

# Acting Out in the Classroom

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*All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players. --Shakespeare*

## Why bring drama into the classroom?

- It engages multiple forms of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences—particular those that are often missing from a more traditional classroom (e.g. bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual, spatial, linguistic)
- It integrates all three major ways humans think as proposed by Jerome Bruner (psychologist-constructivist) :
  - Enactive – knowing through experiencing with the body
  - Iconic – knowing through image (in mind, drawing, or gesture)
  - Symbolic – knowing through translation into language (Wagner, 2002)
- *“Drama aids thinking because it has the same goal as that of all cognition—to understand, to gain a larger perspective on, and to engage more profoundly with the world” (Wagner 2002).*
- Research in 1999 by Brown and Pleydell reveals strong evidence that movement plays an essential role in thinking, learning, and sensory integration. (Culham, 2002)
- Use of authentic dramatic texts offer examples of conversational dialogue (including dialects in some cases); these dialogues can also be examined for the strategies and tactics used by the speakers and listeners.
- It helps reconnect the body and the voice.
- It helps to create community among students, to build self-confidence, and to encourage imagination and creativity
- It allows students to explore the language by trying on different identities
- Drama provides space to experience the L2 within conflict, tension, and emotion (often absent within the classroom texts – but not necessarily in learners' personal experiences)
- It's a great way to recycle language and use it in more authentic ways.

## What are some considerations in using drama-based language teaching?

- What are the goals? Accuracy vs. fluency (i.e. a controlled vs. opening learning environment → imitation vs. improvisation)
- Process-oriented vs. product-oriented
- Students' diverse backgrounds and perceptions of theater

*A lot of what acting is is paying attention. –Nancy Reagan*

## Activities

*The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.*

*–Carl Gustav Jung*

## **Circle Games**

### **• Passing the clap**

- Rationale – develops cooperation and group cohesion; focus on non-verbal communication
- Materials – none
- Procedure – Have group stand in a circle. The leader starts and turns to one side and “passes” the clap by clapping to the person who must clap simultaneously to accept the clap. The person then turns to her other neighbor and passes the clap to that person who must also accept it. Focus first on precision and then speed while working on non-verbal communication. For added challenge, a person can choose to reverse the direction of the clap by passing it back to the person from whom they received it.

### **• It’s a...**

- Rationale – Uses simple language with a focus on creative imagining using shapes; encourages thinking about symbols outside the box
- Materials – paper shapes or a toilet paper cardboard roll (or other simple object)
- Procedure – first person starts by arranging paper shapes and then declaring what it is (i.e. It’s a sailboat....) then passes them on to the next person who must re-imagine the shapes into something else

### **• Tactics**

- Rationale – Using a single simple word or phrase, students practice using various tactics. The words we use do not always reflect the action behind them. This brings action to the word(s).
- Materials – slips of paper with verbs on them
- Procedure - Establish one word or phrase to be used (e.g. Hello, good afternoon, how are you?). The slips of paper should be folded and placed in the center. The first person goes to the center and selects a slip of paper. This person then turns to the person to her right in the circle and says the established phrase using that verb as intention. The group tries to guess the verb. The person may need to repeat for the group to guess correctly. Then the turn passes to the person to the right.

## **Proverbs**

- Rationale – Students learn proverbial expressions and then incorporate them into an original skit playing out a scene in which one of the actors has reason to use the proverb. Contextualizes proverbs through students’ conceptualization and imagination.
- Materials – strips of paper with proverbs on them (one per group)
- Procedure – Divide class in groups and hand out a proverb to each group. Groups discuss meaning of proverb first (if questions, can ask teacher). Then they work together to create a short skit of a situation in which one of the characters would use that proverb. Groups perform skits for each other. The audience guesses the meaning of the proverb based on the skit.

## Tongue Twisters

- Rationale – These can be used to practice fluency, prosody, pronunciation, sentence stress, conveyance of meaning, etc.
- Materials – copies of the tongue twister for students
- Procedure – This will vary depending on the particular selection of tongue twister used. Make sure to allow students to have time to just practice with a partner for a few minutes to get it into their lips, teeth, and tongue prior to really “working” with it.
- Example :  
*Betty Botter bought some butter  
But she said this butter’s bitter  
If I put it in my batter  
It will make my batter bitter  
So she bought some better butter  
Better than her bitter butter  
And it made her batter better—not bitter.*

## Do you Like My Hat? (mini-dialogues)

- Rationale – Students integrate emotion and language with simple dialogue. Further explorations can be done considering characters’ relationships and assumptions. (see other contentless scene as well)
- Materials – The dialogue (taken from Go, Dog, Go by Dr. Seuss)  
*A – Hello  
B – Hello  
A – Do you like my hat?  
B – No, I do not like your hat.  
A – Goodbye  
B - Goodbye*
- Procedure – Have students memorize simple dialogue (half the class part A, the other half part B). [For beginner students, you may want to have the dialogue available on poster paper in case they get stuck.] Have the As go to one side of the room and the Bs to the other. One pair at a time, have an A and a B cross to the center and execute the dialogue but with the emotion that the leader/teacher calls out.

## Choral Readings

- Rationale – Requires in-depth group interpretation of text through the use of movement and voice with consideration to repetition, timbre, speed, volume, action, number, etc. Students use all physical and vocal elements to make text come alive with meaning.
- Materials – text (poems, Shakespearean monologues/sonnets, other texts)
- Procedure – Divide class in groups and hand out texts. Instruct groups to work together in order to create a performance reading of the poem. They may want to consider movement, single and multiple voices, repetition, breathing, speed, rhythm, etc. Groups should then perform for each other. Talk about similarities and differences in performance. How was meaning and interpretation made through the reading?

**Additional Content-less scenes:**  
(taken from *Acting One* by Robert Cohen)

Scene: "What did you do last night?" (p 30)	(p 22-23)
A: Hi!	A: Can I see you on Monday?
B: Hello.	B: How about Tuesday?
A: How's everything?	A: How about Wednesday?
B: Fine. I guess.	B: How about Thursday?
A: Do you know what time it is?	A: How about Friday?
B: No. Not exactly.	B: How about Saturday?
A: Don't you have a watch?	A: How about Sunday?
B: Not on me.	B: Okay, then, Sunday.
A: Well?	
B: Well what?	
A: What did you do last night?	
B: What do you mean?	
A: What did you do last night?	
B: Nothing.	
A: Nothing?	
B: I said, nothing!	
A: I'm sorry I asked.	
B: That's alright.	

### References

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*I regard the theater as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being.*

—Oscar Wilde