

Short Student Plays in the Foreign Language Classroom

I. Introduction

II. Rationale:

- Short plays target the visual, the auditory and the kinesthetic learner. Students see and hear language being performed. They *play* the language with body movements and gestures.
- Working on and rehearsing plays, especially comedies, creates a comfortable environment and lowers anxiety levels.
- Through memorization students retain more language.
- Mastery of idioms is facilitated.
- Association with meaning takes place.

III. Two-Fold Approach:

1. Using existing plays
2. Creating plays
 - a Adapting existing narratives
 - b Creating original works

Most important preparation for either approach: Role-plays, original or provided, of increasing lengths.

1. Steps for Using Existing plays:

- Distribute especially formatted copies of plays
- Read plays, set emphasis marks
- Discuss: Characters
 - Setting
 - Cultural significance
- Explain and practice new vocabulary
- Practice pronunciation
- Read in groups
- Start acting
- Memorize roles
- Rehearse
- Preparation of props, setting, decoration
- Dress Rehearsal
- Performance
- Videotape performance and show at a later date.

2. Steps for Creating Original Plays:

a Adaptation of Narratives

- Choose a narrative from short stories, fairy tales, fables, jokes, or other sources
- Show and practice how to change narrative to dialogue.
- Modify settings, e.g. modernize
- Modify characters and create list of adjectives for character descriptions

- Change story line and/or plot development
 - Discuss vocabulary
 - Practice pronunciation
- (Then follow same steps as in 1.)

b Creation of Original (Comical) Play

- Watch comedy in film or theatre and discuss different kinds of humor
 - Slapstick
 - Misunderstandings
 - Word play
 - Grotesque behavior
 - Stereotypes
 - Differences in race, sexual orientation, etc
 - Brainstorm themes and settings that can be utilized, for example, family, restaurant, travel, school, traffic, etc.
 - Form well mixed groups
 - Compose plays
 - Peer editing and discussion
 - Teacher edit with addition of idiomatic expressions and specific vocabulary
 - Practice pronunciation
- (Then follow steps as in 1)

Have a party to celebrate the successful performance.

Sources:

"Content Strategies for Foreign Language." 15 Oct 2007 <http://www.stanford.edu/group/step/new-step-website/resources/LanguageSite/Foreign_Language_Strategies.html>.

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