On Stage: Contemporary drama, humour and community

NBE3U, Unit 5: Stories Now, Lesson 7. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Plays by First Nations playwrights such as Tomson Highway and Drew Hayden Taylor put Indigenous communities on Canadian stages, often with sharp humour. Laughter can resist stereotypes, build community and make hard truths possible to hear.

What students do: Students read a teacher-chosen scene from a contemporary play, analyse how humour and dialogue present community and resist stereotypes, rehearse and read the scene aloud (without imitating accents), and evaluate the scene's effectiveness for different audiences.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
C1.6	analyse texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, in terms of the information, themes, ideas, and issues they explore in relation to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, explaining with increasing insight how various aspects of the texts contribute to the presentation or development of these elements
C1.7	evaluate the effectiveness of texts from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, and, as appropriate, relevant texts from non-Indigenous sources, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, using evidence from the text to support their opinions
C5.2	analyse the influence of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit literary works on identities and heritage in Canada, commenting with increasing insight on the role of literature as a social and cultural force in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities

From The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies (2019), English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices, Grade 11, University Preparation (NBE3U). A = First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Perspectives and Text Forms in Canada, B = Oral Communication, C = Reading and Literature Studies, D = Writing, E = Media Studies.

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning to analyse a contemporary play. • We are learning how literature can shape identity and heritage.	• I can analyse how a scene uses humour and dialogue. • I can explain how a play presents a community. • I can evaluate a scene's effectiveness with evidence. • I can explain how plays like this influence identity and heritage.

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Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** On Stage deck.
- **Handouts:** Scene Analysis (page 1), Evaluation (page 2).
- **Play:** A teacher-chosen scene from a board-approved contemporary play, for example Tomson Highway's The Rez Sisters (1986) or a play by Drew Hayden Taylor (titles only; not included).

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	What's funny?	Discuss.	
8–20	**Context**	Playwright.	Note.	
20–45	**Scene**	Read and analyse.	Analyse.	Evidence for humour's purpose.
45–62	**Read aloud**	Groups.	Perform.	Expression without imitation.
62–75	**Evaluate**	Audiences.	Write.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Scene summary before reading.
- **ELL:** Smaller speaking parts.
- **Challenge:** Research how the playwright describes humour in interviews.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Scene Analysis and Evaluation	Analysis (C1.6), evaluation (C1.7), influence (C5.2)

On stage: key points

- **Humour:** Can build community, expose hypocrisy, deflate stereotypes and make pain bearable.
- **Dialogue:** Characters argue, tease and care; the community is complex, not a single image.
- **Audience:** A line may land differently for Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences; both responses matter.
- **Influence:** Contemporary plays brought Indigenous stories and actors to mainstream stages, shaping how communities see themselves and how others see them.
- **Evaluation:** Judge with evidence: what the scene aims to do, and whether its choices achieve it.

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Teacher notes

- Preview the play: some contain strong language and adult themes. Choose a scene suited to your class.
- Students read with expression but do not imitate accents, dialects or “Indigenous voices.” Focus on meaning, timing and emotion.
- Students learn about ceremonies, protocols and oral traditions; they do not imitate or perform them, and they do not retell community stories. Leave sacred knowledge to the people who hold it.
- Do not ask Indigenous students to speak for their communities, to share personal or family histories, or to act as experts. Every student's participation in sharing is optional.
- We strongly recommend reviewing this unit with your board's Indigenous education lead and, where possible, inviting a First Nations, Métis or Inuit Elder, Knowledge Keeper or guest speaker following your board's protocols (including offerings and honoraria). Local Nations' own sources come first.

Coming up

Lesson 8, Short Fiction.

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