

How to Be a Great Audience Member: Lesson Plan for Grades K-3

Essential Question

How can I be a respectful audience member at the theatre?

Objectives

Students will...

- Prepare for their student matinee experience at Alabama Shakespeare Festival
- Practice being a respectful and engaged audience member

Materials

Chairs or poly spots
Whiteboard or poster board

Prologue:

- Prepare for the lesson by setting up chairs or poly spots with room for a few students to stand in front of them.

I. Intro to ASF (5 minutes)

- Teacher Aside: Depending on your school or classroom's relationship to ASF, you may want to amend the introduction to remind students of prior field trips, or provide more information about their first trip to the theatre.
- On _____, our class is taking a field trip to Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery, Alabama to see _____.
- Has anyone seen a show at ASF?
- ASF is the State Theatre of Alabama and one of the largest Shakespeare Festivals in the world. It opened in 1972, and moved to Montgomery, AL in 1985. Despite the name, Alabama Shakespeare produces more than just plays by Shakespeare; they produce contemporary plays, musicals, and new works.
- For some of you this may be your first time going to a theatre, so we're going to practice how to be a good audience member.

II. Let's Take a Seat! (10 minutes)

- After our bus drops us off at the theatre, it will be time to take our seats. We'll form a line behind a big doorway and listen to where the *usher* tells us to sit. An *usher* is a person at a theatre who helps audience members find their way around.
- The usher will point us towards several rows of cushy seats to sit in. It's important when sitting as a group at a theatre to fill in all the empty seats in a row and move up to start filling a new row when the first one is full.
- We're going to practice this together. First, I want everyone to stand up and form a calm, quiet, single-file line - just like you would at school.
- I'm going to stand by the first row of seats and pretend to be the usher. When the first person in line reaches me, I'll point them into the row. The line leader will walk all the way to the end of the row and sit in the last seat. The students behind them in line should follow the line leader into the row and fill in every seat, not leaving any empty seats or spaces.
- Teacher Aside: "Seats" can be created with whatever you have available. Chairs, desks, poly spots, even numbered pieces of paper work as long as each student has a demarcated spot to sit in.
- When a row gets full, I'll stop the next student in line and point them into the next row. They should do the same as the line leader and walk all the way to the end of the row and sit in the last seat. We'll keep filling in rows and starting new ones until everyone has a place to sit. Ready?
- Teacher Aside: It's helpful to model these instructions for students as you explain them. Expectations will be clearer if they see you walk down the row and find a seat first.
- Now that we've practiced how to get to our seat, we'll talk about how to sit in them. Theatre seats are realllllly comfy and they flip up and down like at the movie theatre. It can be hard for me to control my body sometimes because they're so fun to play with. BUT playing with my seat can be really distracting for the people around me and make it difficult for them to enjoy the show. Because of this, I know it's important for me to sit flat on my bottom and keep my body calm while I focus on the show, like this (*teacher models sitting calmly in seat*).
- Can you all show me calm bodies while you sit in your seats. Wonderful! Now when I say "go," I want you to sit in a way that would be distracting to the people around you. Go!

- j. Teacher Aside: Point out to students *how* the ways they're sitting now might be distracting, i.e. blocking people's view, creating noise, stealing focus, etc. If your class sometimes struggles with personal boundaries, be sure to remind them to keep their hands to themselves during this portion of the activity.
- k. Now when I say "go," again, show me how to sit flat with calm bodies. Awesome! Sitting this way at the theatre shows the other people around you and the actors on stage that you are ready to watch the show.

III. **Lights Off** (5 minutes)

- a. At the theatre, when the lights go down and it gets dark it means the show is about to begin. This is a signal to the audience that it's time to be quiet and focus.
- b. We're going to play a little game to practice this from our new "seats." When the lights are on, make lots of noise and talk to your classmates. But when the lights go off, turn your voices all the way off and put your eyes on me. We'll play a few rounds until the whole class successfully gets quiet and turns their focus to me when the lights go down.
- c. Teacher Aside: If you have students who are uncomfortable with sudden light changes, consider keeping a window open or lamps on. You can also count down for students that the lights are going off rather than turning them off at will.

IV. **Act it Out** (15 minutes)

- a. When we go to the theatre there will be many exciting moments to watch onstage. I know when I see something funny, surprising, or even sad I have a big reaction. That's normal! But when you're at the theatre, it's important to try and keep reactions quieter and smaller than normal because there are lots of other people there watching the show too. We can still laugh, cry, and gasp, we just have to be mindful about it.
- b. To practice responding with mindfulness, we're going to create some exciting scenes of our own. I'm going to call you up 3 at a time. Those 3 students will become the "actors" and everyone else will become the "audience."
- c. Teacher Aside: Feel free to call students up in as big or as small of groups as work for you. 3 is simply a good base number.
- d. I'm going to whisper to our actors an emotion, like happy, sad, or grumpy. I will then ask students on the count of 3 to make a statue of that emotion. A statue is a frozen picture you make with your body. These statues will show the audience the emotion the actors are feeling.
- e. When the actors make their first statues, I want you to respond loudly. Laugh, sigh, and talk to your friends until I say "freeze," at which point you should turn your voice off, and give focus to the actors again.
- f. Then, I'll have the actors make new statues for that emotion on the count of 1, 2, 3. This time I want you to imagine we're inside a dark theatre when you respond. You can still laugh, whisper, or groan, but do so with a quiet voice and calm body.
- g. After the actors have made 2 different statues, I'll pick 3 new students and whisper to them a new emotion. We'll play the game until everyone has had a chance to be an "actor."
- h. When you were on stage as an actor how did it feel to have everyone talking and responding loudly to your work during the first statue you made? Did you experience a different feeling during the second statue when the audience responded more mindfully? The actors we'll see at the theatre are up on stage every day trying their best just like you did. How do you think they feel when an audience is loud, not paying attention, or talking over them?

V. **Conclusion** (10 minutes)

- a. What excites you about going to the theatre?
 - i. For many of you, this may be your first time going to the theatre. For most of you, it will be your first time seeing this play.
 - ii. What are you most excited to see or do? What are you curious about? What do you think our day at the theatre will be like? How will it make you feel?
 - iii. Teacher Aside: Keep track of student answers on a white board or poster board. Star responses that come up most frequently.
- b. While watching the play at ASF, I want you to think about a few questions.
 - i. How does the stage look? Does the stage change at all during the play? How do the characters use the stage to tell the story? What about the costumes? What do the costumes characters wear tell you about them?
 - ii. How do the characters feel during the play? How do you know? How do the characters use their bodies and voices to tell you about themselves?
 - iii. What do the characters want in the play? Who or what is in their way?