



This tool asks students to physically manifest their understanding of a question or concept.

## Tableau

*What I hear, I forget. What I see, I remember. What I do, I understand.*

Kung Fu Tzu (Confucius)

**T**he old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words reminds us that often we can understand an idea better when we can see it and not just hear about it. Drama teachers ask students to create “freeze frame” scenes as the simplest way for students to explore and express emotions, characters, relationships, and abstract ideas. Software developers have created a program called Tableau that turns vast amounts of data into images that can be more easily and quickly understood by businesses and consumers.

**With the Tableau strategy, students play roles and position themselves to create a silent frozen picture to show their understanding of an idea about historical figures, a scientific principle, or a mathematical formula.** The name of this strategy comes from the term *tableau vivant*, which means “living picture.”

Creating a Tableau serves two purposes:

1. It allows students to participate actively in the lesson by creating an image with their bodies that represents their understanding of a concept.
2. It creates a quick visual of the student’s level of understanding so you can quickly assess whether students need more information; are confused about a concept; or have achieved mastery and are ready to move on.

Students must truly understand the meaning of a concept or idea in order to communicate it using physical poses, gestures, and facial expressions rather than words. This collaborative strategy is appealing to kinesthetic learners and allows all students to be creative while strengthening their comprehension of a concept. Tableau can be used with students of all ages and in a variety of subject areas.

### How to Use Tableau

#### 1. Prompt

After instruction, prompt the students to convey the meaning by creating a Tableau. The first time students participate, it is helpful to show them some picture examples of a Tableau. (Search “images of tableau examples in the classroom” for examples.) Explain that they will be creating a picture using their bodies to show their understanding of a concept or idea. Explain the parameters of the activity—will they be allowed to create and use props, or will they be able to use their bodies only?

#### 2. Brainstorm and Plan

- ♦ Assign students to groups to work on their Tableau.
- ♦ Assign the topic to the group. You can use a variety of topics related to a concept so that each group presents a different Tableau or give just one concept to the whole class to have multiple representations of the same topic.
- ♦ Give students time to brainstorm ideas. Encourage them to sketch out what their Tableau will look like and create props if that is a part of the assignment.
- ♦ Give students time to rehearse their Tableau.

#### 3. Present

Students present their final Tableau or freeze frame image to the entire class. After presentations, students can vote on the presentation that best captured the concept.



## Tableau (continued)

Consider taking a photo of each Tableau as it is presented. These photos can be used to decorate the classroom with examples of student work, to review information for a quiz or exam, or to spark discussion or review of a previously taught topic.

### 4. Clarify and Assess

The teacher should watch carefully as each Tableau is presented. The purpose of creating the Tableau will influence how you assess it. If you were using this as a final assessment at the end of a unit, create a rubric for students to use as they plan their Tableau so that they know what criteria to meet.

As the students plan their Tableau, walk around and talk with students. This technique will be effective in clearing up misunderstandings before the final Tableau is presented.

Look at each Tableau to check for understanding and to assess whether the representations indicate that concepts are understood by the students. Follow up with students to provide clarification as needed.

### When to Use Tableau

Use a Tableau as a way to check for understanding. This is most commonly done at the end of a lesson or unit to:

- ♦ Check students' understanding of key concepts
- ♦ See if students can apply the content in a new way
- ♦ Formulate guided groups for students who did not demonstrate understanding after the lesson
- ♦ Create extensions for students who demonstrate mastery after the lesson
- ♦ See if students can assess information and draw conclusions
- ♦ See what new insights students have gained during the unit of study

When used as a formative assessment, Tableau is not graded. It can simply be a check for understanding to tell you the level and depth of understanding of a student or group of students about a particular topic or idea. You can use this information to guide further instruction as you plan the next day's lesson.

### Tableau Variations

#### 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). In this variation, the Tableaus would link together to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

#### Tableau with a Twist

After the students "freeze" into their Tableau, the teacher taps a student in the Tableau on the shoulder, and the student makes a short statement about their "character."

#### Tableau Interview

After the students "freeze" into their Tableau, the teacher or a student acts as a reporter and conducts short interviews with individuals within the scene.



## Tableau (continued)

### Tableau with Sound

Depending on the subject, the Tableau might be more effective with sound effects or music. Students can choose what sounds to play or make sound part of their planning process.

### Value of Using Tableau

- ♦ Gives you an assessment of the student's knowledge and comprehension level
- ♦ Gives you an assessment of a student's depth of knowledge at the evaluation and synthesis level
- ♦ Is a very flexible formative assessment
- ♦ Can be prepared very quickly and used at the end of class to check for student understanding of a single objective
- ♦ Can be used at the end of a unit of study to assess students' understanding of a piece of literature or a larger concept as a more formal project

Students develop social skills by working as part of a team. By working collaboratively, students not only gain content knowledge, but they also learn how to function as part of a team. They develop listening and speaking skills, practice negotiating, and learn how to be patient and empathetic.