

SATIPS

Support and training in Prep, Primary and Senior Schools

Drama

Editorial

Warm greetings to all SATIPS Drama readers. What an honour to take the baton from the great Andrew Pope, who I'm sure has inspired many of you over the past 94 (!!!) editions.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Kirsty Savage and I am currently the Head of Drama and English at St. Helen's College in Hillingdon. During my career I have taught both primary and secondary drama in the independent and state sectors.

Hopefully you will continue to be inspired and equipped with new ideas for your classrooms. I encourage you all to email any interesting articles you have regarding outstanding drama practice.

Drama Classroom Visuals and Supports

I utilise two major visuals in my Drama classroom, the first being the class agreement and the second being my Drama terminology chart.

The drama class agreement is a visual reference that covers all the areas in which a lesson can be disrupted. Children can easily be put back on task by referring to one of the following:

Concentration
Cooperation
Communication

The second visual reminder that I use is a drama terminology and key words chart. It enables the children to consolidate the use of correct drama terminology, rather than everyday language. Please let me know if you use visuals cues for classroom management or to develop knowledge in your classroom.

Drama and Filming

Over the past few years I have endeavoured to increase the use of film in my Drama lessons. My aim has not just been for the end product, but also for the benefit for self and peer reflection. I realise that even the thought of using technology would frighten quite a few teachers, but the positives definitely outweigh the negatives.

During a recent school 'Drama Week' I held a scriptwriting competition whereby the winning script would be filmed. Encouraged by the incentive of writing and directing their very own film, as predicted, the children whole-heartedly embraced the competition. To add to the excitement, we also invited a guest speaker, a real-life film director, to speak about his work and award 'Oscars' to the winning entrants.



Other filming lessons have involved Year 6 students performing excerpts from Macbeth with puppets created in Art lessons. In addition, my Year 4 students created their very own TIE videos to educate younger students on subjects of their choice. Fortunately I was able to collaborate with the Head of IT, so that the children could edit their own films in ICT lessons. These films were then shown to the younger years.

This year I aim to further develop my use of film and have my Drama classes, in groups, film their own performances on tablets, so that they take ownership and self-evaluate their performances.

Finding the right play

It's always the same problem as a school play producer – finding the right play to fit the talents of your cast. You need to find something that will stretch them rather than bore them, give those with ability a chance to show their talents to an audience, and also most crucially find something with an appropriate theme / subject matter for a prep school cast.

It isn't easy – so many plays are written with either a primary (up to Year 6) market or a secondary (up to age 16 market) that the senior end of a typical prep school falls somewhere in the middle. 🍷

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Primary school plays can be rather babyish for Year 7 & 8 pupils, and secondary school plays can be a little too adult. About twenty five years ago I co-produced with the Head of English at my then prep school and we faced exactly the same issue. I rather casually said when we were scratching our heads as to what to do that I had had a vague idea for a play, to which he retorted “Why don’t you get on and write it then!”, or words to that effect. The result was “The Scottish Play”.

Since then I have written three more for Mount House in Devon: “Sherwood”, “Sherlock Holmes & the Secret of Immortality” and “The Scarlet Pipistrelle”. I make no claims as to their literary or dramatic merit, save that they seemed to do the trick: actors were stretched, audiences were entertained, and they seemed to “work”. All were written as affectionate pastiches of existing tales or characters which happen to be particular favourites of mine. Personally, I have described my writing style as a cross between “Morecambe & Wise” and “Carry On”, so perhaps that gives you some idea. I was perhaps lucky that in the year I produced “Sherwood”, the BBC launched their “Robin Hood” Saturday night series. Complete coincidence, but certainly something that helped gee up the interest of the cast.

Having recently retired from the classroom, and following encouragement from parents and colleagues I have decided to put my scripts “out there”, and have created a website www.walkietalk.co.uk to market them. I hope that colleagues might find something that suits their school. Otherwise, if you are contemplating writing your own, I would always recommend writing about something that you love. Parody one of your favourite books, write about one of your favourite periods of history or about one of your favourite personalities. Above all, keep it simple. Not too many scenes, as scene changes are complicated, and certainly not too many sets. It’s easy to get carried away, but the simple reality we have to face is that we don’t produce at the Palladium, and our facilities are limited! Whatever you choose, the very best of luck – break a leg!

Artsmark

Often, over the summer holidays, I research new ways of bringing life to my current Drama curriculum. In my search, I discovered the ‘Artsmark’ award. Delivered by Trinity College, Artsmark is a programme that enables schools to analyse, enhance and celebrate the arts within schools. In addition, it raises the public profile of a school or setting in the eyes of prospective students, their families and across the wider community.

Having not heard of the award previously, I decided to go along to an introductory meeting. Surprisingly, I was the only representative from the independent sector.

As the Artsmark representative explained the process my initial thoughts were, ‘We already do this...and more.’

We literally had to do no extra Arts activities for the award, just sit down as an Arts team and brainstorm each of the Arts activities that fall under the required categories. Luckily we had the luxury of being assisted by our lovely Director of Communications and Marketing who typed our responses to the required questions.

In the independent sector we excel in Drama and the arts. Why not be awarded for something we already do? Not only will it be a reward for the hard work and effort you have put into your subject area, but it will help promote the public profile of your school.

Top Teacher Tip!

During improvisation tasks children are often scared of ‘silences’. To promote the use of silence and non-verbal communication to increase tension, I use a bell to indicate when I want the children to stop and start speaking.