

# Blue Man Learning Lab

## The Blue World

### Blue Words, Old Words, New Words

#### Elementary School

##### *Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses*

The Blue Man speaks volumes with no words. He speaks the language of music. He communicates a percussive truth that invites head bobbing, body shaking, and bigger-than-life smiling. His face poses questions, acts humorously, and reacts in total concert with his full body. If the Blue Man talked, what would he say? How would he say it? What would it sound like? Would the Blue Man use words? Would the Blue Man use sentences of movement punctuated by gyration? The purpose of this lesson is not to develop a Blue Man language. The Blue Man does very well outside the bounds of words. Rather, this lesson will provide learners the opportunity to explore communication by developing new words that, like the Blue Man, push boundaries of text and language.

##### *Lesson Summary*

Begin the lesson by asking learners to brainstorm a list of outrageous words. Ask learners to prepare for the discussion by having 5 of the most outrageous words they know written down. Encourage learners to include words that sound like what they mean, describe something specific, and/or identify something important. Make sure word lists have nouns, verbs, and adjectives. It is not necessary for the words from every learner's list to be present on the general list of words.

Once a general word list has been generated, ask learners to look for patterns amongst the words. Start by categorizing words as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. When categorization is difficult, ask learners to think about the word on the basis of how the word is generally used. Once all words have been categorized ask learners to combine syllables of two of the words to create a new word. Once a new word has been created ask learners to define the new word. For example, the words dolphin and tiger could be combined to become dolphger, and the word could mean a large striped cat who lives and breathes underwater and communicates with high pitched sounds. Another word could combine forgetful and happy to become forgappy, and be defined as being so amused and joyful yet having no idea why. Another word could combine homework and broccoli to become homewoccoli, and be defined as an awful tasting dessert that comes with math problems to solve.

Once you have brainstormed and defined a few new words, let learners know they will be asked to establish groups. Groups should be comprised of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate; a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand; and a Scribe, who records group ideas.

Once groups have been established. Ask groups to complete 3 tasks: 1. Create 10 new words with definitions using the list of 20 words. 2. Write a letter (either business or personal) using the 10 new words. 3. Choose a song and use the 10 new words in a verse of lyrics for the song. Use examples of new words to guide creation of new words. Think about a specific type of letter, such as business or personal letter, to guide letter writing. Learners will need to determine the easiest way to access the song that will provide the melody to their lyrics. Use at least 5 new words in each of the two items (the song and letter) making sure to use all 10 words between the two. That avoids having the song and letter be too similar.

Once letters have been written, ask each group to share their letters. Letters will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

Once songs have been chosen and lyrics written, ask each group to share their songs. Lyrics will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

Following letter and songs being shared, a concluding discussion could include the following questions: What was the easiest part of creating and using new words? What was the most difficult part of creating and using new words? What are other uses for new words? What role might other languages play in the development of new English words?

A possible extension of this lesson could be to ask groups create a 5 step dance sequence and use those movements in a dance performed to the song to which they had previously written lyrics. This would give learners the opportunity to communicate using movement rather than words.

#### *Connecting to Standards*

- Reading Standards for Literature K-5 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards K-5 Texts Types and Purposes
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Speaking and Listening K-5 Comprehension and Collaboration, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards K-5 for Language Knowledge of Language, Presentation of Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

- Language Standards K-5 Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use, Conventions of Standard English

## **Drums**

### **Middle School**

#### *Applying the Blue Man Creative Impulses*

The beat of the drum is the heartbeat of the Blue Man. Pipes pulse. Groove shares space with wide open eyes. In the Blue World people move together with energy not bound by culture. In the Blue World people are embraced by something no bigger than the tilt of a head, and louder than the cheer of 1000 sports fans in a stadium. In the Blue World time means nothing and heart means everything. Into that world, drums of all types bang in discordant unity. This lesson will allow learners to explore the world of drums in order to better understand the cultural connection of the Blue World to the world in which we live.

#### *Lesson Summary*

Begin the lesson by viewing the video of the Blue Man performance with Kodo. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Augycj4Z4U4>). The video lasts approximately 6 minutes. Ask learners to watch the video with the following guiding questions in mind: Describe the drums that are being used in this video? If they know the specific kind of drum, what is it? How are the drums being played? How would you describe this video to someone who has not seen it?

Following viewing the video, discuss learner responses to the guiding questions.

After discussion guiding questions, let learners know they will be asked to establish groups. Groups will be comprised of 3-5 learners. Ask learners to appoint the following roles: a Leader who is responsible for making sure all group members participate; a Timekeeper who makes sure the group is aware of how much time the group has to complete the task at hand; and a Scribe, who records group ideas.

Once groups have been established, let learners know they will be asked to become travel writers writing about drums from around the world. Prepare several examples of travel writing from Conde Nast Traveler, Fodors, Lonely Planet, and Let's Go to show learner groups the task at hand. When having groups look at travel writing, ask them to consider the following questions: What is the purpose of travel writing? How does travel writing differ from other forms of writing?

All travel writing tasks will be able to be accomplished with pen, paper, and basic Internet access. Internet access is the key to researching the cultures of the respective drums.

Each group of learners will be asked to focus on one type of drum. Have the names of a variety of drum written on 4x6 notecards to ease the instrument selection process. Consider allowing learners to also choose other types of interesting percussion instruments in addition to drums, if they so choose. Examples of drums and other percussion instruments include: dafli, dhol, axatse, balaphone, bougarabou, brekete, caxixi, djembe, bata, tingsa, singing bowls, rain sticks, cajon, herrara, and maracas. A great resource for types of drums is the *Glossary of World Percussion*, <http://www.drummagazine.com/hand-drum/post/the-glossary-of-world-percussion-instruments/P2/>. Make sure drums and percussion instruments from around the world are represented on cards. To insure that all continents are represented in the lesson, it might be helpful to write drum/percussion instrument names on different color cards that correspond to continents and have learners choose cards of different colors.

Once all groups have chosen a drum/percussion instrument, explain they will be asked to be travel writers. They will be asked to write an article intended to persuade the audience to travel to the part of the world where they would hear their drum/percussion instrument. The article needs to include: a description of the cultural context of the instrument, a picture or drawing of the instrument, and a fictionalized description of a performance of the instrument.

All group members need to be involved in the research and writing process.

Ask learners to present their article to the larger group. Presentations will involve summarizing the article, and sharing visual and/or audio documentation of the instrument gathered during the research process. Travel writing products will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

A possible extension of this exercise could be for learners to develop materials in pen and paper, and then build blogs to share content.

### *Connecting to Standards*

- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Reading Standards for Literature K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards 6-12 Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

- Language Standards 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

**1991**

## **High School**

### *Applying The Blue Man Creative Impulses*

Blue Man Group grew out of series of “happenings.” The first televised “happening” was called “Funeral to the 80’s” which involved a group of people painting themselves blue and taking a casket of various pop culture references, music and art to Central Park and lighting it on fire. MTV covered the event. Many more “happenings” occurred before the Blue Man Group officially started in 1991. Blue Man Group started as an organic, creative, critical, physical and funny reaction to the society and culture of the 80’s. The Blue Man created art in a specific world. Humor grew from the humanity of the Blue Man reaching out to the world. Into what world did the Blue Man enter? Who was famous? What was invented? What did people watch? To what did people listen? What made people laugh? Connection was central to the Blue Man then. Connection is central to the Blue Man now. This lesson will offer learners the opportunity to research history, explore culture, and interpret texts by connecting a few of the dots of the original Blue Man world.

### *Lesson Summary*

Begin this lesson by brainstorming a short list of current famous people. Take 4 or 5 names. Once several names are provided, choose one name to explore. Try to choose the name that has the most potential for discussion. Ask learners to briefly describe the biography of that person, including their biggest accomplishments. Then ask learners to say the most recent accomplishment of that person. Encourage the use of smartphones and other classroom resources to fill in the information, if needed. Once one famous person has been fleshed out given the previous questions, ask learners to think about the name of another famous person connected to the first person. Answer the same questions for the second famous person. This time, describe how that person is connected to the first famous person. Continue this activity connecting at least 4 famous people—first person to second person, second person to third person, and third person to fourth person.

Following this exercise, ask learners the following questions. What were some of the accomplishments of the people explored? In what ways were people connected? Did it get harder to connect people the more people had been considered?

Following the activity, let learners know they will be exploring the year 1991, the year Blue Man Group officially started, using the same approach. They will be investigating 1991 to figure out what connections existed among people at that time and further understand what connects people today.

Continue the lesson by asking learners to divide into pairs. Give each pair a large sheet of white paper. Ask learner pairs to divide the large sheet into six columns. In the first column, ask learners to write three things: the name of a famous person from 1991, a brief biography of that person, and what they accomplished in 1991. In the second column ask learners to write 4 things: the name of a famous person connected to the famous person identified in the first column, a brief biography of that famous person, what they accomplished in 1991, and their connection to the first famous person identified. In the third column ask learners to write 4 things: the name of a famous person connected to the person identified in column two, a brief biography of that famous person, what they accomplished in 1991, and their connection to the first famous person identified in column 2. Continue this exercise through 6 famous people.

Make sure learners know they are only asked to connect famous people in the adjacent (immediately to the left on the page) column. Learners will need Internet access to conduct research.

Once the list activity has been completed, ask learners to create a visual representation of their lists. The visual representation needs to capture how each famous person is connected. The visual representations can be collages, sculpture, pictures, for example. Each visual representation will need to have a label that outlines the famous people who are part of the representation, and a general statement about their connection.

Visual representations will be evaluated on completeness, clarity, and creativity.

Once learner pairs have created their visual representations, ask them to share their representations with the large group. Following visual representations being shared, a concluding discussion could include the following questions: What are some distinguishing features of 1991? If you had to choose three adjectives to describe 1991, what would they be? Based on the famous people selected, what did it mean to be famous in 1991? In what ways has fame change since 1991? In what ways has culture changed since 1991?

### *Connecting to Standards*

- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- Reading Standards for Literature K-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
- Writing Standards 6-12 Text Types and Purposes, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Range of Writing
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Language Standards 6-12 Conventions of Standard English, Knowledge of Language, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12 Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity