TOOLKIT

THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

BY

BERTOLT BRECHT

DIRECTED BY

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WILLPOWER!
A supplement to Yale Rep’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* Study Guide, this TOOLKIT is designed to further engage your students in our production of Brecht’s play. The following pages include theatre games and exercises to prepare students for seeing live theatre, as well as activities, information, and lessons geared specifically to this production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

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For more information on Yale Repertory Theatre and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, please visit yalerep.org, email Roger-Paul Snell yalerep@yale.edu, or call the box office at 203.432.1234.
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AN ACTOR’S WORLD: VOCAL EXERCISES

The following vocal exercises model the preparation an actor might do to get her voice ready for a performance. These activities also work well as ice-breakers to ease students into theatre games and give them a taste of the way that theatre demands an actor to use his voice and body. These exercises will also give students a chance to hear the human voice in an expanded range of tones beyond everyday conversation.

Relaxing the Jaw

Make as wide a face as possible (wide open mouth, wide eyes). Then scrunch as tightly as possible. Repeat four times.

Yawn on a descending scale.

Chew imaginary bubble gum.

Yawn on a descending scale.

Chew imaginary peanut butter.

Yawn on an ascending scale.

Chew an imaginary hard candy.

Stick the tongue all the way out and point it down, then up, then left, and then right.

Make as wide a face as possible. Then scrunch your face as tightly as possible. Repeat four times. Leader can call out “Big face! Little face!” as needed.
An Actor's World: Vocal Exercises

Listening to Sounds, Part One: Name Game

a. Students stand in a large circle. One by one, they say their names.

b. Next, go around the circle again, but this time everyone should pronounce their names in exaggerated, silly, and/or strange ways. The goal is to elongate vowels and purposefully over-emphasize each consonant. Encourage students to play with the pitch and vocal tone. Ask them to get to know their names as simply a collection of sounds.

**EXAMPLE:**

“Jane Doe” becomes Jjjjjj-ja-jah-nnnnnnuuhh DDDDooooohuh

c. As the game progresses, ask students to identify any sounds they haven’t heard before and listen for the way a speaker’s changes in pitch and sound-shape affect the way others hear her.

*Can students still catch each unique syllable?*

*Is anyone noticing the difference between, for example, “ay” and “eh?” Between “oh” and “ooh?” Can anyone feel from exactly where in the mouth certain sounds are made?*

*Do any sounds seem to possess more power than others? Why? How might that power be useful to an actor on stage?*

Listening to Sounds, Part Two:
Conducting the Symphony of Your Name

a. For this follow-up exercise, one student at a time becomes the “conductor” and makes use of her classmates as “instruments” of the “orchestra.”

b. The conductor assigns different parts of her name to her classmates.

*Names do not necessarily need to be broken down by syllables. “Jessica,” for example, could become Jess-ih-ca OR Je-sss-ih-cccc-ahh.*

c. Once parts have been assigned, the conductor points to the instruments, who in turn say the portion of the name assigned to them.

*Conductors should be encouraged to be creative when composing their name’s symphony: hand gestures indicating volume, speed, repetition, and rhythm can lead to fascinating sonic discoveries!*

*This activity is primarily about vocal play, but it is also intended to spur focused collaboration—an essential skill for theatre artists—between students.*
Listening to Sounds, Part Three: Delicious Words

a. This game will give students the opportunity to consider sound in tandem with their other senses. Begin by having students think of their favorite foods. Go around the room and have each student pronounce their food in such a way that emphasizes its deliciousness. Ask them to communicate the taste and texture of the food through the way they say the words.

**EXAMPLES:**

If the food is French fries, ask the student to see if she can communicate the sizzle of the frying oil, the heat of biting into a hot fry, and the delight of crunching into the golden battered potato.

If the food is ice cream, ask the student if he can convey the smooth texture, the cold temperature, and the joy he feels when the first bite of that sweet treat hits his tongue.

b. Next, have the students invent a nonsense word and speak it aloud. Then have the students put the deliciousness into their new words (particularly into the vowels). Can they achieve the same sensory communication through sound-shaping these nonsense words as they did for their favorite foods?

**EXAMPLE: Ta-sha-koo-za-bee-bee**

c. An alternate option to continue this game is to do a second round with the students’ least favorite foods, keeping an ear open for how emotional response affects the way students manipulate their sounds.
An Actor’s World: Vocal Exercises

Enunciation Exercises and Tongue Twisters

Short Phrases #1:
Speak each of the following as clearly and completely as possible five times in a row. Increase the tempo to increase the challenge.

Around the rough and rugged rock the ragged rascal ran.

An annoying noise annoys an oyster.

Who washed Washington’s white woolen underwear when Washington’s washer woman went west?

Slippery southern snakes slide swiftly down ski slopes.

An elephant was asphyxiated in the asphalt.

Zizzi’s zippy zipper zips.

Six thick thistle sticks

What gall to play ball in this small hall!

I cannot shut it any shutter.

A hotch-potch, moss-blotched, botched scotch block
Short Phrases #2
The substitution of “n” for “ng,” although common in colloquial speech, is an error of articulation. Have students speak aloud the following words. In addition to challenging them to perfect their articulation of the “-ing,” ask what the different sounds might indicate about a character speaking them. How does articulation affect our understanding of a person’s identity?

- Doin’ vs. Doing
- Comin’ vs. Coming
- Nothin’ vs. Nothing
- Walkin’ vs. Walking
- Talkin’ vs. Talking

Short phrases #3:
These phrases focus on repetitive plosive consonant work. Once students have mastered articulating them, challenge them to speak as fast as possible without sacrificing attention to enunciation.

- Poppa locka poppa locka poppa locka boo!
- Bully bully bully bully bully bully bah!
- Digga rigga digga rigga digga rigga roo!
- Hobba ninny hobba ninny hobba ninny hah!
Another instrument a performer relies on is her body. An actor’s body can help tell a story as much as her voice. Just as an athlete should warm up her muscles to avoid injury, so should a performer. The following exercises are designed to not only raise students’ awareness of this part of the actor’s world, but also to help elevate their comfort level with performing.

Physical Warm-up #1: “How do you do?”

a. Have the group walk around the room. When one student passes another, each must say “how do you do?” and then immediately change direction. Continue until each student has greeted every other student at least once.

b. Play a second round of the game in which each student, rather than changing direction after a greeting, must walk backwards until his next greeting, then forwards, then backwards again, etc.

c. Instruct students to be aware of other people in the space and to make eye contact throughout. It should be one of the goals of the game not to bump into others; students should try to gain a mindfulness of the spatial relationships between the bodies in the room.

Physical Warm-up #2: Around the World

a. Have everyone stand in a circle. As a group, go through the following sequence: stretch up, lean right, lean left, stretch up, lean back, lean forward

b. Then pick someone to start with a new gesture or simple combination of moves. Instruct the person to her right that he should mimic the movement after the leader performs it. And then the person to his right should follow suit, and on and on around the circle. The idea is to create a “wave” effect of the sequence.

c. Goals to set: no physical contact is made (students must focus on maintaining control of their bodies in space—no bumping!); all eyes should stare straight ahead (everyone should use their peripheral vision to know when it’s their turn to move); gradually speed up to see how fast the group can go as a team while maintaining a cleanly-executed sequence.
Physical Warm-up #3: “Where is everybody?”

a. This game is intended to increase spatial awareness in motion. Everyone should walk slowly around the room. They should fill the space and walk wherever they want (as opposed to forming a large circle or lines).

b. When the leader claps, they must quickly change direction and continue walking. Eyes should always be looking straight ahead.

c. When the leader calls “freeze!” students must immediately stop moving and close their eyes.

d. While the students’ eyes are closed, the leader should instruct them to point at a particular person.

**EXAMPLES:**

Point to where you think the tallest person in the room is right now; point to where Christopher is right now; point to where the girl wearing the blue shirt is right now; etc.

e. Keeping their pointing arms outstretched, have them open their eyes to see how well they fared. Continue playing until the group seems to have gained an ability to “see” each other even if they’re not looking at each other.
AN ACTOR’S WORLD: COMBINING BODY AND VOICE

The game of “Bah!” affords students an opportunity to combine both vocal and physical awareness. It requires focus and asks students to develop their ability to respond to a partner “in the moment.”

Basic “Bah!”

a. Have students form a circle with enough room to safely turn to the side without hitting one another.

b. One student begins by turning to the person on his right and shouting “Bah!” while making a hand gesture that says “I’m passing this word to you.”

c. The person receives the “Bah!” and gesture and delivers it to the person to her right as quickly as possible. Each “Bah!” must be given and received with eye contact.

d. This giving and receiving of “Bah!” continues around the circle. As the game progresses, the group should try to increase speed and intensity while maintaining precise eye contact and the order of the circle (do not anticipate your “Bah!”).

“Bah!” Variations

a. Once the students master the basic game, allow them the ability to change the direction the “Bah!” travels. This will force everyone to stay on their toes.

b. Add a mimicry component. Challenge students to notice and perform every movement, vocal tone, giggle, etc. of the person passing them the “Bah!” This is not to embarrass anyone, but rather because everyone will notice how quickly the sound/gesture will change the more they try to make it the same.

c. With new rounds, pick a student to add a secondary gesture to the “Bah!” that must be repeated by the next person and make at least one complete revolution around the circle.
The following exercises are adapted from Stephen Unwin’s book *The Complete Brecht Toolkit*, which is a useful tool for exploring Brecht’s work—in theory and in practice—with students. These exercises explore some of Brecht’s concepts, including “Alienation Effect” and “Gestus,” which are defined below:

**Gestus:**
Brecht wanted to create a kind of theatre that made its points with all the vivid clarity of a biblical parable. He was more interested in the relationships between people than in their individual experiences and saw character as the result of social conditions and not the other way around. At its simplest, “gestus” is like the English word “gesture”: the pointed finger, the shrugged shoulder, the turned back, etc. Gestus refers to something deeper, however: an embodiment of social relationships. In practice, gestus means presenting an action with quotation marks around it (a direct extension of alienation). For example, a gestus is the posture an actor has developed when she is standing in a way so as to demonstrate “this is how a businesswoman stands who is pretending not to recognize the old man waving to her from across the street because she does not want to give him a job.” Another example would be “this is how a lawyer stands after winning an acquittal for a client he knew was guilty.”

**Alienation Effect:**
Brecht’s most famous theoretical idea is *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is commonly translated as the “alienation effect.” However, a better definition of the concept is to say that alienation is about “making the familiar strange.” The idea is also referred to as “de-familiarization” or “distancing.” Brecht hopes that his theatre can make us see something familiar in a new, or strange, way.

Brecht’s theories for the theatre are fascinating and revolutionary, though it is important to remember that we neither need to brood over them while watching his plays nor worry that we aren’t “getting it” if we aren’t Brecht scholars. First and foremost, we should enjoy our role as spectators and take pleasure in the theatrical experience.
Exercise #1: The Person through the Walk

Objective: To introduce the concept of “alienation” that involves the group as a whole. Observation is key. This is an initial way in to physical characterization.

One person walks around the space. Ask the walker to put herself in a state of mind in which she is not listening to the commentary from the rest of the room. Instruct her to move as naturally as possible. Everyone else observes the walker intently, while considering the following questions:

Which body part leads her gait? 
Forehead, chin, nose, chest, hips, knees, etc?

What is her tempo/rhythm? 
Does she move side-to-side or directly forward? 
Does she sway, or is she still? 
Are her steps small or large? 
Is she a fast or slow mover?

What element is she? 
Earth, water, fire, wind, light, etc.? Does she glide or stomp?

What do her arms do?

Which parts of her body seem tense as she moves? 
Which parts move freely?

After a minute or so of this, another member of the group joins the walker, walking just behind her and mimicking her walk as accurately as possible in all respects. After thirty seconds or so, another group member joins, mimicking the person directly in front of him. Continue this until the whole group is walking in a chain. The original walker then stops leading and moves to the end of the line, mimicking the person directly in front of her. After a few seconds, the rest of the group sit down and re-observe the original walker. How close to the original walk is the final walk? Which aspects of the original walk have changed? Which have been exaggerated? Which have disappeared?

In another version, each walker exaggerates at least one characteristic of the walker in front of him. When the original walker comes to take over, he is adopting an estranged version of his original walk—he is made aware of the way in which he walks and is in a position to ask the question: What aspects of my walk, if any, are a result of my social being?
**Theatre-Making Connections: Exercises**

**Exercise #2: Seeing Afresh**

**Objective:** To introduce the concepts of “alienation” and “gestus” through collective play and the creation of tableaux vivants.

The whole group walks around the room. They pay attention to their environment. After a minute or so, they allow themselves to notice something in the room as if for the first time. This could be large or small—on the ceiling, wall, or floor—an object or simply a mark. When something has caught their attention, they stop still and focus their attention on that thing—they may stand, crouch, kneel, lie, etc., while they contemplate the object or mark. Others in the group who are still moving in the space can join someone who has stopped and join in the contemplation of the object or mark. Small groups of “observers” may form. Only the original observer who first noticed the object or mark can break this contemplation by moving away—this releases the group to carry on moving through the space. Each individual keeps moving through the space until he either notices something himself or joins another observer who has stopped to contemplate something. The object/mark takes on a de-familiarized (alienated) aspect.

**Variations:**

1. The same, only this time the observer and those joining reach out to the object or mark—they do this with an attitude toward it (e.g. with love, trepidation, awe, disgust, etc.). Everyone may adopt different physical positions in relation to the object or mark and to each other. This will create a tableau vivant that portrays particular attitudes that are created in the space.

2. The same, but with various socially-specific circumstances being dictated by the workshop leader. For example: the scene could be residents of Ferguson, Missouri, coming out onto the streets to survey the damage done (or not done) to their neighborhood the morning following protests, or New Yorkers coming out onto the streets of their city on the morning following 9/11. Alternatively, the leader could assign a broad character to each student, such as the Beggar, the Queen, the Pirate, etc.
Theatre-Making Connections: Production Context

During the design phase of Yale Rep’s production, director Liz Diamond was asked to describe what she wanted her production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* to look like. Brecht’s play takes place in the fictional country of Grusinia. As Diamond was imagining the Grusinia she would create on stage, she “couldn’t escape images of the latest eruption of violence in Israel and Palestine, the unfolding disaster in Syria, and the crisis in the Ukraine. People who live just like us, who send their kids to school, watch TV, and send text messages, were having their homes blown to smithereens by drone strikes and missiles. People like us were picking their way through the ruins, refugees carrying their homes on the backs of donkeys because their cars had been blown up.” These images of destruction and conflict in the real world drove Diamond and her design team to create a world on stage that blends the way life looks in the midst of catastrophe with exaggerated, theatrical brushstrokes.

The economic disparity between classes drives much of the action of the story, so a major task for costume designer Soule Golden is to ensure each garment demonstrates social status. For example, the play begins in a palace during the highbrow celebration of a noble-born child. The court will be dressed in the height of luxury in stark contrast to the servant class. Soon, the celebration is interrupted by a bloody coup which drives the nation into civil war. The creative team hopes that the resulting image—characters of all classes fleeing the city, aristocrats turned refugees running alongside beggars in the streets—will be a startling one.

The scope of the play exemplifies Brecht’s desire for “epic” theatre. It moves through many locations, regions, and seasons. The set design must move with the story and shape-shift throughout Grusha’s journey to provide nearly a dozen different settings. Scenic designer Chika Shimizu has created a massive wall, capable of breaking apart and being reconfigured to multiple shapes. Smaller set pieces—such as Yussup’s house or the crumbling inn on the road—will be built on wagons and rolled onto stage. These miniature sets within the set are not only functional, but also provide comedic effects. Diamond thinks of them like “clown cars,” in which Brecht’s ironic sense of humor can play out in front of the ruptured wall constantly looming in the background.

There are a great many songs in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Lang is writing new music for Yale Rep’s production. The actors will create the music live on stage, so Lang is looking at compositions that include “found” and unusual instruments. For example, a character who fled her home may not have managed to take her violin in the melee, but she could find a makeshift bow and some string and fashion a new instrument out of a piece of driftwood.
Theatre-Making Connections: Production Context

Before Seeing the Play

Discuss the major themes of the production design outlined above with your students. Perhaps you might share photographs of people living in the aftermath of a recent civil war. Possible questions for the classroom might include:

• What sort of opinions do we form about people based on clothing?
• How might a politician use fashion to gain favor with his constituency?
• Do we receive words differently when they are sung as lyrics instead of spoken as dialogue?
• Can you think of any other literary and/or dramatic works that make use of a wall as a metaphor? (Ex.: Pyramus and Thisbe’s scene in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall,” etc.)

After Seeing the Play

Questions to ask might include:

• Generally speaking, how does the design support the themes of the play?
• During which moments did you feel the designers’ work tie directly to an idea being expressed?
• Were there any design choices that confused you? Angered you? Made you think differently about a situation?
• Did each design element (set, costumes, lighting, projections, sound) work well with the others to form a fully realized theatrical world?
• Regardless of what you knew beforehand about the designers’ intentions, in your opinion, what story did the production design tell?
• Based on what you have read in the accompanying Study Guide and from your experience of the class exercises outlined in this Toolkit, to what extent would you call the design “Brechtian?”
THEATRE-MAKING CONNECTIONS:
Three Ways In to The Caucasian Chalk Circle

TEACHING STRATEGY #1
The Home of Reason:
Argument and Brecht’s
The Caucasian Chalk Circle

Created for this Toolkit
by Rachel Sexton

Objective:
By engaging students in a text-based
deliberation of an issue, this strategy will
improve their ability to develop claims and
counterclaims and to argue and deliberate
rather than debate and persuade.

• Alignment to Connecticut Core
  Standards for ELA/Literacy (Common
  Core State Standards)

• Reading Standards for Informational
  Text: Key Ideas and Details (RI.9-10.2
  & RI.11-12.2, RI.9-10.3 & RI.11-12.3)

• Writing Standards: Text Types and
  Purposes
  (W.9-10.1 & W.11-12.1)

• Speaking and Listening Standards:
  Comprehension and Collaboration
  (SL.9-10.1 & SL.11-12.1)

Connection to Brecht’s text
Brecht’s plays create a critical distance
between the audience and story, pushing
us to engage with his productions
primarily through rational thought rather
than emotion. In their emphasis on
argument and reasoning, the Common
Core State Standards similarly call for
students to engage with texts and ideas
through reason rather than emotion. The
following strategy uses an informational
text that raises complex issues and
questions similar to those in the play in
order to teach students argumentation
skills.

Notes to the teacher
The purpose of this activity is to explore
one of the central questions that The
Caucasian Chalk Circle raises: Who owns
what? Who deserves to own what? While
that question is introduced in the Prologue
in relation to land, it unfolds in the rest of
the play over the life of a child. Therefore
the text used with this activity focuses on
the question of who should have parental
rights to a child.

[Please note: For this activity to be used
most effectively, do not introduce the central
question until after the students do a first
reading of the article (see step 2 below).]
Directions to the teacher

Step 1
Begin by distinguishing among debate, discussion, and deliberation. Explain why the last, with its focus on reasoning and arrival at a “truth” is the heart of argumentation. Establish rules or norms for deliberation, e.g. hear all voices, ask questions, don’t yell, don’t disparage others’ points of view, etc.

Step 2
Introduce the issue that is the lesson’s focus, but do not tell the students the framing question (i.e., the focus as “ownership” or “what it means to be a parent”). Have the students read the article about the Indian mother who is demanding the return of her child (see materials below). Tell them that their purpose for the first reading is simply to discover what the article is about. Once they have finished reading, ask students:

“What’s most important or interesting in what you’ve read? Why?
What questions do you have about it?”

Focus here on ensuring that the students have understood the article’s content.

Step 3
After discussing what the students have read and clarifying any misunderstandings of the content, share the framing question: Should the child be returned to her birth family in India?

Divide the class into groups of four (or five or six) and split each group into two halves made up of the A’s and the B’s

A = arguments on one side of the question (“Yes, the child should be returned to the family in India.”)

B = arguments on other side (“No, the child should remain with the family in Australia.”)

Have the A’s and B’s in each group work among themselves to identify reasons and evidence from the reading to support their side.

Step 4
Have each side share its work with the other, following this protocol:

Side A has 2 minutes to share their thinking. Side B should simply take notes on what they hear.

Side B has 2 minutes to share their thinking. Side A should simply take notes on what they hear.

Keep time and call out when the sides should switch roles. Remind students that they will need their notes for subsequent steps.
Step 5
Have students switch groups (A’s rotate to a new pair of B’s) AND switch sides (A’s become B’s; B’s become A’s). In their new groups, have them share, following this protocol:

Old Bs now share the A side with
the new A’s for 2 min.
New A’s share the B side with
the old B’s for 2 min.

Each side should draw on the notes they took in step 4 to inform what they say. You may want to give the sides 1 or 2 minutes to prepare before starting this round.

Then have the students share in their groups about what each person actually thinks (1 min. per person). Ask them to try to come to consensus on a response to the question (5 min.).

Once they’ve had time to talk, ask:

For the groups that came to consensus, what made it possible?
If the group didn’t come to consensus, what were the points of agreement?

Step 6
Have the students form a Continuum Line to see where everyone is, with 1 = absolutely NO and 5 = absolutely YES. Tell them to find someone from the other end of the line and ask that person to explain his/her thinking.

[Note the teacher: While it is tempting to skip this step, this allows students who were the minority in small group see that they might be the majority in the class.]

Step 7
Questions for discussion:

How is what you think now different from or more developed from what you thought at first?
What was it like to have to say the other side (second round)? Why?
What did you learn by doing this? About the issue you discussed? About what you think and how you think? About your classmates and what they think? About making an argument?

Extension
While the issue of who owns the child might seem more clear-cut in The Caucasian Chalk Circle, students may still want to debate whether Natella has any legitimate claim on Michael. The question of who deserves to own what might be complicated further with inclusion of the other examples of challenges to ownership presented in the play as well as those we face as a society.

Materials
Australian Broadcast Corporation.
indian-family-demands-qld-parents-return-daughter/4533126
TEACHING STRATEGY #2

Visualizing War: Using Images to Create a Brechtian Narrative

Created for this Toolkit by Jessica Sack and Rachel Sexton

Objective:
By analyzing a visual text and using the inferences made to write an original narrative, students will deepen their understanding of how a writer’s choices concerning craft and structure create an intended effect on an audience.

• Alignment to Connecticut Core Standards for ELA/Literacy (Common Core State Standards)

• Reading Standards for Literary Text: Key Ideas and Details (RL.9-10.1 & RL.11-12.1, RL.9-10.2 & RL.11-12.2, RL.9-10.3 & RL.11-12.3);

• Reading Standards for Literary Text: Craft and Structure (RL.9-10.5 & RL.11-12.5);

• Writing Standards: Text Types and Purposes (W.9-10.3 & W.11-12.3)

• Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration (SL.9-10.1 & SL.11-12.1)

Connection to The Caucasian Chalk Circle

Brecht used the “alienation effect” to make the familiar strange. He pulled inspiration from the world around him—creating stories from the tumult of 20th-century history. By using images of women in war to create dialogues or narratives that encourage an audience to respond with a critical distance, students will explore Brecht’s approach and themes while deepening their understanding of the relationship between author’s craft and audience and purpose.

Directions to the teacher

Step 1

Explain that this lesson will give students a chance to exercise their analytical reading and creative writing skills. Divide the class into groups of four or five and assign each group an image to analyze. Provide only the image. You may use any images you like, but a recommended source, a photographic retrospective of Women during World War II, is available here:

theatlantic.com/photo/2011/09/world-war-ii-women-at-war/100145/

Tell the groups to analyze their image, responding to the following questions:

What is happening in this image?
What stands out?
What questions come to mind when you look at this picture?

Step 2

Explain that each group is going to use the structures Brecht developed (titled episodes, narration, and music) to create a narrative/short story from the photograph. The story should depict only the incident suggested by the photograph. The incident should include a scene before, during, and after the photograph...
and the photograph can represent any of the three moments in the incident. The story should be written as if the writers are observers of the incident, using as few, carefully chosen, and descriptive words as possible. Direct the students to use words that are necessary for an outsider to visualize the incident and its participants.

Once the ideas of the story are determined, the story should be divided into three episodes. Each episode should be given a title that comments on the action that occurs within the scene.

**Step 3**

Have the groups perform for each other the stories they have created, following these instructions:

- Find a way to present the title of each scene.
- Find a way to narrate the images of each episode. This can be achieved with a narrator separate from the action, with the actors narrating themselves, with actors narrating one another, etc.

**Step 4**

Engage students in reflecting on their experience, using the following questions:

- How did the way the events were narrated change the way the audience experienced the episode?
- What role did women play in these episodes?
- Where else have people seen examples of the “alienation effect”? (Ex.: in movies, television shows, real life, etc.)
Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, founder of The Theatre of the Oppressed, lived from 1931–2009. He understood the theatre as a unique environment in which human beings could observe themselves in action. Humans are unique in our capacity to see ourselves in the act of seeing, of thinking through our emotions, and of being moved by our own thoughts and the thoughts of others: we can see ourselves today and imagine ourselves tomorrow. According to Boal, theatre is the art of looking at ourselves. It is a form of knowledge which can and should be used to transform society. He believed theatre can help us build our better future rather than simply waiting for it.

Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed is a form of performance used in radical populist movements throughout the Americas and Europe. He incorporated methods of both Brecht and Stanislavsky in his teachings—mixing pieces of Brecht’s demonstrative, archetype-based acting style with Stanislavsky’s emotional, character-driven Method—and developed a style of interactive performance created through exercises, games, and street theatre. His troupes would often perform in public, engaging with communities to interrupt the daily routine and point out situations of social injustice and/or moral quandaries.

His theatre asks the audience to become active participants in the theatrical experience. The audience members, or spectators, are transformed into “spect-actors.” The audience and performers together function as a community forum for ideas expressed through scenework. The spect-actors are given license to comment on the play’s action and to intervene with suggestions for better outcomes to the conflicts playing out on stage.

Here are two basic Boal exercises to introduce your students to his work. They are very much in line with Brecht’s ideology and may be used to bolster your discussion of the issues of justice and moral choice in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

The second exercise below focuses on the collaborative creation of narratives and aligns to Writing Standards: Text Types and Purposes (W.9-10.3 & W.11-12.3) and with the Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration (SL.9-10.1 & SL.11-12.1).
**Exercise #1: The Liar Game**

The objective in this exercise is to have the group work together and really observe behavior in others.

1. The teacher is the leader. The students sit in a circle and close their eyes.

2. The leader says that one person will be tapped, but secretly, the leader taps no one.

3. Students open their eyes and point to who they believe was tapped. This is done in silence.

4. Students close their eyes again.

5. The leader says again that one person will be tapped, but this time, the leader secretly taps everyone.

6. Students open their eyes, looks to see who they believe has been tapped.

7. The leader asks that the person who was tapped in the first round to raise their hand—no one raises.

8. The leader asks who was tapped in the second go round—everyone raises their hand.

Students should share their rationale behind picking someone they thought was tapped. What behaviors became cause for suspicion or signs of innocence? What was it like thinking you had been the only one tapped? Did that affect your behavior? What was it like realizing the leader had deceived the group on both occasions? Did anything happen to the energy in the room when everyone realized the rules had been tampered with?

**Exercise #2: Creating Forum Theatre Scenarios**

[Note: This is a challenging exercise for unpracticed actors or students unfamiliar with basic improvisation skills.]

Break the class up into smaller groups. Each group must identify a perceived social problem. It must be an active problem that they can bring to life in a short scenario or skit. The dialogue can be written out specifically or mostly improvised, but either way each scene should follow this shape:

1. Articulate the problem.

2. Identify the protagonist. The protagonist should be the person who has to overcome the problem.

3. Identify the antagonist(s).

4. Identify a course of action that will be acted out to resolve the problem.

Once each group has had time to rehearse, the scenes are performed for the class. After a scenario has been acted out once without interruption, the group goes back to the beginning and performs it again. This time, however, the spect-actors in the audience have the power to call for a “stop” in the action. If someone calls “stop,” they then offer a suggestion for a superior choice for the protagonist which they believe will lead to a better resolution to the problem. Once they have offered their solution, they take the protagonist’s place on stage and the scene resumes with the spect-actor in the role. This new protagonist, along with the rest of the cast, improvises new dialogue to test out their hypothetical solution.
After a scene has been performed with the assistance of the forum, the class should discuss what worked or didn't work about the alterations the spect-actor made. Did the characters’ new choices improve their situation or not? Did it make it worse, even? Are there any consequences that might arise from the characters’ choices in the long run, even if their own lives were improved? Is there a possible resolution that ends with justice for all? If time permits, play the scene a third time incorporating the ideas sparked during the discussion.