

# Scenes in Tableau: Drama Strategies to Use With Any Day's Times (Part 2)

[learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/07/scenes-in-tableau-drama-strategies-to-use-with-any-days-times-part-2/](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/07/scenes-in-tableau-drama-strategies-to-use-with-any-days-times-part-2/)



**The Learning Network**  
Teaching & Learning With The New York Times



Stephane Duroy/Agence VuA demonstrator pounded at the Berlin Wall next to the Brandenburg Gate early on Nov. 11, 1989, as East German border guards, on the other side, responded with a water hose. Students might use a dramatic moment in history like this one to create tableaux. [Go to related 2009 article »](#)

This week is [Drama Week](#) on The Learning Network, and we've teamed with David Kener, a teacher and former executive director of [the American Place Theater Literature to Life Program](#), to bring you different strategies daily for using theater techniques in classes across the curriculum.

Here in Part 2, we are featuring a technique called Tableau, in which students work together to interpret a text, then present their interpretation as a frozen scene or series of scenes.

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## Tableau

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### Directions

Tableau works best when students work in small groups and collaborate to figure out how they want to represent the ideas in a text.

To begin, the teacher gives each group a text or text excerpt, and the groups are charged with creating a frozen image that somehow captures the essence of what is going on in the reading. Teachers might choose to assign all groups the same text, or give each group different but related texts.

Students must then collaborate to decide how to represent something important in the text in the form of a tableau. They can represent people, objects or even symbols, and can create something that reproduces some aspect of the text, or do a tableau that works more as a symbol. No matter what they do, students should carefully craft their gestures, facial expressions and physical poses.

Give groups enough time to plan and rehearse and, when they are ready, have students present their scenes while the rest of the class discusses what they think is going on in the tableau. Finally, have the group that presented share the article or excerpt that inspired their tableau with the class, and have the class discuss the choices that went into making that particular tableau.

### **Additional Ideas to Get the Most Out of Tableau**

- The tableau doesn't just have to be a mute frozen image. Students can be told in advance that they will be tapped during the presentation, and that they will have to say aloud a phrase, sound or sentence to provide a clue as to who or what they represent in the tableau. Alternately, the teacher or a student could act as a reporter and conduct short interviews with individuals acting in the tableau.
- The teacher might choose to facilitate a discussion with the audience by highlighting certain tableau details through questioning. For example, you could ask, "Why might this character be smiling?" or "What do you think this character is thinking?"
- Tableaux can also be a series of frozen images that, together, tell a story with a beginning, middle and end.
- Depending on the subject, the tableau might be more effective with sound effects or music. Students can choose what sounds to play as part of the process of planning their tableau.
- Groups might want to use slow motion to transition from one tableau to the next.

### **Times Examples**

This technique offers an effective way to get Times articles and other nonfiction readings "on their feet" for students.

### *History*

Social studies teachers might use tableau as a way for students to understand the emotional impact of historical events. For example, students could be assigned to create a tableau based on the November 1989 article, “[Clamor in the East; East Germany Opens Frontier to the West for Migration or Travel; Thousands Cross](#)” about the fall of the Berlin Wall, or a [2009 piece in which a reporter who was there remembers the day](#). Students might consider taking the role of border guards, East Berlin citizens, or the West Berlin mayor.

To find more possibilities for creating theatrical pieces based on dramatic historical moments, scroll through our [On This Day in History collection](#). A tableau based on the [1965 march to Selma](#), the [sinking of the Titanic](#), the [1906 San Francisco earthquake](#), the [fall of Saigon](#) during the Vietnam War, or the [moon landing](#) would require students to read these newspaper reports, many based on eyewitness accounts, and understand how they were experienced at the time.

### *Arts and Culture*

The [Arts section](#) can be an easy place to find articles that connect to your curriculum or interest your students. Paging through recently, for instance, you might have found “[For More Pianos, Last Note Is Thud in the Dump](#).”

To work with this piece, which has an accompanying video, have students both read the article and watch the video first, and then discuss how they could represent the ideas as a tableau. Instruct students that they should consider the emotions, cultural values and economic realities the pieces describe, and let them know they can add sound effects to their tableau, but no words.

As students present, you might ask the audience to describe what they see in the tableau first. After enough students have offered their observations, ask for interpretations of the scene. Finally, ask a volunteer to read the first three paragraphs in the article aloud. How well did the student tableaux capture the article? Why?

### *Science*

Use tableau to help students understand a process, a discovery or a complex scientific idea.

For instance, using information found on the [Times Topics page about the Higgs boson](#), including this July’s “[Physicists Find Elusive Particle Seen as Key to Universe](#),” students might use tableau to show their understanding of the particle and the role it plays. (You might also be interested in this Reader Idea, in which college freshmen do a [DNA dance](#) based on a Times piece — another way to have students use movement to explore ideas.)

### *Literature*

Tableau can also be a useful tool for literature teachers. It encourages students to slow down and think about the meaning of pivotal moments in a text, as well as consider the viewpoints of different characters. In [a 2006 lesson plan](#) we suggested using this technique with Shakespeare, but you could, of course, use it with anything from "[The Hunger Games](#)" to "[Huck Finn](#)."

## Going Deeper

For a chance to see tableau in action, and hear students and teachers discuss their experience with tableau, watch this video by [Arts for Academic Achievement \(AAA\)](#), a Minneapolis Public Schools program.

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See [other posts in this series](#), and tell us what you think or how *you* use drama in the classroom by commenting below.

Comments are no longer being accepted.

Rosalind Flynn [August 7, 2012 · 5:30 pm](#)

Let me start this second comment I am leaving by giving the NY Times a standing ovation for this series endorsing the use of drama in the classroom! These articles are excellent and I agree with each point and recommendation made. And thanks for the AAA video link. I've found that teachers with little to no theatre background benefit greatly from photographs and videos of drama strategies like Tableau in action, so I am including links to a few from my collection to add to the Tableau resources:

A Dramatic Approach to Reading Comprehension: Tableau  
<https://vimeo.com/34895988>

Introducing Tableau  
<https://vimeo.com/35846054>

Tableau in Action  
<https://vimeo.com/35854472>

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