



Signature in the Schools: The Voices on Blackwell Island

Exercise: Civic Statues

Subject(s): Theatre and Social Studies

Goals: Students will be able to:

- Portray unique, multidimensional characters.
- Describe how theatrical works can entertain, inform, and interpret the human experience.
- Examine the extent to which power is shared.
- Identify the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and ethical use of material and intellectual property.

Show Connection:

Patients like Nellie, Elizabeth and Matilda on Blackwell's Island physically rebel and speak up when they can, strategically, to protest their treatment at the hands of the administration. Students will better comprehend just what civic empowerment looks like as they physicalize their relationships to civic empowerment and how they fight for the causes that matter to them for future generations.

Set-Up:

Divide the class into equal sized groups, minimum of five students per group, and place them in distinct areas of the classroom.

Description:

- In each group, have students discuss the following questions. (Instructors should float around the room and support productive and insightful discussion among the groups.):
 - » What does the phrase “civic engagement” mean to you?
 - » What does being a well-rounded citizen in the United States of America mean to you? What things does a well-rounded citizen do?
 - » In your opinion, do all people in the United States, regardless of gender, have the same opportunities and abilities to pursue their passions and the causes that matter to them? Why or why not? How could possible inequalities between genders be eliminated?
- Following a short discussion, each group has 10 minutes to create group tableaus that represent one of the following

thematic titles: There is More Than One Way to Make Progress

- » Planting Seeds of Progress for the Future
- » Is My Fight Your Fight?
- » A Common Goal for the Common Good

- Groups should create one tableau each, using their full bodies and found objects in the room.
- Each group's frozen picture must feature every member of the group. Every person in the group should be able to identify what person, place, thing, feeling they are representing in their frozen picture. These images can be literal depictions or can be more metaphorical in nature should the group be so inclined.
- The instructor should move around the classroom, offering support as they can. Encourage the groups to think in three dimensions, use their full bodies, levels and depths of field to tell a story through a frozen image.
- Once time has elapsed, have each group present their frozen picture and hold it in place for the class to explore. Students that are not in the presenting group can get up close and personal and way up to and through the frozen picture to closely examine the image presented to them. What does the audience see? What story is being told? Who might have power or lack power in these frozen images? Is there a clear winner or loser in the image?
 - » *For an added challenge, with the group that is frozen in place, countdown from 10 to 0. When you reach 0, the members of that group should reposition themselves into whatever they think is the opposite of the position they were frozen in before. So, if they were in a powerful position standing tall and strong, maybe they are now smaller and more passive, closer to the floor. If they were connected to many other members of their group physically, now they are isolated and not physically connected with any other member of their group. Groups present and the audience walks around museum style to explore it. Discuss and note things you noticed. (Feel free to do this with as many or as few groups as you might like.)*

Discussion:

- What do these frozen images tell us about how we as a community feel about working together towards a common goal? What makes working together hard, and what could make it easier?
- In *The Voices on Blackwell Island*, how do the characters fight for progress? What does that fight look like? Are they successful?