

## Ten Ways to Build Drama from a Source

Print can be the starting point for dramatic improvisation, and dramatic work can lead to a greater understanding of print. Drama becomes the medium for the exploration of the ideas, relationships, and the language of the print source. The situation from a story or poem can serve as a beginning point for drama and may deepen and enrich the learning experience. We need to consider the source carefully for dramatic possibilities: for issues, concepts, or problems to be solved that might absorb the students' attention. We then need to consider the conventions we will choose to extend ideas and themes from the source and structure drama work.

### **1. Raise Questions**

Questions can stimulate the students, helping the students to go beyond what they already know. Questions are used both inside and outside the drama, both in role and out of role, to give purpose, direction and shape to the learning activities. Students can work as a large group, or in small groups to brainstorm questions inspired by a text that can be answered through further drama exploration. Questions can be discussed orally or written down. Questions can also be used by the teacher to deepen belief and commitment and help students to reflect on the work and on their personal views.

### **2. Explore Time**

The group considers scenes that take place in the present and then brainstorms events that might have taken place in the near or distant past to explain or give background information to a conflict. Alternatively, the class can consider events that might take place in the near or distant future to predict how an issue will develop or be resolved.

### **3. Select a Role to Play**

When a teacher works in role, she or he adopts a set of attitudes to work with the students. While acting is not required, the teacher must alter his or her status in the classroom to help students explore issues or examine possible directions that a drama may take. Depending on the role that the teacher takes, she or he can extend the drama, focus attention, challenge the class, suggest alternatives, support contributions, slow the action and clarify information in order to enhance the commitment, the language, and the thoughts and feelings of students as they work in a fictional context.

### **4. Build a Community**

A source may offer the group the dilemmas of a single character or of a group of characters. Drama is about exploring different points of view and a community can be invented where students choose to create and become different characters who live in the community, work together, or are involved in a common mission.

### **5. Interview Characters**

Characters are interviewed by reporters in order to question their motives, values, and beliefs or to elicit more facts about a given situation. This can be done in pairs, in small groups, or with the whole class. Interviews can be conducted in role by the teacher.

## **6. Tell Stories**

Storytelling can provide the initial starting point for the drama. It can reveal an unexplained idea in a familiar story, it can focus details, it can serve as a review of what has already taken place, or it can be a way to build an understanding of character and situation. In drama, stories can be told in and out of role to express concerns, ideas, and feelings about a situation. Stories can be told alone or with others, can be written or created visually, can be enacted through voice and movement. Students can enact a story to represent what they have experienced; elaborate the story, building on its key events or issues; or invent a story, creating new stories from old ones.

## **7. Conduct a Meeting**

The group gathers together within the drama to hear new information, plan action, make collective decisions, and suggest strategies to solve problems that have arisen. The teacher can lead the meeting by assuming a role, or a committee can chair the proceedings without the presence of the teacher.

## **8. Create Still Images/Tableaux**

Working alone, with a partner, or in small groups, students create a still image, or series of images using their bodies to crystallize a moment or an idea in the drama. By creating a frozen picture(s) with others, students are required to discuss, negotiate, and make a decision about images that will communicate or represent their ideas to depict a story or theme.

## **9. Read Text Aloud**

Texts—including excerpts of texts—can be offered to groups to be read aloud. Groups can work together to prepare a reading that experiments with pace, pause, emphasis, voice, and gesture. Members of the group can make decisions about assigning parts that could be read aloud as solos, with others or in unison. When students interpret texts, they not only enhance their skills of reading aloud, but through rehearsal, come to explore strategies for presenting text. The construction of the read-aloud can be shared with others to give information or give form to situations or issues presented in the drama.

## **10. Write in Role**

Letters, diary entries, journals, or messages from a single character or a number of characters can be used to introduce the drama by creating tension or giving information. Writing samples can provide evidence or reveal insights about a character's motivation. Writing-in-role can also help students to engage in expressive and reflective aspects of drama, drawing on their own life meanings and experiences. Drama also provides opportunities for collective writing, in which groups collaborate on a mutual enterprise—cooperating in collecting data, organizing information, revising and editing—to be used in the subsequent drama work.