

# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

## ROLE PLAY

The class and/or teacher take on roles in an imagined situation. There is no audience. The group improvise as the action unfolds around them. It is useful for the teacher to take on a role where s/he can help set the scene and establish location, tone and style.

Using *role play* in the classroom can remove the pressure of 'performing' for an audience. Children have the opportunity to use their initiative and imagination to move the narrative on. They can use ideas from any real life situations, including their own experiences. Action can be stopped by the teacher at any time to discuss problems or move the story on.

It is important that all participants are prepared to suspend disbelief and enter a 'fictional situation'. It allows them to experience being 'in' a particular scenario. They can become someone who has a very different character or point of view from themselves. It can be a really enjoyable way to explore the why? who? and where? of a situation.

*A class is looking at Rosa Parks, who refused to abide by rules that segregated blacks and whites on Alabama buses in the 1950s. Children become her workmates at the clothing factory where she works, on the day after she has been released from prison. Each child must decide what attitude his/her character has towards her actions and what job they do. The teacher is in role as the foreman, who does not want productivity affected by these events, and at other times as Rosa Parks.*

The Times

### TUTANKHAMUN FOUND !!!

On November the 4th 1922 Howard Carter discovered Tutankhamun and his tomb. Carter, ex-  
guide of Egypt used to hate his job but now he loves  
he job because he finds ancient  
Egyptian history. He told us  
his first words. They were:  
"With trembling hands I  
made a breach in the upper left  
hand corner... widening  
the hole a little I inserted the candle and  
peered in... at first I could see nothing,  
the hot air was escaping from the chamber  
causing the candle flame to flicker, presently  
details of the room emerged slowly from the  
mist, strange animals, statues and gold-  
everywhere the glint of gold."



MR CARTER

### Writing in role

Students create a document from the perspective of a character or person other than themselves [eg a diary, letter, secret journal, newspaper article, advert, log book, telegram, witness statement, written evidence].

This gives children the opportunity to deepen their understanding of a story, issue or situation. It encourages them to consider: appropriate tone, style and vocabulary; other people's point of view; the motivation behind particular courses of action. Children's understanding and investment in writing in role is increased considerably if it happens during or after drama work.

*KS2 child writing in role as a reporter about the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. The class has just hot seated Howard Carter.*

## Role on the Wall

This strategy can be used to represent a real or fictional character [eg Rosa Parks] or to help a class develop their own character [eg a homeless teenager].

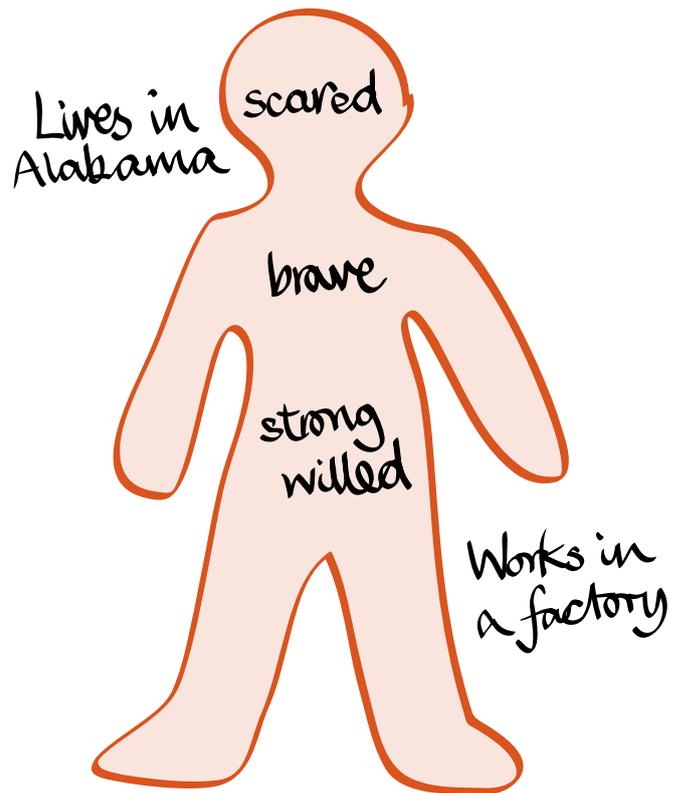
A simple outline is drawn on the board/flip chart. In the space around the outline children put all the things they know about the character [where they live, their family, what they like to do etc]. They can also put questions that they want answered, or things that they are not sure about [eg what the teenager feels about being homeless].

In the space within the outline they put words to describe how the character is feeling at a particular time [eg how Rosa Parks felt when she was arrested]. They can also put words which describe the character's personality [eg shy, resilient, hot-headed].

The *role on the wall* can be kept as a 'living commentary' on the character and can be re-visited to add things to or see if children's perception has changed. It is a good way of sharing information, developing empathy and deepening thinking and works well alongside *hotseating*.



*The Pied Piper. A 'townsperson' making an announcement in role about what to do about the rat problem in Hamelin.*



## Teacher in role

This convention allows the teacher to participate in a *role play* situation, providing information and guiding the narrative. It offers a focus for children's questions and reasoned arguments, while 'equalising' the teacher with the children.

- ❑ The teacher explains that she is going to work in role [pretend to be someone else], and sets the scene for that role - and what it may require of children.
- ❑ To 'sign' the role, the teacher makes it clear that she is in role when [for example] she wears an item of clothing [hat, shawl], carries a prop [garden fork], or is standing/sitting. When she wants to finish working in role, she removes the item and tells the children she is the teacher again.
- ❑ The teacher does not need acting skills for this, but may want to use body language to give clues about the person she is portraying.

## Hot seating

The teacher researches a real or fictional character and, in role, answers questions prepared by children. Children with sufficient knowledge and confidence might also take the hotseat. *Hotseating* is useful for sharing information and developing questioning skills.

# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

## TABLEAUX AND SOUNDSCAPES

### Freeze frame [still picture, still image, tableau]

A three dimensional picture uses body language, facial expressions and space to create meaning. It is especially useful for exploring pivotal moments in a narrative or in children's own lives. It can be used within a *role play* or performance to stop the action at a key point for questioning and investigation. Captions are often used alongside freeze frames. They are short phrases which suggest what the drama is about.

We have found that photographs and pictures provide a useful starting point for work on drama and citizenship. Through creating a *freeze frame*, children begin to question what is taking place in the image, why it was created - and by whom.

### Still theatre

A series of *freeze frames* tells a simple story. Movement between the frames can be minimalist or stylized, depending on the mood being created. This is good for taking children 'out of the situation' and for sequencing significant events.

“ It's the discussion that goes on to create the image that's most important. ”

### Thought tracking

This device is used to show the audience what characters are thinking. Children in a *freeze frame* take it in turns to share their thoughts after a signal [eg the teacher tapping them on the shoulder]. Alternatively, members of an 'audience' 'read' the picture, standing behind a chosen character and announcing their thoughts. Thoughts should be made in the first person 'I'.

*Thought tracking* is a useful device for deconstructing, humanising and 'getting under the skin' of an image, moment or *freeze frame*.

### Soundscapes [sound collage]

Children provide a sound track for a *freeze frame* or improvisation [eg for a driving lesson, pupils reproduce the sounds of other traffic - the repetition helps to create the confusion and stress the driver feels].

### Thought tracks from Year 7 children working on Lowry's "The Fight"



I don't know what to do.

Stop fighting.

people these days!!

I don't want to get involved, it looks vicious.

What's going on? I need a better view!

What should I do? Should I stop it?

I feel really disappointed with myself because I was encouraging them.

It was childish. Grown men fighting like children.

People yelled louder to drown me out.

I tried to talk some sense into them.

If no one gathered around there'd be no show.

Why do they have to fight?

I was trying to get through but people were blocking me.

I'm not going to get mixed up with that lot.

---

# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

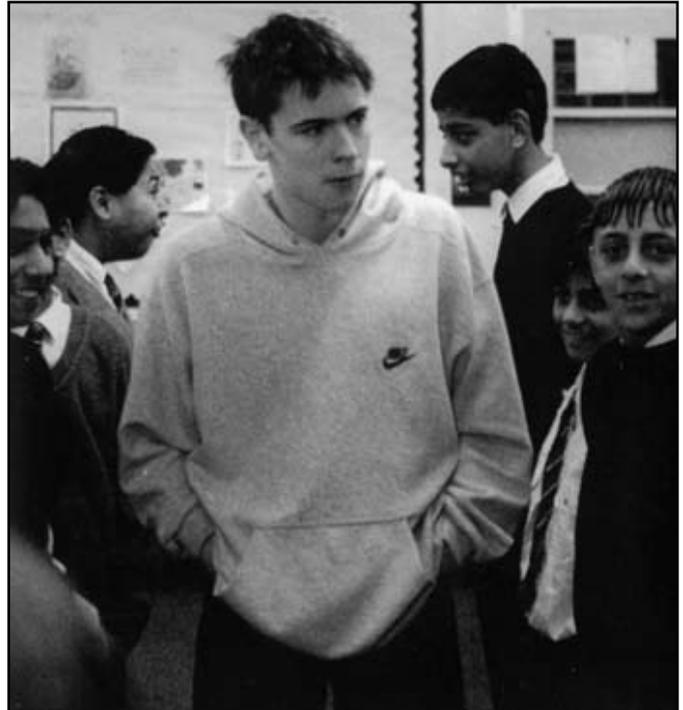
## CONSCIENCE ALLEY

This helps enable all children to contribute and respond to a particular situation or dilemma. It is particularly good for gauging responses to political acts, or interpersonal developments.

- ❑ The class makes two lines facing each other, in the form of an alley or corridor, with enough room for a person to walk easily between them.
- ❑ One individual [teacher or child] takes on the role of the character in a key situation.
- ❑ The rest of the class then voice the character's thoughts and feelings as s/he walks past them.
- ❑ It is alright if someone earlier in the line has already said the same thing.
- ❑ It is helpful to do the exercise more than once, as this gives less confident children the chance to think of something to say. You could freeze the character at the end of the alley and get all the pupils to voice the thoughts again.

Examples of how this might be used:

- The girl in the song *I don't like Mondays* walks along the corridor to the room where she is going to shoot her classmates.
- A homeless teenager walks to the phone box to ring either a family member or a hostel.



“ Before you can participate meaningfully in any discussion, you must begin to feel safe to voice your feelings and express an opinion. With conscience alley, children can begin to find their own voice. ”

---

# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

## FORUM THEATRE

“ Do you seek to take children into actually dangerous places, or do you let the force of the fiction imagine the danger around them? ”



This is a means of investigating, interpreting, exploring and testing action. It is an ideal activity for ‘rehearsing’ citizenship situations safely as it encourages children to change the drama from within, and to participate actively in problem solving.

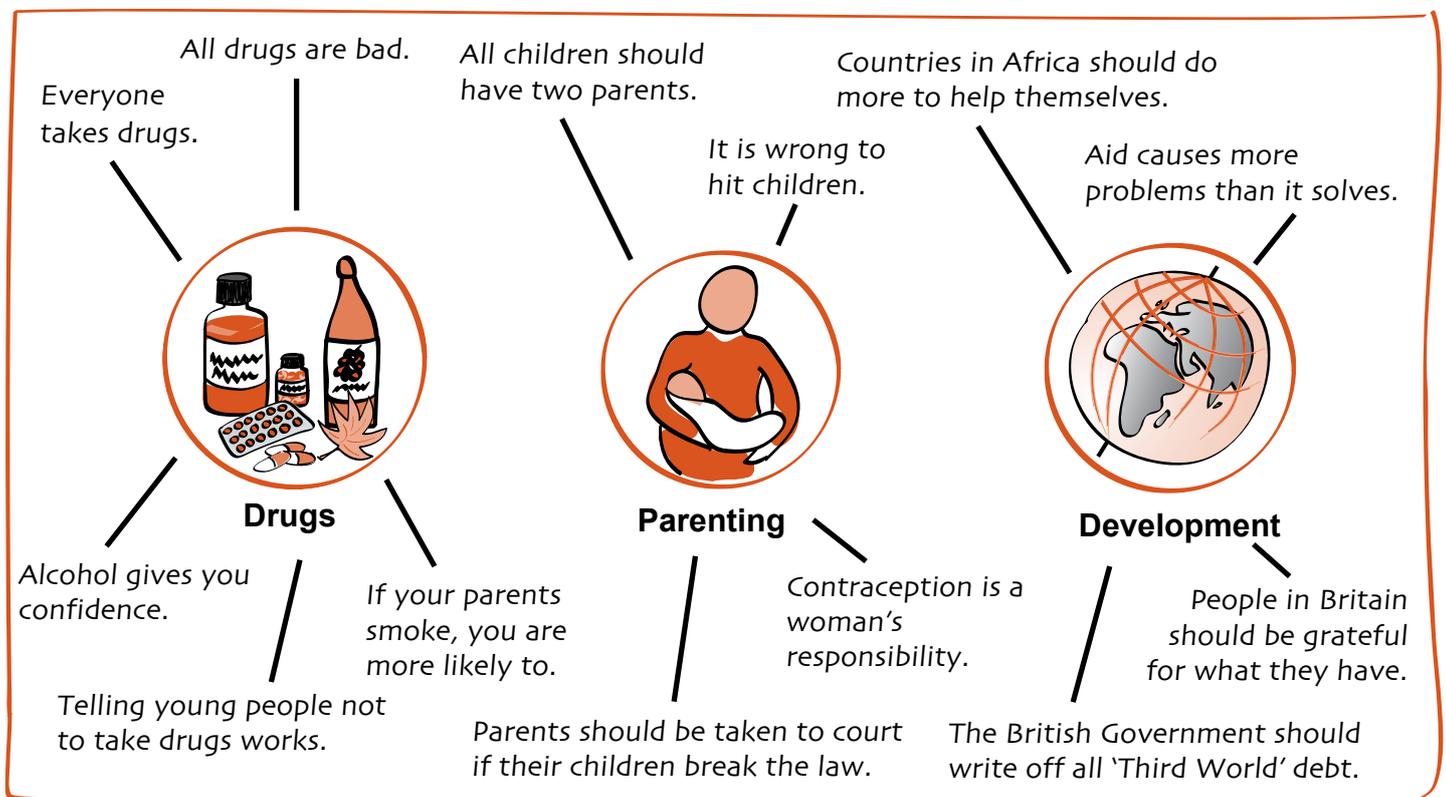
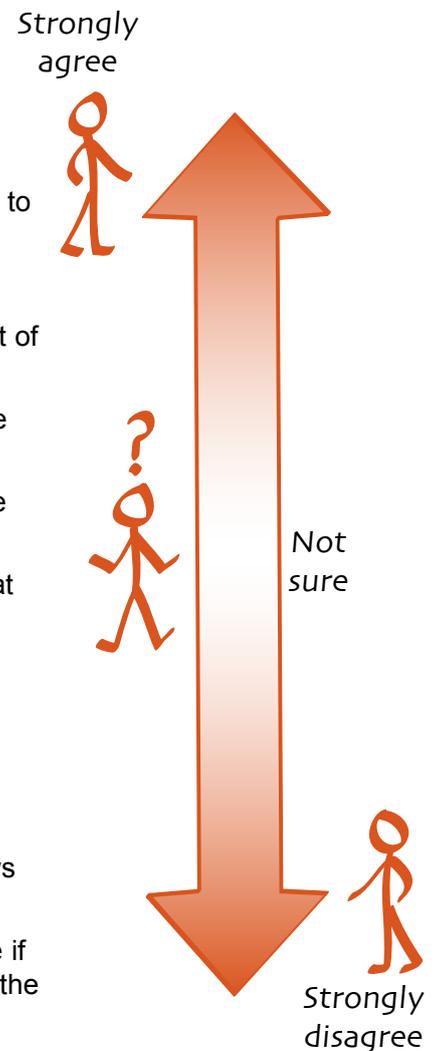
- ❑ The class sits facing a small acting area, which is usually the centre of a circle.
- ❑ A scene is chosen which has become the focus for exploration [eg an area of wasteland, with residents objecting to the construction of a playground there].
- ❑ Volunteers select roles [eg residents going to meet the playground inspectors].
- ❑ The scene of the meeting is set up, and the encounter is improvised.
- ❑ The audience [rest of the class] stops the action with an agreed signal when they wish to question what is happening, take on the role for themselves, or alter the improvised play [eg by suggesting what might be said or done at a point where they would behave differently].
- ❑ We have often found it useful to enact the scene twice. First, a group enacts a short scene that ends in a crisis. Second, the other children intervene in ways which might prevent that crisis.
- ❑ It is important for the teacher to create a positive and secure working environment in order to get the best from Forum theatre, especially when dealing with sensitive issues [for example, children should accept each other’s point of view, avoid derogatory comments about acting style etc].

# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

## LINE OF CONSCIENCE

This is a useful and easy activity for examining and challenging beliefs and attitudes. It can be used to explore any issue. It gives children the opportunity to share their opinions in a structured, democratic and [ideally] non-judgmental setting. It allows them to hear different points of view, justify their beliefs and develop well-informed opinions. The teacher is able to tailor the activity to the needs and abilities of the class. We have found it particularly useful at the start of a topic or project.

- ❑ The teacher or children create a series of controversial statements about the issue or subject being explored [see examples below].
- ❑ The teacher asks the children to imagine a line running along the floor of the classroom.
- ❑ They stand at one end of the line if they strongly agree with the statement, at the other if they strongly disagree.
- ❑ When each statement is read out, children decide which place on the line represents their own opinion. They can stand anywhere on the line, near either end, or somewhere in the middle.
- ❑ The teacher first asks those at the extreme ends why they strongly agree or disagree. These statements are not judged, just shared.
- ❑ The teacher moves slowly towards the middle, until a wide spectrum of views has been shared.
- ❑ The teacher offers children the chance to move to a new position on the line if they have changed their minds, or feel differently about the statement, after the discussion.



---

# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

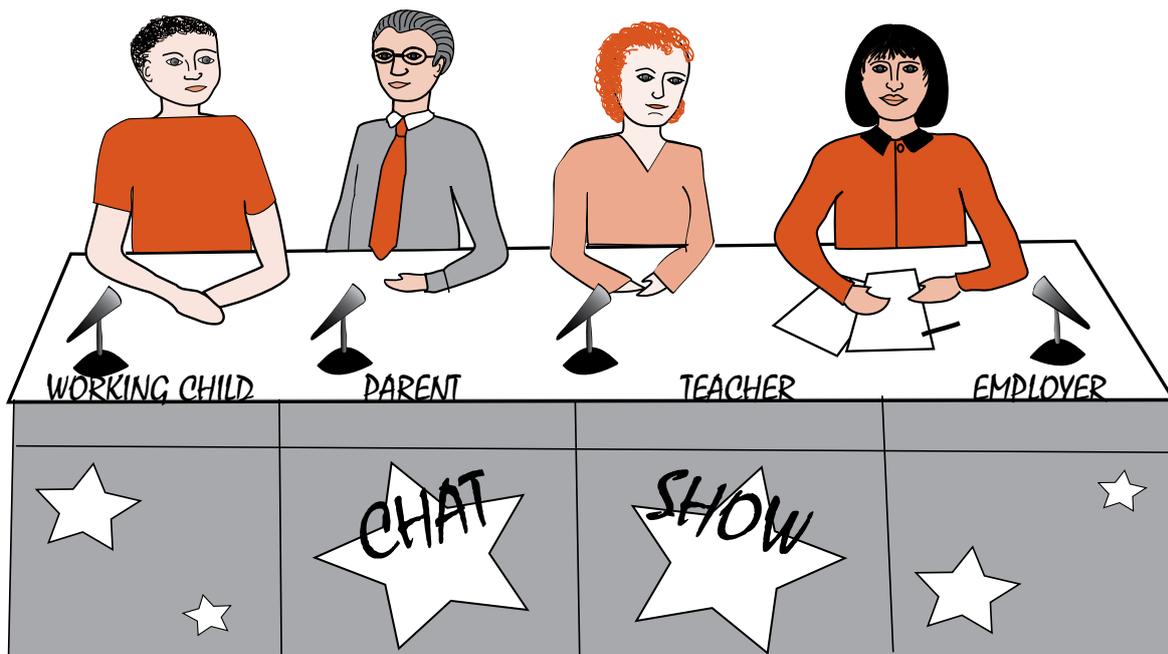
## CHAT SHOW

This strategy uses a structure and context known by the children, to broaden the discussion of issues in a fun but relevant way. It is a whole-group activity, which needs preparation beforehand to be really effective. We would recommend it as a development activity rather than as a starting point.

### “Young people should not be allowed to take up employment whilst at school”

#### A KS3/4 debate

- ❑ The teacher takes on the role of the chat show host.
- ❑ Children split into a number of groups and are given a role [children who work, teachers, parents, employers etc]. They discuss their characters' view points with peers. Newspaper cuttings/statistics can be given to help deepen understanding.
- ❑ One person is chosen from each group to be on the 'panel' out front, whilst the rest of the group become the 'carefully selected audience'.
- ❑ The teacher/host interviews the 'panel', takes questions from the 'audience' and facilitates the discussion. The host has the power to swap a member of the audience onto the panel at any point.
- ❑ To encourage reflection, we have found it useful to ask the group to vote on a motion first as their character, then [out of role] as themselves.



# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

## MANTLE OF THE EXPERT

Do we see ourselves as teachers of Drama or as teachers of children?

Unlike many of the drama strategies described here, *Mantle of the Expert* is not a drama convention but an approach to the curriculum, using the power and the constraints inherent in a fiction. It has been developed by Dorothy Heathcote through work with children and teachers.

*Mantle of the Expert* gives children a fictional 'frame' within which they can take responsibility for a situation. This implies children 'rehearsing their citizenship', and in particular developing a collective sense of their relationship to an event.

Knowledge becomes information, evidence, source material, specification, records, guidelines, regulations, theories, formulas, and artefacts, all of which are to be interrogated. This is an active, urgent, purposeful view of learning, in which knowledge is to be operated on, not merely to be taken in. //

Dorothy Heathcote

// 'Mantle of the Expert' is the antithesis of a fragmented and fact-driven curriculum, the antithesis of the drive to acquire ever more decontextualised skills. //

- In this instance, the event is the sinking of a ship.
- Members of the group are 'framed' as 'researchers' [working for insurers or relatives of the crew, and known for their expertise].
- Their task is to research the event for those alive today. [This provides them with a specific responsibility, interest, attitude and behaviour in relation to the sinking.]
- Over an extended period, the children assume their roles within the task with growing conviction, complexity, knowledge and understanding. Challenges are risen to as the children think from within a powerful imagined context. They are playing and acting.
- Time, space, role and situation can be manipulated by the teacher [often using *teacher in role*] to present increasingly complex dilemmas.

[For a full account of the approach, together with detailed examples of classroom work in a variety of settings, see *Drama for Learning*, by Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton].

