

Drama Techniques with Pictures Used in English Classes

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Teachers often use children's picture books as lesson starters in English classroom. These pictures can be used in different ways in order to improve learner's speaking skills. Below are given some ways for how teachers can turn pictures into role plays which can be used during English lessons.

Simple Story Dramatization is the most simple and straightforward approach, but it often does not yield a simple result. After reading a story to the class, teacher may ask them act out the story. This requires both careful planning and flexibility. Teachers have to plan who will play each character, and which parts of the story to act out. Usually some teachers prefer to take a more carefully structured approach, like one of the ones below.

Problem-Solving Exercise is activity where firstly teachers tell the students that they are going to act out some of the scenes from the story afterwards. In order to do this safely, students should follow the classroom rules, teacher have to be flexible and creative. Teacher should instruct students to think, while listening to the story, about what some of the problems might be when teacher try to act out the story. Once the story is finished, teacher should discuss the problems that have to be solved before acting out the most exciting scenes. Moreover, teachers have every child act out the scenes in unison rather than trying to "cast" the story.

Soundtrack is activity that teachers read the story, showing the pictures, fairly quickly, stopping at every picture if the book is short or at the most exciting ones if it is longer. When teacher stop pictures and ask students to imagine what are all the sounds might hear in the depicted scene. Teacher should try to coach them to really get in-depth. In a picture of a cow in a farmyard there are lots of things besides "moos." Chickens, a rusty weather-vane, boots in mud, the farm dog, the cow's bell, a creaking gate, birds overhead, all make a complete

soundtrack. Then they return to the beginning of the book and teacher read it again, but this time the sounds happen automatically when each picture is revealed. This results in a smooth telling of the story with a running soundtrack.

Narrative Pantomime is a simple activity that can be done with any story, whether from a book or not, but teacher should put it there because a book is a good source for a story. Each student finds his/her own personal space in the room. There will be no interaction between the children: each is in his own story. As the teacher reads or tells a simple story, each person, on his own, "acts it out." Ordinarily there would be no sound, since that would make it hard to hear the story, and there are no props or costumes. Each student concentrates on the five senses on really "experiencing" the character's adventures.

Instant Illustrations Read a book to the class but don't show them the pictures. Explain to them that while the illustrator has one idea about how the scenes in the story might look, there are many possible ideas. Periodically--once per page if the book is short, less frequently for a longer book--stop and have the students create the illustration, using their bodies in frozen tableau. This can be more or less involved, depending on the age of the children. With young ones I just have each student make his own illustration, but sometimes with older children I expect them to work together to create one definitive picture. (Sometimes it works better to read the whole story through first, then go back and make the illustrations--it just depends on the complexity of the story.) I like this activity because it will work with literally any book, and need no preparation or planning, so it is a good fallback if whatever I have planned is impossible for any reason--if I've planned a lesson with music and left the tape home, for example. I can just grab up any book off the shelf and go.

What's Up, Tiger Lily Woody Allen once made a movie by taking a Japanese B spy movie and dubbing it into English with an entirely different plot. This film is the inspiration for this activity. It can work with a familiar book or with one the

students have never seen, although there are necessary differences in approach if the book is familiar. The idea is to create an original story that works with the illustrations of a picture book. This project takes several lessons. Begin by showing the class the book, but not reading the words. (If the book is familiar, it is probably better to go ahead and read the words, so that the whole class is on the same page, but if it is unfamiliar to everyone, don't read the words.) Then go through it again, and brainstorm what might be happening on each page. It is not necessary to settle on one interpretation of each page--what is important is to stimulate a lot of ideas. When you have gone through the whole book this way, it is usually time to end class for the day. If not, go on to another activity so that the ideas have a chance to ferment. Return to the book project next class. Divide the class into small groups--four to six in a group seems to work best. If you have multiple copies of the book, give one to each group. If you own the books, obscure the words in some way, with tape or something. If not, though, there's no real harm in letting them see the words at this point. Each group must come up with a story and dramatize it, using whatever props and costume pieces you have available, or finding their own. I often do this activity with no props or costumes at all, beyond the desks, etc. in my classroom, but that's only because I really haven't put together a collection of costume pieces yet. This might take all of one class period or more, but with younger children it will probably take less. When the groups have had a chance to rehearse their scenes (with the teacher, or course, side-coaching as needed, they share their stories with the class. Once the project is over, you can read the original story and discuss how it is similar and different.

Reference:

Pattison, P. (1987) *Developing Communication Skills*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ur, P. (1981) *Discussions that Work*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.