

PARANORMAL SALAD Jr.



TRILLBERRY PHANTOM THEATER CLUB LESSON PLAN

created by award-winning director and acting coach
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PART 1: AN INTRODUCTION FOR THE EDUCATOR

THE AUDIO DRAMA AS A LIVING TEXTBOOK

This lesson plan is designed to accompany the five-part audio drama, *The Trillberry Phantom*. It approaches the audio drama not merely as a story to be passively consumed, but as a dynamic, narrative-driven textbook for fundamental theatrical concepts. The plot of the audio drama organically introduces key theatrical roles, spaces, and vocabulary in a sequential and memorable manner.¹ This curriculum is structured to mirror that progression, using the story's escalating mystery as a scaffold for learning.

The advantage of this method is that it embeds vocabulary and concepts within a compelling context. Students will not just learn the definition of the "fly space"; they will learn it at the precise moment a sandbag dramatically falls from it, nearly hitting the protagonist.¹ They will learn about the role of a "stagehand" by following Jax's journey into his new job.¹ This narrative integration transforms abstract terms into tangible, story-driven elements, significantly enhancing retention and understanding. Each session builds logically upon the last, allowing students' theatrical knowledge to grow in parallel with the unfolding mystery of Eleanor Vance.

FOSTERING A CREATIVE AND SAFE SPACE

Theater is an art of collaboration and vulnerability. The success of the games and exercises in this plan depends on establishing a safe, supportive, and creative environment. The following principles should be established from the outset:

- **Collaboration Over Competition:** Emphasize that the goal is to create something interesting together. There are no "winners" or "losers" in these games.
- **Celebrate Bold Choices:** Encourage students to be brave in their physical and vocal choices. A "wrong" choice is simply an opportunity to discover something new. Foster a "no-failure" environment where experimentation is the primary objective.
- **Respect for All:** All ideas and performances should be met with respect and constructive feedback. Listening is as important as performing.
- **Adaptability:** The activities are designed to be flexible. For younger students, focus on the core actions and emotions. For older or more advanced students, encourage deeper character analysis and more complex improvisations.

PART 2: SESSION ONE - AN UNSETTLING WELCOME

FOCUS

This initial session introduces students to the world of the theater through the eyes of the protagonist, Jax. The activities focus on establishing a foundational understanding of core theater roles, spaces, and the power of atmosphere.

LISTENING GUIDE (EPISODE 1)

Pre-listening Discussion:

- "The story is set in a very old community theater. What do you think a theater from 100 years ago might look, sound, and smell like?"
- "The main character, Jax, gets a job as a 'stagehand.' Based on the name, what do you think a stagehand does in a theater?"

Post-listening Discussion:

- "How does the writer use sounds to make the theater feel creepy? Think about the specific sounds you heard when Jax entered the building." (Examples: heavy, creaking wooden door; echoes; an icy gust of wind; a mournful moan; electrical crackles).
- "The two adults Jax meets, Ms. Periwinkle and Mr. Silas, are complete opposites. How do their voices and the words they use show their different personalities?"
- "What were some of the ghost stories Leo told about the theater? Do you think they are real or just stories?"



VOCABULARY SPOTLIGHT



Theater:

The building where plays are performed. The Trillberry Community Theater is the main setting for our entire story.

Stage:

The area within the theater where the actors perform for the audience.

Backstage:

The area behind the stage that the audience cannot see, including the wings and dressing rooms. This is where actors and crew prepare, and where Jax spends most of his time.

Director:

The person in charge of all the creative decisions of a play, like a captain of a ship.³ In our story, Ms. Periwinkle is the energetic, "overly cheerful theater director".

Stagehand:

A person who works backstage setting up scenery, lights, props, and other equipment for a show. This is Jax's new job, where he works with the gruff Mr. Silas.¹

Actor's Neutral:

A basic ready position for an actor. It involves standing tall with feet shoulder-width apart and hands at the sides, ready to transform into any character.⁷ This will be the starting position for our acting exercises.

THEATER GAME: ATMOSPHERE ORCHESTRA

Objective:

To translate the theater's atmosphere from the audio drama into a live, layered soundscape using only voices and body percussion.

Instructions:

Divide the class into four or five sections.

Read aloud the vivid descriptions of the theater's sounds from Episode 1.1 Assign one sound to each section. Examples include:

1. The "sputtering engine" of the old car.
2. The "heavy, creaking wooden door."
3. The "faint HUM of unseen machinery" backstage.
4. The "ICY GUST OF WIND" and "mournful MOAN."
5. The "sharp ELECTRICAL CRACKLES" of the flickering lights.
6. The "RUSTLING sound" of scripts tumbling to the floor.

Explain that you will be the "conductor." When you point to a section, they begin making their sound quietly. As you raise your hands, they should increase their volume.

Begin by conducting one section at a time, then start layering the sounds on top of each other. Experiment with bringing sounds in and out to build suspense, creating the creepy, multi-layered soundscape that Jax experiences when he first enters the theater.



ACTING EXERCISE: CHARACTER EMBODIMENT

Objective:

To explore how a character's personality traits can be expressed through physical choices like posture, gesture, and movement.

Instructions:

Have all students stand in "Actor's Neutral."

Using the distinct character descriptions from the story, call out a character and ask students to physically embody them.

Prompts:

1. "Show me Ms. Periwinkle. She's described as 'energetic' and 'overly cheerful.' How does she walk? How does she stand?"
2. "Now, become Mr. Silas. He's 'gruff' and 'elderly.' What does his posture look like? How does he move around his backstage space?"
3. "Let's try Jax. He is 'observant' but also 'a bit anxious.' How would he stand in this new, creepy theater? How would he walk?"
4. "Finally, show me Leo. He's 'enthusiastic,' 'imaginative,' and has a 'dramatic flair.' How would he enter a room?"
5. Encourage students to make big, clear choices. After exploring each character, discuss what kinds of physicalities they chose and why.

