

Drama Experiences

Drama Games

Drama games can take many forms and are used for multiple purposes in school-based learning. In particular, drama games can be used:

1. As a warm up or cool down (to drama activities or for the day)
2. For relationship building
3. To motivate and engage students' interest in a topic
4. To build cooperation and team work skills
5. As a relaxation and focus tool
6. To build specific skills (logical thinking, communication and so on)
7. To encourage language use and expression
8. For fun!

It is important to remember that students need time and clear instruction to effectively engage in drama games. Beginning with simple games provides a good introduction and will allow you to give ownership to the students if you wish, and add complexity as you work through and manipulate the different elements of drama. Finding games that can be repeated for different purposes (with different forms and/or elements) is beneficial, as you do not then need to be introducing and teaching new games on a regular basis. There are many resources for drama games publically available. You and your class will find the drama games that you enjoy!

Ways of using Drama Games:

1. For students requiring language support or non-English speaking backgrounds:
Drama games are wonderful ways of breaking down the 'language' boundaries and engaging students with all levels of language ability in activities that level the playing field for them. Games that engage 'nonsense' language are particularly good as well as those reinforcing body language and non-verbal communication.

Bread and Butter – The only two words students can use in this game are 'bread' and 'butter'. They need to communicate a question and response using these two words and relying on tone of voice and gesture to support what they are asking e.g. giving directions, asking for help with a positive or negative response, scolding or apologising (NB You could use any words including nonsense ones during this activity).

Follow the Leader – An old favourite, 'Follow the Leader' and all the variations possible provide non-English speaking students with a bounded and successful way to engage their fellow students. They need limited language (which can be followed) as the main focus is on physical imitation.

2. As a warm up or cool down (to drama activities or for the day)

When engaging students in drama it is important for students to know the space in which they are working and its physical boundaries. Warming up the body is also crucial, as many drama activities will encourage students to use their body in unfamiliar ways.

Exploring the Space – as the name implies, this drama game encourages students to move around a defined drama space. You can vary the pace and level and it is

important to encourage them to view the space from a perspective they have not done so before e.g. under chairs, through windows and so on. Using a drum to keep the beat is helpful and can also introduce students to the element of *time*.

3. Relationship building

Connecting students who may or may not know each other at the start of the year is always important. Similarly, finding ways for a newly formed class to form a cohesive group is essential for maximising all learning opportunities.

Name Game – students should sit in circles of 6-8. They need to think of a fun way to introduce themselves by using an Adjective, an Animal and a Place e.g. Revolting Raccoon Rachel from Rome. This can be done purely as a fun introduction or a memory style game where each person says their own combination and then repeats the details of the students before them. It is also effective for reinforcing grammatical structures being taught in Literacy at all levels.

4. Build cooperation and teamwork skills

Drama games provide an effective way of building skills to boost cooperation and teamwork amongst students.

Counting Game – students sit circles of 6-8. The aim is for the group to count to 10 however they must have their eyes closed, they cannot count around the circle and no student can nominate who begins. If two students speak at the same time they go back to one. This game is good for encouraging focus and concentration as well as responsiveness to other students – it is a good equaliser allowing no student to dominate.

5. Relaxation and focus tool

Many students enjoy the relaxation and focus opportunities drama games can provide. Games such as the one outlined below are usually done in silence so provide time for students to escape from the usual classroom and playground chaos.

Mirror Mirror – students work in pairs (sitting). Their hands begin raised with palms facing each other, but not touching. The aim of the game is for the students to copy each other's movement, but to do so without speaking. It is helpful for students to move slowly and for a student to be nominated as first leader before starting. As they become more familiar with the activity (or want a challenge!), they can begin without a leader being identified and shift between each other fluidly.

Improvisation/Role Play

There is often confusion between role-play and improvisation. A simple definition of each is provided below.

Improvisation – spontaneous interaction in an imagined situation

Role-play – a type of improvising in which the students make-believe they are someone else (this usually has some predetermined planning or characterisation)

Improvisation and role-play build on basic characterisation skills developed within mime and movement activities through the inclusion of voice. The characterisation being developed physically can take on an additional layer as students experiment with pitch (high/low), volume, pace, inflection, tone and vocal quality.

Beginning drama experiences with mime and movement activities is important for building students' knowledge of drama more broadly as well as expectations for working respectfully. This understanding is crucial as students begin to work more

openly within improvisation and role-play scenarios as outlined below.

Improvisation

Improvisation is best undertaken through the use of effective starting points such as simulations or analogies.

Simulations - In a simulated improvisation activity, students are required to spontaneously act out real world scenarios such as a fire drill or shark alarm at the beach.

Analogies - Analogies take an example that parallels real life and encourages students to improvise drawing on their prior experiences.

Space Jump – one student is in the centre of the circle improvising an activity/action, the teacher calls 'space jump' and the student in the centre freezes. A second student then enters the scene and begins a new activity/action based on the frozen pose of the first. Together they improvise the new activity/action until space jump is called again and a third student enters. To make it difficult, a teacher can opt once all have entered a scene to have students then exit in the same order with the same scenes recreated in reverse order.

Role-play

Drawing on key questions of who, what, where, when and why can help to trigger improvisation opportunities. When the activity begins with the 'who' the focus shifts to role-play. A number of different improvisation-based drama activities begin with students in role.

At the ATM/At the Bus Stop (depending on student age) – students need to decide on a role. One student moves up to the space agreed to be the ATM/Bus stop and begins engaging naturally in that area. A second student also in role then approaches and interacts spontaneously with the first. Their interaction continues until the first student leaves the ATM/catches the bus. A third student then enters to converse/interact with the remaining student etc

Both of these activities build crucial listening and cooperation skills vital to effective drama work.

Playbuilding

Playbuilding refers to a staged process where students begin with a stimulus of some sort and work in a group through a series of activities to generate a script and performance. The different stages of playbuilding need to be loosely followed however there is flexibility and some stages may be done in more or less detail. The core elements below are however critical to be covered by every group to ensure a detailed and well thought out final script and performance.

- Choose the topic
- Generate Ideas
- Scaffold Ideas (include plot, characters, settings, emotion)
- Script and performance development
- Reflect

Stage 1 – Choose the topic

A number of different stimuli can be used to trigger the start of the playbuilding process including nursery rhymes, poems, images, personal experience, or objects (symbol). It is important for a consensus to be reached within the group to ensure a

common focus moves forward into the remaining four stages.

Stage 2 – Generate Ideas

In this stage students discuss/brainstorm what the short piece might be about. They need to begin exploring characters and establish the identities that will be featured. No idea is silly at this stage and all should be explored as long as they focus on the topic agreed upon in Stage 1. Some good activities to assist in this stage include:

- Mime/movement to build physical characterisation and emotional connections
- Bus Stop/ATM role-play to explore relationships
- Hot seating to draw out possible character details

Stage 3 – Scaffold Ideas

In this stage the story needs to begin being shaped with a specific plot and characters identified. The activities undertaken in Stage 2 could be repeated to allow a focused picture and characterisation to be created. Initial role-play based around the agreed focus of a scene will help begin to develop dialogue for the final scripts.

Stage 4 – Script and Performance Development

As the stage title implies, students finalise their script and work on their performance. It is critical in this stage to ensure students remain true to the topic, plot and characters previously generated. Subtle changes can be made, but the basic structure should not.

Step 5 – Reflect

It is important to engage groups in reflection on the playbuilding process. Not all students will have had their ideas included in the final product and discussing with each group their selections (including omissions) is important in fostering understanding of the creative process.

Tableaux – Still Image and Drama

The use of tableaux or 'still image' is an effective way of engaging students in drama. Tableaux can be used as a tool to engage student learning as well as an effective learning experience during or at the end of a unit. It can:

- assist in character exploration
- be an alternative way of engaging with the narrative in texts
- be a way to explore emotion and provide a safe way to demonstrate the resolution of issues
- assist in shaping the development of text and performance in playbuilding
- be an effective way of engaging students with the elements of drama

Put simply, tableaux is a frozen image, like a photograph, where the people are frozen and the picture they make tells a story.

Tableaux as a stimulus or 'starting point' for learning

There are four key ways to stimulate engagement with tableaux.

- Use images from a picture book with a 'known' narrative
- Use general images from a book or elsewhere that suggest a story, but do not have a known narrative
- Draw on a commonly shared experience or event e.g. Birthday party
- Begin with a known emotion

Each of these starting points has its challenges, but all provide an effective way to begin.

Lesson planning hint – Depending on the age or experience you can consider a few different options for tableaux in the classroom. It is useful to begin with students generating a single image as a group before moving into a series of three images. For all of the starting points below, you could begin with the single image then instruct the students to create two more images that fall before, after or around the one they had already done. This allows for the students to engage in character building and narrative generation without requiring the use of dialogue.

Images from a known narrative - Any simple picture book can be used to trigger a tableau or still image activity. Images that have interesting levels and focus as well as a breadth of emotion are good to use. When using images with a known narrative, it is good to select an image part way through the story to allow for extension activities involving multiple tableaux to be engaged more easily.

Example Text – 'Uncle David' by Libby Gleeson has some nice images along with 'Who Sank the Boat' by Pamela Allen

General images

Using general images is a good way to ease students into the use of tableaux, but encourage their thinking of characterisation and narrative. When using general images, it is important to select ones with enough detail and depth to encourage thinking. For students new to this way of working in drama, clear and simple images that suggest a story and characters is helpful to begin. More abstract images could be drawn on later.

Example Text – Jeannie Baker's collage books including 'Mirror', 'Window' and 'Where the Forest Meets the Sea' are good due to the implied story, but lovely detailed images. Information on these books can be found at www.jeanniebaker.com

Commonly Shared Experience

Drawing on a shared experience is an effective way to engage students in thinking about characterisation. When engaging tableaux in this way, it is important to ensure that the topic selected is universal and that all students would have a shared understanding of what it might mean. This is particularly crucial when working with students from various cultures as well as those from bi-lingual or non-English speaking backgrounds. An activity engaging tableaux in this way could also be used to demonstrate different perspectives on known events as a way of celebrating classroom diversity.

Example topics – Birthday party, running race, shopping/supermarket, a wedding

Shared Emotion

Beginning tableaux from a given emotion is fairly difficult, so only students who are comfortable using still images should be encouraged this way. It is a wonderful tool within the playbuilding process as well as an effective way to address issues that may be occurring within the school or classroom community and explore resolution strategies. For that purpose, students would be asked to do a series of still images to represent the emotion of the different groups of people in the scene e.g. friendship group and new student standing alone, as well as a resolution and change in the emotion.

Tableaux across the Curriculum

Create your own picture book – Create a series of tableaux, photograph them and write the text

Soundscape and tableaux – Integrate music and drama through creating a soundscape to accompany a single or series of tableaux images. This can be based on a picture book or novel the class is studying to assist in bringing the text to life.

Education content in this section was developed by Dr Rachel Perry as part of the Monkey Baa Arts Ed: Crossing the Line project.