

Staging Characters & Relationships: Tableau and ‘Reading’ Stage Pictures

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Introduction: Status

The question of status, or our place in any given society, is one of the building blocks of drama. Look at any Shakespeare play and you will find characters fighting for higher status, trying to maintain status, or being deeply impacted by how slippery the nature of status is.

Introductory Exercise: *Think of a time and circumstance in which you had very high status. Where were you? Why did you have such high status? And then, ask yourself to think of a time in which you were or felt you were, close to the bottom of the power pyramid. What changed?*

Quick exercise: *Have your students share examples of feeling high or low status. As you generate a list, ask if anyone has any examples of experiencing a big range within the same environment? School, for example, is often a place in which the conditions (age, grade, grades, social cliques) can turn on a dime.*

Staging status and relationship:

Staging status, or creating a stage picture in which the viewer can see that some people have more power, authority, or status than others, is a great first entry point to staging.

Exercise: “Great Game of Power”

- Clearly define the boundaries of the performance space. Put a few simple pieces of furniture there - chairs, maybe a table. If the furniture is sturdy enough to stand on, all the better.
- Ask one volunteer to enter the space, and put their body in the place - and the physical position - that gives them the most possible ‘power’ in the space. Ask them to consider the “audience” as well as the room itself.
- Ask a second volunteer to enter the space, and put their body in the place - and the physical position - that gives *them* the most possible power, and takes it from the first volunteer.
- Repeat as desired, up to 5-6 people.
- Debrief: Discuss the tactics people used, and what tools are available in a theatrical setting to give a particular character/performer/body more or less power/focus/status onstage.



Introduction: Tableau

A tableau is a frozen picture, a staged photograph of a moment in time. Tableaux allow us to stage a moment that can show us relationship, power, status, environment, and even conflict! Once you have explored status, you can apply that to the tableaux, or pictures, you make to tell a story.

As you explored in the GGP, you can show status in a variety of ways, from position relative to the audience or actors, literal height or levels, body languages and facial expressions.

Exercise: Three Tableaux

Have the class come up with a simple story everyone knows, like *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Then break the students up into small groups of 3-4 people. Have each group stage three tableaux: the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Ask them to consider the following question:

Who are the characters? What is their status relationship to each other? Does it change?

Where are they?

What is the event of each frozen moment?

Have each group perform their three tableaux in order and then discuss what story they told and what choices really made the story pop!

