

3 Drama Strategies

Meeting and becoming people

Collective role

In a collective role several people simultaneously take on a single role. A collective role could involve two people, a small group or a whole class. The strategy allows shared ownership of a role and requires shared responsibility for making it work. Classes coming to collective roles for the first time might find the following guidelines helpful:

- Always refer to yourself as 'I' and 'me' not 'we' and 'us'.
- Even though you are in a group try to imagine that there is only one of you present.
- Sit or stand close to the other members of the collective role.
- Try to share the talking opportunities. As teacher you can impose a rule that no member of the collective can make two consecutive contributions. You can also help to distribute participation by aiming questions and comments at individual members of the collective or giving an object that is passed around and setting a rule that only the person holding the object speaks.

Role on the wall

This strategy enables a class to collate and display what is known about a character at particular points in the drama. Normally a drawn outline of the character is displayed and participants in the drama are invited to write things that are known about the character on adhesive labels. When stuck around the outline, the labels provide an audit of shared information. Different coloured labels can be used to record 'things we know' (referential) 'things **we think** we know' (inferential) and 'things **we'd like** to know' (inquisitorial) (Figure 3.1).

Role sculpture

Role sculpture is a way of allowing members of a whole class or a smaller group to contribute to a collective role-building and to deepen their understanding of a role. Having encountered a character in a drama, individual members of a group come into a central space one by one and freeze in a still shape which embodies something about the character. Piece by piece the sculpture emerges until the whole group has joined it. Digital photographs taken from different angles enable all participants to observe, discuss and evaluate the finished sculpture (Figure 3.2).

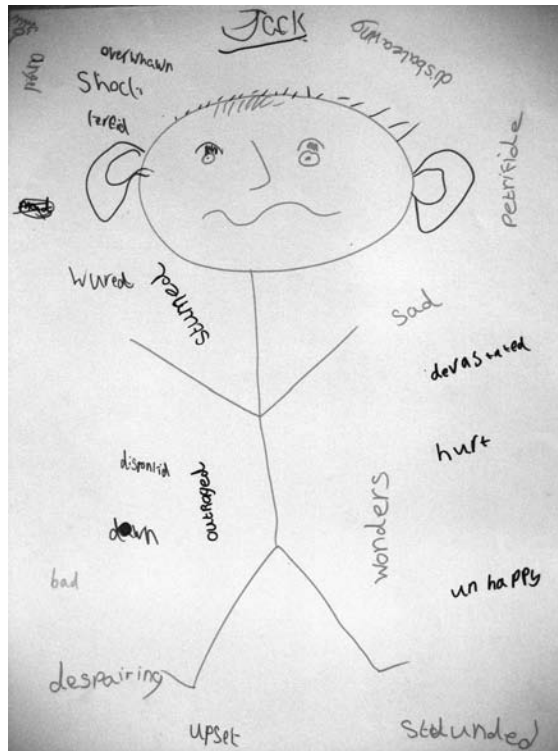


Figure 3.1 Role on the wall



Figure 3.2 Role sculpture

Teacher in Role

Teacher in Role (TiR) involves the teacher entering the drama by taking on a role alongside the children. This can be the most important and effective strategy available to a drama teacher. TiRs can be of high status (giving instructions, imparting information, setting challenges to be met or problems to be solved) or of lower status (asking for help, seeking advice or following instructions). Before taking on a TiR a teacher needs to:

- Know the function of the role (e.g. to inform, to advance the story, to find out what the children have understood, to build tension, to present a challenge).
- Decide how to clearly sign the role so that the children will know exactly who the TiR is supposed to be, for example, ‘so when I sit down in this chair (or put on this hat or come through that door) I will become . . .’.
- Ensure that the pupils know exactly who they are going to be while the teacher is in role. Are they also taking on roles or are they interacting with the TiR as themselves?
- Adopt a commitment to the role. Brilliant acting is not required but a seriousness of purpose will make the TiR ‘live’ for the children.

Making decisions and judgements

Conscience alley (or decision alley)

This strategy in which members of a class literally take sides is very useful for reviewing an argument, sharing conflicting viewpoints public and taking stock of the factors which need to be considered before making a decision. The class divides into two groups depending on which side of an argument they or their roles prefer. The two groups line up facing each other forming a corridor or alley. A character with a decision or judgement to make can now walk down that alley. As he passes, each person in the line says something to persuade the decision-maker of a particular point of view. The person who travels down the alley will simultaneously hear opposing views or advice expressed and at the end of the journey can make a decision or judgement by joining one of the two lines. It is as if the character is hearing conflicting voices in their heads. This can be repeated several times with different members of the class experiencing the alley and reaching their own decisions.

Voting with your feet

This is similar to, ‘Where do you stand’ but here people place themselves on a line. The feelings of a group about a particular issue in a drama can be quickly and effectively gauged by indicating or drawing a line on the floor using string, chalk or a long paper strip. At either ends of the line two contrasting arguments or position statements are written on large sheets of paper. The class is now invited to take up a position on that line relating to their particular viewpoint. Stress that although some people may feel very strongly about the issue and feel the need to be at the end of the line others may be less certain and find themselves moving towards the middle ground. Having listened to the thinking behind these decisions using statement prompts to justify and explain, such as ‘I’m standing here because. . .’ you could ask if anyone wants to change position on the line. The activity can be repeated at various points in the drama. It is interesting to see if people change their positions having participated in the drama.

Where do you stand?

This strategy helps us to sympathize and empathize with characters in a drama. At any moment in a drama the class can be invited to show how they feel about a character by placing themselves in a space in relation to that character. If for example a king has made a

decision you might ask people to stand close to the king if they think the king is right, or far from away him if they think he is making a mistake. In the case of an argument between two roles people can show which side they support by moving closer to one of the two roles. Statement prompts such as 'I am standing here because. . . .' can help to explain and justify the reasoning behind the person's positioning.

Making images

Essence machines

Essence machines can be made by small groups or by a whole class. The machine which can capture the essence of a moment in a drama, a character's feelings or a difficult decision is normally composed of three elements – movement, speech and sound. Members of the group become part of the machine one by one bringing with them a repeating sound, movement or fragment of language. Essence machines can be an effective way of examining contrasts. Machines can be 'operated' by teacher using signals which control volume and tempo. They can build up to include the whole class at the same time, or alternatively people (the machine parts) may enter or go from the machine.

Freeze-frame

A freeze-frame is the deliberate halting or freezing of action within a drama. The freeze needs to be cued for example by teacher calling out 'freeze', a drum beat or by the cutting of accompanying music. The freeze is an opportunity for members of a class to see and reflect on what is happening in the drama at that exact moment and perhaps to examine other people's frames together for interpretation, discussion and analysis. Just as a cueing mechanism is used to freeze action another cue is needed to reactivate it.

Image theatre

This involves the composition of a series of two or more still images. Often these images are contrasting showing different sides of an issue or a character, or may be 'the reality' of a situation in contrast to 'the ideal'. In image theatre slow-motion transitions between contrasting images can often make effective, engaging and meaningful performance to which words or sounds can be added.

Still image

A still image is also a moment frozen in time but this image has been devised and composed intentionally to represent an idea or moment in order to show it to others. Still images can be made by individuals, small groups or by whole groups. Although they are often composed using just participants' bodies, props, costumes and captions can be added to communicate additional meaning. Still images can be composed spontaneously and very quickly or built up gradually person by person. The image composition process can be accompanied by detailed discussion and verbal negotiation but it is sometimes interesting to ask groups to make their images without talking thus relying on non-verbal means of communication (Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3 Still image

Storyboard

Storyboard is a form of image theatre which focuses on sequencing a narrative. Small groups may be asked to represent a story or part of a story by making a series of still images. In creating their images groups will need to think about character and incident but also about structure and sequence. For example some stories need to be told in chronological order but others benefit from flashbacks or leaps into the future. Transitions between the still images can animate the storyboard and retell the story while captions and speech bubbles can add commentary and dialogue. Sometimes a whole class can create a storyboard with subgroups taking responsibility for an individual part of the story. Digital photography and filming can provide one way of recording and sharing storyboards.

Still images, freeze-frames and storyboards can be given written captions. Although it could be argued that a well-composed image should be able to communicate its meaning without the need for words. However the writing of captions can sometimes encourage groups to reflect on their images from an audience perspective and perhaps to make improvements.

Asking questions

Hot-seating

Hot-seating enables us to find out information about people who we meet in drama but may also offer an opportunity to challenge and even confront characters. Normally the character to be 'hot-seated' sits in a chair in role and is questioned by the rest of the class who may or may

not be in role themselves. The hot-seated role might be represented by an individual member of the class, a group undertaking a collective role or by a TiR.

Talking objects

In this strategy members of the class physically represent objects which can talk and interact. Some members of the class place themselves in turn, as objects in a specific location and other members of the class can then question those objects in order to find out more about a location, situation or character. When introducing the strategy for the first time it's important to stress that we are very interested in the object's perspective on the room in which it lives and the person who owns it. The physical representation is of secondary importance to what the object says. For example in Unit 1 a mirror on the wall in Mary Maguire's attic bedroom would be able to tell us if she takes a pride in her appearance but we would know nothing of her life outside the room. It is often useful to give people an opportunity to think of the questions they are going to ask an object before they actually 'meet' it.

Tracking thoughts

Eavesdropping (overheard conversations)

This is a way to access what is being said and thought by individuals, working pairs and small groups. It gives opportunity for spoken fragments to be heard by all. Short scenes are improvised for a while and then the action is frozen. The teacher walks around the space pausing in front of individual groups or pairs (as if listening in). This is a cue for a scene to reactivate (either moving forward or returning to replay what has already been said). We can 'eavesdrop' until the teacher moves on at which point the scene will freeze and the next will come alive and be heard as the teacher arrives.

Statement prompts

Statement prompts are useful thinking and speaking frames which offer a ritualistic, structured and supportive way for participants in a drama to contribute and share their ideas. In this strategy teacher provides the opening words of a statement which needs to be completed in turn by individual members of the class. Teachers can make up their own statement prompts. Statement prompts used in the drama units in this book include:

Unit 1: 'I wonder . . .'

Unit 2: 'I remember . . .'

Unit 3: 'The first thing I saw was . . .'

Unit 5: 'I'm leaving tomorrow because . . .'

Thought-tracking

This is the most frequently used method of accessing and sharing the thoughts of characters in a drama. At a given moment, a drama can be paused and everyone in role speaks the thoughts of a character, which might be their own character in the drama or else a designated character at that particular moment.

Thought-tracking: human keyboard

This is particularly useful in tracking the thoughts of collective roles. Ask members of a collective role to stand closely together and sum up what they are thinking or feeling in a word or phrase. Activate the chosen words and phrases by tapping group members on their shoulders. When tapped, each person will speak their chosen words. Shoulders now become keys on a keyboard. Interesting effects and meanings can be achieved by repeating the same 'note' for emphasis or playing two notes at the same time for synchronicity or contrast. Invite members of other collectives to play the keyboard. Experiment with two players (four hands) or three players (six hands). Alternatively invite the 'keyboards' to improvise without hands activating the 'keys' allowing people to decide for themselves the most appropriate and effective moment to speak aloud. Groups can experiment with repetitions, echoes and pauses making their own improvised effects.

We can add meaning and depth to still images or freeze-frames by writing characters' thoughts on pieces of paper and placing them in the images as in comic strips and photo-stories. Appropriately shaped laminated thought-bubbles are a very cheap and useful resources as they can be wiped clean and used time and time again.

Thought-tracking: passing thoughts

In this variant of thought-tracking a character stands in the centre of a circle. Individual members of the class take it in turns to cross the circle speaking aloud the thoughts of the character as they pass.

Making meaning through sound

Choral speaking

Choral Speaking involves a group of people speaking together for dramatic effect. They may speak in unison or experiment with a mixture of single and multiple voices. The key elements of choral speaking are volume, tempo, tone, vocal register, pause and rhythm.

Soundscape/sound collage

Working in small groups people are asked to make a pattern of sound which might illustrate something or someone in a drama. This is a way of making meaning which could 'allow' language as well as sounds but is more likely to rely on sound effects. Groups need to experiment with ways of making non-verbal sounds, for example, using:

- their mouths (sighing, whistling, breathing, cheering);
- other parts of their bodies (stamping feet, clapping hands);
- 'found' sounds (a piece of paper slowly ripped or screwed up, a pen rattling on a radiator, a door squeak);
- percussion (improvised or conventional musical instruments).

Soundscapes/sound collages are often performed to audiences who have their eyes shut to ensure only an aural focus.

Voice collage

The voice collage is a variant of the soundscape in which only vocal effects are allowed. This approach is more likely to 'allow' language to be included alongside other vocal effects.

Making meaning through movement

Mime

In mime we are using our bodies to interact with imaginary objects, people, locations and audiences. Working in mime has a number of practical advantages. First it can be immediate and by definition requires no props or setting. Second mime can focus us on visual and kinaesthetic communication (stripping away verbal communication) as it relies on only gesture, facial expression and movement. Third it is something that all children naturally do in their play and even older students often experience a sense of pleasure in being allowed to 'equip' their work from the store rooms of their own imaginations.

Expressive movement/dance drama

Movement work in drama can easily cross a line into dance. By adding music or percussion to activities such as essence machines, transitions, storyboards movement work can become more theatrical and expressive. Classes who are used to expressing themselves in more formal movement styles will often ask for music to accompany their work. Sometimes the work is set up as dance drama and the boundaries are intentionally merged (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4 Expressive movement. Photograph courtesy of Steven Beaumont (professional photographer, www.stevenbeaumont.com)

'Move if . . .'

This simple strategy can be used at the start of a drama to make links between past, real experiences and the themes and issues in the drama that is about to unfold. It invites engagement and encourages empathy. The participants stand in a circle and the teacher makes a series of statements starting with. 'Move if . . .'. All those to whom the statement applies must move to a different point in the circle. For example (Unit 5), a drama about migration opens with a number of 'move if' statements which require the participants to think about their real life experiences of travel, leaving home and separation. This is an active, personal but safe way of opening the door to engagement with the drama.

Working in role

Drawing/designing/writing/mapping/enquiring/researching in Role

In these activities people carry out tasks 'as if' they were someone else. When working in this way they are required to imagine and respond authentically to situations and tasks, from within the role (Figure 3.5).

Mantle of the Expert

In this strategy (which some now consider to be a curriculum 'approach') participants in the drama are 'given' roles which carry assumed expertise and responsibilities. Although even young children will know that this expertise is imagined and not real the tasks set from within the mantle (often commissioned by an external client) can empower, raise self-esteem and performance, improve motivation and elevate both focus and seriousness of purpose. Mantle of the Expert (MoE) roles in these drama units include trusted advisors to the King, expert



Figure 3.5 Drawing in role

rat-catchers, officials from the Ministry of Food, advertising copywriters and top poster designers.

Telling stories

Active story-telling

This form of physical theatre requires the class either individually or in groups to respond to a narrative by 'becoming' objects and characters as they crop up in the story. The whole group becomes a constantly changing physical shape which can represent geographical features, animals, objects and of course people.

Eavesdropping (see 'tracking thoughts')

This strategy can be used to allow a large number of people to contribute fragments of narrative detail to a collective drama. For example, if people working in pairs have been improvising in role, the teacher can ask the class to all be still and silent until the teacher seamlessly passes by each pair in turn. When the teacher passes by each pair, it will be their opportunity to go back and re-enact what they have already enacted or they might carry on improvising from where they left off. When the teacher passes on the pair falls silent and still again and it will be another pairs' turn. The teacher may only stay 'eavesdropping' for a minute or so. This can also be done with small groups.

Teacher narration: first person

Here the teacher takes on the role of a character in the drama and narrates using a first person narrative. *'I sat down on my throne and looked around at my ministers.'*

Teacher narration: third person

Here a teacher introduces or advances the narrative acting as a storyteller and using a third person authorial voice. *'The King sat down on his throne and looked around at his Ministers.'* Often a teacher will try to incorporate ideas supplied by class members into the narration, so that the children hear their ideas as part of a successful narrative.

Improvising

Improvisation involves expression (verbal or non-verbal) which is spontaneous and un-rehearsed. Much of the time when we interact with others in role in drama we are required to improvise and it is the immediacy of this expression which can make drama feel 'real' and exciting. Genuinely spontaneous improvisation can be very effectively shared with audiences however there is also a place for using improvisation as a basis for devising and scripting rehearsed work to be performed for others.

Devising and performing

The showing of work (or the preparation of work to be shown) in drama introduces a different dynamic, makes different demands and promotes different learning. In improvisation we were in the first instance making meaning for ourselves as participants. The introduction of a performance element means that we must now make meaning for others. Often when the time comes to present an improvisation to the whole class a group will want to refine and improve the 'script' or change the shape of the original improvisation so that an audience will have a better view. In thinking about how an audience is likely to perceive, understand and evaluate their work, groups will start to make artistic decisions which are essentially communicative. In devising work for performance a working checklist could include questions such as:

- Will they understand what we mean?
- Will they know who we are?
- Will they be able to see everything we're showing them and hear what we're saying?
- Can we find a better, stronger/sadder/funnier/more powerful way to communicate our ideas?

Forum theatre

In 'forum theatre' the 'play' can be negotiated and purposefully changed through a dialogue between actors and audiences. The audience are encouraged to join the actors in helping them to solve their character's problems and resolve their difficulties by trying different behaviours, speech and actions.

Forum theatre can be used in a drama to:

- work towards the resolution of a problem or issue;
- hear, see and examine both sides of an argument;
- consider alternative courses of action and their impact on self and others;
- consider the impact of the different uses of language;
- examine motivation, why people say and do certain things and what impact this can have on others and on situations;
- discuss why some people have power and others don't and whether and how this can be positively changed;
- help characters to behave and feel differently and experience the possible changes this can make to themselves and the situations they are in (linking cause and effect).

In making 'forum theatre' we need:

A forum	A defined space/place where the discussions and investigations will take place. This could be a stage or simply be a space in the middle of the room.
A 'play'	This might be improvised or scripted dialogue, a moment in a drama, a movement sequence or even a still image. Normally the passage under investigation will be quite short and will have been prepared for presentation and scrutiny.
Actors	To show the 'play'.
An audience	To observe the play and respond to it.
'Spect-actors'	Who join in the play sometimes only partially by suggesting ideas from their seats in the audience or sometimes by getting up and joining the actors in the performance space to work with or as them.
A facilitator (sometimes called 'the joker')	Who 'manages', facilitates and mediates the interventions and discussions. This critical role is usually undertaken by a teacher.
Rules	The facilitator needs to set out clear rules for intervention.

Many types of audience intervention can happen in 'forum theatre'; some of the key ways in which a member of the audience can contribute to the forum and become a 'spect-actor' are through:

INVESTIGATING/CHALLENGING	Questioning characters who then answer in role.
RETAGING	Suggesting alternative actions for the characters to try that may lead to a different response and outcome.
REWRITING	Suggesting different things the characters could say that may lead to a change of outcome when other characters respond.
REINFORCING	Coming into the performance space and helping a character to make a point or win an argument by working alongside them in the role.
REPLACING	Taking the place of a character (substitution) and showing how that character could behave differently.