

ART FORM

Creative Writing

LEARNING AREA

Language and Literacy

SUBJECT

English

TARGET GROUP

Key Stage 1 + 2

MATERIALS

Pen/pencil and paper for everyone
Large sheets of paper
(Flipchart size)

SPACE

Classroom

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 Dialogue is the fifth and final stage in Noel Greig's series of workshops and follows naturally from Creating a Story. It is advisable to begin this session with a warm-up exercise from Warm-ups.

There are five stages in all: Creative Writing Warm-ups, Developing the Use of Words, Creating a Character, Creating a Story, Dialogue. Each workshop can be downloaded separately. Within each section there are a number of exercises, some of which fall into natural sequences. You can use the range of exercises as a menu for a one-off session or a long-term project.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- 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**Alphabet-dialogue (Allow 5-8 minutes)**

1. At the top of a page, write out the alphabet. You do not know who they are, where they are or what is happening.
2. The first word of each sentence begins with a letter of the alphabet, starting with A and proceeding through to Z. [Example 1]
3. When you reach letters Q,X,Z you can break the rule ; if you can't find a word beginning with that letter it can appear somewhere in the word.
4. See what clues the A-Z dialogue gives and what questions it prompts: Who might the two characters be? What could their relationship be? What things might happen in the story? What might the story be about? [Example 2]

Example 1

Here is part of a dialogue created by a member of a college-group I ran a few years back

One **A**n anyone can swim. **B**y human nature.
 Two **C**an't be bothered really.
 One **D**on't give me that. **E**verybody can do it, I've said that already.
 Two **F**orget what you've said, you're wrong.
 One **G**ordon can't swim, he'd sink.
 Two **H**ow do you know Gordon?
 One **I** just do.
 Two **J**ust is a very inexact word.
 One **K**itchen is inexact, what's your point?
 Two **L**eave it off, OK? **M**ind your own business.
 One **N**o, come on, tell me.
 Etc.

Example 2

On the basis of the eleven lines quoted we might suggest: they are two friends, they have quite a competitive relationship, they have a rivalry over Gordon, there might later be a tragic incident involving swimming, and the story might be about friendship.

Outcome

The 'Limitation' of the alphabet-task serves a number of functions;

- As a task-driven exercise, it removes any worries about 'writing dialogue' by requiring the writer to focus in the task.
- It gives a structure within which the dialogue has to operate. A-Z is, of course, a rudimentary structure; but -as we shall see - a scene in a play is something that leads to a definite outcome. However brief the scene, it will always its A and its Z in terms of how it needs to start and when it needs to conclude.
- It establishes the notion that the writing of dialogue is not about how people talk in 'real life'.

Place-association dialogue (Allow 5-8 minutes)

1. Think of the city, town, village , district etc where you live.
2. Write down 5 locations, 5 colours, 5 things(animal vegetable or mineral) you associate with the place. [Example 1] You can add other categories, such as 5 feelings, 5 days etc.
3. Rewrite the list, in alphabetical order(first letters only)[Example 2]
4. Write a dialogue, in which the words occur exactly in that order. Once again you do not know who the characters are when you start. See if the associations with the location begin to give a sense of who they might be, or what might be going on. [Example 3]

Example 1:

(Brighton) Pier, Marina, Pavilion, Station, Beach, Green. Turquoise, Grey, White, Cream, pebbles, Litter Driftwood, Seagulls, Chewing gum.

Example 2:

Beach, Cream, Chewing gum, Driftwood, Green, Grey, Litter, Marina, Pier, Pavilion, Pebbles, Station, Seagulls, Turquoise, White.

Example 3:

- One Do you fancy a walk down the beach?
 Two Only if you'll buy me an ice cream.
 One I paid for the chewing gum, its your turn now.
 Two Driftwood! That's all I am to you. Green stuff, grey stuff, I'm just a bit of Litter chucked up by the sea.
 One Who paid for that meal down by the Marina? Who paid for the rides on the Pier? Etc.

Plot and dialogue (Allow 15- 20 minutes)

1. Divide into small groups of four or five. Each group is a 'family'.
2. Decide which member of the 'family' each person is.
3. The 'family' is doing something ordinary together. You could choose to be domestic (at home watching TV etc.) but think of all the other possibilities: having a picnic in the park, watching a carnival parade etc.
4. You are going to create a progression of frozen 'plot-moments' that will show a story. These will take the form of still images - rather like a sequence of snapshots. The story is about how a conflict arises and is finally resolved. Avoid getting into physical conflict and focus on what is happening psychologically.
5. The sequence is as follows:
6. The family is engaged in its activity. There is a minor upset - a misunderstanding or a disagreement.
7. There is a conflict into which everyone is drawn.
8. Attempts are made to resolve the conflict.
9. The conflict is finally resolved. [Example 1]
10. Share the results with the whole group.
11. Replay one of the sequences. This time as each frozen moment is shown, imagine there is a blank 'speech bubble' above each of the character's heads.
12. The audience now suggests what is in the speech bubbles. [Example 2]
13. Repeat the process for all the sequences.

14. Each family group will now write out their script. Use the suggestions from the 'speech bubble' exercise, but allow the story to develop. Fill in the gaps between the main plot events.

Example 1:

- The family is having a picnic on the beach.
- The grandfather won't let the little daughter go into the sea.
- Everyone takes sides.
- The father suggests they all go for a paddle.
- They all take off their shoes, walk down to the sea and paddle.

Example 2

Frozen image 1: the family are having a picnic on the beach.

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| Daughter | When we've finished eating, are we going to go in the water? |
| Mother | I was reading in the paper that it's not very clean. |
| Son | Can I have another banana? |
| Father | You've had two already, that last one's for your sister. |
| Grandpa | Ah, this is the life.
etc. |

Frozen image 2: The grandfather won't let the little daughter into the sea.

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| Daughter | I'm going to go in the sea. |
| Father | Eat your Banana first. |
| Grandpa | You stay here, my girl, you're not going in that filthy muck. |
| Son | Yes, it's filthy muck. |
| Mother | Yes, it did say in the paper... etc. |

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

The possibilities of where these exercises can go are limitless. Use the exercises in different combinations and revisit them with your class over time.

You can also borrow ideas from other Toolbox workshops – develop a short script for performance using shadow puppets (See Shadow Play and Puppets into Performance, both by Frank Quinn); combine some of Ali Campbell's exercises from Spirit of Place to develop short pieces of performance, inspired by some of the work the students have written.

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

www.youngatart.co.uk/toolbox