



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1993 Volume III: Twentieth-Century Multicultural Theater

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## **Multi-Cultural Theater in Music**

Curriculum Unit 93.03.03  
by Iris R. Davis

This curriculum unit is designed to help fourth and fifth grade students acquire musical and dramatic skills and knowledge. The lessons can be taught in the regular enrichment class and can be completed in less than 30 minutes. It will take approximately nine weeks to complete the entire unit.

By teaching students the contents of this unit they will learn to exhibit performance skills, read and notate musical symbols, and develop skills in working with others. The history of the theater will help students to understand that personal beliefs and societal values influence art forms and styles. Identifying significant works of drama will allow students to understand the diversity between cultures and styles.

As a result of this unit students will be able to recognize the aesthetic qualities of the arts and appreciate the importance of it. They will learn to act, analyze and respond to performances, evaluate the quality of performances, and demonstrate performance disciplines.

Music is worth knowing. It is a field of study with its own special body of knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking. The ability to perform, to create, and to listen to music with understanding is highly desirable for every member of society. An important purpose of the schools is to transmit our cultural heritage to succeeding generations, and music is one of the most glorious manifestations of our cultural heritage.

The schools have an obligation to help each student develop his or her musical potential. Musical potential is one of the basic abilities, along with linguistic potential, physical potential, and others, that exist in every individual. In many persons it remains largely undeveloped throughout life. Music provides an outlet for creativity and for self-expression. It enables us to express our thoughts and feelings, engages our imaginations allowing us to assert our uniqueness.

The study of music can help the student understand better the nature of mankind. It reveals unique aspects of our relationship with other human beings and with our environment. It provides a readily accessible avenue to the study of other cultures and increases the satisfaction that students derive from music and enables them to deal with more sophisticated and complex music raising their level of appreciation, and expanding their musical horizons.

Providing students with opportunities to study the arts benefits the students, schools, and society in important ways. The arts are a key component for the development of the total child. Through the arts students learn to focus on discipline, school atmosphere, various learning styles, commercial vocational applications, creativity,

and teamwork.

## Section I Preparing the Teacher/Director

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Before beginning the unit, it is important for the teacher to know strategies on how to carefully select a play; choose actors; how to effectively choose the cast; use of rehearsal technique and suggestions for keeping it all simple, creative, and fun. Organization is the key to using time and effort wisely. Knowledge of blocking, cues, backstage jobs, sets, lighting, sound and special effects, make-up, props, costuming, and promotional tactics, as well as the job of director and assistant director will help to plan ahead through spelling out the responsibilities of each person involved.

The job of the director is to map out the flow of traffic on-stage. He/She must decide on entrances, exits, crosses, and all other movements of the actors on stage to bring all the elements together. The director must read the play several times and plan how it is to be directed. The idea or concept of how the play should be done is called the directorial concept. Certain questions need to be asked. What actors are to be chosen? What scenery, music, costumes, and props will contribute to one main idea? What kind of set will be needed? The next important point in preparing for a play is the choice of cast members. Casting a play is not easy even for most experienced directors. Professionally known actors are easy to cast. However, amateur actors need to try out for a part before the director knows where she/he will be most effective. When auditioning actors, directors should pick scenes which show different sides of the character. The scenes should be read ahead of time, and should be picked out according to scenes that give a good indication of the role. In order to learn needed strategies and stage technique refer to *On Stage! How to Put on A Play*, by Patricia Sternberg.

The next step is to find out where the play will be put on. Certain plays lend themselves to certain stages, and some plays can be done more easily than others. The cost of putting on a play must be considered as well. Expenses may run on copies of scripts, posters for advertisements, tickets, programs, props, costumes, music, lighting, and make-up. Funds will have to be requested, contributed, and earned with fund raisers. Students can raise money by giving bake sales, hotdog sales, and candy sales. Parent involvement in education is also an important factor. When parents and teachers work together parents have the chance to carry out activities that will enhance the experience of their children while helping to bring up the morale of the students in the whole school. When parents work together in a school the foundation becomes stronger.

Now it is time to consider the third element necessary for putting on a play; the audience. When choosing a play, think about who the audience will be, making sure that the play is appealing. In order to charge admission to the play the actors have an added responsibility to please the audience. But that is not all. Of course no one wants to put on a play that will not interest anyone. So we must find a play that can be talked about, understood, and is fitting for the audience that will attend.

Four basic questions should be asked before a play is set into motion. \* Who are the performers? \* Where will you perform the play? \* What play will you do? \* Who is your audience? Once these decisions are made it is possible to go on with the play with a good percentage of success in your pocket.

## Section II Dramatic Training of Students

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The arts fulfill a human need to express and transform life experience symbolically. This leads to the development of artistic expression in all societies. Regardless of their vocation or lifestyle, students need to understand and participate in arts experiences.

The hardest part of getting students to concentrate is helping them learn how to focus their thoughts in the right direction for a long enough period of time to accomplish the desired effect of each character's personality. Once students have learned to do this they can create an atmosphere which will be enhancing to the actors and the audience.

### Lesson 1 Body Movement

Warm up exercises are to help prepare students for acting by doing some play acting, acting out a favorite story, acting out a song, or a small part of a movie. Acting skills involve the use of the body and the voice, and the refining of observation skills.

Give students a hand-out of a dotted half note and a dotted quarter note, or draw the notes on the board so that they may be seen by all students.

Discuss the characteristics of the dotted half note and the dotted quarter note: A dotted half note receives three musical beats, has a hollow ball for the base, and a stem on the right side; A dotted quarter note receives one and a half beats, has a filled in black ball for the base, and a stem on the right side.

Have students learn the note value of the dotted half note (three beats) and the dotted quarter note (one and a half beats). Have them clap the beats and count them out.

This next activity will help students become more flexible in the use of their body while applying the knowledge of the dotted half note and the dotted quarter note. One of the best ways to relax is to practice becoming free with body movements to music. Here are some suggestions for good selections of music for movement.

Debussy, La Mer

Stravinsky, Firebird Suite

Saint-Saens, Carnival of the Animals

Strauss, 2001: Space Odyssey

Moussorgsy, Pictures at an Exhibition

Greg, Peer Gynt Suite

Tchaikovsky, The Nutcracker Suite or Sleeping Beauty

Wagner, Ride of the Valkyries

Bach, Fugue No. 2 in C Minor.

Begin by having students imagine that they are holding a beach ball. How big is it? How soft or firm is it? Feel its texture. Imagine its weight. Now toss it up in the air and catch it. Toss it higher and higher each time. This time toss it and let it drop to the ground. Does it bounce? If you are playing with someone else, play catch with the beach ball. Throw it gently and then throw it hard. Keep in mind its weight.

Now that students are familiar with the dotted half note and the dotted quarter note and their imaginary beach ball, play a musical selection. Have students bounce the imaginary ball on various beats.

Have students pair with each other and toss the imaginary ball back and forth on various beats of the music.

## **Lesson 2 Observation**

This activity will help students to develop their understanding of diverse peoples and cultures. To understand and value the arts of a particular culture is to understand and value the people of that culture. Students will understand that when they act they become someone else other than themselves. A skill that will help them improve their ability to be someone else is observation. Good actors learn to observe others and perfect their mannerisms.

In order to have students learn more about people's behavior and mannerisms, have them spend time watching others to see how they react in various situations. Have them observe their facial expressions, the way they use their hands, the way they walk, how they hold their heads, how they stand. Notice their reactions to the events around them. Have them observe people in public places. Watch how they greet other people, laugh, respond to animals, comb their hair, etc. Have them notice what different people do when they pass mirrors or big glass windows. Have students demonstrate their findings.

Have students choose a partner, and face each other. Choose one person as the leader, and the other must mimic the actions of the leader just as though he is looking into a mirror. Movements should be slow and simple, and the follower should be very precise in imitations.

Now have students move freely to the beat of a music selection while mirroring with a partner.

Have one person start an action and repeat the movement over and over. A second person adds an action coordinating it with the first person. A third person should join in with an action coordinated with one of the people already involved. Continue to add a on people until everyone becomes a part of the machine.

Have students create sounds while coordinating actions with the other parts of the machine.

## **Using Your Voice**

Have students imitate the voice of someone they know or someone famous. Place emphasis on their pronunciation, their speed, and their rhythm of speech. This activity will give practice in training the voice and trying out a variety of voices different from their own.

To help students understand the difference in one tone of voice and another, teach them to sing music syllables Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, Ti, Do. Showing the syllables written on a poster or the black board will help students to focus on the difference in each tone.

## Matching Sounds

Have students pair with a partner and read aloud from a magazine or book. Have one person read a sentence. Have the other one try to repeat the sentence in exactly the same way. Emphasize the use of the same pronunciation and same loudness. Try out different voices, styles, and accents.

## Lesson 3 Touching, Hearing, and Seeing

Students will be ready to begin the experience of learning to use the dramatic talents that they have not yet discovered. You can help to get students' creative juices flowing with the help of Pamela Prince Walker's *Seven Steps to Creative Children's Dramatics*. The exercises will enhance the student's dramatic talent as well as teaching the principles of acting. Students should focus attention on staying in character using the five senses. These activities will help students to enhance stage presence, demonstrate emotions, movements, and actions, evolve the character's personality, achieve color of character's personality. Acting games such as Status, The Story Game, and The Broomstick Game will be used to reinforce the learned skills and techniques. and must follow each exercise. The exercises have been proven successful in bringing forth the best creative efforts of the group. By the end of the lessons, children will be making up scenes with ease and using their imaginations with assurance.

Students will learn to concentrate using the five senses. First have students concentrate on a real object which will allow them to touch and physically feel the objects that they choose to focus on. But then when using imaginary objects the exercise will become a real challenge.

Students will experience physical activity or physical business on-stage by acting out scenes such as playing the piano with a broken finger, reciting a poem with a bad cough, carrying a heavy load of schoolbooks with a sore back, or waiting for a bus in very cold weather. Say a student usually clears the table quickly before mother serves desert. Have a student show how the dishes will be stacked and gently placed in the sink, or show that because of the rush to get back to the table the stack of dishes get smashed along the way.

The emotional states will be brought up by using tone color to describe anger, happiness, sadness, etc. Through this students will learn to color their character's personality just as they would a portrait of the character. Students will demonstrate and act out fear, irritation, anger, excitement, anticipation, boredom, love, appreciation, and sympathy to various music selections that suggest each emotional state.

This lesson will help students become familiar with the senses through the use of rhythm band instruments. Place rhythm band instruments on a table in front of students. Name and demonstrate each one. For example: While showing a tambourine, give the name, emphasize the shape, and discuss the moveable parts. Be sure to demonstrate the proper way to play each instrument. Blindfold students and place a rhythm band instrument in front of them on the desk. Have students touch the instruments and describe the shape and parts.

Now have students name the instrument. Remove blindfold and have students feel the shape and parts again. Ask them to demonstrate how each instrument is to be played.

This time have students imagine they are holding the same instrument as they had in the beginning of the lesson. Have them describe how the instrument would feel if they were actually holding it. Now have them demonstrate how the imaginary instrument would be played.

## Smell

The following exercise is an extension of teaching students to become aware of their ability to express themselves through imaginary items. Do this exercise slowly, allowing time between one image and another. Ask questions to encourage further imagining. Stress the importance of concentrating during each exercise.

Have students imagine the following: Pick a rose and smell it and feel it. Suggest that they prick their finger on a thorn. Lift the top off a garbage pail. Smell an apple pie cooking in the oven. Smell a cow barn. Gas being put in a car.

## Taste

Have students imagine they are tasting . . . Ice cream, a spoonful of milk of magnesia or cod liver oil, taffy candy, a lemon, coca-cola.

## Section III History of the Theater

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The study of music provides a unique and valuable insight into the cultural tradition or historical period from which it has come. As students become familiar with the music of various cultural traditions and historical periods they gain an intimate and vivid acquaintance with those traditions and periods.

Here is where we find the historical approach to the scenario. I believe that in anything that we do there must be a history behind it or there would be no story to tell. That is why I have chosen to introduce theater to students through *The Dramatic Story Of The Theater* by Dorothy and Joseph Samachson.

We explore how the theater began by pulling out selected points of history from selected chapters. An in-depth study would be far too time consuming and would almost instantly disinterest the students past the point of retrieval. I had not as of yet found a way to present history in a manner which would not bore them to death until I realized that I can have students actually act out the historically important facts. It has also occurred to me that this method will help students to remember what they have learned, as well as gaining some acting experience that can be analyzed later on in the unit.

The historical plays mentioned in this section have been modified and shortened and can be found in *The Dramatic Story of Theater* by Dorothy and Joseph Samachson.

Read text aloud as the class follows along.

The text used in *Abuydos Passion Play* . It was performed at Abuydos, a city in southern Egypt famed as a burial place of kings. The play had only a few lines of text and no stage directing, so actors and directors had to guess about their actions. Egyptian plays were religious in character and sometimes told of dead souls of pharaohs and how they were brought back to life. Others, like this one, described events in the lives of the gods. These plays had very little plot but plenty of action.

This play has scenes concerning the Egyptian gods, numerous fights, and a monk battle. Plays of this era always had processions, religious ceremonies, and battles in which the audience would take part. The plays were given in special temples in the pyramids, close to the tombs of the kings, or in "Houses of the gods". The

Egyptian theater lasted about four thousand years. Then it died out.

A City in China, Any Year, A.D. 1000-1940 The theaters of China are only a small part of the numerous and varied theaters of Asia, Africa, and the islands of the Pacific. It is impossible to mention more than a few theaters. One theater is the magic theater of Bali. Its function was to win the villagers the support of the gods, to protect them against evil spirits. In the Balinese plays, some of the actors are actually supposed to be possessed by the spirits of the witches, the leyaks, whom they are trying to exorcise.

The Chinese theater were usually religious in purpose. Songs were sung by a chorus, and later developed a set of symbols and conventions that has come down to our own times. The plots of the plays tell of emperors and princesses, noble generals and heroes who were trapped in the toils of the villains, and bravely fight their way out. Others tell of trials and tribulations of wives and the sacrifices that they make to aid their husbands. Some parts of the plays have lively action while others are full of poetic thoughts, lofty sentiments and are usually written for select audiences.

Traditional Chinese theater has not changed much during the centuries. Because the symbols are so strange to us one play *Lady Precious Stream* , has been translated and performed in England and the United States.

A Small Park in an American City, 1938. A platform ordinarily used for band concerts is where the vaudeville acts were put on. A juggler skillfully tosses plates and dumbbells. A magician follows the juggler, a song and dance team succeeds the magician. But the next act in this program introduces a serious note. Three men and two women put on a small skit that portrays a strike taking place in a nearby town.

These plays are of strikes, housing shortages, and unemployment. And then there are plays of a different nature; *Pinocchio* was produced to entertain children. In the large cities where theaters are available there are more imaginative stagings. of Shakespeare's *MacBeth* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* , modern classics like Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* .

## **Section IV: Understanding Cultural Diversity through African and Asian Drama**

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In our increasingly diverse classroom students should learn to know and respect their own cultural heritage and that of others. Such an education helps students to live and work in communities that incorporate a variety of cultural traditions. The more students learn about other traditions, the more they are able to share in the cultural riches and experience personal satisfaction through involvement.

Students will discuss and compare African drama to Asian drama. Below is a description that may be used to show similarities and differences between the arts styles of the two cultures.

European explorers landed on the West Coast of Africa called Nigeria. They were amazed to find civilized kingdoms where beautiful bronze art objects were made and that large cities looked sophisticated. The great kingdoms fell to ruins, but many art forms, folktales, myths, and tribal rituals survived and continue to the present day.

The Yoruba tribe of today, numbering about ten million, are descendants of these ancient kingdoms. Nigeria has modern cities and small villages and try to preserve old tribal ways. They earn their living by farming or

raising livestock.

In most parts of Africa, storytellers go from village to village telling tales, usually at night or around a fire. Animals are popular characters in these tales some stories are used to teach moral, others are told for entertainment.

For many centuries, public storytelling in Japan was a profession. The Hanashika, or teller of tales, wore special clothes, used formal language and narrated his tales in a large room. Japanese actors spend years learning to act. Symbolism is a keynote. Gestures are exaggerated, movement and speeches are synchronized. Poses are held by the performer after important speeches. Costumes and makeup are elaborate. Actors paint their faces in expressive, decorative patterns.

## Section V An African Play and An Asian Play / Performance

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In Africa and Asia, the art of storytelling still exists where it may take place in the marketplace, around a night fire, or in a sacred plaza. The tales may be told by one person or a group of people who use pantomime, music, dancing, and singing. A particular form of drama has been handed down from generations of the past until it became a tradition using specific techniques such as the Dabuki theater of Japan, the dance drama of Southeast Asia, and certain tribal dances of Africa. The stories have special meaning and significance for the people in these cultures.

Two plays will be concentrated on. *Ananasi, the African Spiderman* which shares three folktales from West Africa, and *Au Wing Fu and the Golden Dragon*, a folktale in Chinese theater style, both of which are found in *Plays From Folktales of Africa and Asia*, by Barbara Winther.

These imaginative dramatizations capture the charm and flavor of these faraway lands, and have the universal elements of humor and wit which are found in folklore. Young people will delight in playing roles of human and animal characters that bring these plays to life. Both plays are preceded by an author's note giving background information about the story source and costumes, staging, and settings for easy performance. These plays will give students an authentic picture of other times and cultures and are a rich source of lively and enjoyable drama.

We will start off with the folktale of *Anansi, the African Spiderman*. There are three folktales from West Africa: *How Anansi Brought the Stories Down*, *The First Talking Drum*, and *Tall-Tale Man*. All of these three are very short and can be memorized in a short amount of time. Props and costuming will be fairly easy to get with the help of parent and teacher involvement.

*Au Wing Fu and the Golden Dragon* is a folktale in the Chinese theater style. Here students will receive some background on the dragon as a mythical creature which is often found in the folklore of most cultures. Though physical characteristics vary from one country to another, most are related to the snake or crocodile, with scales and the head of a lion, eagle, or hawk. This shows students that we are different in some ways, but very alike in other ways. The myth has it that dragons are destructive, but basically good creatures which helps students to realize that people of other cultures are basically good in nature as well as themselves.

Chinese theater has its own traditions when performed. It is a combination of songs, dances, pantomimes, acrobatics, and stylized acting. The scene of the Chinese theater is different from others in that chairs and



tables represent whatever is necessary to set the scene.

Students will use a chair and a table as any object they choose it to be when rehearsing the play. Because colors and patterns are symbolic students must be aware of the meaning of them.

## **Lesson 6**

Discuss what exaggerated movements in Chinese theater mean so that students will understand the true meaning of “Ah Wing Fu and the Golden Dragon”. This is another art form of Asia.

Weeping—bend head slightly and raise arm to wipe away tears.

Despair—turn palms outward, thumbs pointing down.

Anger, dismay—stagger back, flinging arms forward

Happiness—raise hands chest high, palms down, then turn hands up and thrust arms forward.

Thinking—hold up index finger near temple.

Rowing—arms in air, imitate motion of oars.

Speaking—raise hand to cheek and turn to side.

Next the parts will be acted out by the students. Once the parts are set discuss the types of costuming that are needed to enhance the play with just the right flare in order to keep the audience pleased. Urge parents to become involved with the production of the play so that they can help prepare costumes, props, advertisements, and other things that will help to make the production a success.

## **Lesson 7**

Pass out copies of the “Anasi, the African Spider” folktales. Read the play aloud as the students follow along. Discuss the folktale in detail: the actions of each character, the outcome of the tale, and the moral.

## **Lesson 8**

Music is one of the most powerful and profound symbol systems that exists. Just as everyone must study our verbal and mathematical symbol systems, everyone should study the symbol system represented by music. The ability to create symbols and use them is what makes mankind uniquely human and for this reason should be cultivated and strengthened at every opportunity.

Symbolic colors and patterns of the Chinese theater are; red honesty and loyalty, green—devils, yellow—strength and cleverness, blue—ferocity, white—strength or evil. Leading female characters wear white powder base, with exaggerated black eyeliner, rouge on cheeks, and bright lipstick.

To give an authentic feeling to the production of this play, actors should think of it as a dance which tells a

story, using movements which suggest the characters: dainty and flowing for Chin Li; abrupt and stern for Chu Yu, the tiger; and so forth. Voice tones should indicate the characters and emotions.

Pass out a copy of the music symbols such as: Treble clef, bass clef, staff, etc. Discuss the importance of each symbol. Make a comparison of music symbols to symbols of the Chinese theater. Give each student a copy of "Ah Wing Fu and the Golden Dragon". Read the play aloud as the students follow along.

Finally, it is time for the final preparations; dress rehearsals, and the actual performance. The production of the play of your choice will be enhanced by having the students put to good use learned skills in acting such as the voice and how an actor must speak, building a character using the five senses, and the use of concentration in rehearsal and on stage. As stated before, quite a bit of planning will go into the final production of the play. The students must have costumes, props, special effects, personalized jobs, parent support, skills and techniques. These will enhance the production of the play giving students a sense of accomplishment in both music and drama.

## **VOCABULARY WORDS FOR EACH LESSON**

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### **Lesson 1**

notes

dotted half note

dotted quarter note

value

3/4 time

beats

counts

sound

imaginary

### **Lesson 2**

pronunciation

speed

rhythm

voice

music syllables

tone

sound

loudness

style

accent

### **Lesson 3**

concentration

imagine

### **Lesson 4**

emotion

acting

defendants

### **Lesson 5**

music

Bibliography

Egypt

burial-place

directors

actors

actions

religious

pharaohs

gods

processions

religious ceremonies

battles

musical notation

audience

pyramids

## **Lesson 6**

folktales

ruins

diversity

sophisticated

myths

tribal

rituals

moral

drama

symbolism

synchronized

legends

## **Lesson 7**

no words

## **Lesson 8**

symbolism

colors

patterns

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