

Creating drama from a picture book

Process drama conventions and the teaching strategy of Teacher in role (TIR) can be used to bring picture books to life in the classroom

According to the New Zealand Curriculum, drama contains these elements:

Role,
Time and Space,
Action,
Tension,
Focus

Well the great thing about stories is that they contain these elements too. Picture books are useful because they often tell stories in an economical way – without too many words.

For a picture book to become a drama the teacher needs to make two key shifts – First, the story needs to shift into “now” time (the present tense). Second, the story needs to be happening to “us” (ie teacher and students take on roles as people directly involved in the story).

HOWEVER - with the emphasis on developing the children’s ideas in drama (the DI strand), the idea is NOT to simply ‘act out’ the stories, but to use them as springboards for the children’s own ideas.

There are many possible ways to go about this. One possible structure for a drama lesson based on a story is shown below. Note that the lesson does NOT begin with reading the story...

- Teacher signals shift into role
- TIR describes a moment of tension from the story (in now time).
- Out of role discussion – what is happening here?
- Story is read up to the point of tension
- Children respond to the tension (activity 1)
- Children suggest resolutions
- Children explore and present resolutions to the TIR (activity2)
- TIR brings drama to a close
- Out of role discussion on the drama experience

This is the structure that was modelled for you using the example of “the Lighthouse Keeper’s Rescue”. Now you can take this structure and apply it to a different story to create your own drama.

There are tips on the next page about how to go about choosing and adapting a storybook. Good luck!

Steps in planning

1. Choose a story to work from

Choose a story that is appropriate to your age group and not too long

Find a story that has clearly defined characters (humans or animal characters with strong human qualities)

The story must have a clear dramatic tension – preferably near the start of the story.

2. Highlight the key moment of tension in the story – the turning point / climax

If it is hard to find the tension, try another story

If it is a long read before you reach the tension consider editing, or finding another story

For now, take care to avoid material that may be “difficult” or sensitive for your learners. Drama can be a wonderful way to touch on difficult topics – but it takes training to understand how to do this safely.

3. Choose the TIR character

Decide which character will make the best Teacher in role figure – someone involved in the moment of tension who might need the children’s help, or advice? This may be someone specifically mentioned in the story – or it may be a character you invent (such as a mother, or neighbour or interested bystander).

4. Script the lesson “hook”

Write a short script for the TIR based on the moment of tension selected in number 2. Present the tension as though it is happening NOW and the TIR needs advice. Make sure it sounds urgent and important!

5. Identify what bit the story that will be read out in class

Track the story from the beginning to the point of tension

Edit if necessary

6. Plan activity 1 - children’s response to the tension

Decide what drama convention will allow children to best respond to the tension.

To make an image of it – freeze frame? To show a conversation – phone call?

Or some other possibility? Check out tki drama glossary for some more process drama conventions.

<http://artsonline2.tki.org.nz/ecurriculum/drama/glossary.php>

7. Plan activity 2 – the possible resolutions to the tension

This activity can be done as another drama activity (for example a freeze frame showing what happens in the future). Or the resolution to the tension could also be explored through other curriculum areas e.g. literacy (writing a persuasive letter, diary entry, or newspaper article) art and design (designing a poster or commemorative sculpture) or technology (coming up with a technical solution and going through the design process). Some of these alternatives may take longer than a single lesson to complete – so plan accordingly!

8. Write the remaining bits of the lesson

Opening, ground rules, transition into role, instructions for the different activities, organisation of group, reflection

9. Identify Learning Intentions

Spell out what children are learning at two or three key points in the lesson.

10. List and organise practical requirements.

Don’t forget – signal prop for teacher in role, story fragment, script for teacher in role. Anything else needed?

12. Write up lesson plan in full – and TEACH!