

B Warm-Up Exercises

Some children may feel self-conscious and find it difficult to 'suspend disbelief' at the beginning of a session. The transition from playtime or a previous academic lesson to the demands made on them by a drama lesson needs to be aided. A certain amount of straightforward task work will help (see Drama games for other ideas for vocal and physical warm-up games). Some useful warm-up exercises are:



Inner and outer circle

The outer circle stands looking inward, the inner circle looks outwards. Each child stands opposite someone. At a given signal they start a conversation. (You may wish to offer some clues here, eg what they did at the weekend, had for dinner, favourite TV programmes, etc.) At another signal they stop talking. The outer circle stays still, the inner circle moves one person to the left. Depending on the number in the class this can be a long or short warm-up exercise.

Voice warm-ups

This is a variation on the above. Instead of standing in a circle, the children stand in two parallel lines, each facing a partner about two feet apart. At a signal from you they start a conversation. At the next signal they each take a step backwards and continue to talk to each other. This continues until they are at either side of the room shouting at each other. It is an effective, if noisy, way to make the children understand the high vocal level necessary for speaking on stage, as well as being a fun warm-up exercise.

Mirror images

This is excellent for encouraging concentration and sensitivity. Divide the group into pairs, facing one another. Call one A, the other B. Each pair stands, sits or kneels in identical positions. A starts moving one hand slowly, then their arm – B copies so closely that it should not be noticeable who is leading. Gradually other parts of the body are introduced into the exercise. Then B takes over as leader. The leadership can swap backwards and forwards more quickly as confidence increases, each tracing the actions of the other precisely. Each participant is equal in the exercise, no child should be allowed to become the dominant partner.

Brainstorming

This can either be played as a game sitting in a circle (see Drama games) or can be written for drama ideas. In the latter it is useful to have a long roll of paper – the back of unused wallpaper perhaps – or if this is not possible several sheets of sugar paper. The children are given a felt-tipped pen each and asked to write or draw as many ideas as they can think of connected with a given idea. They are given a time limit – two or three minutes. Then they are given a chance to walk around and see each other's, anonymous, ideas. This can be a warm-up exercise on its own, developing concentration and cooperation, or it can lead into an improvisation.



Egyptians

The Story of Osiris and Set

The Egyptians had many gods and goddesses who were an important part of their civilisation. Some gods and goddesses represented forces of nature, whilst others were connected with daily life.

The following improvisation is based on the legend surrounding the brothers Osiris and Set:

1 Warm-up

- i *Start in a crouched, hunched position on the floor. Grow gradually as the tambourine is banged until you are stretched tall. Put both hands above your head and let them hang like branches on a tree. Wriggle your fingers as a breeze blows through the trees. [A huge tree grew around the casket.]*
- ii *Stand legs astride. Make chopping movements quickly with one hand then the other; then slowly with one hand then the other. [Set discovered the body and had it cut to pieces.]*
- iii *Walk with head held upright, proudly around the room. Pretend your head has a tall, heavy crown on it.*

2 Partner work

Find a partner. Stand opposite each other. One partner uses body language to 'ask' a question ie by moving their arms, hands, legs or whole body. Your partner must answer the question with a body movement.

Show some of the more successful pairs to the class. Develop this into a short sequence of movements, almost overlapping each other. Repeat the sequence three times. Show the most successful sequences to the class together. Compare with a battle. Explain that in stage fights the action is well rehearsed and timed and that nobody actually touches anybody else.

3 Tell the following story, and then ask the children to enact it.

The Egyptians believed that Osiris and Isis had once ruled Egypt. They were good, well-loved rulers, but their brother Set was jealous. He invited Osiris to a party where he produced a beautiful casket. [Mime the rectangular shape with your hands.] Set announced that he would give the casket to whoever fitted exactly inside it. He had had the casket made secretly for Osiris and when he got inside it Set had it thrown into the River Nile. The current carried it to Byblos in the Mediterranean Sea. A huge tree grew around the casket where it had landed on the shore. After many adventures Isis found her friend's body and took it back to Egypt. Set discovered the body and had it cut to pieces. However, Isis and her stepson, Anubis, put Osiris back together again and managed to bring him back to life. In revenge, Set tried to harm Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis. A battle ensued and Horus finally won. He became King of Egypt, while Osiris ruled the Kingdom of the Dead.



Force

a Warm-up

- i Stretching and shaking all the body parts in turn.
- ii Walking on the spot.
- iii Walking in time to a steady, rhythmic beat played on a percussion instrument by the teacher.
- iv Add running (image of wind blowing from behind).
- v Turning (change direction as instrument is hit to create the image of gusts of wind blowing in every direction).
- vi *Now I would like you to imagine that the wind is gusting and you are being blown in all directions. When I hit the tambourine turn quickly and change direction.*
The teacher then beats the tambourine with an irregular beat giving the children time to run about six steps at a time. This should only be a short exercise. The children become very excited and collisions may occur.
- vii Improvise/explore a combination of travelling (including running and jumping), eg being blown from behind and beating into the wind.

b Individual work

Force from above – image of the ceiling lowering and trapping the body (think of the effect of different parts of the body being squashed).

c Partner work

Force between two people – wrestling. A rebounds against B's solid position and vice versa.

d In small groups

External force – use the image of a sea plant attached to the seabed. It is moved by the ebb and flow of the water. Work on the sensitivity of the group members to each other, their involvement, cooperation and concentration.

e Individual work

Using the image of a rough sea:

- i Form a low, inward-focused position. Sweep to a high position. Relax and rebound to the high position
- ii Withdraw to swaying movements and prepare for circular arm movement – the image of a wave breaking.
- iii Make vibrating movements – the image of water tumbling around the body.
- iv Try to think of the shape of the whole movement pattern. Return to the starting position and repeat the sequence.

f Whole class work

- i Running forwards – image of waves breaking on the beach.
- ii Running backwards – as waves retreat and small pebbles are moved.

Staging a Play in a Day

Most primary schools put on at least one long production a year. However, a very rewarding educational experience can be had by putting on a 'Play in a Day'. A play in a day is an immensely enjoyable, instructive, educational and interesting day. In a small school every child and adult can be involved for every minute of the whole day. In a larger primary school this is a venture that a class, year group or section can undertake. It actually covers National Curriculum Attainment Targets as you will see as you go through this material.

Choosing a director

If you are lucky enough to have a community-spirited local actor or director contact them. If they are able and willing to give up a day to join you a treble benefit is gained:

- you have a director without taking a member of the school staff from the production team
- an outside director can bring insights to both your school and your pupils and an abundance of fresh ideas which will generate enthusiasm in staff and pupils alike
- they will bring professional expertise to your performance.

However, do not be dismayed if a member of staff is the only available director. This is an opportunity for a perhaps unsuspected talent to emerge. A third option is to ask a capable pupil to direct, but provide staff back-up all day.

Setting the scene

About two weeks before Play Day introduce the concept of a 'Play in a Day' to those participating. Ask the children to make up a list of all the tasks that will have to be addressed (technology, English). Invitations, with reply slips, should be sent to parents and governors.

Choosing the play

- ▼ In the week before the play ask the children to write a story each. Set parameters for this story:
 - it must be interesting
 - something must happen
 - whatever happens has to be able to be presented dramatically by children in the available space
 - the time span must be short
 - the story itself must be of a reasonable length (a 12 minute performance is optimum)
 - the cast size must be appropriate to the numbers you have chosen to involve, eg it is no good including hundreds of chanting citizens if you only have a class of 30 for the whole project. A sixth of the class is a good number to aim for in the cast.
- ▼ After the stories have been written, delegated members of staff must read them all and make a selection of the best six (not necessarily the best writers of course, but the best stories or ideas that can be translated into a script).