LIVE Arts

TEACHER GUIDE

CRAFTING A CHARACTER

With: Shawn Cuthand
Grade: 7/8
Date: Feb 29 2024
Artistic Discipline: Storytelling/Standup

OVERVIEW

Join Shawn as he takes your class through the joys of of storytelling and stand up comedy. Shawn will teach your classes the basics of writing a story, centering around the tension of a 'want', as well as how to 'punch up' the story with jokes and extra details.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Shawn Cuthand is a nehiyaw (Cree) and Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) writer, comedian, producer, actor and director living in so called Saskatoon on Treaty 6 territory. He has ties to Little Pine First Nation and Akwesasne Mohawk Nation. Currently he is a part of the satirical news group The Feather, where he has on screen roles as well as behind the scenes writing and producing roles. He is a talented photographer and writer currently juggling multiple scripts accepted by Imaginative, Whistler Film Festival and Gordon Tootoosis Nikiwanan Theatre.

MATERIALS

- No materials needed

CLASSROOM SETUP

- Make sure you have a 'stage' space in your classroom with rows or pods facing it.

Curriculum Outcomes & Indicators

GRADE 7

CREATIVE PRODUCTIVE CP7.4 Investigate how dramatic character develops from role. c. Use language with purpose to develop character and achieve dramatic intent when speaking and writing in role.	CREATIVE PRODUCTIVE CP7.5 Use drama elements, strategies, negotiation, and collaboration to help shape the direction of the drama and/or collective creation.. f. Identify and discuss the presence of tension and contrast in own drama work.	CULTURAL HISTORICAL CH7.2 Investigate how Indigenous artists from around the world reflect the importance of place (e.g., relationship to the land, geology, region, urban/rural environments). b. Analyze and interpret the work of Indigenous artists within its cultural and contemporary contexts.

GRADE 8

CREATIVE PRODUCTIVE CP8.4 Demonstrate how dramatic characters interact in relationships within the drama and/or collective creation. d. Describe how focus, tension, and contrast function within the drama.	CRITICAL RESPONSIVE CR8.1 Respond to professional dance, drama, music, and visual art works through the creation of own arts expressions. d. Create own work (e.g., visual or performing arts) in response to a professional arts expression, and describe how own work is inspired or influenced by the original work.	CULTURAL HISTORICAL CH8.2 Analyze the influence of social issues on the work of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists, and share results. a. Research First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists who use their art work to explore and comment on social issues (e.g., Susan Aglukark, Edward Poitras).

Workshop Vocabulary

Jester
A jester was part of the royal court that would entertain and make fun of the royal family (just a bit). Stand up comedians are like jesters.

Performance
A show where someone gets up to present something exciting to an audience. Stand up comedy is a performance.

Spotlight
A really bright light that lights up the stage so that whoever is on stage can be seen easily.

Punchline
The part of the joke where people realize what's funny and start laughing.

Setup
The part of the joke where you get the audience ready to laugh.

Setlist
A list of jokes that a comedian uses to make up their set.

Hot 5
A really funny and excellent 5 minutes of a stand up comic set. It's a career milestone for comedians is to have the chance to perform a hot 5 on late night talk shows.

Pre-Workshop Activity

Name: What Even Is Funny?

Duration:	Materials:
1.5 Hours	• Whiteboard • Projector

EXERCISE 1 - What Makes Something Funny?

• As a class make a list of things that your students find funny. You can make a spider chart on the board filled with topics and jokes.

• Ask your students if everyone always finds the exact same things funny. Ask them what they think makes something funny.

• Come prepared with a list of jokes (or funny videos) for your students. Feel free to use websites like this to get content if you need:
https://parade.com/968634/parade/jokes-for-kids/
https://www.rd.com/list/short-jokes/

• Share the jokes or funny videos with your students and have them show a thumbs up or thumbs down if they thought it was funny.

• Make the point to the students that not everyone finds the same things funny. It's ok to have a sense of humor that is unique.

EXERCISE 2 - Community Agreement

• As a way to continue the teaching from the last exercise, sit down with your students and come up with a community agreement (if you haven't already as a class) for how to make sure every student feels respected and welcomed as they share about themselves and make jokes.

EXERCISE 3 - Introduction Funnies

• Talk to your students about how comedians often use their own lives, personalities and experiences as something to write a joke about.

• Explain to your students that during the workshop broadcast they'll be learning how to introduce themselves and use their name as a starting joke.

• Get the students to start to brainstorm a list of pieces of their identity that they would want to use to introduce themselves. This could involve a list of things they love or don't love or a distinguishing feature they have.

• Have each student choose one of those things and come up with an exaggerated way to introduce themselves using it.

Pre-Workshop Activity

Name: What Even Is Funny?

• This could involve taking something they love and making it their name (ie: They call me Mr. Pizza)
• Or talking about a part of their personality and exaggerating it (ie: I talk so loud they can hear me in space)
• Remind students that it is only okay to brainstorm jokes for their own name, but not any of the other students. Giving students the agency to make their own joke can be very rewarding but is a fine balance in a classroom.

EXERCISE 4 - Intro to Stand Up Comedy
• Introduce your students to the idea of the art form of stand up comedy. Use some of the vocab words on the previous page to do this.
• Watch the following video to give your students a taste of the art form: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2Vg3iSd5ms
• Ask them what they think makes Stand Up comedy different from acting or storytelling or other art forms.
• Ask them about the different styles of comedy and why different artists might communicate and write their jokes differently. Lead this into a short discussion on how identity is expressed in the arts.

Broadcast Program

00:00 - 00:05:
• Artist Bio Video + Introduction.

00:05 - 00:15:
• Have students introduce themselves with a joke about their name.
• How comedians introduce themselves.
• Have students share what kinds of things they find funny.

00:15 - 00:30:
• Talk about different aspects of a story (Want/Need) & the details in a story (ie: how to add details and jokes).
• Take a simple daily activity and exaggerate it.

00:30-00:35
• How to throw punchlines into a story to punch it up.
• Rules of standup (ie: Don't punch down).

00:35-00:45
• Work time for their routine.

00:45-00:50
• Students can share their routine (intro about themselves & quick story).

00:50 - 00:55
• Artist Q & A.

Post-Workshop Activity

Name: Getting Our Show Ready

Duration:	Materials:
1 Hour	• Paper to Write On

EXERCISE 1 - Punching Up A Punchline

• Put students into pairs and give each student a piece of paper. If you're worried about students making inappropriate jokes you can let the students know that the paper will be submitted to you at the end of the period.

• Have each student write the setup for a joke on their paper by writing down a ridiculous 'Why' question (ie: Why does airplane food taste bad? Why do we like sugar? Why does my breath smell? etc).

• Have each student switch papers with their partner and then write a ridiculous answer to their question (the punchline).

• Then have the students switch back papers again and try and think of how they could take the joke as it is and make it even funnier. This could involve making it more absurd, coming up with a current cultural reference to put in it, using a better synonym for one of the words in it etc.

• You could have your students try this a few times and see if any of them come up with anything they like and want to share with the class.

EXERCISE 2 - Public Speaking Prep

• Trying to deliver jokes in front of an audience can be scary. Try and use some of these exercises to get your students a little more warmed up for the stage.

• Have your students line up at the side of the class. Mark off a spot in the middle of the front-of-class.

• Have each student take a turn walking to that middle spot in the class. Have them stop there, make eye contact with all of the students, take a breath and then say their name to the class before walking back to their seat.

• Print out a random selection of pictures and put your students in pairs. Have each student take turns flipping over a paper to see the picture there and then have them 'present' to their partner for a full minute about the picture; improvising a story about it, describing it, saying what it makes them think of etc. If any of the students are feeling extra brave, have them improvise a mini speech on a random photo to the entire class.

EXERCISE 3 - Polishing A Set

• Now we're going to take your students various comedic bits (their last name introduction and their everyday story) and turn it into a little comedy set.

Post-Workshop Activity

Name: Getting Our Show Ready

• Have your students each practice both parts of their set out loud on their own (have them write it down if they're able).
• Put your students into pairs and have them practice their set with each other.
• Instruct your students on how to give constructive feedback. Have each student tell their partner what their favorite part was and what part of the set they didn't understand or find as funny. If the students have any joke suggestions for their partner they could give them but remind everyone that when you get feedback you want to take it all in but you don't -have- to change your set for every piece of feedback.
• Have the students go back to their set one last time and try and add one more punchline or funny detail to make their set even better.
• Have a short discussion with the students about how everyone has their own style of performance and how we can express our identity through the things we write about and the way we communicate them.
• If any of the students are willing, have them perform their set to the class.

Additional Information

Upcoming Workshops

March 26-28 - Hailey Weber - Painting (French & English Program)
April 10-11 - Greg Orrē - Music
April 24-25 - Katherine Lawrence - Page Poetry

More Art By The Artist

To find out more about Shawn, check him out on social media:
https://www.instagram.com/bloodycuthand/?hl=en
https://nac-cna.ca/en/bio/shawn-cuthand