

# USING TABLEAU TO ENTER A STORY

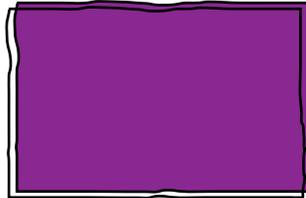
After an introduction to a novel, play, poem, painting, mural, etc., students are prepared to bring its story to life using the dramatic literacy strategy of Tableau (French, meaning visual presentation, frozen picture; pl. tableaux). Using their bodies, the students recreate a key image or abstraction in order to discover relationships and to generate vivid language and specific detail. It is useful in exploring character development, conflict, themes, sequence, nuance, and multiple perspectives. The benefit: students will improve their use of active verbs and develop clear, concise language to communicate their ideas in an individual style with an authentic voice.



## Step 1

**WARM UP:** experience the tableau strategy—take a risk safely!

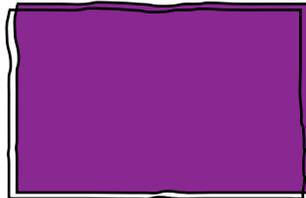
The class generates active verbs that capture motion (e.g., walk, jump, point, etc.). Together, they enact these verbs in place until the teacher says, “Freeze.” At this moment, students “freeze” and hold the position of the action they are demonstrating. The teacher models observation, noticing the variations in stance, gestures, and facial expressions. The students are then asked to specify words further: march, rush, hoard, command, etc.



## Step 2

### ENTER THE PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT

The teacher and the class replicate a specific moment in the story and recreate the character’s stance and expression. It is important to coach students’ movements, (e.g., bend your arm, feel the muscles in his/her face, the weight of his/her step). Who does s/he see? What does s/he wonder? Begin a collection of words and phrases that describe these sensations.

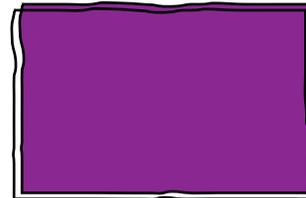


## Step 3

### READ THE TABLEAU

Ask a couple of students to hold the character’s pose and “intensify,” meaning infuse more energy into the pose (clench a fist, slump a shoulder, etc.). “Read” this tableau. Move **from** generalizations like, “She looks surprised or curious,” to specific detail like, “her eyes are wide; her mouth is a big ‘O’ as if taking a quick, deep breath.” Ask the character(s) to add movement, imagining the moment before this freeze and the moment after.

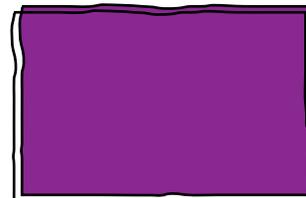
Notice how the original author/artist captures movement. In fiction, the movement may be described; in other forms, it’s inferred. Find language to capture the effect of movement, (e.g., bounce of ringlets, flounce of ruffles, placement of hands) add color, texture, and sounds. What may s/he say? To whom?



## Step 4

### LAYER COMPLEXITY

Dramatize other characters from this scene in the story. “Read” their tableau details. Actually stand next to the student tableau and frame the question for the audience: How would you describe this facial expression (e.g., tilt of chin, gaze, mouth)? Are these characters tense or calm? Fierce or gentle? Where do you see this (shoulders? eyes? teeth? body?). Guide the characters to dramatize the moment before the freeze and the moment after. Compare and contrast.

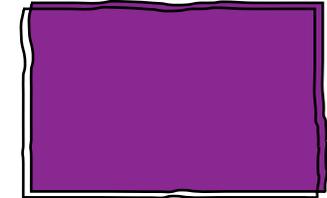


## Step 5

### BUILD ATMOSPHERE AND SYMBOLISM AS CHARACTER

Introduce an inanimate character or condition surrounding the character(s).

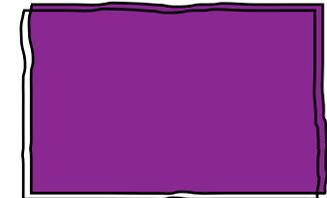
Ask a few students to build a tableau that captures the mood: Is it menacing, playful, inviting, mysterious?



## Step 6

### EXPLORE INFERENCES

Put all the tableau images in action, and then freeze. What are the characters thinking? What may they say to each other, to the environment, to the viewers? Experiment with possibility through voices.



## Step 7

### EXTEND THE TABLEAU

Use the tableau to generate inquiry questions (e.g., What is progress/ freedom/ human rights? What is worth fighting for? What is culture?). Use the tableau to develop discussion, dialogue, debate... What does the story, mural, painting, etc. symbolize as a whole? Synthesize the details and vivid imagery from the tableau for a variety of writing purposes determined by class goals and objectives.