



INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA IN THE CLASSROOM



TEACHER HANDOUT

INTRODUCTION

As a busy teacher it can sometimes be difficult to keep lessons innovative and exciting, not only for your pupils, but also for you having to teach them!

This pack has been created to provide a quick and easy guide to basic drama techniques that you will hopefully want to try out in your own classroom.

A clear description of each technique has been provided as well as examples of when the technique can be used effectively.

Drama is an excellent way to bring lessons to life and can also offer pupils of all abilities a chance to engage in fun activities, whilst learning at the same time. Drama can greatly increase a pupil's confidence, listening skills, evaluation skills and group working skills.

As with all our support material, TAG welcomes your feedback on this handout. We hope you will find it useful in your own classroom and we would love to hear what activities you have tried!

Please check out our website:

www.tag-theatre.co.uk

There are lots of teacher resources available to download from the site. You can also phone us on 0141 429 5561 or email info@tag-theatre.co.uk

Best wishes,

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TAG

DRAMA TECHNIQUES TO TRY

TEACHER IN ROLE

Why do it?

This technique encourages the pupils to enter and engage with the fiction of the drama. If the teacher is actively engaged with her/his role, it makes it easier for the pupils to enter and engage with their own roles.

The teacher-in-role can control the drama from within, develop the fiction of the narrative and question the choices made by the pupils. Teacher-in-role can also lend a huge amount of credibility to the drama and very much encourage young people to get involved in the fiction.

How to do it?

Explain to the group that you are going to play a particular character in the drama you are exploring as a class. The nature of the role you take on will depend on what you want to achieve.

Examples:

1. To excite interest (e.g. a market trader selling strange, magical goods)
2. To control the action (e.g. a police officer who has arrived to question people following an incident)
3. To invite involvement (e.g. a community leader who has called an urgent village meeting)
4. To create choices and ambiguity (e.g. as a young person who has decided to leave the village for the city and wants friends to join him/her)

Choose a piece of costume or a prop to signify when you are in role. As soon as you put on the costume or pick up the prop, become your chosen character and manage the learning opportunities from within the drama.

Remember that the teacher still has a teaching purpose but learning is negotiated in role, allowing teacher and pupils to lay aside their actual roles and create relationships which have a variety of status and power variables.

Ways you could use it

This technique is great to use with younger pupils, as they generally will take on any role they are given and they also tend to suspend their disbelief very easily.

An issue-based project can be explored by using teacher-in-role. This can allow the teacher to put forward arguments in order to provoke debate.

HOT SEATING

Why do it?

Hot seating allows the class (working as themselves) to question or interview people in role. This can help the group learn more about a character's point of view.

How to do it?

One person sits in a chair facing the rest of the class.

The class can ask questions of the character in the hot seat. These will probably be questions to flesh out the group's knowledge of that character (see below for other uses of hot seating).

It is important that the person being 'Hot Seated' stays in character for the duration of the Hot Seating session.

The person being questioned should answer in accordance with what s/he already knows about the character but if a questioner requires more information, the person can simply use her/his imagination to deepen the character.

Ways you could use it

In improvisation.

During a scene being acted out by members of the class, the action can be frozen (by shouting "FREEZE!") and the group can ask questions of certain characters about what is happening at that moment.

A group can answer collectively for a character. Take a chair and place on it something that suggests the character in question, e.g. a hat or a jacket. The group who will speak for this character should stand behind the chair facing the rest of the class. The class should address questions to the chair and any member of the group can answer.

This can work the other way around – the teacher can be in role as a character from the drama to which the group would like to ask questions. This could be done conventionally, where the class is as themselves and the teacher-in-role would be in the hot seat. Alternatively, the class sits in a circle and the teacher in role sits inside the circle, facing the hot seat on which there is an item of clothing/prop. The group asks questions as the character symbolized by the hot seat and the teacher in role must answer the "character" in the hot seat.

TABLEAUX/STILL IMAGE

Why do it?

This is a technique frequently used in drama. It is the perfect way to begin drama work as it is an easy and non-threatening exercise for groups with little or no previous drama experience. Still-image work requires and helps to develop team-working skills. It is a very controlled form of expression which creates pictures that can be interpreted by the class – a picture is worth a thousand words!

It is also a very good way to represent potentially difficult concepts – such as fights, and abstract ideas like freedom or sadness etc.

How to do it?

Split the class into groups of four or five.

Explain that they are going to create a still-image, which is like the image when someone has pressed pause on a DVD. The image has no sound or movement. It is a snap-shot. Ask one group to do an example for the class.

Give the groups a subject for their still-image, e.g. a pop band or a family photograph. Encourage the group to think about what makes an interesting image - different levels, positioning, facial expressions, actions frozen mid-movement etc.

When each group has worked out their still-images they will show it to the rest of the class who will discuss what they think is going on in the image, e.g. 'What is the relationship between the characters we can see in this image?' 'How can we tell what is going on?' It is useful to draw attention to difference in opinion and how different people will have a different view of what they see.

Ways you could use it

Still images can be created by a "Sculptor". One person would move a group into his/her desired image (or this can also be done verbally, through instructions if preferred). This is a useful exercise to look at different people's perceptions of an idea. For example, one person may sculpt an image to represent "Family" as a mother, father and two children. Another Sculptor could then mould this image into a family of a grandparent and four children etc.

Still images can also be used to explore contrasting ideas. For example, a group could be asked to create a still-image to sum up what life is like for them in their community at present. They could then change this image into the ideal, i.e. how they would like their community to be.

THOUGHT TRACKING

Why do it?

Thought-tracking allows the audience to hear the inner thoughts of a character. This can be used with a scene that is frozen for a moment or can be used to track the thoughts of characters within a still-image.

Thought-tracking encourages pupils to reflect on the action of the drama and consider the point of view of the character they are playing. By allowing the group to hear the thoughts of all characters in the scene/still image, thought-tracking encourages an awareness of the views of others and the potential consequences of events/actions.

How to do it?

A group should be frozen mid-scene (preferably at a pivotal moment in the story) or in a still-image. Explain that you are going to enter the picture and tap members of the group on the shoulder. Make it clear that when you do this, you want the person to speak aloud the thoughts of his/her character at that moment.

Emphasise that you want them to speak the thoughts as that character, e.g. "I can't believe he would do this to me"

When all the characters have been "thought-tracked", the scene can continue, or another still-image explored.

Ways you could use it

The groups can be divided into pairs, where one person plays a character and the other plays his/her shadow. During a scene, characters can be accompanied by their shadows, which speak the inner thoughts of the character. This use of the technique is effective to deepen understanding of the potential conflict between outward appearance and inner thoughts.

DEVISING

Why do it?

Devising is simply the term for creating original drama – in other words, making your own scenes up!

Groups of four or five normally work best for devising as there are enough people to create interesting scenarios and not too many to make teamwork difficult.

How to do it?

Divide the class into sub-groups of four or five. Give clear instructions regarding the theme of the drama – often it is helpful to provide the groups with written instructions or some kind of visual aid to act as a stimulus for creativity. To devise without any stimulus is challenging and could take a long time!

Give the group an idea of when they are expected to have something to share with the group. Encourage the sub-groups to act out their ideas as soon as possible. It is often very tempting for groups to sit and talk about ideas for a long time. Devising becomes easier if you try out ideas, usually more will come through physically acting out.

Encourage pupils to choose other names for their characters than their actual names. This helps to clearly delineate between the drama and reality. Give groups space to create and to experiment with their ideas.

If you plan to ask the groups to share their devised work with the rest of the class, it is good to spend time emphasizing the following:

When performing in front of an audience:

Make sure you are facing the audience - avoid having your back to them, especially when speaking.

Make sure you are not standing in front of someone else. The audience should be able to see and hear everyone in the scene.

Make sure you speak slowly and clearly. Avoid speaking at the same time as other people.

Use your body, your face and your voice to communicate with the audience.

MIMED ACTIVITY

Why do it?

Mime is physical movement and action where sound can be added for emphasis or atmosphere. Mime is a good technique to use with young people who are perhaps new to drama as impressive results can be achieved without the pressure of dialogue.

Mime can introduce the group to a more stylized, abstract type of performance which, when coupled with music is a good introduction to dance. Like still-image, when performed in slow-motion, mime is also a good way to tackle difficult events such as fights, football matches etc.

How to do it?

Ensure that the group knows what “mime” means – give an example using a willing participant!

A good way to move gently into mime is to play a game which introduces the discipline required to effectively mime for an audience.

It can be good to ask the group to mime individually in the early stages, perhaps miming through something with which they are very familiar, e.g. their daily routine. Encourage the group to make their movements as clear as possible. Large movements are good!

Ask them to think about facial expression as much as other areas of their bodies – how does this character feel about what they are doing?

Ways you could use it

If you are exploring a theme with the class, e.g. The Industrial Revolution, you could divide the class into sub-groups and allocate different aspects of the experience of people living during this period to each group. Each group should then devise their own mime, ideally a sequence that can be repeated. All groups can then enact their mimes to appropriate music.

Ask the group to consider how the music complemented the mimes. Are there certain parts of the music which contrast well with or complement the movement? Could the mime be re-arranged to fit the music?

REPORTAGE

Why do it?

Reportage is a drama technique that presents events through the medium of documentary or TV news report. It is therefore a very accessible and familiar drama form for young people.

Reportage enables the group to explore both sides of an issue and focus on the different points of view contained in any event. This technique can also be used to explore how events can be distorted by the press.

How to do it?

This technique is basically a devising exercise. So, divide the class into sub-groups, ensuring that there are enough members of the group to cover the necessary characters.

Give each group a prepared news story that they need to cover, with as much detail as you consider necessary.

Ask each group to decide which characters should be included in the news report. Encourage them to consider who presents the news, who runs the interviews, who is interviewed, are there any reconstructions or filmed reports, is there a theme tune?

Ensure the groups have a balanced argument within the report, or at least provide a justification if the report is unbalanced!

Ways you could use it

Instead of TV news reports, you could use the familiar form of TV or radio advertisements as the vehicle for an exercise:

- Groups could devise a simple advert using music, song, dance, slogans etc. to sell a product.
- You could devise “anti-adverts” for products that we may think we need but can easily live without, e.g. fancy cars, designer trainers, sweets etc!
- Create public information adverts in order to convey an important message in a creative way.

A NOTE ABOUT VOCAL WORK

Sometimes drama activities can culminate in an informal presentation to an audience. Therefore, it is worth taking a moment to consider how to help your class make the most of their voices!

The following ideas can be used as a physical and vocal warm-up to prepare for performance:

- Isolate different parts of the body and loosen them up. Please note: each movement must be done in both clockwise and anti-clockwise directions and with legs, ankles, arms etc.
- Standing on one leg, lift your other foot off the ground and circle the ankle.
- Lift one leg up and try circling your lower leg whilst keeping the knee still.
- Try moving each leg from the hip joint in a “figure of eight” shape.
- Keeping the feet on the ground, circle the hips.
- Lift both shoulders up towards ears and circle.
- Circle arms from the shoulder.
- Keeping your mouth slightly open, carefully move head from left to right and up and down. Circle head gently.
- Imagine there is an invisible bar above your head- reach up on to tiptoe and hold onto this. Then lower heels to the ground, keeping the hands on the “bar”. This will stretch the spine.
- Keeping the legs straight, or just slightly bent, flop down from the waist, allowing the hands to brush the floor. Swing from side to side, relaxing the waist. Straighten up, concentrating on one vertebra at a time. The head should be the last thing to come up.
- Making sure the shoulders are relaxed, stand in the “neutral position” (feet hip-width apart, back straight, arms by side, shoulders relaxed, head up straight).
- Practice breathing in deeply – concentrating on the ribs expanding rather than the chest. Practice breathing in/out for 4 counts, then 6 counts, then 8.
- Breathe in, then exhale by humming for a few beats then open your mouth to become “aaahhhh”. Continue until out of breath.