

SING THE HEART OF THE MAGIC: A Jennifer L. Nelson Story TEACHING GUIDE

Lesson #1: What is Your Social Impact?

Student Outcomes

(What will the students be able to do during and/or after this lesson?)

- *Students will consider the definition of social impact and identify the ways that Jennifer L. Nelson demonstrated this concept throughout her life.*
- *Students will reflect on their own individual experiences and interests and predict the ways they hope to socially impact their own communities throughout their lives.*
- *Students will identify the ways others have demonstrated social impact during their lives and the ways that others have acknowledged them.*

Terms/Vocabulary

(Vocabulary words you should define for students prior to viewing the documentary)

“It’s critical to clearly differentiate between the broad term of ‘impact’ and a more deliberate definition of social impact. Impact on its own implies an influence or effect on virtually anything, given its context.

Social impact, however, is grounded in the effect it has on a pressing social challenge.” ([Definition of Social Impact](#))

SOCIAL IMPACT
THEATRE

COMMUNITY
NON-EQUITY ACTOR

THEATER
EQUITY ACTOR

Focus Questions

(Questions that can be answered through a class discussion, short essay, a video, visual art (i.e. collage, drawing, digital print, etc.)

(Grades 6-8)

1. Jennifer L. Nelson had social impact on the different arts communities she lived within. What were the specific ways that she made an impact on her community and how was the impact evident?

(Grades 9-12)

2. What do you consider Jennifer L. Nelson’s singular most important contribution to the DC theater arts scene and why?
3. What type of social impact would you like to leave behind once you retire from your chosen career? How would you know that you’ve made the impact?

Main Lesson Activity

Materials: Paper, pencil or computer | Smart phone or video camera

Estimated Time: 45 minutes to 2 hours

(Allow students ample time to create and share their videos when giving them the following directions)

The documentary film, *Sing the Heart of the Magic: A Jennifer L. Nelson Story*, opens with the following passage:

“There’s a quote from the Dalai Lama about ripples just as they spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water the actions of individuals have far-reaching effects. The far-reaching effects of Jennifer L. Nelson, playwright actor director art administrator and producer are still rippling through the dc theater scene.”

Who are the people who have demonstrated social impact in your life and lives of people around you? How are these people acknowledged by others who they have positively impacted?

Create a 60-120 second video responding to this prompt using the term “social impact” appropriately.

Facilitation Guide for Teacher:

1. Bring students together in a common area where all students can watch the documentary *Sing the Heart of Magic* in a common area, whether virtually or in-person.
2. **Focusing Student Attention:** Ask students who are the people they think about when they think about people who are actors or singers. Many of them will say “Beyonce” or “Michael Jackson” or name pop artists on an international level. Tell them that there are people who make music, or tell stories through theater that live nearby to them. Let them know that you are going to introduce them to someone who has had made music and theater her entire life and helped others along the way. Before watching you may want to give them their vocabulary words so they can take notes during the film. Preface the film by explaining the reason why you are introducing the film to them and why Jennifer L. Nelson is an important figure in the arts world.
3. **Introductory and Developmental Conversation:** Before watching the film, you may want to introduce the students to the idea of social impact and engage in some of the focus questions first. Use your judgement on what makes sense—focus questions before or after the film.

4. **Content-Based Reading:** Make a hand-out or write on the board the definition of social impact so that they can see it while it is being discussed. Make sure that they have a copy of the definition for their later activity.
5. **Content-based art opportunity:** The learning activity can first be introduced as a group brainstorm that students can do as a Think-Pair-Share before they go home to do the activity on their own.
6. **Closing assessment Activity:** Have students share their videos and allow for discussion and processing.

Lesson #2: Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Theatre for Social Change

Student Outcomes

- Students will understand the techniques called Theatre for Social Change, and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO).
- Students will learn the various forms of TO and identify the methods Jennifer and her group, the Living Stage Theatre, presented during performances in jails and other locations, as depicted in the film.
- Students will identify ways they could use TO to bring attention to a social justice issue that is important to them.
- Students will develop and implement a TO sketch activity to address a social justice issue they believe deserves more attention and mobilization around it.

Terms/Vocabulary

“Created by Brazilian visionary, Augusto Boal, **Theatre of the Oppressed** (TO) is a form of popular community-based education that uses theatre as a tool for transformation. Originally developed out of Boal’s work with peasant and worker populations, it is now used all over the world for social and political activism, conflict resolution, community building, therapy, and government legislation.”

[-Imagineaction.org](http://Imagineaction.org)

“The **Theatre of the Oppressed** is a participatory theater that fosters democratic and cooperative forms of interaction among participants. It is a ‘rehearsal theater’ practiced by ‘spect-actors’ (not spectators) who have the opportunity to both act and observe, engendering processes of dialogue and critical thinking. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, the theatrical act is experienced as a conscious intervention, as a rehearsal for social action rooted in a collective analysis of shared problems.” -

[TheatreLinks](#)

Theatre for Social Change is a form of interactive theater designed to lead participants through a process of creating social change around issues pertinent to their own lives through various forms of performative activism.

THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED
THEATRE FRO SOCIAL CHANGE
COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

IMPROVISATION
INTERACTIVE
DIALOGUE

PARTICIPATORY
ACTIVISM
CONSCIOUS

Focus Questions

(Grades 6-12)

1. Why would a theatre company that practices Theatre of the Oppressed and Theatre for Social Change want to present their work in a prison? What are some ways this activity could be empowering for imprisoned citizens?
2. How do you think theatre can be used as a form of community-based education?
3. What do you think are the differences in a theatre performance that involves the audience and a theatre performance that only requires the audience to watch silently?

Main Lesson Activity

Materials: Paper, pencil, computer (Students may decide to use other materials they have on hand to implement their activity)

Estimated Time: 45 minutes to 2 hours

(Have students work in pairs or teams when giving them the following directions)

1. Visit [this website with links](#) about Theatre of the Oppressed and learn about the six forms of Theatre of the Oppressed: Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, Newspaper Theatre and Legislative Theatre.
2. Next, watch the interviews with Augusto Boal on [Democracy Now!](#)
3. Third, in your pair/group, review [these lesson plans](#) that include various Theatre of the Oppressed theatre activities. As a team, select the activity that you would like to lead facilitate with the class and notify your instructor. Once your activity is approved, make the appropriate choices and modifications specific to your class. Assign roles in your team regarding who will facilitate what part of the activity. Be sure to process with your classmates after you implement the activity. What were some of the challenges to implementing your activity? What were some of the strengths? What did you walk away learning once the activity was completed?

Facilitation Guide for Teacher:

1. If the students have not already viewed the film already, bring students together in a common area where all students can watch the documentary *Sing the Heart of Magic* in a common area, whether virtually or in-person.
2. **Focusing Student Attention:** Tell the students that you would like to understand the ways they believe attending school and your class, in particular helpful. Tell them that you will call five of them to the front of the class and when you say go, they are to create a sculpture with their body, without speaking where they are illustrating to us the ways they believe school is important. Then, you will say switch and they will illustrate the ways that school infringes on their rights as learners. This activity will be messy at first. They may need the instructions repeated a few times. They may ask if it is necessary to touch another student. Tell them to do what feels comfortable but to be sure to use their facial expressions, body positioning and any props if they wish to create their sculpture

as a group. Do this once and process with them the differences between the two poses. Ask the class to give interpretations.

3. **Introductory and Developmental Conversation:** Have the presenting group explain their sculpture. Explain that this is a form of Image Theatre and that is a form of Theatre of the Oppressed. Let them know that the woman highlighted in the video did different types of theater like this to engage with audiences and have audiences think about social issues. Ask your class why it is important to be able to share your ideas about things with people who are in leadership roles. Let them know that some people use theater to share these ideas to people who make laws and rules.
4. **Closing assessment Activity:** Ask the students to share responses to the following questions: What were some of the challenges to implementing your activity? What were some of the strengths? What did you walk away learning once the activity was completed?

Lesson #3: Hip Hop Theatre

Student Outcomes

- Students will be able to identify when the term “hip hop theatre” emerged and give an overview of what it means.
- Students will be able to identify at least three prominent theatre-makers who have created works considered to be “hip hop theatre.”
- Students will compare the elements inherent in hip hop theatre to those inherent theatre of the oppressed.

Terms/Vocabulary

“The term “hip-hop theatre” emerged in the early 1990s from Jonzi D, a London-based dancer and emcee. He sought to describe a performance style that encompassed a fusion of hip-hop dance and theatre. Over the 1990s, this definition expanded to include theater works that incorporate graffiti, DJ'ing, breakdancing, emceeing, beatboxing, and/or rap. Will Power described hip-hop theatre as "theatre artists exploring their relationship to hip-hop, focusing on content, form, or content and form." Although the genre was first named overseas, American artists such as Will Power, Psalmayene 24, and Kamilah Forbes actively shaped and created the form through their work in the United States.

In the summer of 2000, the first two hip-hop theatre festivals were founded: In Washington, DC Jennifer Nelson, then the Artistic Director of the African Continuum Theatre, produced the Hip-Hop Theater Fest at the Kennedy Center, bringing together audience members new to hip-hop and audience members familiar with hip-hop and new to The Kennedy Center. Later the same year, playwright/director Danny Hoch and playwright/director Kamilah Forbes co-founded the New York City Hip-Hop Theater Festival (now known as HiARTS). In 2002, artist Rickerby Hinds produced Califest in Riverside, California. These festivals came to be year-round events, drawing artists from across genres and sparking discussions of form and its possibilities.”-[Studio Theatre website](#)

HIP-HOP THEATRE	EMCEEING	BEAT-BOXING	CYPHER
GRAFFITTI	DJ'ING	RAPPING	SPINNING

Focus Questions

(Grades 6-12)

1. [Watch this video about hip-hop.](#) Based on the video, what is hip-hop?

(Grades 9-12)

2. Jennifer L. Nelson produced one of the first Hip-Hop Theater Festivals in the United States in 2000 when she produced one for the Kennedy Center. What do you think are some of the elements of the genre Hip-Hop Theatre that may be different than elements Theatre of the Oppressed? What are some ways they may be similar?
3. Hip-hop theater is a fusion of theater and all or some of the six elements of hip-hop. Reflect on the ways that hip-hop theater has manifested in pop culture even if it is not called hip-hop theater.
4. [In this video](#), Toni Blackman talks about the cypher in hip-hop. How is the concept of the cypher similar to the art of improvisation?

Main Lesson Activity #1

Materials: Paper, pencil and computer to watch videos

Estimated Time: 45 minutes to 2 hours (Suggestion: Assign essay during class, assign rap for homework, or vice versa)

(Have students work in pairs or teams when giving them the following directions)

1. “Why is hip-hop not part of the natural curriculum for performing arts?” [Watch this Ted talk with Jonzi D](#) and write a coherent essay response to this igniting question. Cite at least three sources to support your position.

Main Lesson Activity #2

2. After writing your essay, use the central thesis of your essay to construct a 10-50 line hip-hop rap response. You will be expected to present your rap. [Watch this video to get tips on delivery.](#)

Facilitation Guide for Teacher:

1. Bring students together in a common area where all students can watch the documentary *Sing the Heart of Magic* in a common area, whether virtually or in-person.
2. **Focusing Student Attention:** Ask students about their favorite hip hop artists.
3. **Introductory and Developmental Conversation:** Ask the students if they knew that the musical *Hamilton* was a form of hip-hop theatre. Explain to them what hip-hop theatre is. Let them know that Jennifer L. Nelson produced one of the first hip hop theatre festivals in the country.
4. **Content-Based Video:** Watch some of the recommended videos together featuring Toni Blackman and Jonzi D.
5. **Closing assessment Activity:** Have students share their videos and allow for discussion and processing. What are the differences between hip-hop music on its own and hip-hop theatre as an art form?

Additional Links for Teachers to Learn More Information:

[The 5 Principles of Social Impact](#)

[Theatre of the Oppressed](#)

[Living Stage Theatre in DC](#)

[Interview with Jennifer L. Nelson about Living Stage Theatre](#)

[Toni Blackman and Mikal Lee on Rap and Improvisation](#)