

Drama Fest 2007 - Guidelines for teachers

Physical warm-up

Warm-up exercises are useful as they can break the ice, get students interacting and can be fun and make the kids feel positive about the drama work they are about to do. They can also aid concentration, co-operation and memory.

Shark (if the group is from many different levels and participants don't know each other.) Participants stand in a group. Everyone says their name. Person in the middle is the 'shark'. The shark moves towards one person to 'eat' them. That person escapes from the shark by pointing to another person and the 'shark' then moves quickly to eat the person pointed to. If the first person the shark tried to eat does not respond quickly enough, the shark 'eats' them and that person then becomes the shark.

The hawk, the hen and the chicks

This is a Cantonese game. Participants form into a line. At the front of a line, there is the mother hen, protecting all her chicks or all the participants behind her. In front of this group, facing the mother hen is a hungry hawk, who wants to eat the baby chicken, or the person at the back. The group has to move (while remaining in a line) to protect the baby chick. The hawk can move in any direction. When the baby chick has been eaten, change the hawk and mother hen.

M'bele

Participants stand in a circle, holding hands. Inside the circle is a hunter and baby deer. Both are blindfolded. The hunter has to catch the deer and the deer has to try to avoid being caught. The participants call 'm'bele' loudly when the hunter is close to the deer to alert the deer that the hunter is nearby and more softly when the hunter and deer move away from each other. The game ends when the deer is caught and then another deer and hunter can be chosen.

Assassin

It is essential that the participants do not chat and move quietly around the room to sustain the suspense of the game. The participants stand in their own space an arms length from other participants. Everyone closes their eyes and keeps them closed. The teacher moves among the group and chooses someone to be the assassin by silently tapping them twice on the shoulder. No one except the teacher knows who the assassin is. The participants begin to walk around slowly, keeping their eyes closed. When the participants brush against each other, they try to find out whether the other person is the assassin by moving close to each other and whispering 'Assassin?' in the other person's ear. If the other person is not an assassin, then they whisper 'Assassin' in reply to the other. However, the real Assassin will 'kill' people by whispering 'No' in the 'victim's ear. When the victim has been 'killed' by the assassin, they should 'die' by dropping onto the floor with melodramatic sighing and groaning. Then they open their eyes, become a 'ghost' and move to the 'ghost' corner. The 'ghosts' can warn the other victims about the

approaching assassin by calling the victim's name in a ghostly waving voice. The game ends when everyone has been killed.

The young wives, the old husbands and the young lover

The group is arranged in two circles. In the inner circle, the young attractive 'wives' sit on chairs. Their old jealous 'husbands' stand directly behind them. The young lover, who is trying to tempt the young wives to run away stands slightly to the side, but everyone must be able to see the young lover. The young lover looks at the young wife and winks at the one he wants to tempt. The young wife makes a dash for it, and the old 'husband' must react very quickly to grab the young 'wife' to stop her running away. If the young wife gets away, she becomes the young lover. The person who was the old husband of that wife then sits to become a young wife and the one who was originally the young lover becomes the old husband. This game must move quickly. Also, the old husbands must stand with their hands at their side, not poised to catch the young wife.

Before playing all these games, remind the participants about the importance of not hurting themselves and others.

Drama games in the classroom

Counting to twenty

Three changes

Select 3 student volunteers. Ask them to stand in front of the class. The class members are told to look at the 3 students very carefully as they will soon step out into the hall and change 3 things about their appearance, e.g. push up a sleeve, untie a shoe, and take off a watch. The 3 students then make their changes quickly and re-enter the room. When they re-enter the classroom, their classmates will guess the three changes, one student at a time. Variation: Students get into pairs. Each student observes their partner carefully. The students turn their backs to one another and each makes 3 changes in their appearance simultaneously. The teacher calls for everyone to turn and face their partner. Students take turns to guess the three changes that were made by their partners.

Two sticks

2 sticks is a theatre game that emphasizes the skill of pantomime. It asks a student to problem-solve and to use his imagination as much as possible.

Equipment – 2 sticks (straws) of equal length and size. Teachers should show the group the 2 sticks and ask the students what they see. Of course, the reply will be 2 sticks. The teacher will say, 'No, I'm not holding 2 sticks. I'm holding (name a violin).' The teacher will proceed to create objects such as skis, knitting needles, chopsticks, a violin and bow, earrings and rabbit ears out of the two sticks. The sticks can be turned into larger or smaller items. The key is how they are used. The teacher will now pass the sticks to a student who will create an object. The student will not tell the class what the object is – the rest of the group have to guess what his object is.

Variation: Two balls, two scarves – but there must be two!

Voice exercises

The aim of voice exercises is to make students aware of the power and range of their voices. We want to aim to have students throwing their voices to the back of the hall! Although microphones will be provided, voice exercise training should make students realize that microphones are not essential in performance and students should aim not to use them if at all possible.

‘Conducting’ an orchestra – the teacher can conduct the sounds in this story by raising his/her hand up and down to raise and lower the volume of the students.

This exercise will help students ‘tune’ their voices. Put students into groups and give each group a sound – birds singing and chirping, raindrops falling, babies crying, thunder crashing, cars honking their horns, doors slamming. Then narrate this story – ‘It was a beautiful day, and the birds were singing (cue birds group). Then suddenly, the sky clouded over and rain began to fall (cue rain group). The birds stopped singing (silence bird group) and looked for shelter). The rain slowed down the traffic and cars began to honk their horns (cue car horn group). The rainstorm turned into a thunderstorm and thunder crashed in the sky (cue thunder group). People were rushing to get home from the storm and slammed their front doors behind them as they arrived home (cue door slam group). Then the storm stopped. (silence thunder and rain groups). People stopped honking their horns (silence the car horn group) and slamming their front doors (silence door slam group). The birds began chirping and singing again. (cue birds group and volume up).

Can’t hear you at the back!

This exercise will make students realize how loud their voices need to be for people to be able to hear them at the back of the Hall. Teacher stands near the stage and asks students to and asks students to say 1-2-3-4-5 in a loud voice. Teacher backs away from the stage, all the time asking students to call out 1-2-3-4-5 and telling them if he/she can still hear them.

The principle of economy on the stage

The beauty of Drama Fest is that it encourages students to concentrate on performance, not on the clutter of props that students may think 'add; to a performance but are actually very distracting! The magic of drama is created in the students' performance, not in props, make-up, costume or scenery. So the economical stipulations laid down by the Drama Fest organizers are a great chance for students to show their creativity and ability to make magic out of very little and show that drama can happen anywhere and be a joyful experience! Here are some elements that can help students in the creation of a strong, entertaining, economical performance.

Gestus

Gestus is the distinctive sign by which we recognize a character as that character. Gestus should be simple, strong and immediately recognizable. It can be physical, vocal and may also involve elements of costume. A gestus or sign by which we recognize for an evil villain could be stroking the chin, a sinister ha-ha-ha laugh or a billowing cloak. A beautiful young heroine could twirl a lock of hair around her finger. An old witch could walk with a bent back and speak in a cracked, croaky voice.

Use of cloth

Cloth can represent almost anything and is a very useful in helping to create objects and scenes when there is nothing else on the stage.

In 'Arabian Cinderella', a simple rectangular cloth was used to represent a ball gown, a wedding dress, a bird. Cloth could also be used to represent: the ocean, a bed, a cloak/coat, a door, a fire...the possibilities are endless! Also, the colour of the cloth can be very helpful in signifying meaning to the audience. Red can signify anger, love, heat, good fortune and so on.

Giving the back story

Setting up a still image. This can be useful when you are trying to help students with writing a script. You need a combination of a visual image involving a few props, a PowerPoint image and a little bit of text from the story you are pointing the students towards. The following example uses Hamlet.

If you set up a chair covered with a piece of black velvet, a sword, a skull and a little poison bottle, and show a PowerPoint projection of a spooky castle behind this still image, you will already be giving the students a very strong, helpful stimulus. Then give the students a little bit of back story – in this case, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, has returned to find that his father has died suddenly and that his mother has married his uncle. Ask the students to write a script based on these elements – there is absolutely no need to mention the word 'Shakespeare', as it may just intimidate the students – however, you may be surprised by what they come up with!

Script-writing

Script-writing can be very difficult for students if the teacher suddenly announces that the students have to write a script. The teacher should help the students by stimulating their imagination and creative energy whilst also suggesting a frame for the script. The frame will help students to organize their thoughts. One type of frame is the acrostic writing frame which follows an A, B, C, D...pattern – the first word of each sentence begins with the next letter of the alphabet.

Alternatively, impose a 3-act or 5-act frame based on a story that you have agreed on with the students.

Interviewing the character

This is a good way for students to understand and get ‘inside the skin’ of the character they are playing. Gather the actors in a circle. Students ask each character from the story questions about their behaviour in the drama and why they behaved as they did.

‘Blocking’ and ‘mapping’ the story

If you decide to use a traditional tale as the basis for a drama, it is helpful for the actors to ‘block’ the story by dividing it into sections. This is one process students can follow:

Step	Action
1. Decide on story	Teachers and students together decide on the story they will use. No need to be extremely ambitious: the best and strongest stories are often simple traditional tales. Many traditional folk tales are available on the internet and Chinese culture is, of course, rich in great tales.
2. Divide story into either 3 or 5 sections	By dividing the story into 3 or 5 short sections, it is easier for the students to devise the drama/write the script later on.
3. Decide who will play the characters and narrator in each section.	Fairly self-explanatory, but remember that the characters and narrator don’t have to stay the same the whole way through the drama: if your students are confident enough and you have decided on a strong gestus for each character, the role can switch from person to person
4. Decide on gestus for each character	Gestus has already been explained, but it is vital that each character has a strong and easily recognizable gestus, in terms of voice, physical action, movement and the emotions that the character shows.
5. Decide on the geography of the stage	In order to make and keep it clear where the different locations in the drama are, the teacher and students will need to map out where <i>on the stage</i> the action takes place. For example, a forest will have to be in a different place than a castle, or an ocean! The action can easily be moved from place to place and needn’t take place ‘inside a house’ as long as students are clear and confident about where the action takes place!
6. Devise drama for each section	This will take the greatest amount of time and the final product will be very different from what the students start

	with. It is normal for the students to discuss, debate, negotiate, make mistakes, argue and change their mind during the devising process! However, they must be setting themselves deadlines for devising the drama and must continue to keep going through the devising process, even though it may at times seem to be a struggle. The teacher's role not necessarily to attend every single session of the devising process, but to motivate the students and to give constructive criticism about how the students can improve their performance. It is crucial that the teacher does not 'baby-sit' the students, but acts as a critical friend to help the students develop their work – so make sure you choose independent, motivated and hard-working students for this activity. The devising process should take around 2/3rds of the 'creation time'.
7. Rehearsal	This will naturally follow on from the devising process. Again, the teacher will act as a critical friend, supervising and overseeing the rehearsal process to help pupils make the final product as good as possible.
8. Teacher/facilitator to give comments	This is self-explanatory. However, no drama is ever 100 percent perfect, so don't feel the need to coach students in every single aspect of their performance – you are a 'guide from the side' and you won't be able to improve or change every aspect of the students' performance.
9. Rehearsal/finalizing of drama	It is good to have the students perform watched by someone who hasn't seen the drama before, as this person will bring fresh opinions and ideas that will be valuable to the students. Try to involve this person about 3 weeks before the actual performance so there is time for last-minute changes.
10. Performance	April/May 2007. Remember that this aim of Drama Fest and the final performance is that students will enjoy themselves and have a memorable experience. They are amateurs and they may make mistakes – but they will be talking about this in years to come! So don't worry if they are not perfect – they will have gained immeasurably in terms of practicing English exercising their creativity and improving their confidence!

Resources

General Reading on Drama

www.drama-education.com/site/
www.creativedrama.com/theatre.htm
www.kentaylor.co.uk
www.creativedrama.com
www.childdrama.com/mainframe.html
www.dramaineducation.com

Drama Games

www.artsonthemove.co.uk/
www.learnimprov.com
www.bced.gov.bc.ca
www.aspa.asn.au/Projects/

Resource Books for Drama

Name	Author	Publisher	ISBN
100+Ideas for Drama	Anna Scher & Charles Verrall	Heinemann	0 435 18799 6
With Drama in Mind	Patrice Baldwin	Network Educational Press	1 855 39094 9
AARRGH TO ZIZZ – 135 Drama Games	Patrice Baldwin and Kate Fleming	Routledge	0 415 25578 3
Structuring Drama Work	Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode	Cambridge University Press	0 521 78729 7

Scripts:

www.storiestogrowby.com

15 minute scripts: Longman ‘Voiceworks’ series