

RAG & BONE PUPPET THEATRE

Kathy MacLellan and John Nolan
Drama and Puppet Ideas



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A half-hour kindergarten workshop

WHAT IS DRAMA?

Drama is pretending, acting things out, using your imagination to show things to an audience.

WARM-UP

To get bodies, voices and imaginations ready to go, the students repeat this magic poem, one line at a time:

Ish ka bibble bobble boo
Close your eyes I'll magic you
There is nothing you can't do!

Now they open their eyes and magic themselves into trees—the tallest trees in Canada, stretching up to the sky, bending a little in the breeze and now shrinking—becoming smaller trees, then seeds, then porcupines, icebergs, etc.

Ish ka bibble bobble bee
I look down and I can see
Now I'm magicked back to me.

SOLDIER DOLL OR RAG DOLL

The whole body is stiff and tall and still like a soldier. Then one part at a time becomes like a rag doll: floppy head, one floppy arm, the other arm, one floppy leg, and then the other leg. Add sound effects—a resonant hum to head rotations, rotations from the waist, rotations from the hips.

SNOWBALL

Now that bodies and voices are warmed up, let's try some poems. (Say one line at a time, with actions. The children repeat each line and action. Then try having them repeat the poem again, this time like a tiny mouse or a giant ogre.)

I made myself a snowball as round as it could be
I thought, I'll keep this as a pet and let it sleep with me
I sewed it some pyjamas and a pillow for its head
But late last night it ran away
And first it wet the bed.

(Shel Silverstein)

NURSERY RHYMES

Humpty Dumpty, Hey Diddle Diddle, Three Blind Mice, Jack and Jill, Little Miss Muffet, Little Bo Peep

Say these rhymes one line at a time, and let the children repeat after you. Some children know them, others don't, but they're easy to learn.

ACT OUT A NURSERY RHYME

Mime a nursery rhyme and let the children guess which one it was. (Note: no guessing until the performance is over. Say "the end" or take a bow and then students can raise their hands to guess.)

Now divide them into groups of three or four and let each group go off to plan how they can act out a nursery rhyme with no words.

Each group acts their rhyme silently, and the rest of the group guesses what it was. Then the group repeats their mime, only this time, the rest of the class says the words.

THE LITTLE RED HEN

The teacher/workshop leader is the storyteller and the little red hen. The kids are the baby chicks, who say, "cheep cheep!" and they also play cats, ducks or pigs. Divide the class into three groups and tell them their "lines":

CATS: Not us, we're cleaning our fur.

DUCKS: Not us, we're splashing in the water

PIGS: Not us, we're rolling in the mud

NARRATOR: Once upon a time, there was a little red hen who lived with her baby chicks, who said:

BABY CHICKS: Cheep cheep

NARRATOR: One day, she was pecking in the barnyard and she found some grains of wheat. She decided to plant the wheat but she needed some help, so she asked the cats to help her.

LITTLE RED HEN: Will you help me plant my wheat?

NARRATOR: And the cats said:

CATS: Not us, we're cleaning our fur.

NARRATOR: And the ducks said:

DUCKS: Not us, we're splashing in the water

NARRATOR: And the pigs said:

PIGS: Not us, we're rolling in the mud

LITTLE RED HEN: Fine, my baby chicks and I will do it ourselves. And the chicks said:

BABY CHICKS: Cheep cheep

NARRATOR: (Encouraging everyone to do the actions) So the little chicks dug a hole in the ground, put the seeds in and covered them with earth. Then they watered them, and the grains of wheat grew and grew until they were tall and golden and swaying in the breeze.

LITTLE RED HEN: Now it's time to cut the wheat. Who will help me cut the wheat?

NARRATOR: And the cats said:

CATS: Not us, we're cleaning our fur.

NARRATOR: And the ducks said:

DUCKS: Not us, we're splashing in the water

NARRATOR: And the pigs said:

PIGS: Not us, we're rolling in the mud

LITTLE RED HEN: Fine, my baby chicks and I will do it ourselves. And the chicks said:

BABY CHICKS: Cheep cheep

NARRATOR: (With actions) So the little red hen and the baby chicks took a scythe, which is like a long sword, and they cut the wheat and bundled it up and took it to the miller and he ground it into flour. And when they had some flour, they could make bread. So they put the flour in the mixing bowl with milk and salt and yeast and a bit of sugar and mixed it in the mixing bowl. Then they took the mixture out and kneaded it (etc.) and put it in the oven to cook. And as it cooked it smelled delicious. Then it was done. They put on oven mitts and took it out of the oven and it smelled wonderful.

LITTLE RED HEN: Now, who will help me eat the bread?

CATS: We will!

DUCKS: We will!

PIGS: We will!

LITTLE RED HEN: You wouldn't help me plant the seeds, you wouldn't help me cut the wheat, you wouldn't help me make the bread, so now, my baby chicks and I are going to eat it all by ourselves.

NARRATOR: And the chicks said:

BABY CHICKS: Cheep cheep.



A one hour workshop for grades 1-6

WHAT IS DRAMA?

Drama is communicating with an audience using your body, your voice, your imagination and co-operation.

WARM-UP

To get our bodies, our voices and our imaginations ready to go. Let the students repeat this magic poem:

Ish ka bibble bobble boo
Close your eyes I'll magic you
There is nothing you can't do!

Now students open their eyes and magic themselves into trees—the tallest trees in Canada, stretching up to the sky, bending a little in the breeze and now shrinking—becoming smaller trees, then seeds, then porcupines, icebergs, etc.

Ish ka bibble bobble bee
I look down and I can see
Now I'm magicked back to me.

For the older grades, we would usually drop the poem, but keep the series of stretches, using different images, such as “reach for a chocolate bar on the ceiling.”

SOLDIER DOLL OR RAG DOLL

The whole body is stiff and tall and still like a soldier. Then one part at a time becomes like a rag doll: floppy head, one floppy arm, then the other arm, one floppy leg, then the other leg. Add sound effects—a resonant hum to head rotations, rotations from the waist, rotations from the hips.

TONGUE TWISTERS

Red leather, yellow leather.
Toy boat, toy boat.
Rubber baby buggy bumpers.
Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled pep-
pers Peter Piper picked?

SNOWBALL

Now our bodies and our voices are warmed up, let's try some poems.

Say one line at a time, with actions. The children repeat each line and action. Then try saying the poem again, this time like a tiny mouse or a giant ogre.

I made myself a snowball as round as it could be
I thought, I'll keep this as a pet and let it sleep with me
I sewed it some pyjamas and a pillow for its head
But late last night it ran away
And first it wet the bed.

(Shel Silverstein)

NURSERY RHYME MIMES

Brainstorm the titles of as many nursery rhymes the students can think of

Mime a nursery rhyme and let the children guess which one it was. (Note: no guessing until the performance is over. Say "the end" or take a bow and then students can raise their hands to guess.)

Now divide them into groups of three or four and let each group go off to plan how they can act out a nursery rhyme with no words but in a way that the rest of the group can guess which one they're doing.

Each group acts their rhyme silently, and the rest of the group guesses what it was. Then the group repeats their mime, only this time, the rest of the class says the words.

MACHINES

When you make a machine in drama, every person in the group has to have an action and a sound that repeat. The people making the machine have to somehow be connected. We don't show people using the machine, just the machine going on and on all by itself. No video games, TV's or computers. It should be a normal machine that we've all heard of so that we can guess what it is: something at home, at school, at a construction site, etc.

Demonstrate a machine to the class. (One of the easiest and all time favourites is a toaster—crouch down for a minute, then pop up.) Let the groups go off and plan their machines. See what they come up with. Other popular machines are: a blender, a washing machine, a car wash, a vacuum cleaner, a sprinkler, a front-end loader, or a wrecking ball.

The groups must repeat their actions and sounds at least three times. Then the class guesses, and the group repeats their machine now that everyone else knows what they're doing.

GOOD MORNING YOUR MAJESTY

One student sits in a chair facing away from the rest of the group. This person is the King or Queen.

The other students go up, one at a time, to be the servant. The servant says “Good morning your majesty” in a disguised voice, hoping to fool the King or Queen.

If the monarch recognises the voice, he/she answers using that person’s name, “Good morning, Jason.” In that case the servant has to go back to the group. But if the servant fools the monarch and the monarch makes the wrong guess, the servant is the new King or Queen and gets to sit in the chair.

This is an excellent listening game, as everyone has to be quiet. And sometimes the shyest kid in the class excels at this game, because he or she is the best listener.



More ideas for drama games and activities

WHAT'S MY JOB?

One student goes to the front of the group and says, "What's my job?" Then he or she mimes working at a job, for example, a teacher, a construction worker, and a checkout clerk. When finished, the student repeats "what's my job?" and the other students guess. No guesses until the second "what's my job?" has been said.

EMOTION CHARADES

Have a pile of emotion cards (angry, sad, scared, jealous, happy, etc.) and a pile of action words (skating, washing dishes, laughing, painting). Each student gets a card from each pile, and mimes the action with the emotion. Other students guess what the mime is.

FAIRY TALE TABLEAUX

Students strike a pose, a frozen picture, that illustrates a moment from a fairy tale. This activity can be used in lots of ways to "dramatize" any story or poem. Different groups can be statues to show different parts of a story. The teacher can be the storyteller and move from group to group as the story is told.

ALL TOGETHER MACHINE

Like the machines described above, every person has an action and a sound that repeats. But this time we're making an abstract machine, nobody knows what it is.

One person starts an action and a sound. One by one everyone else joins in, each one finding a way to connect to the others. When the machine is made, the teacher suggests the machine speed up, slow down and stop.

TABLEAUX MACHINES

Start with a tableau. Now everyone in turn makes a repetitive sound and action. Cinderella says, “My Prince!” and the Prince, holding the shoe, says “It fits!” This is an easy and funny way to animate a story.

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Circle games

WHO’S THE LEADER?

One person goes out of the room, and the others choose a leader. The first person comes back and stands in the centre of the circle. The leader leads a variety of simple rhythmic actions or sounds—clapping, foot stamping, twisting etc. The others follow the leader without looking at him or her. The person in the centre has to guess who’s leading, and then it’s time for someone else to go out.

COFFEE POT

While someone is out of the room, the others choose an object, such as toothbrush that will only be referred to by the words “coffee pot”. The person comes back to the circle, and everyone else takes turn telling us one thing about the “coffee pot”, such as dentists recommend using your “coffee pot” twice a day. The person has to guess what “coffee pot” really is.



Other activities

HANDSHAKE MURDER

The kids put their heads down, eyes closed. The teacher walks around and touches two people: one tap for the detective, two taps for the murderer. Heads up, eyes open, the kids get up and walk around as if they're at a party, shaking hands with each other. But the murderer makes a little scratching gesture when he shakes hands; and the person who get this little scratch has to shake hands with two more people, then die a dramatic death.

The detective goes around shaking hands until he/she is ready to make an accusation, at which point everyone stops. If the detective is wrong, the game continues. If the detective is wrong three times, the game is over. If the detective is right, the game is also over, and it starts all over again.

DR. KNOW IT ALL

Three participants sit together at the front. They are Dr. Know It All, a single person with three heads. The emcee takes questions from the audience and repeats them to Dr. Know It All.

The doctor responds with one word from each of the three heads, in a complete sentence which begins by repeating the substance of the question, e.g.:

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Why is the sky blue?

EMCEE: Dr. Know It All, why is the sky blue?

HEAD 1: the

HEAD 2: sky

HEAD 3: is

HEAD 1: blue

HEAD 2: because

HEAD 3: it

HEAD 1: is

HEAD 2: not

HEAD 3: itchy.

Silly answers and silly questions are permissible within reason.

MAGIC SAC SKITS

Stuff several pillowcases with four or five props. Give each group of four students a pillowcase. Let them make up a story inspired by and using the props. (Stories should have a beginning—who?—a middle—what's the problem?—and an end—the solution to the problem.)

CHORAL SPEAKING

This is a way to divide a text among several performers to make it interesting. Some words or phrases are spoken by the whole group, some are solo or in pairs; they can be fast or slow, loud or soft, with or without emotion, and extra sound effects can be added. Try this with poems, stories, songs, narrations, or fact-based introductions.

SHADOW DRAMAS

Try any kind of story or presentation behind a shadow screen. Hang up a sheet, and use an overhead projector as a light source. Use gestures and body language for expression. Add cardboard cut-out shapes, like a big nose or a funny hat. Try various props.

Try drawing scenery on overhead acetates and putting them right on the overhead. A game like “emotion charades” will be even more interesting as a shadow play.

POEMS WITH CHORAL SPEAKING AND MACHINE TABLEAUX

Here’s a way to put lots of the previous activities into a presentation that involves everyone in the class. Find a poem with several verses. Give each small group one verse. Let each group make a tableau of that verse (or more, depending on the group and the poem). Turn the tableau into a machine-tableau. Now we have solid, stylized actions for each verse and it’s time to add the words. Let the students in each group divide the words into choral speaking units. Present the whole poem one verse after another.

Improvisation : Learning Through Drama, Booth, David W., Lundy, Charles, Don Mills, Ont.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.

On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids, Bany-Winters, Lisa, Chicago, Ill.: Chicago Review Press, c1997.

100+ Ideas for Drama, Scher, Anna, and Verrall, Charles, London: Heinemann, 1987

Pushing Up The Sky: Seven Native American Plays for Children, Bruchac, Joseph, New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, c2000.

The Skit Book: 101 Skits From Kids, MacDonald, Margaret Read, Hamden, Conn.: Linnet Books, 1990.

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Scrap Wood Puppets

You need:

wood for a handle

(ruler, paint stir-stick, or moulding)

scraps of wood white glue

construction paper scissors

masking tape fabric

twist ties

heavy duty stapler (optional)

Play with two or three scraps of wood until you see a face.

Glue them together, making sure that the two sides you're gluing are both flat. Let dry.

Meanwhile, make eyes, mouth, teeth etc. from construction paper, and glue them on.

Glue handle at the back. Masking tape will hold it in place while the glue dries, or the teacher can staple it to add security to the glue.

Glue a corner of fabric onto the top of the handle, the puppet's neck, and secure it with a twist tie. This becomes the puppet's body and clothing.



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Putting on Puppet Plays:

WORKING THE PUPPET:

1. Let the audience see. Show the puppet's face. A puppet faces the audience most of the time. Even when speaking to another puppet, it should look "out". Even actions, such as a slave bowing to a king, should be done with both puppets facing the audience. The puppet should also be held high enough to be seen, and in front of the puppeteer.
2. Let the audience hear. You're just pretending to be speaking to the puppet next to you. You're actually talking to that audience member way in the back row. Use a loud voice, not your usual speaking voice.
3. Let the audience understand. Take turns. The puppet that is talking should move, the others should keep still. Everyone (puppets and puppeteers) should give their attention to the puppet that is talking or doing the main action.
4. Safety note. Puppets shouldn't actually touch each other, especially when fighting. If one puppet hits another puppet, the puppets will break. (A fight scene can be more safely faked if the puppet receiving a blow shows a big reaction.)

MAKING UP PUPPET STORIES:

Start with short, quick scenes that have a beginning, a middle and an end:

In the beginning, the audience quickly finds out who is in this story, either through dialogue, monologue, or narration.

In the middle, a problem is introduced. This problem can arise from the characters (e.g., if there's a mouse and a lion, the lion might want to eat the mouse). It should be an interesting problem, and

there might even be a complication, which makes it even more interesting.

In the end, the problem is solved. Sometimes it's a good idea to clearly state the solution: "And after they scared him, the bad guy never returned."

The whole story can be about two minutes long to begin with. More details about character and plot can be added once the basics are clear, and easy to understand. Let a group of three or four students improvise a scene, present it to classmates, work on it again, and present it again a few times before anyone even thinks of writing anything down. This keeps the work fresh and easier to remember, and more flexible (if someone's absent, the group can work around them, or add someone else etc.)

And remember, the audience wants to see, hear, and understand! Have fun!



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Language Curriculum links

Making a puppet play in groups is an excellent way to address these expectations from the Language Curriculum.

THE ORAL COMMUNICATION STRAND:

Students will:

1. listen in order to understand and respond appropriately in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes;
2. use speaking skills and strategies appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes;
3. reflect on and identify their strengths as listeners and speakers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in oral communication situations.

THE WRITING STRAND:

Students will:

1. generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience;
2. draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience;
3. use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively;
4. reflect on and identify their strengths as writers, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful at different stages in the writing process.

THE MEDIA LITERACY STRAND:

Students will:

1. demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts;
2. identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning;
3. create a variety of media texts for different purposes and audiences, using appropriate forms, conventions, and techniques;
4. reflect on and identify their strengths, areas for improvement, and the strategies they found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts.

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