

Using Drama Strategies to Enter and Explore a Painting

Resources: *The Pioneer* a tryptic by Frederick McCubbins (1904)

The Pioneer by Anna Zahalka

The Immigrants – a photomontage by Anna Zahalka

The Immigrants (2) – a photomontage by Anna Zahalka

1. Look at the three pictures of McCubbin's tryptic of *The Pioneer*. Ask what the universal themes are, e.g. migration, family, death, etc.

Statues: The teacher gathers the themes. The students move around the room, freezing into a still image that depicts the theme being called out each time, by the teacher.

Picture 1

1. **Thought prompts:**

What do you notice?

What do you wonder?

2. **Thought-tracking:** Get into the woman's physical position. Let's call her Mary.

Think in role as Mary, silently

Now let's hear what Mary might be thinking?

Thought Collage: Improvise a spontaneous, whole-class voice collage of Mary's inner thoughts, (reaching a crescendo and ending in silence).

3. **Collective Role:** Let's call the man, Simon. What might Simon be thinking as he looks at Mary? Get into his physical position. Speak aloud a thought that Simon is thinking, as he looks at his wife, (Mary). No-one speaks twice in a row.

4. **Improvisation (in pairs):** Improvise a conversation between Simon and Mary. It is the day portrayed in Picture 1.

5. **Eavesdropping/Overheard Conversations;** The teacher passes by each pair in turn and listens in. Only the pair that the teacher is near, can move and speak.
6. **Movement** (groups of 4): Devise a movement piece that repeats seamlessly. It portrays a disturbing dream that Mary or Simon has on their first night in this place.
7. **Role on the Wall:** What do we know/think we know/want to know about Simon and Mary?
8. **Collective role/Hot-seating:** 6 students together take on the role of Mary and answer questions. No-one who is Mary can answer 2 questions in a row. This activity can be repeated for Simon, with a different group of students in role as Simon.
9. **Still Image:** Make a still image of 'a memorable moment' that occurred for the couple, between Picture 1 and Picture 2, (but not a baby being born). Present the moment as a still image and then turn to the audience and recount the moment in role.

Picture 2

10. **Teacher in Role/ Hot-seating:** Mary is standing and holding her baby . She is open to answering questions in role. She finished by walking into picture 2 and freezing (**Freeze-frame**).
11. **Small group play-making (devising)/ Still Image:** In pairs as Mary and Simon, devise a short scene for performance. Each pair is given a different emotional state to work on for their scene, i.e. happy, worried, sad, afraid, surprised, angry, excited, grumpy, argumentative. The scene will start and end with a still image.
12. **Performance Carousel 9Performance Wave):** The pairs perform the scenes in turn, seamlessly. The scenes could them be recounted as first person narratives, (for an imaginary audience).

13. **Talking Objects:** There is a house in the picture. What is inside? The students in turn, enter the space and place themselves as an object in the house. As each object gets into position, it states what it is and gives a piece of information about itself and/or about the occupants of the house.
14. **Teacher in Role:** Mary and/or Simon, passes by each object in turn. The object can pass comment about them, or speak to them, as they pass by.

Picture 3

15. **Thought Prompt:** The teacher says, '*I wonder what you wonder...*' and the students' wonderings must start with, '*I wonder...*'
16. **Alternative endings/guided visualisation:** Imagine adding something to Picture 3 that would make it less ambiguous – an epitaph?
17. In groups of 3 or 4, prepare a guided visualisation for us. What might a picture between Pictures 2 and 3 have contained that would help us understand Picture 3? Help us imagine it.

There are various possibilities.

- Verbalise the picture
 - Bring us into the space and make us into the picture
 - Paint the picture
 - Write the scene
18. **Tableau:** One at a time, enter the space and silently become part of a commemorative sculpture, '*In memory of the Pioneers*'.
19. **Still images:** Devise 3 updated still images, depicting a 2022 triptych that fits with the universal, timeless themes.

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