
**HowlRound
Theatre Commons:
Essays and
Conversations
from the
First Ten Years
(2011-2020)
Lesson Plans**

Programming and
Pitching a Season

Programming and Pitching a Season

Tags for Courses

Directing
Arts Administration
Entrepreneurship through the Arts
Arts and Equity
Producing

Focus Questions

- ▶ What do regional theatre seasons look like and what is missing from our stages?
 - ▶ How does a theatre put together a season?
-

Objectives/Goals

- ▶ Students will learn about how theatres approach season planning.
 - ▶ Students will analyze current theatre seasons and trends across United States resident theatres.
 - ▶ Students will craft their own criteria for building a season.
 - ▶ Students will practice pitching a season.
-

Room Setup

A large, open space with chairs in a semicircle. If projecting a slide with the diversity grid, have your computer and projector prepared to do so.

Materials

Sticky notes (8 per student), pen/pencils, hard copies of the diversity grid or a slide with the diversity grid to project

Check-In

Share your name, pronouns ([what's this?](#)), and a word/short phrase that guides you as an artist. What would the bumper sticker version of your artistic slogan say?

5 min per participant

Pre-Reading

- ▶ *How A Season Comes Together* | by David Dower (*mandatory*)
- ▶ Encourage students to choose 2 additional articles that resonate with their identities or lived experiences AND/OR fills a hole in their understanding about the field.

Choose 2 additional articles:

- ▶ *We Are Not a Mirror* | by Lauren Gunderson
 - ▶ *Queer Narratives in Theater for Young Audiences: A Call to Action*
by Gabriel Jason Deen and Lindz Amer
 - ▶ *Teenage Girls on Stage* | by Helen Schultz
 - ▶ *My Parents Were Tiger People* | by A. Rey Pamatmat and christopher oscar peña
-

Pre-Assignment

Read the assigned articles ahead of time and come ready to discuss. Additionally, research a [resident theatre](#)'s current season. Bring in notes from the theatre's website—including their mission/vision statement or guiding principles, synopses of the plays, and any info on the playwriting/creative team.

Engagement:

Exploding Atom (15 min)

1. Invite students to join you in a standing circle if that is comfortable for their body.

2. Instruct students: In a moment, I will read a series of statements, and you will respond with agreement or disagreement by moving to a specific space in the room. Imagine you are standing on your own continuum or on a straight line. Moving your body to the center of the circle means “I completely agree” and moving to the outside edge of the circle means “I completely disagree.” You can also move toward the middle of those spaces to signal degrees of agreement, disagreement, and neutrality.

3. Accessibility note:

For students with mobility challenges, they can remain seated and signal their opinion using their head or arms to point in the direction of their response. For low vision students, be sure to verbally describe where the responses are falling: “We have 3 people in the agreement category,” etc.

4. This activity is silent, and students should focus on responding for themselves on their own continuum.

5. Read each statement twice and give students time to move to their position.

6. For reflection: You can choose to have students silently observe where the class's opinions fall, invite a few students in each response (agree/disagree/neutral) to share why they moved where

they did, or have them discuss their opinion with the people who are closest to them, then share out with the big group. Additional follow-up questions have been provided.

7. Choose the prompts below that most resonate with your student population/class topic.

- ▶ When approaching season planning, the budget should shape a theatres' season.
- ▶ When approaching season planning, the mission should shape a theatres' season.
Follow-up: What else should shape a season?
- ▶ Theatres should program plays that they know will sell tickets.
Follow-up: When can/should theatres embrace uncertainty in their programming?
- ▶ It is a theatre's responsibility to program a season that reflects the identities of their community.
Follow-up: How can theatres ensure they are reflecting their community?
- ▶ It is a theatre's responsibility to program a season that reflects their artistic community (designers, actors, directors).
- ▶ The community should have input in a theatre's season planning.
- ▶ A theatre's job is to amplify unheard artistic voices.

Group Work: Analyzing Seasons (30-35 min)

1. Hand out 6-8 sticky notes to each person and invite them to write the name of the theatre company they researched and 1 name of a play from their season per sticky note.
2. Check in with the group about what theatre companies they choose. Put people into smaller groups of 3-4 people based on geographic location.
3. In their small groups, invite them to look at their theatre's seasons and share any background info you gathered on the plays or artistic teams as well.
4. Next, they will group the sticky notes with the plays according to similar characteristics—perhaps according to the playwright's identity, subject matter, etc. Once everyone has them grouped, give each category a name and write that on an additional sticky note.
5. After categorizing the plays, discuss in their small group:
 - ▶ What do these theatres' seasons have in common?
 - ▶ Is there anything that is overrepresented in your theatres' seasons? What is underrepresented?
 - ▶ How are these seasons in conversation (or not) with the readings we had for today?
6. Return to the big group and share out each group's findings.

Note: Proceed with the next activity if your class time allows. Or give this as an assignment to lead into the Programming a Season assignment.

Individual Work: Creating a Theatre Company (10-20 min)

This is an individual brainstorming activity. Each student can return to their chairs and grab something to write with and something to write on. Move through these prompts aloud, giving time for students to marinate and respond at their own pace. Write prompts on the board, or project them on a slide, so students can return to the instructions.

- 1.** Crafting a theatre company and guiding principles: Imagine you are starting your own theatre company. Craft 2-3 guiding principles that communicate your values about the work you want to produce. For inspiration, refer back to your “artistic slogan” from our check-in.
- 2.** Look back to the diversity grid from the article by David Dower. Share image as a print-out or projection.
- 3.** Consider metrics: What would the diversity grid for your imagined company look like? What considerations would you need to measure potential projects against? Brainstorm a list of metrics you would use to measure potential performances against. Borrow from Dower’s grid as is relevant.
- 4.** Partner feedback: If you have time, pair students up with a partner. Invite them to share their guiding principles with their partner. As they listen to their peers’ ideas, consider: Are there any other opportunities to strengthen/refine their guiding principles or anything to add to their diversity grid? Share feedback with your partner, then switch and have the other person share.

Closing

Go around the circle and invite each person to share one thing that is sticking with them about season planning.

Extension: Programming a Season Assignment

1. Find 4-6 plays that fit within your guiding principles.
2. Plot them on your diversity grid.
3. Write a season announcement for your theatre company that tells the board of directors the story of your season. The season announcement will take the form of a 3–5-minute presentation for the class.
4. The format of your assignment should look like this:
 - ▶ **Name of theatre:** Create a name for your theatre company.
 - ▶ **Guiding principles:** A list of 3-4 guiding principles for your theatre.
 - ▶ **List of plays:** This includes playwrights and synopses. You do not have to write these synopses; you may use the ones from the playwrights, just be sure to cite the work properly using MLA/APA format.
 - ▶ **Diversity grid:** The grid you created with all your plays plotted on it.
 - ▶ **Season announcement:** Prepare a 3–5-minute presentation for the class where you announce the season and share your rationale for the choices you've made. Consider how to engage your audience through creative presentation strategies and/or visuals.

Optional extension: During presentations, put the class in the role as the board of directors for each theatre company. After the presentation, the board can follow up with any questions they have about the season.

- ▶ **Works Cited:** Include citations for play synopses and any additional sources. You can follow MLA or APA formats.

Programming and Pitching a Season

Curriculum Writers:

Emi Aguilar and Meg Greene

Graphic Design:

Paul Del Bosque

HowlRound's Intellectual Property Statement:

All content, unless otherwise noted, is free cultural work available to you by our community of content contributors under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). If you republish one of our pieces, please include the following sentence in your publication:

“This curriculum by Emi Aguilar and Meg Greene was originally published on HowlRound Theatre Commons [hyperlink to the original article url on howlround.com], on [Date].”

For more progressive essays, podcasts, videos, and conversations like this, visit www.howlround.com.

