Lesson Plan One

"Perception, the Ideomotor Effect, and Psychological Interpretation"

Course Context

This two-day lesson (60-minute class periods) occurs in the middle of the Perception chapter for a Social-Cognitive Psychology course. The class uses *Cognitive Psychology* by E. Bruce Goldstein as the primary text.

Lesson Overview

Over two days, students will explore perception through hands-on activities and media analysis:

- The Ideomotor Effect: Students will examine unconscious muscular movements and how group dynamics amplify them
- Ouija Board Activity & Analysis: In small groups, students will experience the ideomotor effect using a Ouija board, then read Fr. Jim McDermott's article on its psychological and historical context[2]
- Video & Neuroscientific Perspective: Students will watch SciShow Psych's "Why Ouija Boards Are So Convincing," exploring the brain mechanisms behind the effect and how locus of control influences interpretation of the experience
- Homework Assignment: Students will complete a horror film analysis project examining psychological concepts in their viewing experience

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this section, students will be able to:

- Differentiate between sensation and perception, understanding how raw sensory input is processed into meaningful experiences
- Explain how attention, motivation, and sensory adaptation influence perception and shape how we interpret our environment
- Define social psychology and describe its focus on how individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by social contexts
- Identify and explain the actor-observer bias, including how it affects our judgments of our own behavior versus others' behavior

National Standards

This lesson aligns with the following content standards:

Perception Standard Area:

- Content Standard 1: The process of perception
    - Learning Target 1.1: Describe principles of perception

    - Learning Target 1.2: Explain the concepts of bottom-up and top-down processing
- Content Standard 2: The interaction between the person and the environment in determining perception
    - Learning Target 2.5: Explain how diverse experiences and expectations influence perception

Consciousness Standard Area:

- Content Standard 1: The different states and levels of consciousness
    - Learning Target 1.2: Distinguish between processing that is conscious (i.e., explicit) and other processing that happens without conscious awareness (i.e., implicit)

Day 1: Introduction to Perception and the Ideomotor Effect

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Differentiate between sensation and perception
- Explain how attention, motivation, and sensory adaptation influence perception
- Introduce the ideomotor effect as an example of unconscious perception affecting behavior
- Experience and analyze the effect through a hands-on activity

Materials

- Slide presentation (or whiteboard notes) covering key concepts
- Excerpts from Cognitive Psychology, Chapter 3
- Ouija board and planchette

Lesson Plan

Warm-Up (10 min)

- Extended discussion of perceptual experiences and optical illusions
- Student sharing of real-world examples
- Discussion prompt: Have you ever seen something that wasn't really there? Or thought you felt something move when it didn't?

Direct Instruction (20 min)

- Lecture covering:
    - Sensation vs. perception
    - How attention, motivation, and sensory adaptation affect perception
    - Introduction to the ideomotor effect
    - Social psychology concepts and actor-observer bias

Ouija Board Activity (20 min)

- Small group activity using Ouija board while making mental observations:

    - Initial expectations
    - Sensations while using the board
    - Group dynamics and how responses change over time
    - Observations of their own versus others' movements
    - Attributions made about the source of the movement

Debrief & Homework Assignment (10 min)

- Quick discussion connecting experience to ideomotor effect
- Introduce horror film analysis homework:
    - Watch a horror film of choice
    - Identify and analyze three psychological concepts from the current chapter
- Preview next class content

Day 2: Psychological and Cultural Analysis

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze psychological and neurological explanations for the Ouija board experience
- Explain how social and cultural factors shape perceptions of the supernatural
- Apply their understanding of perception and cognition to media analysis

Materials

- "What Catholics Need to Know About Ouija Boards" by Fr. Jim McDermott, S.J.[3]
- SciShow Psych video: "Why Ouija Boards Are So Convincing"

Lesson Plan

Article & Discussion (25 min)

- Reading and guided discussion of McDermott's article:
    - Historical origins of the Ouija board
    - Impact of *The Exorcist* (1973) on modern perceptions
    - Neurological and psychological basis of the ideomotor effect

Video Analysis & Integration (20 min)

- Watch SciShow Psych video
- Discussion integrating:
    - Brain mechanisms involved
    - How locus of control affects interpretations

---

[3] Teaching at a Jesuit school, this article meets several curricular needs. There are alternatives, such as The Ouija Board Explained at *Psychology Today*.

    - Connections to previous day's hands-on experience
    - Links to horror film homework findings

Final Discussion & Reflection (15 min)

- Students share horror film analysis insights
- Write reflection synthesizing:
    - Personal Ouija board experience
    - Horror film analysis
    - Scientific explanations
    - Cultural interpretations