

Workshop four: 'Getting into character' – bringing the script to life with expressive performance

Learning objectives

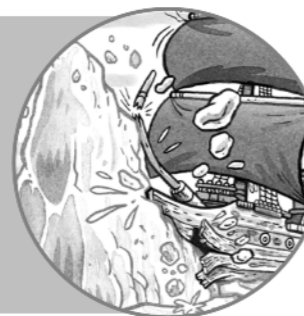
We are learning to:

- Perform a scripted scene making use of dramatic conventions (Y5);
- Improvise using a range of drama strategies (Y6).

Learning outcomes

I can:

- Show how a character might react at key points in the play;
- Improvise an interview situation with characters in role.



Getting started

Remind the children of the ground rules and your agreed signal for 'stop'.

Warming up (whole class)

Begin by playing a version of the game 'Port/starboard' or 'The story of the Southern Seas'.

Port/starboard

One player is chosen as Captain Greenbeard and they call out orders to the rest of the class who are the crew. The crew must follow the orders of the captain correctly. The last player to follow a command can be 'clapped in irons' (they have to stand in a designated area) for the count of 20.

You and the children can make up your own orders. Here are some to get you started:

Port: Run to the left side of the boat.

Starboard: Run to the right side of the boat.

Bow: Run to the front of the boat.

Stern: Run to the back of the boat.

Hit the deck: Lie down.

Attention on deck: Salute and yell, 'Aye, aye, Captain Greenbeard!' The crew must remain at attention, and ignore all other commands, until the captain says, 'At ease!'

Scrub the deck: Get down on knees and scrub.

Shark! Run to a safe 'island'.

Penguins!: Waddle with 'flippers' outstretched to a safe 'island'.

The story of the Southern Seas

Start off by saying 'I sailed to the Southern Seas and I saw an albatross'. The next person repeats the first line and adds something new, this time beginning with the next letter of the alphabet: 'I sailed to the Southern Seas and I saw an albatross and a blue whale.'

You can vary this game by throwing a bean bag around the circle. The catcher has to continue the story. Allow the children to be inventive in their choice. Try changing topics, for example, 'I sailed on The Flying Porpoise and I took ...'

Focus (group work)

Ask the children to work in groups of three and to take on the roles of Captain Greenbeard, Poll Ooshun and a TV reporter. Invite them to improvise a live TV **interview** (see page 16) in which the reporter asks them to explain their actions. Encourage the interviewer to come up with their own questions, but you could suggest the following:

To Greenbeard: Why do you want to stop Poll? What might happen if she is successful? What is your hope for the world?

To Poll: Why are you sailing to Deception Island and what do you hope to do there? Are you persuaded by the Captain not to go? What are your motives for going?

Encourage the children to swap roles and try the interview technique again. This time the characters can be Briny Surfrider and Tim Burr.

Development (group work)

Allow a few minutes for the children to work in groups of three and to read the second half of Scene Two in which Poll taunts Greenbeard while Tim and Syd try to avoid the impending collision with the iceberg.

Begin with these lines on page 18 of the playscript:

Tim: Ahoy there, Captain! The Porpoise has gone about. Port side. I reckon we've shaken her off!

End with the lines on page 19 of the playscript:

Poll: Make space in the lifeboats for one more. Poll Ooshun's jumping in!

After the read through invite several children to try out the following lines from page 18 of the playscript. Point out any effective body language, for example, hands on hips or shaking a fist.

'Can't stand the heat, eh, Greenbeard?'
'Fallen off your surfboard, Surfrider?'
'Going back to play splashy-splashy with the kiddies in the shallows?'

Now ask the children to work in pairs and to take turns to try taunting each other in the character of Poll. Those playing the part of Greenbeard should not respond during the improvisation.

Ask a few pairs to demonstrate their work to the rest of the class. Can the observers say what worked well and why? Remind them to comment on body language as well as tone of voice. Return to the script and for the second reading ask the children to stand a few metres apart from each other. Poll should be looking out to sea at The Flying Porpoise. Tim and Syd are looking in the opposite direction at the iceberg. Tim and Syd sound fairly in control to begin with, but become increasingly alarmed. Poll gets more and more outrageous in her taunts of Greenbeard and ignores Tim and Syd until she finally notices the horror of the collision.

Performance

The groups will need time to rehearse their scenes before showing the rest of the class. Ask the audience to comment on:

- Where were the actors looking? Was Poll looking in a different direction from Tim and Syd?
- How did the scene build up in tension? How could you tell that the atmosphere switched from control to panic?
- Did the actors show how they were feeling through their bodies as well as by their words?

If you have time, you can consolidate the techniques and learning from Workshops three and four by staging all the action from Scene Two as the two ships race across the sea. Ask for volunteers to take on the speaking parts and divide the rest of the class into the two crews. Remind them to 'freeze' when the action is taking place on the other ship.

Plenary

Ask the children: What techniques can an actor use to reveal the character he or she is playing? How can actors add to the drama even when they are not speaking? What have you tried today that has worked well and why did it go well?

Self-evaluation sheets are provided on pages 47 and 48.

You can also use Smart Scripts for a full performance...go to www.smart-learning.co.uk/scriptsamples to download ideas for assemblies