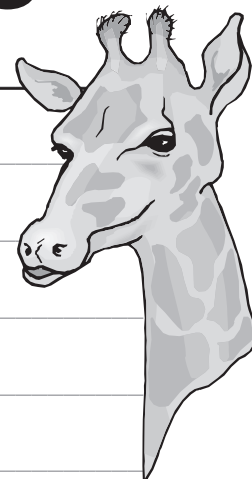


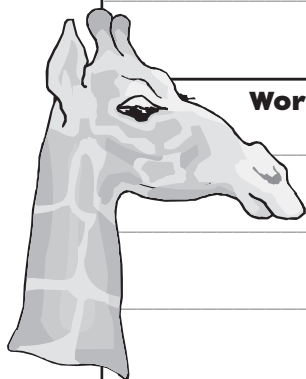
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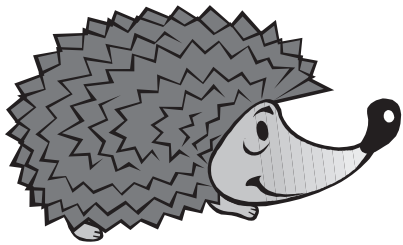
All About Giraffes

Key Words	Notes

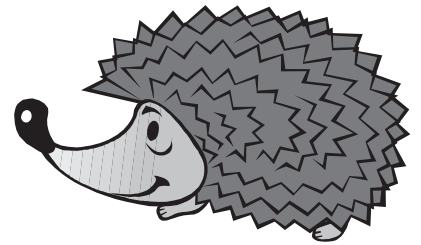


Key Words	Notes





Real or Fiction?



Real

Fiction

Acting Out: Using Creative Drama in the Library

• Keep 'em Reading •

Grades
1–5

by | Judith Snyder

Creative drama opens the door to a magical land of make-believe, exposing children to myriad experiences that transcend the ordinary and awaken the imagination. Literature comes alive when actors immerse themselves in the problems and emotions of story characters. Children bloom in the spotlight and delight in the story.

When I initially invite other teachers to join me in the creative dramatic process, they usually have a caught-in-the-headlights look just before they try to run from the room. Luckily, most teachers take the risk, and find the rewards are well worth their time. I'm not saying it's easy—I'm saying the outcome is worth every ounce of work. Take a risk. Try something new.

Creative Drama, Defined

Three questions pop into the mind of many instructors when introduced to creative drama. What is it? Why should I take valuable time to employ it? How do I manage it?

What is it? *Creative drama* focuses on the process—what happens during practice—rather than a final polished performance. Actors improvise dialogue as they interact with other characters. These presentations are more informal than *theater* performances, which concentrate on memorizing previously written lines for a final product staged for an audience.

Why do it? Creative drama easily integrates a wide variety of skills that students need in a learning environment. Practice with story sequence and plot benefits reading comprehension. Stage presence, kinesthetic awareness, and voice projection develop naturally and create a venue for active listening. In addition, students:

- React to literature by summarizing details, analyzing the plot, and synthesizing information to modify a story



Awaken the imagination with creative dramatics.

- Grow in their willingness to respect the ideas and attitudes of others by working on cooperative endeavors
- Develop positive risk-taking behaviors as they become confident in newly learned skills
- Engage in higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills as they look at new ways to tell old stories

How is it orchestrated? Try these three simple steps:

1. Read through the next three main topics for your background information. Examine lesson examples, referring back to the main topics as needed.

2. Get your feet wet. Try some short warm-up activities when you have an extra five minutes with a class.
3. Find a story you like, and dive in.

Integration and Collaboration

Like most library units, creative drama works best in collaboration with the classroom teacher while integrating curriculum, skills, and literature. Develop a collaborative plan, choose curriculum content (i.e. Families in Asia, Biographies of Famous Americans, etc.), and decide on the standards to be taught.

Though a whole class is manageable with the right story, the easiest group size to work with is ten to twelve students. To accomplish this, partner with the classroom teacher to split the class in half. Each instructor works with a group toward the desired results.

Example: A second grade teacher and librarian decide to use creative drama in conjunction with a unit on Asian cultures. Together they agree on the skills and outcomes for the students. The classroom teacher chooses to teach research skills with each half of the group, with China as the topic for one group and Japan for the other. While one group works on research, the librarian engages the other half in acting out a Chinese or Japanese folktale. Both groups share their final outcomes with each other. (If the teacher opts to teach the creative drama, the librarian takes the opposite role.)

Preparation

1. Choose stories with simple plots and the potential for enough character roles for the group size. Many folktales, picture books, or chapters from fiction books work well. (See the folktales sidebar on page 24.)
2. Decide if the final presentation will be shared with other classes and/or parents. This determines the number of sessions needed. An informal sharing within the class can be done on the fifth day. For a more formal presentation, students need additional practice sessions.
3. Familiarize yourself with five basic creative drama terms:
 - **Voice Projection:** speaking loudly enough for the audience
 - **Open-up:** shoulders facing or at a 45° angle to the audience

Stage Sets

Build boxes out of sturdy plywood to create versatile stage sets. By reconfiguring these boxes in different groupings, students change them from tables to thrones, to wells, to caves. The boxes create interesting set designs and help restless actors know where to be when not involved in the scene. This also eliminates unnecessary on-off movement and promotes kinesthetic awareness. The one-foot by two-foot boxes are built strong enough to hold the weight of an adult. Handholds cut at the end of two sides make them easy for children to move. When not in dramatic use, the boxes double as book displays, puppet theaters, or reading corners.



Keep 'em Reading

- **Share-the-picture:** actors avoid standing in front of one another, blocking audience view
- **Focus:** concentrating on the task or the character being played
- **Blocking:** a plan for positioning actors in a scene

Classroom Setup

Ideas for Staging and Props

Keep it simple. For a neutral background, cover a wall with a couple of white sheets or lengths of butcher paper. If this becomes an annual event, paint a landscape on the sheet that can be folded and stored. Clear a section of the floor large enough for half the class to move comfortably. After a warm-up exercise, set the stage with chairs, stools, or tables. The wooden boxes described in the sidebar on page 21 create interesting and flexible sets.

Borrow percussion instruments from the music teacher to use with warm-up exercises and props. A hand drum, triangle, and wood block provide simple sound effects that refocus kinesthetic awareness. An instrument playing rhythmic patterns can also signal the beginning and end of the performance.

Keep props to a minimum. Actors can pantomime the needed props during the first few sessions until they are acquired.

Ideas for Costumes

Simple costume changes give the actors a sense of their character. Add scarves, aprons, vests, or hats to school attire. Robes, made from old sheets or fabric remnants, can also be worn over regular dress, and provide easy and economical costumes.

Warm-up Activities

Prepare short warm-up activities to teach some of the basic drama techniques and to help students hone their concentration. Try one of the following ideas or check out the online sources listed at the end of the article:

1. **Freeze Game:** Students spread out in the acting area, leaving space around themselves. (This is called “personal space.”) Students



Mrs. Elnicki's second grade class at Antelope Ridge Elementary act out *Tikki Tikki Tembo* and *The Seven Chinese Brothers*.



pantomime playing games in their personal space until the teacher calls out “freeze.” Students hold their exact positions, even halting eye and head movement. Repeat.

2. **Focus-Pocus:** Hold one hand about a foot from the face, fingers spread wide. Children focus all their attention on the fingers, noticing that the fingers are clear and “in focus,” and that the background is fuzzy. Now focus on the background beyond the fingers. Notice that the fingers blur and the background clears. Change the focus back and forth using a drumbeat or triangle chime to instigate the change. If students truly focus, they tire after five or six changes. Explain that staying focused on a character is hard work, too.
3. **Muscle Memory:** Students first establish their “personal spaces.” The object of this exercise is for students to create different shapes with their whole body and to move back and forth between the shapes. (Students must have two parts of their body touching the floor in each position so they can balance.) Start in a neutral position, both feet on the floor and arms to the side. This is “shape one.” Beat the drum and call out “shape two.” Students move to a second shape of their choosing. Practice moving between shape one and shape two several times before adding a third. Mix up the numbers or increase speed for more of a challenge. Kids love it!
4. **Open-Up:** Students move to music within the acting area. At a signal, stop and “open up” by turning shoulders to the audience or at a

45° angle. This keeps actors cognizant of body position and aids voice projection.

5. **Share-the-Picture:** repeat “Open-up” but also include moving slightly so that no one is standing directly in front of another, blocking the audience’s view. It helps to model this with a few students.

Creative Drama Lessons

What follows is a suggested sequence of lessons, divided into half-hour, numbered sessions.

Objectives

To increase student achievement in:

- Fluency of oral expression, voice projection, phrasing, and pacing
- Maintenance of sequence and plot through dialogue
- Group problem-solving skills
- Kinesthetic awareness
- Higher-order thinking skills

Time allotment: Five to ten half-hour sessions

Materials: For each half of the class, choose one folktale or picture book with a simple storyline.

Session 1

Warm-up: Focus-Pocus

Acting Out: Read the story and discuss the characters and the events. Most of the stories do not have enough characters for each child to have a part, so activate creative thinking. Since everyone in the group needs a speaking part, students develop a list of other possible characters that could be added. Animals and trees can talk. Two brothers can become four brothers and two sisters. Include a storyteller (narrator) to introduce the story, narrate scene changes, and end the tale. Let students know that they will change parts the first five times they act out the story. This motivates active listening as actors improvise dialogue.

Session 2

Warm-up: Muscle Memory

Acting Out: Students volunteer for parts in the first dramatization. The first time students act out the story, more input from the instructor is required. Stop when necessary to reflect on the

story’s sequence of events and to elicit dialogue ideas for students needing help. Actors change the story to accommodate character changes. With no written script, dialogue may change, but events become standardized, allowing the drama to move from beginning to end. Set the stage and block the players for the beginning scene. Use chairs, tables, or wooden boxes designed for set arrangement.

When finished with the first dramatization, stop and evaluate the results. Discuss the dialogue to repeat in the next enactment.

Sessions 3–4

Warm-up: Open-Up and Share-the-Picture

Acting Out: Students volunteer for different parts and act out the story again. Actors need less teacher input as they become familiar with the story. When finished, evaluate again and choose new parts for the following day. Begin to emphasize the following skills: voice projecting, opening up, sharing the picture.

Session 5

Warm-up: Repeat any exercise as needed.

Acting Out: If the end product is intended for sharing with the other half of the class, use this session for the performance.



Students “share the picture” as they act out the story.

Folktale Suggestions for Creative Dramatics

- **African folktales:** Anansi and the Moss-covered Rock, Who's in Rabbit's House
- **Asian folktales:** King of Heaven, Funny Little Woman, Mouse Match
- **European folktales:** Enormous Turnip, Little Red Hen, Golden Goose
- **Hispanic folktale:** Billy Goat in the Chili Patch

If the dramatization is to be presented to other classes and parents, actors will need additional days to practice. Until today, the parts have rotated through the group. Now you will want to assign permanent parts so actors can develop confidence with their dialogue. Leave the major part and the storyteller part in the hands of your most capable students. Students who long for a larger part than what they received may add dialogue as long as it furthers the plot. Try to give students some choice in choosing their final characters.

Sessions 6–8

Each run-through provides practice for the final performance. Actors solidify their dialogue. The instructor blocks the scenes so actors know where to stand to deliver lines. Dialogue, body placement, and voice projection become the focus.

Sessions 9–10

Use session nine as a dress rehearsal, emphasizing voice projection. Remind the actors that costumes should not detract from the dialogue. The final session doubles as a performance. Expect changes in

Online Sources

These sources offer background information and many additional ideas.

- www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards.cfm
- www.childdrama.com/mainframe.html
- www.creativedrama.com
- www.creativedrama.com/book.htm

dialogue as actors learn to adjust their acting to the audience's laughter and applause. Remember the skills and confidence learned throughout the nine sessions are as important as the final performance.

Extensions

Once intermediate students have learned basic theater skills, creative dramatics can be used to develop higher-level thinking strategies. Use short and simple plots from novel segments or integrate characters from several different novels into a new situation.

Biographies offer another interesting option for creative dramatic performances. Assign groups of four to six participants, all of whom assume the identity of their biography report subject. Make sure the famous people in each group come from different time periods or from different fields. Challenge the groups to produce a creative drama that includes important information about these famous people and uses dialogue to reveal the characters and develop the plot. Students need one planning session and three to four practices before presenting to the rest of the class. Students do not write scripts. Oral preparation and practice encourages a more natural flow of language. Discourage panel discussions and news broadcasts so students are forced to synthesize their knowledge to create a new event.

Evaluation

Assess growth in drama skills and group cooperation through teacher observation throughout the process. If additional time is available, tape the dress rehearsal. After viewing, students can discuss or write self-evaluations using speaking rubrics.



Judith Snyder has more than thirty years of experience in elementary classrooms and libraries in the Cherry Creek School District in Colorado. She integrates Creative Drama activities with all levels of students, and is a firm believer in the importance of including the arts in education. Judith is a professional storyteller, freelance writer, and the author of the Jumpstart Your Library series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from UpstartBooks. Her picture book, What Do You See? will be available from Odyssey Books in the fall of 2009.