

ROLE REGISTERS and POSITIONS in drama teaching

These different positions can be used when teaching in role (or ‘shadow role’) to prompt different qualities of response from students.

REGISTER	Position	Example	Intended response / impact on the drama
I AM THE ONE WHO KNOWS	The teacher is positioned as someone important – with direct influence over the group	Teacher In role as the gang leader adamantly refuses to allow the bank robbers to use guns in the hold up	Can be used to slow down the pace. Can prevent students opting for ‘easy’ or stereotypical solutions to complex problems Prompts deeper thinking Adds new important information to the fictional world Asserts teacher’s authority
WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW..?	The teacher is positioned as someone with important information, which may be important to the group should they care to ask for it.	Teacher in role as Parihaka local who can describe what happened when the village was raided – but will need to be asked.	Invites a questioning stance Adds information and supports curious inquiry Builds engagement – sense of earning the knowledge Builds empathy Invites students to consider the act of questioning – how to go about it
I HAVE NO IDEA	The teacher is positioned as someone with no idea what to do next.	Teacher in role as the lighthouse keeper’s wife. Her husband and cat have gone missing and the light has not come on – she has no idea what to do.	Encourages the children to take charge of a situation within the fiction. (Teacher still has control of the situation in the real world of the classroom). Prompts genuine responses and creative ideas. Engages critical thinking about the traditional teacher-student power / knowledge relationship.
IF WE... ON THE OTHER HAND IF WE...	The teacher is positioned as someone aware of implications of different courses of action. The teacher presents these to the group and invites them to consider what to do.	Teacher in role as village elder points out that if the village banishes Maui for his trickery then justice will be served – but they will also miss out on using his superpowers for good.	Helps focus the class on what has happened so far in the drama and what might happen next. Helps prompt discussion (and possible exploration) of different courses of action Helps students build awareness that actions have consequences Complexifies the right / wrong binary

TELL ME MORE	The teacher is positioned as interested listener – someone who is keen to hear the story of the drama so far	Teacher in role in role as the wolf’s grandparent asks children (in blanket role as the wolf) to give their version of the story about blowing down the pigs’ houses.	Prompts reflection in action. Can help students consolidate what has happened so far in a drama OR – it can help students take a whole new perspective on the story Can help the teacher ‘take stock’ and decide where the drama could go next.
I’LL GET YOU WHAT YOU NEED	The teacher is positioned as ‘in service’ to the group. A helper who provides the resources (symbolic or actual) that allow them to put their ideas into practice – without providing the answers.	Teacher in role as personal assistant to a team of expert detectives investigating the scene of a monster invasion is provides pens and paper for ‘monster profiling’	Particularly useful in dramas that use expert framing Helps the teacher position students as competent Supports inquiry – encourages student to pose and pursue questions that matter to them Encourages shifts in language register – from both teacher and students
I’M KEEN TO LEARN FROM YOU	The teacher is positioned as apprentice	Teacher in role as a beginner explorer asks the students (positioned as more experienced) for advice on what to pack for their first trip to Antarctica	Allows teacher to conduct learning conversations with individuals and groups of students (assessment) Helps the teacher position students as competent Encourages students to grapple with incomplete understandings Encourages students to take a position, even if unsure
YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO...	The teacher is positioned as ‘devil’s advocate’ taking a deliberately provocative stance on an issue.	Teacher in role as head huntsman advises students (charged with taking Snow White into the forest and losing her) to “just kill her and get it over with”	Confronts students with a point of view dramatically opposed to the one they are presenting in the drama Builds engagement, through dramatic surprise and challenge. Encourages ethical thinking as students have to justify and defend a more ethical position Encourages critical thinking and appraisal skills Allows students opportunities to practice ‘speaking truth to power’