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Culturally Responsive Drama

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ABSTRACT

What does culturally responsive teaching look like in the drama classroom? As a former NYC public high school teacher and current arts practitioner and educator, I've learned that implementing lessons where students feel valued and empowered, focusing on empathy and ensemble in the classroom, removing the teacher from a central classroom role, and actively listening are all facets of both theatre education and culturally responsive teaching. The following article details lists of dramatic activities that provide pathways into students' points-of-view and voices. They are specifically formulated to help create empathy among students and promote risk-taking and perseverance. It is my hope that this article, along with its coordinating website, will serve as a toolkit for educators wanting to incorporate cultural responsiveness in their drama classrooms but are struggling with the "how."

INTRODUCTION

It was November 2020. The pandemic was in full force. My family and I had moved temporarily out of New York City and were living in a small suburban town in Central New Jersey. I was listening in on a Zoom class that my son, an intelligent first grader, was taking. It was art class and the teacher was explaining Thanksgiving and the origins of the holiday. Naturally, my ears perked up; I was curious to hear how she would tackle this complicated moment in history. I was immediately disappointed. Her assignment was to have the students draw the "Pilgrims and the Indians." Sigh.

Incorrectly using the word "Indian" was not only problematic in general, but it was also specifically fostering and teaching inaccurate history to my child. I knew the importance of properly labeling a particular group of people to prevent stereotypes and encourage cultural understanding and sensitivity. As a drama teacher and social justice advocate, this was important to me on many levels, and I was eager to use this as a teachable moment. I emailed the teacher and sent along articles and information about the plight of Native Americans and the danger of mislabeling communities from less dominant cultures. She responded politely, thanked me, and said simply, "I wasn't aware of this." That got me thinking: is it possible that some teachers don't have the language or educational background to truly respect and understand how the dominant culture and worldview were shaping their curriculum and their teaching?

Because of this formative moment as a parent, I shifted focus to my identity as an educator and theatre teacher. I wanted to take action. For nine years prior to this moment, I was a drama teacher in an urban high school in New York City. I worked with hundreds of diverse students and planned my units with that diversity in mind. I saw how tweaking my lessons to celebrate student uniqueness and valuing other voices and perspectives made an incredible difference in how the students navigated their time through school. My drama lessons—with cultural consciousness in the foreground—established a sense of safety and belonging, and built empathy among my students.

It was time to put my knowledge and experience into action. I often heard of teachers having interest and excitement for culturally responsive teaching (CRT) but they simply didn't know where to begin.

I decided to create a formula for teachers who wanted to expand their knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy, specifically in the drama classroom. I created a workshop and a website to serve as a toolkit for teachers to incorporate cultural responsiveness in their classrooms. It was specially designed for those who were struggling with the "how." The website (www.culturallyresponsivedrama.com) is packed with lesson plans, charts, and checklists that will help even non-drama teachers find a way into this important aspect of teaching. In this article, I examine (through a reflective narration) culturally responsive pedagogy in the drama context and document several examples of how to engage in this process with young people. These sample lessons, detailed later, show teachers how to bring rich cultural content into their curriculum in a way that expands students' knowledge, interest, and respect for the group being featured.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Teachers have a key role to play in creating culturally inclusive classrooms that involve all members, whatever their identity. Quality culturally responsive teaching enhances students' achievement and well-being and helps create environments, curricula, and instructional methods that validate and reflect the diversity, identities, and experiences of all students. Culturally responsive teaching stresses the importance of:

- students finding their own voices in classrooms;
- students being encouraged to bring who they are into schools; and, finally
- respect for the family background, culture, and prior experiences of everyone concerned, both students and teachers (Berry and Candis, 2013).

What exactly is culturally responsive teaching and how does it connect to drama education? As defined by teacher-educator Zaretta Hammond, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a research-based approach that makes meaningful connections between what students learn in school and their cultures, languages, and life experiences. These connections help students feel valued and empowered, enable them to access rigorous curriculum, and encourage the development

of higher-level academic skills (Hammond, 2015). Most teachers can recognize the obvious cultural differences such as foods, holidays, arts, and clothing—differences that, much like the tip of the iceberg, are clearly visible above the water. Less visible are the different ways in which we interact with others and the ways our cultures influence our understanding of the world. These more nuanced differences might include how we understand and define concepts like responsibility, education, family, and success. These hidden aspects of culture can cause misunderstandings and cross-group conflicts, impact teacher-student and student-student relationships, and create hard-to-identify barriers to academic content matter.

There are countless ways that this teaching framework can greatly benefit students of all ages. The following are a few reasons to begin this type of instruction immediately. CRT can benefit students because it:

1. builds cultural competence and strengthens students' ethnic identities;
2. promotes a sense of safety and belonging;
3. helps validate and reflect the diversity, identities, and experiences of all students; and
4. maximizes students' academic achievement by integrating their cultural references in the classroom (Milner et al., 2019).

Now, back to the school in New Jersey. When I approached this teacher, and later the principal, they told me: "We are culturally responsive! We teach the students about Martin Luther King, Jr.!" As I swallowed back a laugh, I told them that cultural responsiveness is more than teachers celebrating differences by integrating information about famous people and cultural artifacts of various marginalized groups. This is bigger than a Native American bulletin board to celebrate Thanksgiving or Black History Month. With these, it's like saying once the month is over, we'll get back to our regular scheduled programming of the dominant culture.

Thus, a *meaningful* multicultural education must go beyond saying that we're a "melting pot," having an ethnic food celebration several times a year, and acknowledging a few well-known historical figures. It's important to get beyond heroes and holidays and to expand past the anecdotal mentioning of non-dominant groups. As Jones (2022)

states, this:

> environment unequivocally asks students to leave their home culture outside so that it can be erased and replaced with an idealized Black culture that will remain subservient to the dominant, colonial framework of white supremacy. Cultural critique and true self- actualization do not exist in these spaces. (p.7)

Therefore, schools must actually integrate these voices into the everyday curriculum itself. If this is implemented properly, students will begin to value other voices and perspectives that will help them rethink assumptions, stereotypes, and the way things "should be."

And drama teachers have the unique ability to do just that.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN THE DRAMA CLASSROOM

For much of my time teaching and learning in NYC, administrators and universities were constantly talking about teaching in a "culturally responsive" manner. I made it my goal to truly unpack and understand what that means for drama teachers, specifically. The advantages of drama education, in general, include not only academic achievement but also increased cultural understanding, better self-esteem, and a healthier cultural identity (Cannon, 2007). The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) position paper on developmentally appropriate practice states that "dramatic play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence" (2007, p. 14). Drama is also a useful energizer in the classroom where students become active, have fun, and enjoy their learning experiences. A shy student is more easily able to take on an alter ego or persona, different from their reserved self, in order to speak and act. Drama is a valuable tool in text studies to identify literary devices, study the language more carefully, and meaningfully enact words. It also benefits oral skills development (e.g., pronunciation and intonation) and emotional intelligence development (Cannon, 2007).

So imagine the magic that happens when you combine the principles of both drama education and CRT. It seems that implementing lessons where students feel valued and empowered, focusing on empathy and ensemble in the classroom, removing the

teacher from a central classroom role, minimizing teacher-led and whole group lessons, and actively listening are all facets of *both* theatre education and culturally responsive teaching. Dramatic activities are a 'way in' to your students' points of view and voices. They are specifically formulated to help create empathy among students and promote risk-taking and perseverance. Additionally, cultural similarities and differences may become more obvious and more understandable through drama activities (Belliveau, 2006). Thus, **culturally responsive drama** encourages students to gain an understanding of other perspectives, have the experience of being human, and attach appropriate feelings to expressions. It also can help establish rituals and routines to produce a space where students contribute authentically to all aspects of learning and creating. By combining drama and cultural responsiveness, a teacher can benefit from the diversity and strengths of their students and can infuse classroom tasks with new energy and creativity.

I, much like other successful drama teachers, often liken my drama classroom to a 'safe space.' I find it essential to create a learning environment where students feel that taking risks will not result in any type of ridicule or shame. They can take these risks, both interpersonally and skill-based, thus enabling them to engage, connect, change, and learn with their peers. Hammond (2015) provides a detailed understanding of how important safe spaces are for students' brain functioning. If students determine a space they are in to be unsafe in any way, their body receives a distress signal from their brains. That signal then cues the body to create stress hormones, which render learning to be practically impossible. Therefore, it is critical for student learning that teachers build trusting and caring relationships with them "that signal to the brain a sense of physical, psychological, and social safety so that learning is possible" (Hammond, 2015, p. 45).

Drama lessons also help students feel safe**,** and drama teachers who build relationships to foster this safety are more attuned to their students**'** needs and requirements. According to Wanless (2016), when students feel safe in the classroom, "they are more likely to enact self-regulated strategies such as offering ideas, admitting and learning from mistakes, asking for help, engaging in learning opportunities, providing feedback to others, and speaking up" (p. 8).

I write this article drawing heavily on the work of theorist and

teacher educator, Gloria Ladson-Billings. In all of her groundbreaking writings, and specifically in her seminal text, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, she posits that the three aims of culturally responsive pedagogy are **academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness** (1995, p. 469). These three aims have stuck with me as I have navigated through my tenure as a drama teacher who values a teaching practice that explicitly engages with questions of equity and justice. I have witnessed the individual and collective importance of these specific categories and have created lesson plans and workshops that work in tandem with each of these aims. I draw not only from Gloria Ladson-Billings and other leaders in the field, but also from my own knowledge and research that culturally sustaining pedagogy allows for a fluid understanding of the culture of my students.

In the following sections, I will lay out the significance of each of these three objectives, followed by a specific drama lesson plan geared toward the intended goal.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Academic achievement goes beyond simply receiving high grades. It requires the teacher to create a culture and backbone for students to achieve despite possible obstacles. This type of education empowers and enables students to maximize their potential and to work toward excellence personally and with a community. It pushes students to excel, and in many ways, this approach “grants” students permission to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Additionally, students are more likely to stick with challenging tasks and assignments when they believe their effort is a determining factor in their growth. Studies have shown that “grit”-- the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long- term goals-- contributes significantly to successful outcomes. In short, grit is a better predictor of high school graduation and grade point average than IQ (Laursen, 2015). As the great Thomas Edison said, “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work” (Steele, 2016, p. 1). For students to become successful citizens of their local and global communities, classrooms must be transformed to provide intentional experiences for them to learn the knowledge and skills required for career and community participation such as collaboration, problem-solving, grit,

perseverance, and tenacity.

Throughout my time as a high school teacher, I created and implemented many lessons geared specifically toward building students' capacity for perseverance and grit. Teenagers are very likely to encounter obstacles in their learning journey, and if they do, what tools do they have to keep on 'keepin' on'? What can we do as teachers to prepare students to persevere if things go wrong and to sustain interest and effort in long-term goals? Drawing from the book, *Fostering Grit,* teachers should support their students by providing them with "clear tasks, strategies, care, and encouragement" (Hoerr, 2013, p. 6). All of which are outlined and implemented in my original lessons.

The lesson below is one example (of many) that is designed to encourage students to learn to take on a growth mindset—that is, even though mistakes may not be pleasant they help us learn (Hoerr, 2013). If a student were to receive a poor grade or simply forget to do an assignment, this drama activity can guide them to get back on track. The trick of culturally relevant teaching is to get students to "choose" academic excellence and to want to persevere in times of setback. For most students, learning how to respond positively to hindrances is essential. These lessons-- including writing a letter to their future selves-- encourage students to persevere in times of stress, can offer agency over their own accomplishments, and**,** therefore**,** promote academic achievement.

Sample Lesson: Perseverance and Grit—Academic Achievement

Sequence of activities:
Large pieces of brightly colored paper should be hanging around the space

1. Sleepwalker: Ensemble task activity
   Seats will be scattered throughout the space. One seat will be empty. One student is a designated "sleepwalker" whose objective is to sit on an empty seat. The group's objective is to prevent the "sleepwalker" from sitting down by moving from one seat to another. The goal is to prevent the sleepwalker from sitting down for 1 minute.

   Discussion Questions:

- How do we work together to accomplish this goal?
- How do we actively listen to each other's ideas?
- When something goes wrong, how do we respond? (This illustrates how we communicate and what we rely on to communicate—language, movement, eye contact—what happens when those are limited or manipulated?)

2. Walk around the space
   When you encounter someone, make eye contact. Facilitator gives prompts: on a scale of 1-10: 1=slow, 10=fast, and 5=walk. Then 7, then 9, then 3, then 1. Stop.

3. Walk the colors
   Notice the colors hanging around the room. Walk toward the color that you connect to when you hear the following words:
   - Love (Ask a few to share why.)
   - Sadness
   - Anger
   - Boredom
   - Stress (Ask a few to share why.)
   - Passion
   - Art
   - Success (Ask: What is success to you? What does it look like/feel like? Get a few responses.)
   - Failure (Ask: What are some words to describe how you feel when you fail at something?)
   - Perseverance

   Reflection in Pairs:
   Discuss: What is perseverance? What does it look like? What does it sound like? Feel like?

   If helpful, give this definition: perseverance is continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.

4. Small group work
   - Writing exercise: Share a story of a time when something

went wrong. How did you respond to this setback? Did you persevere and move forward? If so, how?
- Share in small groups of 3 or 4
- (ESL adaptation: Meditate. Share out loud with a partner. One partner listens while the other tells their story; then they reverse roles.)

5. Graffiti board (a large, shared writing space used for students to record their experiences and responses)
   - What did you hear your partner say?
   - How does it feel to move through adversity?
   - What does it mean to not give up?
   - (Teacher can add any relevant discussion questions here.)

6. Large group discussion
   What skills or tactics do you use to help you get past difficult moments? How can we develop a "growth mindset?"

7. Letter writing
   Write a letter of encouragement and choose a color from the color wall that makes you remember to persevere.

   This will be a free writing session. The letter is for the student's eyes only. It will not be shared. When a time is challenging, feel things are going wrong, or need words of encouragement, they will read this letter that they address to themselves.

   Prompt: You are to write a letter of encouragement to yourself; it is a motivational letter, a compassionate letter, and a love letter that no one will see but you. Then put it in an envelope, self-address it, and I will mail it out to you. You'll receive your letter in a few months when you aren't expecting it. (*ESL adaptation: Write the letter in your home language.)

8. Optional Performance
   Turn the letter of encouragement into a monologue or a series of tableaux.

9. Closing Circle: Reflection time

Discussion Questions:

- What were some of the topics we explored in this lesson?
- How do we actively listen to each other's ideas?
- In what ways can we apply these topics to our daily lives?

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cultural competence is defined as "the ability to interact effectively with people of diverse backgrounds and different identity groups by being sensitive, appreciative, respectful, and responsive to beliefs, practices, and cultural needs that are different from your own" (Garran, 2013). Making a genuine commitment to cultural competence requires that teachers seek to promote the understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of cultural differences. This can play out in numerous ways in the classroom, yet I tend to believe that the first and foremost is to help students develop their own identities and then guide them to learn who *they* are as individuals. According to Steele and Cohn-Vargas (2013), "students have a sense of identity safety when they believe that their social identity is an asset, rather than a barrier to success in the classroom and that they are welcomed, supported, and valued, whatever their background" (p. 5).

Culturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture and identity as a vehicle for learning. A pioneer in drama education, Dorothy Heathcote asserts that 'living through' a drama experience in real time can change the participants' understanding of their identity (Sayers, 2011), and therefore is paramount in creating cultural competence and community in the classroom. Inspired by these foundational artists and teachers, I believe that identity work is particularly effective for breaking down subject and cultural boundaries. My lesson plans that focus on the importance of identity, encourage students to demonstrate curiosity and articulate personal meaning and significance of their own original work.

It is particularly exciting when we can see this pride for culture and openness of sharing identities manifest in the classroom. I've included a few anecdotes from a recent workshop with seventh graders:

- A student referenced being known as the "quiet Asian girl" in school but with her family and cousins she "doesn't shut up." This sparked the attention of her classmates who began to ask

her questions around her identity and culture.

- Another student used this “I am” monologue as a way of sharing with the class that English wasn’t his first language—something that they (nor I) didn’t know prior to this.
- In the below example, another student wrote and performed the words, “People might think I am toxic, but really I’m trying my best.” I recorded in my personal notes that this student not only had the guts to share deep feelings, but was also met with encouragement and support from her classmates that continued throughout the remainder of the semester.

Culture is steeply embedded within and around each of us and is especially shaped by the social context of drama education. Through these lessons and the vulnerable moments of identity sharing, I witnessed the class become a community who not only supports and lifts each other up, but respects and admires differences.

Sample Lesson: Identity—Cultural Competence

Sequence of activities:

1. Tossing the ball
   Ask the students to stand in a circle. Pass one ball around and ask students to say their names when they receive the ball. Once the ball gets back to you, explain that you are going to begin tossing the ball to someone across the circle. Before they toss it, they must say the name of the person they are tossing it to. Remind students to remember who they threw it to and who threw it to them, as they will need to repeat the pattern. Once the ball gets back to you, practice the pattern at least two more times.

   Once the group seems comfortable, pause to add another level. Pass another ball around (in some way, it should appear different from the first). This time, ask students to say their favorite food when they throw it. Once the ball has made it around, toss it again, maintaining the new pattern.
   - Ball 1—Name
   - Ball 2—Favorite food

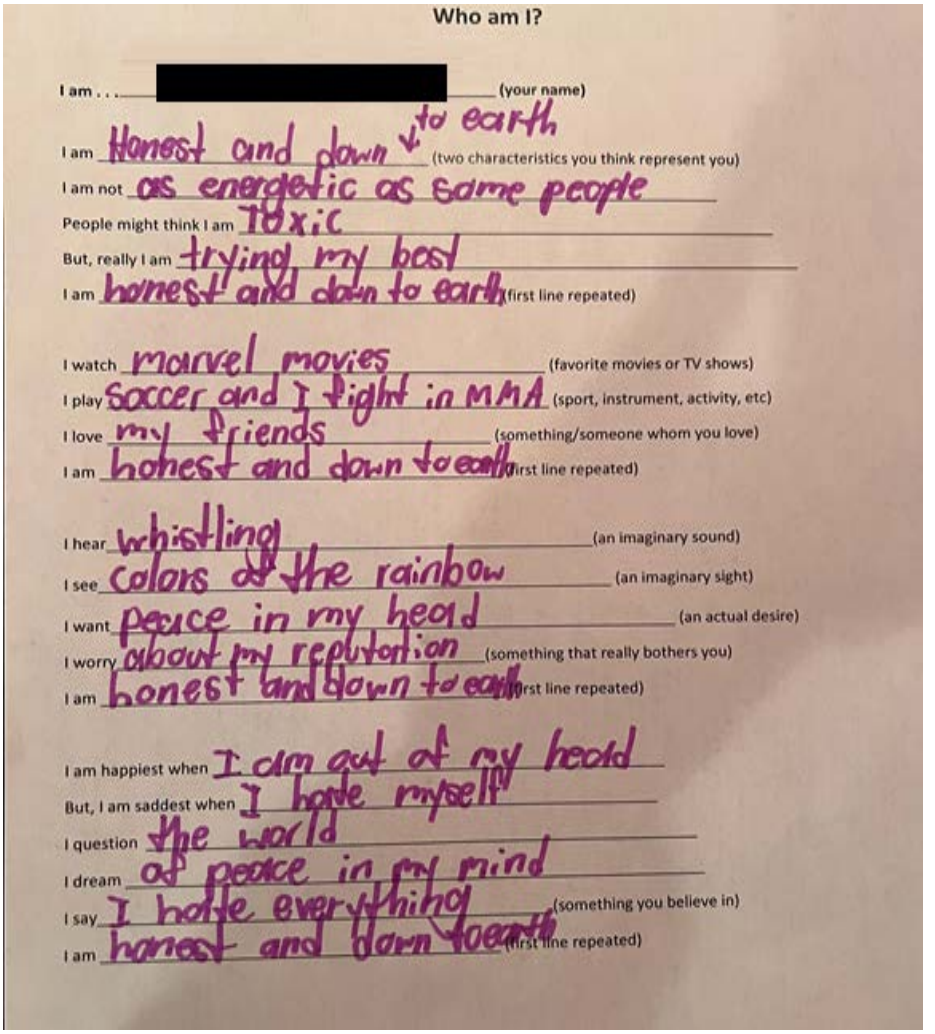
You can modify and add other prompts for balls such as "something you are good at" or "add an adjective that describes you."

2. Blindfolded self-portrait
   - Students will each receive a piece of paper, a colored pencil, and a blindfold. They will have to draw their self-portrait with the blindfold on.
   - Give students one minute to draw their self-portrait with blindfold on. Then take off blindfold and look at drawing.
   - Discuss: How did you see yourself in your head? Did it translate on paper?

3. Role on wall
   Now we will use these self-portraits to learn about ourselves (what's on the inside and what's on the outside).
   - On the outside of your face, write words or descriptions that are obvious to those around you. How do you think people see you? (Teacher model an example—i.e. blue eyes, female, 29, confident, smiling, etc.)
   - On the inside of your face, write words that describe you which are not so obvious to others— things that make you who you are. (Teacher model example—shy, nervous, scared of heights, loves pasta, etc.)

4. "I AM" monologues
   - Students will take the discoveries learned about themselves from the ball game and the role on wall (self-portrait) and turn them into a monologue about themselves.
   - Teacher will hand out the format for "I AM" monologues (see below). Teacher will model their own and then give students ten minutes to work on theirs.
   - Students will break into pairs to share their monologues with each other.
   - Pairs will then volunteer to stand in front of the class and perform their "I AM" monologues.

5. Reflection/Debrief/Close of Class
    - As each student performs, give them specific positive feedback about something you learned about them and/or something you enjoyed about their monologue.
    - Ask students how it felt to share these thoughts with their classmates.
    - What did you learn about a classmate that you did not know before?



Who am I?

I am . . . [redacted] (your name)

I am Honest and down to earth (two characteristics you think represent you)

I am not as energetic as some people

People might think I am Toxic

But, really I am trying my best

I am honest and down to earth (first line repeated)

I watch marvel movies (favorite movies or TV shows)

I play soccer and I fight in MMA (sport, instrument, activity, etc)

I love my friends (something/someone whom you love)

I am honest and down to earth (first line repeated)

I hear whistling (an imaginary sound)

I see colors of the rainbow (an imaginary sight)

I want peace in my head (an actual desire)

I worry about my reputation (something that really bothers you)

I am honest and down to earth (first line repeated)

I am happiest when I am out of my head

But, I am saddest when I hate myself

I question the world

I dream of peace in my mind

I say I hate everything (something you believe in)

I am honest and down to earth (first line repeated)

Figure 1: Sample “I AM” monologue from Identity Workshop, 2022. Anonymous student, grade 7.

SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

I believe that the most important section to focus on here is sociopolitical consciousness—an individual's ability to critically analyze the political, social, and economic forces shaping society and one's status in it (Seider et al, 2019). How can students identify their status in the world without investigating what truly matters to them and their culture? For a teacher, fostering sociopolitical consciousness means giving students the space, time, and permission to explore what is going on inside them. This type of teaching is validating for students in that it affirms and acknowledges the cultural backgrounds, experiences, worldviews, ideals, and values of students and their families. When teachers draw directly from the assets and strengths of the communities of students, they send a real message to students about who (and what) matters in the space (Milner et al, 2019).

In this final lesson plan, I have paid special attention to scaffolding a process where students are able to articulate, in a dramatic way, what the factors are in their lives that matter to them, and which factors cause pain or trouble. Being truly culturally responsive and being aware of all students' needs and desires are very important, vital skills for a teacher to have. A final anecdote to bring this paper to a close: I recently had a female student of color coming in late to class almost every day. She would enter the class, talk loudly to her friend, and disrupt the lesson already in progress. Naturally, I was annoyed. However, as I took a closer look and got to know the student (using the drama lesson outlined below), I learned that she was responsible for feeding her little sister breakfast each morning, getting her dressed**,** and bringing her to kindergarten before coming to school herself via a 60 minute train ride. She used these details of her life to write a powerful and moving solo play. Instead of anger and annoyance, what this student needed was care and compassion. I would have never known about her circumstances if it weren't for the culturally responsive dramatic activities. Even though she was resistant at first, she opened up to the prompt "what pisses you off" in such a profound way. She trusted me, her classmates, and her own creative voice to tell the story of her life and that of her sister. By the end of the year**,** our relationship blossomed**,** and she would come to me with questions**,** solicit advice**,** and even spend some lunch periods in my classroom. I learned from this experience that these students who are often marginalized need care. They need attention**,** and they need

community. If they are constantly punished and labeled, they will not succeed.

This lesson plan (featured below) gives students the power and space to articulate what is important and meaningful for them.

Sample Lesson: Sociopolitical Consciousness — Personal Values

Sequence of activities:

1. Safety exercise
   - Give everyone post-it notes as they enter the room.
   - Prompt them to each complete the following sentence: "I feel safe when…" by writing one thing that makes them feel safe.
   - As a full group (standing to increase energy), have 5-8 participants volunteer to share out one of their sentences.
   - Reference that this can be the beginning of a group contract or to establish rules for the group to create a safe and creative space.

2. Rant game!
   Stand in a circle and go around, each sharing (ranting) about one thing that pisses you off!! It can be large social issue or a small pet peeve.
   - Round 1: 10 seconds
   - Round 2: 20 seconds
   - Round 3: 30 seconds

3. Writing exercise
   In a few words, make a list of:
   - 4 things that piss you off
   - 3 things that inspire you
   - 3 things that break your heart
   - 3 social issues that are on your mind
   - 3 things you love about your culture

4. Circle your topic
   Look over your list and identify one thing that you feel strongly about, right now, that you cannot shake, and about which you

would want to write.

Note: This gives students the space, time, and permission to investigate what is going on inside.

5. Writing exercise
    - On chart paper, write your topic/issue in the middle of the page.
    - Next, write down everything that comes to mind around the topic you chose. It could be a word, person, lyric to a song, drawn picture, a color, thought, or ANYTHING that feels connected to your topic. (This is brainstorming and should not be judged. The purpose of this activity is to get the artist out of self-judgment and use other parts of the senses like impressions, sound, sensations, images, etc.)
    - Think of a specific character that would be struggling and/or in conflict with your chosen topic. It could be you, a neighbor, someone from your imagination, the news, etc. Give the character the topic about which you just spoke. This character gets to express whatever they have been withholding around this topic.
    - Briefly answer the basic W's: Who? What? Where? Why? When?
    - Create a monologue or a story that incorporates the basic W’s you noted.
    - After the group has finished writing their individual monologues, volunteers will be asked to share out or perform their draft. Volunteers can also share the type of character they envisioned.

6. Reflection
    - Express in a few words what it was like to generate a monologue around a topic that you feel strongly about.
    - Share in a few words why it matters that students embrace what matters to them.
    - SHARE NOTE: Our outcome for the day was to have a start to a monologue and know the basic outline of your story—these working drafts are not expected to be polished.

CONCLUSION

I believe that these culturally responsive dramatic lesson plans will help both students and teachers understand and relate to histories and cultures of people different from themselves. This type of work has the power to be transformative; "that is, encourage academic excellence that embraces critical skills for progressive social change" (Lee et al., 1997, p. 9). It is my hope that these lessons will convey politics of possibility and will help marginalized students feel empowered and valued within an environment that is safe and welcoming. The below quotes were taken from a recent workshop I conducted using these lesson plans (personal notes).

> *"I didn't know my teacher actually cared about what I care about."*
>
> *"I loved the self-portrait because no one else knew that I sometimes feel shy when I usually seem so loud and confident."*
>
> *"Now I feel a little less stressed for my math test next period."*
>
> *"This kinda feels like therapy. In a good way."*

This work isn't easy. But, it's important. If all teachers take action to create conditions that bring key components of culturally responsive pedagogy to life, they will inevitably establish classroom environments that reflect diversity, equity, and justice. And of course, drama.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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As an educator, director, and actor with 15 years' professional experience in the arts, Lauren Gorelov believes that the key to successful drama education is maintaining a positive mindset, promoting community and teamwork, and building self-confidence and self- esteem in young people. Lauren holds an M.A. from New York University and a B.A. from Tufts University in Theatre and Communications. She is currently a Doctoral Candidate at NYU Steinhardt in Educational Theatre with a focus on socially conscious and verbatim theatre.