



# Drama

*Drama is both a creative activity in its own right and a vehicle for learning.*

- imaginative play and drama are critical in early language and literacy development, however, standardised measures, particularly in the early years, threaten the place of drama in the curriculum
- drama is a powerful motivator of creative learning however, creativity is often neglected in the primary curriculum because of high stakes learning
- for children fully to benefit from drama approaches, teachers need to plan carefully but develop learning spontaneously.

Drama has been differently defined:

- ‘the art form of social encounters’ (Cremin, 2015: 25)
- ‘the active and integrated engagement of mind and body, involving imagination, intellect, emotion and physical action’ (Franks, 2010:242)
- ‘creative learning’ (Neelands, 2011)
- a multimodal art form which ‘makes meanings through the languages of movement, visual images, sound and music as well as through the spoken word’ (Nicholson, 2000).

UKLA recognises that drama motivates and engages young learners and sees imaginative play and drama as essential to secure early language and literacy development. Recognised as ‘the serious and necessary occupation of children’ (Dyson, 2009: 122) studies of young children reveal the significant role of imaginary play and show how through such play children explore notions of self. In relation to classroom drama, which many scholars argue is closely linked to play (both make use of the imagination, narrative, emotions and dialogue), a meta-analysis indicates that drama has a beneficial effect on young children’s oral language

development and facilitates both their narrative recall and their understanding (Podlozny, 2000). Studies with older children also indicate the contribution of drama to writing, to children's ideational fluency and motivation to commit to paper whilst engaged in drama (Cremin *et al.*, 2006).

However, Wohlwend and Pepler (2015) warn that play is losing out to the demands of standardised measures, particularly in early years classrooms. Similarly, creativity is in danger of being squeezed out of the primary curriculum because of high stakes testing (Moss, 2017). Drama allows children (and adults) to bring the known world and the world of the imagination together. To flourish in classrooms, drama needs teachers who are ready to be adventurous, who tolerate uncertainty and can handle the spontaneity required by adopting roles. Teacher in Role is critical in developing children's talk and meaning-making in imagined worlds which teachers inhabit alongside the children (Edmiston, 2014), yet it is a somewhat underdeveloped teaching and learning tool in the primary profession. Other drama conventions such as freeze frame, hot seating and decision alley, for example, are more widely used to examine the language, interpretation and meaning of events in narrative and in life (see for example Cremin, *et al.*, 2016). Combined, Teacher in Role and a range of drama conventions, offer rich routes to engagement in literacy.

## Sources

Cremin, T. (2015) Developing Creativity in Drama (2015) in T. Cremin, D. Reedy, E. Bearne and H. Dombey *Teaching English Creatively*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge. pp. 25-40.

Cremin, T. and McDonald, R. (2013) Developing creativity through drama in D. Wyse, and R. Jones, (2013) (eds.) *Creativity in the Primary Curriculum* pp. 83-97 London, Routledge.

Cremin, T., Gooch, K., Blakemore, L., Goff, E. and McDonald, R. (2006) Connecting Drama and Writing: seizing the moment to write, *Research in Drama in Education* 11 (3) pp. 273-291.

Cremin, T. McDonald, R. Goff, E. and Blakemore, L. (2016) *Jumpstart Drama!* David Fulton.

Dyson, A.H. (2009) Writing in childhood worlds, in: R. Beard, D. Myhill, M. Nystrand and J. Riley (eds.) *Handbook of Writing Development*. London: Sage, pp.232-245.

Edmiston, B. (2014) *Transforming Teaching and Learning with Active and Dramatic Approaches Engaging Students across the Curriculum*, London, Routledge.

Franks, A. (2010) Drama in Teaching and Learning Language and Literacy, in D. Wyse, R. Andrews, and J. Hoffman (eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of English, Language and Literacy Teaching*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge. pp.242-253.

Moss, G. (2017) Assessment, accountability and the literacy curriculum: reimagining the future in the light of the past, *Literacy* 51 (2) pp.56-64.

Neelands, J. (2011) Drama as creative learning, in J. Sefton-Green, P. Thomson, K. Jones, and L. Breslar (eds.) *The Routledge international handbook of creative learning*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge. pp. 168-76.

Nicholson, H. (2000) Drama, literacies and difference, in E. Bearne and V. Watson (eds.) *Where Texts and Children Meet*. London: Routledge. pp. 113-122.

Podlozny, A. (2000) Strengthening verbal skills through the use of classroom drama: A clear link. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34(3-4) pp. 239–275.

Wohlwend, K. and Peppler, K. (2015) All rigor and no play is no way to improve learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 96 (8) pp. 22-26.

## **Classroom examples**

### **Leaning on literature: *The Bear and the Piano***

Many teachers lean on literature as a form of framing text to investigate through drama. For example with *The Bear and the Piano*, by reading to the point where the animals have gathered around the bear playing the piano in the forest, you can invite children to share in partners what the animals might say about the magical melodies and then by freezing in position as an animal, you could use the drama convention ‘thought tracking’ and listen to several animals voicing their thoughts, feelings, questions or comments about the music and about the playing. Reading on to where the bear is asked to go to the city but knows the other bears will miss him, they might ‘role play’ the conversation between the bear and the girl from the city. This could lead to a ‘decision alley’ in which the class voice the bear’s views and one child walks down the alley of his mind, listening and finally deciding what to do. Perhaps narrate a little more of the tale and await the children’s responses before deciding with them if the bear writes a letter home, a diary entry or rings a friend to share his loneliness or his happiness. In this way the children can co-create the narrative they design as well as hear the story David Litchfield wrote.

### **Leaning on life: *The Island* Armin Greder**

Exploring life experiences through drama can open new insights, offer space to examine, consider, create and imagine as well as connecting emotionally with a theme or experience. For example, drawing on the theme of the migration and belonging, you could invite children to first consider what domain knowledge they bring to the title of the text *The Island*. After drawing what they think the title page could look like, show them the front cover and discuss the discrepancies and the local knowledge needed to comprehend the text. Read the first page to the point where it says, ‘He wasn’t like them’. The white space above this line may depict thinking time as the people of the Island and the man meet each other for the first time. Invite the children to voice the thoughts and questions the man might have before reading to where the people of the Island are discussing whether to take the man in. Through a ‘decision alley’ explore the differing views between the Islanders and the Fisherman. Continue to the point where the man appears in the town. Through ‘role play’ children could take the role of

the Fisherman who needs to convince a range of Islanders that he should be given a job. Narrate more of the story noting how rumours were spreading about the man and an article was being planned for the front page of the Island newspaper in the morning. In groups, children could write the alternative article from the perspective of acceptance and understanding. Continue the story to where the Islanders seized the man. Use 'role on the wall' to explore the possible feelings of the man before reading to the end of the text when a wall is built around the Island. Create a physical image of the wall either through 'group sculpture' or with classroom furniture. Discuss what the wall symbolizes before asking children to use the power of language to create their 'hope for the Islanders' which they can then place on or around the wall. As each hope is placed, a piece of the wall is removed.

### **Leaning on life: Plastic pollution**

Continuing the notion of creating opportunities to connect with life experiences through drama, the theme of plastic pollution could be chosen. This often evokes emotional responses due to the impact the pollution can have on the environment and is something everyone can act on. Immerse the children in the theme through newspaper reports, pictures, poems, on-line news clips and podcasts. Use the sources to elicit the salient points from all sides of the plastic pollution argument. Encourage children to voice their opinions as you explore the theme together. With the children draw out what the problems, issues and tensions are. Consider using a range of drama conventions to explore the tensions through various scenarios where the children adopt, for example, the role of an environmental campaigner or local sympathizer. Set up the scenario imagining that a new supermarket is planning to locate in your village and you have heard that they are packaging the majority of their produce in plastic. In groups children could decide on the argument they are going to present to the manager of the supermarket through a 'role play' activity. Leading up to this, the children, in role as the families from the village, could enact the conversations taking place in their household on receiving the leaflet notifying them of the new supermarket. Phone conversations could be made between the different families sharing their concerns. Move to the point where a meeting will be held in the town hall between the managers of the supermarket and local residents. Through 'role play' organize the meeting with groups of families meeting representatives from the supermarket. The drama could conclude with posters being made to display around the village, letters being written to the supermarket managers or information leaflets prepared to post through villagers doors.

### **Children's books**

Armin Greder (2008) *The Island*. Allen and Unwin. ISBN 9781741752663

David Litchfield (2016) *The Bear and the Piano*. Frances Lincoln. ISBN 9781847807182

*Teresa Cremin and Roger MacDonald on behalf of UKLA*

See also

**UKLA bookshop**    [www.ukla.org/shop](http://www.ukla.org/shop)

*Drama: Reading, Writing and Speaking Our Way Forward*

by Teresa Cremin and Angela Pickard

*Building Communities of Readers*

by Teresa Cremin, Marilyn Mottram, Fiona Collins and Sacha Powell

*Storyline: Creative Learning Across the Curriculum*

by Carol Omand

*English Language and Literacy 3-19:Drama*

by John Richmond

**UKLA website**    [www.ukla.org/resources](http://www.ukla.org/resources)

CLPE Reading and Writing Scales

both on: <https://ukla.org/resources/collection/professional-development>