Tips and Suggestions

• Theatrical performances can take many forms, including staged readings, reader’s theater, improvisations, work-in-process showcases, classroom stagings, one-act plays, and full-length plays. But no matter what the form of the performance, students will appreciate it more by understanding the elements of drama: literary, technical, performance. Make sure you understand the concepts and terminology related to the elements of drama and review them with students as appropriate to grade level before students attend and respond to a theatrical performance.

• Responses to dramatic performances can take many forms but generally fall into three broad categories. An immediate response refers to the overall impression made by the performance: Did you like it? Did you understand the story and the character relationships? How did it make you feel? An intellectual response uses knowledge of the elements of drama to describe, analyze, and evaluate a performance. An artistic response is one in which students express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions about a performance in creative ways, using drama or one or more of the other art forms.

• Regardless of what form of response you ask students to make, a four-step critique process—description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment—encourages them to take a focused, detailed, and specific view of a theatrical performance.

• In helping students understand how to use the four-step process, explain to them that it’s good to begin with the facts of a performance. In the description step they should think about what they actually saw and heard during the performance. Remind them that the performance may be slightly different from the written script. If the performance is an adaptation, it could be very different from the short story or novel from which it is taken.

• To help with the analysis step, review the elements of drama with students before they see the production. To help them focus, you may want to identify certain elements for them to pay special attention to.

• Explain that the interpretation step means considering what the point of the play was. What ideas or themes were conveyed? Make sure students understand the difference between plot and theme. Ask them to look for ideas and experiences conveyed that remind them of their own lives.

• Encourage students to support their judgment of the production with specific examples. Remind them that their examples should draw from the elements of drama and that they should use appropriate drama/theater terminology.

• Before attending a performance, help students become more informed and focused audience members through discussion and research. Have them read the play or a synopsis or scenes from it. They might research the playwright or the time period, location, and culture in which the play is set.

• Discuss with students the role the audience plays in the performance and appropriate behavior.

• There are many ways students can express their responses after attending a performance. This can be a class discussion, group work restaging or improvising a scene from the play, writing of character biographies, the performance of character improvisations, or writing reviews using the four-step process of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. You might have younger students retell the story in a storytelling circle.

• The following worksheets can be used as discussion guides or for students to complete individually or in groups. You can vary the language as appropriate to your students’ knowledge level. With younger or beginning students you may want to guide them through one critique before asking them to do a critique on their own.
Responding to Drama: Description—What Happens in the Play?

Name:

Name of the play:

What story does the play tell?

What happens in the beginning of the play?

What happens in the middle of the play?

What happens at the end?

Who were the characters?
Were there costumes? What kind?

Was there scenery? What kind?

What props did you notice?

What kind of lighting was there?

What else did you notice or remember about the play?
Responding to Drama: Analysis—How Does the Play Tell Its Story?

Name:

Name of the play:

Who were the main or most important characters?

How did the characters relate to each other?

Choose a character from the play and think about how the actor portrayed this character. What did you learn about the character from the way the actor moved or spoke?

Did the scenery, costumes, or props help tell the story? How? What did they add to the play?

Was the lighting bright or dim? Did it change from scene to scene? Did it help tell the story? How?
Based on the scenery, props, costumes, and lighting, where do you think the play takes place (e.g., indoors, outdoors, a certain country, etc.)?

What time period do you think the play is set in (e.g., present day, past, future)? Do the scenery, props, costumes, and lighting help convey the time period of the play? If so, how?

What is the major conflict of the play? How is it resolved?
Responding to Drama: Interpretation—What Are the Big Ideas in the Play?

Name:

Name of the play:

What is an idea or theme that comes across in the play?

Can you relate an idea from the play to something that has happened in your life? What is the idea and how does it relate to your life?
Responding to Drama: Judgment—What Is Your Opinion of the Play?

Name:

Name of the play:

Did you like the play? Why or why not?

Did any parts of the play make you smile or laugh? What parts?

Did any parts of the play make you feel sad or cry? What parts?

Did any parts of the play make you think? What parts?

Do you think the actors did a good job of conveying their characters? Why or why not?
Do you think the director did a good job of conveying the main idea or theme of the play? Why or why not?

Is there anything you can think of that would have made the play better?