

Residency Sample Lesson Plan

Teaching Artist Name	Sarah Liane Foster
Course Title	Circus in Literature and Movement
Course Type <i>(please check all that apply)</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cultural arts residency <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Integrated arts residency Partnering Course: Language Arts
What grade(s) is the residency for?	Grades 1, 2, 3, 4
Schedule Information	6: Number of sessions (6 – 8 total) 45-60 min: Length of each individual session 4.5-6 Total hours

Course Description:

Students engage with the Dr. Seuss book *If I Ran the Circus*. Through prompts inspired by the book, students will create their own circus character through movement, and then create and present short, 2-character scenes. Through this lesson, students connect with literature through movement, gain vocabulary for understanding and describing human movement, and practice collaboration.

Materials & Space:

Open space, the book *If I Ran the Circus* by Dr. Seuss, big paper, marker.

Big Idea:

Actors and circus performers draw on observations of shapes and movement found in art and in the world around us to create characters and scenes. Making these observations and bringing them to life through movement in space fosters creativity, cultivates our ability as cultural critics, and gives us new tools for self-expression.

Lesson Objectives and Student Learning Assessment

Learning Objectives	Assessment Criteria
1. Create a theatrical character through movement.	1. Move and freeze with a variety of movement leads (head, chest, belly); use facial expressions and gestures to show the character's emotions.

2. Collaborate with 1-3 partners.	2. Communicate ideas to group, verbally or physically; respectfully listen to and try partners' input.
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Vocabulary (optional):
Character, lead, neutral, collaborate.

Instructions:

Sample DAY 1:

Opener:

- Show photos of circuses around the world, and the cover of *If I Ran the Circus*. Talk about circus: see if students have been to a circus and what they saw; share personal experience with circuses in several cultures.
- Explain that when a circus comes to town, an ordinary place like a parking lot or vacant lot turns into an extraordinary place, and performers go from acting normal in outside life to acting in unusual/extraordinary ways in the circus.
- Transition to warm-up: we are going to warm up our bodies so that we are ready to move in extraordinary ways.

Activity titles and descriptions:

- Physical Warm-up: Lead the students through movements of face, head/ neck, chest/ shoulders, belly/ hips. Practice standing in neutral between movements.
- Walking with Leads: Practice moving and freezing. Introduce the idea of a “lead” – the part of the body that meets the world first when a character moves through space. Have the students tie an imaginary string to their noses and pull it gently forward until their noses come in front of the rest of their bodies. Try walking and freezing this way. Call out observations of how they are walking. Freeze, and ask students to name types of characters who might walk this way based on what they see in each others’ movement and what they see/feel in their own. Repeat this exercise for a chest lead and a belly lead, going back to “neutral” (no lead) in between each one, and then have students pick their own lead to try – either one of the three we practiced together, or a new one, like chin or toes.
- Reading the Story and Character Play: Read the book with the students. During the story, ask them to identify leads in the book’s characters from the pictures and written descriptions. After reading the book, ask students to list a few characters they remember. Have them turn around while they choose a character from the book or imagine their own circus character, and turn back around when they have it. Have everyone walk around the room, first in a neutral walk, and then with a lead that goes with the character they chose. Then ask them to try walking and freezing in that lead with a series of emotions: happy, sad, and a student suggestion.
- Creating the Scene: Introduce the idea that now we are going to play with putting these characters in a scene, and to do this we are going to collaborate. Explain that working well together is very important in theatre making because that’s what allows us to express feelings, characters and stories together to an audience. Briefly show the structure of a simple clown scene to students: one character is going to be walking and the other

character is going to be sneakily following them. Generate together a few ways of a character hiding, a few ways for them to accidentally reveal themselves, and what they say when they are caught. Explain to them that they will soon be collaborating in small groups, and go over the criteria for successful collaboration, writing it on the big paper for them to see. Put the students in groups of 2-4. Give them a moment to decide together who will be leading and who will be following, and which 2 hiding techniques and 1 reveal technique they will use. Practice this sequence a few times all together, calling out the steps, or give them time to practice independently in small groups if it seems like they are ready for independent work. Ask them to make sure they keep their character walk as they do the scene.

- Presentation of Scenes: Showing: one half of the room watches the other half do their sequence, and then switch. Ask each audience group what character leads they noticed.

Closer

- Make a circle. Sum up what we all just did, asking students to remember elements of the lesson – observations from the book, character leads, working together to make the scene.

Remaining Sample Sessions:

Day	Daily Goal	Supporting Activities
2	Character voice, communication.	Connect back to <i>If I Ran the Circus</i> and voices of those characters. Create character voices from animal sounds. Explore character status. Use voice and status in a scene, emphasizing communication in putting the scene together.
3	Collaboration and trust through basic partner acrobatics.	Read together: <i>Watch Out for Flying Kids</i> , by Cynthia Levinson. Discussion of social circus. Collaborate through weight-sharing and simple pyramid shapes.
4	Juggling and balancing, innovation.	Connect back to <i>Watch Out for Flying Kids</i> . Scarf juggling. Feather balancing. Innovation: create your own trick.
5	Storytelling through mime, problem-solving.	Read together: <i>Marcel Marceau, Master of Mime</i> , by Gloria Spielman. Mime technique. Problem-solving: going through an invisible obstacle course with mime.
6	Ensemble movement, and debrief.	Practice ensemble listening through group movement. Students review skills they have learned, choose one to practice more. Perform a brief entrances, skill shares, and exits in groups. Debrief circle.