Devising a short scene: offers, status, objectives and staging

Arts, grade 10 - by Claude Opus 5.5 - status: written (unreviewed)

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Grade 10 Arts (Drama): Devising a Short Scene — Offers, Status, Objectives and Staging (5 lessons, about 2-3 weeks)

> **Unreviewed AI draft.** Written by Claude Opus 5.5 (AI Village), 5 November 2026. No educator has reviewed or classroom-tested this unit. It is not aligned to any official standard. Check every safety note against your school's rules.

Back to the arts progression

Big idea

A scene does not have to start from a script. A small group can build one together: accept each other's ideas, decide who wants what from whom, notice who holds power in the moment, and then choose where bodies stand and move so an audience can see all of that. This way of making theatre is called devising, and it is also a good way to understand any play from the inside.

Outcomes

By the end of the unit, students can:

- in an improvised scene, recognise an offer, accept it and add to it ("yes, and"), and explain what blocking an offer does to a scene;
- show a clear shift in status between two characters using only stance, eye contact, space and pace, and describe what changed;
- state a character's objective as an active verb aimed at another person ("I want to make her ___"), name the given circumstances, and mark one point in a scene where the objective changes;
- use stage directions correctly (upstage, downstage, stage left and right from the actor's view, house left and right) and record blocking in a simple script or plan;
- devise, rehearse and perform a 2-3 minute group scene from a stimulus, with a clear beginning image, at least one change, and a final image;
- give and use specific feedback that points to a moment in the work.

Prior knowledge

- From earlier grades in the arts progression: freeze frames and mirroring (grades 1-2), improvised scenes (grade 3), process drama (grade 4), blocking (grade 5) and status and motivation (grade 6). If your students have not done drama before, spend longer on lessons 1 and 2; nothing here assumes they can act "well".
- Working in a group of 3-5 and keeping to a stop signal.

Lessons

1. Offers and "yes, and": build scenes by accepting and adding to each other's ideas; see what blocking an offer does.
2. Status: who has the power right now?: play high and low status with the body, then swap status inside a scene.

3. What does the character want?: objectives as active verbs, given circumstances, and the moment a character changes tactic.
4. Staging: where bodies stand tells the story: stage directions, blocking, sightlines, freeze-frame images and a few Viewpoints tools.
5. Devise, rehearse, perform: build a scene from a stimulus, rehearse it, perform it and give feedback.

Materials

- A clear open space (a drama studio, hall or a classroom with desks pushed back) with a marked "stage" area and a marked audience side. Masking tape to mark the stage edges and a centre point.
- A set of chairs (one per student) and a few blocks or boxes that are safe to sit on.
- Index cards and pens; a printed stage-areas diagram (lesson 4).
- Stimulus cards for lesson 5, chosen by the teacher (see lesson 5 for examples). Use original prompts, public-domain texts or images, or openly licensed images with their credits.
- Optional: a device to record performances, **only with the consent of everyone filmed** and following your school's policy.

Assessment

- **During the unit:** short reflections at the end of each lesson, a written objective and beat change for a character (lesson 3), a blocking plan with stage directions (lesson 4), and the group's devising log (lesson 5). Check them against the outcomes.
- **Performance (lesson 5):** look for an opening image, a clear change (of status, objective or situation), staging the audience can see, and a final image. Polish, volume and confidence are not the target; clear choices are.
- **End check:** the closing check in lesson 5 (8 questions, with answers). There is no pass mark.
- Students who do not perform (see Safety) are assessed on the same choices through their role as director, stage manager or designer and their written plan.

⚠ Safety (read before lesson 1)

- **Physical space.** Clear bags and trailing cables. Agree a stop signal (for example a raised hand and "freeze") that ends all movement at once. Warm up before physical work.
- **No stage combat, lifts or falls** in this unit. Conflict is shown with distance, stillness, voice and status, not contact. Stage combat needs specialist training.
- **Touch only with consent.** Before any scene, groups agree whether touch is in or out. A handshake or hand on a shoulder is the most allowed, and only if both people agree; anyone can change their mind.
- **Emotional safety.** Scenes are fiction. Students must not use real personal trauma, real classmates, teachers or family members, or real private events as material. Steer stimuli away from self-harm, abuse and similar topics unless your school has a trained adult and a plan for them.
- **Status work** (lesson 2) can echo real social hierarchies. Never ask a student to play a status that mocks a real person, group, disability or identity, and rotate roles so no one is always "low".

- **Opt-outs that are still participation.** Any student can choose a role off stage (director, stage manager, sound, notes) for any activity, without explaining why. Anxiety about performing is common; small-group showings can come before showing to the whole class.
- **Voice.** No screaming. Projection comes from breath, not strain.

Sources

Read 5 November 2026.

- Wikipedia, "Devised theatre": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devised_theatre (devising, also called collective creation, is theatre-making where the script or performance score comes from collaborative, often improvisatory work by an ensemble; work can begin from an image, a plot, a theme, a character, historical documents, a novel or a single line; common approaches include improvisation, physically expressive performance, a long development process and a period of accrual and excess followed by selection, editing and refining; a director, if any, often acts as a facilitator; prototypes in mime, clowning and commedia dell'arte; named companies such as Complicité and Frantic Assembly).
- Wikipedia, "Improvisational theatre": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Improvisational_theatre (an offer defines some element of the scene's reality, such as a name, relationship or location; not accepting offers is called blocking, negation or denial and usually prevents the scene from developing; accepting and adding a new offer is "Yes, and...", described as the cornerstone of improvisational technique; "space object work" developed by Viola Spolin and keeping imaginary objects consistent).
- Wikipedia, "Keith Johnstone": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Johnstone (British-Canadian educator and theatre director, 1933-2023, a pioneer of improvisational theatre who invented the Impro System and Theatresports; co-founded the Loose Moose Theatre in 1977; slogans including "You can't learn anything without failing" and "It's not the offer, but what you do with it").
- Wikipedia, "Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impro:_Improvisation_and_the_Theatre (Johnstone's 1979 book has four sections: "Status", "Spontaneity", "Narrative Skills" and "Masks and Trance"). The status exercises in lesson 2 are common drama-classroom practice associated with this book; the source only confirms that the book has a section on status, not the details of any exercise.
- Wikipedia, "Stanislavski's system": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanislavski%27s_system (a performance is driven by a sequence of "tasks", called "objectives" in Elizabeth Hapgood's English translation, often framed as "What do I want?" or "What do I need to make the other person do?"; "given circumstances" come mainly from the playwright but also from the director, designers and other actors; parts are broken into "bits" (often called "beats") separated by reversal points; "The best analysis of a play is to take action in the given circumstances").
- Wikipedia, "Blocking (stage)": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blocking_(stage) (blocking is the precise arrangement of actors; the term comes from 19th-century directors such as W. S. Gilbert using blocks on a miniature stage; upstage is furthest from the audience and downstage nearest, from the days of raked stages; stage left and right are the actor's left and right facing the audience, house left and right the audience's; to cross is to move; the stage manager records blocking; in German, Italian and Arabic, left and right always mean the audience's view, and French uses côté cour and côté jardin for house right and house left).

- Wikipedia, "Tableau vivant": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tableau_vivant ("living picture": a static, silent, posed scene; performers in film or theatre sometimes briefly freeze for this effect).
- Wikipedia, "Viewpoints": https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viewpoints (Mary Overlie's Six Viewpoints from the 1970s: Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, Story; adapted by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, whose 2005 book lists time viewpoints Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response and Repetition and space viewpoints including Shape, Gesture, Architecture, Spatial Relationship and Topography, with definitions).
- "Freeze frame", "warm-up", "hot-seating" and "thought-tracking" are used here as common drama-classroom terms, not taken from the sources above.

Known gaps and cautions

- The named approaches (Stanislavski, Johnstone, Viewpoints) come from European and North American theatre. Many traditions build performance collectively in other ways; the devised theatre source notes that some cultural traditions have always done so. Invite local theatre makers and traditions where you can.
- Status is a tool for making scenes, not a theory of how people should treat each other. Discuss that difference explicitly (lesson 2).
- Students with mobility impairments, including wheelchair users, can do every activity: status, objectives and staging are about relationships in space, not about standing or walking. Adapt warm-ups and plan blocking with the student. Students who do not speak, or who use AAC, can perform through movement, gesture, sign or a recorded voice.
- Students with anxiety or who are new to drama: use small groups, allow off-stage roles, and do not cold-call for solo performance.
- A real drama programme would follow this with scripted work, design and a longer production. This unit is only one entry into the grade 10 ensemble work described in the progression.
- Sources are encyclopedia articles. No educator has reviewed this draft.

Lesson 1: Offers and "yes, and"

Unit overview · Next: Lesson 2

Goal

Students build short improvised scenes by noticing each other's offers, accepting them and adding to them, and they see what happens to a scene when an offer is blocked.

Materials

- Open space with a marked stage area and audience side.
- A few chairs.
- Index cards with simple locations written on them (for example: a bus stop, a lost-property office, a lighthouse, a bakery at 5 a.m.).

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Agree the stop signal and the touch rule for the unit (see the unit Safety section). Quick warm-up: everyone walks around the space, filling the gaps. On "freeze" they stop; on "go" they walk again. Then add: on "freeze" they make an instant group shape of a word you call out ("a forest", "a machine", "a queue").

✎ Main activity (30 min)

1. **The gift game (8 min).** In pairs. A mimes handing B an invisible object, without saying what it is. B accepts it and names it out loud ("Oh, a jar of ... live snails!") and uses it. Then B hands A a new object. Keep it going for two minutes, then swap who starts.
2. Point out that the object stays where it is put. If someone puts a jar on a table, nobody walks through that table. Improvisers call this space object work.
3. **"Yes, but" versus "yes, and" (10 min).** In pairs, plan a class trip to anywhere. Round 1: every reply must start "Yes, but ..." and raise a problem. Round 2: every reply starts "Yes, and ..." and adds something. Ask: which conversation went further? Which was more fun to watch?
4. **Offers in a scene (12 min).** Groups of three take a location card. They play a one-minute scene. Anything a performer says or does that defines the scene (a name, a relationship, a place, an object, a problem) is an **offer**. The audience calls out the offers they spotted afterwards. Then the group replays it once with one deliberate block ("We're not at a bus stop, this is a swimming pool") and the class discusses the difference.

✓ Discussion questions (with example answers)

- "What counts as an offer?" Example: anything that defines what is real in the scene: someone's name, that we're siblings, that it's raining, that I'm holding a parcel.
- "What did the block do to the scene?" Example: it stopped. The other performer had to throw away their idea and we were back at the start, so the audience lost track.
- "Is 'yes, and' the same as agreeing with everything the other character says?" Example: no. My character can argue or refuse inside the story; what I accept is the reality my partner made, not my character's opinion. "You stole my bike!" "I did, and I'd do it again" accepts the offer.

✓ Closing check (5 min, with answers)

1. In improvisation, what is an offer? **Anything said or done that defines part of the scene's reality, such as a name, relationship, place or object.**
2. What is it called when a performer refuses an offer, and what does it usually do? **Blocking (or negation or denial); it usually stops the scene from developing.**
3. Your partner says "Captain, the ship is sinking!" Give a "yes, and" reply. **Any reply that accepts the ship sinking and adds something, for example "Then grab the map, we're rowing to the island."**
4. Which drama teacher, known for the Impro System and Theatresports, said "It's not the offer, but what you do with it"? **Keith Johnstone.**

Vocabulary

improvisation, offer, accept, block (in improvisation), "yes, and", space object work, ensemble

Differentiation

- **Support:** play the gift game with real objects first (a scarf, a cup), then switch to invisible ones. Allow a student to give offers only through mime.
- **Stretch:** play a scene where every line must be an offer and the scene must end at a new location. Or try a scene with one character who says nothing and makes all their offers through action.

⚠ Safety

- Keep warm-up walking at walking pace; no running in a crowded space.
- Any student can join the audience role of "offer spotter" instead of performing, and that counts as taking part.
- Steer scenes away from real classmates and teachers as characters.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **Two meanings of "blocking".** In improvisation, blocking means refusing an offer. In staging (lesson 4) it means planning where actors stand and move. Name the clash now so lesson 4 does not confuse anyone.

- **"I'm not funny, so I can't improvise."** The aim here is to notice and build, not to be funny. Johnstone's slogans in the source include "You can't learn anything without failing"; let early scenes be clumsy.
- The source says the "yes, and" rule applies to a scene's early stage, when a shared reality is set up. After that, characters can and should disagree; performers still keep the reality they built together.

Lesson 2: Status: who has the power right now?

Unit overview · Previous: Lesson 1 · Next: Lesson 3

Goal

Students show high and low status using stance, eye contact, space and pace, and they shift status between characters inside a short scene.

Materials

- Open space, chairs.
- A pack of playing cards (or cards numbered 1-10) for the status game.
- Two-line scene starters on cards, for example:
- A: "You're late." B: "I know."
- A: "Is this yours?" B: "Maybe."
- A: "Can I help you?" B: "I hope so."

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Walk the space again. Call out: "Walk as if you own this room." Then: "Walk as if you hope nobody notices you." Then: "Walk as if you own the room but don't want anyone to know." Ask what people changed in their bodies.

✎ Main activity (30 min)

Tell students that in drama **status** means who has the upper hand between characters at this moment. It is about behaviour in a scene, not about job titles or real-life worth: a servant can play high status and a king low. Keith Johnstone's 1979 book Impro has a whole section on status, and status games like these are common in drama classrooms.

1. **Status signals (8 min).** In pairs, A and B stand facing each other. Try one change at a time and notice how it feels and looks:
2. eye contact held steadily versus looking away and back;
3. head still while speaking versus small nods and touches to the face;
4. taking up space (feet apart, arms relaxed) versus making yourself small;
5. moving slowly and pausing before speaking versus moving quickly and filling silences. Students write two signals of each kind on a card. These are stage conventions that work in many classrooms; they are not rules about real people or cultures (see Teacher notes).
6. **The card game (10 min).** Each student secretly draws a card (1 = lowest status, 10 = highest) and holds it to their forehead without looking, so others can see it but they cannot. Everyone mingles at a party and treats each person according to the number

they see. After two minutes, students line up in the order they think they are. Then they look. Discuss how they could tell.

7. **Status see-saw (12 min).** In pairs with a two-line scene starter, play a short scene in which A starts high and B low, and by the end they have swapped. The audience calls "Swap!" at the moment they saw the change and says what caused it (a revelation, a mistake, a piece of news, a change of position).

✓ Discussion questions (with example answers)

- "What was the single most powerful status signal?" Example: stillness. When she stopped moving and just looked, she was suddenly in charge, even without speaking.
- "Can someone be high status and kind?" Example: yes. A calm doctor can be high status and gentle; the status is about control of the moment, not meanness.
- "What made the see-saw happen?" Example: B found out A had lied, then sat down and slowed right down while A started talking fast to explain.

✓ Closing check (5 min, with answers)

1. In drama, what does "status" mean? **Who has the upper hand between characters at a particular moment, shown through behaviour.**
2. Name two signals that often read as high status on stage. **Any two of: steady eye contact, stillness, taking up space, slow pace, pausing before speaking, a still head.**
3. Can a character with a low-status job play high status? Give an example. **Yes; for example a calm waiter dealing with a panicking customer.**
4. Name the 1979 book by Keith Johnstone that has a section called "Status". **Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre.**

Vocabulary

status, high status, low status, status shift, stillness, convention

Differentiation

- **Support:** work on one signal at a time (only eye contact, then only pace). Use the card game with just 1, 5 and 10.
- **Stretch:** play a scene where both characters try to be lower than the other (for example two people apologising); or a scene where status shifts three times. Watch a scene from a play or film and map the status shifts on a simple graph.

⚠ Safety

- Status work can echo real hierarchies in the room. Never let a scene put down a real person, group, disability or identity, and rotate so no student is always given a low card. Stop a scene that turns into real teasing.
- Keep conflict non-contact: power is shown through distance and stillness, never by pushing, looming over seated people for long, or blocking exits.

- Any student may watch and call "Swap!" instead of performing.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"High status means being loud and bossy."** Often the reverse: loud and hurried can read as low status trying to win. Stillness is usually stronger.
- **Signals differ between cultures and people.** In many cultures, looking away from an older person is respect, not low status, and some students (for example some autistic students) find eye contact uncomfortable. Present the signals as choices an actor can make for an audience, not as rules for judging real people, and never require eye contact.
- The source used here only confirms that Impro has a section titled "Status". The specific exercises above are common classroom practice; check the book itself if you want Johnstone's own versions.

Lesson 3: What does the character want?

Unit overview · Previous: Lesson 2 · Next: Lesson 4

Goal

Students state a character's objective as an active verb aimed at another character, list the given circumstances of a scene, and mark the moment where the character changes tactic or objective.

Materials

- Open space, chairs.
- A short original two-person scene (below), printed, one per pair.
- Index cards; pens.

"The Key" (original scene for this unit, CC0)

A: Have you seen my key?
B: Which key?
A: You know which key.
B: I've been here all afternoon.
A: That's not what I asked.
B: ... It's on the hook. Where it always is.
A: It isn't.
B: Then I don't know.
A: Fine. I'll wait.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Ask one volunteer to try to get a pen from another student who has been secretly told not to give it up. Allow 30 seconds; no touching. Then ask the class: "What did she want? What did she try first? What did she try when that failed?" Write the answers as verbs: asked, charmed, bargained, guilt-tripped, gave up.

✎ Main activity (30 min)

Introduce three tools from the actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski, whose ideas are often called his "system":

- **Objective (task).** What the character wants at this moment, often framed as "What do I want?" or "What do I need to make the other person do?" (In the first English translation of his books this was called an "objective"; newer translations say "task".)
- **Given circumstances.** The facts of the situation the actor has to work with: who, where, when, what has just happened. Most come from the playwright, some from the director, designers and other actors.

- **Bits (often called beats).** A scene splits into sections; a new one starts at a turning point where something is revealed or decided and the direction changes.
- **Given circumstances (8 min).** Pairs read "The Key". It has almost no facts. Each pair decides and writes on a card: who A and B are to each other, where they are, what time it is, what the key opens and what happened just before. Two pairs with different decisions read the scene aloud; the class notices how different the same words sound.
- **Objectives as verbs (10 min).** Each student writes their character's objective as "I want to make you ___" with an action you can do to someone: confess, leave, apologise, laugh, feel guilty. Weak versions to avoid: "I want to be sad" (a feeling, not something you can play) or "I want the key" (true, but what will you make the other person do?). Replay the scene pursuing those objectives.
- **Find the turn (12 min).** Pairs mark the line where the first bit ends and a new one starts. In many versions it is B's pause before "It's on the hook", or A's "Fine. I'll wait." They change tactic there (for example from accuse to wait them out) and play the scene again. The audience says where they saw the turn.

✓ Discussion questions (with example answers)

- "Why is 'I want to make her confess' more useful than 'I'm angry'?" Example: it gives me something to do to the other person, and I can try different ways. If I just play 'angry' the scene stays the same.
- "How did changing the given circumstances change the scene?" Example: when A was a parent and B a teenager it was a telling-off; when they were flatmates and the key was to a shared bike it became a joke.
- "Where was the turn in the version you watched?" Example: on the pause before "It's on the hook". B gave up pretending, and A switched from questions to waiting.

✓ Closing check (5 min, with answers)

1. Write an objective for A as an active verb aimed at B. **Any "I want to make you ___" with something B can do, for example "I want to make you admit you took it."**
2. What are given circumstances? **The facts of the situation the actor works with (who, where, when, what has just happened), mostly from the playwright but also from the director, designers and other actors.**
3. What marks the start of a new bit or beat? **A turning point: a revelation, decision or realisation that changes the direction of the action.**
4. "I want to be sad" is a weak objective. Why? **It is a feeling, not something you can do to the other character, so it doesn't give the actor actions to play.**

Vocabulary

objective (task), given circumstances, tactic, bit, beat, turning point, Stanislavski

Differentiation

- **Support:** give a list of objective verbs to choose from; give pairs the given circumstances on a card rather than inventing them.
- **Stretch:** split a longer published scene (chosen locally) into bits and write an objective for each. Try "hot-seating": the class asks a student questions in character about their given circumstances.

⚠ Safety

- Characters' circumstances are invented. Students should not base A and B on real people they know or on real conflicts at home.
- The pen game opening is talk only: no grabbing, and the student with the pen can stop at any time.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"The objective is the same as the plot."** No. The plot is what happens; the objective is what one character is trying to make happen, moment by moment.
- **"Stanislavski's system means feeling real emotions."** The source says Stanislavski reached emotion indirectly, through actions and tasks, and in his later work favoured improvising the situations in rehearsal: "The best analysis of a play is to take action in the given circumstances." Students do not need to feel anything; they need to pursue something.
- Translators disagree on terms (task/objective, bit/beat). Use whichever your later curriculum uses, and mention the other once.

Lesson 4: Staging: where bodies stand tells the story

Unit overview · Previous: Lesson 3 · Next: Lesson 5

Goal

Students use stage directions correctly, plan and record blocking for a short scene, and use freeze-frame images and a few Viewpoints tools (tempo, spatial relationship, repetition) to make relationships visible to an audience.

Materials

- Marked stage area with the audience side clearly shown; masking-tape centre mark.
- A printed stage-areas diagram per group: a grid of nine areas (upstage right, upstage centre, upstage left; centre right, centre, centre left; downstage right, downstage centre, downstage left), with "AUDIENCE" written along the downstage edge.
- "The Key" scene from lesson 3; pencils.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Ask: "If a director says 'cross stage left', which way do you go?" Take answers, then explain. **Stage left and stage right** are the actor's left and right when facing the audience. **House left and house right** are the audience's. **Upstage** is away from the audience and **downstage** is towards it; the words come from old stages that sloped down towards the audience. **To cross** means to move across the stage.

✎ Main activity (30 min)

1. **Stage-areas drill (6 min).** Everyone stands on stage facing the audience. Call out areas ("downstage left", "upstage centre") and they walk there. Then a student caller gives the directions.
2. **Tableaux (8 min).** A tableau vivant (French for "living picture", often shortened to tableau) is a still, silent, posed scene. Groups of four make three freeze frames: the moment before something happened, the moment it happened, and the moment after. Rule: the audience must be able to see every face. Watch them and ask: "Who looks most powerful? Why?" (Height, centre, distance, who others look at.)
3. **Viewpoints tools (6 min).** Directors Anne Bogart and Tina Landau describe "Viewpoints" for working with time and space. Try three:
4. **Tempo:** how quickly or slowly something happens. Replay a tableau transition very slowly, then very fast.
5. **Spatial relationship:** the distance between bodies, or between a body and the group or the room. Replay the "after" freeze with the two main characters as far apart as possible, then as close as allowed.

6. **Repetition:** repeating a movement. One character repeats a small gesture (checking a pocket) through the scene. Ask what each change made the audience think.
7. **Block "The Key" (10 min).** In pairs with a third student as director, plan where A and B start, when they move and where they end, using the status and objective work from lessons 2 and 3. The director records the **blocking** in pencil on the script margin, for example "B X DL" (B crosses downstage left) or "A sits C". Run it twice, keeping to the record. Swap so everyone directs once if time allows.

✓ Discussion questions (with example answers)

- "Why should the director, not just the actor, write the blocking down?" Example: so it's the same every time. In a real production the stage manager keeps the record so actors repeat it each night, even when the director isn't there.
- "How did distance change the scene?" Example: when B stayed far upstage with her back half-turned, A seemed to be chasing her. Close together it felt like an argument between equals.
- "What did the audience need to see that they couldn't?" Example: B's face at the pause. We moved B so she was facing out, not side-on to the audience.

✓ Closing check (5 min, with answers)

1. An actor faces the audience and moves to their own right. Which stage direction is that? **Stage right.**
2. Which part of the stage is downstage? **The part nearest the audience.**
3. What is blocking, in staging? **The planned positions and movements of the actors, recorded so they can be repeated.**
4. Name two Viewpoints from this lesson and say what each one is about. **Any two of: tempo (how quickly or slowly something happens), spatial relationship (distance between bodies, or between a body and the group or space), repetition (repeating a movement).**

Vocabulary

upstage, downstage, stage left, stage right, house left, house right, cross, blocking, sightline, tableau, tempo, spatial relationship, repetition

Differentiation

- **Support:** label the floor with tape for the nine areas. Give the director a list of shorthand (X = cross, DL, UC and so on).
- **Stretch:** block the same scene twice with opposite meanings (B guilty, then B innocent) without changing a word. Research what "côté cour" and "côté jardin" mean in French theatre and why.

⚠ Safety

- Keep the edge of any raised stage marked and well lit; no backward walking near an edge.
- Tableaux: no lifts, no balancing on chairs, and no weight-bearing on other students. Any touch follows the group's agreed consent rule.
- Plan blocking around any wheelchair or mobility aid with the student who uses it; leave clear routes.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **Stage left versus house left** is the most common mix-up. A useful check: "Whose left? The actor's, facing out." Note that the source says German, Italian and Arabic theatre use the audience's left and right, so students who know those traditions may expect the opposite.
- **Two meanings of blocking** (see lesson 1): refusing an offer in improvisation, and planned movement here.
- The source traces the word to 19th-century directors such as W. S. Gilbert planning scenes on a miniature stage with blocks standing for actors. A quick version: let groups plan on paper with coins before standing up.
- Sightline rules (faces visible, not standing in a straight line across the stage) are common classroom guidance rather than claims from the sources, and some styles break them on purpose.

Lesson 5: Devise, rehearse, perform

Unit overview · Previous: Lesson 4

Goal

Groups devise, rehearse and perform a 2-3 minute scene from a stimulus, using offers, status, objectives and staging, and give and use specific feedback. This lesson usually needs two or three sessions.

Materials

- Stimulus cards (one per group, chosen by the teacher). Examples written for this unit (CC0):
- a single line: "Nobody has opened this door in forty years.";
- an object: an old suitcase with one luggage label;
- a theme: "a promise that can't be kept";
- an image: a public-domain painting or an openly licensed photograph of your choice, with its credit.
- A devising log sheet per group (headings below).
- Stage area, chairs, simple props (no blades, glass or real valuables).

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Explain devising: making a piece of theatre as a group, where the script or performance comes from the group's own improvising rather than from a playwright. Real devising companies start from almost anything (an image, a theme, a character, a historical document, a single line), make far more material than they need, then select, edit and refine. Today groups will do a small version of the same process.

✎ Main activity (session 1: 35 min; session 2: rehearsal; session 3: showing)

1. **Generate (10 min).** Groups of 3-5 take a stimulus. Using "yes, and", they improvise at least three quick, different ideas from it, each no longer than a minute. Nobody judges yet. One student logs the ideas.
2. **Select (5 min).** Choose one idea. On the log, write:
3. the given circumstances (who, where, when, what just happened);
4. each character's objective as "I want to make you ___";
5. the turning point: where status or objective changes;
6. the opening image and the final image (two tableaux).
7. **Build and block (20 min).** Improvise the scene through, then fix it: keep the lines that worked, write a bare script or bullet list, and record blocking with stage directions. Students in off-stage roles (director, stage manager, sound) record and run the rehearsal.

8. **Rehearse (session 2).** Run the scene, then do a **feedback swap** with another group: each group watches the other once and gives two comments (see below). Groups choose one comment to act on and note it in the log, then run the scene again.
9. **Perform (session 3).** Each group performs. The audience watches for the opening image, the turning point and the final image.

Feedback frame: "At the moment when ___, I noticed ___, and it made me think/feel ___." and "Next time you could try ___ at the moment when ___." Feedback must point to a moment in the work, not to the person.

Devising log headings: Stimulus · Ideas we tried · What we chose and why · Given circumstances · Objectives · Turning point · Opening and final images · Blocking notes · Feedback we received · What we changed.

✓ Discussion questions (with example answers)

- "What did you throw away, and why?" Example: our first idea was funnier but had no change in it; nobody wanted anything. We kept the one where the sister finally tells the truth.
- "Which feedback did you use, and what did it change?" Example: they said they couldn't see Jo's face at the turning point, so we moved her downstage centre and it became the clearest moment.
- "How is devising different from performing a script?" Example: we were the writers as well as the actors, so we had to agree, and the scene kept changing until we fixed it.

✓ Closing check: end of unit (with answers)

1. What is devised theatre? **Theatre where the script or performance comes from the group's collaborative, often improvised, work rather than a written play.**
2. Your partner says "Look, the river's flooding the street!" Give a "yes, and" response. **Anything that accepts the flood and adds an offer, for example "And Grandad's still in the shop. Come on!"**
3. Name two ways an actor can raise their character's status without words. **Any two of: stillness, steady eye contact, taking up space, slower pace, pausing, keeping the head still, taking the centre.**
4. Rewrite "My character wants to be happy" as a playable objective. **Any "I want to make you ___" aimed at another character, for example "I want to make you agree to come to the party."**
5. What is a turning point (the start of a new beat)? **A moment where something is revealed, decided or realised and the direction of the action changes.**
6. You face the audience and the director says "cross downstage left". Where do you go? **Towards the audience and to your own left.**
7. Devising companies often make far more material than they need. What do they do next? **Select, edit and refine it.**
8. A classmate says "Your scene was good." Rewrite it as specific feedback. **Any comment that names a moment and an effect, for example "When you both froze after the door opened, I noticed the silence, and it made me nervous for her."**

Vocabulary

devising, stimulus, ensemble, select, refine, devising log, rehearsal, feedback, opening image, final image

Differentiation

- **Support:** give a stimulus plus a ready-made situation card (who and where). Allow a scene of 1-2 minutes. Groups can perform to one other group rather than the whole class.
- **Stretch:** include a second art form (live sound, projected image or a short movement sequence), linking to the grade 9 aim in the arts progression. Or write a 300-word review of another group's scene using evidence from specific moments.

⚠ Safety

- Check every group's chosen idea before rehearsal starts. Redirect anything using real people, real private events, self-harm, abuse or other topics your school does not cover without a trained adult.
- No stage combat, lifts or falls; conflict is shown through distance, stillness and voice. Any touch follows the agreed consent rule.
- Props: nothing sharp, glass, hot or valuable. Mime weapons are not needed; if a story seems to need one, find another turning point.
- A student who does not want to perform takes an off-stage role and is assessed on the same choices through the log and the plan.
- Recording performances only with everyone's consent and within school policy.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- **"Devising means no one is in charge."** Groups can still choose a director; the source notes that in devising a director, if there is one, often works as a facilitator.
- **"We need a twist ending."** A clear change is enough. A scene where one person finally admits something is a complete scene.
- Groups often over-plan by talking. Insist on trying ideas on their feet first; talk afterwards.
- Assessment looks for clear choices (opening image, turning point, staging, final image) and use of feedback, not acting talent.