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STORY DRAMAS

*A New Literature Experience
for Young Children*

by Sarah Jossart & Gretchen Courtney

 GOOD YEAR BOOKS

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION TO STORY DRAMA

- **DEFINITION OF STORY DRAMA**
- **A STORY DRAMA EXAMPLE BASED ON “HUMPTY DUMPTY”**
- **EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**
- **THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DRAMA AND READING INSTRUCTION**
- **HOW STORY DRAMAS ENHANCE YOUR OVERALL CURRICULUM**



DEFINITION OF STORY DRAMA

Story drama allows students to become active participants in the stories and poems they hear and read. The written text—whether poetry, fiction, fantasy, or history—is the spark from which the students can begin to improvise, expand, and explore. The written text comes alive as students become characters within the text or create new characters. The expansion and exploration is accomplished through imagery, problem-solving, questioning, writing, art, and even cooking. Through these expansions and explorations of text, students have a deeper understanding of all the elements of literature. Through visualization of the story, the students see the literature coming alive.

The teacher/leader provides the following functions:

- Guides the students through the development of the drama by reading and then stopping at appropriate places in the text to allow the students the chance to explore and expand
- Models new situations, characters, feelings, and observations
- Models various questioning techniques, including open-ended questions expanding on students' ideas and text
- Establishes a problem to be solved within the context of the story and leads the students into the integration of the problem to real-life situations
- Models the acceptance of all ideas and guides the students into this acceptance
- Encourages every student to share and leads all students into active involvement
- Plays a role/character along with the students

The familiar nursery rhyme “Humpty Dumpty” is one of the simplest drama guides in this book. It is a good example of how poems and stories can be expanded into story dramas.

A STORY DRAMA EXAMPLE BASED ON “HUMPTY DUMPTY”

TEACHER AS A PARK RANGER: Welcome to _____ (*inserts school's name*) Park. I am Ms. Woods, one of the park rangers. I go around the park checking to make sure this is a safe place for all of us to be. It is nice to have you all in the park today. It is always more fun to know the other people who are with us in the park. Let's meet our new friends. Tell us your name, why you are in the park, and what you like about this park.



The teacher sets the stage for the drama. The only scripts are the teacher's roles, which the teacher is encouraged to ad-lib. The teacher models an introduction of his/her character.

Students should then introduce themselves in character to the group.

The students are quickly active participants. They are speaking and listening as well as creating their drama characters.

TEACHER AS MS. WOODS: Yesterday afternoon when you were all at _____ Park the most unusual thing happened. I understand you were all witnesses to an accident in the park. Just to remind you of the situation, I will read to you the accident report before I ask you some questions about what you saw happen.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.

All the king's horses and all the king's men,

Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

When the teacher reads the text, the text becomes "alive" as the students and teacher recall the event, which sparks the imagination of the drama.

TEACHER AS MS. WOODS (*questioning the students in their roles*):

What exactly did you see happen?

What exactly did you hear?

Where was Humpty Dumpty sitting? How high was the wall?

What was he doing up on the wall?

Should Humpty have known he should not be on that wall?

How would he have known this?

Who was Humpty Dumpty with?

Did any of you speak to him, and what did you say?

What did you do after the accident? How did you help?

What did you observe the king's men trying to do?

Do you have any other suggestions for them to try?

Will they work? Why or why not?



The teacher models questioning, and through questioning, the text is expanded and explored. Often a response will spark a new question. The list of questions is only the beginning of what might be discussed during a questioning part of the drama. The open-ended questions give all students the chance to continue participating in the drama. Accept all responses, allowing students to take risks and stay involved. Pay close attention to the roles students choose. Ask specific questions to them in these roles. For example, some students may have chosen to be police officers. What would they say to Humpty Dumpty? How would a mother or the park gardener help? Encourage students to ask questions of Ms. Woods and other characters concerning the accident.

Give students authentic chances to practice their questioning skills, and allow them the chance to expand on their ideas or their drama role.

TEACHER AS MS. WOODS: We want to make _____ Park a very safe place for everyone. Let's make a list of safety rules to post by the park entrance (*school playground*) so everyone remembers how to be safe.

A problem to be solved is presented to the group. The presentation of a problem gives the students practice in applying problem-solving techniques. Here students can apply past experiences, discuss cause and effect, and do some critical thinking.

Students in small groups make a list of safety rules. Each group shares their list. Then the class can compile a list of safety rules and post it near the exit to the school's playground.

Students are involved in both large- and small-group interaction during the drama. They are writing for an authentic purpose. They are learning and applying cooperative group decision-making skills. Posting or displaying student-generated responses tells the students of their worth as human beings.

EXAMPLES OF FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Ask students to

- Write a "get-well" letter to Humpty Dumpty.
- Write a newspaper account of this accident.
- Draw a picture showing what Humpty Dumpty was doing on the wall.
- Write a journal account of what they saw happening the day of the accident.
- Write about a favorite park.
- Draw a picture of what they like to do in the park.



Several follow-up activities are suggested. The students are asked to write, illustrate, cook, perform, and so on. These activities cover a wide range of expectations and are not labeled for a specific grade level or age span. Each teacher is free to select the activity or activities appropriate for his or her group of students. Select what you know your students can do, or possibly allow students an opportunity to select their own activities. This can allow for a wide range of abilities, from those of students in special education classes to the gifted. Don't be afraid to try a new activity! Model the activity, then work through the new activity as a group. As you stretch and challenge these young readers and writers, you will be amazed at what they can do.

Risk-taking will be a real part of a story drama experience, and students may need to participate in a couple of dramas before all students are willing to take the risks. Extended modeling of the teacher's roles will greatly enhance the students' performances. Be a risk-taker yourself. Warm-up activities before a drama will help students become more comfortable with the drama experience. Use the ideas for warm-ups in Section 2, Warm-ups.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DRAMA AND READING INSTRUCTION

Imagine—it is Tuesday morning, 9:15. According to your schedule, it is reading instruction time, and your students are playing the roles of exotic birds parading around the room. You, the teacher in the role of a toucan, are also parading. The door opens and in walks your principal. "What are you doing in here?" Just responding "Story drama" might give you an unwelcome frown, and we don't want any ruffled feathers, do we? So . . . what do you say?

Story drama is reading instruction. Students are listening to and reading some of the best of children's literature, including poetry, concept books, fantasy, fiction, and historical texts.

Story drama integrates writing activities. Students are given opportunities to write for many different reasons and audiences. Writing will happen during some dramas or as an extension of others.

Story drama is vocabulary development. Students are given the chance to hear new and cross-cultural vocabulary over and over again. Students are also given the chance to try out new words in real conversations through interaction in small-group or class discussions. All this exposure to new words and ways to use words helps students to incorporate new vocabulary into their own language.



Story drama is understanding a character's point of view as students play the roles of story characters or roles of other characters that could be part of a story.

Story drama is working with main idea, plot, and theme. Story text becomes real as students involve themselves in roles and problems to be solved.

Story drama is questioning and answering. Students generate their own questions as they interview each other about the characters they are playing or ask questions of a story character. Students make inferences, draw conclusions, compare and contrast, and evaluate as they answer questions posed to them. Many chances to ask and answer open-ended questions are all a part of story drama.

Story drama is a lesson in prediction. Students predict character roles, solutions to problems, and story outcomes.

By now you are out of breath and your principal is grinning from ear to ear. Your principal has spread her arms and asks, "May I join your parade?" Without a moment of hesitation you continue the story drama and provide reading instruction, as well as teach skills that favorably impact your overall curriculum.

HOW STORY DRAMAS ENHANCE YOUR OVERALL CURRICULUM

Story drama is schema-based instruction. Students are required to use prior knowledge and information to participate in character roles and problem-solving situations. Many times the problem to be solved is related to real-life situations, and students relate to those problems with knowledge they bring to the situation.

Story drama is acting, pretending, role-playing, dramatization, mime, and pantomime. Ideas generated by the students are performed or presented before the group or in small groups, giving students a variety of experiences.

Story drama is sharing. Ideas, introductions, problem solutions, dramatizations, and writings are all shared with small groups or with the whole class.



Story drama is a medium for reaching all students at all learning levels, whether they are strong in verbal, auditory, or hands-on skills. Each student can feel successful, and, therefore, learn. Group activities, in particular, allow students to share their special strengths and feel they have participated.

The current trend is to include students with diverse needs in regular classrooms. Story drama is particularly good at providing opportunities for all age levels and learning styles. Many students learn best in nontraditional ways, especially when the emphasis is placed on the development of critical thinking skills. In a story drama experience, all students will improve their ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems.

Story drama enhances imagination and creativity by allowing for opportunities to develop new characters, problem solve, and respond through illustrations and writing.

Story drama gives students a sense of belonging by involving them in activities in pairs, small groups, and large groups.

Story drama contributes to social growth by the teacher's acceptance of all student responses, and validation that all responses are valued as part of the community effort.

Story drama helps students see the teacher in a new light by observing the teacher participating in drama roles and play-acting with students. The teacher becomes more approachable.