From the Page to the Stage: Teaching Literature through Drama

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

For teachers there exists a constant challenge to provide students with a wide variety of learning activities and opportunities. While it is the goal of every teacher to present students with activities that foster creativity and encourage cooperative learning, the growing demands for student achievement and teacher accountability make it difficult to incorporate such projects. In order to be able to have students participate in creative projects, teachers must make sure that these activities also are valid learning experiences. Dramatic performance activities are an excellent addition to any classroom curriculum because they can be used to enhance instruction as well as provide students with a creative outlet, an opportunity to work with other students, and an opportunity to build student confidence. The area of instruction that dramatic performance activities can be used to enhance and extend instruction most easily is literature. This guide shows educators important concepts in both literature and dramatic arts instruction that need to be addressed as well as activities that can be used to teach them. In addition, it provides lists of materials and resources for teachers to use in preparing instruction and use in the classroom. This guide will enable any educator to feel confident in using dramatic performance activities as a vehicle to extend and enhance literature instruction.

Acknowledgements

- I wish to thank Dr. Mary Ellen Van Camp for her constant guidance throughout this project. Her advice helped me shape this project and give my ideas direction.

- I would also like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Lowe who began my love of theatre, which led to this project.
Process

When I first began this project, I wanted to create a unit for literature instruction in the elementary classroom that focused on using plays instead of children's literature or basal readers. The project has undergone many changes throughout the course of its development. Through weekly meetings with my advisor, Dr. Van Camp, the project became something much more comprehensive than my initial idea for a unit plan.

I knew the basic idea that I wanted to convey through my thesis was that using theatre in the classroom was a more applicable and enjoyable way to teach literature to elementary children. I came to this conclusion through experiences I had teaching children in pre-service and student teaching classrooms. I developed an interest in theatre throughout my school career. When I began teaching, I knew it was something I wanted to share with the students I taught. What I discovered was that it not only made literature more enjoyable for them but it also had many other benefits. The students learned more, developed cooperative learning skills, and increased their self-esteem.

I believed in this method of teaching literature but I was unsure how it would take form as a project. I believed that the idea was a simple one and perhaps would not merit an entire thesis. Dr. Van Camp helped me understand that for many teachers who did not have experience with theatre, using it in any format in the classroom, let alone as a method of instruction, would be an intimidating task. That is how the project came to be an explanatory guide for educators. I believed that if teachers felt comfortable and confident with this method, they would be more likely to employ it in their own classrooms. I also recognized that through the writing process, I would be able to reflect
on my own teaching practices and see areas where I could improve how I used this method as well.

A decision that was difficult for me was selecting the components of the literature and dramatic arts instruction that I needed to include and explain. It was very helpful to me to meet with Dr. Van Camp every week because she is very knowledgeable in both the areas of literature and dramatic arts. She reviewed my selections of literary and dramatic terms and concepts I included and helped me find resources that were very helpful in the completion of my project. I then decided that I needed to provide activities that would help teach the various literary and dramatic concepts as well.

A decision that Dr. Van Camp helped me to make was to include a section of resources for teachers. She brought up the point that if teachers have little experience with dramatic arts, then they may not know where to obtain quality drama and Readers Theatre scripts. They also may initially have difficulty selecting literature that can be adapted into dramatic scripts. So the resource section was created to provide quality books, scripts, and websites that teachers can use with their students. In this section Dr. Van Camp reviewed my selection of authors and materials.

It was at her suggestion that I included poets from the National Council of Teachers of English award winner list. After researching poets on the NCTE website, I noticed that the standards of the NCTE were also being addressed through my project. Since they are a reputable source in the literature education, I decided to include a section that addressed the NCTE standards that I felt were taught especially well using dramatic arts activities in the classroom.
Throughout the process of writing my thesis, it has undergone many changes. What began as a basic idea I felt could improve literature instruction became a detailed plan for how to implement that idea to its best use. I am grateful for the high level of involvement on the part of my advisor, Dr. Van Camp, who not only shared her considerable knowledge on this topic with me but also helped steer me in the right direction when I was unsure where to next. My hope for this project is that it can help any teacher feel comfortable using theatre as a way to enhance and extend the literature instruction in his or her classroom.
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**Rationale for Using Dramatic Performance Activities in the Classroom**

For teachers there exists a constant challenge to provide students with a wide variety of learning activities and opportunities. Teachers want activities that are not only educationally sound, but also those that spark students’ interest to learn, and help them grow as people. One set of classroom activities that accomplishes these goals for many students is dramatic performance activities. Dramatic performance activities can fulfill not only those educational needs, but also develop students’ social skills, provide opportunities for authentic assessment, and involve the students’ families in the classroom. Dramatic performance activities can provide valid learning experiences for students, spark their creativity, help them develop socially, and increase their self-esteem. In addition, for teachers who wish to integrate dramatic performance activities with another classroom curriculum area, dramatic performance activities can serve as an outstanding classroom experience to extend literature instruction.

The most obvious reason to have children take part in plays and other dramatic activities is that it is fun (McCullough 8). Even children who do not like to perform are likely to find an aspect of putting on a play they can enjoy. By giving shy students smaller parts, however, teachers can help students overcome the common fears of public speaking and performing. Everybody can be given a role in the company that will make them an essential part of the company (McCullough 1). Putting on a play gives the teacher the opportunity to give each student a role in which to excel. If a student is shy about speaking in public, the student can help paint scenery, build sets, design costumes, or even write a script for other students to perform. Each student should be given a chance to shine.
Another benefit for teachers is that dramatic performance activities can be integrated at any grade level of students. Most children are capable of the skills needed to act by the age of four. By this age they are capable of some memorization, copying others, and pretending to be someone else (McCullough x). It would, however, be very difficult to put on a finished production with kindergarten or first grade students. Dramatic performance activities consist of much more than just putting on plays. They can include Readers Theatre, storytelling, puppet shows, dramatized poetry, or choral reading. Students can also write and perform radio shows, television screenplays or documentaries (Robbins 2). The purpose of many of these activities is not to prepare a performance for an audience. The purpose is for the learner to gain a greater understanding through performing. “Classroom drama is not learning about drama, but learning through drama (Robbins 1). Any classroom can find a place for dramatic performance activities to enhance and extend its instruction.

Hands-on, performance driven activities are needed in the classroom maintain motivation and interest among students. James A. Smith says that teachers in language arts must constantly challenge students and work to maintain a high level of motivation to avoid a classroom of bored, apathetic students. Albert J. Harris and Edward R. Siplay say they believe that having students perform for an audience naturally motivates a child to read “with a critical and evaluative attitude” (Sloyer 4). Knowing that they will be performing for audiences of family and friends is one of the greatest motivators I have seen for students. It is a part of our human nature to want to please the people we care about, to make them proud, and to look good in front of others. Knowing they will have
an opportunity to show their skills to others is often all students need to throw themselves wholeheartedly into reading, interpreting, evaluating, and eventually performing texts.

Also, “dramatics provide a vehicle for the improvement of learning skills” (Silverman 4). Students can improve their reading fluency by repeatedly reading their parts. They also learn to read with inflection and emotion as they practice their dialogue. Children also improve their active listening skills from listening for cues from other actors and stage directions from the director. Social skills like teamwork and responsibility can also be learned as students work together for a successful performance. Teachers can also have students improve their writing skills through creating their own scripts. Students can work on writing with proper spelling and punctuation, editing, peer editing, and revising their scripts (Silverman 4). Working with dramatic performance activities provides students with learning opportunities in every aspect of language arts education.

Dramatic performance activities enhance and extend literature instruction. One way it does this is by giving students a place in their own lives to apply their knowledge of literature. It is important to do this because children construct knowledge schematically. They connect new information to things already in their memories (Sloyer ix). It is like hooking a piece of new knowledge to something they already understand. In dramatic performance activities students can view different literary terminology and concepts in the context of the pieces they are performing. For example, students will develop a better understanding of characters, setting, and plot once they can identify the characters, setting, and plot of their own play. They can extend their knowledge of plot development by identifying, which sections of their play classify as rising action, climax,
and falling action. They can gain understanding of terms like conflicts by identifying what the conflicts are in their own performance pieces. Improving their understanding of all these terms help strengthen their knowledge of story structure, plot development, and character development. This is important because once students can understand the basic structure of a story, its plot, and its characters; they can improve their comprehension of that story. The students can then start to make better predictions and better understand the meaning of the story (Huck 10).

Dramatic performance activities also enhance literature instruction because it reaches more of the multiple intelligences than traditional literature instruction approaches. Literature is a visual medium so the majority of the instruction time is benefiting solely visual learners. By engaging in activities like storytelling, Readers Theatre, and theatre, it incorporates sound and movement into the instruction. This enhances the instruction by now reaching aural and kinesthetic learners instead of just visual learners (Lin 2). Incorporating more multiple intelligences in any lesson is an excellent way to reach more students and make instruction more meaningful for them.

Participating in dramatic performance activities also familiarizes students with different forms and genres of literature (Lin 2). Authors write in each genre for a specific purpose, for example, historical fiction is supposed to help the reader develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the past. It is supposed to encourage them to make judgments on past events and understand their connections with the past (Huck 464). There is no better way to understand a character from the Civil War or to appreciate how hard life was for the pioneers than to pretend to be one. Dramatic performance activities strengthen students’ understanding genres by giving them living experience with it.
Dramatic performance activities also help children strengthen their knowledge of genres by helping them identify different pieces of literature or theatre as different genres. It also helps them distinguish between different genres. Works in each genre or subcategory of genre share distinguishing characteristics. For example, fables, from the Traditional Literature genre, all have some very distinct characteristics. Fables feature mainly animals as characters who represent different parts of human nature. The stories are relatively short and always aim to teach the reader a moral (Huck 275). Fables make excellent scripts for dramatic performance activities for younger students because they are short and usually star animals. If small performance groups in a class all shared some characteristics of their script, the class could construct their own knowledge of what a fable was by looking at the characteristics each piece had in common. Activities like this provide a deeper understanding of the genre than simply memorizing its definition.

Allowing students to write their own plays also has another educational benefit. Having students write their own plays, poems, or monologues to be performed allows teachers an excellent opportunity for authentic assessment. In Shirlee Sloyer’s book, students invite their audience members to write their own poems after viewing a class production of Readers Theatre based on poetry (41). She also suggests having students rewrite lines in their scripts, write introductions to their performances, and generate their own stories or poems to be performed (5). All these writing opportunities are creative options for students to develop their writing skills. Additionally, it allows students to write on a topic that interests them. Teachers can then use these writings to assess a multitude of skills like spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, or editing. Teachers can also incorporate other activities like pre-writing, writing for a specific audience, or writing for
a specific purpose, all of which are skills that appear in the Indiana State Academic Standards in Language Arts (Indiana Dept. of Education). Also since works of theatre require children to use upper-level thinking strategies like evaluating and synthesizing information, it is an excellent tool to assess students’ understanding at high orders of thinking (Robbins 2). Dramatic activity certainly provides the teacher with more interesting options for assessment that standard paper and pencil tests.

Another benefit is that nearly any piece of written work can be turned into Readers Theatre, theatre, or a dramatic reading. There is room for every child’s favorite story, poem, or character in the class program. Sloyer suggests using picture storybooks, fairy tales, fables, poetry, realistic stories and plays as different types of literature that can be adapted into Readers Theatre (11-21). On his website, Aaron Shepard, a respected advocate for Readers Theatre in the elementary classroom, has provided many free scripts he has adapted for Readers Theatre. Many of the scripts are adapted from his own picture storybooks; however, many of these stories are based on folktales, like the Native American story, The Hidden One. He also turned chapters from transitional books into Readers Theatre, like in Three Sideways Stories from Wayside School from Louis Sachar’s Sideways Stories from Wayside School (Aaron Shepard’s RT Page). In a case like that, where a class is reading a chapter book, the class could be broken into small groups, where each group performed a chapter, either as Readers Theatre, or as a small play.

Participating in drama-based activities helps a child grow other ways than academically. Sloyer says, “the children see themselves as vital to the success of the project. This perspective gives them a sense of pride and self worth” (5). It is very
important for students to have experience where they feel a sense of ownership for a project. It not only teaches a sense of responsibility but also offers the student an opportunity to be part of a community of people with a shared vision. Performing can also boost self-esteem because students are doing something constructive that will earn them praise from both the audience and their fellow performers (McCullough x). It gives them the opportunity to build their self-confidence during the rehearsal process and then have “success in a public way before peers, parents, and teachers” (Silverman 4). As a teacher, performance activities are wonderful opportunities to celebrate the accomplishments of one’s students. Whenever teachers have put on a performance with children, they can feel an immense sense of pride in their accomplishments. It is astonishing to watch how far they can. It is another way to bolster the confidence of even the shyest students in the class.

In addition to allowing students to receive praise and recognition from family members, performances are also a way to involve family members in the classroom. Parents can be involved at home by helping students rehearse their lines. There are also, however, a number of ways that teachers can involve the parents in the performance at school. Although dramatic performance activities can be done very simply, with minimal sets and costumes, some classes may wish to create more elaborate performances. If this is the case, the more help from parents, the better. Parents can help with sewing costumes, building sets, applying makeup, taking tickets, passing out programs, helping put together programs, or videotaping the performance (McCullough 4-5). I am a strong believer in involving family members in the classroom. It establishes lines of communication between parents and the teacher, which is always beneficial. It also helps
the family members feel valued by the teacher and the student as well as letting the
student know that his or her educational success is important to the family.

There are many benefits to incorporating dramatic performances activities into the
classroom. In addition it is an excellent education tool to extend literature instruction, it
can do so much more. It can improve a child's social skills and self-esteem. It brings the
children in the class closer together, and can bring them closer to the family. Students
can overcome fears of speaking in public and learn to work together as a team. It creates
a feeling of community within the classroom that few other activities can rival. Bringing
theatre into a classroom opens up endless possibilities to students to achieve and express
their creativity.
**Literature Instructional Goals**

Before dramatic performance activities can be used to enhance or extend literature instruction, certain aspects of literature must have been already taught. The teacher should decide on a set of literature instructional goals that will are the most important for the students to know and which will be best enhanced and integrated with the dramatic performance activities. While the goals have been divided into groups by grade level, the instruction of these goals should extend from year to year. That is, the goals from grades one and two must be reviewed each year and a greater understanding developed. Similarly, the goals from grades three and four should reappear in grades five and six.

Some of those goals are:

**First and Second Grade**

- To develop students’ basic understanding of literary terms like character, setting, and plot
- To develop students’ knowledge and understanding that most stories have more than one setting
- To help students understand what rhyme is and be able to identify rhyme in a story or poem.
- To introduce students to genres of texts such as fiction, non-fiction, and poetry, and drama

**Third and Fourth Grade**

- To develop students’ understanding of plot development by introducing terms like rising action, climax, and falling action
- To teach students that all well-written stories have conflicts which must be resolved before a story is finished
- To develop students’ understanding of story structure by teaching that a story can be told from different points of view such as first person, third person limited, and third person omniscient
• To develop knowledge and understanding of different genres of literature by exposing students to familiar genres like traditional literature, picture storybooks, poetry, and drama

• To develop a greater student understanding of poetry by exposing them to many different types of poetry and teaching them to distinguish between them

Fifth and Sixth Grade

• To develop literary understanding through terminology like symbolism, theme, and foreshadowing

• To continue to develop students’ knowledge and understanding of genre by teaching the genres historical fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, and modern fantasy

• To develop students’ understanding of genres by teaching distinguishing characteristics and providing examples of each one
How to Teach Literature Goals

First and Second Grade

Plot

Developing knowledge of plot can be done in a variety of ways. Students must first be exposed to plot through reading many different stories. In younger grades, students need to possess only a basic understanding of plot. They need to know simply that the plot is the events that occur in the story. In early grades a good way to assess a student's knowledge of plot would be to have the student read a story and then tell or write the plot of the story.

Character

Teaching character, like plot, starts with exposure to many different characters through reading many different texts. Teachers can help students learn to identify a character’s traits by having students engage in dialogue about the character, mimic the character, or produce an open-minded portrait of the character. One of the best ways to see what a student knows about a character is the open-minded portrait. In this activity, the student draws an outline of the characters head and inside writes or draws words, pictures, phrases, or sentences that help describe the character. Students can be assessed to see if they learned this skill by then reading a story, selecting a character, and producing a character map or open-minded portrait independently.

Setting

Learning about setting also begins with exposure to many different settings in different texts. Teachers must make students aware of the different components that
define a setting. Students should know that setting can be defined by the place, time period, or time of day that a story occurs. After being exposed to different settings in texts and discussing them in class, students should be able to read stories on their own and identify the setting. The setting could be drawn by the students to show their understanding of it. Students who learn more kinesthetically could build a diorama showing a setting from the story. Students could also describe to the teacher either verbally or in writing how the setting looks, what kind of items are around, or other characteristics that define the setting of a given story.

Another important concept students need to learn about setting is that in most stories there are more than one setting. This is something that needs to be pointed out to students each time a story is read. To help students learn this, the teacher could have students make a map of the town or place where the story takes place. The students could include on the map each location that is a setting in the story.

**Rhyme**

Being able to recognize rhyme is an important not just for learning about literature, but also for developing successful readers. Teachers can help students learn to recognize rhyme by exposing them to a wide variety of poetry and rhyming books. The National Council for Teachers of English website (www.ncte.org) awards a prize to outstanding poets of children’s poetry. Some outstanding poets who have been recognized by the NCTE are Eve Merriam, Myra Cohn Livingston, and Mary Ann Hoberman. The website is a good resource for finding quality poetry for children. Using popular children’s poetry, like Jack Prelutsky, or rhyming books, like Dr. Seuss, is also a great way to help children connect with the material they are reading.
There are a number of activities that can be used to help students recognize rhyme. One way is through oral reading. Teachers can model reading aloud and point out the rhyme in the poem or book. Students can read aloud individually or the class can do a choral reading. The teacher could even have students make a sign every time there is a rhyming word. For instance, students could raise their hand or stand up every time they say a rhyming word in the poem or book. Teachers should also teach that many rhyming words have similar structure. Students could look through a poem or story for these words and make lists of the rhyming words they find.

**Genres of text: Fiction, Non-fiction, Poetry, and Drama**

To help students understand genres, teachers must expose them to many examples of each one. The characteristics of each genre must be directly taught by the teacher. The teacher should also model how a reader can classify a book by seeing which genre’s characteristics it possesses. For example, when beginning to read a fiction story with the class, the teacher might say something like, “On the cover of this book, I see a little boy flying on a magic carpet and a dog wearing a hat and sunglasses. Since I know these things can not happen in real life, this is probably a fictional story.” When reading a poem, the teacher could say, “I’m noticing that every line of text ends with a rhyming word. I know that when I read something that rhymes, it means I’m reading a poem.”

One way the teacher can assess the students’ knowledge of genre is to have them create reading logs. Each student can list the title of each book he reads, the author of the book, the books genre, and why he thinks it fits into that genre. The teacher can go back and check the logs to make sure students have a clear understanding of genre. Another group activity that could be is to reorganize the class library by genre. Each student
could choose some books to read. The teacher could label a shelf or area for each genre. Then students could decide into which section the books they are reading fit.

**Third and Fourth Grade**

**Plot**

In the third and fourth grade, the teacher must help their students develop a greater understanding of plot. The teacher must directly teach the parts of plot, such as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution and identify them in stories that are read in class. Students must also practice identifying the different parts of plot as it applies to the books they themselves are reading. Students could use a diagram such as the one shown below. To assess plot knowledge, teachers can have students read stories and fill in a blank plot chart as it applies to the story they are reading.

![Plot Diagram](image)

**Conflict**

Another important concept students must learn is that all well-written stories have conflicts that must be resolved. For many students, the first necessary step will be to develop an understanding of what a conflict is. Teachers must have students read many different stories and point out the conflicts in each one. For students to practice locating the conflict themselves they can have students make a chart with two columns, one
labeled "Conflict" and the other "Solution." As students read a story, they can record the conflict and how it is solved.

**Points of View**

To develop students’ understanding of points of view they must read stories that are told from each different point of view. Points of view that should be addressed in the elementary classroom are first person, third person, and third person omniscient. The teacher must model for the students how to determine which point of view the story is told from by figuring out which character, if any, is narrating the story. In order to gain a greater understanding, students could practice writing stories that were narrated from each point of view as well.

**Genres: Traditional Literature, Picture Storybooks, Poetry, and Drama**

Teaching genre in third and fourth grade must begin just as it did in first and second grade. The first step must be to teach the characteristics of each genre by exposing students to numerous examples of each. The teacher should also teach that these genres contain subdivisions as well. For instance, within traditional literature, the teacher should help students differentiate between folktales, fables, and myths. Teacher modeling is still important in this step. The activities earlier mentioned, the reading log, and classroom library sort are activities that would work in these grades as well.

Since these students have greater writing skills, however, more activities could be used. Students could read a text, determine its genre, and make a poster for it. The poster could show scenes from the story, give its genre, and have pictures or writing that illustrate why the student classified it in that genre. For example, if a student read a piece
of traditional literature, like Cinderella, the poster could show the fairy godmother with
the glass slippers, since folktales often contain magic objects. If a student chose to make
a poster on a fable, the poster could show animals, since they are usually the main
characters, and have the moral of the fable written on the poster since fables usually
contain morals.

Another way to assess the students knowledge of the genres is to play a game
show. The teacher could read a list of characteristics for a genre or sub-genre and the
students would have to give the genre the teacher is describing in order to get a point.

Poetry

The only way for students to learn different types of poetry is to be exposed to it.
The teacher must provide a plethora of different examples of poetry for their students to
read. To help students learn and remember different types of poems, each student could
pick one type of poem to make a mini-poster about. It would have the title of the type of
poetry at the top, give its characteristics, and then have an example of that type of poem.
Some examples of types of poetry that students could focus on are couplets, limericks,
haikus, diamantes, ballads, or blank verse. To make this activity more thought
provoking, the example poem could be one that the students themselves write. These
mini-posters could be posted around the room so that students could see examples of each
one and have a reference if they needed to help identifying a poem.
Fifth and Sixth Grade

Literary Terms Such as Symbolism, Theme, and Foreshadowing

The first step to teaching these terms is introducing them and their definitions. Then teachers must have the students read texts where there are strong examples of the term on which the class is focusing. After the teacher has modeled recognizing these terms in the text, the

In the upper grades students have the most advanced writing skills, so writing activities can be most easily used here to help teach. One way to help students learn the meanings of commonly used literary terms would be to have students make flashcards with the literary term on one side and an example of the term from a story that has been read in class. The student could be shown the example, and then give the literary term. For instance, if the class is reading the book *Holes* by Louis Sachar and the card said “Determination, friendship, loyalty,” the student would guess the term theme.

Genre: Historical Fiction, Contemporary Realistic Fiction, and Modern Fantasy

To develop knowledge of these more complex genres, students must first have been exposed to literary works from each genre. Then, as the teacher is teaching the students the characteristics of each genre, the students will have a real life experience to which they can connect that new knowledge. Because these genres are all novels and it will take the students a longer amount of time to read them, the teacher may wish to focus on only one or two examples for each genre and study each one of those in depth. To give students practice learning the characteristics of these genres and to assess their knowledge of each genre, the teacher can have the students write a short story in one of the given genres. Another fun way to assess their understanding of the genres would be
to show each student an illustration and have them tell in which genre a novel containing that illustration would be categorized and why they believe so. The illustration should contain characteristics from one of the genres. For example, a modern fantasy novel might show witches and wizards doing magic with wands as in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. A historical fiction novel might show people in covered wagons as in Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie*. Contemporary realistic fiction novels would have nothing extraordinarily distinguished about them, however, a teacher could use an illustration that depicts part of a contemporary realistic fiction novel the class has recently read to make it easier.
Dramatic Instructional Goals

Dramatic performance activities are an excellent way to enhance instruction, particularly literature instruction, in the classroom. Before children can participate in these drama activities, however, they must gain a basic knowledge and understanding of dramatic terms and concepts. As they participate they will gain a greater knowledge of dramatic performance. Some of these goals are the following:

- To develop students’ knowledge of different kinds of dramatic performance activities such as storytelling, poetry reading, choral reading, Readers Theatre, and performance of stage plays

- To teach students to speak with inflection to display emotion through their voices

- To teach children to display emotion through their facial expressions and body movements

- To develop students’ understanding that they must constantly be aware of other performers on-stage

- To teach students understand how to read text in script format

- To teach students that stage directions in the script are not read aloud but are used to show the actor his blocking and actions

- To develop students’ understanding that performing plays or Readers Theatre requires teamwork and cooperation

- To develop students’ understanding of basic dramatic vocabulary, such as stage, scenery, and props

- To develop students’ understanding of basic stage directions, such as upstage, downstage, stage left, and stage right

- To develop students’ understanding of the play production components set building, costuming, and scenery painting

- To develop students’ understanding that scenery helps the audience determine the setting of the story being performed

- To develop the students’ understanding that costumes helps the audience and the actors determine the characterization of each role being portrayed
How to Teach Dramatic Instructional Goals

Here are some ideas I would use to introduce students to acting, Readers Theatre, and dramatic performance activities such as choral reading, storytelling and oral poetry interpretation.

To develop students' knowledge of different kinds of dramatic performance activities such as storytelling, poetry reading, choral reading, Readers Theatre, and performance of stage plays

The instruction here should begin with teacher modeling. The teacher should model activities like storytelling and poetry readings. After the modeling, the class could discuss the defining characteristics of that type of dramatic performance. The characteristics could be made into a chart or poster during the discussion, which could then be displayed in the room to help students remember. The teacher can also help students learn the characteristics of the performances by letting them compare two performances. For example, while modeling storytelling, the teacher can read one story with lots of facial expression, body movement, vocal inflection, and emotion. The second story could be read with less enthusiasm and motion. Then the students could tell the teacher which performance was better and why. They could offer suggestions on how the second performance could be improved. Then students could practice the story and perform it better than the teacher had done. These activities could be done in small groups to help introduce students to the idea of practicing pieces and then performing them for a small audience.

To teach choral reading and Readers Theatre, students can be placed in small groups to practice. For choral reading, students should be given a familiar story that
contains lots of opportunity to use vocal inflection and emotion. Another option is to use a popular song or rhyme the children know instead of beginning with a story. For Readers Theatre, the children should actually be given the opportunity to try some scripts. Aaron Shepard’s Readers Theatre website (see Teacher Resource section) has many free scripts that can be printed for classroom use. The scripts even come with suggested age groups so it is very easy to find a script appropriate for any class.

To develop students’ understanding of basic dramatic vocabulary, such as stage, scenery, and props

This is a skill that I believe should be explicitly taught. Although to adults, this vocabulary may seem to be something that everyone knows, many students, especially younger ones, have never been exposed to theatre. One way to teach it is to take a walk down to the auditorium, stage, or wherever in the school performances are held. That way the students can actually walk on the stage, look at the scenery, and touch the props. This will help them learn these terms more easily since it will give them a real life experience to attach to this terminology.

To develop students’ understanding of basic stage directions, such as upstage, downstage, stage left, and stage right

Understanding stage directions is a skill that has been tricky even for many adult performers. Knowing them, however, is crucial to learning one’s movements during a scene. One way to help students remember stage directions is to put stickers, like name labels, on the floor of the stage that say things like “USC” for upstage center or “DSL” for down stage left.
Another way to help reinforce the idea is to play this game. After teaching the stage directions, take the students down to the stage, or if it is not big enough, any space large enough for children to run. Then face the students and call out stage directions. As soon as the teacher says stage direction, the students have to run to that portion of the stage or room. If a space is not available with room for all the children to run, the children can be placed in small groups and the teacher can call only one group to run at a time.

To develop students' understanding of the play production components set building, costuming, and scenery painting

This is another skill I believe is best explicitly taught. Before the production of the play begins, I believe the teacher should sit down with the students and explain all the components that need to be in place in order to make the production a success. The students could even form committees that would be responsible for each component, such as a property committee, a set construction committee, and a costume committee. One possibility would be to get parent volunteers who would be willing to come in for a few rehearsals to supervise each committee. This would not only take some stress off of the teacher during the production but is also a great way to strengthen classroom and parent relations.

To develop students’ understanding that scenery helps the audience determine the setting of the story being performed

I think that a great way to teach this component would be to have students view clips from movies and television shows. These are both media that are very familiar to most children in today’s classroom. It makes sense to use them as a learning tool.
Teachers could show students a movie like Aladdin or Holes, and then ask them questions about the setting. Here are some sample questions:

- Did the setting help you know where the story took place?
- What about the setting made you know this?
- What clues told you when the story was happening?
- How did you know what time of day, season, year, etc. it was while you were watching this?

Another way to help children learn how to use scenery to better tell a story would be to have the children design sets. The students could read either a story or a script for a play. Then they could decide what the scenery should look like. They can draw their scenery and write a description that highlights the important elements of their set. They should also explain why those elements would help the audience know the setting based on their scenery.

To develop the students' understanding that costumes helps the audience and the actors determine the characterization of each role being portrayed

Teaching this skill would be taught very much like the previous goal. Students could again view movie clips but this time pay attention to the costuming. The students could explain to the teacher what that character’s clothing says about them. Students could also be shown pictures of people from storybooks or magazines and describe what some characteristics of that person might be based on how he or she is dressed.

Students can also read a story or play and then choose a character for which they would like to design costumes. The students can then draw their costumes and write brief explanations of how that costume tells the audience about their character.
To teach students to speak with inflection to display emotion through their voices

This skill requires modeling on the part of the teacher. Students will begin learning this skill the first time the teacher reads a story or a poem to the students simply by observing the teacher read with inflection. Many children are natural mimics so if the teacher presents good examples to follow, the students will pick it up naturally. Students then need to be provided with opportunities to read aloud in the classroom to practice using their voices. This can be done by having students read in pairs or small groups instead of reading silently.

To teach children to display emotion through their facial expressions and body movements

This skill can also be learned through modeling. The model can be the teacher, people in their everyday lives, or actors in movies or television shows. Just by making children aware that people use their faces and bodies to express emotion everyday will help children start to notice it in their own lives. Students can be asked to go home and watch the people around them to see how they express emotions with their face and body movements.

To allow students to practice, the teacher can have the students play a game much like Simon Says. The students can line up and the teacher can give directions like, “Show me your angry face,” or “Show me what you would do if you were surprised.” Other emotions to practice could include joy, fear, exhaustion, loneliness, or frustration. The important idea to remember here is to have students practice emotions beyond happy and sad. Students can then try to display that emotion with no talking, using only their face and body.
To develop students' understanding that they must constantly be aware of other performers on-stage

This skill is most important in performing plays since in many of the other dramatic performance activities; there is not much blocking. During the blocking stage of the production is when students will need to begin to develop an awareness of the other performers and their blocking. To do this, the teacher or director may need to remind students to make sure they are not standing directly in front or behind another performer. When I did plays, this was called finding a window. If a performer was in a window, that meant he or she was between the other actors, not in front of or behind them. Teaching students to find windows helps ensure all the performers can be seen.

Another way to avoid problems onstage is to make sure each performer follows his or her own blocking. Even if a student is playing a minor character, the teacher needs to provide that student with blocking so the student always knows where he or she is supposed to be. If students write down their blocking in their scripts and memorize it along with their lines, it will eliminate collisions and traffic problems onstage.

To teach students understand how to read text in script format

This is a skill that the teacher can model for the students before beginning Readers Theatre or the production of a play. The members of the cast can then sit down and have a read through of the script. This is where all the characters read their lines, but remain seated. There is no blocking or movement during a read through.
To teach students that stage directions in the script are not read aloud but are used to show the actor his blocking and actions.

This is another skill that needs to be explicitly taught or modeled by the teacher. Although it is a very simple skill and takes only a minute or two to explain, it is crucial that students know how to read the script and how to understand their stage directions and blocking.

To develop students’ understanding that performing plays or Readers Theatre requires teamwork and cooperation.

Students will practice this skill while going through the process of preparing their show. Although the teacher can prepare the students for working together and developing good teamwork skills, the teacher cannot make them be a good team. Since each group has different dynamics, each one will have to discover for themselves how to work as a group. What the teacher needs to do for each group is set ground rules. Some examples are letting each person have a turn to speak, respecting everyone’s ideas, and voting to make decisions when the group members cannot all agree. After that, some freedom should be given to the groups. As they learn to work together, they will become a team.
Relevant Literary Terms and Their Definitions

Below is a list of literary terms that are important that students have a strong understanding of before integrating dramatic performance activities into the literature curriculum. The literary terms have been divided into the levels at which I believe it is most appropriate to focus instruction on each term.

Grade 1-2

Characters - The characters are the humans, animals, or fantasized beings who are created by the author to act within a story for the author’s purposes. In some instances, such as in historical fiction, there may be real human beings who lived during the time period of the story. A good writer creates characters that the reader cares about. The reader may love them or hate them, respect them, or hold contempt for them, but the writer has created and evoked those emotions by the selection of details provided about the characters. (Van Camp)

Setting - Setting is the times and places in which the events of the story occur. Most stories have multiple settings, which have been created by the author to tell the story. In identifying the setting, one may start by naming the town and year in which the story takes place (if these are identified by the author), and then by identifying the more specific locations of the story where the action takes place, such as specific rooms in a central character’s home, a school classroom, a local store, a barn, a woods, a city street, an imaginary planet, etc. In teaching children and students to think about setting, it is also useful to have them consider how the nature of the events changes with the settings. The kinds of events that take place in a local store are usually different from the kinds of events that occur in a school classroom. (Van Camp)

Plot - The plot of a story is the series of events created by the author to tell the story. Plot may be discussed in terms of rising action, climax, and falling action. The term rising action refers to the events before a climax, while the term falling action refers to the events, which occur after the climax. The climax may be defined as the highest point of interest in a story and it is the point at which one (or more) of the conflicts is resolved. If there is more than one conflict in the story, there may be more than one climax. (Van Camp)

Rising Action – The part of a dramatic plot that has to do with the complication of the action. It begins with the exciting force, gains in interest and power as the opposing groups come into conflict (hero usually begins the ascendancy), and proceeds to the climax. (Harmon 448)

Conflict - Conflict is the element of the story, which shows the concerns of the central characters. There are some universal conflicts, which are often identified by the terms: character vs. character, character vs. self, character vs. society, character vs. nature. One or more of these may be used by an author to tell a story and to present a theme or a set of themes. (Van Camp)
Climax - The climax is the point of highest interest, whereat the reader makes the
greatest emotional response. In dramatic structure climax designates the turning point in
the action, the crisis at which the rising action reverses and becomes the falling action.
(Harmon p. 99)

Falling Action - Falling action is the second half or resolution of a dramatic plot. It
follows the climax, beginning often with a tragic force, exhibits the failing fortunes of the
hero (in tragedy) and the successful efforts of the counterplayers and culminates in the
catastrophe. (Harmon p. 208)

Theme - Theme is the central unifying element of the story which ties together all of the
other elements of fiction used by the author to tell the story. It indicates the pivotal ideas
around which the author was writing. In order to identify a theme of a story, one must
know the whole story. (Van Camp)

Resolution - The events following the climax. (Harmon p. 99)

Rhyme - The similarity between syllable sounds at the end of two or more lines. Some
kinds of rhyme (also spelled rime) include:

- Couplet: a pair of lines rhyming consecutively.
- Eye rhyme: words whose spellings would lead one to think that they rhymed
  (slough, tough, cough, bough, though, hiccough. Or: love, move, prove. Or:
  daughter, laughter.)
- Feminine rhyme: two syllable rhyme consisting of stressed syllable followed by
  unstressed.
- Masculine rhyme: similarity between terminally stressed syllables. (Harris)

Grade 3-4

Alliteration - The repetition of initial identical consonant sounds or any vowel sounds in
successive or closely associated syllables, especially stressed syllables. (Harmon p. 13)

Fantasy/Fiction & Non-Fiction -

Fantasy - a conscious breaking free from reality. The term is applied to a work
that takes place in a nonexistent and unreal world, such as fairyland, or
concerns incredible and unreal characters...or relies on scientific
principles not yet discovered or contrary to present experience, as in
some science fiction and utopian fiction. Fantasy may be employed
merely for whimsical delight, or it may be the medium for serious
comment on reality. (Harmon p. 209)

Fiction - Narrative writing drawn from the imagination rather than from history
or fact. (Harmon p. 212)
Non-fiction – Non-fiction writing is entirely true or real. The topics of non-fiction writing are real people, places, things, or events.

**Symbols/Symbolism** - Something that on the surface is its literal self but which also has another meaning or even several meanings. For example, a sword may be a sword and also symbolize justice. A symbol may be said to embody an idea. There are two general types of symbols: universal symbols that embody universally recognizable meanings wherever used, such as light to symbolize knowledge, a skull to symbolize death, etc., and constructed symbols that are given symbolic meaning by the way an author uses them in a literary work, as the white whale becomes a symbol of evil in Moby Dick. (Harris)

**Background** – The term is rather loosely used to specify either the setting of a piece of writing or the tradition and point of view from which an author presents his or her ideas. (Harmon p. 48)

**Narration** – One of the four types of composition; its purpose is to recount events

**First Person** – When the narrator tells his/her own story. The narrator is usually the main character.

**Third Person** – The narrator is telling someone else’s story. The narrator can be the main character, a minor character, or an outside observer. In third person, the knowledge the narrator has is limited.

**Third Person Omniscient** – In this type of narration the narrator knows more information than the characters in the story. This narrator knows everything that is happening. The narration can be delivered again by the main character, a minor character, or an outside observer.

**Point of View** – The vantage point from which an author presents a story. If the author serves as a seemingly all-knowing maker, the point of view is called omniscient. At the other extreme, a character in the story – major, minor, or marginal – may tell the story as he or she experienced it. Such a character is usually called a first-person narrator... The author may tell the story in the third person and yet present it as it is seen and understood by a single character, restricting information to what the character sees, hears, feels, and thinks; such a point of view is said to be limited. (Harmon p. 400)

**Onomatopoeia** – Words that by their sound suggest their meaning: “hiss,” “buzz,” “whirr,” “sizzle.” (Harmon p. 361)

**Parable** – An illustrative story teaching a lesson. A true parable parallels, detail for detail, the situation that calls forth the parable for illustration. A parable is, in this sense, an allegory. In Christian countries the most famous parables are those told by Christ, the best known of which is that of the Prodigal Son. (Harmon p. 372)
Grade 5-6

**Chorus** – In ancient Greek plays, the chorus was a group of actors who acted as narrators. Choral reading follows a similar structure because a group of readers all read the story together.

**Blank verse** - Unrhymed iambic pentameter. (Harris)

**Didactic** – Didactic stories teach a lesson or a moral to the reader.

**Imagery** – The use of descriptive language that helps the reader create mental pictures while reading.

**Limerick** – A popular type of rhyming poetry with the rhyme scheme AABBA.

**Simile/Metaphor** – A type of comparative imagery. In simile, the writer uses “like” or “as” to compare two objects that are seemingly different. For example, “That girl is as beautiful as a rose.” In metaphor, the two objects are compared without the use of “like” or “as.” For example, “That girl is a rose.”

**Sarcasm** - A form of sneering criticism in which disapproval is often expressed as ironic praise. (Harris)
Dramatic Arts Terms and Their Definitions

In order to put on a theatrical production, students must acquire a basic understanding of stage directions and other theatrical vocabulary. Here is a list of terms and their definitions.

Stage- the place where a play is put on

Stage left- the left side of the stage from the perspective of the actor onstage

Stage right- the right side of the stage from the perspective of the actor onstage

Upstage- the back half of the stage from the perspective of the actor onstage

Downstage- the front half of the stage from the perspective of the actor onstage

Wings- the area on either side of the stage behind the curtain; the wings are where actors wait to make their entrances

Backdrop- a drawn or painted piece of cloth hung at the back of the stage to depict the setting of a scene

Props-items that the actors use or carry during a scene; anything onstage that is not part of the scenery

Pre-set- to put a prop on the stage before a scene begins so it is ready to be used in that scene

Scenery- drawings or paintings used to decorate the stage and define the setting; the scenery can also consist of objects that do not move during a scene such as furniture, trees, walls, etc.

Spike- make marks on the floor to show where props, scenery, or actors are supposed to be

Strike- to take down the scenery, put away the props, costumes, and other items after a performance, usually the last performance, of a show

Understudy- an actor who learns one of the lead parts and can take over that part if the original actor cannot perform

Additional theatre terminology can be found in (McCullough, 155-164)
**Areas of the Stage (McCullough 17)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Backstage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upstage Right</td>
<td>Upstage Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center Stage Right</td>
<td>Center Stage Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downstage Right</td>
<td>Downstage Center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Audience
Literary and Dramatic Concepts

Comedies and Tragedies

Works of drama can either be characterized as comedies or tragedies. There are many subdivisions within those two categories. In general, though, a work of comedy is one that ends happily for the protagonists. Comedies also often attempt to entertain and amuse the audience by poking fun at people or life. (Harmon 106) In a dramatic tragedy, the audience watches the main character progress through a series of events that ultimately end unhappily. (Harmon 522)

Formats of scripts and literary texts

Children will need to be taught that one reads a script quite differently than one reads a literary text. In a literary text, there is both dialogue and narration. The dialogue or words that the characters speak aloud, is set off by quotation marks. The rest of the text is called narration. Narration can tell us what characters are thinking, what events are taking place, or where the story is located.

Scripts are made up entirely of dialogue. Each line begins with the name of the character that is speaking. Since a script is all dialogue quotation marks are not used. Another important concept children need to be taught about reading a script is how to read stage directions. Stage directions may appear in a character’s lines. They are always set off by parentheses. The important idea that students need to learn is that stage directions are not read aloud. Stage directions are there to tell a student how to read a line or how to move or act while saying it. Since scripts have no narration, stage directions are very important in helping students figure out their character’s mood.
Students also need to be taught to pay a great deal of attention to the beginning of a script. Most scripts have a list of characters at the beginning, as well as a description of the setting and production notes. Since there is no narration to give descriptions of the characters and settings, it is essential that students read this beginning part of the script thoroughly.

**Theatre vs. Readers Theatre**

Though many children may have experience with Readers Theatre, few have actually performed in theatrical productions. While Readers Theatre is a good stepping-stone to help students prepare for theatrical productions, there are many differences between the two. Readers Theatre requires much less preparation than staged theatrical performances. The first difference is that readers can use their scripts during the performance. Also, Readers Theatre can be done without the use of scenery, props, and costumes. Also, students don’t need to learn formal blocking. The students can just read their parts without moving. It does, however, get students used to reading a script and reading orally with inflection.
Introducing Children to Acting

A lot of elements go into getting children ready to perform. During one of my pre-service teaching experiences, my children had to perform at an assembly in front of their whole school. It takes a lot of rehearsal time to help children feel comfortable with being onstage in front of people. The size of the audience does not matter. To some children performing for two people is just as intimidating as performing for one hundred. Students need to feel well prepared in order to be comfortable during a performance.

The first component to concentrate on is learning lines. Students need to rehearse their lines every day. Not only will this help prepare them for the performance, but the added reading every day will help them develop their fluency skills as well. While students should be given time to rehearse their parts in class, assigning students to practice their parts at home for a family member will help students become used to performing their parts for an audience. Helping students learn their lines is the first step a teacher needs to take towards performing a show with them.

There are some tricks that can help younger performers remember their lines. One idea is to stage poetry or songs. Some students have an easier time remembering what comes next because it has to rhyme and fit into the rhythm of the poetry. When my cousin’s kindergarten class performed play, each student was given a small number of rhyming lines and that teacher experienced great success. That teacher also helped her students experience success by limiting the number of lines each student had to memorize. While some students could only memorize one line, others were capable of more. Start students with just a few lines and then add to them as time progresses.
Students also need to learn their cue lines. A cue line is the line immediately before one’s own. Actors listen for cue lines to know when it is time for them to speak, enter, or exit the stage. It does not occur to students that they will not always know when their next line comes, so it is essential that the teacher stresses the importance of each actor learning his or her cue lines.

As students are learning their lines, they also need to learn their blocking as well. Blocking is a theatrical term used to describe movements an actor does on the stage. If students are old enough to write, they should write their blocking down in their scripts. This way, they will not forget it and each time they practice their lines, they will see their blocking again. This way it will become engrained in their minds before rehearsals ever start. Each movement should be written next to the line it corresponds with. If the agreement with the publisher allows the teacher to photocopy scripts, it may help students to have their script copied onto regular sized paper to give them more room to write their blocking. Often scripts are printed on 5” x 7” paper which makes it difficult for some students to write their blocking small enough to fit the paper. Since it is recommended that students write their blocking down, this can be a time consuming process. While blocking, only have the students who are in that scene around. Otherwise, the students who aren’t onstage will become restless while waiting for their turn. Pull small groups to work on blocking while other students paint scenery, have oral readings, or work on other class work. Once students have began to rehearse their lines and written down their blocking, it is time to begin to put it all together. It is time to start rehearsing.
Initial rehearsals should start with the students just going through their lines and blocking. This is the time when students need to learn some basics about being onstage.

Below is a list of important stage rules that students will often forget:

- Never turn your back to the audience.
- Never stand directly in front of another actor.
- Never walk in front of another actor who is saying a line.
- If you can see the audience when you are standing offstage, the audience can see you.
- Speak more slowly than you normally. Some students have the tendency to speed up their speech when nervous, so reminding them to slow down becomes very important.
- Speak so loudly that the person in the last row will be able to hear you.
- It is respectful to the people onstage to be quiet while you are offstage.

Eventually as rehearsals progress, students should start rehearsing with props and costumes. Some costumes make it more difficult to walk or move around in, and it is important that students get used to these differences before opening night. It is also important to rehearse with props. An actor can pantomime carrying around a prop perfectly, but it is much different when he has to carry around an actual object. The actor also needs to practice remembering to get the object before coming onstage or preset the object before a scene begins. Since the students will be the actors and the props crew, they need to practice remembering bringing their props with them. Once the major pieces of furniture and scenery are available, it is important that students take time getting used to them as well. Furniture or set pieces may cause students to need to adjust their blocking. Students need time to familiarize themselves with their surroundings on the stage to move comfortably through it.

As it draws closer to the actual performance of a show, students need to have run through rehearsals. In a run through, students perform the actual play in its entirety,
without stopping. It gives students a sense of flow and the actual amount of time between scenes. This is especially important if there are scenes in the show where many students leave the stage. During rehearsals that time offstage may seem like an eternity but when the show is done without stopping, it is only a minute or two. I believe run throughs should begin the week of the show and culminate with a full dress rehearsal. Regular run through don’t need to incorporate all the props, costumes, and set changes. The full dress rehearsal, however, does. This rehearsal should be treated like an actual show. Students should practice being quiet in the wings, remembering their props and changing their costumes if necessary. I believe that there should be at least one full dress rehearsal before any performance. For longer or larger scale shows, I believe it is wise to have two. Another positive of the full dress rehearsal is that it allows family members or friends of the students who cannot attend the actual performance to get to experience the student’s show. It is also a good time to videotape since students may not be as nervous and there will be no applause or background noise from the audience.
Resources for Teachers

Readers Theatre


This book contains many Readers Theatre scripts as well as warm-up activities to prepare students and tips for teachers on getting students started.


This website is written by a teacher in Canada. It has free scripts for students, resources for teachers, and helpful information for writing one’s own Readers Theatre scripts.

Reader’s Theater Scripts and Plays for the Classroom.


This page is easy to use. It has a large collection of free, printable Readers Theatre scripts, many of which are based on very popular children’s books. There are also links to sites dealing with different aspects of RT, including vocal inflection and costumes. There are also books that teachers can purchase.


This website has a definition of Readers Theatre, free scripts for classes to perform, books teachers can purchase, scripting worksheets, and collections of other wonderful Readers Theatre resources.

Some scripts from Aaron Shepard’s website that I believe would be good examples to use to help students learn characteristics of literature and drama are listed below. The examples are organized by the age of students for which the piece is appropriate. On the actual scripts Shepard gives a preview of the plot, the genre, culture of origin, theme, number of readers, ages of readers, and the length of the piece. He also gives production notes such as pronunciation, staging ideas, information about culture or authors associated with the piece.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Appropriate for age</th>
<th>Number of readers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which Shoes Do You Choose?</td>
<td>Aaron Shepard</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help! Hilary! Help!</td>
<td>Aaron Shepard</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>12 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Frog Went to Heaven – A Tale of Angola</td>
<td>Aaron Shepard</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>16 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hidden One – A Native American Legend</td>
<td>Aaron Shepard</td>
<td>7 and older</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legend of Lightning Larry</td>
<td>Aaron Shepard</td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>22 + could be done by a whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Sideways Stories from Wayside School</td>
<td>Louis Sachar</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapted for RT by Aaron Shepard from Sideways Stories from Wayside School</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Princess Mouse A Tale of Finland</td>
<td>Aaron Shepard</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>8 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sea King’s Daughter A Russian Legend</td>
<td>Aaron Shepard</td>
<td>10 and older</td>
<td>9 +</td>
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</table>

Theatre Resources


This book has activities for students in pre-school through second grade that could be used to first introduce the idea of performing literature. The book contains songs, poems, and stories that students can learn and recite aloud. The book also has reproducible letters for teachers to send home to parents and reproducible hats that act as costumes for each reading.


This book has scripts especially written for children to perform. The plays are all adapted from familiar stories like Charlotte’s Web and The Wizard of Oz.

This collection of plays features folk tales from sixteen different countries including Johnny Appleseed from the United States and the Son of William Tell from Switzerland. These plays can be performed without paying royalties and are a good way to incorporate the folk tale genre of literature into drama.


This book is designed for students in grades three to five. It has five funny scripts that are designed for a larger number of students to perform. Symbols in the character list denote if the character has challenging lines, fewer lines, or no speaking lines or sound effects. Also, each play comes with reproducible activity pages and different writing activity for students to do in conjunction with the play.

Literature Resources

Below is a listing of books and their authors categorized by genre. These books are suggested as examples to teach students the characteristics of their genre. They would also be good to have students adapt into Readers Theatre or stage play scripts. Most of these books are also relevant in style and topic to students in today’s classrooms because the majority of the books selected for this list have been published within the past ten years. I have omitted the genre of picture books from this list because without words students cannot analyze their literary components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Douglas Florian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Insectlopedia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laugh-eteria</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Inner City Mother Goose</td>
<td>Eve Merriam, NCTE Poetry Award Winning Poet</td>
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<td>The Singing Green</td>
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<td>Fresh Paint</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sky Songs</td>
<td>Myra Cohn Livingston, NCTE Award Winning Poet</td>
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<td>Space Songs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Celebrations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Poems for Fathers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Something Big Has Been Here</td>
<td>Jack Prelutsky</td>
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<td>Monday’s Troll</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Dragons Are Singing Tonight</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Literature: Folktales</td>
<td>• The Gingerbread Boy</td>
<td>Richard Egielski</td>
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<td>Theresa Tomlinson</td>
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<td>• Dear Mrs. LaRue</td>
<td>Mark Teague</td>
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<td>• The Paper Bag Princess</td>
<td>Robert Munsch</td>
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<td>• Stephanie’s Ponytail</td>
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<td>• The Watson’s Go to Birmingham - 1963</td>
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Dramatic Performance Activities Incorporate the NCTE Standards

The National Council of Teachers of English is greatly respected for their work on improving the quality of literature instruction. I believe their standards for the English Language Arts are a clear guide to what students should be learning in the classroom. Many of their standards can be applied to the dramatic performance activities that will be used to extend literature instruction. This way I can ensure that I am still addressing standards in my classroom while integrating dramatic activities.

1. **Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.**

   By supplying students with various scripts to read and comprehend, the teacher can address this first standard to a greater degree than by simply having their students read books. There are many scripts for children, which are examples of traditional literature. Often these are folktales from different countries around the world. This can help students build understanding of other cultures. Similarly, there are nonfiction plays that can teach students new information. Scripts for students can be found in almost every genre of literature, with many different themes. Including script reading in literature instruction increases the number of texts students can experience.

2. **Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.**
Since many plays for children are adapted from books, scripts can be found for every
genre of children's literature. Many plays for children fall into the genre of Traditional
Literature, especially folktales. There are, however, examples of children’s theatre in
many different genres. For example, “The Diary of Anne Frank” is an example of
historical fiction. Performing historical fiction plays can bring alive historical figures and
events for students. Modern fantasy is another popular genre for children’s theatre.
Many animal tales and fairy tales have been adapted for performance on the stage. Since
many children are already familiar with fairy tales, and therefore know the basic plot, this
makes an excellent starting point for younger performers.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate,
and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with
other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts,
their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g.,
sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

In order to be able to perform a script, students must understand it. Wanting to do
a good job and look good onstage is a great motivator for students to work to comprehend
the text. I also believe that any time an actor is in a play, he develops a deeper
connection to that script than he can to a book. Since he lives the story each time he
rehearses, it becomes a part of him. He develops a greater appreciation for the story and
the characters than he would if he simply had read the story in book form. Students are
constantly interpreting and evaluating while preparing to perform a text. They must
interpret the emotions and actions of their characters in order to understand them. They
must also judge how their character feels about other characters and situations to know
how to relate to the other people onstage. Acting is an excellent activity for developing these upper-level thinking skills.

4. **Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.**

Acting to me is the art of communicating a story to an audience. The performer's job in the performance is to use spoken language to communicate with their audience. Whether the goal of the actor is to entertain, inform, or persuade, the actor is always trying to get the audience to feel or think a certain way. Since each person has a unique way of communicating, actors constantly are adjusting their speech to fit the given character. Students will learn how to vary their style of speaking to fit their characters. Adjusting one's spoken language is definitely a skill students can learn through performing.
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