



Drama Without The Drama - Avoiding Pitfalls In The Classroom

designed for teachers
and educators



Our Story

We are a small charity based in Buxton, Derbyshire that specialises in creating original theatre shows for children, young people, and their families. We have been creating award-winning theatre shows since 2000. Our work has been performed in schools, community spaces, outdoor places, and theatre venues throughout the country to audiences in excess of 150,000.

We have 25 years experience of running creative workshops with children and families in communities and educational settings.

We approach each project as artists and scientists; with open minds and curiosity, searching for the sparks of excitement and inspiration to guide our path. We set off on each creative endeavour with a sense of adventure, without a firm picture of what the end result will look like. Our theatre making skills and expertise will help sculpt, shape, and inform the final event, whatever that may be. We aim to create work that is rooted in story; that is exciting, fun, engaging, thought provoking, and magical.

We believe in the power of story to change lives.





How To Use This Booklet

Drama Without the Drama is your guide to using drama techniques in the classroom without the chaos. Whether you're new to drama or looking to refine your approach, this booklet offers practical solutions to common challenges.

Each section provides tips to help you navigate potential pitfalls and make drama an exciting and valuable learning tool for everyone.

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Setting The Stage For Success

Drama is a powerful tool for learning. Using drama techniques in the classroom are a great way to engage students and encourage creativity, and success comes from creating a safe, structured, and inclusive environment. However they can also present challenges if not carefully managed. Here are some common pitfalls and strategies to overcome them.



Classroom Management & Disruptive Behaviour

The Challenge: Drama can bring energy and excitement, and without clear boundaries it can bring loss of focus, excessive noise and disruptions.

How to Overcome It:

Establish the ground rules.

Set clear expectations and ground rules before starting any activity. Ensure students understand that you can have fun, but you expect focus. Recognise that sometimes focus can drop, and the introduction of a quick focus exercise can quickly bring back the concentration needed. (Copy-Me - Simon Says etc)

Use structured warm-ups to channel energy positively and signal when it's time to be serious.

We tend to begin a session with a fun high-energy game (Stuck-in-the-mud, Stop & Go, Name Tag) followed by a group focus exercise (Zip,Zap,Boing, Clapping Game, Pulse) before introducing the principal activity.

Have a signal or a call and response signal. (e.g. a clap pattern or phrase '1,2,3 Eyes On Me!') to quickly get the children's attention.

Assign specific roles to pupils (e.g. "Scene Captain"). Their job is to help maintain the focus and structure within any group work. Contract of Work - Agree with the pupils the rules of working together - We listen to other's ideas, we encourage each other to make suggestions, we accept if our idea isn't chosen and move on.

You can make this part of the first few sessions with some Image Theatre where you ask the groups to create an image of a group working well together and then an image of a group not working together, compare and contrast and point out good practice and unwanted behavior.



Fear of Participation

The Challenge: Some students feel anxious about performing in front of others, this self-conscious behaviour can lead to reluctance or disengagement from a session.

How to Overcome It:

Start with low-pressure activities without the performance element like frozen images (tableaux style) or mirroring exercises, where students work in pairs and don't have to speak. Praise and encourage participants whenever you can ("I love the statue you've made there, that's a great picture!" etc)

Normalise mistakes by celebrating effort. Always encourage the ethos that it is about experimenting not about perfection.

Gradually build up students' confidence by starting with partner and small group work before moving onto individual performances or sharings.



Exclusion Or Unequal Participation

The Challenge: Some students may dominate the activities, while quieter students hesitate to contribute.

How to Overcome It:

Rotate leadership roles so all students have a chance to contribute, remind and reinforce the need to share everyone's ideas. Electing or employing a group member to be the 'Scene Captain' or 'Outside Eye' or 'Director'.

Use drama exercises that require collaboration over competition. Ensemble work rather than individual work can help the less confident student. (Image Theatre, Mime Stories)

Create space for non-verbal participation, such as movement-based activities, for students who are less confident in speaking roles.



Stereotyping & Sensitivity Concerns

The Challenge: Some drama exercises can unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or make students feel uncomfortable about certain topics.

How to Overcome It:

Be mindful of character choices and storylines, ensuring they are inclusive and representative.

Encourage students to invent their own characters rather than relying on clichés.

Have an opt out policy where students can switch roles or activities if they feel uncomfortable.

Agree in the ground rules that we work together and not against any other person in the space, our activities mustn't make anyone feel uncomfortable or picked on.



Losing Focus on Learning Outcomes

The Challenge: While drama is fun, it can still align with educational goals rather than becoming just an entertaining unstructured activity.

How to Overcome It:

Link activities to the lesson objectives. E.g communication skills, historical events, or creative writing.

Reflect after each session: Get the children taking it in turns to answer questions like, "What did you learn from this activity?" "What was difficult?" "Which bits did you enjoy and why?"

Activities like "Hot Seating" where a teacher or student takes on the role of a character can deepen the learning by providing a human experience aspect to the topic. (Villagers at the foot of an active volcano explaining why they choose to remain living there/leave the area).



Managing Large Groups

The Challenge: Keeping engagement high with a large group can be difficult. It can lead to distractions and lack of participation.

How to Overcome It:

Divide the class into smaller working groups. You then have the opportunity to work on different activities or scenes where each group can tell a different part of the same story. This can keep engagement high. Sharing back to their peers heightens the excitement of working together to create quality work.

Assign student leaders to help manage tasks and guide smaller groups.

Use a clear 'Start' and 'Stop' system to get the focus of the group.

Check In - You can always share what you have so far, and ask for feedback from the whole class using the Stars and Wishes process. Stars - the things the audience like, Wishes - what they would like to see added or taken away from the piece so far to improve it.



Conclusion

Drama can be a dynamic and enriching tool for learning in the classroom, but it requires thoughtful planning and careful management to avoid common pitfalls. By setting clear expectations, providing a supportive environment, and offering inclusive activities that accommodate a range of personalities and learning styles, teachers can create an engaging and focused atmosphere.

Overcoming challenges such as disruptive behaviour, fear of participation, and unequal engagement is essential for ensuring that every student feels able to contribute. With strategies in place to manage group dynamics, address sensitivity concerns, and align activities with learning objectives, drama can become a powerful tool and an enjoyable means of learning, leaving students with an appreciation for creativity and collaboration.





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