



Creating Soundscapes – Secondary Drama and English

The world around is layered with sound. It takes special focus to isolate the sounds within a specific environment. It takes ingenuity to reconstruct these layered sounds in order to create new meaning. The exercises below may be modified for both elementary and secondary students. The goal is to have young people create soundscapes appropriate for readings/dramatizations of “In Flanders Fields”.

Warm up

Close your eyes for one minute. For sixty seconds, pay very close attention to what you hear. Report on what you hear. What should become apparent is the layering of up close, medium distance and far off sounds. Here is an example of what should be reported in just about any Ontario classroom.

Up close: breathing and movements of students, laughing, intercom announcements, movements of furniture, air conditioning/heating, the clock, noise in the hall or nearby.

Medium: sounds from nearby classrooms, grass cutting, vehicular traffic sounds, winds or climate sounds..

Distant: train whistles, dogs barking, traffic or airplane sounds.

Ask students to add up the number of sounds in the 60 second sound inventory. This warm up shows how sound in any environment is layered.

Exercise

Split the class into four groups. Each group has the task to create the soundscape for one of the following:

- a) Early morning on the farm;
- b) Prairie sunset
- c) An afternoon in the rainforest
- d) At the train station.

The students should first make a list of all the layers of sounds you would hear in their environment. Then they need to figure out who will make what sound and in which sequence it will add in. If each group sits in a circle, then one person could start and continue as the others add in one by one. Here’s an example of “Cityscape”

- Extra, extra read all about it (repeated off and on until end of soundscape)
- Footstep sounds continuing throughout
- Car horns and skidding sounds continuing on and off
- Pieces of conversation, “And then she saidNo? Really” “Hey, watch where you’re goin’ buddy”
- Ambulance siren fading in and out.

Students should respond to the soundscapes created by their classmates.

In Flanders Fields

1. Inventory the sounds in the poem. To start you off, there are sounds of wind, birds, guns Imagine other sounds between these sounds. For example, if you could hear birds, what other natural sounds might be nearby?

2. Sounds of war. When the poem makes reference to the sounds of guns, what type of gunfire would have been heard in World War I? Differentiate among the sounds of shells, aircraft, grenades, combat rifles, etc. What are the differences in these sounds of war?

3. As John McCrae is composing the poem at a wound dressing station near Ypres, France, what would probably be the up close, medium range and long distance sounds he would hear? (Think of sounds wounded soldiers might make.)

4. The generational soundscape. Focus on the sounds of a generation. What is the music of WWI? What are the radio headlines? Create the soundscape of what people are hearing to influence their thinking.

5. Start a school reading of “In Flanders Fields” with a pre-recorded soundscape that captures what was going on in the big picture and also nearby where people are dying. This soundscape could continue as backdrop to the school’s reading of the poem.

Students may record their own interpretations of sounds made by themselves. They do not need to record authentic sounds. The value of the soundscape exercise is in finding the layered sounds of the environment that contributed to how people felt and acted at a particular period in history.