



## Learning Objectives

- to expand the use of drama strategies and processes beyond the use of warm-ups and drama games in the classroom;
- to understand the potential role of drama-rich pedagogy across the curriculum; and
- to develop confidence and expertise in planning and embedding a range of drama strategies and devices to enhance deep learning and understanding.

## 1 Introduction

Drama is a discipline that must have its place in the formal curriculum in its own right. At the same time, drama-rich strategies can be powerfully employed across the Key Learning Areas as critical, quality pedagogy (Ewing 2019, 2006). Drama can also enhance students' social and emotional well-being.

Yet, while drama has been acknowledged as an important medium for learning (particularly in English, language and literacy) for decades (see, for example, Moffett 1968; McMaster 1998; Winner et al. 2013), many teachers lack confidence in using drama in the classroom. Some of this can be attributed to the way drama has traditionally been marginalised in contemporary syllabus documents and the dearth of drama professional learning in teacher education. Often teachers carry their own baggage about drama: negative memories of school performances in which they, like many of their peers, wafted in the background as trees, the wind, waves in the ocean or other peripheral items while those with 'talent' performed main roles up front. Still others feel that the importance of drama is limited to games that can provide useful transition activities 5 minutes before the bell or when their students need a break in between 'real work'. Many don't use drama for any substantive activity. A few, while acknowledging that drama is important, feel constrained by

the current emphasis on literacy and numeracy in a reductive curriculum that privileges high-stakes testing. They lament there is no time in the crowded curriculum for the creative use of drama in learning. Finally, some teachers feel hesitant because they believe they will not be able to control the outcomes or because there may not be a written artefact as substantive evidence of learning. These responses to the place of drama in the intended curriculum are a sad indictment of the approach to curriculum that currently predominates in many western education systems.

This chapter demonstrates that drama-rich pedagogy fosters students' already rich imaginations and encourages the 'Cs' or capabilities of creative and critical thinking. While many teachers see a place for drama in English—it is a sophisticated tool for building decoding, vocabulary, syntactic, discourse and metacognitive skills—drama can and should play a central role in all Key Learning Areas enabling children to explore a range of meanings, concepts, cultural assumptions, social dilemmas and issues and develop confidence in their own identities. It encourages collaboration, problem-solving and reflection. Drama can be thought of as a metaphor for bending time and space to create a place for exploratory interactions, dialogues and representations out of which new thoughts, ideas, possibilities and ways of looking/seeing the world can emerge.

The opportunity to explore an imagined context enables us to suspend our real-world persona to make meanings from a range of other perspectives (Bolton 1984). This chapter provides several exemplars in which drama processes and strategies have provided starting points for units of work across the Arts and other KLAs. The power of drama to engage students in creative thinking and problem-solving across other curriculum areas and to help them make emotional connections is demonstrated through evidence of changed student responses to learning and improved thinking and literacy outcomes. Engagement, for example, is identified as a critical element in most frameworks that have been developed to define quality learning and teaching (see for example, Newmann and Associates' authentic pedagogy, 1996; Productive Pedagogies developed by Education Queensland, 2001; and, the NSWDET, quality teaching model, 2003).

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## 2 Defining Drama-Rich Pedagogy

In using the term 'drama-rich' pedagogy we advocate the use of artistic and creative drama processes to deepen and enhance social and emotional well-being, resilience and engagement in learning (Ewing 2019). A range of other terms can be used from 'process drama' (O'Neill 1995) to 'relational pedagogy' (Prentki and Stinson 2016). All can be positioned under the Creative Body-Based Learning umbrella (Garrett et al. 2019) or whole-person learning (Smith 1994). The emphasis is on imaginative and reflective processes, especially embodiment and enactment and the development of personal agency rather than on a culminating final performance (although the process itself, may, and indeed often, lead to some kind of performance—although this may be rather low key). A range of strategies adapted from those used in theatre including sculpture, role walking, role-play, depiction, still image or

tableau, improvisation, mime, thought-tracking, hot-seating or questioning in role, play-building, mantle or enactment of the expert, conscience alley (Ewing and Simons 2016; Ewing and Saunders 2016) can be used to explore a problem, a situation, a theme or a series of related ideas or themes. Walking in someone else's shoes can be seen as the essence of this approach.

As discussed earlier, many teachers feel unsure about what counts as drama. In a broad sense, drama uses our ability to imagine that we are someone or something else. It is about suspending our disbelief for a time and pretending this imagined being/event or thing is real, so that we can explore other perspectives, motivation or situations through language, movement and space. Educational drama activities can help students understand how important it is to interrogate the many messages they receive through words and images. Any ideology, or particular way of looking at the world, can be contested because it is only one world view of many (Smith and Lovat 2003). These ideologies are always embedded in our language practices and in the teacher and students themselves. Drama activities help us challenge the taken for granted in our worlds and explore other possibilities.

► **Activity**

*Teacher Alan Blackwood (2009) thinks about educational drama as having three main areas:*

- *the physical self using creative movement and mime;*
- *the speaking self focusing on voice and speech including projection, tone and pitch; and*
- *role-play and play-building.*

*Is this a useful way to thinking about embedding drama strategies in your classroom?*

Blackwood (2009) advocates beginning from wherever the children are, using your own particular teaching strengths and establishing firm rules for ensuring the class stays well managed; the importance of positive feedback; and beginning sessions with physical warm-up and ending with winding down or debriefing.

The most important components of drama, that is, role, focus, tension and symbol, are discussed briefly in the next section together with some commonly used drama strategies. For more details about these, please refer to Haseman and O'Toole (2017); Miller and Saxton (2004, 2016); Ewing and Simons (2016); Ewing and Saunders (2016).

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### **3 Components or Elements of Drama**

#### **Role: Stepping into Another's Shoes**

By taking on someone else's character or ideas, you can start to see things from another perspective and this is at the heart of drama. The first level of role as

described by Morgan and Saxton (1987) is *dramatic play*. Young children seem to naturally take on roles in their early dramatic play. As one grandparent recently commented:

*While at the cafe waiting for their milkshakes, three year old Jake and four year old Asher morphed into waiters and chefs without any obvious transition. They happily took our extensive orders and retired behind a nearby vacant table to prepare our requests and then serve us.*

Morgan and Saxton (1987) list four other ‘levels’ of role that build on this dramatic play:

- *Mantle of the expert* (sometimes known as ‘enactment’ of the expert) where students are given expert status to explore a phenomenon. They might be en-rolled as architects designing better use of their school playground space or zoo assessors evaluating the care of the animals.
- *Role-play* involves adopting someone else’s opinion or attitude—not necessarily any of their personal characteristics or manner. At this level students might be asked, for example, to take on the views of an ardent climate change activist or a person who thinks climate change is a fiction—a very relevant debate.
- *Characterisation* is a more deliberate attempt to explore the signs and symbols of a particular character—how might a wicked stepmother walk and how would she speak to her lowly stepdaughter Cinderella.
- *Acting* is a more refined performance after some rehearsal to ensure a particular character is authentically represented through voice, gesture, movement, dress, etc.

## Focus

There needs to be a worthwhile point or reason for planning educational drama activities. What are the important concepts, themes or understandings that you would like to address? Anticipated outcomes can be framed as a key question that may provide a useful starting point and may also infer tension.

Some examples we have used effectively include:

- *What does ‘happily ever after’ really mean?*
- *What does reconciliation look like?*
- *What does it feel like to be a refugee?*

## Tension

Life has many competing forces/conflicts/dilemmas. Some kinds of tensions engage learners in drama activities. This does not need to be a surprising or highly energetic

moment in process drama in the classroom. Rather, it can be about finding a way to postpone the resolution to explore the gaps in the text (Bolton 1984) or the ‘spaces’ (Williams 1987) and ‘places’ (Gleeson 2007) to play.

**Symbol** is the use of one thing to represent another and often at a number of different levels. Any symbol may carry different meanings for different individuals. An object, a word, a colour, a ritualised way of moving may all come to have a shared meaning. In one kindergarten classroom, the farmer’s question *How goes the work?* became a catch cry of the teacher’s to find out how the children were progressing on a task after they had embodied the poor oppressed duck in *Farmer Duck* (Martin Waddell and Helen Oxenbury 1991).

## Warming Up with Drama Games and Strategies

Drama games are often used as ice breakers to establish a rapport in a new group, as warm-ups for a lesson or as a game or exercise to fill in time. While these can be fun for students and can provide a useful starting point for creating a trusting classroom community, Ewing and Simons (2016) have expressed concern that often drama stops here. It seems more pertinent to use icebreakers, warm-ups and games that align with the unit of work being undertaken. Suggestions for these have been included in the units below.

## Embodiment

There is much to be said for using our bodies to develop a closer understanding of the meanings of particular words, sayings or images.

In beginning a unit of study on Nadia Wheatley’s *My Place* (1988), for example, Year 3 and 4 students were asked to embody images of their feelings about their home or a place that was special to them. They were encouraged not to think about material goods but how their home or special place made them feel. Having chosen such words such as ‘calm’, ‘happy’, ‘safe’ and ‘comfortable’, children were asked to embody these. Similarly, when reading *Bambert’s Book of Missing Stories* (Jung, 2008) students in Years 5 and 6 were asked to embody the description of Bambert as a *shipwrecked mariner cast up on hostile shores on the far side of a dream* (p.11). First, of course, it was important to establish the meanings of ‘mariner’ and ‘hostile’. Students can also embody rich descriptive words and phrases. How can we embody the magpie in *Fox* (Wild and Brooks, 2000) who desired at various points to *melt into blackness* and *burn into nothingness*?

Embodiment can be just as effective with students in the younger years of school. Embodying the frog prince and princess at loggerheads in *The Frog Prince Continued* (Sziekza 1991) helps them experience the emotions of both characters and think about what they might do in a similar situation. Embodiment can be recorded with digital cameras and the emotions can later be recorded in speech and thought bubbles alongside the images (Image 6.1).



**Image 6.1** Small group depicting a critical moment

A small group depicting a critical moment from *The duck and the darklings*. (Glenda Millard and Stephen Michael King 2014).

## Sculpture

One participant's body becomes 'thinking clay' for his/her partner or small group to sculpt into a character, thought or thing (also see 'Living clay' in Chap. 10). How might you represent a dragon according to eastern and western cultural traditions?

## Depiction

Identifying and portraying one or more critical moments in a story or historical event (often also called frozen moments, tableau or freeze frames) can be enormously valuable for students of all ages. They can then be asked to justify their reasons for these choices.

In the early childhood classroom this can mean initially asking children to depict a scene from the orienting moments in the story or its complication. Alternatively a story can be read to a certain point and students can be asked to predict what happens next or represent a way that the problem or dilemma can be resolved.

Consider, for example, what might befall the frog prince in the above story who runs into the forest to find a witch to turn him back into a frog or how *The Keys to Rondo* (2008) may be rescued by the children after all seems lost. Finding ways for students to engage in meaningful collaborative talk, genuine dialogue, is important for deep understanding (Barnes et al. 1976). Asking them to explain their thinking to each other and then, if necessary, justify their opinions will lead to higher order thinking. Enacting the scenes chosen and tracking the thoughts of each of the characters at these particular moments in time will lead to more imaginative writing. Saxton, Miller, Laidlow and O'Mara's (2018) *Asking better questions* is an excellent guide to asking challenging questions that probe surface impressions. They make much use of drama strategies to illustrate their thesis.

### Hot Seating

Hot seating, or questioning the characters in role, can be used when participants have a need to expand their understanding of a particular character or situation by questioning a character or group of characters in role:

Why is Grandfather cross that his grandson has brought home a wounded duck in *The Duck and the Darklings*?

Is Hannah's father (*Gorilla*) worried about something?

Why is Goldilocks so angry with Herb (*Who's afraid of the big bad book?*)

This strategy allows us to begin to understand motives that underlie particular actions through the use of questions. It also changes the dynamics in the classroom because the teacher is not providing an evaluative feedback loop.

### Conscience Alley

Conscience or decision alley can provide an opportunity for students to appreciate multiple perspectives. Students become the voices a character hears in his/her mind when making a difficult decision. The person who must make a decision walks slowly between two lines of participants who are facing each other but have opposing viewpoints. As the person making the decision moves down the alley, participants in turn comment or reflect on the difficulty of choice.

For example, when deciding whether or not to pull down the town's Anzac memorial in Gary Crew and Shaun Tan's *The Memorial* (2000) participants in conscience alley might suggest to the Mayor:

*You can't pull it down because it's the most important landmark in this town; and You must pull it down because it's in the way of the town's progress.*

Students are thus provided with opportunities to consider alternative perspectives/rehearse consequences of different decisions, consider characters' reasoning and think about potential resolutions (see for example, Ewing et al. 2008).

## Thought-Tracking/Tapping in

An opportunity is provided to tap into a character's thoughts and feelings while they are in a sculpted position or depicting a character in a freeze frame.

## Readers' Theatre

A script is developed from a story the students have been studying closely. The students engage in a group storytelling with a focus on their voice and limited gesture, focusing on the audience rather than the other characters (Ewing 1991, 2009). Below is a short excerpt of the beginning of a readers' theatre script developed for Anthony Browne's *The Tunnel* by a Year 2 class.

*Adapted from The Tunnel (Browne 1997)*

*Narrator 1: Once upon a time there lived a sister and a brother who were not at all alike.*

*Narrator 2: In every way they were different.*

*Narrator 3: The sister stayed inside on her own, reading and dreaming.*

*Narrator 4: The brother played outside with his friends, laughing and shouting, throwing and kicking, roughing and tumbling.*

*Narrator 5: At night he slept soundly in his room. But she would lie awake, listening to the noises of the night.*

*Narrator 6: Sometimes he crept into her room to frighten her, for he knew that she was afraid of the dark*

### Example

The following unit provides an example of leading with Drama to explore literature and concepts like memory and the aged in our committee. It was developed by Robyn Ewing as a teaching artist on the *School Drama* programme working with a Year 1 class at Curl Curl North Primary School in 2019. The format used is that used for *School Drama*, a teacher professional learning partnership between Sydney Theatre Company and the University of Sydney designed to help teachers develop confidence and expertise in using drama and literature to enhance student literacy outcomes.

**Aim:** to use drama techniques to explore a quality text to engage pupils and improve writing outcomes.



<b>Unit Title:</b>	What is a memory?
<b>Text:</b>	<i>Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge</i> by Mem Fox and Julie Vivas
<b>Year Level:</b>	Appropriate for Years 1–2 (and beyond)
<b>English Focus:</b>	Oracy
	Imaginative writing
<b>Resources:</b>	Scarves or sleeping masks to use as blindfolds, enough for one between two; a range of symbolic objects (e.g. a candle, a shell, an unusually shaped piece of driftwood, a brightly coloured scarf, set of keys, multiple copies (6–8) of the books above, oil pastels or crayons, charcoal, large sheets of paper, quiet instrumental music if desired, percussion instruments)
<b>Key Themes:</b>	Memory; history—past and present; hope; trust; friendship; the power of story

### Introduction

This beautiful book has huge symbolic significance and places a lot of hope in the compassion of a young child who helps his elderly friend rediscover important memories.

#### Related Texts:

Gleeson, L. & Blackwood, F. (2013). *Banjo and Ruby Red*.

Graham, B. (2008) *How to heal a broken wing*.

#### Workshop 1

- Strategy Title:** Warm Ups and Name Games

**Grouping:** Whole class drama circle

**Purpose:** To ‘warm up’ our bodies and imaginations

Play some name games: *My name is Robyn and your name is...; Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?*

Getting used to conventions with clap sticks

Role walk
- Strategy Title:** What Is a Memory? Group Storytelling

**Grouping:** Whole class drama circle, then pairs, small groups

**Purpose:** To explore the concept of memory

Teacher shows children her memory box and plays some guessing games about what might be inside

Teacher lays out some artefacts (e.g. a candle, a shell, a ribbon, driftwood, a key, an old photo...) and shares some of her memories—she shares a special memory.

Children asked to walk around and think about the different artefacts laid out—choose one that triggers a memory. In time, teacher asks students to move to a small group of students who have chosen the same object and share their memories. Children are asked to re-form the circle and take some time to visualise this memory, then share this memory in pairs, small groups and with whole group.

Discuss the importance of memories in our lives:

- Why do we need them?
- What does a memory look like/feel like/sound like?

**Follow-Up:** students are asked to note a few things about their memory on a post-it note. Students can sketch the object they chose and draw/write about the memory it triggered in their journal.

(Further follow-up: each small group could construct a story based on one or a blend of a number of these memories. One student in the group is appointed as the storyteller while the other students mime the story. These mimed stories can be shared with the rest of the class.)

## Workshop 2

**Recap:** Last Session Through Sharing Some of Children’s Writing About a Memorable Moment

### 1. **Strategy Title:** Warm-Ups

- Using a scarf to become different things.
- Role walk as old, young, tired, excited...
- Clumping to represent ‘friendship’, ‘trust’.

### 2. **Strategy Title:** Trust Walk

**Grouping:** Whole class drama circle, then pairs.

**Purpose:** To develop trust and courage, an important theme in this drama unit.

Teacher explains that this unit is going to explore the concepts of friendship and trusting each other will be important. After a brief discussion about the meanings of these words, children are paired and one student is asked to close their eyes. Teacher explains that their partner will lead them around the open area in the classroom explaining where they are going and helping them avoid any obstacles. After about 5 minutes students can reverse roles.

Discussion about what it means to trust your partner.

### 3. **Strategy Title:** Hot Seating

**Grouping:** Whole class drama circle.

**Purpose:** Start to think about what it might be like to have lived for many years.

Teacher introduces our special guest and talks about the strategy of hot seating.

What was it like to go to school 70 years ago? What did Sydney look like? What might it mean to be old?

Teacher introduces a special guest, ‘David’, and asks the children in pairs to think about some questions for him.

Hot seat David. Teachers initially model some questions.

4. **Strategy Title:** ‘I Wonder...’

**Grouping:** Pairs, then whole class drama circle.

**Purpose:** To encourage prediction.

Teacher shares the first three openings of *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*.

5. **Strategy Title:** Discussion

**Grouping:** Whole group.

**Purpose:** To discuss the main characters in the story.

Teacher asks the students to think about the following questions in pairs or triads:

- What kinds of people live in the retirement village?
- How are they feeling as the story opens?
- Why might they be feeling this way?
- How would they move when feeling like this?

6. **Strategy Title:** Sculpting

**Grouping:** Pairs.

**Purpose:** Embody some of the characters.

Introduce the idea of sculpting. Talk about ‘thinking clay’.

Students sculpt each other as some of the characters are introduced.

After students have had time to work together on their sculptures, they all present these together. Each of the characters sculptured can be present in a gallery. Discuss similarities and differences.

**Follow-Up:** students can draw their character and add descriptive words.

**Workshop 3**

**Recap:** Share Some Examples of Children’s Writing About a Memory and Drawing of Their Sculpted Character

1. **Strategy Title:** Warm-Ups

- Using a scarf to become different things.
- Role walk as the different characters.
- Clumping to represent ‘friendship’ and ‘trust’.

Teacher shares next opening—Wilfred Gordon overhears his parents talking about Miss Nancy.

2. **Strategy Title:** Earsdropping—Conversations

**Grouping:** Pairs.

**Purpose:** To develop a brief improvised dialogue to demonstrate an understanding of Miss Nancy’s problem.

In pairs children decide who will be Wilfred Gordon’s mum and who will be his dad. They are to create a conversation in which they discuss what is happening to Miss Nancy. After students have had some time to discuss what might be discussed, teacher sets up the signal for the improvised conversation to start and stop. Students have several opportunities to engage in this conversation.

Vary the conversation—the conversation now is between Wilfred Gordon and his mother.

Teacher asks some pairs to share their conversations with the class.

**Follow-Up:** children record a brief excerpt of their conversation.

Teacher shares the next four openings about memory.

### 3. **Strategy Title:** What Is a Memory?

**Grouping:** Whole class.

**Purpose:** To embody the different conceptualisations of memory expressed by the different characters.

**Follow-Up:** children take one of these definitions of memory and imagine something that responds to the question: ‘What is a memory?’

Teacher shares the rest of the book.

### **Workshops 4 and 5**

**Recap:** Share Some Examples of Children’s Conversations Between Wilfred Gordon and His Parents

Teacher revisits the story.

#### 1. **Strategy Title:** Warm-Ups

- Voice warm-ups;
- verbal tennis; and
- embodying the different conceptualisations of memory expressed by the different characters (e.g. something sad, something to make you laugh, something as precious as gold, etc.).

Teacher reads the rest of the story. Brief discussion.

#### 2. **Strategy Title:** Readers’ Theatre

**Grouping:** Whole class then small groups.

**Purpose:** Learn about the drama form reader’s theatre. Think about the use of voice, face and limited gesture to convey meaning.

Teachers will explain the form reader’s theatre and how it works.

We will model how we use our voice to convey meaning (e.g. pitch, pace, pause, inflection etc.).

Children will be grouped by the class teacher. They will: read through their scripts, highlight their parts, annotate the words they will emphasise, stick their scripts into folders etc.

Readers’ Theatre Developed from *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox and Julie Vivas

#### **Part 1**

Storyteller 1: There was once a small boy called Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge

Storyteller 2: and what’s more, he wasn’t very old either.

Storyteller 3: His house was next door to an old people’s home

Storyteller 4: and he knew all the people who lived there.

Storyteller 1: He liked Mrs Jordan who played the organ.

Storyteller 2: He listened to Mr Hosking who told him scary stories.

Storyteller 3: He played with Mr Tippett who was crazy about cricket.

Storyteller 4: He ran errands for Mrs Mitchell who walked with a wooden stick.

Storyteller 1: He admired Mr Drysdale who had a voice like a giant.

Storyteller 2: But his favourite person of all was Miss Nancy Alison Delacourt Cooper

Storyteller 3: because she had four names,

Storyteller 4: just as he did.

Storyteller 1: He called her ‘Miss Nancy’ and told her all his secrets.

Time in both workshops 4 and 5 will be spent reading through scripts, focusing on reading for meaning with expression and fluency, deciding on gestures and sound effects. etc.

Children will perform their reader’s theatre as a grade or school assembly item. ◀

### Teacher Reflection

The children responded so well to thinking about memory and the unit on past and present they were undertaking. The class teacher was also thrilled with their imaginative writing triggered by the early work on memories. The reader’s theatre also improved students’ fluency in reading as well as their inferential comprehension. They worked collaboratively in their groups. There were important discussions about care for older community members. (Robyn Ewing)

### Example

The following integrated interdisciplinary unit of work explores some of these ideas in more depth. Designed for Year 2, it is easily adaptable across most stages. The unit was developed by Robyn Ewing and is illustrated with drawings by 2R at Curl Curl North Primary School who undertook the learning experiences with great enthusiasm (Image 6.2).

#### **Starting with Drama *Herb, the Vegetarian Dragon* (Bass and Harter)**

Purpose: This sequence of activities begins with drama. It will enable the students to develop an understanding of conflict and peace in history. In addition, learning experiences address both English and Creative Arts outcomes. Each session takes between 45 and 60 minutes.

#### Session 1

Visualise a dragon.

Write down any words that you associate with dragons.

Choose one of your words to share and think about saying your word with as much feeling as you can to communicate its meaning.

Take it in turns around the group to say your word with as much emotion as you can.

(N.B These words can be written on the blackboard/whiteboard/interactive whiteboard and used to create a soundscape—percussion instruments can be added to a subsequent reading.)



**Image 6.2** Meathook gives Herb an ultimatum

### Session 2

Sculpt a partner into your dragon. Remember the partner acts as ‘thinking clay’—he/she does what the sculptor says/demonstrates to be moulded into a dragon. Swap roles.

Divide the group in halves and each half takes a turn to look at the sculpted dragons and note the similarities/differences. (At this point, dragons can be drawn/painted/modelled out of clay, describing words arranged around them.)

### Session 3

Read the first half of the book *The Vegetarian Dragon*.

The text lends itself to dramatisation along the way.

Stop reading after Meathook has given Herb the ultimatum—eat meat or be beheaded.

Hotseat Herb—how is he feeling at this point in time?

Create a story map of what happens next individually.

### Session 4

Divide into groups of four. Share your outcome with the group.

As a group decide on which outcome you prefer or incorporate elements of all group member’s stories. Make a still image/depiction demonstrating what happens.



**Image 6.3** Herb is going to be beheaded

Each image is viewed and teacher taps into various characters asking them to share how they are feeling at this point in time (Image 6.3). (The still images can be captured on digital camera and the stories can be written down with thought/speech bubbles.)

#### Session 5

Use conscience alley to weigh up what Herb should do. (*You should eat the meat because.....you shouldn't eat the meat because.....*)

Students create a Plus Minus and an interesting chart about the pros and cons.

Students write in role as Herb or Meathook about how they are feeling at this point in the story.

#### Session 6

Discuss the different endings predicted.

Read the rest of the story.

Discuss the concept of choices and living in harmony with others who are different.

Children can draw a concept map to demonstrate their understanding of 'peace'. ◀



### Example

The final exemplar highlights the use of oral storytelling with a range of other drama strategies to help develop both the teacher's and her students' use of these important skills, so often neglected in western classrooms.

#### **Storytelling Exemplar Based on *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak 1963)**

This unit of work was designed by Victoria Campbell and has been implemented in several lower and middle primary school classrooms (Early Stage 1, Stage 1 & Stage 2.).

*Purpose:* the aim of this sequence of learning experiences is for students to develop skills to orally retell a story. The focus is on students making personal connections with the text by using their own grammar and syntax, to develop a sense of narrative structure and encourage expressive use of voice and gesture.

#### **The Importance of Voice**

*Effective oral storytelling is reliant on expressive use of voice. The two 'warm-up' activities below encourage students to explore the nuances of volume, pitch and tone.*

#### ***Vocal Tennis***

This vocal 'warm-up' allows students to experiment with:

- Volume (*loud, soft*);
- pitch (*high, low*); and
- tone (*angry, cheerful, etc.*).

Students, in pairs, stand opposite each other. They verbally *throw* words backwards and forwards to each other. The teacher structures the activity by giving students categories to choose words from and the vocal quality she/he wishes the students to experiment with. For example, the teacher might ask for, 'Fruit— high pitched' (*Some other examples of categories are: vegetables, girls names, boys names, countries, cars.*) Adapted from: NSW, DET. (1998). *Exploring the World of K-6 Drama: Anna and Her Cloth of Dreams.*

#### ***Expressive Names***

Students form a circle. One by one, the students say their name out loud, and the rest of the class repeats that student's name. Continue around the circle until all students have had a turn. Next time, around the circle, ask students to experiment with volume, pitch and tone. Encourage students to exaggerate the way a name is said. (For younger students, suggest saying their name like a lion, cat, mouse, etc. This automatically changes pitch, volume and tone.)

#### **The Importance of Gesture, Facial Expression and Body Language**

*The non-verbal aspects of oral storytelling are essential for breathing life into a story. The following drama strategy gives students an opportunity to focus on gesture, facial expression and body language.*



### ***Sculpting***

Students work in pairs and sculpt each other as characters from the text. While reading the text, choose two to three critical moments, stop at that section of the story and have students sculpt each other. Some examples are, Max making mischief/his mother sending him to bed; Max arriving on the island/a Wild Thing greeting him; Max as king/a Wild Thing as servant. Each person in the pair takes on one of these roles.

Once students have finished their sculptures, ask half the class, that is, one student from each pair, to freeze in a circle, so that their sculpture is facing out (e.g. *all the students who were Max making mischief*). The other students walk around the circle and examine the sculptures for effective use of facial expression and gesture. Teacher invites students to respond by asking questions on the specifics of gesture, facial expression and body language. For example: ‘What do you see?’ ‘What are they doing with their faces, their hands, their bodies to show this?’ Have the other half display their sculptures.

### **The Importance of Narrative Structure: The ‘Bare Bones’ of the Story**

*For students to effectively retell a story, they need to be familiar with, and understand, the sequence of events within a text.*

### ***Exploring Narrative Structure***

The teacher re-reads *Where the Wild Things Are* and asks the students to reflect on:

- moments of surprise (*complications, tension*);
- protagonist/antagonist relationship (*tension*);
- character development/evolution (*the protagonist [Max] moves through various states of emotional being—status*); and
- the sequence of events.

As students suggest critical moments, write them on individual pieces of A4 paper (*this can be modified for use with a smart board*).

For example:

- Max is naughty/creates mischief.
- Max is sent to his room.
- A Forest grows in Max’s room.
- Max arrives on the island/the Wild Things roar their terrible roars etc....(fear).
- Max tames the Wild Things with his magic trick.
- Max is made King.
- The wild rumpus.
- Max wants to return home—(loneliness).
- Returns home—(food).

Ask the students to organise the individual pieces of A4 paper in a chronological order. (*This can be done in small groups or with the whole class, multiple copies will be needed for small group work.*)

***Freeze Frame Circle:*** whole class enactment with teacher narration.

***Resource:*** a crown.

*The crown is passed to each student in the role of Max to wear during the depiction.*

Divide the class into groups of three. Each group is given a critical moment to perform as a still image (*tableaux*). A chair, for each key event, is placed in a circle (*about nine chairs*). The groups are arranged in a chronological order around the circle. One student from each group is Max, he/she sits on the chair. The other students take on the role of the other characters suggested by the scene. (e.g. *Max's mother; Max's dog, trees in the forest, Wild Things, etc*) As the teacher narrates the story, each group performs their given scene in chronological order. While one group is performing, the other groups observe. After each scene, the teacher stops and encourages students to improvise dialogue by either *tapping-in* or inviting them to briefly *role-play* the moment. Focus on vocal and facial expression.

*NB: See drama definitions for still image (depiction) and tapping-in.*

### **The Importance of the Listener**

*The relationship between the teller and the listener is crucial. The storyteller must select information and relate it in a manner that is meaningful for the listener. The storyteller need only be familiar with the story, they do not need to memorise it. Students adhere to the narrative structure, the chronological sequence of events and characters; however, they are free to make personal connections with the text by using their own words, grammar and syntax.*

### **Teacher Models Retelling**

The teacher retells *Where The Wild Things Are* using his/her own words, syntax and grammar to demonstrate personal aspects of oral storytelling. This differs considerably to Maurice Sendak's written text; however, some words, phrases and dialogue might be the same. After the story is told, encourage discussion about the differences between the text and the teacher's oral version.

### **Students Retell Where The Wild Things Are: Advance/Detail**

Students have an opportunity to tell the story using their own words. There is no right or wrong way to tell a story; however, they do need to include the characters and sequence of events. (*For the younger students, the teacher may like to display the A4—critical moment cards in the classroom.*)

Students work in pairs, student A and student B. They tell each other their version of *Where The Wild Things Are*. Student A tells the story to student B. While B listens he/she asks A to either *detail* or *advance* the story. When asked to give *detail* student A stops in the sequence of events and describes the moment in the story. When asked to *advance*, student A continues with the narrative. Swap roles, so that student B tells student A the story.

Things to consider:

- *Ensure students alternate between the two directions – advance or detail*
- *Encourage students to think about colour, shape, size; sounds, smells, taste, touch; emotional qualities of a character, atmosphere, mood etc.*

- For younger students *‘forward/description’* may be used instead of *‘advance/detail’*
- *This activity can be used with any story that the students are familiar with, a myth, legend, fairytale or folktale.* (Adapted from: Pierse, L. (1997). *Theatre Sports Down Under.*) ◀

### Teacher Reflection

This sequence of learning experiences allows students to embody and kinaesthetically engage with the text before retelling it. This is not only an effective and enjoyable way of developing learning, but it is also an efficient way of working toward the often difficult outcome of students confidently being able to orally retell a story. The key to success in this unit is that it allows students to improvise within the given structure of the story, and by doing so, make personal connections with the text. Students are at the centre of the learning experience as they take ownership of the story and make it their own. The greater opportunities students have to develop proficiency with oracy, or with talking and listening skills, the better their overall literacy will be. (Victoria Campbell)

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## 4 Conclusion

It is our assertion that using drama-rich forms, strategies and techniques allows students to enact situations and to empathise with others as they explore the unfinished as well as the taken-for-grantedness of their own life experiences and feelings. In so doing, students challenge the ‘saturated consciousness’ (Apple 1990) that can often cloud beliefs, attitudes and judgements. Opportunities to story/challenge/question and interpret from multiple perspectives builds students’ capacity for deep understanding and so enables them to become more critically literate (Lankshear 1994). Drama strategies, including, readers’ theatre, storytelling, depiction, teacher in role, mantle of the expert, puppetry, hotseating, improvisation and thought-tracking (Ewing and Simons 2016), grounded in authentic contexts but distanced from children’s actual experiences, can be used in the classroom to support every aspect of critical thinking, problem-solving and literacy development. The imagined and physical contexts of drama worlds allow students to go beyond the superficial or stereotypical to explore the making of meanings in a multisensory medium (Baldwin and Fleming 2003).

While the use of enactment in enhancing literacy development is well documented, drama as critical, quality pedagogy is not as widely used in primary classrooms as it should be given its power to transform learning. Drama-rich pedagogy, through its embodied learning activities, enables students to understand meanings conveyed. Oral and written storytelling helps us explore and reflect on who we are through storying (Gleeson 2010). Drama helps teachers change traditional classroom discourse structures to enable students to engage in meaningful exploration of important themes and issues. The development of higher order thinking and deeper understanding of others’ perspectives can equip students with critical life skills.

## Questions

Peter O'Connor (2008, p. 24) defines drama as a:

*...process through which humanity has sought to define itself and to reflect on who we are and who we might become, must be seen as central to any process that attempts to make sense of the world we live in.*

Do you agree that drama can enable us to make sense of our world and life situation or is it an overstatement? Do you have any evidence to support your view?

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### *Useful Websites*

Drama Australia  
<http://www.dramaaustralia.org.au/>  
Australian Drama  
<http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/Drama>  
Sydney Theatre Company School Drama Program  
<https://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/schooldrama>  
Windmill Performing Arts., <http://www.windmill.org.au>  
Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company  
[www.somebodysdaughtertheatre.com/](http://www.somebodysdaughtertheatre.com/)