

Seattle Children's Theatre –Story Drama

BIG IDEAS

- ✓ Drama is different than theatre. There is often a fine line drawn between the two. Creative drama may be crafted into a piece of theatre and the very elements of characters and conflict and interpersonal relationships are the same in both. But DRAMA focuses on the process of dramatic activity as an educational tool while THEATRE focuses on the product of performance and a technical skill in which not all students will excel.
- ✓ Drama can be adapted to all ages and abilities.
- ✓ Your students should be allowed to risk as much or as little as they need to.
- ✓ The more *you* risk, the more freedom they will have to risk.
- ✓ The “brink of chaos” is often scary and just as often the most creative and educational moment.
- ✓ There are tremendous resources to aid you with drama in your classroom. The ones that I most highly recommend are Viola Spolin’s book *Theatre Games for the Classroom* and Nellie McCaslin’s *Creative Drama in the Primary Grades*. And of course SCT’s Education Outreach Program is a great resource you can invite into your classroom for workshops and residencies on themes such as the productions at SCT or any piece of literature or theme.

TYPICAL CLASS

Transition Activity: Involves getting each student connected to the story as you transition into Story Drama time. This activity may involve an art project that will connect the students to the story.

Warm-up/Motivation: Begin your journey into the story with movement, voice and sensory exercises. Before the story is read, the theme and characters are introduced through imagination exercises.

Story Time: Together, discover the voice and dramatic conflict of the story.

Playing: Take a ride into the story with your new movements, voice, and teamwork skills.

Evaluation/Reflection: Come back together in a circle to explore the students’ feelings about the story and find the most memorable moment from the day’s story.

TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

These art projects help to ease the students into the world of the story and act as a ritual to transition into Story Drama time. For K-2nd grade, take some time to set up the space before the students arrive, laying out art materials, playing appropriate music, and arranging the furniture for the dramatic play. Transition activities are useful for the Pre-K-2nd grade students and can be modified to act as a ritual for the older students to help you transform the drama space. Some examples of transition activities:

- Create individual pictures of something in the story: use chalk, decorate with glitter, and personalize. After everyone is done, hang in museum. Each student titles his/her piece and the rest respond with, “Ohhhh, Ahhhh. What a masterpiece!”
- Hang butcher paper and create a group map or collage of the environment in the story.
- Use clay to mold a character, environment, or emotion from the story.
- Play music to establish the mood for the ensuing activities.

STORY TIME

Elements of a Story:

Stories for dramatization should be of good literary quality and should appeal to the leader and the students. Choose material that lends itself to the drama process. There should be interesting characters, a plot with a problem or conflict, and a specific locale. This basic dramatic structure is variously known as given circumstances or the five W's:

- Who characters
- Why motivation (what the characters want)
- What action (what the characters do)
- Where setting
- When time

When choosing stories for the K-3rd grade, look for ones with dramatic conflict, repeated lines, mix of boy and girl heroes, and a story that can be read relatively quickly.

You can also choose books and use drama activities to explore a theme or issue with your students.

Story Drama Book Ideas (K-3rd):

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes

Meanwhile... by Jules Feiffer

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst

No Moon, No Milk by Chris Babcock

Olivia by Ian Falconer

Tacky the Penguin by Helen Lester

The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister

Each One Special by Frieda Wishinsky

Sweet Dream Pie by Audrey Wood

Imogene's Antlers by David Small

Zomo the Rabbit told by Gerald McDermott

Book Ideas (4th-6th)

The Hoboken Chicken Emergency by Daniel Pinkwater

Holes by Louis Sachar

Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar

The BFG by Roald Dahl

The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by Avi

The Midwife's Apprentice by Karen Cushman

PLAYING

The moment you close the book, it is best to jump right into the dramatic play. This involves incorporating one or two of the exercises that the students practiced during warm-ups into the adventure of diving into the story or physically exploring the themes/concepts in the book. When creating your curriculum, set a goal (also known as an Objective) for yourself and the students. (e.g. In the book *The Rainbow Fish* the students will explore sharing and how it feels when someone doesn't share.) You will then use this goal when you plan how you want to structure the time when you play in the story. You will also go back to your goal when you are assessing and helping the students reflect on the experience. Here are some helpful hints to make your dramatic-play time more successful. (Taken from *An Introduction to Creative Drama*, The U. of Tennessee at Chattanooga.)

Space:

Arrange the room so that students have an adequate amount of space in which to move freely and comfortably. Define where in the room action can happen. Mark the space in some way (with your body, masking or plastic tape, etc.) and set an "off limits" to avoid problems with fragile objects, "attractive nuisances," etc. It is best to arrange the room before you begin the warm-up activities.

Controls:

At the beginning of the warm-up/motivation exercises, set rules, limits, and control signals so students don't have too many decisions to face at once. Basic rules can help free students to be creative during the dramatic-play time.

- Set a signal which freezes action and sound (e.g., "Freeze", 3-2-1-Stop, drum beat, lights on/off, hand clap)
- Set a signal that tells students that you need their focus. One example is a call and response where the teacher says, "Focus" and students respond, "Check". When you vary the volume or pitch or expressiveness of your "Focus" the students respond with the same in their "Check". Another fun focus signal is for the leader to say "Hocus Pocus" and the children reply with "Focus."

- Set a signal to create a sitting or standing circle. (a short song that fits with story, count backwards from 5-Zero, a phrase that is a call and response)
- Set a signal for students to move in “slow motion” in order to control action if necessary.
- Set limits regarding personal interaction (no one touches another person or any object in the room unless instructed to do so by the leader as part of the activity.)

Grouping:

During the dramatic play, arrange group work to fit the experience and skill level of the class:

- Unison playing (all students working individually but at the same time) helps students overcome feelings of self-consciousness.
- Pair playing (all students working in pairs but at the same time) is a step toward building group cooperation skills.
- After working in unison and pairs, students will be able to work simultaneously in small groups and then share their work with the entire class.

REFLECTION

It is worthwhile to set aside some time for the students to reflect after they have dramatically explored the story. As the information they have gathered in the play time sinks in, reflection helps the students to establish a deeper memory of the experience and learn from what they have just done. This can also be used to evaluate whether or not you have met your goals for the lesson. Simple types of reflection are:

- Discussion about the story (these can reinforce vocabulary like *main character, conflict or obstacle, environment, etc.*) Describe the environment that Rainbow Fish lives in. How was Rainbow Fish in conflict with the other fish? How did the other fish feel when Rainbow Fish didn't share? What did the wise fish say to Rainbow Fish that changed his mind?
- A phrase and movement that represents the story. When repeated, this memory will help the students to remember the book and the dramatic play attached.
- Draw a picture of the conflict or resolution in today's adventure.
- Pass around a “talking stick” and when the students have the stick they can share what they remember about the story.

DRAMATIC STRUCTURES FOR EXPLORING CHAPTER BOOKS

With any piece of literature there are many dramatic structures that can be employed to bring the characters, the conflict, sometimes even the whole environment to life in the classroom.

- **Tableaux:** Human sculptures, freeze frame fairy tales, slide shows of the story, family portraits, crime photos—all consist of one to five still images created by students to tell a complete story. The image may include one student, frozen in a pose that reflects the idea, or it may be an image that will involve half, or all, of the class.

- **Physical Brainstorming:** Students sit in a half circle facing a stage area. After identifying the topic, students take turns (in order around the half circle) coming into the stage area to show their image. This activity is similar to charades, but there is no guessing or discussion during the brainstorm. Subsequent rounds may add sound, words, or movement as desired by the leader. If necessary, the leader may give a default image which students can show if they have trouble thinking on their feet.
- **Thought Tracking:** While holding a tableau, the leader circulates, touching each student in turn to speak his or her thoughts out loud.
- **Hot Seating:** The leader or a student is set in front of the group in the role of one of the characters. The group questions the character, either as themselves, in the roles of a group with a particular relationship to that character (e.g. reporters, loyal subjects, etc.) or in a collective role representing one person with a particular relationship to that character (e.g. her mother, her boss, her best friend, etc.).
- **Media Interviews:** News reports, talk shows, interviews, documentaries (filmed or live), and radio and TV advertising—explore aspects of characters in an out-of-story context. Talk shows are often self-starters and need less facilitating than others.
- **Who Is to Blame:** Courtroom cases, debates—Can you try the Big Bad Pig for destruction of property? Who will the witnesses be? Who will testify?
- **Non-Linear time:** 10 Years Later, 10 Years before, Simultaneous time—Create scenes with characters 10 years older, or a scene that might be happening simultaneously with the one being told in the story.
- **Experts:** Students take on the role of experts—whether detectives, scientists, or explorers. This idea couples well with the Media Interviews structure and curriculum-based drama. Try a talk show with a panel of experts on a topic such as the human body or Mexico or whatever works for your story, and each expert has their take on the topic based on their area of interest.
- **Scenes that aren't there:** Much like non-linear time, create improvised scenes that might have occurred *between* those that happen in the written story, using the same set of characters, settings, and given circumstances.
- **Inner Monologues:** Leader (teacher) calls out “Freeze!” and as all are frozen, one by one the students, as their characters, are allowed to speak their thoughts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

An Introduction to Creative Drama, The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga: The Southeast Institute for Education in Theatre, 1997.

Bany-Winters, Lisa. *On Stage: Theater games and activities for kids*. Chicago Review Press, 1997.

McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Drama in the Primary Grades*. New York: Longman, Inc., 1987.

Pereira, Nancy. *Creative Dramatics in the Library, Second Edition*. Rowayton, CT: New Plays, Inc., 1976.

Rubinstein, Robert. *Curtains Up! Theatre Games and Storytelling*. Fulcrum Resources, 2000.

Schotz, Amiel. *Theatre games and beyond: a creative approach for performers*. Meriweather Publ, 1998.

Spolin, Viola. *Theatre Games for the Classroom*. Northwestern University Press, 1986.