



ART MUSEUM CURATOR: A DRAMA IMPROVISATION GAME TO PLAY WITH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



Image 1
5 person sculpture

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"Art Museum Curator" is one of many theatre games in *Enlivening Instruction with Drama and Improv: A Guide for Second and Foreign Language Teachers* (Cahnmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021) which contains dozens of embodied practices to use in the language classroom. There is a lot to learn from the language found in any museum. In particular the language used by museum curators endows visitors' understandings of what they are viewing with meaning. Curators enhance connections to the context and story of any object under observation. Whether or not your class can visit an art museum, natural history museum or other museum with language students for language learning and cultural awareness purposes, the classroom itself can become a gallery where students transform themselves into both object and curator.



By improvising the theme of "The Museum," students use the particular language of the context (e.g. the "art terms" used to describe an artist's style, medium, experimentation, identity, and historic context) to produce meaningful and engaged learning that is surprising and fun for both teacher and learners. Describing sculptures they create with their own bodies is a great way for students to practice present and progressive tenses, acquire new vocabularies, and study the ways in which we make collective sense and humor through the language of observation.

PROCEDURE

1. Ask your class to form teams of three.
2. The first player strikes a pose as if they were a sculpture in a museum
3. The second player endows the sculpture with new or more clear meaning by striking a second pose in relation to the first. The two performers are now the complete sculpture.
4. The third player, "the museum curator," studies what they see and explains the sculpture to the classroom audience. They are encouraged to "title" the piece.
5. Teachers can coach curators to break with expectations when describing the "object" under study. For example, if a student is posed as a child tying shoes, encourage students to consider a description that might be less expected such as a kangaroo stretching open her pouch or a scientist examining boll weevils on cotton plants. When coaching, be sure to take into account students' language level to provide comprehensible instructions and scaffolding.
6. Play again, swapping roles. This time, ask player one to become the curator, player two to strike the first pose, and player three (the former curator) to strike second pose. Continue to rotate until all three players have had a chance to play the curatorial role.
7. Ask another group of three to perform for the group. You may also like to give students a chance to practice in small groups prior to performance for the class.
8. Discuss with the class: What surprised you the most? What made you laugh? How did the players integrate the museum language into their presentation?



Image 2
Vivi Chair



Image 13
3 person sculpture

Adapt or Extend the Activity

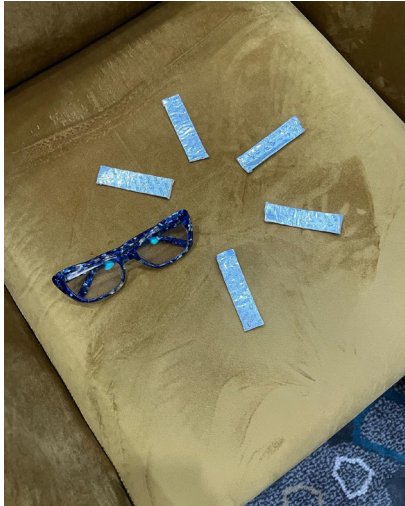


Image 4
Gum glasses



Image 5
Trevis sticks



Image 6
Water tampons

1. Connect to writing by asking students to write their interpretations of others' sculptures and read them aloud to the class! Writing well is a necessary skill for an art curator. Use a digital camera and take pictures of the sculptures. Ask students to "curate" by writing for an imagined catalog of the exhibition. Study the Museum of Modern Art's "art terms" page (https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/glossary/) and see how many terms students can incorporate into a description of their peers' sculptures or images of artwork from your local museum.
2. When playing with students of lower language levels, ask curators to only come up with a short title for the sculpture. Ask students to decide if their sculpture will be made of clay, stone, wood, metal or concrete and to prepare to explain their sculpture. Use the following simple dialogue between the "curator" (teacher or student) and "artists" (student group):

Curator: What a [adjective: great, wonderful, strange, curious, etc.] sculpture! What is it called?
Artists: [title]!
Curator: What material did you use to make this sculpture?
Artists: [list materials]!
Curator: Tell us more! Where is the idea from?
3. When playing with students of advanced language levels, ask the curator to elaborate beyond the title to explain some of the history of this sculpture, the artist who made it, the materials used, and anything else that will enhance the meaning of what students "see" in the imagined museum piece!
4. Adapt the game by playing *Anthropology Museum*. Ask each student to choose 3-5 personal possessions on their person or in their bag, desk, etc. Then, individually, ask students to arrange themselves into a sculpture incorporating their objects. These sculptures, like dioramas in a natural science museum, are designed to convey information to museum visitors about the lifestyle and values of the people in the sculptures. Ask each person to remember their sculpture. Then ask half the class to walk around viewing the sculptures, as in a gallery. After the gallery viewing, switch so the other half has a turn to share their sculptures, view the gallery. Extend by asking students to write about their trip to the anthropology museum – what did they learn about humans living in your city 1,000 years ago? Students should imagine they are from 1,000 years in the future and write only from the clues they saw at the museum exhibition. Scaffold learners for success by explicitly teaching or providing a list of necessary terminology.
5. Adapt the game for online play by providing break out rooms with the goal of recreating an image of artwork in their screens, selecting items players have at home. Each player can enliven the artwork by speaking in the voice of one quality in the painting or sculpture--players can speak from inanimate objects or even from colors!

REFERENCE

Cahnmann-Taylor, M. & McGovern, K. R.
(2021). *Enlivening instruction with drama and improv: A guide for second and world language teachers*. New York: Routledge.