

School Worksheet: **Drama based ideas and activities**

Prepared by Anna Sutton - Level 5 Professional Tutor

Many of the drama activities below are tried and tested or adapted from a range of practitioners. Most are suitable for groups but may be adapted for one-to-one learning situations.

Drama workshop games tend to be played in a circle so that all participants can see one another and feel included in the activity. It is always acceptable for a participant to decline a turn and a signal may be agreed at the start of the session. Ensure there is adequate space for the movement-based activities.

The structure of a Drama Session usually includes an introductory activity such as an Ice-breaker game, followed by a physical/vocal and mental warm up activity, then a subject focus/group work involving a collaborative activity and a cool down or reflective activity.

Drama as a learning medium, not as a subject

The power of playful learning and an opportunity for active learning.

My experience as a drama teacher highlighted the enjoyment and motivation learners of all ages experience when staging a production or interacting in drama-based activities. Drama is a powerful means of communication and as an active teaching and learning medium. Barriers to the text can be reduced and opportunities to experiment with the text and make discoveries can be extremely powerful for learners, as the teacher acts as a guide or facilitator.

The medium of drama is an opportunity to engage with the tangible world of the story without having to decode the written text so that immediate connection with the content can be made.



In its essence, the very speaking of a text aloud can be empowering and enable understanding and support memory.

Drama can be about the story world and making it tangible, collective enjoyment and an oral / visual / active experience of language. It is an opportunity to 'feel' a word through the voice and movement.

Going to the theatre in itself can bring a text to life and aid comprehension.

Reading on the move

Movement while reading or speaking can make language tangible and promote the feeling of 'not being pinned down'. For example, walking and reading a sentence from a book and then turning sharply in an opposite direction at every full stop or punctuation mark. This can be very powerful in communicating the pace and emotion of prose and poetry as it literally physicalises the sentence. It may also support memory and develop vocabulary.

Getting to grips with reading: using mime

For those who find reading difficult, pairing up with a participant who is willing to read the text can be empowering. The non-reader must respond by miming facial expressions, moving and using gestures to communicate the words and phrases spoken by the reader.

This may be performed to an audience referring to the reader and non-reader as the Narrator and Performer. This activity can be applied to almost any text and can help to reinforce vocabulary and comprehension so that the on-reader may develop confidence to read the text in future work.

Vocabulary / Word Game

Word Tennis or Wind Ping Pong:

This is a word-association game. A topic can be selected relating to the interests of the group or to a curriculum subject e.g. volcanoes, photosynthesis, electricity, the Tudors etc.. Suitable for any age group.

This works effectively as a paired game or as a team game.

Players have to keep retrieving a word in the chosen category and it is 'batted' back and fore.

If a word is repeated, unrelated or there is the player can't think of a suitable word, then they are out or the next player steps in to continue. You could provide a timer or a word limit for each category and be ready to change the category.

A great active revision game for those preparing for exams.

Storytelling

Catch a Story:

Tell a story by passing a ball to other participants. An active game for developing story sequencing, sentence construction and creative ideas.

Sit in a circle on the floor. The first person holding the ball begins the story. He/She begins by providing the first sentence of the story then chooses another person, from an opposite side of the circle, and rolls the ball to the next person. That person continues the story by adding another sentence and so on until the story is complete.

This can be adapted so that each person gives a single word rather than a sentence which is suitable in a one-to-one learning situation.



Props in a box:

This activity may be used in a one-to-one situation or with a group. Select three props e.g. a bunch of flowers, a saucepan and a hat.

Tell a story using the three props. This activity can be adapted to link to a well-known story or to develop creative writing ideas. The box could even be Long

John Silver's Treasure Chest, Pandora's Box or a Jewellery box! Possibilities are endless.

Freeze Frames or Active Story -Boarding:

A group activity that can bring a story to life through pictures and creating scenes. Select a story that has been studied in class or select a story theme.

One or two people play the part of director and 'sculpt' a series of freeze-frames (10 maximum) to re-tell the story.

The other players are directed where to stand in the scene, what facial expression to hold, how to stand etc.. This is a still life image - no need for dialogue. A series of freeze-frames are created for each key moment in the story.

When completed the frames are demonstrated to the group - minus explanation. The audience in the group are prompted to ask questions and re-tell what they have seen. The director and performers respond to their interpretations and discuss how it could be developed to communicate effectively with their audience.

Photographs can be taken of each scene and used as a memory aid for a class-based activity involving writing the story at a later date. Also, captions may be written during the devising process to go with each frame or a narrator can begin to retell the story. A play may emerge as more dialogue is added over time. It can be as simple or detailed as the group want it to be.

I have used this approach with a variety of age groups over the years from re-telling a fairy tale story, developing pantomime, presenting the key dramatic moments in a Shakespeare play and even performing the processes in a chemical reaction. It is active, interactive, creative and memorable with opportunities for developing language, vocabulary and storytelling skills.



Getting to grips with character

A range of drama-based activities can be implemented to develop comprehension and stimulate a writing activity.

For example: A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens.

1. Start by asking the participants to walk and move as different types of character in the story:

- A rich person
- A poor person
- A miserly person
- A hungry person
- A ghost
- A well-fed person
- A bully
- A victim
- A beggar



2. As they move ask them to add a voice to their movement and think of a phrase the character might say e.g. Scrooge: 'Bah Humbug!'

3. Next, they must add a gesture to express that character e.g. rubbing hands together

4. Develop the characters with a simple interaction. For example, a rich person meets a hungry person - what happens next?

5. Encourage the participants to think about the story. Where would such a meeting take place? Which characters might perform them? Name badges could be added to the actors for the specific characters once decided.

6. The participants are encouraged to write down words, emotions and simple sentences that they identify with the characters before them. This could be recorded in a variety of formats or recorded on a voice recorder then replayed to aid recording as sometimes ideas can be forgotten.

7. The activity may be developed to include description or labelled diagrams of a suggested costume for the character and a prop.

Working Memory and Number

Fuzz Buzz:

A great game for concentration, multiple recall and working memory. The players stand in a circle or this can be played with students seated.

Each person counts numbers clockwise, except for:

Any number that is a multiple of 3, which becomes 'Fuzz'

Any number that is a multiple of 5, which becomes 'Buzz'

Any number that is a multiple of 3 and 5 (like 15) becomes 'Fuzz Buzz'.

This game can be adapted to include a range of number patterns and sequences.

Useful Resources

David Farmer has a useful website with a wide range of drama based activities. This also includes links to his publications. www.dramaresource.com

Anna Scher and Charles Verrall (1990) '100+ Ideas for Drama'. Heinemann Educational Books. Suffolk.

The Royal Shakespeare Company have produced a range of active approaches to enable children and young adults to bring Shakespeare's Plays alive in the classroom. This arose from their manifesto 'Stand Up For Shakespeare' which encouraged children and young people to do Shakespeare on their feet and see it live. www.rsc.org.uk/education

Mantle of the Expert: an approach for making learning active and imaginative as learners play the part of 'experts' in imagined situations. www.mantleoftheexpert.com