

# The Power of Tableaus in Understanding Oppression

*Same Story, Different Countries*

Lesson created by Marielle Kraft

## OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This lesson guides students to use historical facts and narratives to portray scenes of South African colonialism and the Middle Passage through tableaus which are still scenes created with the body. They will practice using facial and body expression, dialogue, and creative characterization to portray the concepts surrounding these periods of oppression.

## EDUCATION STANDARDS

Grade 6 | 90 minutes

Common Core Standards	National Core Arts Standards
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details	TH:Cr1.1.7c: Explore a scripted or improvised character by imagining the given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.9: Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.	TH:Cr2-6: Contribute ideas and accept and incorporate the ideas of others in preparing or devising drama/theatre work.

## OBJECTIVES

1. **Cognitive:** Students will be able to portray a scene from either the Middle Passage or South African colonialism based on both the facts and/or narratives about this

historical time of oppression. Students will be able to explain the concept of oppression and how it relates to the treatment of African people in both the United States and South Africa.

2. **Affective:** Students will work well in small groups and whole class settings. Students will demonstrate listening and oral participatory skills, as well as focus during independent work. Students will follow directions in a timely manner. Students will move about the classroom and the school safely when performing their tableau.
3. **Artistic:** Students will use drama to portray a fictional character in history in the form of a tableau. Students will use body and facial expressions, as well as some dialogue to portray the character according to historical context.

## ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

1. **Cognitive:** Teacher will evaluate the student's understanding of their historical scene by asking them to speak about the historical context while in the tableau. Students will reflect on the historical context of their tableau in a reflection that will be collected at the end of class (rubric below).
2. **Affective:** Teacher will circulate around the classroom to make sure students are working well together both in pairs and in small groups. The teacher will ask students to remind her the expectations for moving around their space safely. She will ensure that this is the case.
3. **Artistic:** Teacher will observe as students create the tableaus (their use of facial and body expression, dialogue, and creative characterization) as well as collect a written reflection from each student at the end of class. This reflection must include an explanation of their role in the tableau and why a tableau is an important tool that can be used in understanding history and culture.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

1. [Resource 1.1 - Beginnings of Oppression in America and South Africa](#)
2. [Resource 1.2 - Passages for Tableaus](#)
3. [Resource 1.3 - Assessment Rubric](#)

## ACTIVITY

### Lesson Focus/Activation of Prior Knowledge

- Introduce the lesson by introducing the topic of “Oppression”. *Oppression: the state of being subject to unjust treatment or control (Merriam-Webster)*. Inform the students that they will discuss ideas surrounding this concept and some examples they have seen of oppression in our own worlds today,
- Read the passages from **Resource 1.1 (Beginnings of Oppression in America and South Africa)** or explain the significant aspects of the roots of oppression and segregation in the United States and South Africa.

### Integrated Arts Activity

- Introduce the concept of the “Tableau” (French word meaning “picture”) as an art form. Explain that creating a tableau is like creating a life picture, where the characters and subjects are still but full of meaning and emotion.
- Call 4 students up to create a Tableau of 3 bullies ganging up on one kid in the hallway, forcing him to give up his lunch money. Give students a few moments to create this scene and then ask the class to comment on it. Then, tap on the shoulder of a few of the students, asking them to say their character and to tell what they are feeling in that moment captured in the tableau.
- Split the students into groups of 4 or 5 students each. Each group will receive one of the passages from **Resource 1.2 (Passages for Tableaus)** about either the Middle Passage or the Colonialism in South Africa.
- Explain to students that groups will read their passage together and discuss its relevance to the Middle Passage or the South African colonization. Students are to discuss what the passage tells us about those two eras of history, and how this relates to the idea of oppression. This discussion should be about 5 minutes long.
- Then groups will be creating a tableau of a scene within the context of their passage. They need to work together to discuss their understanding of the historical context, as well as how to portray the human emotion and details of the circumstance in a tableau. All students should be prepared to be tapped on the shoulder.
- Circulate around the room while students are discussing their ideas in groups. Emphasize that this is an activity with both historical and artistic importance.

These tableaux aren't just representing a moment in time, they are telling a story of the people in the scene. This is theater! Be creative and step into character.

- Call on the groups to display their tableaux one at a time at the front of the class. First, they will set up and the class will observe the tableau for a minute. Then, I will tap on the shoulders of each of the people in the tableau for who they are, their importance to the scene, and their thoughts/emotions at the moment. The class will have the opportunity to ask questions to anyone in the scene and the students must respond in character.

### Unit Culminating Activity

- Students will be asked to head back to their seats and write a short narrative of the character they portrayed in the tableau. They must include the historical context of their tableau, the character they portrayed, and the thoughts and emotions of the character according to the historical context of the scene.
- Then, students will be asked to include a reflection on how the tableau helped them to understand this cultural history better than if they were to just read the facts in a textbook.
  - What about the tableau added to their understanding of the Middle Passage and/or South African colonialism?
  - Why is it important to step into the characters of the people during these times?

(This reflection will be collected for a grade.)

## REFERENCES

1. PBS: The Middle Passage - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p277.html>
2. South African History Online - <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-africa-1900s-1900-1917>
3. *The Ten layers of Oppression When You are Black and Poor in South Africa* <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1844>
4. South Africa's "Gold Slaves" - <http://www.equaltimes.org/south-africa-s-gold-slaves#.V59KP5MrKYV>
5. National Arts Standards - <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>

6. Common Core Standards - <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>

## RESOURCE 1.1

### Beginnings of Oppression in America and South Africa

#### Middle Passage

Beginning in the 1600s, European traders took Africans captive to be shipped and sold as property to the American people. The “Middle Passage” was the second leg of a 3-part voyage across the world. The first leg of the voyage carried a cargo that often included iron, cloth, brandy, firearms, and gunpowder. Upon landing on Africa's "slave coast," the cargo was exchanged for Africans. Fully loaded with its human cargo, the ship set sail for the Americas, where the slaves were exchanged for sugar, tobacco, or some other product. The final leg brought the ship back to Europe. The transportation from West Africa to America was by boat, but the conditions were deadly. African people were packed like sardines, contracted diseases like wildfire, and chained to one another for up to 60 days of sea travel. When they arrived, they were traded and sold into a life of slavery against their wills. This was the start of an incredibly unjust and dark time in American history, where Oppression of the African slaves became a way of life for the American farmers, plantations owners, and working families.

#### Colonialism in South Africa

The Dutch were the first European trading power to set up a permanent settlement in South Africa. In 1652, the powerful Dutch East India Company built a fort and established a supply station under the command of Jan Van Riebeeck on a site that later became Cape Town. What was initially just a stop on the trading route became a town of foreigners with others from Europe following close behind. As they settled into the land and found it very suitable for farming, Europeans captured African natives in the area to provide the hard labor that working in the field required. Colonization expanded and took over more and more land, displacing Africans and forcing many of them to become servants and slaves to work in newly struck diamond mines. In South Africa the Khoi San, the San and later the Xhosa were captured as slaves and put to work on the farms of settlers and frontiersmen.

*Colonialists created ‘race’ as a way of oppressing the colonized. This race construct was created on the myth of the ‘inferior other’, the primitive dark man whom the white man could tame, pacify and put to work ‘for his own good’.* – South African Civil Society Information Service

## RESOURCE 1.2

### Passages for Tableaus

#### Can you describe the Middle Passage?

A: There is the diagram of a slave ship, showing precisely how the slaves themselves were stowed, how they were placed for the voyage when they were below decks or between decks. Typically there were two levels, one above the other, on either side of the ship, with a central passageway. They had about 18 inches head room, less than 2 feet head room. They couldn't sit. And because they were manacled, they couldn't really change position very easily at all, without hurting themselves or their companions. When the weather was rough they were kept below for a long period. It must have been a nightmare. In the mornings, after the end of periods of bad weather, when they could finally get down there, they would find two manacled together, one dead and one living. It was quite a common experience. I think that in terms of hell on earth, that must have been as near as anyone ever comes, I think, to it.

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#### Describe the Middle Passage from the point of view of an African?

A: Slaves who were herded into the slave ships, into the dark, landed on unsanded plank floors, chained to their neighbors, their right foot shackled to the left foot of the person to their right. Their left foot shackled to the right foot of the person to their left. About 18 inches or less below, another layer of slaves on another unsanded plank floor.

Every time the waves came you could see them and prepare for them, you just slid across these unsanded floors. There was no fresh air, no light. The slaves had no way of knowing where they were going [or] when, if ever, they would get there. And indeed it was a long trip. At best, if the weather was good, it was a six weeks' journey. And then they were unloaded among these strange pale-skinned people with bright colored eyes who hollered things at them. And if they didn't understand it, they hollered louder.

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## South African village raids

In South Africa the Khoi San, the San and later the Xhosa were captured as slaves and put to work on the farms of settlers and frontiersmen. With the European colonists expanding their territory and eventually reaching the borders of African villages, African groups attempted to fight back on many occasions. However the Europeans had the weapons and firearms that the Africans did not, and therefore the pushback didn't last long and the Africans had little hope. Families were stripped apart, rights were stripped, and free labour became the expectation of the European colonists for the African natives. They were now forced to work for foreigners on the same land that had originally been their home.

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## Working in the Gold and Diamond Mines

With the discovery of gold and diamonds, the settlers required labour to work the mines and those indigenous people who still lived and farmed on land were then subjugated via the 1913 Land Act, which effectively dispossessed black people of their land and turned them into cheap labour to be used as chattel.

*Narrative from a mine worker:*

*“At gunpoint, we were handcuffed, stripped of our clothes and inked on our buttocks until someone came and bought me for US\$70 – like a slave. You crush the stones for five hours every day. It is backbreaking work, made even harder by the hunger and violence. Before climbing down a mine shaft each trafficked miner is given a belt of explosives, a torch and a diesel generator for rock drilling. We have little or no safety equipment or protective gear. If you walk upright, then rocks will slice your shoulder bones.”*

The captured men work 19 hour days but are only fed twice a day, surviving on meager rations of bread, boiled cabbage, porridge, and mango juice. They sleep underground on flat rocks until the start of their next shift.

- <http://www.equaltimes.org/south-africa-s-gold-slaves#.V59KP5MrKYV>



## RESOURCE 1.3

The teacher should evaluate based on:

1. The tableau reflection which will be scored from 1-3:

Poor (1)	Fair (2)	Excellent (3)
Reflection does not include all elements of the criteria. Little to no reflection is included about the process and explanation of historical significance does not clearly relate to the tableau.	Reflection is complete but lacks depth in thought. Some historical context is connected to the tableau, and the student somewhat reflects on the importance of the experience.	Reflection is thoroughly complete with original thought and critical thinking. Clear connections are made between the historical context and the theatrics of the tableau. Student clearly explains why the tableau is an important tool in understanding history and culture.

2. Group work and participation: Students will each fill out the “Group Evaluation Form” found on page 276 of “Interdisciplinary Learning Through Dance” textbook.