



LESSON 4: 'MAKE 'EM LAUGH'

AIM:

To understand how visual comedy works and to use ideas for an original performance

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: BY THE END OF THIS LESSON I WILL...

- * KNOW how to use visual/physical comedy in at least two ways.
- * UNDERSTAND how to use my body to create funny moments.
- * BE ABLE TO create a short presentation that uses some of these ideas effectively in performance.

TO BE SUCCESSFUL I WILL ...

- * Have engaged with the clip and analysed some of the ways that Donald O'Connor uses physicality in a comedic way.
- * Have produced a short comedy sequence where I use movement techniques to make the audience laugh.

RESOURCES

A COLLECTION OF PROPS
2 CHAIRS PER STUDENT
SCOTT JOPLIN 'RAGTIME' MUSIC

GETTING IN THE ZONE

CIRCLE:

CROSS THE CIRCLE

Students are sitting in a circle and are each given a number 1-5. The aim is to cross the circle and sit down in an empty space according to the teacher's instructions but the idea is to try and be as over-the-top as possible: introducing the idea of 'Playing for laughs'.

Teacher calls out a number and then an instruction, for example:

- You are ballet dancers
- You're all dinosaurs
- Your hair is on fire
- It's pitch black and you can't see
- You dropped something really precious
- You're all aliens
- You suspect someone in the circle is about to attack you

WHAT'S GOING ON?

One student leaves the room and the teacher tells the rest of the group something that will be true of the student when they return. The student has one minute to guess what the teacher told the group. Examples:

- The student turns into: a really cute fluffy kitten; the Queen; a vampire; Ed Sheeran; the Head teacher;
- The student is invisible; the student smells terrible; the student is a Dalek;
- The student is shouting really loudly; the student is a ghost etc. etc.



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TAKE IT TO THE SPACE

Students find a space. They start a movement sequence: stretch up to the ceiling, arms go forward until fingertips touch floor, arms go behind body and then back up to ceiling. Repeat until all the students are doing this sequence in their own time:

- * Shout 'Freeze' students to hold that position, however strange
- * Take that character for a walk: how does he/she feel? Speed it up; slow it down. Differences. Let them interact (without words) with other characters.

Are statuses emerging?

- * Students relax and repeat activity: this time they will have a different position and then different characters will emerge.
- * Get those characters into groups of 3 or 4. Improvise them meeting in the street and saying hello to each other. Try to pull out the comedic effects.

BASIC CLOWNING TECHNIQUES

This may be revision or new concepts. Students to work in pairs trying out a 'Funny walk' – props e.g. hats etc. may inspire them. Look at the idea of 'exaggeration' as being key. Students can start by watching their partner walk normally and then use that as the basis for exaggeration to make it over the top and more comedic.

Clown emotions:

Students can try out over-the-top emotions. Happy (running around clapping and jumping) Sad (long face, crying, sitting on the floor in a puddle of tears with a big handkerchief etc.) Scared (Knees knocking, nail-biting etc.) The idea is to get the students used to making things larger than life in order to be amusing. Share good ideas.

THE MAIN EVENT:

There is an iconic scene in Singin in the Rain, 'Make 'Em Laugh' where Donald O'Connor gives a masterclass in the art of physical comedy. He was a very skilled performer known for his athleticism. He makes the sequences look effortless: the truth is the scene took 3 days to film and he got through four packets of cigarettes a day to keep his nerves together as it was so challenging.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SND3v0i9uhE>

Students watch the sequence: what are some of the main skills and actions that O'Connor does that make up the comedy? Which bit did they enjoy the most? Has this comedy gone out of fashion now or do we still enjoy physical slapstick comedy? Show excerpt from 'One Man Two Guvnors' starring James Corden:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcJM1Z3Trfo>



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Solo work

Students to work on their own version of the 'One Man Two Guvnors' scene where they have an argument with themselves:

- It can be about anything
- It needs to escalate
- There should be at least one of the techniques that Corden or O'Connor use in the sequence (O'Connor's facial expressions or strangulation of himself etc.)

Pair work

In pairs using two chairs to represent a park bench, students imagine that they are two old-school tramps (a la Charlie Chaplin – may need to show a clip if students not familiar).

Students work on a sequence 'Park Bench battle' where they incorporate all that they have learnt about over-the-top physical comedy. Hats, props and other accessories can be used. One tramp is settling down for the night, the other wants his spot. How can their fight over the bench be funny, engaging and ultimately draw in the audience? And how can it make 'em laugh? Share work as appropriate using Scott Joplin piano rags as the soundtrack (Maple Leaf Rag; Black and White Rag; The Entertainer etc.)

SUCCESS CRITERIA:

* Can I build up the comedy so that the audience don't just laugh but engage with the characters? *

PLENARY:

Which performances worked best and why? How does it feel to use our bodies in different ways? Which students enjoyed creating this kind of comedy and why?