

TEACHING & LEARNING SUPPORTS

Reflection Strategies

WHY

Why do we reflect?

It is widely accepted that if we do not reflect upon our experiences, we cannot learn from them. Nevertheless, reflection is regularly overlooked in arts education. While many arts teachers are already proficient in including reflection in their pedagogy, this Juilliard resource invites us all to use a wide range of effective reflective tools; to use reflection more intentionally to boost the learning we care about most; and to build lifelong reflective capacity in the students we are preparing to improvise their way through a life in or with the arts.

“Reflective practice” has become a buzzword in education and other industries, and for good reason: it improves results. Teachers benefit from more reflection used in their pedagogical practices, but it sinks in priority in the face of more urgent demands on their time and attention. However, increasing one’s intentions and experiments around student reflection is a good way to boost reflective practice for the teacher. You do your whole teaching practice a favor when you increase your intentionality around student reflection.

Think about the times you reflect in your adult life. We can reflect to solve problems and to find answers to relevant questions, to go back over good and troubling experiences to get more insight out of them, to make things go better, to help others more effectively, to follow our intuition to get to the bottom of something, and for many more reasons. Mostly we reflect in order to learn, and to do that well we must know when we don't know something and what we don't know. This is especially true in the arts, where so much of the knowing is subjective and aesthetic. Artists are fundamentally reflective practitioners, and we must activate those reflective impulses in our teaching and in our students’ artistic learning. We benefit our students greatly when we help them develop a taste for, and then an ingrained habit for, reflecting about their experiences in art and life. If we succeed, they will learn more, becoming better artists and more well-rounded people. For a lifetime.

WHAT

What can we reflect upon?

Aspect of a Learning Process	Approach

Key aspects of a lesson, class, or rehearsal	Draw students' attention to what <i>they</i> found most interesting or significant in their experience. Invite them to explore their own experience of an aspect of the lesson or class that you found significant.
A creative process in composing, choreographing, or playwriting	Support your students in noticing their creative style, patterns, habits, strengths and weaknesses, experiments, and ways of challenging themselves.
Responding to Core Works that they see or hear	Develop classroom habits of attending that press beyond the instinctive and socially conditioned liking/disliking or getting stuck in unexamined preferences. Guide your students toward deep noticing and the ability to articulate their experience as they encounter an artwork.
Discoveries about a classmate's work	Guide your students to examine the work of their peers to help expand ideas about creative options. Emphasize this opportunity for student discovery as a way to give your class a greater understanding of and empathy toward each other and the work of professional artists.
Specific details of their rehearsal work	Invite students to notice their rehearsal habits as they work on challenges, successes, and creative approaches. Foster their awareness of the range of potential strategies, including those modeled by classmates and teachers.
Student insights about themselves in performance	Support students' reflections on performance opportunities, going beyond "How did it go?" and instead considering questions such as "Where did you make new choices during performance and why?" and "How did your specific rehearsal strategies affect your performance outcomes?"
Noticing the art form outside of formal classes, lessons, and rehearsals	Regularly invite students to notice the role of their art form in their daily lives. Encourage connections between their studies and their natural interests and curiosity, and their discretionary time choices.

HOW

How do we reflect?

1. **Reach beyond just words.** One of the most common mistakes educators make is assuming reflection happens solely in spoken and written words. Certainly, linguistic tools are good ones for reflection, but certain topics benefit even more from non-linguistic responses, especially when we are looking to experience ideas that are metaphoric or less easily categorized.
2. **Use a wide range of tools.** Artists reflect in visual media (and not only visual artists)—that’s why mapping and storyboarding are useful in many fields—because finding symbols that hold our understanding is good reflection. Artists reflect physically (and not just dancers), finding insight through their bodies and senses. People reflect naturally in many modalities, and to serve all our students well, we must invite them to reflect in a variety of ways. Doing so activates different aspects of their artistry, helps them discover new things, and includes and encourages those for whom linguistic processing is not a particular strength.
4. **Change up your reflection modalities regularly.** In addition to using a range of reflection modalities, change them up regularly. This will keep your class from developing rote habits and will keep your students “on their toes,” ready to try new ways of thinking and learning.
5. **Make your reflective questions and opportunities inherently engaging.** Reflection questions are like little works of art. And when you get a good one, trust it; give it time. Come back to it another time. “Take some notes on what you noticed” is not an inherently interesting prompt. “Find one thing that surprised you, and note some implications of that discovery” might be.

Tools

Reflection Tools and Examples

Reflection Tool	Possible Goal	Example
Guided Thinking	deepen artistry or creativity	Pose a great question for your class to think about, e.g., “What are some metaphors for the natural world? How can we depict the natural world through our art form?”
Guided Class Dialogue	develop a nuanced understanding of	Ask illuminating questions and follow-up questions, guiding and

	the material through hearing the ideas of others	hearing from the full group: "let's discuss the role of the narrative in this work—what were some big ideas of the story? What artistic strategies were used to convey its meaning?"
Conversations or Projects with a Partner or in Small Groups	encourage full-class engagement	Request that your students reflect upon an idea in small groups, choosing one member to report back to the full group the highlights from their conversation.
See/Hear, Think, Wonder	prompt younger students to articulate feelings, questions, and observations, thinking analytically about what they see or hear	Use images such as pictures of an eye/ear, a cloud, and a question mark. Toss a cube with these printed on each side, or point to a specific image on the board to prompt classroom conversations. See Structures for Artistic Thinking in dance, drama, and music .
Using Prompts	guide the conversation	Use specific prompts as conversation starters, such as "I was surprised to hear that..."; "this work is different from my previous work because..."; "I'm excited to learn more about..."
Kinesthetic Response	experience insights by accessing what the body tells us	Have students create a series of three tableaux (frozen sculptures) that capture the emotional journey of a performance. Revise by adding more details inspired by the work.
Embodying the Action	foster physical recollection	As soon as students finish viewing each other's dances or a Core Work video, ask students to embody something they saw in the dance in a still pose, a movement, or a vocal sound. Have students show their poses and movements in half-class groups.

Reflecting Fingers	create opportunities for stationary kinesthetic response	Invite your students to draw the contour of the music in the air, or take turns using fingers as performers to reenact a few moments of what they just saw.
Goodbye Reflection	highlight student representation of their learning	At the end of class, have the students move to the door using a key idea of the lesson, e.g., walking using their clown character, dancing triplet steps, or clapping a rhythm.
Musical Response	experience insights by tapping what we can experience musically or aurally	Develop a musical soundscape in small groups that describes the environment they felt was described in the work.
Pause the Music/Video	encourage predictive and analytic capacities	Pause a video or sound in the middle. Ask your students to predict what might happen next, or how the piece might evolve.
Give It a Title	crystallize understanding through the use of metaphor	After watching student presentations, have the student viewers create their own title for the work, explaining their rationale for its choice.
Single Word Response	clarify through description	Ask your students to think of a single word that captures something they observed (or a response to what they observed). In rapid succession, have them take turns calling out the words.
Talking to Ourselves	engage the full class	Set a timer for 60–90 seconds. Ask all students to talk aloud to themselves, all at the same time, about what they just saw, heard, or experienced. Invite a few students to share.

Mapping the Noticings	explore and concretize through visualization	Ask your students to create a map that describes what they noticed while listening to or watching a performance.
Individual Lenses	experience a range of ways of looking	Put specific viewing or listening lenses (e.g., rhythm, use of gesture) on index cards and randomly distribute to students before the presentation. Ask them to watch/listen with that idea in mind and discuss afterward.
Interview Peers	dig deeper into an observation or idea	Have your students share with a partner the concept and plan for a solo project, asking each other clarifying questions. Alternatively, pair up students. Ask one student to play the role of one of the performers they observed in the Core Work audio/video and the other to play the role of the interviewer. The interviewer will ask the performer a series of questions about the performance.
Buddy Up	use a partner to encourage and expand one's progress	Have your students share a learning goal, using each other for advice, clarification, and encouragement.
Examining the Recipe	unpack artistic elements	After listening to or viewing the audio or video, ask your students to create a recipe of the piece, using the artistic elements as the ingredients. Determine: What are the ingredients? How are they combined? Is the piece served raw or "cooked"? How is it cooked? Baked, simmered, sautéed, roasted, fermented...?

One-Word Responses	think metaphorically	Ask your students to find the flavor, smell, or color that best describes this dance/drama/musical work.
Reenacting	jog the memory	Ask your students to reenact, to the best of their ability, a section of a piece after listening to or observing it.
Responding through Puppetry	uncover less comfortable ideas	Have your students use puppets to discuss and reflect upon the work viewed/heard.
Storyboard	document compositional structure or rehearsal process	Invite your students to create a five-cell storyboard that captures key moments of a performance or a rehearsal process.
Guided Journal Writing	capture expectations	Request that your students write down at least three expectations about a work or an experience. Follow up afterward: "Where did they come from and how have they been met or surpassed?"
Making Metaphors	explore through reinterpretation	After listening to a piece of music or viewing a dance or a play, ask students to think about metaphors: if this piece was a country (or a city, a landscape, a food, an animal, or a piece of jewelry) what would it be? Why?
Considering the Opposite	determine artistic properties	Suggest that your students think of a movement, sound, character, or line of text that would feel really out of place in the Core Work, and to discuss why it wouldn't belong.
Make a Poem or	highlight	

Rap	collaborative reflection process	Give your students a “fill in the blanks” sheet of a short poem or rap. Establish a beat or a simple rhythm and read the text on template, including saying “fill in the blank” over the beat as a model. Give small groups a short amount of time to fill in the blanks, then read their poems/raps over the beat. Example: <i>The first thing I noticed was (fill in the blank).</i> <i>Another thing that stood out was (fill in the blank).</i> <i>It really surprised me that (fill in the blank).</i> <i>If I got to name the piece I'd call it (fill in the blank).</i>
Write a Review	focus critical attention	Ask your students to write a 100-word review of their run-through or performance.
Keeping a Journal	reflect over time	Have your students keep a creative journal. Invite them to record examples daily that exemplify their ideas and questions about their creative process. Collect and review to better understand and assess your students' progress.
Improvise	switch perspectives	Request that your students describe the performance from the point of view of a performer or an instrument in the work of dance, drama, or music just performed or viewed/heard.
Self-Assessment	embed habit of self-assessment	Regularly give your students time to jot notes in process journals of details done or experienced during the development of a project.

Strategies

Here are some examples of reflective strategies that can be seen in Juilliard Creative Classroom activities.

Dance

- For visual strategies and multiple post-viewing strategies, see [Dancing the Symbols](#).
- For a reflective use of a collaborative revision process, see [Stealin' Steps](#).
- For use of manipulatives as a reflective modality, see [Organized Chaos](#).

Drama

- For kinesthetic and spatial reflection strategies, see [Playful Giants](#).
- For a visual graphing strategy, see the final reflection in [Energy Spectrum](#).
- For a multiple modality reflection, see [What's on Your Mind](#).
- For some quick teacher-led prompts to inspire a range of reflections, see [Not a Bag](#).

Music

- For reflecting with musical improvisation, see [Play What We Know, or Make Something Up?](#).
- For a range of listening reflective modalities, see [Passing a Melody around the Orchestra](#).
- For visual and kinesthetic reflections, see [Depth in a Musical Landscape](#).

SUMMARY

Reflection Recap

A handy reminder of essential concepts to remember in guiding student reflection:

1. Allow for enough time.
2. The environment for reflection is built over time.
3. Prompt students to reflect in different modalities.
4. Make your reflective questions and activities inherently engaging.

Reflection need not be for one length of time, like a ten-minute chunk at the end of a class. It comes in large and small opportunities. It can be an invitation to pause for just a few seconds to investigate a moment, a brief activity during a transition during a lesson, or a big project like

a performance presentation, a storyboard of a process, a timeline of one's artistic lineage, or a process folio that captures the story of a project over time. What matters is that reflective activities pay off experientially in the learners and that they increase in complexity (to stay interesting and challenging) and regularity. With sustained practice (part of our responsibility as teachers), reflection becomes a habit, a part of the fabric of artistic pursuit. We don't require an interesting question to arise; we instinctively attend to features of a process, to the underpinnings of an interesting moment in rehearsal, to the origin of a new idea. That is how craft and individual voice are developed and sustained, much more than through breakthrough inquiries and inspiration. We learn to play the musical passage well not only through repetition in practice, but through reflection-infused effective practice, in which we pose questions and assess results. The 99% of genius that is perspiration (according to Thomas Edison) only advances an artist if the hard work includes consistent, effective reflection.