
**HowlRound
Theatre Commons:
Essays and
Conversations
from the
First Ten Years
(2011-2020)
Lesson Plans**

Collective Envisioning,
or Undoing the
American Theatre

Collective Envisioning, or Undoing the American Theatre

Tags for Courses

Directing
Acting
Producing
Playwriting
Arts Administration
Leadership
Arts and Equity

Black Theatre
Latinx Theatre
Indigenous Theatre
Representation
Arts and Nonprofit Management
Community Engagement

Focus Questions

- ▶ What is your vision for the American Theatre?
 - ▶ What possibilities exist to undo institutional inequity in the American Theatre?
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Objectives/ Goals

- ▶ Students will interrogate 2 articles relating to racialized and gender-based trauma in the American theatre.
 - ▶ Students will develop concrete professional strategies to subvert trauma.
 - ▶ Students will craft their vision for the American theatre.
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Room Setup

Enough space and pathways for participants to move around safely and comfortably. If your classroom allows it, an open space with enough room for a sitting circle is ideal.

Note: If your classroom is virtual, use the JamBoard function to create a virtual “sitting circle” with a circle of chairs on the board. Participants can assign themselves a chair with their name as they enter the virtual room.

Materials

Objects of significance (participants and facilitator bring), sticky notes, poster-sized paper, markers, pen or pencil for each participant.

Check-In

Participants take turns sharing their object of significance in a circle. While not sharing, participants are invited to listen/witness authentically.

1 min per participant

Pre-Reading

Required:

- ▶ *We Have Suffered Enough: The Cost of Performing Trauma for Women of Color* | by Melisa Pereya
- ▶ *The American Theatre Was Killing Me: Healing from Racialized Trauma in an Art Workspace* by Amelia Parenteau and Lauren E. Turner

Choose One:

- ▶ *A Manifesto for Staging Gendered Violence* | by Sharanya
 - ▶ *We Are Not a Mirror* | by Lauren Gunderson
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Pre-Assignment

Read the required assigned articles ahead of time, choose one optional article, and come ready to discuss. Participants are invited to bring an object of significance from their home/living space that reminds them of the community they come from and who they are bringing with them into the space. For example, a person might bring a photograph of their family. Another person might bring a family recipe. Someone else might bring a small toy that was passed down or a family basket.

Engagement: Abundant Connections (10 min)

Frame this activity with transparency. If helpful, share this context:

Racialized and historical trauma exists in every fiber of this country. If we understand white supremacy and settler-colonial culture to be rooted in scarcity, then the opposite of that is abundance. Abundance is rooted in the collective; the idea that there are many changemakers with many solutions. There is no right way. Today we will explore strategies to subvert harm in the American theatre and nonprofit sector. We are exploring strategies because we know that in a single session, we cannot tackle all things. However, we can each be rooted in our shared humanity and our right to create within liberating and creative spaces. We are reminded that the objects of significance we brought in today remind us of everyone we are bringing into the learning space with us. Please bring their perspectives, too.

Prompt

Provide a few minutes for participants to find their groups.

You are invited to stand near people whose object of significance has the possibility of connection to your own. Try to keep groups at five people or less. If a group has five people, find new connections between your object and someone else's.

Prompt

Provide 5-7 minutes for participants to discuss and come up with a title. At the end of that time, invite each group to share their title.

At your group, discuss what connections exist between your objects, and try to come up with a title for your group.

Group Work: Inquire/Imagine/Envision (25 min)

Each group should have: a poster-sized paper, 2-3 markers, a writing utensil for each person, and a stack of sticky notes. Invite participants to create an Inquire/Imagine/Envision column on each poster.

Inquire	Imagine	Envision

Inquire

In this activity, participants will discuss and create within their established groups through the following questions:

Invite participants to discuss and then individually list one example per sticky note and place it on the poster.

What examples of institutional inequity did we see in these articles?

Imagine

Invite participants to discuss and then individually list one example per sticky note and place it on the poster. Invite them to draw visual connections between the items listed in the “Inquire” category and “Imagine” category for clarity.

What opportunities exist for allyship in each of these examples? How could a fellow staff member or leadership member have shifted the scenario?

Envision

Invite participants to draw collaboratively on the poster board, to edit/cross out/defy examples from the inquire category, to draw connections visually between examples in the inquire category and the envision category, and to share how their object of significance serves as a metaphor for their vision.

What is your vision for the American theatre? What would it look, feel, and sound like? How might your object of significance serve as a metaphor for your vision of the American theatre?

Closing:

Collective Altar (15 min)

In the middle of the room, or in a place for everyone to access and witness, invite participants to create a collective altar for their vision for the American Theatre. The facilitator may provide the choice between the Living Altar or Visual Altar or choose what works best for the culture of this classroom.

Option 1

Living Altar:

Invite participants to embody their vision through the use of tableaux or “frozen statues,” simple gestures, repeating phrases, rhythm, and song. Participants should allow one another to add on improvisationally, collaboratively, and at a generous pace.

Option 2

Visual Altar:

Invite participants to collectively envision by placing their objects next to others; adding words of affirmation on sticky notes; drawing or attaching images from their posters; or embodying their vision physically, drawing inspiration from their objects of significance from their poster discussions. Participants should allow one another to add on improvisationally, collaboratively, and at a generous pace.

Extension: Reflective Artmaking and Gallery Walk (25 min)

As a follow-up exercise in class or as an independent reflection, invite participants to draw a visual reflection of the collective altar. This can be a still-life style or a representative drawing of the energy of the collective altar.

Gallery Walk: Invite participants to place their drawing on their desks and provide time during class for all students to witness one another's reflections nonverbally.

If there is a permanent space that these drawings can live, hang them there for ongoing witnessing by students. If there is a virtual classroom space, such as Canvas, post the collection of images to the class board to continue the discussion.

Optional materials: white paper, pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, instrumental music.

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Curriculum Writers:

Emi Aguilar and Meg Greene

Graphic Design:

Paul Del Bosque

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