

DRAMA *Works*

Year 7 Drama Plans

EXTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Not everyone is going to be an actor, even at the G.C.S.E. level, but nowadays everyone needs drama skills in one form or another. This is the age of the 'presentation' where products and ideas are sold in a competitive market-place by the strength of the presenter and his powers of delivery. The scientist, the businessman, the engineer, the bank manager, the retail executive, the designer, none are exempt.

Even before this stage, many examinations have oral or presentation components. Jobs and further education often require interviews. There is an increasing need for a confident outward persona, an ability to speak with ease and audibility using the appropriate relaxed body language.

The Year 7, 8 and 9 Drama Lesson plans cover a range of skills. On the one hand, they prepare the student for G.C.S.E. drama exams and are an excellent platform for more advanced drama and theatre examinations in the sixth form; on the other they prepare every student for life skills that there may not otherwise be time for in a busy school schedule.

THE SKILLS SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSED IN THIS BOOK FOR YEAR 7:

Life Skills:

Concentration; listening to each other, to instructions, etc.; developing the memory; general alertness and quick responses.

Confidence building: getting used to being watched, talking and acting in front of others.

Learning to work with anyone, group tolerance, working in different group sizes, building up group sensitivity and awareness of others.

Building up trust of each other, overcoming embarrassment in front of others in many areas including touch.

Problem solving, individually, in pairs and in groups.

The ability to analyse and evaluate.

Enhancing Practical Creativity:

Expanding and encouraging the use of the imagination.

Preliminary explorations into character.

An understanding of basic narrative skills.

Structuring stories and structuring drama.

Presentation and Performance Skills.

Vocal expression: audibility, clarity, thinking on one's feet, language apt to character and situation

Movement: flexibility and expressiveness, movement apt to character and situation

Acting learning points: picking up cues, stage sense - keeping visible and audible; control - vocal and physical.

Improvisation learning points: Beginnings and endings; the importance of the whole stage picture; use of space and levels for interest; focusing on one thing at a time; the importance of structure.

audience learning points: learning what to look for in a performance; giving respect to performers - listening and concentrating.

All of these skills are developed further in the next two books. The skills used and the learning points made are identified throughout all the lesson plans.

HINTS FOR THE DRAMA TEACHER

I am aware that many people teaching class drama at this level are not specialists; I have therefore taken care to explain everything - games, exercises, terminology - at the risk of irritating those specialists who are also delivering these lessons. I felt it was better to over-explain and to make clear the justification for each exercise than to leave anyone awash. For instance, there are many games used, but a lot of these are enhancing particular objectives such as working together, concentration or alertness and these have been identified. Drama teachers are used to justifying learning through games. I do not overuse them, tending only to begin sessions with one or two. Starting with some whole group activity is a way of drawing the group together and of starting in a disciplined way. Games are a useful part of the structure of the whole lesson quite apart from the individual skills also addressed by participation in them.

A drama teacher is a very unusual person; he must be prepared to join in and to demonstrate and consequently needs to dress appropriately, as do the children. You cannot expect inhibitions to go down or flexible movement and practical challenges in the realm of the imagination when restricted by tough unbending shoes, high heels, or short straight skirts. Just as for P.E. the student attending a drama lesson needs to feel that he is attending something with special requirements, out of the conventional restrictions of the normal class-room. I suggest that you make a firm ruling from the beginning that they wear trousers or tracksuit bottoms and soft shoes, plimsolls or bare feet. If you yourself need to deliver other more formal lessons, make sure that you, like them, have some tracksuit trousers to change into and are prepared to take off your own shoes.

Students new to the idea of drama are going to absorb a great deal from your manner at the beginning. That is why clothing is so important as is a relaxed but disciplined atmosphere. They must know that no nonsense is tolerated at the same time as feeling they can trust you and everyone in the group. If this sounds a frightening balance to the non-drama specialist, a lot will be solved by making sure there is plenty to do: the exercises don't flag but are moved quickly on from one to the other. The lessons in this book will help you here.

In addition, here are a few more ideas as to how to structure your drama lesson. They will very quickly become used to your way of working and will treat the structure with as much respect as a more formal lesson sat behind desks.

After changing, they move automatically into a seated circle in the centre of the room. It is better if this circle is seated on the floor, not chairs. Some games specify chairs but on the whole if I have said 'seated' I mean on the floor.

As soon as you join them in the circle they fall silent. That is the signal that the lesson is about to begin.

When you have indicated that an exercise has finished, they sit where they are on the floor, fall silent and listen to the instructions for the next exercise. They should never move - e.g. to get into pairs - until you have indicated that all the instructions have been given.

Lose no opportunity to promote the idea of tolerance and of working together to build a mutually supportive group.

Most of the last exercises of the lesson are 'performance' ones where the groups take turns in presenting their work to the rest of the class. Establish from the start where performances happen, i.e. on the stage or on the floor and where the group should sit in relation to them. At this early stage, I usually have them all on the same level as it is less threatening, so on the floor with the class sitting in a horseshoe shape, leaving one end clear for performance. The signal to get into this audience shape should also be a signal to silence, for concentrated listening.

Retain this shape for the ending session, where you can move into the open end of the horseshoe and lead the discussion as indicated at the end of every lesson.

This evaluative discussion is one of the most important areas of these lessons. The ability to analyse and evaluate not only the work of others but your own is a skill widely used in many subjects at examination level and one that they find hard, unless they have been trained in the habit early on, as these lessons propose. This can be kept to an oral form as indicated in this book, or, if you desire, you can give them an exercise book for the purpose and ask for a brief paragraph on what they have learned from each lesson plus the evaluation as discussed. Early on, encourage them to spend no more than a sentence or two describing the game or exercise whilst the main proportion of their writing should be what they felt about it, what they learned, what could have been improved and so on.

BASIC RESOURCES

I have deliberately kept requirements to the minimum, because drama teachers often have to take lower school classes in strange spaces. I have listed what is needed at the top of each Plan but many do not need anything other than the ideas themselves and your energy and enthusiasm. You will sometimes need: a ball [tennis or large soft ball], some percussion instruments - home-made ones would be fine if you cannot borrow from the music department: lentils in tins and boxes, pebbles inside tubes, etc., saucepan lids and so on - it would be helpful to have one drum, tambourine or cymbal, though, to use as a signal or rhythm maker; strips of cloth as blindfold[s]; a tape-recorder with tapes of contrasting slow and fast pieces of music. These are the basics, but if possible add to this by having access to flowing larger pieces of cloth made from lightweight material, and a selection of inspiratory objects: hats, glasses, pipes, handbags, shoes and so on. I used to keep all sorts of assorted objects in a large box for emergency use.

Apart from these 'things', you will need a sufficient space uncluttered by chairs and desks, preferably with enough chairs stacked at the sides for use by a complete class if necessary. You do not need a stage or a raised level though clearly more work can be done on the advantages of different levels in stage presentation if you have.

Extract One

LESSON FOUR

needed: tape/CD of music - anything lively and up-to-date

We are still getting used to each other, so that work keeps fairly general for the moment, exploring the realms of movement while getting comfortable with each other and laying down the ground rules of trust and working together.

1. From the opening circle, give each person a number from one to however many are in the class. Even numbers form an outer circle; odd numbers an inner one. Even numbers move clockwise and odd anti-clockwise. They keep moving round in their circles to the rhythm of the music, freezing and turning to the person next to them in the other circle when the music stops. Carry on in this way like a game of musical statues. Then instigate a speaking routine. Call out a number after the freeze and that person says to the person opposite him in the other circle, 'Hello, ... [name of that person].' He then follows up by saying his own name and some fact about himself. It can be simply where he lives or his age or something more interesting such as a hobby, a favourite food or piece of music. The fact he chooses to tell will be dependent on his confidence at this point of the term. No one may call out or interrupt during this; the person receiving this information simply responds with a 'thankyou' and the music begins again.

2. * Move on from this to a speed of reaction/concentration game where the two circles join together to become one and the person who received information the last time in the previous exercise goes into the middle. Centre man calls out two numbers who must swap places without the centre man getting into either place first. The one left out is the next one to call the two numbers from the centre position.

3. For the next exercise, the class should be in pairs. This game involves short activities with rapid changes of partner, thus mixing the class up again and continuing the quest for crossing the touch barriers. All the activities involve touching, e.g.:

touch noses, touch backs, touch heads to partners' knees, etc.

Here are some more:

touch tops of heads, touch elbows, make an arch with fingertips, interlock fingers,

touch heels, put your foot alongside your partners' foot.

Every so often call out 'People to People' and they must swap partners with someone completely different each time. Work up from quick 'Touch this with that' instructions to more complicated 'trust' or balance exercises, e.g.:

standing back to back, support each other down to a sitting position and up to standing again;

support your partner absolutely still as he stands on one leg bent over to reach for the floor;

support your partner in a handstand,

and so on. Each of these more complex ones need to occur with a new partner so intersperse each one with the call 'People to People.'

Here are some more:

one lying on stomach is helped by partner arch up and back with legs and torso to a held position;

holding hands and touching toes find a point of balance leaning back and out from each other;

find a position where one supports the other with as little touching the floor as possible;

allow your partner to fall back into your supporting arms.

It goes without saying that all these must be done with the utmost seriousness. Trust in a drama group is imperative and the seeds of it must be laid early on.

4. After the last call of 'People to People' move with the new partners into a new exercise. This time one becomes the robot and the other is the control. Remind them of the movement work they did last week and that you expect the robot /human contrast to be clear. The pair work out a simple series of instructions by touch, e.g. a touch on the left shoulder means turn left, on the right turn right, on the top of the head means stop, in the middle of the back means straight on. It doesn't matter if they all use this simple code; it is the most obvious.

The control steers his partner around the room without bumping into anyone or anything. If desired, the trust idea can be furthered by insisting that the robots close their eyes. Instructions about the importance of maintaining trustworthiness must be reinforced firmly.

Swap over after a reasonable length of time so each have a turn.

5. Call out 'People to People' again so that there is another partner exchange. This time the partnership is puppet and puppetmaster, masters to take their puppets through a sequence of movements: suggestions are sitting, standing, walking on the spot, waving. It would be better if the masters are standing on chairs or on the edge of the stage with their puppets on a lower level. Movements have to be carefully correlated.

Once again swap over so that each have a turn at being puppets.

6.* With the last call-out of 'People to People' and the last swap of partner the pair become ventriloquist and dummy, the dummy sitting on the knee of the ventriloquist. Practice: the ventriloquist walking in 'carrying' the dummy; placing the dummy on the knee; creating the illusion of puppet limbs and movements; trying a few words matching the ventriloquist's tight-lipped speaking with the puppet's loose mouthed pretence.

Finish by building up a short sequence for presentation. The stimulus is that they have been asked to entertain at a birthday party for a five year old; they are to develop a short entertainment suitable for that age group.

See as many as there is time for, making sure that you leave time for the final discussion session.

In this session start to encourage evaluative comment about people's performance that is of a positive or a constructive nature, e.g. I thought it was really good when Never ' Dan looked really stupid when ...'

Extract Two

LESSON SIX

The first five lessons should have established certain practices and created a spirit of co-operation, trust and discipline which will be the foundation for all work from now on.

The focus of the next few weeks will be movement and progresses from generally freeing and exploring the potential of the body [the last few lessons have already begun this] to, on the one hand, movement as a feature of characterisation and, on the other, to basic mime.

Now that the opening circle and the closing circle with its discussion/evaluation are established, there is no need for me to mention them any more; they are assumed to occur.

1. * Warm up with a few minutes of a fast tag game. In this tag, the one caught has to stop in his tracks and hold onto whatever part of the anatomy he was touched. He may not rejoin the game until released by a further touch from any free member of the group; this touch must be on the affected area, that is the part he is holding with his hands. The chaser tires very quickly in this game, so change over frequently.

A variation is to make the person touched become the next chaser; only he has to pursue hampered by one hand touching the area by which he was caught, e.g. he may have to run bent over with one hand touching his own shin or awkwardly with one hand touching the small of his own back. To make it fairer, all the rest have to copy exactly.

2. Now form into a circle. Someone starts with a gesture, such as raising a hand above his head, stamping a foot or bending at the knees. The game progresses around the circle with each one remembering the previous gestures and adding their own. These must be done in order.

This is a difficult test of memory for those at the latter end of the game. To be fair, it ought to be played twice, with those who ended the first time being the ones to start off the next round, this time perhaps with a sound, such as a raspberry, a shriek, a hum.

These games have introduced the elements used in the movement work for this week: touch and sound, as well as testing concentration.

3. Keeping in the circle, now seated, ask for a volunteer to get up and start a repetitive movement accompanied by a sound. Invite others to join in one at a time by linking on in some way to the first person and adding their own movement and sound. The effect should be that of a machine.

After five or six have joined on, start again with a new volunteer to make a new 'machine.'

4. * After two or three samples of the above, divide the group up into pairs and invite them to come up with suitable movements and sounds for the following machines:

a grass roller; a food mixer; a pneumatic drill; a washing machine; a hairdryer.

5. Moving into groups of about five or six, ask them to combine as many movements as possible to make a machine of their own invention. It can be absurd: a getting-to-school-on-time machine, a dream machine, and so on - or more down-to-earth, such as a sausage machine.

Encourage them to think of a shape to their final presentation, e.g. the machine being switched on at the beginning, going into overdrive and breaking-up at the end.

Ask that each machine should be introduced, telling the audience clearly what is being produced and perhaps adding the advantages of such a machine as if to prospective buyers.

Watch as many of these as there is time for.

It is never too early to start them off on the ideas of what makes a good presentation. Make sure that each presentation is commented on in an encouraging fashion whilst at the same time pointing out what could have been clearer.

Apart from movement, group co-operation and inventiveness, many presentation skills are also being addressed here. Sound - the use of the voice audibly - is being used by everyone and some are furthering their vocal presentation skills.

Extract Three

LESSON TEN

needed: drum, tambourine or music

This lesson develops from last week and shows how as a method of working these ideas can be taken into dance/drama.

1. Start with a game of 'Red Rover'. For this game, the class clusters against one wall of the dramaroom whilst one person, the catcher, lurks around the floor area waiting. Everyone in this game has one foot off the floor; hopping is the only method of movement allowed and in addition the catcher must keep his arms folded in front of him.

On a signal from the teacher all those lined up at the wall must hop across to the other side of the room. The catcher tries to nudge anyone he can intercept to make them lose their balance [stress that this must not be rough]; if he succeeds in forcing someone to put down their other foot, then that person becomes another catcher. The ranks of the catchers grow quickly and the game continues, going back and forth across the room, till all are caught.

The game is best played with simple strategies such as the catchers, once there are two or more of them, working together to target members of the class and it is thus a game of group co-operation. It is also very tiring!

2.* Follow this with a quieter game of 'Prisoner'. For this the class needs to be divided into two groups, one group having three more in it than the other. All members of the larger group take a chair each and place them in a well spaced-out circle. They then stand behind their chairs with their hands behind their backs. These are the guards. Each member of the smaller group sits on one of the chairs, leaving three chairs empty. These are the prisoners.

Those who have empty chairs want to fill them, so they can wink at any of the seated group to attract them to their chair. On receiving a wink, the recipient leaves his chair and goes over to the new place, but the guard behind the chair will try to prevent his escape by quickly encircling him with his arms.

It is thus a game of alertness and concentration as well as speed of reaction. The guards must move their arms from behind their backs very fast and the prisoner must seek to be faster still, to escape his grasp.

3. These elements of prisoner, freedom, victor and victim, are drawn together in the main work of the day. Divide the class into four large groups and ask each group to go to a separate corner of the room to work. Each group is given a title: war, peace, refugees and triumphant victors. In their corners they are to work on a tableau that encapsulates their particular title. Each group show their tableau.

Then to the slow beat of a drum or to suitable atmospheric music each group moves to cross the floor and swap positions with another group. Thus, war and peace will change places and the refugees and victors.

First: work on suitable ways of moving for each group. The whole class can do this. War must use strong aggressive moves, threatening facial expressions, etc. Peace needs flowing calm moves. The refugees need to move dispiritedly, huddled together and the victors need to strut aggressively and triumphantly.

Second: Dividing the class into two on opposite sides of the room, have one side start off with warlike moves and the other half with peace. As they cross each other in the middle they start to change until as they cover the last half of the room they are using the opposite moves from those with which they began. Now do the same with moves suitable for the refugees and the victors.

Third: send them back into their original corners to re-establish their tableaux. War now need to see if they can copy the peace tableau exactly or as near as possible and vice versa. The same needs to be done with refugees and victors.

Finally have them crossing the room as practised, changing modes of movement as they pass and ending up in the opposing corner frozen in their opposite tableaux. Try varying the speeds of sections of this from normal to slow motion; this is especially effective for the crossover and for getting in and out of tableau positions.

This piece of work is very satisfying to do and can look very effective. You will need the control of the drum or the music and it may be beneficial to have a particular signal for unfreezing at the start and for the closing freeze.

5. * If time, a useful extension to this work is a development of the opening before the tableau. They could find several alternative tableaux expressive of their particular theme and find ways of moving from one to the other, jerkily to separate beats or fluidly in slow motion.

The benefits of such work are obvious. Concentration is required plus close teamwork. In addition, there is a beginning of a sense of theatre. They will have needed to think of the effectiveness of their tableaux and their movement, using a variety of levels. Each tableau needs to be composed to make an effective and interesting stage picture.