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The Distance Learning Resource**

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The
**DISTANCE LEARNING
RESOURCE**

◀ Warm-ups, Exercises, and Articles ▶



By Kerry Hishon

The Distance Learning Resource: Warm-ups, Exercises, and Articles
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THE DISTANCE LEARNING RESOURCE: Warm-ups, Exercises, and Articles

Teachers, we know you've got so much to think about right now. Your brain is full! Take a break and use *The Distance Learning Resource* for warm-ups, exercises, and articles specific to teaching in a virtual environment.

Distance learning is a new experience for so many teachers and students. But any experience can be used to challenge students to think creatively and problem solve theatrically. Just remember to not compare what you're doing in a virtual environment to what you did in a traditional classroom. Treat the virtual classroom as its own thing with its own challenges and learning opportunities. You can do it!



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Warm-ups



MINDSET WARM-UP: QUESTION OF THE DAY

Starting your drama class with a Question of the Day is a great way to get your students into the “drama class” mindset. It’s a way to help create a routine for your students — they know that as soon as they enter the classroom it’s time to open their minds and challenge themselves to think creatively.

How you present the Question of the Day can be as simple as posting it on a slide deck, writing it in your chat, or if your online platform supports it, writing it on a virtual whiteboard.

What should the content of the Question of the Day be?

Your Question of the Day can be anything that has to do with theatre. It’s best if it ties in with whatever topic you’re currently covering in class, as a method of introducing the topic or as an extension of what was covered in the previous class. Sometimes the Question of the Day can be something totally random, just to get those creative juices flowing.

The Question of the Day should be open ended so students don’t just give one-word answers. (This might happen anyway, but as students get used to the Question of the Day concept, encourage them to expand on their answers.) Some topics may start discussions involving students with different opinions, and that’s great!

Here are some questions to get you started:

1. If you could write a play about any topic, what would you write about and why?
2. What recent movie or television show do you think would make a great stage production?
3. What technical role do you think is the most challenging?
4. What would you do if the lead performer of your show got pneumonia on opening night?
5. How can actors help each other succeed in their roles?
6. If you could go back to a certain era or a different country to learn more about a certain type of theatre (e.g., Greek theatre, Japanese Noh theatre, or commedia dell’arte in Italy), when/where would you go and why?
7. Whose job is easier: onstage performers or backstage crew? Why?
8. What do you think will be the “next big thing” in the theatrical world?
9. How could you present an extreme sport or activity (e.g., downhill skiing, skydiving, or rock climbing) safely and creatively onstage?
10. What historical or literary character deserves to have a show written about them?

And here are some questions specific to distance learning:

1. What are some advantages of studying drama virtually? What are some disadvantages?
2. If you could change one thing about distance learning, what would it be and why?
3. What is something new you've learned since starting distance learning? (This doesn't have to be related to school or drama class.)
4. What is one big change you've noticed in yourself since starting distance learning?
5. What play, movie, television show, or book would be fun to adapt to perform online?
6. What do you miss the most about being in school? What do you miss the least?
7. Given the choice, would you prefer to continue online learning or go back to school?
8. How could theatres make physical distancing work for audiences? For performers? For technicians?
9. What should our school's first in-person production be when we are allowed to have one?
10. If our class were to do a virtual talent/variety show, what would your act be?
11. How do you think people would cope with a pandemic if we didn't have the Internet?
12. What theatrical skills are easiest to study/practice virtually? What are the most difficult? Why?

Once you get into the habit of presenting a Question of the Day, get your students involved in creating the questions. Then once a week you can have a different student prepare the question and determine the method of presenting it to the class.

Finally, how should students answer the Question of the Day? The easiest way is for students to write their answers individually in a journal doc. They could write their answers using the chat function. If your students are comfortable with it, you could have a class discussion about the question. Students could also present their answers in a creative way. You might challenge them to sketch their answers or write them in rhyming couplets. Or you may let them work together in breakout rooms and then present their thoughts in a variety of ways — as a group scene, to the tune of a song, as a mime scene, and so on.

No matter how students answer the questions, make sure they answer them within the first five minutes of class. Your students might feel that they don't have enough time to answer the question when you first introduce this exercise, but stick to the five-minute time length. Eventually their "creativity muscles" will strengthen and answering the Question of the Day will become easier and quicker.



MINDSET WARM-UP: BRAIN DUMP

This low-tech warm-up exercise is perfect for days when your students are feeling stressed, frustrated, or unfocused. You can use it at the start of class to help students clear their brains, or mid-class as a way to interrupt any feelings of negativity. If you are working on any sort of dramatic writing, this activity can help students practice sitting down and writing, even when they are having a tough time doing so. It's also a technique you can use yourself if you are feeling stressed or upset.

MATERIALS

- Writing implement (pen, pencil, marker, crayon — for this activity, it doesn't matter)
- Scrap paper (lined, unlined, or from the recycle bin)
- Timer or stopwatch (teacher only)
- Garbage can (or recycle bin if students have them at home)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Have each student grab a writing implement and piece of paper.
2. Set a timer for five minutes (or whatever time you prefer).
3. For those five minutes, students will free write about everything that comes to mind in response to a question/statement. For example:
 - a. What is something that recently upset you or made you angry?
 - b. What's something that's currently stressing you out?
 - c. Describe a sound that annoys you.
 - d. Describe a celebrity that you just can't stand.
 - e. What is something you'd like to say to someone but feel like you can't?
 - f. Write a letter to someone who has upset or annoyed you.
 - g. What's something you wish didn't exist?
 - h. What do you think is the worst personality trait a person can have?
 - i. What's a task or chore that you absolutely hate doing?
 - j. What's something you wish you could post online but know you shouldn't?
 - k. What's something you wish you could get off your chest?
 - l. Describe a situation from your childhood that you've never really gotten over.

- m. What's something you think is totally unfair?
 - n. What's something you know about that you wish you didn't know?
 - o. What's a possession or experience that someone you know has/had that you wish you could too?
 - p. What's a genre of music that you think is just garbage?
4. This isn't a time for perfect writing or self-censoring. Students should not stress about spelling, grammar, or perfect penmanship. They should not feel that they need to come up with a reason, justification, or solution for the topic at hand if they can't or don't want to. If students are having trouble thinking of what to write, have them write "I don't know what to write" over and over until the timer goes off. If they are really struggling with words, have them draw or scribble how they're feeling. Just encourage them to keep the pen to the page for the full five minutes.
 5. When the time is up, have students put their writing implements away. At the same time, they will all take a deep breath. When you give a signal, they will take their papers and scrunch them up, making lots of noise. They can vocalize if they want to while they're scrunching — it can be a great release of stress and tension.
 6. One by one, students will take their scrunched up paper and dramatically throw it into their garbage can or recycle bin. Students can stomp on and chuck the paper, toss it into the bin like a basketball, rip it into confetti and let it float down, or pick it up with a pincer grasp like it's something smelly and fling it. They can be as dramatic as they want. They can vocalize when they throw out their paper if they feel so inclined.
 7. Ask students: How do you feel now? It's best for students to respond verbally if they're comfortable, either as a full class or in small groups, as their hands might be sore from writing! The goal is for students to experience catharsis. Some students may have a different reaction — see if those feelings are shared with other students.
 8. If you wish, have students complete this exercise at a different time, as homework. Have them submit a brief written reflection (a few sentences is plenty) describing how they felt afterwards, and whether the experience was helpful or not.

Teaching Resources

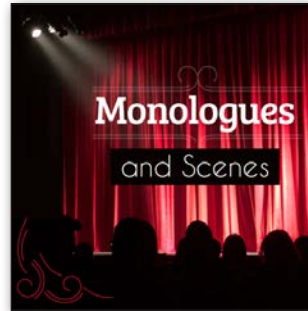
Quality resources to use in your drama classroom



The Drama Classroom Companion

The Drama Classroom Companion is filled with articles and exercises to build the skills needed for theatrical performance as well as real world skills like creative thinking, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.

theatrefolk.com/companion

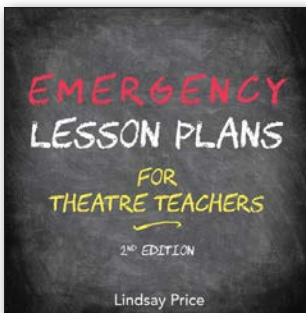


Monologue and Scene Collections

Whether it's for classwork, competitions or auditions, these collections of student-appropriate monologues and scenes can help you find what you're looking for.

All monologues and scenes come from published plays and include running-times, descriptions, character notes and staging suggestions.

theatrefolk.com/collections



Emergency Lesson Plans For Theatre Teachers

Emergency Lesson Plans For Theatre Teachers, 2nd edition gives you the tools and resources you need to confidently leave your class in the hands of a substitute teacher. Customize your lesson plans to suit the specific needs of your class when you can't be there.

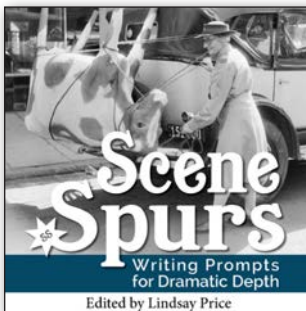
theatrefolk.com/elp



The Student Director's Handbook

Help students take their show from first audition to opening night with *The Student Director's Handbook*. This easy-to-use ebook is full of guidelines, tips and templates designed to help students create a vision, circumvent problems and organize rehearsals on their way to a successful production.

theatrefolk.com/student-director



Scene-Spurs: Writing Prompts for Dramatic Depth

Scene Spurs is a collection of photo-based writing prompts developed by playwright Lindsay Price. The set includes 35 different Spurs along with an instruction guide to integrate them into your drama classroom.

theatrefolk.com/spurs

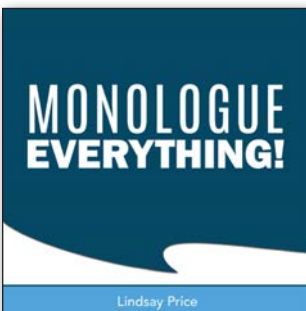


Write Your Own Vignette Play

Your students want to write and perform an original play. You want to include a playwriting unit in your program. But where to start? What if your students have never written a play before? What if you've never written before?

Write Your Own Vignette Play will answer all your questions and more

theatrefolk.com/write_vignette



The Monologue Everything Program

Want your students to write their own monologues? Have you tried to incorporate monologue units into the classroom with less-than-satisfactory results?

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Competition Material

Plays, monologues, and scenes for drama competitions including royalty information and exemptions.

theatrefolk.com/competition



Practical Technical Theater: The Complete Solution for Technical Theater Classrooms

This series of instructional DVDs is perfect for the teacher who feels more at home with a prompt book than a hammer, and would welcome a new, visually oriented teaching tool for their tech classes and production crews.

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