

PRIMARY DRAMA WORKSHOP

Introduction

Working through drama engages children's imaginations, natural curiosity and creativity, increasing motivation to explore, discover and create, as they bring their prior knowledge, thoughts, feelings and experience to their learning experiences.

Primary Drama Workshop highlights a selection of drama strategies which we hope can empower non-specialist teachers to deliver high-quality learning outcomes which develop:

- *Oracy*: speaking, listening and sharing perspectives
- *Movement skills*: developing physicality and somatic awareness
- *Social skills*: sharing ideas, planning, negotiating and working collaboratively
- *Vocabulary*: exploring and extending language in a range of contexts
- *Empathy and emotional intelligence*: stepping into a drama and thinking, feeling and acting from different perspectives
- *Imagining and creating*: finding forms that give expression to new ideas
- *Wellbeing*: providing space and a place to acknowledge where children are and what they need and want to express

The *Primary Drama Workshop* videos and accompanying frameworks suggest ways in which drama can be incorporated into cross-curricular approaches to learning, with activities that support study across a broad range of topics: traditional stories, history, geography, RSHE (PSHE), technology and science.

Beginning drama work

The videos, frameworks and these notes are designed to equip non-specialist teachers working with 7 to 11 year olds to begin using drama in their classrooms.

We aim to provide simple activities that will build confidence, skills and understanding of how to plan and run drama activities with your pupils. All of the approaches featured can be adapted for other subject focuses.

These Notes focus on the key drama strategies we used in the *Primary Drama Workshop* videos, outlining how to set up and run each activity and the thinking behind why they are effective.

The activities provide structures and processes through which pupils can explore their creative responses to the dramatic context. They ask children to draw on their prior knowledge, connect to their own experiences and imagine and create within the imagined world.

If you are new to working through drama try experimenting with one or two short activities first to see what happens. Notice how your pupils respond and reflect on how you can set up and run the activity effectively.

You can always stop what you're doing at any time. You can discuss what has happened with the children, thinking about what you have discovered and what questions you have that will shape future drama work.

Discussion and reflection are key: talk before and after the activities allows children to share their ideas and listen to each other's perspectives.

Drama is all about 'stepping into' a fictional context, embodying physically and speaking and thinking as the characters within the imagined world. This could be in an activity that lasts a few minutes - to bring something alive briefly in a lesson - or in extended dramas that evolve over a series of sessions.

Many of the drama strategies suggested slow down action and ask children to notice and interrogate what is happening in a particular moment. Teachers are often deterred from using drama because of concerns that children will become unfocused and difficult to manage. Using rich stimuli and simple, clear tasks that ask pupils to use their imaginations, invent, create and question, can result in powerful, collaborative learning experiences.

Sequencing activities

The approaches outlined have been designed to build depth over a range of different activities. We have structured the sessions to build context first: creating the world of the drama, before moving into more complex, exploratory activities.

However, the frameworks and resources provided are flexible and teachers can adapt them to a range of learning contexts.

Foregrounding pupils' experience and responses

The activities demonstrated in the videos are tightly structured and present the children with tasks that have clear parameters. Within these constraints - eg the historical period, the chosen story, or limiting dialogue in a scene - the aim is to enable children to bring their thoughts, feelings and responses to the imagined world and the freedom to imagine and create in response to the stimulus.

Teachers new to the drama strategies may choose to keep close to the scripts and resources provided at first. As you build confidence listen to what the children bring into the drama and respond to what they find compelling. Listening to the children's contributions will show you where to take the work next.

Individual, pairs, small group and whole class activities allow children to both follow what resonates for them personally and share and explore other perspectives, working collaboratively for complexity and depth.

Acknowledgements

These Teacher Notes and the accompanying frameworks and resources are by Cath Greenwood. Cath has worked in theatre and drama education for over 30 years. She was Learning Associate at the Unicorn Theatre for 15 years, has collaborated with the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) on a number of CPD training programmes for teachers and is currently working on *Story Seekers*, a KS2 collaboration between the National Theatre and the Unicorn Theatre, developing oracy through storytelling.

Additionally we would like to acknowledge the contribution of drama practitioners Sam Adams and Nicola Chambers, as well as that of teachers Jane McCarthy and Sarah Lewis.

Particular thanks to our four teachers who took part in the filming - Alana, Charlotte, Isabella and Rob - who rose to the challenge of running the drama sessions, and to all the schools and pupils taking part.

Featured drama strategies

Still image (Freeze frames)

Creating a frozen moment of action - like a statue or a photograph - allows children to capture their thoughts and feelings in a distilled moment. This is a controlled form of expression, giving form to their creative ideas and crystallising meaning.

Children use body language and facial expressions in their construction of a still image, enabling them to tune into the thoughts and feelings of a character in a particular moment.

Responding to images pupils have created will help build confidence in what they are doing. Noticing how they use their body, the angle of the head, their facial expressions, will help children understand what it is they are communicating to an 'audience' or outside eye. How well they are showing the moment, character or setting and what it is they are doing that makes their image effective.

You can model for children before you begin - eg showing the class how you might become someone 'lost in a forest' or 'waiting to be called into the head teacher's office.'

Still image and *Freeze frames* form the building blocks of many activities in our frameworks: - eg *Story Whoosh*, *Scene making* and *Five point narrative*. We have introduced teachers and pupils to still images through the game *Stop and Go*.

Stop and Go

Playing *Stop and Go* at the beginning of a session is a great way to first build focus and concentration with your class before moving on to build the context of your future drama work through the introduction of the characters and settings.

Start with pupils moving around the room, being aware of where others are and working together to cover the floor area evenly.

Introduce the *Stop and Go* instructions and work towards stopping and moving as a whole class at the same time. Next introduce the instructions 'Jump!' and 'Clap!' and work for the class to jump and clap in unison.

If children walk around in friendship groups you could ask them to walk a pathway of the initials of their name. Or explain that you need to imagine the floor is balanced on a pin in the centre and that in order to keep the floor balanced you need to be evenly spread.

Remind the children that when you say 'Stop!' the aim is to be as still as a statue - so balancing on one foot won't help! Notice the children who are doing it really well - eg 'You look like you've been turned to stone'.

You can then reverse the instructions. When you say 'Stop!' the children should 'Go!', etc. This requires the children to be even more focused after enjoying the fun of initially getting it wrong.

Once the structure of the game is established the game is then used to begin to imagine the world of your drama as you introduce key characters, settings or concepts in the drama - eg 'Show me a King', or 'A child lost in a forest', or 'In groups of three become an angry storm cloud', or 'A family waiting to be let into the workhouse'.

You can ask pupils to create individual still images or work in groups of a number you call out. You can even make an image as a whole class.

Now and again ask the children to look at what others are doing and notice how they have interpreted the character, or how they have worked in a group to solve a creative challenge - eg like making 'The heavy door in the palace being closed and locked.'

Asking pupils to transform as you count down from five to zero will help to develop movement skills. Stories, myths and folktales are full of creatures that can shape-shift, turning from one thing into another.

Thought-tracking

Thought-tracking is a useful way of accessing a character's thoughts and feelings at a particular moment. If children present a short scene, or have created a still image, you can stop the work and focus on a particular character.

Put your hand on their shoulder and ask the child to speak the character's thoughts out loud. Children may start to say 'She's thinking...' Help them to rephrase what they are saying in the first person ('I'm thinking...') so that they are speaking *as* the character, rather than *about* them.

If the class are all creating the same moment - eg the miller blurting out a lie to impress the King - you can thought-track a number of children, or even the whole class. Hearing multiple perspectives will build and deepen the moment. All contributions can be 'true', however contradictory - eg it is possible for someone to be scared and excited at the same time.



Film 1. Pupils in Glasgow use a Story Whoosh to present the climax of their drama based on the story of Rumpelstiltskin.

When you have heard a child's initial thoughts you can ask follow up questions that allow them to improvise and invent more meaning in the moment - eg 'Have you been in the presence of the King before? What did you feel when he approached you? What do you think might happen now?'

Story Whoosh

A *Story Whoosh* is a way of acting out a story with the whole class and allows you to see the main narrative, action and characters in broad brush strokes.

Go around the circle with each child taking part in turn. This makes it an accessible and inclusive activity, with all the children contributing and no one child being the main character. The teacher takes an active narrator / director role, supporting the children in their creation of the images.

The *Story Whoosh* needs to be broken down into clear moments of action. In our frameworks we have highlighted in bold when a new character, place or object is needed.

Invite children in turn around the circle to show the moment described and at the end of each scene / moment 'Whoosh!' them back into their seats and move onto the next children around the circle.

A *Story Whoosh* aims to tell the story in broad brush strokes, to give a sense of the overall narrative. Children are free to create in the moment and explore their responses in a playful, unpressured way.

You can also take your time and really slow down moments, asking the children to reflect on what is happening and what that tells us about the characters.

You can anticipate children in the circle who you think might be more comfortable with a smaller, less challenging role. They may be more comfortable making the forest of trees, or the birds looking on. However, less confident children often enjoy the opportunity to briefly be the main character and centre of attention in this supported structure.

Always read a *Story Whoosh* before you run it with your class so that you are clear of the narrative and can imagine in advance how the children might bring the moment to life.

You are narrator and director - telling the story as well as helping children into the moment. Try not to physically move the children, but you might want to help 'stage' moments a little - eg 'Let's have the trees of the forest here and the fire set to one side so that we can see the messenger hiding and watching the imp dancing and singing.'

You can ask children to create still pictures, or ask children to act out what is happening. When you say 'Freeze!' they hold the image.

Note what children are doing and showing and offer encouragement to foster confidence and commitment.

Adding dialogue at key moments can be useful. You can read the dialogue first and ask the children to speak it after you, or you can pre-prepare lines of dialogue to hand to children. You can also ask children to improvise - eg 'What might your character say at this point?'

Story Whoosh can be highly effective with EAL children, particularly where there is repetition in the script, as there is with *Rumplestiltskin*.

Many teachers return to a *Story Whoosh* more than once. This helps the class to develop their skills at creating a story together and hone and deepen their understanding of the narrative.

Story Whoosh was first developed by Joe Winstone at the Royal Shakespeare Company where he employed it to make the complex storylines of Shakespeare plays clear and accessible to pupils of all ages.

Some teachers call this collective story telling strategy a *Story Square*, with children sitting around the carpet in their classroom.

Vivian Gussin-Paley developed a process of whole class story acting in the early years setting where she worked. Her focus was on children creating and telling their own stories to a member of staff, which was then acted out by the class. She ensured that each story was read exactly as the child had told it to a member of staff. This gave the children agency, affirming their idea of what a story was.

Teacher in role

Teacher in role is an effective way of developing depth by joining the children in the drama in what is a whole class improvisation. When everyone is in the imagined world together the teacher is able to play alongside the children, asking questions and challenging thoughts and feelings from inside the story.

The teacher in role is able to give out information, pose problems, identify dilemmas, and help the pupils in the drama imagine possible future courses of action.

An obvious role for a teacher to play is an authority figure. In our *Victorian childhood* framework the teacher is in role as the housekeeper or butler in the Manor House.

This high status role allows the teacher to provide information about the Manor House and the rules that must be observed. The role can act as a guide but also make demands on the newly employed servants.



Film 2. The teachers adopt the roles of butler and housekeeper to check the cleanliness of the new employees at the Victorian Manor House.

Another effective role is someone with lower status, who doesn't know something, who is lost, or is anxious and needs help. This gives children more power in the drama, allowing them to be experts and use their experience, understanding and knowledge to help the teacher in role.

For example, the teacher could be a child on their first day in a new school and the children are able to guide and support the new child. The children can also empathise and help with the teacher in role's feelings of being new and in unfamiliar surroundings.

Children who are less confident with 'performing' can be liberated in *Teacher in role* and *Children in role* work. Engaging imaginatively in the drama without the pressure of being watched, they may not be vocal, but are often actively participating, observing what is happening and thinking from a different perspective.

The teacher in role can ask less confident, quieter children, direct questions from within the drama. The children are not performing, or being stared at: they are in it together and open questions can allow them to develop and give expression to their thoughts, feelings and understandings.

The teacher in role is a playwright in the moment - selecting what part of the story to place next, assessing what the children are interested in exploring further or what might challenge or extend their thinking.

While *Teacher in role* does require you to take on a character it is not about performing. A piece of costume may help 'sign' when you are in role, and you could use a different vocal register and body language to draw the children into the situation or dilemma.

However, what is most important is that you speak and think from the perspective of the character and play the truth of the situation.

You can start with a really brief *Teacher in role* that only needs to last a few minutes as together you establish the rules of the game.

Try a simple role and focus on how you can interact with the children with the aim of eliciting their ideas, thoughts and feelings through questioning, finding out what they understand about the situation and perhaps asking for their advice.

Teacher in role is particularly associated with drama pioneer Dorothy Heathcote and the process drama of Cecily O'Neill, among others.

Dorothy Heathcote went on to develop *Mantle of the expert* in which pupils take on a role as experts working for a client and an extended drama evolves over a number of sessions as pupils fulfil tasks presented by the client. Pupils' 'Expert' roles might be journalists at a climate conference, web developers asked to create apps to support the deaf and hearing impaired community, staff at a donkey sanctuary, or - as in our Ancient Egypt framework - archaeologists working on an excavation.

Process drama also aims to immerse pupils in an extended drama where the emphasis is on a process of discovery, rather than on a performance. Participants take on roles that are needed for the exploration of the subject matter. The attitude of a particular role is more important than the idea of characterisation.

Writing in role

Once pupils have inhabited a role introducing a writing task allows them to develop their character and deepen their investment in the drama. This should be part of the dramatic action, rather than a writing exercise, as children invent more detail about a particular moment in time. They can write details of their backstory or imagine future possibilities in the drama - eg they might write a letter sharing a secret, which they know will have consequences.

You may ask pupils to write a diary entry which gives them the chance to express private thoughts that their character doesn't share with others.

Or they could write to a close friend or relative - maybe someone they can be honest with, or someone they are trying to protect from the truth.

They could also write more formal letters - eg in our *Victorian childhood* scheme, after attending the meeting about reforming child labour laws, they could write a letter persuading their MP of the need for action.

When they have finished ask them to underline one line that they are happy to share with the rest of the class. Gather these together and ask each pupil to read the line they have chosen. Hearing something from everyone will build a collective sense of this moment in the drama - of the multiple perspectives, thoughts and feelings that have been imagined.

Scene making

This strategy requires pupils to work in small groups to combine their creative ideas to shape a short scene.

First set them the task - eg creating the scene in a Victorian family after an accident in the cotton mill. Give the groups time to improvise their initial ideas.



Film 3. Pupils work on the still pictures that will form part of their Five point narrative exploring the excavation of Tutankhamun's burial tomb.

Once pupils have shared their ideas ask them to practise starting and ending their scene with a still image, so that they clearly show what is happening between the characters.

Then ask the groups to limit the dialogue to a maximum of two lines per character. This will ensure that they have to work together to decide the best way of communicating what is most important in their scene.

The constraints of the task - starting and ending with a still image and limiting dialogue - help keep pupils focused on their collaborative decision making.

Five point narrative

This activity asks pupils to work in small groups to create a simple narrative in still images and movement. In our framework *The Enchanted Forest* the task is for children to decide their five most important moments in the story and to bring them to life.

In the *Ancient Egypt* framework the task is more challenging as pupils are asked to invent their narrative based on factual information they have been given about the excavation of the tomb of Tutankhamun. Groups start by creating five still images that depict the main moments they want to show.

Next they are asked to find a way to transition in slow motion from the first image to the second, the third, etc. As they rehearse in their groups you can count them down - giving a count of 5 for the slow motion transitions and a count of 3 when they hold their still images.

Play some instrumental music as they are rehearsing to underscore their movement pieces.

Extension

Once pupils have created this simple movement piece there are ways they can extend and develop it. This can be useful if you have children working at a different pace or levels of complexity; if a group needs an additional challenge you can ask them to add more elements to their piece.

You can ask groups to bring to life their five moments adding action and one or two lines of dialogue for each character.

Groups can give their piece, or each scene, a title. They can write these on strips of paper and hold them as banners or ask a member of the group to introduce each moment with their title.

They can also choose one or more of their group to become a narrator, speaking directly to the audience to offer details that they think will enhance their story. The narrator can be a neutral 'storytelling' figure, or they can be someone with a particular perspective or vested interest - eg the miller's daughter could narrate the story of *Rumpelstiltskin*.

Conscience alley

Conscience alley allows pupils to explore a moment of dilemma by voicing a character's inner thoughts at a moment of decision.

The alley is created by arranging the class in two lines facing each other. The children who form the walls of the alley speak aloud the thoughts of a character in a moment of doubt or hesitation. One pupil is asked to represent that character and, as they slowly walk down the alley, the rest of the class speak the character's inner thoughts.

Creating a physical representation of the walls of the alley helps to visualise the moment of dilemma and bring it to life. The activity has the effect of slowing down time, creating a heightened moment during which the children can reflect on different points of view.

You can structure the activity so one side of the corridor articulates all the reasons *for* a particular course of action and the other side the reasons *against* it.

In our *Ancient Egypt* framework we have highlighted the decision of the archaeologist to break open the sealed wall to the tomb of Tutankhamun; in the *Victorian childhood* scheme the *Conscience alley* is used to reflect on the decision of the servant to enter a meeting on reforming child labour laws.

A *Conscience alley* can be employed in many drama contexts - eg someone deciding whether to buy some expensive trainers, or someone deciding whether to enlist in the army in 1914. It is helpful for pupils to discuss first - in pairs or small groups - all of the reasons for or against a particular course of action before setting up and running a *Conscience alley*.

Dream sequence

This activity can be used as a summation of the work pupils have done throughout a drama scheme and is an opportunity for them to draw on all the content and drama strategies they have already explored. The intention is for this task to be very open, allowing pupils to interpret and explore whatever has most appealed to them in the topic.

A *Dream sequence* releases the children from the constraints of reality and they can allow their imaginations to invent freely.

Discuss with the class the nature of dreams and how they are often surreal: there is no need for logic. Things, people and places can transform - anything can happen!

Then remind pupils of the different drama skills they have developed - eg still image, transformation in slow motion, bringing still images to life, naturalistic scenes with dialogue, a chorus of overlapping voices in the *Conscience alley*.

Being an audience

Responding to the work pupils have created is an important part of the process; reflecting on the choices they have made, what has interested them in the drama and how they have chosen to communicate their ideas to an audience or outside eye.

You can suggest a question for the class to think about when watching each other's work. This can be as simple as asking what they liked about another groups' work; or it could be more focused - eg 'Look out for what their scene tells us about how the adults feel about the children going back to work in the coal mine tomorrow.'