

Drama Strategies

To Support Reading
Comprehension



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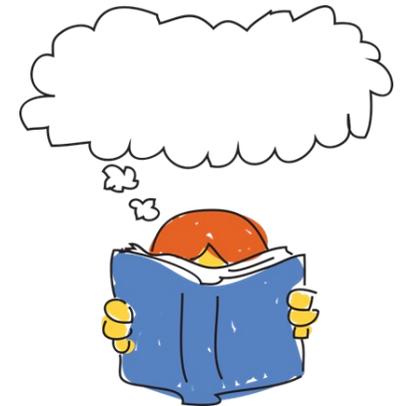


Pupil and School Support

Using Drama Conventions to Improve Reading Comprehension

Reading aloud is one of the most powerful and pleasurable resources for developing children's love of reading, their vocabulary, their language development and comprehension; but if this is combined with lots of opportunities for developing children's confidence with drama, then you are also giving them virtual experiences of situations and events that they might not have experienced for themselves.

Introducing and extending EAL children's reading through drama will deepen their understanding of the flow, rhythm and patterns of the English



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Acknowledgement
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A chart like the one on the previous page is very useful for children to be able to review the key events for freeze frames, particularly if they are having difficulty remembering the complete sequence of events in the story.

The class teacher may guide them in creating the freeze-frames, aiming to get as many children as possible to take part - so some may need to represent furniture or trees, or one may be designated to speak the caption, (*what caption would go underneath this picture in a book?*) Key characters are played by different children in each frame.

Some children may need more help from the teacher, e.g talking them through what to show, helping them to position themselves.

The class teacher 'photographs' each frame, using the words, 'Starting positions—freeze!' The frame is frozen for a few seconds and then he/she moves on to the next frame, the 'click' of the camera signalling the end of one scene and the start of another. The whole story can be moved through quite quickly, frame by frame— or they can be shown in a random order and everyone reads the picture to discover which moment is being shown.

language, help them to structure events in a meaningful way that they will remember and the exploration of characters and settings will also deepen their understanding and use of the language of feelings and empathy. The importance of learning English within a context is vital for EAL learners, so is learning with their peers and having fun—hopefully, the ideas contained in this booklet will provide you with all three.

All of the ideas for use of different drama conventions are based on the story of Red Riding Hood so that you can see more easily how each one could be adapted for any narrative.

Enjoy



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Red Riding Hood Example:

With help, children select the key moments from Red Riding Hood and create a series of still pictures to illustrate what is happening. Key events could be

Red Riding Hood and mother in their own cottage

Packing the basket

Mother telling her not to leave the path through the forest

Red Riding Hood skipping along

Red Riding Hood leaving the path and picking flowers

Talking to the wolf

The wolf knocking on the Granny's cottage door

The wolf swallowing Granny in one go

The wolf dressing up in Granny's clothes

Red Riding Hood talking to the wolf

The arrival of the woodcutter

8. Still Images / Freeze Frames

Summary:

'Still images', 'freeze frames' or 'frozen pictures' are similar to 'sculpting', (see page 15), but involve small groups or the whole class. Using their own bodies, they depict a moment in time. It is literally a frozen moment when we imagine time has stopped, giving us the opportunity to look more closely at it. 'Thought Tapping', (see page 11), can be used once the still images have been refined in order to find out more about what is happening in each picture from different perspectives.



1. Collective / Collaborative Storytelling

Summary:

The whole class joins in with the telling of the story. The class teacher leads the telling and invites individuals to supply words, sound effects, phrases or whole sentences. This way, the detail is supplied by the children, while the development of the plot is controlled by the teacher.



Red Riding Hood Example:

An oral re-telling is preferable to a written text as the children can help to tell the story—emphasise that this is our special version and it may not be the same as other versions they may have heard. Start with the traditional opening and set the scene ... *Once upon a time, there lived a little girl whose name was Red Riding Hood. Everyone who knew her called her this because* after modelling the storytelling technique for a while, give children opportunities to supply words/phrases to finish your sentences. Tell them that you will look directly at the person who you want to give the next part of the story.



2. In-Role Storytelling

Summary:

The class teacher develops roles for each of the children—they can choose who they would like to be, but the rule is that they cannot be one of the main characters in the text, as the purpose of this activity is to add another dimension to the story for deepening understanding. Initially, children tell their partners who they are going to be and they need to make it clear how they know the other main characters. Then in groups of four, they tell the story in-role as their character, describing events from their point of view. If children are new to drama, it would be wise for class teachers to model this ... *Shall I tell you what happened to me yesterday?*

Coming out of role ...

Remember to tell the children, several times, that you are now out of role: some children can become quite anxious if they think you are still in-role as someone else.



Depending on how brave you are, either follow instructions given by individuals to refine your position or children come forward and physically manipulate parts of your body until an agreed sculpture of the wolf is seen...

At the beginning of the story, when he meets Red Riding Hood in the forest, how is he going to be feeling?

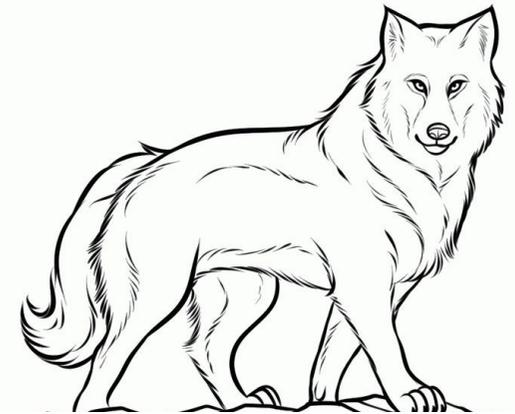
How will he look to show that he is feeling happy and excited?

Shall we see him standing or sitting?

How will he stand and what about his paws?

Will his head be hanging down like this or up like this?

What about the expression on his face?



7. Sculpting

Summary:

This way of working involves children making statues of each other or the class teacher through suggestions and physical manipulation. Sculptures can be made to crystallise ideas about a character, such as what the bully looked like; or to express a feeling, such as how anger could be physically represented.

Red Riding Hood Example:

Sculpting Mr Wolf

The class teacher or a child is sculpted by the children to represent the wolf at given moments in the story. Choose three different points in the story such as the beginning, the moment of capture and in his cage or prison cell. These can be focused on to investigate the use of body posture and gesture to convey the feelings of characters.



Red Riding Hood Example:



Tell the children you are going to tell the story of Red Riding Hood again as if you were one of the characters. You could use some simple props or costume to indicate you are in role as Granny. In-role as Granny, recall the events that happened in your cottage yesterday. Talk about the different viewpoint. How would it be different if the wolf had told the story?

Tell the children that they are all going to be characters in the story and although they cannot choose to be one of the main characters, they could be someone who knows one of them ...Granny's neighbour ... or someone who goes to school with Red Riding Hood. They might be one of the people who live in the forest, or even a woodland animal friend of Granny's or Red Riding Hood, (rabbits, owls, foxes, ... etc.), but be sure to clarify that children are to behave in a humanised manner and can talk! Particularly useful characters are Mrs Wolf and the children. In fours, they each introduce themselves to the group in role

I am Mrs. Wolf. I am married to the wolf who ate Granny yesterday. I can't believe it! He's never done anything like this before

3. Hot Seating

Summary:

One child goes into role as a character sitting in front of the class. Whoever is on the 'hot seat' answers as their character would. Children must be allowed time to prepare for this by having a discussion beforehand about what they know about that character. This will ensure that they can give quality responses to the questions from the class. At the same time, the class should also prepare questions to ask the child who is in-role.

If children are inexperienced with hot-seating, it is important that the class teacher models this and is questioned in role by the children first. Additionally, if this way of working is new to the class, they could be split into two groups and go into group role: half the class as one character, half the class as someone else. The class teacher could direct questions at each half of the class, or different members of the group can ask questions of the other character. This is interesting because different children can pose questions in role.

6. Decision Alley

Every story has its decision moment when the story develops further, so sustaining the interest of the reader. One of Red Riding Hood's developmental points happens when she decides to leave the path, in spite of her



mother's warning not to do so. This is an interesting area to explore with children and it helps them to consider cause and effect of characters' decisions. Following on from use of the Thought Tunnel activities, in a similar set up, half the class stands on one

half on the left-hand side reasons why leave the could be



might see a wolf, you might get lost, you might fall over .. The right-hand side tells her why she should go off the path, e.g there could be some flowers, or some blackberries to pick for Granny, or a short cut to Granny's house ... etc. When she reaches the end of the alley, she must turn and speak aloud her thoughts and then make a decision on a course of action.

side of her and other side. The has to think of she should not path .. E.g it dangerous, you

In another example of a Thought Tunnel activity, the children are asked to speak the thoughts of the wolf as he walks down the corridor towards the police cell, the cage in the zoo or wherever you decide to put him after his crime! Discuss possibilities about what might be going around in his mind first so everyone feels that they have something to say. Teacher in role walks slowly along the 'corridor' and his thoughts are spoken...

I wish I hadn't done it.

I'm in big trouble now

Still, I was really, really hungry

I'm sorry

That woodcutter should have minded his own business

I wonder if I'll have any visitors in prison?

Alternatives to these activities : Red Riding Hood could be asked about how she feels at key moments in the drama, e.g leaving her home ... walking through the forest ... meeting the wolf arriving at Granny's house and finding the door already open ...



Red Riding Hood Example:



Hot Seating the teacher in role:

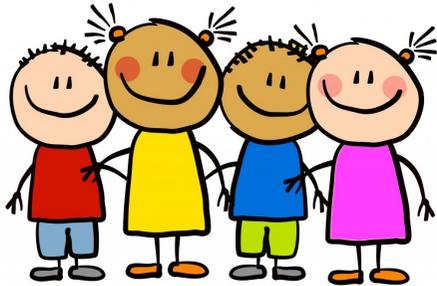
Tell the children that it is a couple of days after the incident and Red Riding Hood is feeling very nervous about what happened. She is afraid that some other awful things may happen. Ask the children if they will talk to her about what happened and try to reassure her. First they could ask some questions about the incident and then go on to reassure her about things to boost her confidence.

Provide time for the children to think of questions they could ask Red Riding Hood to get a clearer picture of what happened and how she's feeling and support them to frame their questions ... *How can they ask her what happened without frightening her? What can they say to reassure her? What tone of voice should they use? Why did she not obey her mother's instructions to stay on the path? How did she feel when the wolf spoke to her in the forest?* The children could then have a turn at being in the 'hot seat' as Granny, the woodcutter , or Red Riding Hood's mother ...

4. Role on the Wall

Summary:

The outline of a person, (character from the story), is drawn onto a large sheet of paper. Information about the person in the drama is collected and written around the outline. It is possible to contrast different types of information in a role on the wall. What the character says can be written in one colour and what she/he thinks in another for example or information of what we know about the person's life so far around the outside of the outline and how she/he's feeling or what she/he says written on the inside. This helps to gather everyone's understand- and thoughts and ing of events characters together and enables the class teacher to see quickly and simply who needs greater clarification of vocabulary /language and provides a visual platform from which to challenge children's thinking and analysis.



Red Riding Hood Example:



Tell the children that they are going to be able to tell the wolf what they think of his behaviour. Give some examples in order to avoid inappropriate statements!

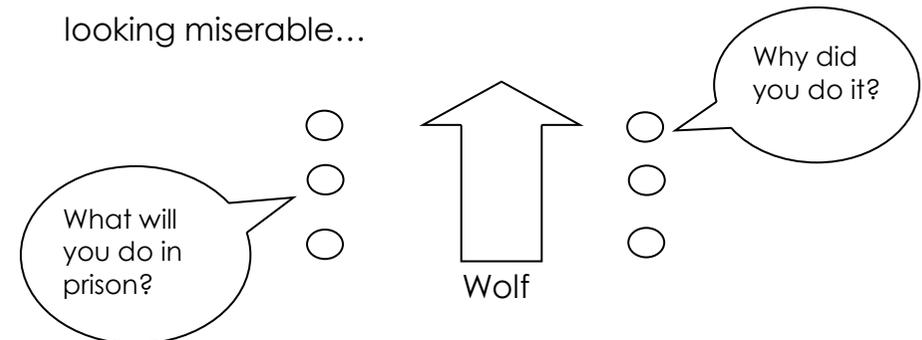
I think you should be ashamed of yourself

Why did you do it?

They should throw away the key!

What did Granny taste like?

Children form two parallel lines facing into the path between the lines. Teacher in role as wolf walks down the path and each character has the opportunity to express his or her thoughts about him. The wolf cannot reply to the comments and questions and walks slowly along the path looking miserable...



5. Thought Tracking

Summary:

Thought Tracking enables children in role to speak aloud the thoughts that would normally remain concealed. This can be done in different ways such as, 'thought tunnels' and 'thought tapping'. Thought tunnels require the children to face one another in two lines. The class teacher or child walks slowly between the two lines, (through the 'tunnel'), in role as a character from the drama. The thought tunnel can vary depending on what you want to explore. You may wish to consider the thoughts of one character by asking the children to speak aloud his/her thoughts they might be having at this point in the drama. It is best to have alternating sides speaking at the moment the child in role as the character passes by them. Alternatively, you may wish to consider the thoughts that other people have about the character, asking the children to provide these as he/she walks by.

Thought tapping is when the teacher literally taps a child on the shoulder as a signal for him/her to speak the thoughts of the character he/she is playing — this may be done in the midst of mimed activity or still images.

Red Riding Hood Example:



Mr Wolf is hungry and has a plan to trick Red Riding Hood and her grandma.

Mr Wolf knows where Granny lives and gets there quickly.



He wanders the forest looking for food.

Mr Wolf is cunning and quick thinking.

He pretends to be friends with Red Riding Hood by showing her a quick way to Granny's house.

Why is that little girl wandering the forest all alone?