Greek theatre

Part 1 - Chorus

Duration: 2-3 weeks

Driving question

In the context of Greek theatre, what is a chorus and what skills are needed to create a chorus?

Overview

Through practical movement-based tasks, students are encouraged to develop ensemble skills, timing and rhythm. Students read about the dramatic convention of the chorus and are given the opportunity to express their learning through written, oral and performance activities.

| Stage 4 outcomes | Stage 5 outcomes |
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| A student: | A student: |
| 4.1.2 improvises and playbuilds through group-devised processes | 5.1.2 contributes, selects, develops and structures ideas in improvisation and playbuilding |
| 4.2.3 explores and uses aspects of dramatic forms, performance styles, theatrical conventions and technologies to create dramatic meaning | 5.2.3 employs a variety of dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques, theatrical conventions and technologies to create dramatic meaning |
| 4.3.1 identifies and describes elements of drama, dramatic forms, performance styles, techniques and conventions in drama | 5.3.1 responds to, reflects on and evaluates elements of drama, dramatic forms, performance styles, dramatic techniques and theatrical conventions |

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Content

This lesson sequence provides an introduction and practical exploration of Chorus as a technique used in Greek Theatre. The chorus is used to provide information to the audience, often about events that could not take place on stage. They also fill the gaps in the story or progress the narrative. They have a direct relationship with the audience as well as the characters. They communicate the moral message of the plays. They would do this as one unit or with one member of the chorus ‘stepping out’.

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| Cross-curriculum content and key competencies |
| Literacy |

Assessment

All activities require students to demonstrate their learning and are all assessment for learning activities.

Teaching and learning activities

Reading

Students will:

1. review Greek theatre – chorus handout
2. as a class, discuss where they might have seen a chorus before and discuss any unfamiliar words.

Key term match-up

Scatter key terms and definition cards on the floor throughout the classroom.

Students will:

1. review the words and definitions provided on the cards
2. work in small groups to match the appropriate terms and definitions
3. when matched correctly as per the table below, place key terms and definitions next to each other on the classroom wall so they can be used throughout the unit of work

|  |  |
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| Term | Definition |
| Canon | When a group of performers present the same movement, gesture or phrase one after another. |
| Unison | To do something at the same time. |
| Stichomythia | Lines of dialogue being presented by alternating characters. |
| Locomotor movement | Movement that involves the body moving from one place to another. |
| Gestural movement | Movement of the hands, face or other body parts that communicate particular messages. |
| Chorus | A group of performers who sing, speak, dance and move in unison. |
| Exaggeration | Making something larger or greater than it is naturally. |
| Repetition | The repeating of a word, phrase, movement or gesture. |

1. discuss any new or unfamiliar terms with students modelling fluency and pronunciation
2. students copy definitions and words into their books as a ‘glossary’ that can be used throughout the unit.

Moving as one

A core feature of the chorus in Greek Theatre is the ability to move as one distinct unit. The following movement-based tasks allow students to explore different ways they might use choral movement as a theatrical device.

Snake

1. Stand in a single line of 4-8 people with their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. Playing gentle instrumental music in this task is optional.
2. Begin to walk around the room, focusing on moving in unison. They should focus on using the same leg, looking in the same direction and maintain the same distance with the person in front of them.
3. Swap leaders and encourage them to begin ‘snaking’ around the room. Play with:

* tempo
* add stops
* starts
* twists
* and turns into their movement.

1. Remove their hands from the person’s shoulders, following the person in front of them while maintaining the same distance, without touching, using the same leg, and looking in the same direction.

Parallel Lines

1. Stand in two parallel lines. They place their outer arm on the shoulder of the person in front of them and their arm on the inside of the two lines on the shoulder of the next to them.
2. Walk around the room, focusing on moving in unison. They should focus on using the same leg, looking in the same direction and maintaining the same distance with the person in front, behind and next to them.
3. Swap leaders and encourage them to begin ‘snaking’ around the room. Encourage them to play with tempo and add stops, starts, twists and turns into their movement.
4. Remove their hands from the person’s shoulders in front of them and begin to move around the room. Focusing on the same leg, looking in the same direction and maintain the same distance with the person in front, behind and next to them, continue to move around the room in unison.

Mirroring

1. Divide students into pairs and ask them to find a space in the room.
2. Ask each pair decide who is performer A and who is performer B.
3. Pairs stand facing one another in a neutral position, making eye contact.
4. As Player B begins moving, A is to mirror B’s actions exactly. Both players should maintain eye contact, and monitor each other’s movement using their peripheral vision.
5. Encourage slow and sustained movements, to begin with, simple actions like brushing teeth or playing a sport in slow motion.
6. After a short period, ask students to switch leaders.
7. Eventually, pairs can be encouraged to switch back and forth between leaders on their own or to try and work together where neither person is leading.

Flocking

The object of the activity is for the group to look like they are moving as one. All movement should be improvised. This activity can be done with or without music.

1. Stand in groups of four in a diamond formation. All students should be facing the same direction and have enough room to stretch out without touching each other.
2. The individual at the front tip of the diamond will perform an action, lead everyone in the controlled movement. The remainder of the will group follow or mirror the leader.
3. If and when the leader shifts direction from the front to the side of the room and is facing another wall, the control of the movement shifts to the person now at the front of the diamond.
4. Encourage students to aim for fluid transitions between leaders

Canon

To warm students up and introduce them to the concept of a canon, ask students to participate in the following task. Before beginning, it is a good idea to reiterate the meaning of canon and gestural movement using the definitions that were placed on the classroom wall during task one.

1. Stand in a circle.
2. Start off with a gesture.
3. Perform the gesture, followed by the other students copying it in a canon manner around the circle.
4. Explain that the essential element of a canon is the use rhythm and timing.
5. Pass the gesture around the circle again, this time focusing on timing and maintaining a steady rhythm.
6. Continue exploring canon, add a gesture to the original movement each time it goes around the circle until you form a phrase of movements.
7. Pairing up with the person next to them in the circle, find a quite space in the room. As an ensemble, they are to explore canon using the same phrase of movement and order of students as in the circle, however, this time they are using different spatial relationships and formations.

Speaking in chorus

As a class watch the [Prologue from Beauty and the Beast](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2rDrKUb6bM&t=12s)

Students will:

1. in small groups of three to six, create a short performance to the prologue from [Beauty and the Beast script](http://www.fpx.de/fp/Disney/Scripts/BeautyAndTheBeast.txt) with a focus on speaking in chorus, they are encouraged to experiment with the following techniques:

* choral moments
* solo moments
* pitch
* tempo
* canon
* repetition.

1. ask students to add gestural movement, locomotive movement and music.

Newspaper activity

1. Review by discussion the chorus techniques covered over the previous exercises.
2. Provide students with a newspaper article OR ask them to bring one in before this lesson.
3. Students will use the newspaper article as the stimulus to devise a performance that uses a chorus.
4. Allocate students with some time (depending on the length of performance, this may take a few lessons) to devise and rehearse the performance.
5. After a short period ask students to form an audience take a turn at presenting their performances to the class.
6. As a class provide feedback and discuss the students’ use of the chorus.

Reflection

Students will:

* respond to the reflective task in their logbooks. A question to guide their response could be:
  + describe how chorus was effectively used in your, or another groups’ performance.
* encourage students to use the key definitions covered at the beginning of the sequence in their response
* encourage students to use their workshop experiences to support their findings.

Differentiation

Extension

Students could:

* expand the distance between each other when working on choral movement
* go beyond focusing on voice and use music and movement in the Flocking activity to heighten mood and atmosphere

Life skills activity

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| Life skills outcomes |
| A student: |
| LS 2.1 a student explores dramatic forms and theatrical conventions |
| LS 3.2 a student identifies and respond to the elements of drama or theatre in performances |

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Students could:

* participate in the movement based tasks that focus on building chorus and ensemble skills
* students verbally discuss how they worked with their group to explore the stimulus provided.

Evaluate

Feedback is formative during the lessons.

Reference list and resources

* Greek theatre – chorus handout
* Key terms in Greek theatre
* Access to [Prologue from Beauty and the Beast](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2rDrKUb6bM&t=12s)
* Access to [Beauty and the Beast script](http://www.fpx.de/fp/Disney/Scripts/BeautyAndTheBeast.txt)
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