

Videotaping an English Mini-drama in Your Classroom

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Using a camcorder in class is an effective teaching tool because it captures the students' attention. For the past two years I've used my camcorder to record an English drama performed by each of my freshmen and sophomore oral English classes. I'm convinced it works since students often take the trouble to tell me how much they enjoyed the play later on in the course or after the course is finished.

Here are some guidelines I usually follow:

Choose a short, action-packed play, a one-page play is best. Since I try to get the play done in one class period (90 minutes) anything longer than that will be too much. (My favorite play is "The Three Goats" in *FIRSTHAND ACCESS* (Lingual House)). Any action (walking, jumping, flying, fighting) is what makes the play really fun.

Warn students ahead of time you're planning to use your camcorder This allows students to dress up if they want.

Classroom Presentation

- Step 1: Read the play aloud, from start to finish. Call on students to read one paragraph at a time. Ask some comprehension questions to make sure every one knows what the story is about.
- Step 2: Divide the class into small groups. Each group should have enough members to perform the play entirely.
- Step 3: Ask students to decide on their roles. Make a list of the characters on the board including the narrator. Assign any "extras" (odd number of students left over, or latecomers as assistant narrators to other groups.) Tell students they have to memorize their lines, except the narrator who can read the lines. If there is more than one narrator to a group, the narrators should divide up their work.
- Step 4: Ask students to read through the play from start to finish with each student reading their respective parts. Tell them to practice three times. On the third round, ask them not to look at their scripts. If time allows, let them practice a fourth or fifth time. Usually three times is enough.
- Step 5: Let each group rehearse in front of the classroom. Help students with where they should stand. The narrator should use a microphone/amplifier for best effects. Let each group perform the play from start to finish. Guide students on their movements and give them ideas regarding gestures. (Such as putting hands on hips to show anger.) Help them with pronunciation and intonation. Masks, costumes, or special props should be used if available.
- Step 6: Show time. Call on groups to perform the play. Stand in the middle of the classroom and record the play. Use the zoom lens occasionally. Record each group. You'll find the plays can be performed quickly, in about 5 minutes.

Since most camcorders can be attached directly to TVs for playback, it's usually no trouble to show the class their performances. I usually do so the next time the class meets.

Pointers

1. Time management is critical. A rough guide is as follows: Getting organized and practicing: 30-40 minutes, rehearsal: 30 minutes, show time: 20-30 minutes. This time allotment is for a class of 40 students. Smaller classes would take less time. In this case, you can spend more time on practice and rehearsal. In any case, remember to keep things moving!

2. Make sure the climax of the play is emphasized. Encourage students to be dramatic at this scene. Tell students that "This is the highlight."

3. Some classes may initially balk at the idea of being recorded. Assure them that it will be fun, and that you will show them their performances. I wouldn't record any one who really objected, though.

Evaluation

I don't evaluate students on their acting skills, but I usually ask a few comprehension questions about the play on a quiz or test.

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