Stepping In: Forum Theatre and the Power to Change the Story

Lesson 1 · 50 minutes · Grades 6–8 · Theater Exploration

Lesson Goals

Central Focus

Students will apply their ensemble and tableau skills to devise silent scenes of harm or indifference and use Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre technique to intervene as spect-actors — with an emphasis on precision, discipline, and follow-through under time constraints.

State Standards

- 6-8.TH:Cr3.1 — Refine a devised drama/theatre work through repetition, self-evaluation, and use of theatre terminology.
- 6-8.TH:Cn11.1 — Explore how theatre can be used to understand and depict social behavior and community issues.

Learning Objective

I will devise, rehearse, and tightly execute a silent scene of harm or indifference, then step in — within a set time limit — as a spect-actor to demonstrate and defend a better choice.

Academic Language and Language Supports

Language function: Devise, Refine, Justify, Debate

Language demand: Speaking, Analyzing, Justifying, Debating, Timekeeping

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

Syntax: Students use structured sentences to defend and compare intervention choices. (e.g., "This intervention solves ___ better than the first one because ___.")

Discourse:

- "The first intervention changed ___, but the second one also addressed ___."
- "As the director, I chose ___ because ___."
- "Our real-world inspiration for this scene was ___."

Materials

- Open floor space (grip socks per studio norm)

- Freeze cue — bell, clap, or a called “Curtain!”, distinct from the timer chime
- Visible timer or stopwatch for hard-stop devising rounds
- 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 comparing and defending intervention choices.
- Bilingual notes welcomed when explaining a scene’s real-world inspiration.

Gifted/Advanced Students

- Since this group is largely experienced, use the full Forum structure: after a first intervention, invite a second, competing intervention and have the class briefly debate and vote on which resolves the harm more convincingly.
- Push these students toward scenes with a systemic-level harm (not just a one-on-one interaction) if they finish devising early.

IEP/504

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

Culturally Responsive Teaching

- Require scenarios to be grounded in a moment of harm or indifference students have actually noticed in their own lives or community, not a generic prompt.
- Name explicitly that Boal’s method treats the audience — not the teacher — as the authority on what “better” looks like, so competing interventions can both be valid.

Lesson Plan Details

4 min Step 1 — Hook & Objective

- Fast, high-energy framing: “You’ve got the skills. Today’s challenge is precision — can you build it, freeze it, and change it, all within the clock?”
- Post and read today’s learning objective.

6 min Step 2 — Focus Warm-Up: Silent Freeze Countdown

- Whole group free-moves; on a 3-2-1 countdown, everyone freezes in character silently — no giggling, no talking.

- Repeat three times, timing how fast the room goes fully silent each round and trying to beat the class's own time — this turns excess energy into a game against the clock instead of against the teacher.

6 min Step 3 — Model & Name the Technique

- Teacher models the bus-seat example: an elderly rider stands and sways while nearby seated riders scroll on their phones without looking up; freeze.
- Class names the moment of harm and what the "story" is missing; one volunteer spect-actor demonstrates the offering-a-seat alternative.
- Introduce vocabulary: tableau, freeze, spect-actor, intervention, forum.

> **Assessment 1.1 (Informal) · Standards: 6-8.TH:Cr3.1**

10 min (hard stop) Step 4 — Timed Small-Group Devising

- Groups of 3–4 assign rotating jobs: Director (calls freeze), Performers, Timekeeper.
- Groups devise a three-image sequence (action → freeze → open space for the spect-actor) using a scenario of their own choosing that shows a real moment of harm or indifference they've noticed in their own lives or community.
- Hard 10-minute timer: groups that go over lose their first-choice spot in the performance order.

14 min Step 5 — Performance + Forum Rounds

- Each group performs and freezes on cue.
- A first spect-actor steps in with an intervention.
- A second spect-actor may step in with a competing intervention; the class briefly discusses and votes on which better resolves the harm and why, building toward a true Forum Theatre debate.
- Each group's Director briefly names the scene's real-world inspiration before or after the performance.

> **Assessment 1.2 (Formal) · Standards: 6-8.TH:Cn11.1**

5 min Closure: Step 6 — Reflection

- Exit ticket: "Which intervention today changed the story most convincingly, and why? What's one moment in your own life where you could be the spect-actor instead of the bystander?"