



The Usual Suspects

Interactive Classroom Unit

UNIT OUTLINE

RESOURCES

An Interactive LIVE! Experience

by Mandee Thomas

This Interactive Experience begins with a dramatized interrogation scene involving one actor and several students. It continues with an interactive improvisational game adapted from the popular television program, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, and culminates in a participatory mock trial involving all students. The role of the judge will be played by the adult facilitator.

Introductory Activity (Interrogation Scene)

As students enter, random participants will be handed sealed envelopes. The class will be called to order by the entrance of an actor carrying a stool and floor lamp. He is the lead investigator who has rounded up "the usual suspects", and asks the students holding the envelopes to make their way to the front of the room. The actor explains that this is a line up. Another actor is brought in to identify the suspect, but recognizes them all: The Witch, The Wolf, The Giant, The Wicked Step Mother, and The Mysterious Old Man. The lead investigator then sits each student down and interrogates him/her individually. A copy of the script with their lines highlighted will be in the sealed envelopes.

Class Discussion and Wrap-Up

A facilitator will explain what the next several sessions will entail, and ask questions to gauge where the students are in terms of understanding point of view and what they predict will happen during the mock trial.

Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf?

In Session Two, students will explore their childhood fears through the pages of familiar fairytales. They'll have to identify the 'villain' in each of these tales and turn the stories around, creating and staging Twisted Tales that recount the alleged villain's point of view.



VIDEOS/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The Facilitator will be showing several video clips from both Stephen Sondheim's Broadway musical, *Into the Woods*, and the recent film adaptation. A selection of optional, extension activities is included in this outline.

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MOCK TRIAL GUIDE

Students will be given a trial guide. A more detailed guide will be made available to teachers beforehand.

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Whose Fault Is It Anyway?

In Session Three, students will participate in, The Blame Game, an improvisational activity adapted from the television program, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*.

Trial by Jury

During the last several sessions, a mock trial will be staged to determine which of the usual suspects is responsible for the destruction of the village in Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* as well as the deaths of several key characters.



Video Clips

The facilitator will use a variety of video clips to spark the students' imaginations, enhance group discussions, and to illustrate important points throughout the unit. The following are only two examples:

<https://youtu.be/ryAyTzGA-dk>

Wolf Scene from film adaptation of *Into the Woods*

<https://youtu.be/AK2FVhr9l3A>

"Your Fault" from Broadway musical *Into the Woods*

TEACHERS CAN EXTEND THIS INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- WATCH THE PBS TELEVISED VERSION OF THE BROADWAY MUSICAL, *INTO THE WOODS*. YOU CAN CHECK OUT A COPY FROM ENLIVEN!. IT FEATURES BERNADETTE PETERS AS THE WITCH. THIS FILM IS SUGGESTIVE, HOWEVER, SO IT WOULD BE BEST FOR MATURE AUDIENCES, BUT THE RECENT FILM ADAPTATION IS APPROVED FOR YOUNGER AUDIENCES. KIDS OF ALL AGES LOVE THIS STORY, AND ITS LESSONS ARE ENDLESS. AFTER VIEWING THE FILM, FOLLOW UP WITH WHOLE OR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS.
- DESK COPIES OF SEVERAL OF THE MUSICAL'S MORE THOUGHT-PROVOKING SONG LYRICS CAN BE CHECKED OUT AS WELL. THESE CAN ALSO BE USED TO FACILITATE FURTHER DISCUSSION.
 - STUDENTS MIGHT ALSO ENJOY EXTENDING THE STORY'S PLOT BY PROVIDING ALTERNATE ENDINGS OR IN DESCRIBING *WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?*



Teacher's Guide

Teachers will have access to a more detailed guide prior to session one. They will be more than welcome to participate or just observe.



Student Scripts

Students will be given scripts from which to draw inspiration, but will be encouraged to develop their own characters and lines of questioning. This aspect can be modified to better fit various ages and/or stages of development. For example, older students will want to work independently (breaking away from their scripts) while younger students may need to stick more closely to their scripted roles.

Mock Trial Guide

PREPARING THE CASE

Introduce Mock Trial Procedures

Assign Parts

Break into groups/Assign Jobs/Familiarize themselves with or Develop Facts of the Case

- Lawyers will need copies of the Procedures (script) AND a statement of the facts
- Witnesses will need to review a statement of the facts AND their own testimonies
- Jurors must decide where they'd like to lend a hand as legal assistants

MAKING A CASE

- Lawyers work on Opening/Closing Statements AND Direct and Cross Examination Questions – They will need copies of examples of questions and objections – They will also be allowed access to all witness statements
- Witnesses write or memorize their testimonies AND Copy and answer questions from attorneys
- Jurors continue to work as legal assistants, preparing witnesses etc.

TRIAL PARTICIPATION

- Lawyers follow their scripts
- Witnesses are called to answer both direct and cross examination questions
- Jurors listen to and deliberate on the facts as they are presented – They will take notes and will have to explain their decision to the court

