

SATIPS

Support and training in Prep, Primary and Senior Schools



Editorial

Welcome back to the new school year! I hope you had a refreshing holiday and are excited by the new opportunities that lay ahead.

During my summer holidays I visited Japan and experienced a traditional Kabuki performance. As a result, I was inspired to focus this edition on theatre traditions.

Hopefully you will be inspired to incorporate some into your drama classroom.

Kirsty Savage, Editor

Kabuki

As an avid traveller, I love experiencing different countries and cultures. Over the summer, whilst in Japan, I grabbed the opportunity to view a traditional Kabuki performance in the principal theatre of Tokyo – Kabuki-za. Kabuki is a highly stylized performing art which combines acting, dancing, and music in an extraordinary spectacle of form, colour, and sound.

Donned with a portable translator, my husband and I were transported into ancient Japan as soon as the curtains opened. We were enthralled by the classic storytelling along with flamboyant costumes, elaborate make-up and exaggerated body movements.

To our surprise, during the performance, we heard customary shouts from various corners of the audience. The names of the stars on stage were called out to give them praise and encouragement.

The invaluable experience was an interesting insight into the Japanese culture of yesteryear and the world of the samurai.

Have you ever incorporated Kabuki theatre into your drama scheme? If so, I would love to hear from you.

Greek Theatre

To coincide with the Year 4 study of Greece, I teach the art of Greek theatre. After a discussion of

Contents

- 12** Editorial
- 12** Kabuki
- 12** Greek Theatre
- 13** Creating your own chorus
- 13** Presenting a narrative in chorus
- 13** Melodrama
- 13** Acting style
- 13** YOU!
- 14** One word improvisations
- 14** Stock characters
- 14** Improvisation



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the key features, including the role and function of the Greek chorus and staging, I incorporate the following exercises in to my unit:

Creating your own chorus

1. Divide the class into groups of four or five and stand in a diamond formation with four corners. Everyone must face one direction; thus the corner person in front becomes the chorus leader.

2. The leader leads the group in walking around the space while maintaining the original diamond formation and distance between each member.

3. Whenever the leader calls 'change' she or he turns to face someone in a corner and they become the new leader, who then takes over. Gradually try to achieve this changeover without speaking.

4. When the groups are moving together with ease, the leader offers a gesture or action - either on the spot or while moving. The chorus mirrors every action the leader initiates. Eventually, experiment with different levels, movements on the spot and across the space.

Presenting a narrative in chorus

1. By using a well-known nursery rhyme or short story, create your own chorus-based narrative to present to the class (in groups of five or six). The chorus can:

- Tell the story by speaking the lines together, or alternating among the group and by using gestures and symbolic movements.
- Step into role and act out short scenes as characters.
- Make extra comments on the action directly to the audience.

I have also employed the same steps with 'The Riddle of the Sphinx' and various excerpts from Sophocles.

The unit is concluded with a performance of the Greek myth 'Daedalus and Icarus' whereby the children choreograph their own performance.

Melodrama

Presently, my Year 6 students are studying the life and times of the Victorians, so, for the first time, I am going to teach Victorian melodrama - a style characterised by exaggerated emotions, stereotypical characters and interpersonal conflicts.

Standard melodrama includes:
stock characters
exaggerated dramatic tension
sensational scenes
high emotions
comic scenes
a happy ending
music
a moral

After learning about Victorian stages and comparing today's films and television, here are some of the exercises in which the students participate:

Acting Style

Externalising Emotions

1. Everyone stands in a circle facing outward.

2. The teacher calls out an emotionally charged word such as fear, love evil desperation or misery. Each student repeats the word loudly using only his/her tone of voice to present the meaning of the word.

3. The teacher then calls out the word a second time. Each student repeats the word once more, this time using both tone of voice and one large gesture to present the meaning.

4. This exercise is repeated, but this time the students respond using highly exaggerated tones of voice, gestures and facial expressions to present the given emotion. Freeze each 'emotional portrayal' for 3 seconds.

YOU!

1. Everyone stands in a circle facing outward.

2. The teacher instructs the group to show different emotions (for example: anger, disbelief, horror, joy and surprise) by only using one word 'you' with melodramatic use of voice gesture and facial expression, according to the given emotion.

3. Alternate students leave the circle and face a partner (A and B). The teacher repeats the emotion A adopts a pose to represent the word and freezes.

4. B adopts a complimentary pose and both form a tableau.
(For example, B may kneel as if begging for forgiveness.)

One-word Improvisations

1. Divide the class into groups of three or four to devise an improvisation.

2. Each 'line' of dialogue used is to be only one word. It may be 'yes', 'no', 'what?', 'where?', 'when?', 'who?', 'why?' and so on.

3. Give the children 5-10 minutes to prepare a one minute improvisation (based on a very simple story) in which each person expresses his/her 'lines' as if they are an actor in a melodrama. (For example, the villain kidnaps the heroine and is discovered in the act by the hero.) They should then present their scene to the rest of the class.

Stock Characters

Melodramas feature 'stock characters' which usually include : a villain, hero, heroine and comic character.

Improvisation

1. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Each person becomes one of the following characters: villain, victim, hero or heroine.

2. Create an imaginative tableau depicting a highly dramatic scene in which each character has a crucial role in the action.

3. Each child decides on one line that suits his or her character and the situation.

4. The group then deliver their lines with appropriate actions and then return to the tableau. They should practise the scene for a few moments before presenting it to the class.

Afterwards, the children write and perform their own melodramas. In the future, I would love to create some black and white films based on the children's own script writing.