

Lesson Sample: High School Tech Theatre, Perform/Create

Elements of Scenic Design is a basic lesson plan designed to work in a high school level introductory technical theatre course. It should be noted, this plan is written with adaptability in mind, and should be used as a framework around which to design individual lesson plans based on the specific student group being taught.

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title: | Elements of Scenic Design |
| Length of Class: | Approximately three 90-minute class periods |
| Skill Level: | Beginner, adaptable for all levels |
| Domains: | Perform and Create |
| Standards: | <p>HS1.T.P2.B: Select and apply specific technical elements to create a design for a theatrical work.</p> <p>HS1.T.Cr2.B: Examine and justify original ideas and artistic choices in a theatrical work based on critical analysis, background knowledge, and/or historical and cultural context.</p> |
| Objectives: A. Know B. Understand C. Do | A. Students will know the basic terminology needed in scenic design (i.e. upstage, downstage, flat, proscenium, etc.) B. Students will understand how this terminology applies to their specific theatrical work and how to use it in an actual practice design. C. Students will create small practice designs for a specific theatrical work and will be able to explain and justify their artistic choices. |
| Instruction: | <p>Activating Strategy:</p> <p>Set up a gallery walk around the classroom with images of sets from various productions (these can be pictures from previous school productions, professional productions, or basic drawings, as long as they are all fairly different). Have students answer the following questions based on their observations of the sets:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does this set suggest about the possible socioeconomic status of the characters? 2. What does this set say about the location of the scene? 3. What might be happening in this scene? How can you tell? 4. What does this set suggest about the time period of the play? |

5. What interesting or unique elements do you notice about this set?
6. What does this set tell you about how the location may affect the plot of the play?

Give students several minutes to complete the walk before coming back to their seats. Ask students to answer the questions based on each image making sure they can explain their answer. After discussion, ask students what all these images have in common. (Answer: they are all set designs from stage productions designed for a specific purpose.)

Activity 1:

Begin by asking students to define the term “scene design.” Discuss each word individually and then as a whole. Have them take notes on the definition. Then discuss each set picture. **(Higher Order Thinking Questions: [HOT] What elements of design are used in each set? What are some factors which must be considered when designing a scene/set?)** Discuss how each theatre is different and so each set must be different to match each theatre. Review the types of stages (thrust, round, proscenium, etc.) and discuss how each type affects the sets which can be built. **(HOT: What factors must be considered for each type of stage? What design elements can remain the same? Which ones must change? How might the actors be affected by each stage type? How might the audience be affected?)** Tell students they will be working on a set design for a given production. This can be any play, but if possible, have the design be for an actual production.

Give each student a copy of the “Scenic Design 101” graphic organizer and a copy of the script for which they will be designing. Use limited direct instruction and modeling to help students answer the questions and fill in the various design models on the first page. Reiterate the fact they will need all this information to successfully design a set for the school play.

Activity 2:

Next, if possible, have students watch a clip from another produced version of the play. Ask them to pay attention to the design of the show: what it looks like, what it sounds like, where and when it is set, etc. After students have watched a substantial clip, have them work in small groups to discuss various aspects of the scene. **(HOT: Where was the scene set? When was the time period? What creative elements were used? [color, light, pattern, etc.])** Bring students back together and have each group share their observations. Also ask students to identify parts of the set which are informative, expressive, appropriate, and

usable. **(HOT: Does one design element dominate? How do you know?)**

Have students work in pairs or table groups to complete the "Research" section of the "Scenic Design 101" graphic organizer, referring to the script for evidence. Discuss pairs' answers as a class. Once the research has been completed, have students work in table groups to complete a basic sketch of their set design. Trade sketches between table groups and have each group assess another's work based on the elements of design and the research of the script.

Activity 3:

Instruct students that they will take their basic scene drawings and adapt those to scale on their "Ground Plan." Once scene design sketches are complete, have each group draw a ground plan for their design utilizing the "Ground Plan" graphic organizer. Remind students this will require math so they may need a calculator, and it might be difficult, so review the mathematical principles of scaling.

Activity 4:

Once a successful ground plan has been sketched, have students start brainstorming ways they can create a 3D scale model of their design. Remind groups they will be using the same measurements on their model as in their ground plan, but they have to account for height as well as depth and width. Make sure they continue to take into account the parameters of their theatrical space, and consider the materials they need and the overall finished look of their designs (have them refer to the "research" section of the "Scenic Design 101").

After groups have brainstormed and agreed on a plausible solution for creating their model, allow groups to begin work on building the model. If possible, coordinate with the art teacher for materials and ideas, and possibly curriculum. Popular materials are poster board, construction paper, markers, magazines, balsa wood, lots of glue, cardstock, paint and paint pens, cardboard, and tape. Encourage students to use any other materials they might deem necessary and have readily available.

Once models have been completed, have each group present their model to the class. Have groups focus on pointing out various elements of design, as well as how each element might contribute to the overall understanding of the story the script tells. **(HOT: What design elements did your group use? How can you tell? How does your design contribute to the overall understanding of the**

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | story? What could you add to your design? What could you subtract from it?) Each group should submit their model for assessment. |
| Assessment: | Use the “Scenic Design Rubric” to assess each ground plan and model. |
| Materials: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set design pictures for gallery walk • Projector and computer for playing video • Materials for models of scenic design • “Scenic Design 101” graphic organizer • Scenic Design rubric |
| References: | <p>Abel, L. (Ed.). (1999). <i>Theatre: Art in action</i>. Lincolnwood (Chicago), IL: National Textbook Company.</p> <p>Gillette, J.M. (1997). <i>Theatrical design and production: An introduction to scene design and construction, lighting, sound, costume, and makeup</i> (3rd ed.). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.</p> |

Scenic Design 101

We will be discussing various elements of scenic design in order to successfully create an actual set for an actual play. Use this graphic organizer to take notes and organize ideas.

ANALYSIS: The *who, what, when, where, why, and how* of the production.

What is the play? _____

Who is producing the play? _____

Who is in the play? _____

Where is the play being produced? _____

What is the production budget? _____

When is the design due? _____

Why are we doing this play? _____

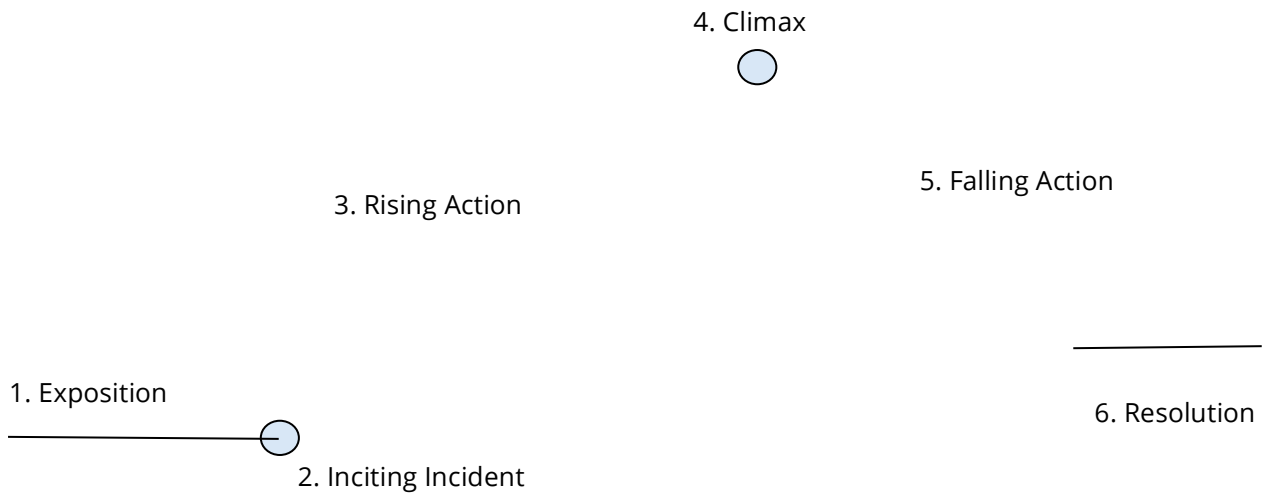
How is the set to be constructed? _____

DESIGN: The elements of an effective set.

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Informative</i> design communicates the time and place: where and when is your story set?</p> | <p><i>Expressive</i> design evokes theme and mood: what are the theme and mood of the play?</p> |
| <p><i>Appropriate</i> design is suitable for both the action of the play and the performance space: what needs to occur in the story and where does it need to happen?</p> | <p><i>Usable</i> design is flexible, dynamic, and workable: will all aspects of the play be able to happen efficiently and effectively?</p> |

RESEARCH: The background, cultural relevance, and concept of the play.

What is the basic storyline of the play? _____



What is the time period of the play? _____

What is the mood of the play? _____

What is your immediate impression of the play? _____

What sensory elements are described? Write them in the boxes below.

| | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Visual Elements: | Auditory Elements: |
| Physical Elements: | Other Elements: |

GROUND PLAN: Drawing a scale model

Step 1: Based on your notes from the previous pages, and based on the storyline and characters of your play, draw a sketch for what your set should look like. Simply use a blank sheet of paper for your sketch. Make sure to also consider materials, stage space, color, and who will be using the set. It doesn't have to be perfect, but should be thoughtful. Label things whose purpose or identity is not readily apparent.

Step 2: Now that you have an idea of what you want the set to look like, you need to design a *ground plan* for your stage. A ground plan is a "bird's eye view" of what your set will look like. In other words, imagine your set from the top down. Drawing a ground plan requires measuring, scaling, and drawing. Think of this as an architectural undertaking. Set designers use the same techniques for designing and planning sets as architects use for designing buildings.

Also think about the materials you will need to create your set. Will you use flats? Boxes? Doors? Moveable walls? Whatever you use, make sure you know how big (or small) it needs to be. Jot down these measurements as a basis for your ground plan.

Stage width: _____ Stage depth: _____

List the other components you will use and their measurements.

| | | |
|-------|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

Step 3: Based on your measurements and your scene sketch, draw out a ground plan for your set. This will require scaling your measurements down to fit on a piece of graph paper. Start with a simple scale such as 1 inch equals 1 foot (one inch on your drawing will represent one foot of the real set) or a 1:1 ratio. If that's too big, try a ½ inch equals 1 foot (a 0.5:1 ratio) or even a ¼ inch equals 1 foot (0.25:1 ratio.) The most important factor is that your ratio remains constant.

Scenic Design Rubric

Domains: Perform and Create

Standards:

HS1.T.P2.B: Select and apply specific technical elements to create a design for a theatrical work.

HS1.T.Cr2.B: Examine and justify original ideas and artistic choices in a theatrical work based on critical analysis, background knowledge, and/or historical and cultural context.

| Concept | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technical Elements | The design clearly demonstrates an in-depth analysis and understanding of the story and clearly helps convey the message of the play. | The design demonstrates a basic analysis and understanding of the story and mostly helps convey the message of the play. | The design demonstrates some analysis and understanding of the story but does not help convey the message, or is unclear. | The design demonstrates little or no analysis or understanding of the story and does not help convey the message of the play. |
| | The design has an accurate and clearly written ground plan. | The design has an accurate and clearly written ground plan, but some elements may be a little unclear and/or incorrect. | The design has a ground plan which is lacking accuracy and clarity but is still understandable. | The design has no ground plan, or the ground plan is neither accurate nor clear. |
| Artistic Choices | The design is well-suited for the performers, the script, and the space. | The design is mostly well-suited for the performers, the script, and the space with few discrepancies. | The design is only marginally well-suited for the performers, the script, and the space with several discrepancies. | The design is not well-suited for the performers, the script, nor the space. |
| | The design shows strong understanding of and sensitivity to the historical and/or cultural context of the play. | The design shows some understanding of and some sensitivity to the historical and/or cultural context of the play. | The design shows little understanding of and little sensitivity to the historical and/or cultural context of the play. | The design shows little or no understanding of or sensitivity to the historical and/or cultural context of the play. |
| Originality | The design is highly original and showcases excellent creativity. | The design is somewhat original and showcases some creativity. | The design is not very original but showcases some creativity. | The design is not original and showcases minimal creativity. |