

Story Drama
Grades K-8

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Introductions

- Story Drama uses theatrical skills to experience story and character and to explore the world and specific details of the story. Appropriate grade levels K-6 (*Can be adapted for even older students when exercises are layered to fit their skill level.*)
- Drama is different than theatre. There is often a fine line drawn between the two. Story drama may be crafted into a piece of theatre and the very elements of characters and conflict and inter-personal relationships are the same in both. But DRAMA focuses on the process of dramatic activity as an educational tool while THEATRE focuses on the product of performance and a technical skill in which not all students will excel.

Objectives

Learn techniques of Story Drama and apply them to broader curriculum goals and the application of theatrical skills and the creative process. (*Based on Arts EALRs*)

- **Conceptualize** problems and solutions.
- **Gather** information from diverse sources.
- **Develop** ideas and theatrical techniques.
- **Organize** movements, gestures, phrases, and characters within a creative world.
- **Reflect** on individual feelings and personal connections to a story.
- **Refine** work based on the specific story demands or guidelines.
- **Present** and share work with others throughout the process.
- **Interpret** and create a personal response to the work.
- **Engage** actively and purposefully.

Using the curriculum from this workshop students' will be able to:

- Use gesture and vocal inflection to depict objects, characters and action.
- Articulate the details of the literary component of the work.
- Develop and present solutions to problems using critical thinking.
- Work together and be able to listen and share with each other.
- Collaborate with other students to tell a story.
- Analyze how the details of the story affect them personally.

TYPICAL STORY DRAMA CLASS

Transition Activity: Involves getting each student to **conceptualize** the problem of the story and get connected to it as you transition into the story. This activity may involve an art project that will have the students **gather** resources and information from the environment or perhaps from a visiting character. (*Played by the leader*)

Warm-up/ Motivation: Begin your journey into the story by having students **develop** a movement, or voice or other sensory expression. Before the story is read, students **organize** these gestures around the theme, characters and dramatic conflict. At this point “hook lines” are introduced, and techniques for their expression are **developed, presented, and refined.**

Story Time: Using listening skills and imagination students **conceptualize** the world of the story and **develop** ideas based on the voice and dramatic conflict of the story.

Dramatic Play: The students use elements of the story to **present** and **refine** new movements, voices and **develop** collaboration skills to solve the overarching problem in the story. The leader uses point of view and goes into role by portraying characters in order to make the story unique to the class.

Evaluation/ Reflection: Students come back together in a circle to **reflect** upon their feelings about the story and **conceptualize** the most memorable moment from the day's story.

TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

These projects help to ease the students into the world of the story and act as a ritual to transition into story drama time. For K-2nd, take some time to set up the space before the students arrive laying out materials, playing appropriate music, and arranging the furniture for the dramatic play. Transition activities are useful for the Pre-K-2nd grade students to **gather** information and **organize** the ideas and **conceptualize** the world of the story. These activities can be modified to act as a ritual for the older students to help you transform the drama space. Some examples of transition activities:

1. Create individual pictures or pieces of art related to something in the story: **Gather** diverse materials such as chalk, decorate with glitter, and have each student **organize** in order to personalize his/her own work of Art. Each student titles his/her piece and presents it to the others who respond with, “Ohhhh, Ahhhh. What a masterpiece!”
2. Meet characters that are in similar situations from the story. **Present** questions or **develop** ideas with these characters.

TRANSITION ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

3. Explore the stories physical environment with movement, **refining** ideas with more and more detail.
4. Hang butcher paper and create a large map or collage of the environment in the story. **Organize** and **develop** the idea as a group.
5. Use clay to **conceptualize** a character, environment or emotion from the story.
6. Play music to establish the mood for the ensuing activities.
7. Present and personalize the problem in the story.

STORY TIME

Elements of a Story:

Stories for dramatization should be of good literary quality and should appeal to the leader and the students. Choose material that lends itself to the drama process. There should be interesting characters, a plot with a problem or conflict, sensory opportunities and a specific locale. This basic dramatic structure is variously known as given circumstances or the five W's:

- **Who:** characters
- **Why:** motivation (what the characters want)
- **What:** action (what the characters do)
- **Where:** setting
- **When:** time

When choosing stories for the K-3rd, look for ones with dramatic conflict, repeated lines, mix of boy and girl heroes, and a story that can be read relatively quickly. You can also choose books and use drama activities to explore a theme or issue with your students.

Story Drama Book Ideas (K-3rd):

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes
Meanwhile... by Jules Feiffer
No Moon, No Milk by Chris Babcock
Ming Lo Moves the Mountain by Arnold Lobel
Olivia by Ian Falconer
The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister
Muncha, Muncha, Muncha by Candace Fleming
King Bidgood's in the Bathtub by Audrey Wood
Penny Lee and Her TV by Glenn McCoy
Aaaarrgghh Spider by Lydia Monks
How I Became a Pirate by Melinda Long
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst
The Guild of Geniuses by Dan Santat

Book Ideas (4th-6th)

The Hoboken Chicken Emergency by Daniel Pinkwater
Holes by Louis Sachar
Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar
The BFG by Roald Dahl
The Midwife's Apprentice by Karen Cushman
The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by Avi

DRAMATIC PLAY

The moment you close the book, it is best to re-start the dramatic play. This involves diving into the story or physically exploring the themes/ concepts in the book. When creating your curriculum, set a goal (*also known as an **Objective***) for yourself and for the students. (*i.e. In the book "The Rainbow Fish" the students will explore sharing and how it feels when someone doesn't share.*) Then use the goal to structure the time when you play in the story. You will also go back to your goal when you are assessing and helping the students **reflect** on the experience. Here are some helpful hints to make your dramatic playtime more successful (*The following contains some information taken in part from An Introduction to Creative Drama, the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga interwoven with some helpful ideas based on classroom experiences.*).

Space:

Arrange the room so that students have an adequate amount of space in which to move freely and comfortably. Define where in the room action can happen. Mark the space in some way (with your body, masking or plastic tape, etc.) and set an "off limits" to avoid problems with fragile objects, "attractive nuisances," etc. It is best to arrange the room before you begin the warm-up activities.

Controls/Rituals:

At the beginning of the warm-ups/motivation exercises, set rules, limits, and control signals so students don't have too many decisions to face at once. Basic rules can help free students to be creative during the dramatic playtime.

- Set a signal which freezes action and sound (e.g., "Freeze", 3-2-1-Stop, drum beat, lights on/off, hand clap)
- Set a signal that tells students that you need their focus. One example is a call and response where the teacher says, "Focus" and students respond, "Check". When you vary the volume or pitch or expressiveness of your "Focus" the students respond with the same in their "Check". Another fun focus signal is for the leader to say "Hocus Pocus" and the children reply with "Focus."
- Set a signal to create a sitting or standing circle. (E.g., short song that fits with story, count backwards from 5-Zero, a phrase that is a call and response)
- Set a signal for students to move in "slow motion" in order to control action if necessary.
- Set limits regarding personal interaction (e.g., no one touches another person or any object in the room unless instructed to do so by the leader as part of the activity.)

DRAMATIC PLAY (CONTINUED)

Grouping:

During the dramatic play, organize group work to fit the experience and skill level of the class:

- Unison playing (all students working individually but at the same time) helps students overcome feelings of self-consciousness.
- Pair playing (all students working in pairs but at the same time) is a step toward building group cooperation skills.
- After working in unison and pairs, students will be able to work simultaneously in small groups and then **present** their work to the entire class.

REFLECTION

It is worthwhile to set aside some time for the students to **reflect** after they have dramatically explored the story. As the information they have **gathered** in the playtime sinks in, reflection helps the students to establish a deeper memory of the experience and learn from what they have just done. This can also be used to evaluate whether or not you have met your goals for the lesson. Simple types of reflection are:

- Discussion about the story (these can reinforce vocabulary like *main character, conflict or obstacle, environment, etc.*) Describe the environment that Rainbow fish lives in. How was Rainbow Fish in conflict with the other fish? How did the other fish feel when Rainbow Fish didn't share? What did the wise fish say to Rainbow Fish that changed his mind?
- A phrase and movement that represents the story. When repeated, this memory will help the students to remember the book and the dramatic play attached.
- Draw a picture of the conflict or resolution in today's adventure.
- Pass around a "talking stick" and when the students have the stick they can share what they remember about the story.

IMPORTANT GENERAL IDEAS

1. Drama can be adapted to all ages and abilities.
2. Your students should be allowed to risk as much or as little as they need to.
3. The more *you* risk, the more freedom they will have to risk.
4. The "brink of chaos" is often scary and just as often the most creative and educational moment.

5. There are tremendous resources to aid you with drama in your classroom. The most highly recommended are Viola Spolin's book Theatre Games for the Classroom and Nellie McCaslin's Creative Drama in the Primary Grades.
6. And, of course SCT's Education Outreach Program is a great resource you can invite into your classroom for workshops and residencies on themes such as the productions at SCT or any piece of literature or theme.

DRAMATIC STRUCTURES FOR EXPLORING CHAPTER BOOKS

With any piece of literature there are many dramatic structures that can be employed to bring the characters, the conflict, sometimes even the whole environment to life in the classroom.

- **Tableaux:** Human sculptures, Freeze Frame Fairy Tales, Slide shows of the story, family portraits, and crime photos—all one to five still images **developed** by students to tell a complete story. The image may include one student, frozen in a pose that **reflects** the idea, or it may be an image that will involve half or all of the class.
- **Physical Brainstorming:** Students sit in a half circle facing a stage area. After identifying the topic, students take turns (in order around the half circle) coming into the stage area to show their image. This activity is similar to charades, but there is no guessing or discussion during the brainstorm. Subsequent rounds may add sound, words or movement, as desired by the leader. If necessary, leader may give a default image, which students can **present** if they have trouble **conceptualizing** on their feet.
- **Thought Tracking:** While holding a tableau, the leader circulates, touching each student in turn to speak and **present** his or her thoughts out loud.
- **Hot Seating:** The leader or a student is set in front of the group in role as a character. The group questions the character, either as themselves, in role as a group with a particular relationship to that character (i.e. reporters, loyal subjects, etc.) or in collective role, representing one person with a particular relationship to that character (i.e. her mother, her boss, her best friend, etc.).
- **Media Interviews:** News reports, Talk shows and interviews, documentaries (filmed or live), radio and TV advertising—exploring aspects of characters in an out-of-story context. Talk shows are often self-starters and need less facilitating than others.
- **Who Is to Blame:** Courtroom cases, debates—Can you try the Big Bad Pig for destruction of property? Who will the witnesses be? Who will testify?

- **Non-Linear time:** 10 Years Later, 10 Years before, Simultaneous time—Create scenes with characters 10 years older, or a scene that might be happening simultaneously with the one being told in the story.
- **Experts:** Students take on the role of experts—whether detectives, scientists, explorers. This idea couples well with the Media Interviews structure and curriculum-based drama. Try a talk show with a panel of experts on a topic such as the human body or Mexico or... and each expert might have an area of expertise.
- **Scenes that aren't there:** Much like non-linear time, create improvised scenes that might have occurred *between* those that happen in the written story, using the same set of characters, setting and given circumstances.
- **Inner Monologues:** Leader (teacher) calls out “Freeze!” and as all are frozen, one by one the students as their character are allowed to speak their thoughts.
- **Three Questions:** Leader asks students to come up with three questions to ask one of the characters from the book. Students are then instructed to choose one question and to answer it based on clues from the book as well as their imagination. Additional questions are then asked about the answer, and so on, leading to a deeper understanding of the characters.

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Story Drama Lesson Plan Outline

Title	
Objective	
Grade Level	
Time Needed	
Brief Description (2 or 3 sentences)	
Materials Needed	

Transition Activity:

Warm-up/ Motivation:

Story Time:

Dramatic Play:

Evaluation/ Reflection:

Assessment Criteria (Finish the sentence: "Students will..."):

SCT Education Outreach ♦ 201 Thomas Street ♦ Seattle, WA 98109-4535

206-443-0807 ♦ EducationOutreach@sct.org ♦ www.sct.org

Karen Sharp Education Director karens@sct.org

Notes/Variations:

Story Drama Curriculum

• Book Title	Ming Lo Moves the Mountain by Arnold Lobel
• Objective	To integrate science and math into established story drama curriculum
• Supplies	Scarves and poster

- **Transition Activity:**

*Involves getting each student to **conceptualize** the problem of the story and get connected to it as you transition into the story.*

Introduction of problem or objective: Announce to the students that your friend named Ming Lo is trying to design a new house, but we need their help. Ask if anyone has built a house before. Have them use tableaux to show us with their bodies what a house should look like.

It turns out that the Ming Lo's house looks like the back of a show poster. Talk about where we should build the house. Take an imaginary ride to a few places where you might like to build your new house (maybe by the ocean or in a Zoo?). Decide why those places won't work. Finally decide that building your house by the mountain will be perfect. Put the poster by an imaginary mountain and have the students paint it using scarves.

- **Warm-up/ Motivation:**

Begins your journey into the story.

Everything goes wrong with the house.
Rain (spray bottle) comes through the walls.
Snow and hail (ping pong balls) bounce off the roof.
It's always cold because of the shadow of the...

- **Transition to story:**

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Karen Sharp Education Director karen@sct.org

*Dramatic techniques for students' expression are **developed, presented, and refined.***

...Mountain! Whose idea was it to live by this mountain anyway? What should we do?
Try some suggestions from the class.
Finally, you or your assistant suggests going to the wise person played by Kathryn.

Note: Have a ritual about trying the idea and going to sleep and then finding out the idea didn't work.

First off, the wise person tells us to return to the house of Ming Lo and try balancing on one leg with your arms out (a balance concept from the science unit) If one student can do that while the other students count the mountain will be so impressed that it will move. We try it, but it doesn't work. We go back to the wise man.

The wise person suggests if a student can solve a math problem that the mountain will move. We try it, but the mountain doesn't move. We go back to the wise person.

Finally, the wise man suggests we read a book about mountains moving. Maybe that will help us out.

- **Story:**

*Using listening skills and imagination students **conceptualize** the world of the story and **develop** ideas based on the voice and dramatic conflict of the story.*

Have the students repeat the hook lines, "Go back to the wise man, Ming Lo" and "Go home, Ming Lo."

- **Dramatic Play:**

*The students use elements of the story to **present** and **refine** new movements, voices and **develop** collaboration skills to solve the overarching problem in the story.*

We give the book to the mountain but still no relief. .

We gather up pieces of our house and step to the Dance of the Moving Mountain.

When we're exhausted from all that mountain moving and our house is rebuilt, we stop and look at the mountain. Miraculously, it is much farther away.

We bask in the sun, plant a garden, and listen when the rain falls on our roof (rather than through it).

- **Evaluation/ Assessment:**

*Students come back together in a circle to **reflect** upon their feelings about the story and **conceptualize** the most memorable moment from the day's story.*

End of class ritual.

Using a talking stick, have each student remember which characters we met and who played each character.

Freeze in a statue of the Dance of the Moving Mountain.

- EALER'S Met: 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.1, 3.1