITY 2

(10 minutes)

Please/No

Now students will improvise the scene between parent and child, exploring the tactics.

1. Assign two actors, one parent and one child. The child can only use the word, "Please" and the parent can only use the word, "No".

2. Assign a director for each actor. The director will hold up a tactic notecard and that will be the tactic that the actor will express physically and vocally, using their one word. After the actors explore one tactic with 3 exchanges of “Please” and “No”, the director will switch notecards to a new tactic. The actors will change their physicality and voice with each tactic.

NOTE: Restricting the actors’ words allows them to focus on and commit to the physical and vocal choices to express the tactic. For enhancing improvisation skills, re-do the scene and now the actors can improvise other lines than just “Please/No”, but must be inspired by the tactic. For example: Students must only create dialogue about making a deal with their parents when the tactic is make a deal and then switch to flattering dialogue when the director changes the tactic to flatter.

ACTIVITY 3

(10 minutes)

If the class is familiar with a scene, improvise that scene with “Please/No” and different tactics. You can choose one line from the script for each actor instead of “Please/No”.

Share Time

The students in the audience will observe and should comment on how they saw the actors’ physicality change with each tactic.

Restate what was learned/practiced

Actors use tactics to try to achieve their character’s goal. They must use their body and their voice to communicate their intentions. Actors will use posture, gesture and facial expression.

Homework/Writing reflection

If your class is rehearsing a scene or script, the actors take notes on their scripts, choosing their own tactics for their characters. Then, the class watches the scenes and tries to figure out which tactics the actors used. An interesting activity is for actors to choose opposite tactics to the content of the line. For example: Choosing a tactic of flatter for an angry line or threaten for “I love you.”

Discussion questions

Which tactic did the actor play most effectively? What physical or vocal choices did you observe with the different tactics? How do an actors' tactics enhance the scene?

Teaching standards met by this lesson

New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theatre
Theatre Making: Acting; Developing Theatre Literacy
Making Connections Through Theatre
Working with Community and Cultural Resources
Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning

Erin McCready has been a resident of Brooklyn and teaching artist in NYC public schools for over 10 years. She has taught residencies in acting, playwriting, directing, Shakespeare and theatrical design in over 100 schools with the 92nd Street Y, Theatre for a New Audience, Roundabout Theatre Company and others. The creation and development of Brooklyn Youth Company to empower young people through theatre-making has been her dream and passion for many years.

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