

## PROJECT 2 Theater



**Unit Description:** Focus on oral production of the French language, including sight reading, pronunciation, and intonation. The students will also be exposed to a largely unknown medium from the French-speaking world outside Europe. The ultimate goal of this project is to improve pronunciation while expanding vocabulary. Students will also associate spoken French with

a highly expressive and interactive extra-curricular activity.

**Duration:** 10 lessons (20 hours)

### **FINAL PROJECTS:**

- Individually: a 60-120 second monologue to be played for the class, costume/set designers only.
- Whole class: short theatrical production, ideally fully staged, costumed, and blocked by students with minimal artistic direction from facilitator (approximately 3-4 minutes per actor. Costume/set design will give a five-minute presentation of their concepts for the design based on the text.)

### **WEEKLY LESSON STRUCTURE:**

Homework: since any worksheets assigned will be ungraded, to be completed in class as a group for personal reference, the only homework will be individual memorization of the text

Participation: students will be graded entirely on enthusiasm for class activities and dedication to memorizing their lines and blocking. About 25% of the average lesson will be warmups and focus activities; the rest should be devoted to rehearsal time, instructor circulating among scenes giving feedback.

### **SUGGESTED TEXT:**

*L'Enfant des passages*, by Ina Cesaire.

## WEEKLY LESSON AIMS AND ACTIVITIES:

### Lesson 1

Materials: Stapled packets of each character's text.

Aim: Build trust and rapport among students, introduce text to be performed, note students' individual strengths and weaknesses during warmups for future casting purposes

Icebreaker: To get students speaking to each other and warming up their voices, try this observation exercise. Each student is assigned a partner whom they did not know from outside class and stands with them, so that each student is facing a partner who is about five feet away. Students turn their backs on each other, and Person A

Introduction to course: Distribute theater diagram worksheet (attached) and work as a class to fill in the blanks correctly.

Warmup: "Choix de Voix" (see page 7 for sample text)

In *Choix de Voix*, each student will receive the same text to be performed "cold" for the class after only about 10 minutes of individual prep. The twist is, each student receives along with the text a card reading one of a variety of adjectives that describes the tone of voice with which the student is to perform the piece. (Ex: disappointed, proud, frightened, written on index cards and not to be shown to other students.) Be sure to stress that they are receiving adjectives, not simply words, to reinforce grammatical context. The final phrases should be chosen by the student to fit their individual adjective by filling in the blank with a suggested noun or student's creation.

\*\*\*A *Choix de Voix* exercise can start any lesson as a warmup, or follow another more physical warmup as a cool-down exercise, but note that the text used (invented or existing) must discuss a situation vague enough that it takes on new meaning with each different adjective. (Ex, a scene at a zoo could have any number of emotions reacting to animals, whereas a scene of a doctor performing a checkup may not make sense when performed with the adjective "disappointed".) Class guesses the adjective after each performance.

Rehearsal: Casting

The instructor will give a plot summary of the selected full-length text to the students and show them the character list with descriptions of each one. The leads will be decided based on instructor's judgement of the most energetic performance of the *Choix de Voix*. Secondary roles will be determined by students' preference. Instructor may choose to designate one or more students in a larger class to costume and set design.

Students will leave the lesson with their packet of lines to memorize at home.

### Lesson 2

Aim: Pronunciation

Warmup: Pass the squeeze

Entire class including instructor stands in large circle holding hands. All close eyes, complete silence. Instructor gives a quick pulse of a squeeze to the hand of the student on the left or right. Student passes the pulse through to the next student, the idea being to focus

silently in preparation for working loudly. Ideally, no one will break the chain, and the pulse will reach the instructor through the other hand within sixty seconds. Set goals for students: if they succeed at sixty, try forty-five seconds, etc.

Rehearsal: Students break into their scene groups to practice their lines together with the goal of slowing down the pace of their speech now that they have worked on the words by themselves. Goal: finish each word before moving on to the next; exaggeratedly slow so as to be comprehensible by an audience for whom the text is new.

### Lesson 3

Aim: Pronunciation: Clarity

Warm up: *Mordez le doigt*

Students select a passage at random to read to a partner from a different scene group, but with either their finger or a pen or pencil between their upper and lower teeth. Goal: free up the mouth, use lips more than in normal speech to enhance pronunciation

Rehearsal: Scene groups. Instructor will have to remind them constantly to slow down and exaggerate each syllable. Tell them to police each other; did I understand every word of my co-star's line? Am I speaking at that rate myself?

### Lesson 4

Aim: Pronunciation: Volume, presence

Warmup: All students move to one end of the room, taking turns one at a time reciting 15 seconds' worth of text; the class votes whether there was enough volume to hear the piece  
Mini-lecture: Creating the character: "consistent inconsistencies". Explain how each character should have a signature voice different from the normal speaking tone of the actor. This peculiarity is inconsistent with the rest of the population of the world, but consistent to the identity of the character. Students reflect on the context and emotional nature of their role to create a voice unique to that role (deep, squeaky, accent, etc).

Rehearsal: Scene groups, ideally one scene per room as the students practice projection with their new voices.

### Lesson 5

Aim: Blocking: Gestures

Warmup: *Serpent*

All students get in single file. The leader of the line chooses where, and more importantly, how the line moves. The body of the line must imitate every movement and noise: shuffling/skipping/gliding, silent/mooing/singing, and especially the hand motions. This should

get silly; that's the idea. After thirty seconds, the leader goes to the end of the line and the next person in line becomes the leader

Rehearsal: In scene groups, decide together what kind of gestures of the characters will correspond with their lines. Goal: hands never at sides unless playing a definitively nervous/uptight character.

### **Lesson 6**

Aim: Blocking: locomotion in relation to co-stars

Warmup: Sitting, leaning, standing: group by group, students perform their scene for the class, however, each of them is given a beginning posture such as lying down, or squatting, or leaning on something. Though they begin in this position, the first character to speak must change his or her position to adopt that of another character from the scene, at which point the movement waterfalls as the second character must change his or her original position and so forth. No two characters must have the same posture for longer than a few seconds of transition. Goal: create interest in the scene with dynamic movement.

Rehearsal: If this has not already developed organically, students should incorporate

### **Lesson 7**

Aim: Vocal Expressivity

Warmup: Oscar-winning performance

All students receive the same 20-second text to read cold. After a 5-minute prep, three to six volunteers are chosen to perform the piece for the class with blocking and gestures. After each performance, instructor gives constructive criticism, the goal being that each performance becomes more expressive, clear, and interesting than the previous rendition. Class votes for best performance award winner after all performances are given.

Rehearsal: Scene groups for majority of period. In the final 30 minutes, costume designers introduce to the whole class their vision for the costumes, same for set design. Homework: bring designated pieces (scarf, required prop, etc) for following lesson, study lines with blocking of set in mind.

### **Lesson 8**

Aim: Blocking: locomotion in relation to set

Warmup: *Choix de Voix 2* (instructors: note degree of improvement from *Choix de Voix 1* for consideration in the grading process)

Rehearsal: Students run scenes once as usual, then for the rest of the period are individually consulted by the costume/set designers to ensure the costume honors the mood of the characters' performance.

### **Lesson 9**

Aim: Dress rehearsal

Warmup: Individual prep, then group Pass the Pulse.

Dress rehearsal: Students should have the piece completely ready for exhibition for an audience. If no formal performance is scheduled, this will be the performance graded for energy and focus.

## **Lesson 10**

### Exams:

Active quiz: Divide class into two teams. Each team sends a representative to the front for each question before hearing the topic. Instructor gives a blocking cue (ex: dans les coulisses), and team representatives race to follow cue. Tests vocabulary and teamwork, as stumped representatives may tag-team a teammate to answer in their stead. Other questions may be open-ended, such as, "What are three things a performer could do with his or her voice to make the text more engaging?"

Design presentations: any costume and/or set designers will give a short oral presentation on their creative process in developing their unique aesthetic for the play, showing a thorough familiarity with the piece by citing examples in the text which called for specific props, furniture, costume details, etc.

Additional warmup and activity suggestions:

<http://improvcyclopedia.org/>

[http://artswork.asu.edu/arts/students/tb/05\\_01\\_warmups.htm](http://artswork.asu.edu/arts/students/tb/05_01_warmups.htm)

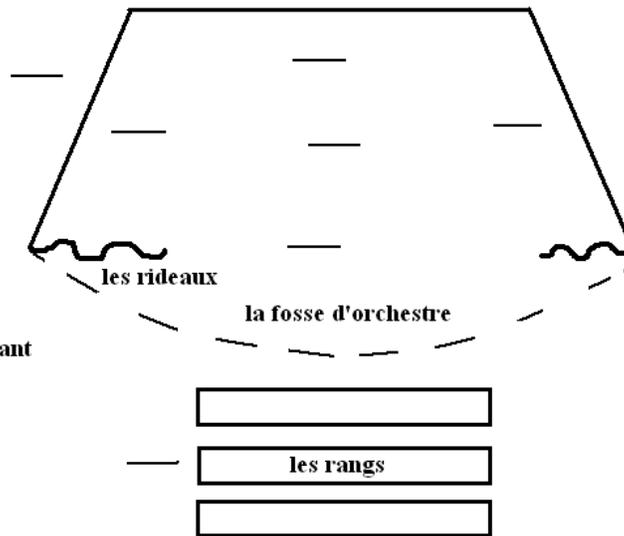
**\*\*\*Questions? Contact Sarah Witman: [ssw246@nyu.edu](mailto:ssw246@nyu.edu)\*\*\***

## Vocabulaire du Théâtre

- 1) **stage**: la scène
- 2) **house**: la salle
- 3) **stage right**: côté jardin
- 4) **stage left**: côté cour
- 5) **upstage**: l'avant-scène
- 6) **downstage**: l'arrière-scène
- 7) **backstage**: dans les coulisses

### Autres

- cue** (v): en avant  
**prompt**: souffler (v), souffleur (n)  
**stage fright**: le trac  
**blocking**: le «blocking»; instructions concernant les mouvements des joueurs sur la scène



***Choix de Voix***

Tiens, j'ai quelque chose à te raconter. Tu te souviens du tableau que j'ai peint dans le cours d'art la semaine passée ? Je l'ai donné à Philippe hier parce que j'avais trop de choses dans mon casier. Mais je viens d'entendre qu'il a fait 250 copies, et tu sais ce qu'il a fait ensuite? Il est revenu à l'école pendant la nuit, et aujourd'hui les couloirs sont couverts de ma toile. Elle me semble très différente maintenant que je la vois en nombre. Quel(le) \_\_\_\_\_!

catastrophe

jour

choc

bêtise

honneur