

Drama Techniques or Conventions

Freeze-frames

These are still images or silent tableaux used to illustrate a specific incident or event. Individual children or groups are asked to represent the characters at a significant moment. The freeze-frame can be improvised or planned briefly. Sequential frames can be used to represent the key events as a narrative, progresses. Freeze-frames can also be brought to life through improvisation or used as the basis for thought tracking. Freeze-frames are useful for enabling close scrutiny of an incident or situation. Positioning and body shape have to be considered carefully in order to represent ideas or emotions. Freeze-frames also help establish roles by giving children thinking time.

Conscience (or decision) alley

The class create two lines facing each other. One child in role as a particular character walks down the 'alley' between the lines. The class voice the character's thoughts, both for and against a particular decision or action which the character is facing, acting as his or her conscience. The child in role listens to his or her conscience before making a decision about the course of action to take. Conscience (or decision) alley is a means of exploring a character's mind at a moment of crisis and of investigating the complexity of the decision he or she is facing.

Thought Tracking

Focusing on the characters in a freeze-frame, or those from an ongoing drama where the action has been frozen, thought tracking involves the rest of the class in contributing ideas as if they were speaking the thoughts of one of the characters. These can support or contrast with the words that the characters actually say. The class can make a circle around the character and say their thoughts one at a time, or individual children can stand next to the frozen character and speak their 'thoughts' aloud. This is a good technique for creating and then examining the private thoughts of characters at particularly tense moments of a narrative.

Mime

Children work with actions rather than words to convey elements of a character or their emotions. The mime might be realistic or be slowed down to accentuate aspects of the movement. This is a good strategy for establishing whole-group drama and for building an appropriate atmosphere for the work. It gives children time to think about their roles and the kinds of language they might use.

Hot-seating

Hot-seating involves the class in asking questions of someone in role as a character, who sits on the 'hotseat'. The questions can be prepared or improvised. Obviously this works best if both the role player and the questioners are familiar with the character and the narrative. Hot-seating focuses closely on a character and enables motivation to be explored. It is also a good way of exploring the gaps in a character's story.

Forum Theatre

A small group act out a scene while the rest of the class watch them. The class work as directors of the group in role, for example, asking them to act or speak in a different way,

suggesting that a character might behave differently, questioning the characters in role, or suggesting an alternative interpretation of what is happening. Forum theatre allows an incident or event to be seen from different points of view. The opportunity to investigate different perspectives makes this a very useful strategy for examining alternative ideas.

Telephone Conversations

This involves pairs of children improvising a telephone dialogue between two characters at a problematic moment in the narrative. Variations might include the teacher speaking as one character while the rest of the class, in turn or when ready, speak as the other character. Telephone conversations are a simple way of focusing on important dialogue so that the whole group are aware of how two characters are communicating. Once the conversation has been held it can not only be discussed but also fed back into a drama to influence subsequent events.

Role on the Wall

One or more characters are selected from a story and their outlines drawn on large sheets of paper. The space around the outline can be filled with comments made by other characters (children in role) and the space inside the figure can be used to capture the character's own feelings at significant moments in the text. This can be used to create a focus on the difference between external views of a character and the way that he or she sees him- or herself.

Meetings

The teacher in role, for example, as an official, can call a meeting for the whole class to attend in order for a decision to be made. Meetings enable information to be shared with the whole group and allow a group decision to be made about a situation facing them. They allow children to adopt a collective role, for example, as villagers, which can help less-confident children. Meetings used at the start of a drama can be an efficient way of creating roles or focusing on a problem.

Paired Improvisation

Pairs are given roles or agree them for themselves. They begin a dialogue on a signal, making the conversation up as they go along. Use this strategy to get children into a drama quickly.

Ceremonies

Ceremonies in drama are ritualised movements or activities accompanied by appropriate language, which are developed into a pattern, used to mark a notable event. They give a dignity to action and are useful to establish a notion of a culture, which a drama might subsequently explore, or to give a satisfying conclusion to a piece of work. They often help children deepen their commitment to the drama.

Flashbacks and 'flash forwards'

These stop the dramatic action being explored through improvisation and require the children to refocus on something that happened before (which perhaps caused a particular event) or later (perhaps as a consequence of the action). You might use other strategies, for example, freeze-frames, to create the flashback person by person. These strategies are effective for getting children to focus on the consequences of action rather than on the action itself. They help avoid the full-scale battle scene, for example! They encourage reflection and discussion.