



Drama

Techniques

for the Classroom

Freeze-frame

(Lessons 4, 9, 12)

Description:

Individuals or groups hold a 'frozen image' with their bodies, encapsulating a moment in time.

Learning:

A way of crystallizing meaning into a visual form that can be shared with others or used to deepen the moment.

Application Examples:

- Use to stop action during a class drama and allow thought-tracking, for them to describe what they can see, the opportunity to reflect on the moment or the chance to witness each others moments.
- Freeze moments from stories that they know or have read and comment, question, on each others, thought-track or hot-seat as a way of deepening their understanding of the story and the characters.
- Create freeze-frames to show emotions and then explore the picture, look at body language and discuss what might be happening.
- 'Fast freeze-frames': Give students a word or a phrase and then ten seconds to create freeze-frames individually, in pairs or small groups. Use them as a springboard for developing ideas further, e.g. decide exactly who they are and precisely what they are doing; explore issues; develop storylines backwards and forwards.

- Use to bring pictures and photographs to life: i.e. the students create a freeze-frame of the picture and then thought-tracking, and descriptions of what they can see or what they are feeling (with justifications) can deepen the understanding of the original visual stimulus. They can develop this by making new freeze-frames using the same characters.

Thought-tracking

Lesson 4

Description:

Tapping students on the shoulder during freeze-frames and asking them to voice their thoughts as if they were that character. Specific questions can be asked or general feelings sought.

If they are given a short time to prepare an answer, the results can be used to create a Sound Collage.

Learning:

Students realise a greater understanding of their characters/situation can be accessed and this in turn can deepen the quality of the continuing drama work.

Application Examples:

- It gives them a voice with which to express (and for everyone to hear) responses to the work that is underway.
- It can act as a check to see how involved they are in the drama.
- If they are asked to describe what they can see this can help to build the visual 'picture' of the drama for the whole class.
- Something exciting is about to happen and you want to deepen their involvement before taking them to the next stage.
- Help students to engage emotionally with the drama.

Hot-seating

(Lesson 12)

Description:

One or more people take on the role of a single character. The rest of the group ask questions which must be answered as if they are that character.

The questions can be open or closed depending on what kind of information you wish to elicit.

A variation on this is for anyone to ask questions and any member of the group can answer, providing they are in role (you can make the proviso that they must not contradict answers already given so that a coherent picture builds up or you can elicit different answers to a single question so that the differences can then be discussed.)

Learning:

Hot-seating encourages them to develop characters to greater depth and/or explore issues and problems that the character faces. These characters can either be of their own making, or from other sources such as stories or History.

Application examples:

- Students can hot-seat a person that they have studied in History, try and discover more about how s/he felt about their work and develop an empathy with them by relating to similar feelings and situations.
- Take a character from a book (minor characters in particular) and use hot-seating to explore what their side of the story may be.
- In a Class Drama, place characters in a situation where they are being questioned or interrogated to develop the drama.

Sound Collage

(Lesson 9)

Description:

Using words and/or sounds together to build atmosphere.

Individuals each create a sound, word, phrase or sentence and the words/sounds of the whole group are then orchestrated, singly and/or together, building atmosphere/tension/rhythm.

Learning:

Working together as a team.

Vocal co-ordination.

Building drama.

Building atmosphere.

Giving meaning to a situation.

Application Examples:

- Building a scene: e.g. a group of refugees in freeze-frame each in turn say one word to say how they feel; this is then repeated with voices building on top of each other until the force of their voices conveys their emotions even though the words can no longer be individually heard.
- To create a setting e.g. a factory: each student or group develops a noise that when rehearsed together gives a soundscape of machinery.

Teacher-in-Role

(Lesson 8)

Description:

During a Class Drama, the teacher and/or other adults take on a role within the Drama that moves the Drama forward in some way, either introducing new information or forcing the students to take some kind of action.

The effect is to manage, direct and sustain the Drama from within rather than outside the role play.

Learning:

Once the teacher is part of the action, the world of the Drama takes on a deeper resonance as the 'outside' teacher is no longer available and decisions and all interactions need to be made in character.

It shows a unique commitment to the world created in the Class Drama and so deepens the involvement of the whole class.

Application Examples:

This technique has very wide ranging applications in all Class Drama Structures.

NOTE: This is never about the teacher needing to be 'a good actor' but is in the spirit of shared play, and is the same for the children.

Role-play as the Expert

(Lesson 8)

Description:

In the fictional world of the Class Drama, the children are given roles as experts in a particular field, either using their imaginations and/or by building in an area of learning that they are familiar with e.g. newspaper journalists, nurses with Florence Nightingale.

Learning:

This raises their status and involvement, creating a space in which their views are very highly valued. It can increase motivation and encourage further learning (e.g. they can be asked questions in role that they need to report back on later in their capacity as 'experts'; thus giving them time to extend their knowledge so that their 'expertise' genuinely grows.)

Application Examples:

- At the beginning of a Class Drama, the students are 'framed up' as scientists about to take part in a space mission. They all have their own areas of interest and must specify what they need for the mission to be successful.
- 'Framed up' as archeologists they must make sense of some ancient 'artefacts' and prepare to be on a 'television show' to discuss them. This could then be videoed.
- As 'Social Workers' they must interview someone who has run away from home.

Interviews / Meetings

(Lesson 8)

Definition:

The form of the Meeting or Interview within a Class Drama creates purpose, meaning and conflict within the Drama.

All meetings/interviews need a purpose e.g. to find out something; to tell someone something; to try and reach an agreement on something.

Learning:

Students learn to ask questions, listen, defend their character's point of view and sustain a belief in the world of the Drama.

Application Examples:

- During a 'Refugee' Drama, the students decide to hold a secret meeting to plan their escape. The meeting is fraught with danger from the soldiers patrolling nearby.
- Florence Nightingale (Teacher-in-Role?) calls her Nurses to a meeting to discuss the forthcoming journey.
- 'Reporters' interview 'Locals' to find out more about the haunted house on the edge of town.

10 Tips for Managing Drama Sessions

In Drama sessions we might ask pupils to make a lot of noise, talk a lot, express different emotions and to use the surrounding physical space differently. Normally, a display of anger in class would be frowned upon, but within a drama it may be encouraged. Normally, running in the classroom might not be tolerated, but now a tiger is chasing them. These are a few tips and ideas for comfortably managing drama sessions.

- ‘Freeze’ This is both a technique and a strategy. Once children are clear about what freeze means (i.e. standing as still as a statue, as if time has been switched off, only blinking and breathing are allowed, not even eyes can move!) it can be used to stop a drama at any point without changing the level of focus. What you say next can either slow them down while keeping them in the drama (e.g. thought-tracking), or tell them that they are out of role now as you have something to say.
- Telling them that when you raise your hand they must stop what they are doing, put their hand up and shut up! This one is in every teacher’s arsenal but it’s worth pointing out that you may have to adapt the movement to catch attention e.g. wave, and that it will take longer as they notice each other’s hands go up rather than your own.
- This is a tip I was given on my teaching practice many years ago and I’m still amazed by how magical it looks in action, as though you have some secret power! Tell them at the beginning of a session (assuming you are working in an empty space like the hall or a cleared classroom) that if they see you carry a certain chair to the middle of the room and sit on it, they must come immediately and sit on the floor in front of you because it means you have something to tell them.

- If you are playing a 'Teacher-in-Role' part, ensure that you are playing a figure with some authority, especially if you are trying to build your own confidence with TIR. Don't do what I did in the early days with a group of fifteen year olds when I went into role as a very weak and scared adult and then wondered why they were suddenly tearing round the hall... I had to quickly inform them that I was going to get the 'Head', ran off and came straight back in as a highly authoritarian 'Head! Control regained!
- It's sometimes useful to build into the drama factors that motivate good behaviour: e.g. In a drama where a ghost appears holding a rolled up letter, they must gain the ghosts trust in order to get it. Each time they run, shout or overcrowd the ghost, the order is to 'freeze' and the ghost 'disappears'. This kind of internal structuring means that their behaviour can to a large extent be managed positively and within the drama.
- It's often helpful to manage behaviour within the drama: e.g. The teacher or TIR says to a pupil who is also in role: 'Sir, please could you speak more quietly or the managers of the hotel will ask us to leave...'
- Another way of encouraging appropriate behaviour is by using the 'In Role as the Expert' to frame children up with some kind of authority, e.g. as scientists about to embark on a secret space mission or as nurses going to Scutari with Florence Nightingale. Doing this changes expectations and allows you to treat them with a great deal of respect ('Excuse me Sir, I understand you are very knowledgeable about aliens. Could I ask you what you think about...') Children usually respond to this in kind and it is a wonderful way to build their confidence and self esteem.

- Through Drama, children learn that they need to listen to each other as well as the teacher. To encourage this I often ask children at the beginning of a session to say who is more important, myself and their teachers, or them. The answer of course is 'everyone' because we're all human. At this point, I point out that this has consequences: they all listen to me and their teachers with full attention, so what does this mean if one of them has something to say to the whole group? Answer: Everyone must listen to what they have to say.
- When working as 'Teacher-in-Role' it is important to sustain the role as the children are expected to do, and not jump in and out of role to make comments on behaviour or anything else, without letting the children know you are no longer in role. A good way to do this is to work with a single prop or piece of costume, e.g. a scarf or hat, so that the pupils can differentiate between when you are in and out of role.
- When planning a drama structure, try to alternate noisy activities with quiet focussed activities. It can be useful to try and visualise the structure playing out in the classroom first and this should allow you to discern any 'sticky' bits that you think might cause problems. Then you can either change them, structure them more tightly or have other strategies up your sleeve for use if needed (e.g. freeze and thought track / voice collage/hot-seating). This kind of problem solving will be different with the same drama structure in different classes as each teacher knows their own class.
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