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CREATIVE DRAMATICS

for children

Maureen McCurry Cresci

**with the assistance of
Debra Gordon-Zaslow**

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To My Husband Sal

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Contents

Preface.....	vi
Using This Book in the Classroom	vii

PART 1: LOSING INHIBITIONS AND LOOSENING UP **1**

Group Imagery and Movement	2
EXERCISE 1: From Specks of Dust to Feathers	2
EXERCISE 2: From Balloons to Popcorn	2
EXERCISE 3: From Caterpillars to Balloons.....	3
EXERCISE 4: From Eggs to Candles	3
EXERCISE 5: From Honey to a Scream.....	4
Pantomime	5
EXERCISE 6: One Object Show	5
EXERCISE 7: Passing Exercise	5
EXERCISE 8: Basic Business	6
EXERCISE 9: Imaginary Object from Hat.....	7
EXERCISE 10: Imaginary Object—Two People	7
EXERCISE 11: Come into a Room for a Purpose	7
EXERCISE 12: Become the Toys.....	8
EXERCISE 13: How Do I Help at Home?.....	8
EXERCISE 14: What Am I Carrying?.....	8
EXERCISE 15: What Am I Doing?.....	8
EXERCISE 16: What Am I Eating?.....	9
EXERCISE 17: What Is My Occupation?.....	9
EXERCISE 18: What Animal in the Zoo Am I?.....	9
EXERCISE 19: The Veterinarian’s Office	9
EXERCISE 20: The Foreigner in an American Store.....	9
EXERCISE 21: Costume Exercise.....	10
EXERCISE 22: Become a Musical Instrument	10
EXERCISE 23: Become a Mechanical Object	10
EXERCISE 24: Become the Emotion	10
EXERCISE 25: Become the Element.....	11
EXERCISE 26: Become a Color.....	11
Spontaneous Emotional Response	11
EXERCISE 27: Temper Tantrum.....	11
EXERCISE 28: The Big Scream	12
EXERCISE 29: The Big Laugh.....	12
EXERCISE 30: The Giant Spring	12
EXERCISE 31: Laugh.....	12
EXERCISE 32: Cry.....	13
EXERCISE 33: Get Mad—Cry—Laugh (By Yourself).....	13
EXERCISE 34: Tantrum—Cry—Laugh (With a Partner)	13
EXERCISE 35: Act Out an Emotion on Different Levels	13
Relaxation Exercises	14
EXERCISE 36: The Ocean.....	14
EXERCISE 37: A Meadow.....	14
EXERCISE 38: A Golden Light	14
EXERCISE 39: Ideas for Relaxation	15

Sensitivity Exercises	15
EXERCISE 40: What Do You Hear?.....	15
EXERCISE 41: What Do You See?.....	15
EXERCISE 42: What Do You Smell?.....	16
EXERCISE 43: Feel Imaginary Objects.....	16
EXERCISE 44: Feeling Things Blindfolded	17
EXERCISE 45: Hearing and Smelling Things—Blindfolded.....	17

Extending the Activities to Other Areas of the Curriculum **17**

PART 2: LEARNING CONTROL 20

Physical Control	21
EXERCISE 46: Fall Down.....	21
EXERCISE 47: Laugh at Your Partner.....	21
EXERCISE 48: Do Something Two Ways.....	21
EXERCISE 49: Walking Different Ways	22
EXERCISE 50: Action in Three Speeds	22
EXERCISE 51: Improvisation With “Marks”	22
EXERCISE 52: The Mirror.....	23

Using Control to Win a Contest	24
EXERCISE 53: Who Can Do Things the Longest?.....	24
EXERCISE 54: The Motionless Statue.....	24
EXERCISE 55: Make the Sad Child Laugh.....	24

Character Control	25
EXERCISE 56: Costume Bag.....	25
EXERCISE 57: Act Out the Name	25
EXERCISE 58: Fairy Tale Character	25

Extending the Activities to Other Areas of the Curriculum **26**

PART 3: SPEECH 27

Vocal and Speech Variation Exercises	28
EXERCISE 59: Vocal Projection.....	28
EXERCISE 60: One Sentence Said Different Ways.....	28

Cold Readings	29
EXERCISE 61: Toothpaste.....	29
EXERCISE 62: Flea Collar	30
EXERCISE 63: Plant Food.....	30
EXERCISE 64: Yogurt.....	31
EXERCISE 65: Maple Syrup.....	31
EXERCISE 66: Coffee	31
EXERCISE 67: Ballpoint Pen.....	32
EXERCISE 68: Fruit Juice.....	32
EXERCISE 69: Keep the City Clean.....	32
EXERCISE 70: Spray Starch.....	33
EXERCISE 71: Cough Tablets	33
EXERCISE 72: Laundry Soap.....	33
EXERCISE 73: Bug Spray	33
EXERCISE 74: Spot Remover	34
EXERCISE 75: Peanut Butter	34

EXERCISE 76: Pimple Cream	35
EXERCISE 77: Dog Food	35
EXERCISE 78: Tennis Shoes	35
EXERCISE 79: Pain Spray	36

Impromptu Speech and Storytelling 36

EXERCISE 80: One Object—Tell a Story	36
EXERCISE 81: Continue the Story	36
EXERCISE 82: Prop Bag	37
EXERCISE 83: Commercials from Objects in Pillowcase	37
EXERCISE 84: Speech—“I’d like to tell you about the day that I . . .”	37
EXERCISE 85: Speech—“I’d like to tell the class how to . . .”	38
EXERCISE 86: Speech—“Why I decided to . . .”	38
EXERCISE 87: Speech—“I am the authority on . . .”	38
EXERCISE 88: Debate With a Partner	39
EXERCISE 89: Convince Your Partner	39

Extending the Activities to Other Areas of the Curriculum 40

PART 4: IMPROVISATIONAL WORK 42

Improvisations 43

EXERCISES 90-137: Suggested Improvisations	43–47
--	-------

Improvisational Exercises 48

EXERCISE 138: Improvisations from Objects in Pockets	48
EXERCISE 139: Act Out the Name	48
EXERCISE 140: One Sentence Improvisation	48
EXERCISE 141: Last Line Improvisation	48
EXERCISE 142: First and Last Line Improvisation	49
EXERCISE 143: Pick a Character, Pick an Action	49
EXERCISE 144: Faint	49
EXERCISE 145: Die	49
EXERCISE 146: Three Different Actions—Improvisation	50
EXERCISE 147: Animals Becoming People	50

Characters, Places for Characters, Actions for Characters 50

Characters	50
Places For Characters To Be	51
Actions For Solo Characters	51
Actions For Characters In A Group	51

Extending the Activities to Other Areas of the Curriculum 52

PART 5: GROUP DRAMATIZATION 53

Dramatizing Stories 54

EXERCISE 148: The Dancing Flowers	54
EXERCISE 149: The Wild Horses	54
EXERCISE 150: The Mean Giants	55
EXERCISE 151: The Birthday Party	55
EXERCISE 152: Mean and Nice Wishes	55
EXERCISE 153: Magic Elves	56

Extending the Activities to Other Areas of the Curriculum 56

Preface

The creative dramatic exercises in this book offer opportunities for children to develop acting skills and to express themselves in unique ways. Children are natural actors, and even the shyest ones will be drawn into the fun. While enjoying themselves, they'll explore and develop their own imaginations. They'll build self-confidence by being in front of a group, and they'll learn to be respectful of (and listen to) others. They'll not only express emotions but also learn how to control them. Finally, they'll develop greater degrees of concentration.

Creative Dramatics for Children provides an easy-to-follow and basic approach to leading simple and fun theatre games. It is a book written for teachers and group leaders interested in helping children express themselves through drama; the exercises have been used with students of all ages as well as with professional child actors.

Concluding each of the book's five parts are suggestions for extending the activities to other subject areas of the curriculum. These extension ideas increase the book's practicality for today's busy teachers, as they offer a creative and flexible way to make additional use of many of the exercises in the classroom.

The author would like to thank Anita Meinbach and Laura Fendel for their helpful reviews of the manuscript.

Using This Book in the Classroom

Creative Dramatics for Children is organized in five parts, each of which offers specific goals and suggestions for introducing the activities. Although the format makes it easy to locate specific types of activities, don't think that you must use the book in a linear fashion from start to finish. You can easily mix and match exercises to suit the needs of yourself and your students. For example, students who are already expressive and without inhibitions can skip many of the exercises in Part 1, while other students may need to repeat several Part 1 exercises before moving on. You must gauge what is appropriate for your students and how much to cover in each session.

Take some time to familiarize yourself with the scope of the book before doing any of the exercises. You may find that you want to include exercises from different parts in a single drama session. For example, you might start with a group imagery exercise, move on to a speech or improvisation exercise, and end with a relaxation or sensory awareness activity.

If you can't arrange a whole block of time for a drama session, consider using just one exercise at a time between subjects. Many of the short exercises that require mental focus are well-suited for transitions between subjects. During a gym class, for example, you might want to try some of the exercises that emphasize physical control; some of the more energetic, emotional-release exercises might be appropriate before a recess. You will soon get a sense of what works well for you and your students at different times in the day.

Basic Guidelines in Teaching Creative Dramatics

To enhance the effectiveness of all the exercises in this book, keep the following guidelines in mind:

Be familiar with and enthusiastic about the material.

Take the time to read and understand each exercise fully before presenting it to the children. Teachers who are comfortable and excited about an exercise find that the children will be also.

Give clear directions, but do not offer examples.

Explain the exercise as thoroughly as possible. Then allow the children to interpret it in their own way. Teacher-given examples have a strong tendency to block the creative flow of ideas.

Be willing to accept and appreciate all kinds of responses.

Remind the children that there is no right or wrong way to do the exercises. Some children may have a hard time grasping this concept, preferring to imitate the approach of other children. Gently urge such children to do the exercise their own way, and praise them for even the most modest attempts at a unique interpretation. Always give the children permission to act out their feelings, characters, and situations in the way that seems right to them.

Remind the children not to hurt one another.

Set physical limits from the start. For example, it's not unusual for children to think that it's permissible—when pretending to be large raindrops—to fall on top of each other! Tell them that while the exercises are lots of fun, they must keep within their own space for safety's sake.

Instruct the children to be respectful of and courteous to each other.

Let your students know that you expect them to pay attention to the person(s) performing. Make sure that each student has an opportunity to complete his or her performance before others become involved.

Using the Extension Activities

At the end of each part, you will find a section entitled “Extending the Activities into Other Areas of the Curriculum.” This listing provides brief descriptions of optional activities for teachers who would like to integrate drama into other subject areas. The extension activities are divided into four major subject areas: writing, art, social studies, and science. Every drama exercise that has a correlated activity suggestion at the end of the part is designated by a symbol in the text:



Writing



Art



Social Studies



Science

Although not all of the correlated activities will match your particular subject goals, you may find many that suit your plans and your class. None of these optional activities, of course, is essential to teaching creative dramatics.

Ideally, the combination of drama exercises and extension activities will spark both your own and your students' creativity and make your classroom a more exciting and enjoyable place in which to learn!

PART 1

LOSING INHIBITIONS AND LOOSENING UP



Much of what we do in school requires linear, logical thinking. Creative drama requires just the opposite. Part 1 is designed to help students loosen up mentally and physically and to promote a creative flow of ideas.

The following exercises lay the foundation for all kinds of dramatic activity—speech, storytelling, skits, improvisations, plays, etc. They encourage both the sensory awareness necessary to good acting and the ability to call forth and express a wide variety of emotions. In addition, this part includes relaxation exercises which, while useful anytime, are particularly appropriate after some of the more energetic activities. Relaxation exercises can help calm and focus the group before moving on to another subject.

Introducing the Exercises to Your Students

Ask the children to close their eyes and recall any good actor or actress they have seen. Tell them to focus on what they thought was good about the acting. Explain that the qualities needed to be a good actor or actress don't always come naturally; most performers must train themselves to act well.

Discuss the specific goals of this part, and tell your students how the activities relate to these goals. Emphasize that the first five activities—dealing with group imagery—are not just for children. Although the activities are a lot of fun, professional actors and actresses of all ages take these exercises very seriously.

Group Imagery and Movement

The following five exercises are among the very few in this book in which the instructor should actually become physically involved with the group. If the leader is loose and uninhibited, the children will be also. When leading these exercises, take plenty of time to move from one suggestion to another.

These are group exercises for all age levels. Students act out their own interpretations of what the teacher is suggesting. Although you should encourage jumping, stomping, yelling, and laughing in these exercises, remind the children not to become physical with each other. These are wonderful exercises with which to end a class.

EXERCISE 1



From Specks of Dust to Feathers

We are all tiny specks of DUST . . . we are so small that no one can see us . . . we are floating around in the air outside . . . the wind is blowing us slowly through the air . . . we move very slowly . . . the wind just carries us along.

We land on a little LEAF in a stream . . . the stream carries us along . . . the water starts moving faster and faster . . . we are suddenly in a WHIRLPOOL . . . we are going around and around . . . we are going around in circles . . . faster and faster . . . all of a sudden the water throws us out onto the beach. We lie very still . . . we are very tired.

A SOFT WIND comes along and carries the leaf we are on to a BIG TUMBLEWEED . . . the tumbleweed is very large and round . . . the wind blows the tumbleweed around very slowly . . . the wind feels good . . . slowly blowing us around.

Now everyone has become a person with

a pillow . . . we are all in a giant PILLOW FIGHT . . . we throw pillows hard at each other . . . we pick up pillows and throw them . . . harder and harder . . . faster and faster . . . all the pillows break at once and feathers fly all around us and we all fall down . . . exhausted. We lie there and watch the feathers come down from the sky. They feel so soft as they start to cover us. We lie there and relax.

EXERCISE 2



From Balloons to Popcorn

We are all BALLOONS in a bunch . . . we are at a circus . . . the man that is holding onto the strings lets go . . . we all fly up into the sky . . . we all go our separate ways . . . up, up into the sky . . . higher and higher . . . floating . . . going where the wind takes us . . . higher and higher.

We are still very high in the sky, but now we are people . . . people who can walk on

clouds . . . we play with the clouds . . . we can jump from one to another . . . we jump . . . we lie down on them and roll around . . . we can push them together and make bigger places to play . . . we jump on the soft clouds.

We are now back down on Earth . . . we are in this very room . . . there is **STICKY TAPE** all over the floor . . . we are all trying to walk across the room . . . it is so hard to walk . . . every step that we take is so much effort . . . we have to walk all the way across the room.

The floor is not sticky anymore. The floor has become a giant sheet of **RUBBER** . . . every step makes us sink way down and way back up again . . . we can jump way up into the sky . . . we jump and jump and jump . . . we get so tired from jumping that we fall down on the floor.

We lie there a minute. What is happening now? The floor is getting hot. We have all become **KERNELS OF CORN**, and the floor is burning hot . . . in a few seconds we'll all explode into **POPCORN** . . . the floor is getting so hot that it makes us roll around . . . when we explode into popcorn we'll jump up and yell "POP" . . . hotter and hotter and hotter . . . we can't stand it anymore . . . get ready . . . hotter and hotter . . . get up . . . now . . . let's all "POP"!!



EXERCISE 3

From Caterpillars to Balloons

We are all big fuzzy caterpillars . . . crawling through the forest . . . we travel very slowly . . . it takes us a very long time to move along . . . we just creep.

We have now become **MARBLES** . . . we are rolling on the floor . . . we can't stop rolling . . . on the floor . . . we can't stop rolling . . . there are beautiful colors inside of us . . . the colors flash as we roll around

. . . we keep rolling and rolling . . . suddenly we stop.

We are all wadded up into tight little balls . . . we have all become very small **FLOWER SEEDS** . . . there is a soft rain falling on us . . . it makes us start to sprout . . . our legs are slowly becoming roots . . . the sun comes out and warms us all up . . . we start reaching for the sun . . . we slowly reach . . . we stand up and reach . . . we can feel all our flower buds start to open slowly . . . the sun feels so warm and we all slowly and gracefully become **FLOWERS**.

We stand and let the sun shine down on us. We have started to change again. We have all become big fat **SNOWMEN** . . . we are standing very proudly under the sun . . . the sun is starting to get hotter . . . we are very slowly starting to melt . . . the sun is hotter and hotter . . . slowly we are becoming very very small . . . we are all becoming **PUDDLES OF WATER** . . . the puddles are very still and quiet.

We aren't puddles anymore. Now we are **BALLOONS** with no air in them. Someone starts to blow air into us . . . we can feel a little bit of air going into us . . . we start to get a little bigger . . . there is more air going into us . . . we are getting bigger and bigger . . . we have to stand up now . . . bigger and bigger . . . when there is too much air in us, we will all have to scream when we pop . . . we are getting so big that we can't stand it anymore . . . bigger and bigger . . . get ready . . . everyone . . . "POP"!!



EXERCISE 4

From Eggs to Candles

The floor is covered with millions of eggs . . . we have always wanted to walk on eggs . . . we are wearing giant shoes, and we can break 50 eggs at a time . . . we stomp around until we have broken all of the eggs . . . let's make sure that all of the eggs are broken . . . get every egg.

We are now nice big FUZZY SPIDERS . . . we are trying to crawl through all the egg “goo” on the floor . . . we all have eight legs, and we have “goo” on every one of our feet . . . we have so far to go, and it is so hard to move all these legs with the “goo” on them . . . we finally reach our destination, and we stop for a rest.

We have all become RAG DOLLS, and we are trying to stand up . . . we want to stand up and see what it feels like . . . we are so floppy, and our arms and legs are so loose . . . we try to stand up, but we can’t.

We are all FEATHERS on the ground . . . a very small breeze comes along and makes us move a little . . . it is a gentle breeze, and it feels good . . . the breeze starts to get a little stronger . . . we are getting carried through the air now . . . it is getting stronger and stronger . . . we have each become the center of a TORNADO . . . it is one of the biggest and strongest tornadoes that ever was . . . we are twisting and turning . . . turning . . . the storm has reached its peak . . . and it is starting to calm down now . . . it has become a very gentle breeze again . . . we have been left standing very still with our arms down to our sides . . . we are standing very very still.

We have all become CANDLES. There is a flame burning on the top of every one of us . . . it feels very relaxing . . . the wax is starting to drip down our sides . . . we are starting to get shorter . . . we are getting very short . . . the wax keeps on dripping . . . we are all very short now . . . it feels very good . . . we are now only a pool of wax . . . a very relaxed pool of wax.

starts to slide slowly out of the jar . . . we have all become a mass of stickiness . . . we all move slowly and go in any direction we want . . . we are all very slow and sticky.

We have all become PEOPLE . . . we are standing up and walking in a shallow stream . . . we are trying to cross to the other side . . . it is getting deeper, and we are using smooth stones in the creek to help us get across . . . we have to jump from stone to stone . . . some of the stones are very slippery, and sometimes we fall . . . we keep on trying . . . and we all get to the other side . . . when we get to the other side, we all find shoes with LARGE SPRINGS on the bottoms of them . . . we put the shoes on our feet . . . every step we take makes us jump . . . we can’t stand still . . . we just keep jumping and jumping . . . we jump higher and higher . . . we have jumped so much that we can’t jump anymore.

We all fall down on the grass and relax. We close our eyes and listen to the sound of the creek and to the birds . . . it feels so good . . . suddenly we all open our eyes . . . we have all lost our voices and we can’t make a sound . . . we all see a BIG BLACK BEAR coming toward us. We are so scared that we can’t move. We try to scream, but we can’t . . . we try to move, but we can’t . . . the bear is getting closer . . . he is only ten feet away from us now . . . we want to scream . . . when he gets three feet away from us, we will scream as loud as we can . . . he is getting closer and closer . . . we want to scream . . . he is four feet away . . . we can’t move . . . he is three feet away . . . SCREAM!!

Note: After conducting these exercises a few times, you’ll become familiar with the types of imagery that the group enjoys most. You can then adapt these passages and create exciting new ideas along the lines suggested here.

EXERCISE 5



From Honey to a Scream

Let’s all get close together. We are HONEY IN A JAR. The jar tips over, and the honey