Chapter 3: Exploring Stories through Dramatic Activities

How do we make drama happen? What techniques can we use to build its power, to increase its significance, so that the students participate willingly, work effectively in the art form, and recognize the value of their work?

The Basis of All Drama

Tension is the secret, the mystery, the surprise, the dangling carrot, the time frame, and the space limit. We need to apply pressures of some kind so that the students engaged in the drama will know the urgency of solving the problem or of making the decision at hand.

• We can introduce a surprising or shocking experience into the drama. For example, we can foreshadow that one of the people in the great canoe will die. The shock may force the students into rethinking what they were going to do.

• We can pull the experience in the opposite direction to where it seems to be going. In a plan where the class in role were to take over a community by appearing in the early morning fog, we tell them the fog has disappeared, the sky is clear, and we are in view of the enemy village.

• We can place special demands on the role players: they will have to solve a riddle so they can gain the right to speak to the wise one; they will have to speak in a way that the king will accept, using carefully chosen language to influence him.

• As teachers, we can make things difficult for the students: only one person knows the combination for the safe, or the swans will return earlier than normal because of the eclipse of the sun.

• We can also ask students to become the experts in a field: those who have information on a particular animal that is almost extinct, or those who understand a people’s culture on an island we are about to visit.

• One of the most effective tensions is to slow down the work deliberately by asking the students to reflect within the drama on what has happened. For example, we may see three plans enacted in order to choose only one of them: (1) we can rehearse the battle with the monster to check the state of our weapons; (2) we can use a flashback or a
flashforward to heighten the choices that we must make; and (3) we can require careful planning exercises using chart paper and markers.

What we want to do with these strategies is elevate the students’ feelings and ideas, so that the ensuing drama will be stronger. We are creating an elaborate context for what has happened, not only responding in action but with reflection. Of course, by working in role as teachers, we can offer many more tensions than we could if we were only at the front of the room. Just being able to say, “When I was a young child in this village, I remember something similar happening,” adds other directions for the drama to follow.

**Role playing**

When students role-play, they are propelled into dramatic situations requiring them to think, explore, and interact within a framework of attitudes that may differ from their own. This process helps them gain insight into the motives and feelings of other people within the drama’s context. They can be others like themselves, different from themselves, older, younger, more powerful, a different gender, from another place, richer or poorer. They can role-play.

Role playing in groups requires each participant to interact with others, to adjust their in-role responses to the cues of the other players. In doing so, they can learn to work with and respect the ideas of others, while negotiating their own responses. What a powerful tool for teaching students to listen to one another!

It may be useful to assign a role to a particular student if that student repeatedly chooses to play the same sort of role, or if it seems advisable for the student to experience role-playing a type of person unfamiliar to him or her. Degree of involvement with assigned roles may be lower than with roles students choose for themselves, though. It is advisable for teachers to try to strike a balance between the two.

“The playing” in role enables students to join in, to learn by experimenting, to take on different attitudes, and to see how others respond. Role playing is the basis of all drama. When students find the heart of their roles, they will have created drama.

**Demonstration: The Emperor’s New Clothes—Roles for the Playing**

The old story “The Emperor’s New Clothes” can provide a basis for many situations that call for role playing. It may be helpful to have the class retell what they remember of the story, and to brainstorm all the roles and incidents that could serve as resources for story drama. The following examples reveal possibilities open to you and your students in exploring a story through drama. (There are numerous other scenarios.)

- You are workers building the special loom on which the marvellous fabric is to be woven. Create the loom with movement and sound. (Groups of 8 to 10)
• You are the swindlers putting on a good show of how diligently and carefully you work at weaving, cutting out, and sewing these garments. (Pairs of students)

• You are the emperor and the two swindlers dressing the emperor for the great procession. The tailors can describe aloud the clothes they are presenting. (Groups of three)

• You are the emperor’s entourage (in a tableau or frozen picture) taking part in the procession. (Groups of 10)

• You are the parade marshal planning the procession for the rest of the class, who will create the parade. You describe who will be in it, what the parade route will be, and in what order people will walk in the procession. (Students individually volunteer as parade marshal.)

• You are the emperor’s elderly chief counsellor visiting the swindlers. You make excuses for having trouble seeing the material. (Groups of three)

• You are members of a committee representing the citizens of the empire whose emperor spends such huge sums on his clothes. There are a number of building projects, community undertakings, and so forth that need tending to. You go in a group of three to the emperor to present your case on behalf of the empire. Will the emperor and his advisers reluctantly decide to fund one of the projects? (Whole class)

• You, the emperor, have spent the entire empire’s treasury on clothes for yourself. Now you must go to the bank for a loan. You must secretly try to convince the bank president that you will be a good credit risk. The bank president is a “shrewd” operator. (Pairs of students)

• You are the emperor’s garment workers, and you are exhausted from trying to make all the new clothes the emperor has ordered. You complain as you work. Finally, you decide to go on strike. (Whole class)

• You are the emperor holding a press conference some time after the incident with the swindlers. Reporters still have questions about what happened, but they must be careful in asking them so as not to provoke your anger. You enlist the aid of your chief counsellor in answering the questions. (Whole class)

The following two books contain helpful and wide-ranging descriptions of the conventions that we can use to build drama with students:


With Drama in Mind: Real Learning in Imagined Worlds by Patrice Baldwin

Strategies for Building a Character

Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode note that the experience of drama requires teachers to use forms and structures that engage both the intellect and the emotions in making and representing collaborative meaning. In their book, Structuring Drama Work, they have collected and described dozens of conventions that can be used in planning and implementing a drama lesson, or in developing a drama unit. Throughout this book, you will meet some of these conventions, along with strategies and techniques to support you in constructing drama with your students. As you work in drama, you will discover other modes of representing meaning,
and your repertoire of ideas for containing and shaping the work will expand and become refined.

**Role on the Wall:** Use a life-size outline of a human figure as a cut-out or drawing as the basis for recording the qualities of characters in the drama. The students can read or add statements inside and outside the figure to record and represent a collective understanding of the character’s life and attitudes as it develops through the drama. The figure can be talked about, walked around, used within the action of the drama, or used as the basis for an improvised scene.

**A Day in the Life:** The class creates a sequence of improvised scenes built around 24 hours in the life of the main character of the drama resource. Groups can prepare scenes revealing the incidents in the character’s life that help explain the inner conflicts that determined the character’s actions and the circumstances. The scenes are then shared in a chronological order, and afterwards, students can revise their scenes from the information gleaned from seeing the entire day’s events.

**Circle of Life:** Aspects of a character’s life are represented in four sections of a circle on a large sheet of paper: (1) Home, (2) Family, (3) Play, and (4) Day. Four groups brainstorm the incidents and information about each of the categories that represent the character’s life, building up a composite picture from the minimal information offered in the resource. These descriptions can form the basis for the improvisation around the story. Each group works with a different section and creates a brief improvised scene that illustrates the life of the character, using the information that they had created within the drama.

**Collective Character:** The entire class works together to represent the nature of one character. As the students take turns in speaking the thoughts and words of the character, the character’s nature will alter, and students will begin to understand the composite picture they are creating.

**Objects of Character:** Items can be brought in (or drawn) to flesh out the character in the drama. The objects or possessions can raise questions for the group who will be interpreting how they fit into the character’s life. The teacher can provide the items, or the students can present them as artifacts necessary to the building of the drama.

**Demonstration: The Red Lion—Exploring Stories of Power**

*The Red Lion* is a picture book by Diane Wolkstein, and in a demonstration lesson with eight-year-olds and a group of teachers, I chose the role of a prince who was not supposed to speak to villagers. This limitation meant that the students in role as my subjects had to go back and forth to the villagers, played by the adults. Their task was to convince the villagers that I should not have to follow a law about killing a red lion in order to gain the power of a king. This concept was taken from the story directly.

During the first lesson, the students took part in a discussion on how to persuade the villagers that the prince should be allowed to do what he
believed and not follow tradition. In pairs, the students as ambassadors then went off to the villagers, who were convinced that the red lion must be killed in the traditional way. The adults as villagers wanted to know why the prince was afraid and what he intended to do to gain power; they then explained that the prince must follow the rules of the land.

Before we next met as a drama class, I prepared some artifacts to support the work. In role as the prince, I called my ambassadors together in order to hear about any problems they might have considered with the villagers. I issued a special badge of honor to each ambassador and through this symbol, the power of the role was heightened. Each student was also presented with a scroll to carry. The scroll partially read, “...kill the lion within.” As prince, I told my ambassadors they were to explain what this meant to the villagers and at our next meeting, report any questions and doubts the villagers expressed.

Finally, in preparation for their journeys, I asked the students to lie on their backs, close their eyes, and listen. I narrated the story of how a mountain was climbed, and deep within a cave the scroll with this message was discovered. The meaning of the scroll’s message, which was addressed to whoever was in charge, caused confusion among the students, but through questioning and discussion, I was able to explore the concept of good versus bad leadership, as well as the ideas of loyalty, bravery, and honesty.

One group of villagers asked if the prince had ever hated or been jealous of anyone. A student role-playing an ambassador explained that these emotions and others like them were the lion within: in order to use power for good, one must destroy the evil or flaws in one’s character. Although this concept may have been difficult for the students to comprehend, what is significant is that through the drama, they could stretch their intellects and strive for something slightly beyond their grasp. We had come a long way from killing a lion.

An alternative solution: In another class where the scroll was not employed, the students decided to draft a letter to take to the villagers to explain the prince’s refusal to fight a lion. They devised an elaborate scheme involving magic, chanting, and the creation of a surrogate prince who was brought forth from a dream along with a surrogate lion. The wrestling of the lion and the prince, in slow motion, was a powerful moment in the lives of those students, and somehow the demand for blood was satisfied by the use of the dream. And in truth, the lion in their story remained alive and the prince was not forced to kill it.

Reflection

I want these types of stories, filled with power, where the ideas surge up from beneath the words. The books I use over and over are full of caves and shadows, subterranean tunnels, springs that bubble up in odd places, people who are never just what they seem, who trigger in us suspicion or surprise or sadness. I need stories that won’t let go, that drag into their midst students who had no intention of entering, students who suddenly grasp the challenge, who at the very least try to escape from the red lion.
These are my stories, ultimately, my dramas. And the tales that the students create lie between the pages of my books, waiting for the next reading, revealing the imprint of the previous class every time I read the author’s words to a new group.

Drama Games

Games present opportunities for drama. For example, the tribe can chant while sitting in a circle, with the sound getting louder as the hunter nears the hunted. The tribe can drum on the floor to accompany the movements of the players, or use rattles or tambourines. The players can wear masks or makeup, or you can change the lighting or use a prop. The words of a game can become the chant the players use to build their drama.

Games can provide students with opportunities to role-play in social situations and to explore unfamiliar relationships. They give them a means of practising on their own and within their own social contexts patterns that will be important in their adult lives. They formalize human interaction processes. As in drama, the players are constantly reversing roles: chasing, being chased, leading, following, shouting, listening, opening the way for understanding social actions and counteractions.

In the drama games that follow, the students are involved and participating with voice and movement.

Monster’s Choice: The students form groups of four. Each group has a monster (“it”), which designates who will be the “prey.” The three non-monsters join hands and face into the centre of the circle. The monster is outside the circle. When a signal is given, the monster tries to see how many times the “prey” can be tagged while the other players try to prevent it. The monster is not allowed to reach into or across the circle. The leader calls “freeze” to stop the action. The remaining two players become the monster and the prey, and the leader begins play again. For the third round, the original monster and prey switch roles, and so on.

The Rattlers: The students form a circle around two players. These two are both blindfolded and each is given a rattle (tin cans and pebbles make good ones). One (the pursuer) is going to try to tag the other (the quarry). The rattlers enter the “snake pit,” and the game begins.

To get a fix on each other’s position, rattlers may shake their rattles at any time, with the second rattler immediately responding by shaking hers. However, the pursuer is allowed to initiate only five shakes to locate the quarry, while the pursued can rattle away as much as she dares.

While making sure that neither of the rattlers wanders out of the snake pit, the other players also participate by helping the pursuer keep count of his shakes and cheering and shouting things charming to snakes. To make the game even more interesting, and to keep the other players from feeling like spectators, the teacher can encourage the onlookers to move around, thereby changing the size and shape of the snake pit.

Mirrors: The students operate in pairs, facing each other. One is the mirror; the other is the initiator of the movement. (It is best to have them start slowly with something simple like an isolated arm, hand, or leg move-
ment.) The student who is the mirror imitates the partner’s movement as exactly as possible. The students switch roles, so each can be both mirror and initiator. It is best to begin with abstract movements at first, rather than specific activities like, for example, combing hair.

Then the activity is done by two, three, or four pairs, with each mirror person copying the person opposite—the building up of group size should be gradual. In a group mirror, students focus on being aware both of who their partners are and of what the whole group is doing. It is difficult to do this because the whole group must behave in unison.

The mirror people may distort the initiators’ movements, as in a fun house at a carnival. The person who is the mirror chooses the type of distortion (making the movement small, big, wide, narrow). The mirror person may experiment with delayed action, so that there is a perceptible pause between the initiator’s movement and the reflection of it.

Photocopying: Students operate in groups of three. Student A closes his or her eyes and keeps them closed. Student B assumes any physical shape she or he wishes. Student C gives Student A directions that will permit Student A to become a physical copy of Student B. Student C uses oral instructions only; no physical assistance is permitted.

Moulding Statues: The students work in pairs. One person is the “clay” and starts in a neutral position, such as standing or squatting. The other person, the “sculptor,” moulds the “clay” into the shape desired. The sculptor may use sounds and movements, but not words or direct physical contact. When the statue is finished and the position memorized, the students reverse roles.

Joining In: In this activity for student pairs, one person starts to lift an imaginary object; then, a partner joins in to help lift and put it down, following mimed cues received from the initiator of the action. The activity continues with the partners changing the objects they are carrying. The object can be light, heavy, small, large, gooey, smelly, expensive, fragile, dangerous, and so on.

Sound Exploration: Each student selects a location and writes down a list of all of the sounds he or she can hear at this location. The students re-create what they have heard, using words, sounds, and musical instruments to create a soundscape. These sounds may be tape-recorded. Some examples of popular soundscape themes are a playground, a gas station, and a factory. In one instance, a Grade 5 class created soundscapes of a haunted house on Hallowe’en.

Dead One, Arise: Variations of this game are found in Sicily and Germany. Choose one person to lie on the ground and be entirely covered with a blanket, sheet, or pile of jackets. The rest of the group walks around the body calling solemnly, “Dead one, arise! Dead one, arise! Dead one, arise!” No one touches the body, and everyone pretends not to look at it. Then, when least expected, the “dead” person answers the call, rushing at those who have done the “resurrecting.” The goal is to touch one of the chanters and make that person the dead one.
• When a victim is caught, he or she joins the “dead” body. Continue until everyone has done so.

• Add music, and perform the game in slow motion.

• Create a story about the dead person—who the person is, how he or she died. Add a ritual to the dramatization in order to indicate that this ceremony is hundreds of years old.

• Extend the story: what happens after the dead person arises?

*How a game can lead into drama*

Games can often be a preliminary activity for a dramatic situation. This example, Knights and Dragons, demonstrates how a game can be developed into drama; it is possible, though, to do the drama activity without the game.

*The game—Catch the dragon’s tail:* One person is assigned to be a dragon and wears a tail (a piece of material or a scarf sticking out from the back of his or her clothes). Two people try to catch the tail as the dragon runs around the room. When the tail is caught by someone, that person becomes “it.”

An extension is for students to make a whole dragon. They line up and join together, each holding on to the waist of the person in front. The line cannot be broken or detached. The scarf becomes the dragon’s “tail.” The head must try to catch the tail; the “tail” is always trying to escape the head.

*Scene I—The dragon problem:* The students are told that a dragon has been terrorizing a king’s people. They must do something about it. The teacher in role as king says, “I am going to call upon my knights to devise a plan to stop the dragon. I have called you because I know you are heroic knights. I want you to tell me what heroic deed you have done to be on my council.” The students respond in role.

The king then tells the students as knights that they each have one magical item or power in order to go out on this mission. Each student explains what the item or power is, how it works, and how it will help slay the dragon.

*Scene II—Meeting with the villagers:* Then the roles are changed. The students are now villagers and the teacher, in role as the king, says, “I want to meet with the villagers to get a better description of the dragon. What harm has been done? What trouble has the dragon caused you and your community?” In a series of tableaux, the students as villagers then create scenes that show how the dragon attacked or upset the village. These tableaux are shown to the king to demonstrate the problem of the dragon in the kingdom.

*Scene III—Return of the knights:* The king calls back the knights. In slow motion, students as knights show how they would slay the dragon, using their magical properties. The knights, in groups of three, report to the king how the dragon was destroyed. They try to convince the king that there will be no more trouble and explain the steps taken to destroy the dragon.
**Story Tableaux**

Story tableaux are frozen pictures, or still images, created in response to a theme, situation, or story. They can crystallize complex or conflicting moments in the drama, allowing students to focus on one significant moment. Participants are often able to interpret or read more into this form of controlled expression. In addition, they learn to contribute to a group effort and gain experience in telling stories and in presenting situations from different points of view.

Here are a few variations on how to approach tableaux:

- **Talking images:** Each member of the frozen picture speaks one line and makes one movement, and as each one takes a turn, those in the picture and those watching gain insight into the issue being presented in the still image.

- **Sculpted images:** A student may mould or sculpt an already existing image to represent individual ideas about the drama being explored, for example: two sides of an issue or the unknown dreams of a character. The student gently moves tableau members into the required positions.

- **Images in series:** Working with a familiar story, a group of four, five, or six students can create two or three images that depict events in the story. Once members identify the high points in the story, they create the series of tableaux. Making smooth transitions from one tableau to the next is important. The groups melt from one tableau to the next as a signal is given. They might also create tableaux based on conflicts, characters, and events “outside” the original story (e.g., a tableau of something that happens just before the story begins or 10 years after the story ends).

- **Mass tableaux:** Students listen to a piece of music, paying attention to the images it suggests to them. The music is played a second time, and any student may go to the centre of the room and assume a position suggested by the music. One by one, the remaining students join the student in the centre to develop a mass tableau. It may be necessary to play the music several times to give everyone time to join in.

- **A prism of images:** A single moment can be represented visually in different ways; for example, the many different gifts given to the king.

- **A pause in the action:** A still image in a drama can be brought to life through improvisation and then frozen again as in a paused video frame.

**Demonstration: The Dream Eater—Making Still Images**

“The Dream Eater,” which is retold in blackline master format, is an excellent source of tableau work. Working in groups of five, students create tableaux of the dreams that disturb the sleep of various characters. When each group has developed its image, the class can observe the tableaux one at a time, until all have been seen.
The Dream Eater

Yukio had a recurring dream each night that he was being chased by a three-headed dream demon riding upon a dragon with 20 eyes. Yukio awoke from his sleep each time the demon was about to devour him. He went to his family for help, but each member that Yukio confronted claimed to have had dreams worse than his.

His father had not slept because he had dreamt that, instead of rice, he had planted bamboo shoots. Without any rice to harvest in the fall, everyone would go hungry, and all because of his foolishness.

Yukio’s mother had not slept for three nights. She too had had a terrible dream. In hers, the winter snow turned everything to ice.

Yukio’s grandfather had dreamt he was a golden fish swimming in a silver sea. In his dream, he was caught in a fisherman’s net and was unable to free himself from the net no matter how he struggled.

Danjuro, the old samurai, told Yukio of his dream that the village was being attacked by fierce bandits riding horses and shooting arrows of fire. Danjuro, in his dream, had only a sword of bamboo with which to fight.

Yukio’s father, mother, and grandfather, and the samurai Danjuro sent Yukio away, saying, “It is the time of dreams, and nothing can be done.” Yukio found a place by the river to sit and be alone to sleep.

Yukio was awakened by a noise made by the strangest of creatures that, while drinking from the river, had fallen head first into the water. “Help,” the creature cried out again and again.

Yukio found a strong vine, which he threw out over the river to rescue the creature. “I owe you my life,” the creature said.

The creature explained that he was a baku. A baku eats dreams and nightmares. To a baku, a bad dream is delicious!

The baku asked the young boy for help to satisfy his great hunger. Yukio gladly led the baku to the village. There the baku ate Danjuro’s dream of bandits, the grandfather’s dream of being caught in a fisherman’s net, the mother’s dream of a harsh winter, and the father’s dream of planting bamboo shoots. They now had pleasant dreams, for the baku had devoured their nightmares.

And when Yukio’s dream of demons and dragons came to him, the baku ate every morsel of the nightmare!

Yukio then dreamed of yellow butterflies tanning him on a hot summer’s day.

The baku, filled with the bad dreams of the villagers, lay contented.
Movement and Dance in Drama

Movement in drama offers students an opportunity to explore and express thoughts and feelings through physical action. It can serve to increase the student’s willingness to get involved in the drama and to encourage interaction with other members of the group. Further, by allowing the students to work creatively and spontaneously, it can enhance the aesthetic learning experience.

Dance drama is movement with the interpretation of a piece of music, a series of sounds, a story, or an emotional theme as its objective. The patterns and rhythms of dance blend with the conflict of the drama, so that the action and feeling of a story are conveyed through movement. Dance drama emphasizes expression rather than form. It can be simple, with each student creating a story independently; or more complex, with groups of students “telling” a story through stylized movement. Dance drama can be supported by music, sound exploration, an accompanying text (either read or narrated), a chant, or costume pieces, such as masks or capes.

Through movement in drama, students develop concentration and physical control; they extend and improve their kinesthetic sense and spatial awareness. The good “group feeling” generated by movement activities promotes the trust in and sensitivity to others required for drama growth.

Movement in drama can be used in these ways:
- as a warm-up or lead-in activity for a lesson
- as a mood setter at the start or finish of a lesson
- within the context of the drama situation
- as a basis or framework on which to build the drama

Moving to music

Building an environment: The students move freely around the room to a piece of selected music. As they move, the teacher tells them they are in a series of different environments and situations: for example, deep snow, sinking sand, a small tunnel, a huge spider web, a dark cave. They adjust their movements accordingly. The students should be given adequate time to explore each new situation, using the whole body.

Telling stories: Music that is strong in evoking images and that offers changes in mood, pace, and rhythm should be selected for this activity. The students find comfortable positions on the floor, close their eyes, and listen to the music. If they have previously taken part in a strenuous physical activity, they will find it easier to relax. After listening to the music, they briefly discuss the images they saw while listening. They then form groups of four, and each student in the group describes the story he or she imagined. The group chooses one student’s story, or parts of each student’s story and, through movement only, tells the story. To encourage slow, graceful movement, it is advisable to play the music throughout the activity and to suggest to the students that the story is a dream.
**Mime**

Mime is dramatic action that depends on gesture and movement rather than on words. It stresses exploration of ideas without dialogue. Its simplicity permits the emergence of thoughts and emotions that are sometimes difficult to convey in words. As a result, mime encourages free and spontaneous expression with the students. They act and respond to what they see, hear, taste, and touch. Mime lends itself equally well to activities for large or small groups, students working in pairs, or students working independently. The use of mime in drama moves students into an “action” mode rather than a “talking” mode, and can reveal specifics about the drama that could go unnoticed.

Mime games can introduce students to the “as if” way of working:

**Passing the Object:** Students sitting in a circle are asked by the teacher to imagine that there is a sink in front of them. They wash their hands. They hold up their hands and think about how they feel. (Often hands feel wet or soapy.) Then, an imaginary object is passed around the circle. If the students want to change the object, they are free to do so, indicating, with mime only, what the new object is.

**The Wounded Bird:** The students sit in a circle. The teacher folds a piece of exercise paper, then says: “We are going to imagine that this is a wounded bird. We will pass it around the circle, and each of you will treat it as such. Let’s see who helps make the bird seem real for us.” When the bird returns to the teacher, she takes it gently and then unfolds the paper with a quick gesture.

**Narration and mime**

Narration and mime can be used within the drama to build mood, to calm students down, or to focus the drama. The students may enact the narrative together, each making a personal response. Or, the students may work in pairs or small groups. The teacher can narrate students through a series of mime activities, building in opportunities for individual choices or decisions.

This activity works well with beginning groups and as a warm-up for experienced groups. Selections may be created to complement a particular curriculum (e.g., science) or chosen and adapted from stories. The selections may be edited to stress the physical action, and dialogue may be added by the students as they extend the mime into drama.

**Rituals**

A ritual is a series of actions or activities done in exactly the same way every time they are performed. In many societies, rituals are believed to have special power and the way in which they are performed takes on great symbolic significance. For example, some early clans or tribes used magic, dancing, masks, or costumes to enhance the power of a ritual. All these aspects would help make the ritual unique.
The rituals of early societies were very important in these peoples’ lives. They brought individuals together, focusing all their thoughts and energy on one activity. Everyone worked towards the same goal. In this way, ritual taught a people what was expected of them, which allowed the group to maintain control and structure. As well, through ritual, the knowledge and beliefs of the society were passed on to future generations. The group experience took over and an understanding shared by all was created.

In a ritual, members of a society enact their hopes and fears. Some societies believed that ritual would influence nature and the gods. For example, before a bear hunt, warriors might act out the killing of the bear, with one hunter being the bear and other hunters the attackers. The people felt that this would make the gods sympathetic to their cause and help in the killing of a bear.

Ritual is also very important to students of drama. For one thing, early primitive rituals were the beginning of formal theatre: the duties of the priest and other participants in the ritual gradually became roles taken on by actors; the other members of the group went from being worshippers to audience members. As well, for students of drama, rituals offer a tremendous source of material for creative work. Students can create their own rituals and use these as part of a drama they are creating, or as the beginning or ending of the drama.

Demonstration: The Bear Hunt—Ritual Making

Primitive men have searched in vain for food for the hungry tribe. It is time for another approach. A medicine man places a bear’s head over the head of a hunter. The hunter growls, uses his hands as though they are paws, and lumbers about. He has become the bear. The other men imitate him, prowl and dance around him, and “hunt” him. They pretend to thrust spears into the bear, which then falls to the ground. The medicine man pretends to cut off the head. With a shout, the head is speared and held high. The medicine man leads the hunters in a dance of triumph. The dancers believe that they have made such strong magic during the dance that they will more easily find food.

In two or three groups (depending upon the size of the class), prepare the ritual of the bear hunt. The ritual should begin slowly and gather momentum as the hunters move in to “kill” the bear. Here are some suggested elements to consider in preparing the drama.

- How will you communicate the feeling of extreme hunger?
- How will you represent the searching of food?
- Will the bear be represented by a single person, a pair, a small group?
- How will the bear move? What will it sound like?
- How will the medicine man be portrayed?
- What are some other roles that the participants could take?
- Will there be standing? crouching? leaping? prowling?
• Will there be dancing?
• Will you imitate the bear’s actions?
• How will the space be used? A circle? A line?
• How will the hunters approach the bear? close in on it? capture it?
• Will you use a drum or any other instrument to beat a rhythm?
• Will any props, costumes, or makeup be used to enhance the ritual?
• Can you create masks for the ceremony?
• How can you create the fierceness and bravery of the hunters?
• What nonverbal sounds will you use? Grunts? Growls? Moans? Humming?
• Will you use any words?
• Will there be places of silence? stillness?
• Will the ritual include the killing of the bear? If so, how will it be handled?
• Will there be some group work that will then be made part of the whole in presenting the ritual?
• How will you end? Quietly? With a yell? Fading out? Building up? With music or chant?

**Ways of Working in Drama**

Drama should involve as many students as possible. Generally, it is best if all the students work with you at the same time in setting up the drama frame and in establishing how the drama can proceed. All variations in grouping are necessary for drama to develop: the student alone, the small group, the whole class.

**Independent work**

Sometimes, the students will work independently without interacting with others. This provides an opportunity for deepening concentration, allows privacy for individual exploration, and minimizes distractions. The class works as a single unit, but with each individual functioning as a part of the whole. (*Each of you is creating a statue for the courtyard of the medieval church. As I walk among you and tap you on the shoulder, show me what you have chosen to create and quietly describe your work to me.*)

Some students seem to demand immediate and continuous involvement and need to be pressed into deeper achievement; others must be persuaded to participate. We must continually accept their efforts and encourage them to extend their involvement. The meanings that will accrue in a student’s life grow from personal involvement and experience.
**Group work**

Sometimes, the students will work in pairs or in small groups, stimulating each other’s thinking and lending support to other members of the group. Each student needs to work with a variety of partners, and the tasks can be carefully designed. There need be little sharing, but groups can demonstrate or depict some of their findings, so that there is a sense of community rather than competition. *(The group can now share with us their plans for getting past the guards at the moat.)*

Working in small groups is an excellent way of developing drama skills. It lets all students be part of the group process, sharing ideas and feelings, perhaps changing their opinions or getting other people to change theirs, and finally reaching an agreement. The learning that happens in drama most often takes place during group exploration, and small groups can cover more ground than large groups can.

In a small-group improvisation, three to five people should take part. This group size allows all of the students to participate and to get to know one another’s strengths. Students should also work with different people at different times, so that they gain the experience of building their roles in different contexts. As you move from group to group, you may sometimes encounter leadership difficulties about such issues as who decides a course of action or plays which role. Remember that each individual must feel part of the group, so by negotiating with the members of each group, you can find ways for all of them to become part of the dramatic action.

There are ways to strengthen the group work. You can move about the room, questioning groups, challenging ideas, promoting deeper thought, communicating ideas between groups, resetting a problem, defining a focus. You may structure the task-centred problem—solving in pairs or in small groups, encouraging student-to-student interaction. While working with the students in various groups, you can play a different role with each group.

I have learned, though, that it is important to call the groups back together to check on what has been happening. “What discussion has your group had?” “Did everyone agree?” “What caused your group to think this way?” “Do you agree with what the other groups have said?” The students must feel that what occurred during the group time was important to them personally and to the drama activity as a whole.

Drama is a corporate act. It involves the negotiation of meaning between individuals with different views of what is being worked on in the drama. The teacher assists the class, building a contract where all the participants are making conscious and deliberate decisions in the safety of fictional role. The greatest growth in the students’ understanding of thoughts and feelings of people in the drama situation occurs when the whole class is working together, and where small-group work helps deepen the drama for that experience.

**Small groups contributing to whole-class drama**

There are many good reasons for wanting to share a group’s work. If each group’s work is part of a theme that the whole class is exploring, it helps
to see the interpretation that others have developed on the same topic. Or, groups may be exploring a single situation from different viewpoints. (For example: One group might show a situation from a parent’s point of view, another group from a teenager’s point of view, and another from the peer group’s point of view.) You may wish, in presenting a scene, to use the rest of the class in role. For example, they can all be at a parent–teacher event.

The freedom to explore a situation in drama fully, without the pressure of being watched, can lead eventually to a presentation, but it is while they are exploring the drama and interacting with each other that most learning takes place. It is the shared responsibility of the role players to develop the drama. All players should be prepared to adjust their actions in order to help move the drama along in a mutually satisfactory way. By listening and responding to the others in the group, members can create the drama moment to moment, responding spontaneously to the challenges presented. Once a group has understood its own improvised drama, then perhaps the drama can be polished and reworked for another group to watch.

There are so many ways to let group work play a part in the growth of whole-class drama:

- Each group may report back to the whole class in role (or choose a spokesperson, such as an elder).
- Each group may show a moment of the learning that they arrived at, in tableau or in depicting a special incident; several groups may volunteer to demonstrate some aspect of their learning.
- The groups may re-create an incident which occurred in the drama experience.
- The individuals, in a circle, may express in role their feelings about the group’s work.
- The teacher may freeze a point in the action of each group (it may not be beneficial to show all the work of each group to one another).
- As structured by the teacher, the work that went on in groups can be the basis for the next part of the drama lesson; the group work may become a play within the larger context of the whole-class drama experience, a play within a play.
- Perhaps the most important time for sharing the work is when it might serve as the beginning of a drama that the whole class can then explore.

Whole-class work

The whole class can take part in a single improvisational workshop, acting as a drama ensemble. Events such as meetings, assemblies, inquiries, and protests allow the whole class to participate in this way, contributing in and out of role. New kinds of learning may happen, since all the students may be asking questions, sharing ideas, negotiating with one another, and making choices and decisions; however, there will be much
The way in which the group works together determines the quality of the work that the group does. Whether students are working with a partner, a small group, or the whole class, the behavior of each individual affects the group. Drama demands co-operation in order that a single focus can be created.

more to listen and respond to, and, of course, there will be much more feedback to explore. By exploring and expanding the ideas and suggestions, the class can build the drama co-operatively into a playmaking event.

Even in a whole-class improvisation, students will need to work in pairs or in small groups from time to time in order to complete specific tasks. For example:

- There may be a need to explore several sides to a particular issue.
- The class may want to stop the drama and explore various interpretations of the problem.
- Each pair or small group can present its idea, and the class can choose one as the most suitable with which to continue.
- The whole group might decide to include the thoughts of several small groups and redirect the drama.
- There may be times when you, as the teacher, need to work out of role to negotiate problems that have arisen, and then continue the drama when the members have accepted the compromise.
- There may also be times when the disagreement between the groups is a more interesting idea for the drama than finding a single solution.

The large number of participants means that you, as the teacher, need to act as a moderator or director, and guide the drama along. In order to focus and extend student ideas, you can present other options to the class. At times, you may even assume a role in the drama, questioning, asking for clarification, helping students make decisions. By working inside the drama, you help the class in building powerful drama. The many participants can add to the event’s excitement and tension. This type of ensemble work has group dynamics as its “mind” and theatre as its “heart.”

**Uniting Heart and Mind**

My colleague and friend Gano Haine uses tension as a way of deepening, enriching, and extending the drama. In a medieval drama, children in Grade 5 were trying to get their true king returned to them. They decided to be bird trainers, sending messages by carrier pigeon to the imprisoned king. Right away, through her questioning, her taking on role, her setting the specifics to be explored by partners, groups, and the whole class, Gano asked us about our preparations for the pigeons to fly. She wanted to know who was in charge of tagging the pigeons, who would sweep the coop, who would feed the birds. She had each of us hold an imaginary pigeon, to check its wings, to make sure that it would be able to fly with the message. As a village, we had to test the pigeons’ abilities to see which one would be given the message—one and only one. We fed and cared for them and made them real. Finally, Gano picked one imaginary pigeon feather from the floor, put it between the pages of her book and said, “In this feather is the freedom of our kingdom.”
This chapter surveys the different strategies, conventions, and techniques that we, as drama educators, find useful in developing drama experiences with our students. Incorporating a variety of them in our lessons allows us to achieve a range of goals. By our choice of tools, we can draw a class’s attention to an aspect of the work they had not noticed. With a technique that offers and demands a different way of responding, we can alter the dynamic of the dramatic interaction by changing the mode of representing ideas or shifting the nature of the emotional engagement. With a strategy that moves them to a different viewpoint, an altered perception, we can support or challenge the students’ ideas. By our choice of a convention, we can cause drama participants to make a stronger emotional response, deepening the significance of the issues being explored.

As we grow in our knowledge of conventions, strategies, and techniques useful in our drama practice, we are more able to build drama experiences that are multi-layered, that move far beyond stereotypical responses to the events being interpreted and represented. In each instance, we can choose the strategies that strengthen and enhance the particular event being explored through drama. We can offer ourselves and our students alternative ways of being within the drama.