



Drama – key teaching points

Drama needs to be explicitly taught in its own right and can also be used as a tool for understanding in subjects across the curriculum.

Drama provides many opportunities for children to use heritage languages and knowledge of a range of cultures to experiment with styles of speaking, gesture and mime.

When teaching children to participate in performance:

- develop characters through movement, use of voice and facial expressions, dialogue and interaction with other characters;
- use space and grouping, props and different ways to adapt to an audience;
- create dramatic effects through music, lighting, sounds, costume, make-up and scenery;
- develop understanding of how to act out plots, dramatising the problem, climax and resolution;
- provide opportunities for rehearsing, polishing and presenting plays for performance.

When reflecting on work in progress as well as evaluating at the end:

- use appropriate technical vocabulary;
- encourage discussion of the meaning of the drama and how this is created in speech and action;
- prompt comparisons of dramas on a similar theme, contrasting dramatisations of stories or events with original texts or recounts.

Extend children's understanding of drama by:

- going to live performances and viewing a range of plays on screen;
- talking about how theatrical effects are achieved;
- collecting and considering reviews, programme notes and advertisements and relating these to what they have seen.

Using the convention of teacher in role

- Teacher in role involves taking on some aspects of a character in the situation being explored. Sometimes this may be signalled by changing voice or putting on a piece of clothing (such as a scarf for a pirate). Alternatively, use a convention such as standing in or out of a circle, holding an item or clapping to signal moving in or out of role. Working in role can be a way of challenging children's ideas and influencing their thinking without stopping the drama.

Primary National Strategy

Speaking, Listening, Learning:
working with children in Key Stages 1 and 2

Drama – making it work in the classroom

To develop their skills in drama, children need to learn to:

- improvise and work in role, creating and sustaining roles both individually and when working with others;
- script and perform plays and stories using language and actions to express and convey situations, characters and emotions;
- respond to their own and others' performances, commenting constructively on dramatic effects, characterisation and overall impact.

When teaching drama, remember to:

- model language which is appropriate to the role, context and theme;
- challenge children to move beyond the familiar and everyday;
- build in time to reflect on both the meaning of the drama and how it is enacted;
- structure activities in a unit of work to build both children's skills in drama and work in role, and their understanding of themes and ideas;
- vary the techniques used so that children develop a repertoire and make progress in performance, working in role and evaluation;
- establish ground rules for drama sessions so that children have a clear framework within which to create roles, explore movement or develop scenarios.

Freeze frames

Freeze frames are still images or silent tableaux used to illustrate a specific incident or event. They are useful for enabling close scrutiny of an incident or situation. Individual children or groups are asked to represent the characters at a significant moment. Freeze frames can be improvised or planned briefly. Positioning and body shape have to be considered carefully in order to represent ideas or emotions. Freeze frames also help establish roles by giving children thinking time. Sequential frames can be used to represent the key events as a narrative progresses. Freeze frames can be brought to life through improvisation or used as the basis for thought tracking.

Conscience alley

Conscience or decision alley is a means of exploring a character's mind at a moment of crisis and of investigating the complexity of the decision they are facing.

The class create two lines facing each other. One child in role as a particular character walks down the 'alley' between the lines. Children voice the character's thoughts, both for and against a particular decision or action that the character is facing, acting as his/her conscience. The child in role listens to his conscience before making a decision about the course of action to take.

Forum theatre

Forum theatre allows an incident or event to be seen from different points of view, making it a very useful strategy for examining alternative ideas. A small group acts out a scene while the rest of the class watch them. The class work as directors of the group in role, e.g. asking them to act or speak in a different way, suggesting that a character might behave differently, questioning the characters in role, or suggesting an alternative interpretation for what is happening.

Meetings

The teacher in role, perhaps as an official, can call a meeting for the whole class to attend. Meetings enable information to be shared with the whole group so that a group decision can be made about the situation they face. Meetings encourage children to adopt a collective role, e.g. as islanders or Romans, which can help less confident children. Meetings used at the start of a drama can be an efficient way of creating roles or focusing on a problem.

Working in role – useful classroom techniques

Thought tracking

This is a good technique for creating and then examining the private thoughts of characters at particularly tense moments of a narrative. It focuses on the characters in a freeze frame, or those from an ongoing drama where the action has been frozen. It involves the rest of the class contributing ideas as if they were speaking the thoughts of one of the characters. These can support or contrast with the words that the characters actually say. The class makes a circle around the character and says their thoughts one at a time, or individual children can stand next to the frozen character and speak their thoughts aloud.

Hot-seating

Hot-seating focuses closely on a character and enables motivation to be explored. It is also a good way of exploring the gaps in a character's story. Hot-seating involves the class in asking questions of someone in role as a character, fictional or historical, who sits in the 'hot-seat'. The questions can be prepared or improvised. This works best if both the role player and the questioners are familiar with the character and the narrative or situation.

Paired improvisation

This strategy helps to get children quickly into a drama. Pairs are given roles or agree them for themselves. They begin a dialogue on a signal, making the conversation up, in role as the characters, as they go along.

Flashbacks and flash forwards

These strategies are effective for getting children to focus on the consequences of action rather than on the action itself. They help avoid the full-scale battle scene, for example! They encourage reflection and discussion. They stop the dramatic action and require the children to refocus on something that happened before, which may have caused a particular event, or happened later, perhaps as a consequence of the action. Other strategies, such as freeze frames, may be used to create the flashback from the perspective of different people or characters.

