Silent Scenes, Real Choices: An Introduction to Forum Theatre

Lesson 1 · 90 minutes (block period) · Grades 6–8 · Intro to Theater

Lesson Goals

Central Focus

Students will analyze a quote from Augusto Boal about theatre's power to create change, then build on their tableau (frozen image) work to devise silent scenes depicting everyday moments of harm or indifference, applying Boal's Forum Theatre technique by stepping in as "spect-actors" to physically demonstrate a better choice.

State Standards

- 6-8.TH:Cr1.1 — Investigate ideas, feelings, and given circumstances to create a devised drama/theatre work using tableau and pantomime.
- 6-8.TH:Cn11.1 — Explore how theatre can be used to understand and depict social behavior and community issues.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1 — Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what a text says explicitly.

Learning Objective

I will analyze a quote from Augusto Boal about theatre and change, devise a silent tableau-based scene showing a moment of harm or indifference, and step in — or invite a classmate to step in — as a spect-actor to demonstrate a better choice.

Academic Language and Language Supports

Language function: Analyze, Devise, Demonstrate, Justify

Language demand: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Analyzing, Justifying, Collaborating

Lesson vocabulary: Tableau, Freeze, Spect-actor, Intervention, Bystander, Forum Theatre, Agency

Syntax: Students use structured sentences to interpret the quote and justify scene choices. (e.g., "In my own words, Boal is saying that ___." / "In this image, the character of ___ is doing ___, and it shows ___.")

Discourse:

- "Boal says ___, which I think means ___."
- "This connects to our scene because ___."

- “If I stepped in, I would change ___ because ___.”
- “That intervention worked / didn’t work because ___.”

Materials

- Open floor space (grip socks per studio norm)
- Boal quote posted or projected: “Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.”
- Freeze cue — bell, clap, or a called “Curtain!”
- Optional simple set pieces (a couple of chairs arranged as bus seats works well)
- Student notebooks
- Exit ticket

Differentiation

English Language Learners

- Sentence frames provided above for describing and justifying scene choices.
- Because the base scenes are nonverbal, students build understanding of the image before attaching English language to it — allow describing the tableau in home language first, then bridge to the English discourse stems.

Gifted/Advanced Students

- Challenge students to devise a three-image sequence (before / during / after) instead of a single still image.
- Invite these students to try two different spect-actor interventions for the same scene and compare which is more convincing and why.

IEP/504

- Offer a non-physical role option — “caller,” who rings the freeze cue and facilitates the intervention discussion — for students who need an alternative to physical performance.
- Provide visual step cards for the sequence: build → freeze → call → intervene → reflect.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

- Ground scenarios in situations students recognize from their own neighborhoods and daily lives rather than abstract or generic examples.
- Name explicitly that Boal’s method treats the audience — not the teacher — as the authority on what “better” looks like, so there is no single correct intervention.

Lesson Plan Details

5 min Step 1 — Hook & Objective

- Quick recall: “A few weeks ago you built frozen images. Today those images start moving — and the audience gets to change how the story ends.”
- Post and read today’s learning objective.

12 min Step 2 — Writing Warm-Up: Analyzing a Boal Quote

- Post/project the quote: “Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.” — Augusto Boal.
- Students read it silently twice, then free-write for about 5 minutes: “In your own words, what is Boal saying theatre can do? Where have you seen someone build change instead of just waiting for it?”
- Quick pair-share: partners read one line of their own writing aloud to each other.
- Whole-class: cold-call 2–3 volunteers to share one idea; connect explicitly to today’s work: “That’s exactly what we’re about to do with Forum Theatre.”

> **Assessment 1.1 (Informal) · Standards: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1**

8 min Step 3 — Warm-Up: Statue Switch

- Partners create a frozen pose; on the freeze cue, a new student steps in and replaces one partner with a new pose that changes the “story” of the image.
- For groups who need a game-and-competition frame to buy in: run this as an elimination-style tag game — students race to swap in before a count of 3.
- For groups who are already energized and eager: run it as an open, flowing “museum” warm-up instead, without the competitive framing, to avoid overexcitement.

7 min Step 4 — Model the Technique

- Teacher (or a volunteer pair) performs the bus-seat example: an elderly rider stands and sways while nearby seated riders scroll on their phones without looking up; freeze.
- Ring the freeze cue. Ask: “What’s the moment of harm here? Who could step in, and what would they do differently?”
- Take one volunteer spect-actor to replace a seated rider and demonstrate a corrective action (offering their seat).
- Name the vocabulary explicitly now: tableau, freeze, spect-actor, intervention.

> **Assessment 1.2 (Informal) · Standards: 6-8.TH:Cr1.1**

20 min Step 5 — Small-Group Devising

- Groups of 3–4 build a three-image sequence: (1) the harmful/indifferent action, (2) the frozen tableau, (3) a “blank” space where the spect-actor will step in.

- Because today is a block period, groups have time to devise two silent scenes instead of one, which gives more performance variety in the rounds ahead.
- For groups who struggle with open-ended, multi-step planning: offer a short menu of 3 pre-approved scenarios (not giving up a bus seat for an elderly rider, ignoring a new student sitting alone at lunch, walking past someone who dropped their books in the hallway) — a “menu, not a blank page.”
- Groups who are ready may generate their own scenario instead, as long as it names a clear moment of harm/indifference and a clear bystander.
- Each group writes one sentence connecting a scene to today’s quote: “Our scene helps ‘build the future’ by showing ___.”
- Groups rehearse holding the freeze cleanly and silently.

30 min Step 6 — Performance + Spect-Actor Rounds

- Each group performs a silent scene and freezes.
- Before or after the intervention discussion, the group reads its one-sentence connection to the Boal quote.
- Teacher rings the freeze cue; audience members raise hands to volunteer as spect-actors.
- One to two audience members step in per scene to demonstrate a different choice; teacher facilitates a brief “why did that work?” discussion after each.
- Groups with a second scene ready perform it in a later round if time allows.

> **Assessment 1.3 (Formal) · Standards: 6-8.TH:Cn11.1**

8 min Closure: Step 7 — Reflection

- Revisit the Boal quote as a class.
- Exit ticket: “Boal said theatre can help us build our future instead of waiting for it. Which scene today did that best, and how? What’s one thing in your own life you could stop waiting for and start building?”