

Discover Details and Elaboration in Drama
A Residency for 3rd—8th Graders
by
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FOCUS QUESTIONS

How can drama put zing in student writing?

Students struggle to write with details and elaboration. Drama activities can spice up writing with vivid details and elaboration that support the main idea of a narrative. We will engage in imaginative experiences and write about them.

How do we help students gain the focus and self-control they need to do drama in the classroom?

What is it about dramatic activities that helps writers use details and elaboration?
How can we assess curricular learning through drama?

RESIDENCY PLAN

Day One:

Check in

Agreements

Control Game

Mime Lesson

Small Group Mime Practice

Preparation for Working Alone in a Group: Focus for Drama

Day Two:

Check in

Remember agreements

Control Game

Mime Lesson

Small Group Mime Practice

Embodying a Story

Word banking

Writing the Beginning of a Story with Details and Elaboration

Day Three:

Check in

Remember agreements

Discover Details & Elaboration in Drama

Control Game
Mime Lesson
Small Group Mime Practice
Reading the Story Aloud
Reflections, Suggestions, and Affirmations
Revise Story

Day Four:
Check in
Remember agreements
Control Game
Name Game
Mime Lesson
Small Group Mime Practice
Embodying Middle and End of Story
Writing Middle and End of Story

Day Five:
Check in
Remember agreements
Control Game
Mime Lesson
Small Group Mime Practice
Reading Story Aloud
Reflections, Suggestions, and Affirmations

The structure of the second week is similar to the first, with more emphasis on creating mini-performances of the stories.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES TAUGHT

Theatre Arts:

- **Grade K-8.C.1 Use movement, voice, and writing to communicate ideas and feelings.** C.1.1 Use a variety of postures, gaits, and mannerisms to express a variety of characters in the presentation of stories. C.1.2 Apply appropriate vocal elements of volume, pitch, rate, tone, articulation, and vocal expression in various types of formal and informal presentations.

English Language Arts: Writing

- **Grade 3, 4, 5 W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.** W.3.d Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

Discover Details & Elaboration in Drama

- **Grade 3, 4, 5 SL.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, teacher-led) with diverse partners. SL.4 ...use...relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.**

CHECKING IN

In Theatre Arts, students are expected to use feelings as part of their artistic palette. It is good practice for performers to ask themselves how they are feeling now, and to note what changes different feelings have on their bodies and thoughts.

Checking in allows feelings to be acknowledged as part of the climate in the room. Giving students a moment to say how they feel and listen to the feelings of others can help build trust and foster empathy. It can also make it easier for students who are experiencing strong feelings to focus, and it lets the teacher know who might need extra help or attention today.

CONTROL GAME

(I learned the Control Game from A+ Fellows Jan Adams and Marta King.)

Rules of Control Game:

- *When the music plays, you move according to the prompt.*
- *When the music stops, you freeze.*
- *If you make any sound with your voice, either accidentally or on purpose, you sit aside and watch till invited to rejoin the group.*
- *If you touch anybody else or anything other than the floor, you sit aside and watch till told to rejoin the group.*
- *If you move when you are supposed to be frozen, you sit aside and watch until told to rejoin the group.*

FOCUS FOR DRAMA

We play the control game briefly every day, to reinforce the skills of bodily and vocal control and mental focus. These skills improve with practice, and are vital for students to be able to participate in dramatic explorations in class.

PRE-WRITING IMAGINATIVE ACTIVITY

I tell or read a story and students act it out in their own personal space. The important aspect of the storytelling is that there are options for students to make imaginative choices. I say something generic and they fill in the specifics.

Here is an example of a story I might lead—discussions with teachers guide me in what the story is about:

You are at home. Where are you in your home? The first place you think of is where you are. Look around you. What do you see first? Look at it. What color, shape, size is it? Is there anything unusual about it? Look down around your feet. What are you standing on? Look up. What is above your head? Look around. What is around you? What are you hearing? What can you smell? What does the air feel like on your skin? Is there weather here? What time of day or night is it?

Right near you is an object as big as a piece of furniture. What is it? Look at it. You see something under it. Bend down and you see a box under it. Look at the box. How big is it? What is it made of? What shape is it? What color is it? Is there anything special about it?

Reach under and pull out the box. Feel the texture of it. Inside the box is something you have been wishing for for a long time—something you want or need. It can be much bigger or smaller than the box, or it can be abstract—not something you can touch or hold, but something you wish for. Find out how to open the box and open it. Do whatever you want to do with what is inside. Pay attention to any qualities you notice that it has, and how you feel now that you have it. What is it like?

Now it's time to put it back inside the box, close the box, and put it back where you found it.

WRITING

Students collaborate to write a word bank. Then they write from their own point of view about their imaginative experience, answering these questions: Where were you? Describe the environment. Where was the box? Describe it. What did you discover in the box? Describe it and how you felt when you had it. What did you hear, see, feel, smell and sense? What did you discover?

Students get into groups of four and read their writing aloud. They listen carefully for any details and elaboration that helps bring the scene alive, and let the writer know. They ask questions for clarity and make suggestions for improvements.

CRITIQUING WRITING

When asking students for feedback on writing, I only entertain positive language. I'm not interested in pointing out what was wrong; I want to know what will improve it. If I hear students starting out with a negative word like wasn't, didn't, shouldn't, etc., I cut them off and ask for positive language. There are several reasons, one being that students can use feedback time to be mean to each other, and the main one being that any idiot can point out what is wrong with a thing, but I want my students to be the geniuses who can figure out the solutions to problems raised by the writing.

Some useful questions to elicit positive feedback:

“What is the main idea?”

“What was effective?”

“Were you moved? When?”

“What details helped you see the scene?”

“What elaboration supported the main idea?”

“Do you have any suggestions that would make it better?”

AFFIRMATIONS

Giving affirmations can help students learn their strengths, gain confidence in their abilities, build trust, and get them in the habit of supporting each other's efforts. An affirmation is a short statement of something you want to acknowledge, remember, or value that someone else said or did. You give an affirmation to a particular person or a group. The more specific you can be, the better. An affirmation might sound like: “Mary, I'd like to acknowledge that you said you don't like to perform in front of the class, but you looked confident when you were up there.” Or, “Marquez, I'd like to acknowledge how clear and strong your voice is—I could hear every word you said.

Five C's of Drama

COOPERATION

CONCENTRATION

CONTROL

COMMITMENT

CREATIVITY

Books

Multiple Intelligences, The Theory in Practice, a Reader, Howard Gardner, New York, Basic Books, 1993.

A Dramatic Approach to Reading Comprehension, Strategies and Activities for Classroom Teachers, Lenore Blank Kelner & Rosalind M. Flynn, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann, 2006.

Drama Activities for K-6 Students, Creating Classroom Spirit, Milton E. Polsky, et al., Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield Education, 2006.

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA AND THEATRE ARTS

Drama is the specific mode of a story represented in performance. The enactment of drama in theatre, performed by actors before an audience, requires collaboration among actors, directors, designers, crew, and audience members. The structure of dramatic texts is influenced by this collaborative production and its intended audience. The term comes from the Ancient Greek *drama* meaning "action," which is derived from "to do".

Theatre (or theater) is the branch of the performing arts defined by Bernard Beckerman as what "occurs when one or more persons, isolated in time and/or space, present themselves to another or others." By this broad definition, theatre has existed since the dawn of man, as a result of human tendency for storytelling. The word derives from the Ancient Greek *theatron* meaning, "the seeing place."

Elements of Drama

Narrative Elements

Four-part structure of the traditional drama: The way the playwright (or actors, in a creative drama) arranges and presents these four narrative essentials is the structure of the play.

- Exposition (where, when, why, and who): The process of letting the audience know what kind of play is being presented, where and when it is taking place, who the leading characters are, and in what situations and conflicts they find themselves.
- Plot: The series of related events that take place before the audience—it is the development and resolution of the major conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist. Some define the Stages in the Plot Structure as: (1) Preliminary situation (2) Initial incident (3) Rising action (4) Climax (5) Falling action and (6) Conclusion. Other Plot Structures may be more abstract, imagistic, and non-linear: especially in puppet, mask and mime theater.
- Character: The characters dominant traits are made evident through their speeches and actions.
- Theme: The basic idea of the play, which the author dramatizes through the conflicts of characters.

Performance Elements

Breath control, diction, body alignment, movement, and stillness

Production Elements

Staging, scenery, props, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup

Elements of Theatre Arts

Written or Improvised Text, Scenario, or Plan

This is the starting point of the theatrical performance. The element most often considered as the domain of the playwright in theatre. The playwright's script is the text by which theatre is created. It can be simplistic, as in the 16th century with the scenarios used by the acting troupes of the Commedia dell' arte, or it can be elaborate, such as the works of William Shakespeare.

This plan can also be by design and agreement, an improvisation, whether directed or open. If scripted, this play, scenario, or plan is what the director uses as a blueprint from which to build a production.

The Process

This is the coordination of the creative efforts usually headed up in theatre by the director. It is the pure process by which the playwright's work is brought to realization by the director, actors, designers, technicians, dancers, musicians, and any other collaborators that come together on the script, scenario, improvisation, or plan. This is the works-in-progress or rehearsal stage.

The Presentation, Production, or Performance

This is the end result of the process of work involved. This final production/performance results from all of the labors coming together to complete the finished work, and is done in union with all of the collaborators in the process to create the final production/performance. This is what the audience will witness as they experience the work.

The Audience

Theatre requires an audience. For all of the arts public participation is essential. The physical presence of an audience can change a performance, inspire actors, and create expectations. Theatre is a living, breathing art form. If an audience will view the production live, then the production elements must be designed to be viewed live. If an audience will view the production as a film, television show, web performance or web broadcast, then the production elements must also reflect this fact.