

Introduction

How to use this book

1. How and where do I begin to use this book?

Begin with your own ongoing work. The book is intended to dovetail with your present and future curriculum planning. Think of drama as an active learning process that will help you deliver literacy in an exciting and economic way. If you're intending to set the class a writing task with specific learning objectives then ask yourself, *Which drama strategy can I use to help the class achieve those objectives effectively?*

All strategies have the potential to increase the motivation for children to want to write.

Particular strategies help with particular areas of writing. For example hot seating helps character description. Space building will stimulate the class to focus on a sense of place in their writing.

If you're not sure about the use of individual strategies at this stage, just dip your toes in the water and try a few out. You won't be disappointed.

2. Do I need to use the school hall?

No. A cleared classroom often provides a more focused and atmospheric space than a large and booming hall. Once the class see the cleared chairs and tables or help you to clear them, *they'll be on your side and keen to make the drama work*. If your classroom is tiny ask a colleague for an exchange of classrooms and perhaps in return share the work you've achieved.

Individual clipboards, sufficient for every member of the class, are often useful for children to write on in the cleared space.

3. What's the most effective way to begin the drama?

Drama is active. Try not to talk for too long in your introduction. Work at creating an immediate tension in the drama. One basic definition of drama is: *A person in a crisis*. Allowing the class to hot seat you as a fictional character in role is an excellent way to create tension. The class will love it but you may be daunted. Be honest with the children, seek their cooperation before you begin and don't let the hot seating run for too long. Use a jacket, hat or shawl to distinguish when you're teacher and when you're in role. You may need to take a little time for the class to begin to formulate some of their questions before you step into role.

If Hot Seating is too scary a strategy at this stage find another way into the drama.

For example, still images or space building offer less risk-taking and make fewer demands on both the teacher and children. In both of these the teacher maintains a traditional role and doesn't need to step into the fiction of the drama.

4. When should the class write?

When the moment is 'hot'. The writing will be at its strongest if it comes *immediately after a drama activity* and not later that day or the following day if that's at all possible. If we've just hot seated a victim of bullying or we've created a bombed out house through a space building strategy then the richness of the experience will transfer through to our writing if the ideas are still fresh in our minds. Have individual clipboards at the ready to begin the writing immediately. Don't let yourself be carried away with an over-long sequence of drama at the expense of time for writing.

Use a range of writing techniques to follow the drama – collaborative writing with teacher as scribe, paired and individual writing as well as writing in different genres – headlines, role on the wall, letters, messages, diaries, speech bubbles etc. and non-fiction text.

Writing in role can produce exciting and powerful work.

Think about teacher as writer. A pre-written fictional diary entry can be a model of good practice as well as a strong stimulus.

5. How long should the session last?

Flexibility is key. If you're working in a primary school you may have a whole morning you can devote to this work, particularly if you're combining literacy and history or another curriculum area, for example. If you're working within the constraints of a tight timetable slot in a secondary school or with the literacy hour perhaps one drama strategy will suffice. In the plenary element of the literacy hour, for example, it would be good to use teacher in role as summation.

6. What if I wish to develop the work further?

The power of the drama and writing processes is at its most potent when they interact closely together. These are a few examples:

- Use space building to create an air raid shelter. The class sit in a confined place as if in the shelter and read extracts from their diaries.
- The class have written a message to a giant. They read it out aloud with teacher in role as the listening giant. The listening giant then reacts to the message.
- Previously written speech bubbles are added to paired still images in order to provide a snapshot play script.

The intention here is to further enhance and support the writing by giving it a fictional audience and purpose within the drama.

It's also useful to consider the unique role that drama has in slowing the moment down so we see the depth of emotion and feeling.

Using open questions as a crucial tool, the teacher can deepen the learning and reflection here rather than moving on quickly to another activity.

What children and teachers say

‘It helps you feel what you write.’

‘I like Drama because I like imagining to be other people and to be in different places.’

‘I find it easier because you feel like you’re there, as if you’re the character.’

‘When I do Drama, it makes me know what I’m going to do when I’m writing.’

‘It makes me feel adventurous.’

‘When we wrote about Tom’s Midnight Garden and we closed our eyes in the hall, it made me feel relaxed.’

‘It’s a wonderful creation.’

‘SATs are coming up soon and I must continue with the drama because it unlocks the ability to write, to use words. It helps them to think about what a writer doesn’t say. Children at Yr 6 are just beginning to ‘read between the lines’. The less able are taking only literal meaning perhaps but with the help of drama they are beginning to see what the writer isn’t saying. Beginning to infer and speculate ... all those higher order reading skills which the drama is unlocking. From that viewpoint as drama reader they can write, enabling them to get over the barrier which so many have built up. Writing has always lagged behind reading in this school and beyond. Drama links the two up in a way nothing else can.’