

Senior Theatre Course Outline

Bonnie L. Vorenberg





ArtAge supplies books, plays, and materials to older performers around the world. Directors and actors have come to rely on our 30+ years of experience in the field to help them find useful materials and information that makes their productions stimulating, fun, and entertaining.

ArtAge's unique program has been featured in *Time Magazine*, *Modern Maturity*, on *CNN*, *NBC*, and in many other media sources.

ArtAge is more than a catalog. We also supply information, news, and trends on our top-rated website, *www.seniortheatre.com*. We stay in touch with the field with our very popular newsletter, *Senior Theatre Online*. Our President, Bonnie Vorenberg, is asked to speak at conferences and present workshops that supplement her writing and consulting efforts. We're here to help you be successful in Senior Theatre!

We help older performers fulfill their theatrical dreams!

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Senior Theatre Course

10 week class in Senior Center, Adult Education, or Retirement

Community

1 class per week

2 hours long

The class is designed to be a natural progression from easy skills to more complex ones. It introduces students to some of the many different forms of Senior Theatre such as creative drama, improvisation, storytelling, readers theatre, script-in-hand performances, and easy musical revues.

At the final class meeting, the group will present a 'work-in-progress' for an available audience such as a senior meal site, senior center staff, or any similar non-threatening group. The audience should be told that they are seeing a class project, not a finished production. The show should be short—from 10 to 20 minutes long, at most.

The goal of the production is to demonstrate how to assemble a show. It is an easy, way for performers to appear in front of an audience and learn the basics of performing. It's also a fun way to wrap up the class—with the thrill of applause!

Warning: When you promote the class, you'll get more attendance if you advertise that class members need no prior experience and that no memorization is required.

Class Format: All classes begin with a meet & greet session, in a circle, 5 minutes, to set

the mood.

Follow with a warm-up session that uses music, props (scarves, hats, objects that provoke memories,) improvisation and movement. 10 minutes at least.

Class then flows into activities.

During the class, vary the activity level so students move from active participation to listening, from movement to sitting in a circle.

Supplies Needed:

The Improv Game

"Challenge of Bureaucracy" is in *New Plays for Mature Actors*

"Housecleaning"

Warm up supplies including music, props, scarves, hats, and objects that provoke memories.

Drama Activities with Older Adults: A Handbook for Leaders, Anne H.

Thurman & Carol Ann Piggins

****Above are all available from ArtAge Publications, 1-800-858-4998**

Week 1: Introduction to the Class & Non-verbal communication

- Goal: Orientation to the class. What should students expect to learn? What is expected from students and from the instructor?
- Activities: Basic acting.
- Warm-ups: pantomime, basic improvisations, all non-verbal. Use music and scarves.
- Discussion: Non-verbal communication. How to read it and how observation helps actors

- Homework: Bring an object from home—something that has character and will prompt discussion.

Week 2: Introduction to Pantomime

- Goal: Build group cohesiveness with basic acting and introduction to pantomime
- Warm-ups: Continue with pantomime, basic improvisations, all non-verbal, but more advanced from last week
- Discussion: Thoughts about non-verbal communication—what did you see during the week? Introduce how to give and take criticism
- Props: Use the objects they brought from home. Select one and pass it around the circle. Have each student interact with the object, without talking.
- Homework: Come prepared to tell a one-minute story about something that happened in your life.

Week 3: Introduction to Storytelling

- Goal: Build understanding of how to build a story line with beginning, middle and ending
- Warm-ups: Use pantomimes that have a beginning, middle and ending.
- Discussion: How a story is built—beginning, middle and ending
- Props: Use “*The Improv Game*” to demonstrate how to build a story. Use in a circle.
- Homework: Bring a letter to the editor, *Dear Abby*, *Heloise* or other column.

Week 4: Introduction to Readers Theatre:

- Goal: Introducing verbal communication

- Warm-ups: Use improvisations that use sounds, words, actions to incorporate the spoken word
- Discussion: How to create emphasis with your voice using volume, pitch, emphasis, emotion, character.
- Activities: Use the columns they brought from home have the students read them. Critique for volume, expression, character, etc.
- Homework: Give each student the “*Housecleaning*” monologue; ask them to practice it at home.

Week 5: Introduction to Monologues

- Goal: Understanding how scripts are comprised of monologues
- Warm-ups: Physical warm-ups followed by tongue twisters
- Discussion: Understanding how scripts are different according to character, emotion, etc.
- Activities: Students read their prepared “*Housecleaning*” monologue. Evaluate how they vary, depending on character, mood, emotion, and etc.
- Homework: Distribute two short plays, “*Challenge of Bureaucracy*” and “*Gin & Tonic*.” Ask students to become familiar with the plays by reading them aloud, every day during the week.

Week 6: Introduction to Scene Work

- Goal: Explore how scenes are built
- Warm-ups: Use improvisations that require two actors to react to each other.
- Discussion: Successful techniques for script-in-hand performances
- Activities: Divide class into partners and have them rehearse sections of the plays. Perform them later in the class.
- Homework: Rehearse script-in-hand techniques.

Week 7: Pulling it all Together

This week is dedicated to an area not covered in previous weeks, but will be needed in the upcoming 'show.' You may need to choreograph a short dance to introduce the show, learn a song, have jokes memorized, radio theatre or puppetry...whatever you need, here's the spare week to introduce it!

- Goal: Include elements that will be needed in the show
- Warm-ups: Use the music and movement that will open and close the 'show.'
- Discussion: Determine the theme of the show. Successful ones are very open ended such as "aging is", "I remember," etc. This theme will be used as the title for the upcoming production and will help determine the pieces to select.
- Activities: Perform the scenes using script-in-hand techniques
- Homework: Each student makes a list of their favorite pieces the class has performed. They can choose from the pantomimes, improvisations, storytelling, readings, monologues and scenes done in previous sessions.

Week 8: Introduction to Play Production

- Goal: Students learn how show is compiled. Understanding casting.
- Warm-ups: Use warm-ups that have been popular with the students
- Discussion: Compile production to include pantomimes, improvisations, column readings, monologues and scenes from the class. Write out and post on large poster paper.
- Activities: Plan the show order, then cast the production. Finally, run through the show piece by piece, in order. Evaluate if the show order works

well or needs to be changed. Does the casting work? Need changes? Decide on props, costumes, scenic pieces.

- Homework: Rehearse role for the 'show.'

Week 9: Introduction to Play Rehearsal

- Goal: Students rehearse the performance which will be presented next week.
- Warm-ups: Use warm-ups have been popular with the students
- Discussion: Review order of the pieces to be included in the 'performance.'
Discuss performer decorum, holding for laughter, etc. Make sure the audience is invited.
- Activities: Rehearse the show;

Week 10: Introduction to Performance

- Goal: Students perform 'work in progress' to senior center lunch group or other casual group. Audience understands show is a work in progress.
Include pantomimes, improvisations, readings, monologues and scenes from the class.
- Warm-ups: Use warm-ups have that been popular with the students
- Discussion: Evaluate the performance—what worked well? What didn't?
Follow evaluation with a small celebration that includes food, such as coffee & cookies.
- Props: Congratulatory flowers, trinkets for class members after the show
- Final discussion:
 - Evaluate the class.
 - What happens next quarter? Should class continue? What would they like to explore? Options include:
 - More of the same—monologues, scenes,

- Short plays
- Memory based plays
- Explore some of the many different forms of senior theatre (creative drama, improvisation, storytelling, readers theatre, script-in-hand performances, theatre with a purpose, play production, musical revues, variety shows, puppetry, street theatre, theatre appreciation or others).

Senior Theatre Course

6 week class in Retirement Community

1 class per week

1 hour long

Here's a Senior Theatre class that has been used successfully in a retirement home. They are six outlines for a Senior Theatre class that I designed and conducted while my intern was with me in the office. Planning your Senior Theatre class carefully and thoroughly is really important. That's why I would like you to take a look at the next pages.

We did not to stage a show at the end of the classes. I just wanted to give the students an introduction to theatre; the residents may or may not have acted before.

Each class has a specific and different topic, allowing the participants to discover the basics of theatre. You will also find in these outlines that I used most of the things I also used in classes with more active seniors like music, props, scripts, etc...

Sample Senior Theatre Class #1

Focus of the day: get to know the group

- 9:30** Leave office
- 10:00** Arrive early / Arrange the room
- 10:15** Greet the class members as they arrive
→ Music used: Bruce Springsteen, *Oh Mary*
- 10:30** Name game
- Everybody has to find a gesture to do when he is saying his name.
- 10:40** Song: *Oh, What A Beautiful Morning*
- 10:50** Warm ups with music and scarves
→ Music used: Johann Pachelbel, *Canon and Figue*
Gov't Mule, *Sin's a good man brother*
- 11:00** Memories: Improvisations with senses: onion
- 11:15** Reading: Onion poem written by class
- 11:25** Song: *Oh, What A Beautiful Morning* + conclusion
- What did you learn?
- How do you feel now?
- Ask for next week's song

Oh what a beautiful morning,
Oh what a beautiful day,
I've got a wonderful feeling,
Everything's going my way,
Everything's going my way!

INSIDE THE BOX:

Music
Scarves
Onion

Sample Senior Theatre Class #2

Focus of the day: character

- 9:30** Leave office
- 10:00** Arrive early / Arrange the room
- 10:15** Greet the class members as they arrive
- 10:30** Name game:
- Everybody has to find a gesture to do when he is saying his name.
- 10:40** Song: *Home on the Range* + warm ups with music and scarves
- Music used: Mozart, *Andante (Divertimento in D)*
- Ashley's Ride, Country Fiddle Music*
- 10:55** Improvisations with senses: touch
- Scratch Pad
 - Stuffed puppy (what the puppy can say)
 - Props (shoes, rolling pin, etc...)
- 11:10** Memories: Storytelling about props
- 11:25** Song: *Home on the Range* + conclusion
- What did you learn?
 - How do you feel now?
 - Ask for next week's song

Oh give me a home where the buffalo roam,
 Where the deer and the antelope play.
 Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
 And the skies are not cloudy all day.
 Home, home on the range,
 Where the deer and the antelope play.
 Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
 And the skies are not cloudy all day.

INSIDE THE BOX:

Music
 Scarves
 Props

Sample Senior Theatre Class #3

Focus of the day: plot

- 9:30 Leave office
- 10:00 Arrive early / Arrange the room
- 10:15 Greet the class members as they arrive
- 10:30 Name game
- 10:40 Song: *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* + warm ups with music and scarves
- 10:50 Improvisations with hats – Add plot
- 11:00 Memories: Baseball stories
- Storytelling circle: “Once upon a time”
 - Introduce plot: beginning/middle/end
- I was at bat*
- I hit the ball so far*
- It was lost forever!*
- 11:15 Reading: *Casey at the Bat*
- 11:25 Song: *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* + conclusion
- What did you learn?
 - How do you feel now?
 - How to apply this in life?

Take me out to the ballgame,
 Take me out to the fair.
 Buy me some peanuts and crackerjacks,
 I don't care if I never get back!
 We will root, root, root for the home team;
 If they don't win it's a shame.
 For it's one, two three strikes you're out,
 At the old ball game.

INSIDE THE BOX:

Music
 Scarves
 Hat Collection
 Casey At The Bat

Sample Senior Theatre Class #4

Focus of the day: vocal expression

- 9:30 Leave office
- 10:00 Arrive early / Arrange the room
- 10:15 Greet the class members as they arrive
- 10:30 Name game with expressions
- 10:40 Song: *You Are My Sunshine* + warm ups with music and scarves
- 10:50 Last week: Storytelling about hats
- Where has it been?
 - Who has worn it?
 - Where is it going?
- 11:00 Memories: Story about a hat they wore.
- 11:15 Reading: Flash Cards, phrases that could be said many different ways such as:
- What are you talking about
 - I found a bag of jewels
 - Do you have something in your pocket
- 11:25 Song: *You Are My Sunshine* + conclusion
- What did you learn?
 - How do you feel now?
 - How to apply this in life?

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
 You make me happy when skies are gray.
 You'll never know, dear, how much I love you,
 Please don't take my sunshine away.

INSIDE THE BOX:

Music
 Scarves
 Hat Collection
 Flash Cards

Sample Senior Theatre Class #5

Focus of the day: vocal qualities

9:30 Leave office

10:00 Arrive early / Arrange the room

10:15 Greet the class members as they arrive

10:30 Song: *Oh! You Beautiful Doll* + warm ups with music and scarves

10:40 Last week: Expressions. Today: Vocal and breath qualities

- *The Improv Game*
- Vocal: volume, pitch, emphasis, articulation, intonation
- Voice quality: heavy, light, breathy, hoarse

11:00 Play: *Challenge of Bureaucracy*

1. Get to know the play
2. Characters
3. Plot / Story

4. Expressions
5. Vocal qualities
6. Take home and rehearse daily

11:25 Song: *Oh! You Beautiful Doll* + conclusion

- What did you learn?
- How do you feel now?
- How to apply this in life?

Oh! You beautiful doll,
 You great big beautiful doll,
 Let me put my arms around you,
 I could never live without you.
 Oh! You beautiful doll,
 You great big beautiful doll,
 If you ever leave me, how my heart will ache,
 I want to hug you but I fear you'll break,
 Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh You Beautiful Doll

INSIDE THE BOX:

Music
 Scarves
The Improv Game
Challenge of Bureaucracy

Sample Senior Theatre Class #6

Focus of the day: the play

- 9:30 Leave office
- 10:00 Arrive early / Arrange the room
- 10:15 Greet the class members as they arrive
- 10:30 Song: *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean* + warm ups with music and scarves
- 10:40 Last week: Vocal and breath qualities. Today: Flip cards with lines of the play on it.
- Expressions.
 - Vocal: volume, pitch, emphasis, articulation.
 - Gestures.
- 11:00 Play: *Challenge of Bureaucracy*
- Reading the play.
- 11:25 Song: *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean* + conclusion
- What did you learn?
 - How do you feel now?
 - How to apply this in life?
 - Discuss about what you learned in the class? What's next?
 -

My Bonnie lies over the ocean,
 My Bonnie lies over the sea,
 My Bonnie lies over the ocean,
 Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me.
 Bring back, bring back,
 Bring back my Bonnie to me, to me,
 Bring back, bring back,
 Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me.

INSIDE THE BOX:

Music
 Scarves
 Flip Cards
Challenge of Bureaucracy

Bonnie L. Vorenberg is the author of Senior Theatre Connections and President of ArtAge Publications. Turn to its Senior Theatre Resource Center for a complete collection of plays, books, materials and workshops for the mature performer. Call 800-858-4998 for a free newsletter, email bonniev@seniortheatre.com, or visit online at www.seniortheatre.com. We help older performers fulfill their theatrical dreams!

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