Implementing the Tableau drama technique in Social Studies

Introduction to Tableau for Teachers (Video): Developed by the Alliance Theatre Institute in Atlanta, Georgia
The Benefits of Arts Integration (Video): Developed by The Chester Charter School of the Arts Foundation

Tableau works best when students work in small groups and collaborate to figure out how they want to represent the ideas in a text.

To begin, the teacher gives each group a text or text excerpt, and the groups are charged with creating a frozen image that somehow captures the essence of what is going on in the reading. Teachers might choose to assign all groups the same text, or give each group different but related texts.

Students must then collaborate to decide how to represent something important in the text in the form of a tableau. They can represent people, objects or even symbols, and can create something that reproduces some aspect of the text, or do a tableau that works more as a symbol. No matter what they do, students should carefully craft their gestures, facial expressions and physical poses.

Give groups enough time to plan and rehearse and, when they are ready, have students present their scenes while the rest of the class discusses what they think is going on in the tableau. Finally, have the group that presented share the article or excerpt that inspired their tableau with the class, and have the class discuss the choices that went into making that particular tableau.

Additional Ideas to Get the Most Out of Tableau

- The tableau doesn't just have to be a mute frozen image. Students can be told in advance that they will be tapped during the presentation, and that they will have to say aloud a phrase, sound or sentence to provide a clue as to who or what they represent in the tableau. Alternatively, the teacher or a student could act as a reporter and conduct short interviews with individuals acting in the tableau.
- The teacher might choose to facilitate a discussion with the audience by highlighting certain tableau details through questioning. For example, you could ask, "Why might this character be smiling?" or "What do you think this character is thinking?"
- **Guess the Tableau**
  Give each group of students their tableau topic as a secret they should keep. When each group presents, the class should guess what each group is presenting and provide evidence for their choice.
- **Tableau Series**
  Have students create a series of tableaus with short narration or dialogue in between to link the tableaus (assuming each group has a different prompt or concept that they are working on, within the same unit).

Created and Adapted by: Melanie Kellam October, 2022

Names: _____ Date: _____

Tableau

Your group will create a tableau to explain (*insert prompt here).* You are not allowed to move or talk, but can use your bodies and facial expressions to communicate. You may also use up to three props and two hand-made signs.

Brainstorm ideas for your tableau:

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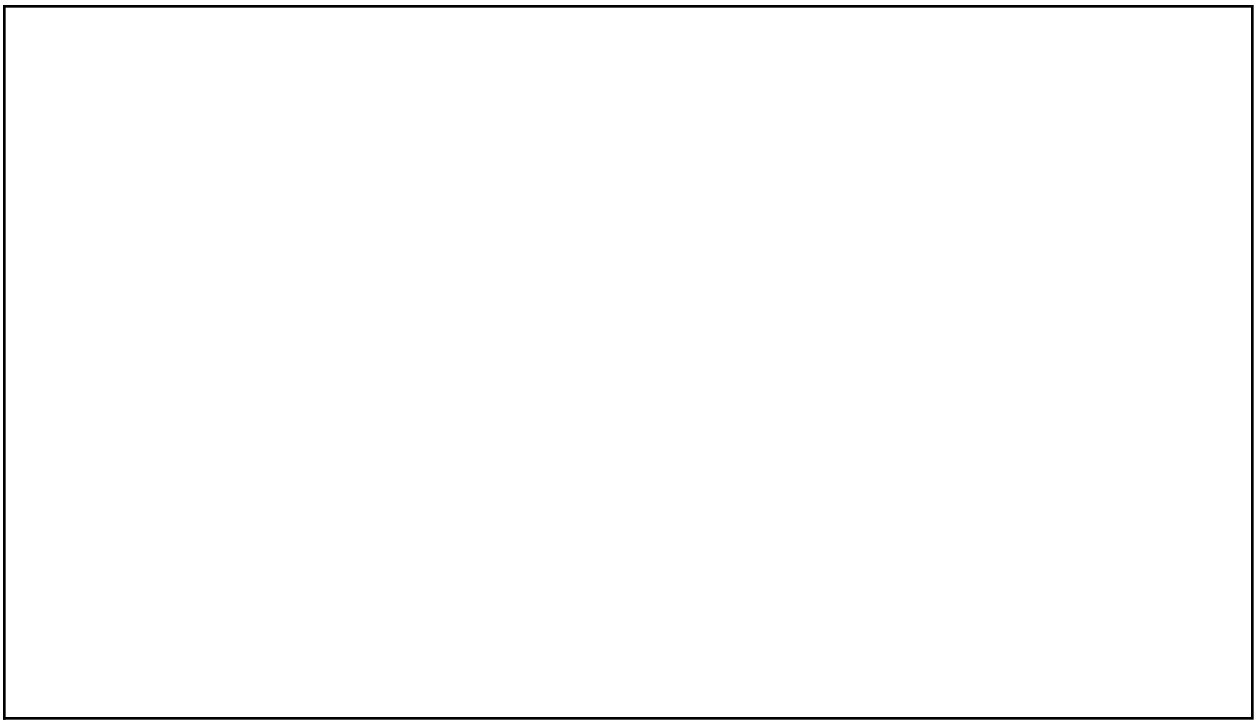
Make a sketch of your tableau: