

Paleontologist Play

This lesson was written for 6-13 year olds at an Autism therapy summer camp. Campers had a drama block 1-2 times a week for 6 weeks. There was no final performance expected at the end. The camp theme was “Prehistoric Pets,” so each group was names after a prehistoric animal (sabertooth tiger, mastodon, etc.). Many campers have an interest in science and history. The reflection moments are based on the “Describe, Analyze, Relate” model from Drama Based Pedagogy by Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Kriger Lee. For the whole summer, campers used V.I.B.E.S., developed by Daniel A Klein II, which stands for Voice, Imagination, Body, Ensemble, and Story, as a framework for talking about the drama work.

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Grade Band: 2-4

Time/Space Requirements: Large Open Area, 35 minutes

Materials: Whiteboard/Paper with essential questions; VIBES Poster; Care Poster; Name Tags;

Artifact Objects: dirt covered backpack, fossils (x2), large paintbrush, chisel, hammer, books about fossils; Whiteboard, Bell

Day 1

Enduring Understandings:

1. We can use our eyes, ears, and previous knowledge to understand what’s happening in a scenario.
2. We can imagine what it might be like to do a job or be in a place when we can go there ourselves.

Essential Questions:

1. How can we use context clues to discover things about a person or situation?
2. How can we use our imaginations to learn about someone or something new?

Objectives:

1. Campers will make inferences about a scenario based on clues during *Artifact*.
2. Campers will combine their own knowledge with information from their peers to create a cohesive image in *This Setting Needs*.
3. Campers will evaluate pro-social (and anti-social) behaviors in *Bad Advice*.
4. Campers will practice empathy by reflecting on another person's life in each activity.

Day 2:

Enduring Understandings:

1. We can use VIBES to learn what life might have been like a long time ago
2. We can use previous knowledge + our imaginations to create a story

Essential Questions:

1. How can we use VIBES to show what a place or situation is like?
2. How can we combine previous knowledge with our imaginations to create a story?

Objectives:

1. Campers will generate new ideas as a group during *Time Travel Machine*.
2. Campers will improvise and perform within a given set of circumstances during *Time Travel Machine* and *Tour of a Space*.
3. Campers will relate their understanding of a scenario to a peer's understanding during *Tour of a Space*.

Intro (3 Minutes)

Hello [insert group name], welcome. Please place your belongings [insert place], get your name tag, and have a stand in a circle [insert area]. I'll know you're ready when I see calm bodies and voices and tracking me.

Lets see what we remember from our CARE dance last time.

[Try it]

Great work. Lets take a seat and get into our first activity.

Engage: Artifact (10 Minutes)

**Activity adapted from Drama Based Pedagogy by Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Kiger Lee*

Today, we're going to learn about a person by going through a bag/box of their belongings. It's okay, I have permission to show you all of their things. So, I have this bag here. What do we notice about the bag?

Lets look at some objects in the bag. How might we describe these? Seen them before? What might they do?

[Pull out objects one by one. Ask for observations. Encourage descriptions of the objects and gathering clues vs. guessing the person's occupation.]

Lets look at all the objects together. What might we assume about this person? What does this person do?

This person is a Paleontologist. What do we know about Paleontologists? Where do they work?

Lets imaging we're at a dig site. We're going to act out what me might see using our bodies to make a frozen picture.

Explore: This setting needs (5 Minutes)

**Activity adapted from Drama Based Pedagogy by Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Kiger Lee*

So, what is something we might see at a dig site? Can you show me what that might look like with your body in the playing space here?

[If necessary, collect ideas of things that can be at a dig site on a whiteboard to use as reference in the activity]

Lets add on to our frozen picture, what else might we see?

Reflection (2 minutes):

D: What things did we imagine were at the dig site?

D: What sounds, smells, etc. might we notice at a dig site?

A: How did it feel to imagine another place?

Transition (2 Minutes):

Thank you for helping us imagine a dig site for our Paleontologist. Now we're going to think a little more about our Paleontologist. What problems might they face while at the dig site?

[Generate a list of at least 3]

Awesome. We're going to play a game in which give some VERY bad advice to our Paleontologist about how to solve some of these problems.

Explore: Bad advice (10 Minutes)

We're going to play a game called bad advice. Here's how this works, we're going to go in a circle and share some terrible advice for how our paleontologist should behave at their dig site.

Think about what they do, where they are, and what tools they use then tell us what they should do. You want to give advice that's the opposite of a good idea. For example "I think our paleontologist should destroy all the fossils they're supposed to bring back to a museum."

[If appropriate, embody some ideas with faces, bodies, maybe a sound.]

Transition (1 minute):

Wow, what horrible advice. Lets hope no Paleontologists ever do those things! We are just about done but I want to reflect on what we did today.

Reflection (5 minutes)

D: How did we use any of our VIBES today to learn about a person or situation?

A: What did it feel like to imagine someone else's life?

R: How might we use the skills of imagining someone else's life during camp?

R: How might we use the skills of using clues like with our bag and our frozen pictures, to understand a situation at camp or in life?

Closing Statement

Wonderful work using your VIBES and showing CARE today. Next time, we're going to continue with our Paleontology theme and really lean into using our imaginations to think about a place and time.

DAY 2

Intro (5 Minutes)

Hello [insert group name], welcome. Please place your belongings [insert place], get your name tag, and have a stand in a circle [insert area]. I'll know you're ready when I see calm bodies and voices and tracking me.

Lets see what we remember from our CARE dance last time.

[Try it]

Great work. Lets take a seat and review what we did last time. Who remembers something we did or learned last time?

[Pull artifacts, settings, bad advice, imagining someone else's life, using context clues]

Today, we're going to continue with this Paleontology theme but really get into what Pre-Historic times would be like.

Engage: Time Travel Machine (5 minutes)

**Activity adapted from Drama Based Pedagogy by Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Kiger Lee*

Today, we're going to use our imaginations to travel back in time to the pre-historic era. Lets make a quick list of some things we know or assume about the pre-historic era. Maybe some animals or geographic features we could see.

[List on whiteboard]

So, now we're going to build a machine with our bodies that will take us back in time. Back, to what camp would have looked like 2.5 million years ago. What might our time machine look like?

[Start to pantomime - encourage specific descriptions of shape, size, color, texture, placement in the room, how we will use objects, etc.]

[Encourage more participation with the following questions, or any others that may come up: What will we need to pack? Lets imagine and show with our bodies what it's like to pack this stuff? How do we travel in it? What do we need to keep us safe in the time machine? How do we get the machine started?]

Lets start our journey by counting down from 5, when we get to zero we'll start to travel.

[Count down]

And we're off! What does traveling sound like?

[Get noises]

What do we see?

[Get responses]

Okay, we're coming up on the prehistoric era, we're about to land in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Okay, we're going to get out of our time machine together and start exploring the space. And as we explore I'm going to put you in pairs.

Engage: Tour of a Space + Spotlight (10 minutes)

**Activities adapted from Drama Based Pedagogy by Kathryn Dawson and Bridget Kiger Lee*

In your pairs, I want you to start an "exploration of the space." So showing your partner what you see, smell, touch, feel, etc. Start describing what's around as if you're scientists discovering this place. I may come around and play this sound [play bell] and then shine a "spotlight" on a group. If I do that, we'll pause and listen in on the conversation. If you don't want us to listen to you, you can say pass.

[Let them go for a few minutes, side-coach by asking leading questions]

Okay we've gotten a LOT of info about the space, lets get back in our time machine and head back to 2022 to talk about what we saw.

Engage: Time Travel Machine (2 minutes)

[Repeat safety and other pantomimes from before. Count back from 5. Describe what we see on the way back. Count back from 5. Land, disembark]

Okay, lets imagine that our time machine has been rolled away and is back in storage. Lets gather together and talk about what we did!

Reflect (5 minutes)

D: What did we learn about the prehistoric time period?

D: How did we use our VIBES today?

A: What did it feel like to imagine being in a different time or place?

R: Do you ever need to think about a place before going there, thinking about how things will look, sound, feel, etc? How does imagining a place help us understand it better? How might imagining a place before we go help us be better friends and campers?

Closing Statement

Thank you for your hard work today. Next time I see you, we're going to focus on using VIBES to strengthen our "working as a group" skills.

