

Teaching Drama in the Classroom

A Toolbox for Teachers

Joanne Kilgour Dowdy and
Sarah Kaplan (Eds.)



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TEACHING DRAMA IN THE CLASSROOM

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ANTHONY MANNA

INTRODUCTION

Teachers talk about drama:

I think it's about critical thinking, like weighing options, considering the repercussions of your choices , exploring values . . . that sort of thing.

Jennifer, high school English

It's about social skills. Students learn the importance of listening and cooperating and sharing ideas.

LaToya, second grade

I'm thinking social studies. In the skits and short plays, my kids are seeing history from the inside out. They're living it by stepping into others' lives and learning what happened from there.

Mark, middle school

I'm amazed how drama helps with reading, especially with comprehension and making inferences, you know, discovering ideas between the lines.

Donnamarie, literacy coach

Three boys in my class who have done almost nothing all year participated in the statue exercise. Even if this doesn't raise test scores, that's enough for me.

Lynn, middle school

Witnessing firsthand the ways drama activity puts their students' imaginations to work, these teachers experienced drama's value as a powerful teaching and learning strategy that invites students of all ages to move collaboratively inside classroom content, human issues, and significant events. When teachers harness drama's power with accurate learning outcomes, a precise structure, and appropriate drama techniques, drama activity can become a fertile method for integrating reading, writing, speaking, listening, researching, technology applications, and art experiences. Inside the imagined space that is drama's domain, students use their own lives and perceptions as a supply of ideas for taking on roles and through their interactions with others, dramatizing and reflecting on the experiences and circumstances which people face throughout a lifetime. Drama inspires students to grapple with different – often opposing – points of view, beliefs and values, to play out alternate solutions to human problems and dilemmas, and to understand the fundamental issues that enliven content area topics and themes – for the purpose of gaining knowledge and the pleasure of developing awareness.

In a time of increased curriculum mandates and test pressures, to suggest to teachers that they draw on drama's dynamics to teach content and examine human issues may seem an untimely idea completely out of synch with school reality. With high-stakes testing and test-based accountability stark realities in their daily professional lives, it's only natural for teachers to ask, what's the point? Why should we take precious time in an increasingly jam-packed classroom agenda to add yet another subject like drama to our program? After all, isn't drama a better fit for teachers who have the talent for directing plays or coaching the drama club or directing the annual full-scale play production that attracts those eccentric and creative kids? Well, *educational* drama is less a subject or special interest than it is an art that can serve as a viable learning medium. And like any thoughtfully planned classroom strategy, drama has the potential to maximize rather than limit instruction while it also supports students' emerging discoveries about content and concepts, the human condition, and themselves as creative makers of ideas in interaction with others.

In *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010), Diane Ravitch, premier education historian and former U.S. assistant secretary of education, passionately advocates for school reform that provides a secure place for the arts, including drama, in every grade. Ravitch is convinced that standardized testing, punitive accountability, and other contentious petitions for restructuring today's schools have become a mandate that narrowly defines what is essential for American students to learn throughout their time at school. What's often omitted these days, Ravitch posits, are sufficient experiences in aesthetic education. Referencing Richard Rothstein et al.'s *Grading Education*, she puts her critique in these skeptical terms: "By holding teachers accountable only for test scores in reading and mathematics . . . schools pay less attention to students' health, physical education, civic knowledge, the arts, and enrichment activities" (p. 161). In the curriculum Ravitch envisions, ". . . all children deserve the opportunity to play a musical instrument, to sing, engage in dramatic events, dance, paint, sculpt, and study the great works of artistic endeavor from other times and places (P. 235). So, what are the benefits of this entitlement? "Through the arts," Ravitch claims, "children learn discipline, focus, passion, and the sheer joy of creativity" (p. 235).

Ravitch is not alone in her prescriptions for strengthening America's schools with a national curriculum that integrates literature, the sciences, civics, geography, history, foreign languages, and the arts. Ken Robinson, a pathbreaking educator and internationally acclaimed leader in the development of human potential, has for years been lobbying for a national education system that thrives on an expanded perception of human intelligence and academic achievement. While Robinson reveres the serviceable abilities and subjects promoted through conventional academic programs, he believes that an education system would far better prepare students to cope with this century's rapidly changing innovations in science, technology, and global thought if educators raised students' instruction in creativity, the arts, and the humanities to a status on par with the training currently provided in mathematics and the sciences, which dominates school life. Robinson's ongoing – and sobering – research among pundits in private industry

has revealed that the skills and talents demanded of twenty-first century thinkers and doers are rooted in creative brainpower: “. . . people who can think intuitively, who are imaginative and innovative, who can communicate well, work in teams and are flexible, adaptable and self-confident” (Robinson, 2001, p. 52). Robinson urges teachers to nurture creative intelligence by welcoming their students into virtual and actual environments that provide them consistent and coherent opportunities to experiment, to play with ideas, to deal with alternate points of view, and to discover connections across pieces of information that at first may appear unrelated. “Creativity is a basic human attribute that must be nurtured among all people, not just among artists and scientists,” Robinson insists. “The freedom to learn, to create, to take risks, to fail or ask questions, to strive, to grow . . . is the ethic upon which the US was founded. Promoting creativity among all people of all occupations, economic classes and ethnic backgrounds is essential to the common good” (p. 195).

If there currently exists a teaching aid that breaks free from narrow and limited notions of what is basic and vital to facilitating learning in a spirit of innovation, imagination, inquiry, and risk, it is the book you are holding, *Teaching Drama in the Classroom: A Toolbox for Teachers*, edited by Joanne Kilgour Dowdy and Sarah Kaplan. This sensible resource describes more than 35 scenarios of teachers and students in early elementary grades through graduate school working together to craft drama events that draw out participants’ creative energies, interpretations of curricular topics, and investigations of social, political, and personal concerns. Within these dramatic incidents teachers help their students to visualize their understanding through writing, reading, engaging in research, weighing options, considering alternatives, inferring consequences, and devising solutions to human problems and conflicts.

In all of these lesson plans, students ramp up their imaginations in order to move into their respective roles and collectively explore whatever topics, concepts, themes, or tensions surface as they navigate their way through the conditions and experiences that unfold in a scene, skit, improvisation, or in interrelated episodes. Yet, for all the information these teachers offer in the way of drama techniques – role playing, scripting, dialogue, audience participation, dramatic tension, improvisation, the strategic use of interaction, space, movement, and gesture, and the like – it may surprise some readers to discover that woven throughout this manual is a perception of drama that has little to do with fine tuning students’ acting skills or turning out refined dramatic events. For these teachers, drama clearly is not about theatrics or stunning performance; it’s about enriching a learner’s life by making content accessible and memorable through an active, hands-on, collaborative exploration of ideas. Nor is the practice of using drama as a teaching method reserved only for teachers with special training or a flair for the dramatic. The teacher who is an effective drama leader makes use of the same skills she or he uses each day to organize, structure, and orchestrate classroom content and to rally students around the tasks at hand with an array of appropriate and meaningful teaching strategies.

Throughout this manual, teachers support learning with an impressive assortment of drama styles and techniques. The more than fifty methods that fill the manual's eight topical sections represent two prevailing strategies that govern the practice of educational drama. Both strategies speak to the needs and experiences of educators new to the practice as well as to those well versed in drama's advantages as a useful tool for fostering active learning through shared imagination, constructive interaction, and critical thinking.

The first type of drama process pursued in this manual culminates with some sort of informal presentation. While a polished performance is rarely the intended goal of educational drama, make no mistake about the appeal and usefulness of low-key performance with even the most spontaneous or briefest classroom drama experience. In many of the manual's plans, for example, students work in small groups to prepare and rehearse their interpretation of a human condition, literary character, historical phenomenon, or subject area concept, which they then exhibit for their peers' edification, enjoyment, and response. A student-generated or commercial script frequently guides the presentation with a fixed structure, stage directions, dialogue, speaker direction, and other elements that distinguish play scripts from other types of written works. When this process occupies students, the enticement of working up an interesting and, as often happens, intriguing presentation serves as an incentive for them to be earnest about their commitment to the assignment, which, in turn, motivates them to closely examine different features of the topic from different angles.

As the manual's writers suggest, when the material interests students, the stakes are high, the outcomes clear, and the spirit of cooperation secure, students involved in a scripted and performance experience are positioned to learn a great deal from the drama process. Such is the case in Karen Elaine Seipert's chapter, "Developing Literature through Drama." Seipert initiates the process to help her high school students understand the characteristics of literary texts, particularly the characteristics of play scripts. They do this by transforming narrative selections into detailed radio scripts, represented in the chapter by complete scripts for their clever adaptations of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*.

A scripting process moves students into a vast range of topics in "Radio Story Drama," Joanne Kilgour Dowdy's chapter. Dowdy directs her students to analyze incidents in newspaper articles as a catalyst for developing and rehearsing short scripts which they then present in audio recordings. In the samples Dowdy provides, students reworked an article about a sports rivalry, a political feature dealing with nuclear arms, and a clash between art collectors into spare satiric and ironic scenarios. Given the topical diversity found in journalism, Dowdy's approach holds much promise for dramatizing content across an entire curriculum.

For Mary Weems in "Don't Forget to FLY: Using Drama to Inspire Self-Esteem," script-making empowers high school females to discover and celebrate their special attributes. Weems integrates visualizing and imaging with writing in response to prompts, discussion about characteristics of dramatic writing and performing, and the use of thematic props as scaffolds to support her students

as they prepare brief scenes that express sensitive personal revelations in a safe and protective workshop setting. Compassionate concern trumps indifference here through Weems's management of student engagement with self-illuminating behaviors.

In "Scripting Success: Using Dialogue Writing to Help Doctoral Students to Find Their Voice," the erratic emotional and intellectual life of graduate students is examined through Susan V. Iverson and Rhonda S. Filipan's tactics for using self-reflective writing, scripting, and performing to forge new understandings and adopt new awareness. Based on studies that clarify the importance of reflective writing for allowing students to make sense of their academic experience, the authors propose that "Writing scripts and dialogues may allow doctoral students to give voice to powerful emotions, especially in a research-intensive environment that rewards objectivity rather than self examination." Iverson and Filipan then set into motion their poignant writing-performing process with inventive prompts that, for example, engage an individual's heart and head in dialogue about salient challenges of graduate school life or that asks the academic self to speak with a different facet of one's self or personality.

The second type of educational drama posited in this manual is largely open-ended. Under its influence, students engage in one-of-a-kind impromptu enactments or extensive improvisations laid out in structured, yet flexible inter-related episodes or scenes. Given that both of these approaches are essentially unscripted, students need to invent dialogue, actions, and interaction when they enter an episode and dramatize the lives of imagined characters in order to analyze and reflect on events from the characters' perspectives.

Although the teaching plan for each approach – short impromptus or multilayered improvisations – typically suggests a rudimentary course of action, a setting, recommended roles, and a basic storyline, the participants' ideas and discoveries about the topic being investigated within the drama often become the incentives for having the drama take unexpected turns. In fact, teachers who favor improvisation encourage participants to help shape the drama by freely interpreting a role and proposing new roles, or by suggesting the introduction of an unplanned event or episode – all for the sake of maintaining interest, strengthening student commitment, and deepening student understanding of the social condition, human event, or subject matter being examined. Taking note of these suggestions, teachers may decide to deviate from their original plans and move an improvisation they are facilitating or that students are processing independently in an unanticipated direction with different characters, a newly discovered conflict, or a different "real world" context that is a parallel reality to the drama's context.

Granted, its unpredictability may seem to make improvisation a risky classroom enterprise. Yet, as the teachers in this text make clear – the majority of whom endorse improvisational drama – the excitement, ownership, empowerment, cooperation, and, yes, *learning* – students experience with open-ended forms of drama, far outweigh the concern that the uncertainty upon which improvisation thrives will inhibit productive learning experiences. These teachers imply that every student, particularly ones who struggle academically, can tap the

creative energy and problem solving skills fostered by improvisation. With Ken Robinson, they believe that “Creativity is not a special quality confined to special people and it can be taught” (p. 114). That’s because all students are capable of putting their imaginations to work in response to the exhilarating question that sets every improvisation – indeed, every dramatic event – into motion: “What would happen if . . . ? In this manual, for example, “What would happen if . . . a group of concerned black and white citizens protest racial segregation in 1960 in the south and clash with other citizens who detest segregation?,” ask Janet Hill and Anthony L. Manna in their chapter, “Exploring History’s Human Dilemma with Process Drama: Ruby Bridges and the Struggle for School Desegregation.” In their multifaceted improvisational drama, the authors incorporate the roles of imagined and actual folks of the time and electronic slides of events and settings of the struggle in order to recreate the moral and political themes of a volatile and courageous transformation in America’s social and political history.

In “Government Story Board,” John Yurkschatt tempts readers to wonder, “What would happen if . . . middle school students are invited to interpret the three branches of the US federal government with skits, songs, tableaux (still pictures), and storytelling?” After doing research on their respective branches, his students, working in small groups, devise story boards that they then present to their peers in inventive improvisations.

The premise of Mary Toepfer’s chapter, “Bring the Story to Life: Using Drama with Literature,” is “What would happen if teachers use improvisation as a pre-reading strategy with students who are preparing to enter some pretty dense texts by, say, Frederick Douglass and William Shakespeare?” In the open-ended episodes Toepfer designed, her students assume roles that, for example, stir them to examine slavery from many deeply moving perspectives. In her carefully structured pre-reading approach to *Macbeth*, students engage in a complex improvisation in which actual lines from the play’s dialogue are incorporated in a contemporary situation and conflict that parallel the play’s.

“What would happen if . . . deaf students paired up with hearing peers to explore their respective cultures?” Carol L. Robinson and her co-authors ask in their chapter, “A Lesson for Merging Cultures.” In pairs, then, their students move through incrementally arranged activities that include pantomime warm-ups, place-to-place movement, role play, and vivid sustained gesture to face the ambiguities, uncertainties, and illuminations that people can meet head-on when they cross cultural boundaries. Seize the opportunity here for using improvisation to make students culturally aware by positioning them inside the experiences of both young and older folks from various cultures not their own!

And so it goes in this wise book! Whether these teachers are endorsing scripted presentations or unscripted improvisations, they serve up a durable assortment of teaching plans that promise to entice students to take full advantage of their creative abilities and move into and reflect on content, concepts, relationships, and incidents. That their inspiring drama strategies come directly from actual experiences with students – in the early grades and up into graduate school – helps explain the feeling of authenticity that is woven like a sturdy thread through the

fabric of each chapter. “You try it, too,” the authors seem to be saying. Try it for the joy of the intense student involvement, communication, and self-confidence drama delivers. But try it, as well, for the cognitive and social skills and the perceptions and empathy it inspires.

In pressing their rationale for drama’s goals as a compelling teaching and learning medium, the manual’s authors affirm what many researchers have discovered about the range of skills supported by educational drama through observations of drama practice in classrooms and other venues (Wagner, 1998; Brown and Pleydell, 1999; Grady, 2000; Anderson, Cameron, and Carroll, 2009). Much like claims made in this book, research evidence asserts that, among other abilities, participation in drama activity encourages students and teachers to:

- integrate concepts, skills, and ideas from various subject areas, including social studies, mathematics, science, and literacy;
- gain an understanding of real world events from the past and the present, the individuals who shaped these events, and the individuals who may influence them in the future;
- develop reading comprehension skills by entering the world of a text through role playing, interacting with others, visualizing events, concepts, and information, and dramatizing the experiences of fictional characters and real-life individuals;
- produce written works in a variety of contexts for different audiences that demonstrate increasing technical skill, self-confidence, and effective management of multimodal and electronic texts;
- discover and scrutinize ethical aspects of social issues such as equity, social justice, citizenship, civil rights, bigotry, bullying, and other forms of antisocial behavior and their reversals from various points of view;
- generate and use spoken, written, visual, and multimodal texts that demonstrate increasing fluency in the way of vivid description, sensory details, and effective persuasive and self-reflective writing;
- understand and develop compassion for others’ representations of ideas, values, beliefs, experiences, and life conditions –from literary characters and challenged individuals to historical figures);
- acquire critical thinking skills in terms of examining, questioning, and perhaps challenging social practices and the language, actions, and beliefs that drive these practices, and investigating and evaluating texts concerning their manner of representing certain people, groups, and notions of reality;
- gain social skills through group problem solving, listening to differing views, respecting, weighing, and perhaps acting on another’s proposals, and expressing empathy and compassion; and
- develop appreciation for the art of drama and theater.

In an era when educators are too often obliged to sacrifice the aesthetic and moral aims of education to only those manifestations of learning and teaching that can be quantified, scored, and tabulated, it’s invigorating to come across a text that offers educators sound advice from the practice of professionals like

themselves. They are, after all, a group of professionals that has discovered valid and reliable strategies for unlocking the inherent creativity of students and channeling that power into a dynamic process that has all the potential to make learning enjoyable and memorable. Welcome to *Teaching Drama in the Classroom: A Toolbox for Teachers!*

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CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

YUKO KURAHASHI

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REPORT:
PRESENTING YOUR RESEARCH USING THE
FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE**

RATIONALE: RESEARCH AND PRESENTATION WITH A SENSE OF
RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMITMENT

I invented this exercise using an autobiographical story-telling technique which I learned from “D’Lo,” a Los Angeles based Tamil Sri Lankan-American, political theatre artist/writer, who came to our department as a guest lecturer. The first exercise in her workshop was to partner with another participant and to listen to each other’s story. Then each participant told his/her partner’s story in the first person. I was intrigued by this exercise, because I found a real sense of connection between myself and my exercise partner, who told her story in the first person using “I.” The workshop participants also developed a sense of responsibility to tell accurately the other person’s story, because they were telling it as that very person. This sense of responsibility led the participants to become more attentive to the information given by their partners and to try to present convincingly as the subject.

Autobiographical writing and presentation have become popular in academia in the past two decades as a vehicle to explore one’s identity and subjectivity. In this first-person narrative exercise, we move beyond our own identity and subjectivity, by learning about the other participants and their experiences and then stepping out of our own identity to take the role of the other participant in telling their story. My version of this exercise is a means to develop the same sort of responsibility toward the subject of their research, that is, to know the subject and to tell its story as accurately and clearly as the participant/researcher can augment the depth and quality of research and writing.

WHAT TO DO

1. Ask students to choose a research topic.
2. Do research using the internet and at least one book/article found in the library.
3. Write a short introductory essay that explains the topic/subject, using the first-person narrative.
4. Present the essay in front of the class.

SAMPLE: WINNIE THE POOH

My name is Winnie the Pooh. I was born in 1926 on Cotchford Farm at the home of A.A. Milne. Telling my stories helped him to become famous as a “master” of children’s literature; prior to 1926 he had been primarily known as a playwright. Pooh in Milne’s stories was not as nice as the later version popularized in the Disney film. I am actually very greedy and surrounded by weird friends like Eeyore the Donkey, who is misanthropic, timid Piglet, and Owl, who has to do everything by the book. I became a “visible character” through the work of Ernest H. Shepherd, the original illustrator for the Pooh stories. Mr. Shepherd was an amazing man who traveled around the world on the income he earned illustrating for children’s books. The licensing rights to The Winnie the Pooh stories were bought by Stephen Slesinger, an American radio, film and television producer. In 1961 Disney acquired the right from Slesinger to produce a film based on the Pooh stories and to create articles of merchandise based on the characters. I, along with my friends, became a famous Disney character. I appeared in several films, including *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree*, *Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day* and *Winnie the Pooh and Tigger Too*.¹ However, in 1991 the Slesinger estate sued Disney for rights infringement, and I was at the center of the lawsuit, until September 2009 when the Federal District Court in Los Angeles dismissed the lawsuit.² In addition to this lawsuit, Mr. Milne’s granddaughter tried to terminate the license granted to Stephen Slesinger in 2006. She is the daughter of Christopher Robin Milne after whom the character of “Christopher Robin” was named. The reason for her lawsuit was that she felt that both the Slesinger estate and the Disney Company ignore the important values in the original stories in their search for profit.³

I don’t want to share only bad news about me, however. In recent years I have been very active in education, becoming a very effective pedagogical subject. For example, Charles A. Walker says that reading Winnie the Pooh is a great way to teach children two main epistemological positions – empiricism and rationalism.⁴ I am very happy to know that I have been useful not only as an entertainer in children’s books and the Disney movie, or as a “subject” of lawsuits. I believe in the importance of exploring a plurality of thoughts, ideas and backgrounds, and it is good to know some educators are using me and my friends to promote it.

¹ “Winnie the Pooh,” *From Abba to Zoom: A Pop Culture Encyclopedia of the Late 20th Century*, Riverside, NJ: Andrews McMeel Publishing (2006), p. 532.

² Dave Itzkoff, “‘Winnie-the-Pooh’ Suit Is Dismissed,” *New York Times* 30 September 2009. Late Edition. 2.

³ “Attempt by Granddaughter of Author of ‘Winnie-the-Pooh’ Books to Terminate Grant to Licensee Stephen Slesinger, Inc., Was Not Effective, Court of Appeals Affirms,” *Entertainment Law Reporter* 27.11 (April 2006), p. 6.

⁴ Charles A. Walker, “Winnie-the-Pooh and Epistemology, too,” *The Journal of Theory Construction & Testing* 11.1 (2007), p. 5.

JOANNE KILGOUR DOWDY

PICTURE THIS: DRAMA AND POETRY FOR PLAY

RATIONALE

The purpose of this workshop is to give students an interactive experience with drama in the classroom. They read, perform and dramatize the themes in selected poems to enhance the kinesthetic approach to learning. Based on the belief that human beings are all players who “act out” and that such a means of communication is natural and important to our successful functioning, the poetry performance workshop also encourages teachers to bring their own experiences to the classroom and develop ways to connect with their students through enacting stories.

WHAT TO DO

1. The teacher shares six selected poems with the participants.
2. The teacher instructs the students to choose the poem that inspires them.
 - a) Participants choose one of the poems presented, forming six separate groups.
 - b) In groups, the participants decide how best to represent the theme of the poem in tableaux. Each student must choose a character to represent.
 - c) Groups look at each other’s pictures.
 - d) Answering the questions who, what, when, where and why will help each person talk about the character that he or she represents in the picture. Each group creates a character sketch for each of the people who appeared in the picture. The sketch may be a tracing of a face that they find in a magazine, newspaper article, or poster for an advertisement. The sketch is for an individual’s poem. The use of the steps that describe the *Cycle of the Character’s Story* are necessary in this part of the exercise.
 - e) Participants then decide who gets which words from the poem to perform during the showing of the tableaux. The group rehearses the oral presentation.
 - f) The group performs the poem in character for the class.
 - g) Participants are invited to put their poems to music and perform the “lyrics” in character as they stand in the picture that represents the poem.

Cycle of the Character's Story

In order to create a character's history, the class is invited to go through a series of creative writing exercises. These include the following directions:

1. Choose a character from the image that you are using as a prompt.
2. Decide on a crisis event or wounding, learning or discovery that your character experiences in the course of his or her life. For example, if your character has had a parent die, it would be considered a wounding event. Try to fill in as many details as possible about the critical event that the character has endured.
3. Finally, create a scenario in your mind's eye about the way in which the critical incident is now applied to the character's life, that is, how does he or she use the learning or discovery to resolve new crises? Write as much as you can about this learning and its application to the character's life (Personal conversation with Jacqueline Peck, March 21, 2008).

These steps were designed to help the students think independently and to give the teachers some choices in their development of the theme. Participants may use them to connect with the artist's intentions and make choices, for example, play a statue, imagine the life of a statue, and then write about what it was like talking as the character of the statue.

RESULTS

The students had to ask questions of the poet, the poem, themselves and their classmates in order to construct realistic personae for their final project (Thomson, 2003). Individual learners showed their attitudes to life experiences, which allowed teachers to learn more about them and, therefore, respond to their needs on a more personal basis (Noddings, 1994). A family atmosphere developed in the classrooms as a result of the kind of listening and performances that students created around their characters. Quiet students found a way to share their inner lives, and outgoing students developed a way to use words to help paint their complex realities. A climate based on mutual respect for each other's work as collaborators became evident.

SARAH KAPLAN

STARTING FROM SCRATCH: CREATING DYNAMIC CHARACTERS

INTRODUCTION

I have found that students are much more engaged in learning if they have a personal connection to the subject matter. When I ask my students to create characters, they often don't know where to begin, so I started using a method of character creation that allows them to begin with information that they know: characteristics of themselves. While I use this lesson in my Acting classes, it could certainly be used in any language arts class as an introductory activity to character development. The goal is that each student will generate a list of nouns that relate to his life and adjectives that describe him. He will then give that list to another student who will create a first-person character monologue from the list of words. Students enjoy this activity, because they have a clear prompt to work from when they are doing the writing, and they end up with characters that are based on themselves. They love seeing the characters that their classmates invent from the details of their lives.

PROCEDURE

1. Ask each student to fold a piece of paper "hotdog style" (vertically). Students should not put their names on their papers, but they should put their gender.
2. Each student should write ten nouns that relate to him in column one. These can be descriptive nouns (friend, son, sister, scholar, actor, athlete or material items such as cell phone, running shoes, IPOD, peanut butter).
3. Each student should write ten adjectives that describe him in column two.
4. The teacher collects each paper and then re-distributes them so that each student has a new paper that IS NOT his or hers.
5. The students should create a monologue in first-person voice of a character based on the 20 words on the page. They should be true to the gender. They must give the character a name and, of course, an age. They do not need to use all (or any) word from the original writer. We are NOT looking for a re-listing of the words. What we want is a creative character based on the adjectives and nouns provided, but, of course, students can add their own details, as long as they make sense in comparison to the 20 words provided. The characters can be of any age, from any location, and with any job.

6. The teacher collects the monologues after they are finished. At this point, there are some options based on the personalities in the class:
 - a) The teacher may read the monologues out loud and guess who the character is based on.
 - b) The teacher may return the monologues to the original writer of the words (he or she has to read the words out loud in order to match them up) and allow students to read on their own.
 - c) The teacher may return the monologues to the original writers of the words and have **THEM** read their monologues out loud.
7. The students discuss their feelings about the exercise. Did their characters sound anything like themselves? What makes these characters unique and interesting?

OPTIONAL FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. In my acting class, I partner up the students, and they have to create a dialogue for their two characters and then perform it.
2. The teacher may also have students in groups create a story that involves all their characters.
3. Since the monologues end up being short and concise, there is always room to add more details. Each student may re-craft the monologue into a longer written piece with more information about the character.

JOANNE KILGOUR DOWDY

CARNIVAL CHARACTERS IN THE CLASSROOM

RATIONALE

This is a kinesthetic approach to teaching about carnival characters from Trinidad and Tobago like Midnight Robber, Dame Lorraine, and Jab Jab, in order to help students appreciate these archetypes. Using the reading theory of Vacca and Vacca (2002) sets up an environment where participants reflect on background knowledge about a subject, generate questions that they want to learn, and then consider the actual knowledge that has been gained after an experience with new material, are included. The workshop helps to uncover underlying personality characteristics that are represented in these carnival characters.

WHAT TO DO

Steps of the workshop: define the characters, have them improvise speeches with each other, have them mirrored in movement by the volunteers, decide on the stories that individual scenes should tell, have the stories told in movement, let the characters find their dance. Reflect on the stories and how they were resolved.

The following presents the five blocks that was developed, in my role as artist collaborator, at the planning meeting on our Carnival Character Development unit.

Step 1: Introduction to the Carnival Character Workshop

- Students would look at descriptions of the Jab Jab, Pierrot Grenade, Midnight Robber and Jamette; and look for clues to the character’s “voice” in the text.
- The students would do small scenes where they experimented with the traditional movement style of each character.

The scenes are created when the group decides on a beginning, middle, and end of a short story that involves the characters. Each character has to determine what movement style represents their attitude, i.e. a “sexy” walk can be used for the Jamette, or a Midnight Robber might act like a bully, pointing his fingers in people’s faces and shouting all the lines in his scene. All the students should have lines or reactions, in their body language, during the scene that is depicted.

Step 2: Practice with Carnival Characters

Activities would lead students to:

- Identify with the character’s “voice.” This can be facilitated if students first talk about a person or movie character who acts like a bully, harlot, evil and sinister antagonist, or verbose and nerdy person.
Then the students can be led in an improvised discussion where they have to say everything in a voice that reflects the character’s attitude, i.e. shouting all the time for the Midnight Robber, or whispering in a sinister tone as Jab Jab.
Students can choose a situation where two characters meet and have to come to a decision about a problem that they want to solve. They could think about two people stuck in an elevator and they talk out their options in the voice of each character.
- Decide on the “point” of the carnival character, and the attitude of the person who would move like the character.
- Talk and write about the story that is being told through the carnival character.

Step 3: Choosing the Carnival Character

- Students will find out about the character; doing research on the history, geography, and events that are depicted in the carnival character.
- Students will find a person or community that they can compare to the person/events in the carnival character.
- Students will interview with someone in the community who reminds them of the character. Write about the way that you identify with the character/community; do improvised scenes in class in character; write “as if” you were the character (i.e., diary entries, newspaper editorials, letters to loved ones, etc.).

Step 4: Rehearsal of Characters

- Students will role play in couples to develop the “voice” of the character, i.e. the body language, the dialect, the clothing choices, etc.
- Teachers will put characters in situations and let them improvise their reaction by speaking with someone whom they just met (i.e., on the phone, at the mall, on the street looking for a house they have never seen before).
- Students will write about the experiences that came out of the improvisations based on character and situation.

Sample:

What We Know, Wanted to Know, and Learned

Following the KWL (Vacca et al., 2003) procedure for improved reading comprehension i.e. Develop a chart that asks: What do you know? What do you want to know? What did you learn? We invited the audience to brainstorm some words and images that they associated with the carnival characters Pierrot Grenade, Jab Jab, Midnight Robber and Jamette. We then invited volunteers to come onto the stage and move around in the physical style of the carnival character that they wanted to depict. After looking at the volunteers move around in character, we froze the action on stage by asking the actors to hold their positions in some kind of statue that represented the personae of the four personalities that they represented.

The group then defined the characteristics of these personalities represented in the statutes that the actors depicted on stage, i.e. (a) Pierrot Grenade is similar to a mako or gossip; (b) Jab Jab acts like a devil or imp; (c) Jamette has the personality of a whore; and (d) Midnight Robber acts like a dangerous thief. Further, the group went on to identify the body language of these characters as depicted by the actors in their improvised scenes with each other. Because of our understanding of each carnival character's nature, i.e. they represented broad characterizations of the whore, the gossip, the thief, and the imp, we saw that the ways in which each person/character chose to communicate their ideas to other people, i.e. through language patterns and body movements, was dominated by the individual's intention or motivation. The physical language that the audience saw was a result of the internal monologue that the character was creating. The character's motivation, or psychology, expressed itself in the body language and speech that it chose to communicate with others, i.e. lascivious movement for the whore; intimidating gestures for the Midnight Robber.

What we wanted to know. What we wanted to know was defined in the question of what would happen when we put these characters in a setting with a teacher character. We knew that the characters would bring their personalities to the setting, using the body language and speech that represented their attitudes to life, and we also wanted to know what the teacher would provide under certain conditions with personalities who acted like whores, thieves, imps, or gossips.

Talking in character. Talking in character helped us realize the goal of the teacher workshop, i.e. to help teachers identify with the attitudes of their students who had characters similar to Jab Jab, Pierrot Grenade, Midnight Robber and Jamette. From the improvisations that the participants presented we could see that it was very hard for some teachers to maintain the attitude of the character if the teacher's personality was different from the attitude that the character represented. During the dramatic scenes that were improvised between the carnival characters that the teachers represented, the group and the actors realized that actors could not say things that were uninformed, or not determined by a logical approach to a character's attitude. For example, if the actor indicated that the carnival character

Jab Jab was an imp and inclined to be mischievous in the classroom, the actor could not act as if he was an easy going, passive human being in the improvisation he created with the teacher on stage.

Characters in improvisations. The “reality test” that the interview situations with characters provided brought home a clear idea – to the teachers and the workshop leaders. First, we noted that while the character’s reality is based on imagination to some degree, i.e. what does a person who acts like an imp, an instigator of mischief, really want from other people in a relationship?, there must be a logic to the way that the imagined reality is organized in a dramatic scene. In other words, if you want your audience to believe your character’s attitude, you are responsible for building that credibility on a firm foundation of body language and speech that convinces the onlookers of the inner monologue and a desire to have power in a given situation. An imp cannot behave like a whore in this dramatic exercise designed to get participants to identify with the characters.

What we learned. The teachers became actors in this journey, working through the upper levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, particularly analysis and synthesis, as they brought characters to life in the workshop (Bloom, 1971). This integration of arts in learning furthered the underlying understanding that organized the drance (a combination of dance and drama methods) project in the carnival workshop. Those teachers who did not identify with their carnival character’s autobiography, expressing a life through the body language and speech, had a difficult time committing their imaginations to the process of the dramatic improvisations. In contrast, those who invested their imaginations and critical thinking reached a very deep understanding of the concepts that the dance and drama symbols offered them to express their interpretation of human motivation and its effects on relationships in the classroom.