

ART FORM

Creative Writing

LEARNING AREA

Language and Literacy

SUBJECT

English

TARGET GROUP

Key Stage 1 + 2

MATERIALS

Pen/pencil and paper for everyone

SPACE

Class room

DURATION

You can use the range of exercises as a menu for a one-off session or a long-term project.

ARTIST'S INTRODUCTION

All of these exercises I have used with the Key Stage 2 age group. I have also used them in very different contexts; with senior groups, with individual playwrights, with community groups. My philosophy is that any constituency can take on board the most sophisticated tasks, if they are presented in an appropriate way.

With all of the exercises included here, my guiding lights (in terms of the age group) have been to (a) take on board the language-experience of the group, and (b) the life-experience of the group. Adapt the exercises to the needs/experience of the class. I have been constantly amazed at the way in which primary students can grasp the basic principles of 'what makes a story work'.

My advice to the teacher is to try the work out on yourself first. This might seem a bit of an arduous task, but it will bear gold.

NB Creating a Character is the third stage in the five part series of workshops and follows naturally from 'Developing the Use of Words.'

You may also wish to begin this session with a warm-up exercise from Warm-ups.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Pupils will have the opportunity to develop:

- Communication Skills – discuss, list, classify and shape words. Perform original poetry. Interview other pupils.
- Creative Skills – develop rhythms for words, build soundscapes, invent characters and write poetry and stories.
- Decision Making and Thinking Skills – make judgements and draw conclusions, select and organise appropriate information, and represent words in appropriate forms.
- Managing Information – work with a focus and follow directions in relation to a task.

INSTRUCTIONS

Today my hand (Allow 1-3 minutes)

- Draw the outline of your hand on a piece of paper.
- Think of all the things your hand has done today: ordinary things, things you feel good about, things you don't feel good about etc.
- Around the hand write five sentences, each beginning with the words 'Today my hand ...'
- Discuss all the things a person's hand does in a day, how we don't even think about it, but how much it reveals about who we are and what we are like.

Outcome

This simple exercise shows how, in one day, the same person can do something with love ('...stroked my cat') and something not quite so loving ('...pulled my sister's hair').

It opens a conversation about how a character in a story may be many things, depending on who they are with, what they are doing, how they are feeling etc.

Inside- outside Part one (Allow 3-6 minutes)

1. Think of someone you know and like. Write a physical description of them, so that if I were to meet with them I would recognise them. Try and use all five senses. Are they big or small? What does their voice sound like? What sort of shoes do they wear? How do they walk? [Example 1 below]
2. Draw a large outline of a person. This is an imaginary character. Around the outline write as many physical descriptions as you can. Try and be very detailed. If they are wearing a blue shirt, is it bright blue or dark blue? If they have black hair, is it short, curly black hair, or long limp black hair? What are the different ways of describing the sound of a voice? We now have an idea of that person is like on the outside. This tells us a little of what they are and what they might be like.

3. Now write inside the outline of the person. In the space where the head is write down all the different words and phrases that describe 'Thinking'. [Example 2 below].
4. In the space where the heart is, write down all the words that describe 'Feelings'. [Example 3]

Example 1: He has rough hands, a high pitched voice, shiny shoes, long legs etc.

Example 2: Plans, brainwork, thoughts, maths, ideas ,interests etc.

Example 3: Love, sadness, hate, feeling good, jolly etc.

Inside-outside Part two (Allow 3-6 minutes)

5. Draw a large outline of a person. This is now a character you are making up.
6. Using the list of 'inside things', write down what thoughts the person has, and what makes the person have different feelings.

Example

She is interested in how big the universe is. She feels sad when she has to say goodbye to a friend. She thinks longer holidays are a good idea. She hates being told to go to bed, etc.

Outcome

The 'outside' things give one description of a person, but the 'inside ' things tell us much more about what a person might be like. When we are making characters for a story or a play, we need to imagine them from the outside; but it is even more important to imagine them from the inside.

Action, feeling and thought. (Allow one minute per story)

1. Having completed 'Inside- outside', go back to 'Today my hand'. You have the original five things the hand did. The task now is to put a feeling to each of the five actions. [Example 1 below]
2. You now have five very short stories, all containing an action and a feeling. Now try to put a thought into the story as well [Example 2 below]. You now have five short stories, each including an action, a feeling and a thought.

Example 1: Today my hand pulled my sisters hair and *I felt guilty*. Today my hand stroked my cat and *I felt calm*.

Example 2: Today *I decided* to hurt my sister, so I pulled her hair, then I felt guilty. Today my hand stroked my cat. I felt calm and *I wondered* what the cat was thinking.

Outcome

The previous exercises all show that, in the creating of a character for a story, we need to know *what* is done (the hair was pulled), *why* it was done (the decision to hurt someone) and the *result* (the feeling of guilt). Interesting stories do not have to be copies of others you know. They can also start from things you know about, and develop on from there.

Basic as these exercises are, they introduce to the very young the notion that stories - which come naturally to them anyway - can be developed and made even more interesting through working at them.

The investigation of what goes on 'inside' is an invaluable way of extending the literacy of emotion, feeling and thought.

The exercises open the door to a discussion about the consequences of actions, and the responsibility for our own feelings.

Interviews (Allow 8-12 minutes)

As with many of the other early-stage exercises, the investigation into the question of how 'characters are built' can be helped by looking at our immediate surroundings; in this case the people we are with.

1. Write a short list of questions you might ask someone if you were conducting an interview for a magazine: likes, dislikes, greatest fears, a good memory, opinions on world-events, etc. They should be questions that you think would give a wider public a thumbnail sketch of that person.
2. Working in pairs, interview your partners (2-3 minutes each). Try not to get into general conversation. If you find your interviewee is digressing into unhelpful anecdote, you may lead on to the next question.
3. Write down your answers in note form.
4. Write a 100 word paragraph on your partner, based upon your notes. Try and make it flow, as a magazine article would. You can rearrange things to fit the style of the article.
5. Rewrite the article, inserting a couple of pieces that are fictional. Make them believable in terms of the person you are describing, but see if they can have a hint of drama, mystery, etc.
6. Read out the results. What fictional information was cleverly placed, seemed in keeping/seemed totally out of keeping with the person being described?

Outcome

This exercise can lead to a discussion about an essential element in the building of a character: whatever we invest the character with, it has to be credible. This does not mean that quiet man down the road cannot turn out to be a mass-murderer; but only if we can say "Of course...that makes sense of everything we know about him", when we discover the truth.

LINKS TO OTHER LEARNING AREAS

- The Arts – using music, art and design and drama to develop aspects of the spoken and written word
- Personal Development – explore aspects of feelings and build confidence in working with others independently.
- Information Technology – compose and edit text on-screen to communicate and develop ideas
- The World Around Us – Use history, geography and the environment as stimulus material and research sources for character and strong ideas

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

You are now ready to move on to Creating a Story.

Don't forget to send feedback to toolbox@youngatart.co.uk

www.youngatart.co.uk/toolbox