

Do you sometimes feel that the speaking tasks you do with learners are not as interesting as they could be? This might mean you need to introduce an element of drama into these activities. This lesson lets you know what extra qualities drama can provide for students while outlining some key ingredients and ideas for using drama successfully in the classroom.

Task 1 – Bad memories

Harry and Lee are talking in the staffroom.

Harry: I need some new ideas for speaking.

Lee: What about using some drama activities?

Harry: Drama? You mean like putting on plays?

Lee: No.

Harry: And lying on the floor imagining that you're a rock or something?

Lee: It doesn't have to be like that.

Harry: I had to do all that at high school – I hated it.



Do you agree with Harry? Why (not)?

Jot down your thoughts on a note pad, then check the answer key below.



Task 1 Feedback

A lot of teachers have very negative associations with the word 'drama' and Harry's attitude is quite typical. However, drama can encompass a wide range of activities beginning with role play, which even a teacher like Harry won't find too threatening!

Key Skill

Two core concepts lie at the heart of successful drama activities: character and conflict. It is useful to apply these concepts to many speaking activities. Students need to know who they are when they do a speaking activity – they need a sense of *character*; and they need to have a reason to speak to one or more students and *conflict* will provide this.

Task 2 – What does drama offer?



Numbers 1 to 6 below are all opportunities that drama provides students with. Letters a to f gives a reason why drama does this. Match the reason to the opportunities.

Opportunities	Reasons
1. Motivation and confidence	
2. Appropriate language use	
3. Meaningful pronunciation practice.	
4. Speaking fluency practice.	
5. Receptive skills practice.	
6. Writing practice.	

Reasons

- a. Drama activities connect language to emotions and feelings. These are often expressed by means of stress and intonation.
- b. A majority of drama activities involve oral interaction of some kind so they ensure that practice in this skill is very much to the fore.
- c. Sometimes students will script a scene before they perform it and focus a little more on the accuracy of the communication.
- d. Drama is an opportunity for shy students to hide behind the mask of another character. They often enjoy this and feel more comfortable speaking than they do when asked to personalise language.
- e. If students are playing different characters, there is a chance the characters will have different social status. Students will need to choose the right language items to reflect their character's status.
- f. Reading or listening texts can provide a stimulus for ideas and act as a good jumping off point for drama activities.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

In summary, it is possible to say that drama activities are very focused on meaningful oral communication. They can be process orientated and involve role plays and games that are threaded through a teaching programme. Alternatively, they can be more product orientated which means work on the activities can lead to some kind of performance in front of peers or other students in your institution.

Task 3 – What does it take?



Letters 1 to 8 outline some of the ingredients that go into making an effective drama-based session for students. Letters a to h provide more detail on these ingredients. Match the details to the ingredients, then sort them into two categories: ingredients that are essential or ingredients that will probably be required.

Ingredients	
1. Some kind of visual stimulus	2. Student willingness to take part
3. Some silent times during the session	4. Group trust
5. An appropriate space	6. Some non-verbal interaction
7. A change in the teacher's role	8. Physical touching

Detail

- a. Drama often involves what is not said and looks, reactions and gestures are important.
- b. This may be awkward or uncomfortable for people from some cultures.
- c. You might need to move all the chairs and tables in your classroom to the side of the room.
- d. This can help generate ideas as can music.
- e. He or she should be more of a “facilitator/participant” and less of a “knower”.
- f. Drama activities are not things that can be forced on students.
- g. Individuals can find some of these activities a bit threatening, so it helps to provide a secure environment.
- h. Students need time to prepare their ideas as well as their language.

Essential ingredients and detail	Ingredients probably required and detail

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

A common theme amongst the essential requirements for successful drama activities is that care is taken with interpersonal relationships and roles. Students need to be active and involved in the activities, but respectful and supportive of each other. The teacher has a core role in setting the tone and making the learning environment a constructive one. However, it is also worth noting that this should be the case with any lesson.

Task 4 – A selection of activities



Numbers 1 to 8 are brief descriptions of some typical drama activities (this is an extremely limited selection – refer to the “Find out more” section to get more ideas). Letters a to h are broad aims that can be matched to the activity ideas.

Descriptions	Aims
1. One student is blindfolded and another student guides the blindfolded student through a simple obstacle course of upturned chairs and tables. The leading student may or may not take the blindfolded student’s hand.	
2. Students read a newspaper article that tells some kind of story (e.g. a bank robbery, a wedding ceremony that goes wrong). Students re-enact the story each assuming the role of one of the characters. The re-enactment should be improvised.	
3. Students choose a photograph of a person and build up a character for that person thinking of a background and something that the character wants. The teacher describes a place and students assume the role of their character to improvise a scene with one or two other students.	
4. Students watch a scene from a TV drama or soap opera that they are not familiar with. The sound is turned off. Students work on writing the dialogue for the scene, then they can act it out before listening to the original version.	
5. Two students stand opposite each other. One is nominated as the “leader” He or she begins moving. The other student follows the leader’s movement. Both students should ensure they maintain eye contact.	
6. Students work in small groups. One student mimes a story (her own or one provided by the teacher) and the other students in the group tell the story. The student who mimes only accepts a correct version of her story.	
7. Students are given a script of a scene – either from a play or something the teacher has written. They rehearse the scene for presentation. If time allows, they could try and memorise the lines of the scene.	
8. Students improvise some kind of role play “in tune” with different pieces of music. Their interaction should alter in reaction to the rhythm and melody of each piece of music.	

Aims

- a. To provide practice in developing a character and his/her motivation in a scene.
- b. To develop spatial and physical awareness in students.
- c. To provide opportunities to work on pronunciation, in particular stress and intonation, and link it clearly to meaning.
- d. To develop awareness of dramatic light, shade and texture.
- e. To build trust between students for other drama activities.
- f. To provide practice in multi-character dramatic story telling.
- g. To develop awareness of gesture, expression and body language as a means of communication.
- h. To provide practice in creating dramatic structure through language.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Think over different speaking activities you have done over the past few months. Did some of them involve some element of drama, for example, a role play of some kind? Think about some of the ideas you have explored in this lesson and work out if there is any way you could have increased the sense of drama in these activities.

Note your observations in your *Teaching log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Try out one of the activities in task 4 that is new to you.

Want to find out more ... ?

The following book is an excellent source of ideas for drama activities: *Drama Techniques: A Resource Book of Communication Activities for Language Teachers (3rd edition)* by Alan Maley and Alan Duff (Cambridge University Press 2005).

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- **Unit 3 e) Speaking 1: Fluency:** *Discusses how different kinds of speaking activities can help get your students talking.*
- **Unit 3 f) Speaking 2: Strategies:** *Discusses useful skills and strategies associated with successful oral communication.*

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

1. d
2. e
3. a
4. b
5. f
6. c

Task 3 – Feedback

essential ingredients and <i>detail</i>	ingredients probably required and <i>detail</i>
<p>2. Student willingness to take part <i>f. Drama activities are not things that can be forced on students.</i></p> <p>4. Group trust <i>g. Individuals can find some of these activities a bit threatening, so it helps to provide a secure environment.</i></p> <p>5. An appropriate space <i>c. You might need to move all the chairs and tables in your classroom to the side of the room.</i></p> <p>7. A change in the teacher’s role <i>e. He or she should be more of a “facilitator/participant” and less of a “knower”.</i></p>	<p>1. Some kind of visual stimulus <i>d. This can help generate ideas as can music.</i></p> <p>3. Some silent times during the session <i>h. Students need time to prepare their ideas as well as their language.</i></p> <p>6. Some non-verbal interaction <i>a. Drama often involves what is not said and looks, reactions and gestures are important.</i></p> <p>8. Physical touching <i>b. This may be awkward or uncomfortable for people from some cultures.</i></p>

Task 4 – Feedback

1. e
2. f
3. a
4. h
5. b
6. g

7. c

8. d