

The Environmental Walk

The “Environmental Walk” is a basic theatre activity which addresses the following fifth & sixth grade level Theatre Arts Competencies (and corresponding competencies in other grade levels) from the MDE Fine Arts Framework:

TH.5-6.1 Know and understand the creation of scripted and improvised scenes based on personal experience, heritage, imagination, history, and literature.

TH.5-6.2 Develop basic acting skills required to interact in improvised or scripted scenes.

TH.5-6.7 Recognize theatre as an important tool to assist in understanding cultures, times, and places.

This is a simple technique for bringing your students into any environment you want them to explore in greater depth. The teacher is the guide for the walk and sets up all the parameters to which the students will respond. The process is as follows.

The students will walk in a circle at normal speed. They cannot touch one another or make any vocal sounds. As the teacher describes a new environment to them, they must continue to walk in a way that is appropriate to that place. They must *show* (not *tell*) with their bodies and faces what the place is like and how they feel while they are there.

The teacher might say: “You are walking barefoot on a hot sandy beach. Now you are walking into the ocean, and you can feel the water slowly rising above your feet. The wet sand squishes between your toes . . . You are crossing a muddy road in your best Sunday clothes . . . You are walking on a tightrope 100 feet in the air . . . You are walking across Antarctica in a heavy snowsuit . . .”

Variations can include walking as animals or as fictional characters or as historical figures (“You are Harriet Tubman guiding a group of runaway slaves through the woods, following the North Star . . .”) or in specific time periods (“You are walking through a prehistoric swamp . . .”). The can students can virtually step into any story or literary work and explore it through a personal journey.

Praise the students for clear communication through body language alone. You can occasionally ask them to “freeze” in one pose and observe the variety of choices their classmates are making. After the walk, it’s very important to have a discussion about what the students encountered during their walk. The teachers asks them to tell what they perceived through their five senses—what did they see, hear, smell, feel, or taste along the way? The teacher should also ask what emotions they felt, and perhaps also about their thought processes and decisions they made during the walk. They could follow up by writing about their imaginary trip. And they could further develop that writing into the script of a play.

This activity can be applied to any subject, any theme or topic, any work of literature, and is a great exercise for the imaginations of both teachers and students.