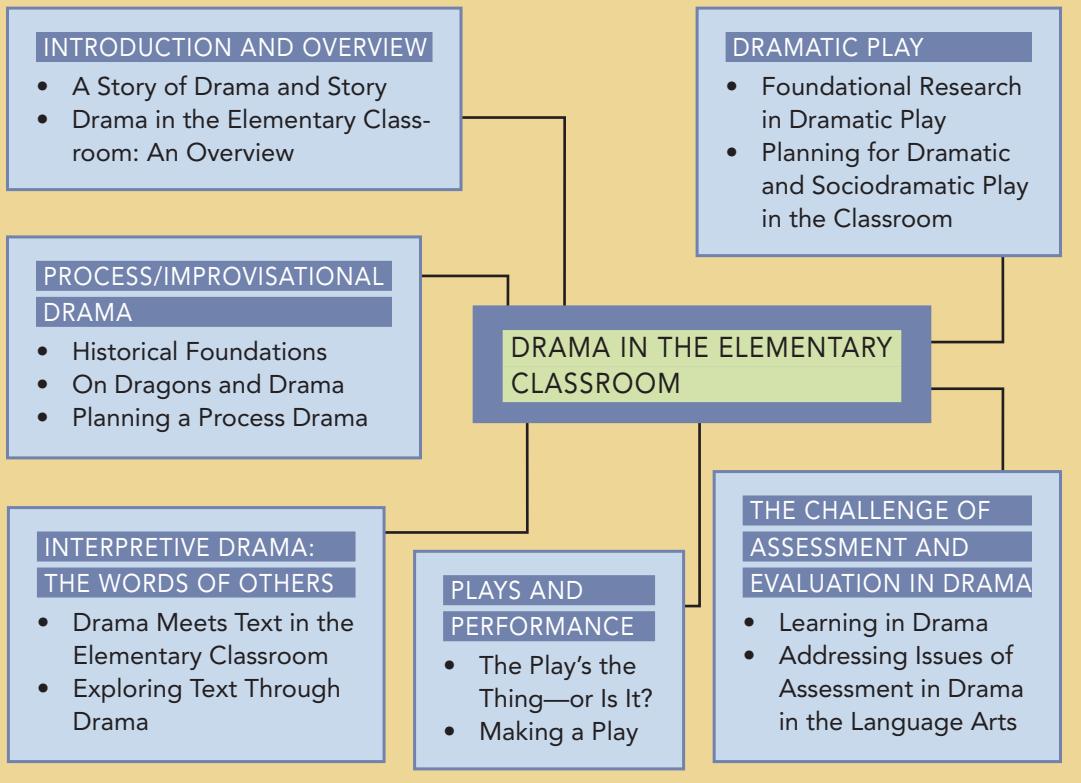


# Drama in the Elementary Classroom



## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

### A Story of Drama and Story

My doctoral research project gave me the opportunity to work with a multi-grade classroom of eighteen grade 4, 5, and 6 students in a small urban school in western Canada. In response to the classroom teacher's request that I show her how drama might be used to teach English language arts, I explored folk tales by engaging her students in process drama activities. The following excerpt from my research journal demonstrates the power of process drama to evoke students' engaged response and purposeful use of oral and written language. Our starting point was the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

The context was set for a discussion of the stealing of the children, and as the students conversed I took on the role of messenger and delivered the scrolled letters from the Pied Piper giving them the news about their children. Soon all the letters were delivered and the family

groups were reading them. They were given the chance to discuss how they felt and what to do next before we ended the episode.

Coming out of role, I asked them how they were feeling about the disappearance of the children. One student, Allison, mentioned that some people would be happy that there were no children to cause accidents and make troubles. Some felt guilty because they'd caused the problem by cheating the Pied Piper. A few were angry at the mayor. Some were lonely without the children.

At this point we were to have the town meeting and chart the plans each household had for getting the children back. The Pied Piper wasn't supposed to come until tomorrow, but I could see that they needed a writing activity rather than more discussion and also needed a conflict injected to deepen the engagement of the group. The messenger explained that the Pied Piper was angry and was going to need some real convincing. Each family would need to write a letter to convince him they deserved to have their children back.

The letters written by the students were passionate and convincing (see Box 1). The old Pied Piper story had a surprisingly emotional impact on students' written response. The experience of classroom drama and role-play can support a variety of English language arts purposes and learning, as this chapter will demonstrate.

#### BOX 1 LETTER TO THE PIED PIPER

To The Pied Piper,

The Pike Family misses our two loving children we are willing to pay what you ask, but please don't hurt them. We miss them very much and we need them home soon. We love them very much. Tell them that we love and miss them. We have found in our hearts we can't live without them. We know we have acted badly before but we are willing to change our ways. Their names are Emily (2) and Cathy (13). Please forgive us for our wrong doings.

Sincerely,

Pike Family





## Drama in the Elementary Classroom: An Overview

This chapter will explore the place of educational drama in the K–8 English language arts classroom. We will discuss drama forms that occur on a continuum from unstructured dramatic play to more formal performance work. We will examine how children create and construct understandings through written and oral language as they participate in the magical worlds of drama.

Table 1 details categories of dramatic activity that may be found in the elementary classroom and describes how these activities are appropriate to different grade levels.

We will examine the foundations for each category of dramatic activity in terms of historical practice and/or pedagogy and explore how teachers may plan for and introduce each type of drama into the elementary English language arts classroom program. Children's books, stories, and poetry form the core sources for all dramatic work that is described here. The importance of inclusive education and addressing issues of diversity and culture through drama work is implicit in our exploration of drama in the English language arts classroom. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenges facing teachers in the evaluation and assessment of drama work.

**TABLE 1** Categories of Classroom Drama

Dramatic Category	Description	Appropriate Grade
Dramatic play	Children engage in self-directed games of “let’s pretend” determined by their own interests and choices. Teachers provide designated space, costume pieces, structures, and props according to the needs and interests of students.	Kindergarten–Year 1
Process or improvisational drama	Teacher-structured and -sequenced learning activities that invite students to assume roles and actively engage in fictional worlds of story in order to learn and understand rather than perform.	Year 1–Year 8
Interpretive drama	Denotes any classroom activity where students are engaged in bringing some type of predetermined text to life through voice and/or movement. Storytelling from books, choral reading of poetry, reader’s theatre, and writing scripts and performing them are included in this category.	Year 2–Year 8
Performance or theatre	Approaches that support students if the expectation is that they will perform for an audience. Alternatives to scripted plays, such as collective creation and polishing interpretive work, are highlighted.	Appropriate grade level is dependent on the particular approach and how it is used.

## DRAMATIC PLAY

### Foundational Research in Dramatic Play

“Let’s pretend …”: these are words most of us remember as invitations we issued or accepted from our friends and playmates during our earliest preschool play experiences. For some of us, our kindergarten or primary-level teachers supported “let’s pretend” in the classroom, and the magic of entering specially designed play spaces where we could use props, toys, and imitation to understand the adult world, extended beyond our early years into our school experience.

Educational researchers have been emphasizing the importance of supporting children’s exploration of ideas and behaviours through “let’s pretend” play for many decades. Piaget (1962) refers to this work of early childhood as *symbolic play* where children use language, toys, and props to make sense of social relationships. Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986), perhaps two of the most influential researchers in child development and language learning, suggest that giving preschool and primary-level children unstructured opportunities to play “let’s pretend”—alone or with others—create spaces in which adult roles and language can be imitated and integrated. Booth (1987) explains how language develops and vocabulary is extended when young children are encouraged to assume roles and create their own stories in a well-designed classroom dramatic play area.

Smilansky and Shefatya (1990) make a clear distinction between dramatic play and socio-dramatic play. Toddlers as young as two years old may often be observed imitating the language and behaviour of parents or caregivers as they play alone with their dolls and toys. This solitary role-playing behaviour (dramatic play) allows the child to interpret what it means to live in and be a part of the social world of others and to explain the social world to himself or herself. Sociodramatic play, on the other hand, occurs when two or more children engage in negotiating the same make-believe context.

Early childhood teachers can be instrumental in supporting positive and productive sociodramatic play within the classroom. Calabrese (2003) suggests teachers designate a special area of the classroom for drama and stock it with durable materials, toys, and print materials. She suggests that teachers should rotate materials often and relate materials to stories or poems children enjoy, but cautions teachers not to interfere with the story lines the children create, except in circumstances in which safety is an issue (pp. 607–608). Balke (1997) states “teachers with vivid interests and awareness … can create an atmosphere that inspires children to be creative” (p. 356).

### Planning for Dramatic and Sociodramatic Play in the Classroom

Building in time for sociodramatic play requires that there be periods of time during the school day when children are free to choose activities that interest them and participate in those activities with minimal teacher interference. Sustained periods of sociodramatic play outside the classroom context may extend to up to two hours if children are truly engaged in the world of “let’s pretend” and are cooperative with each other. Most classroom teachers, however, suggest periods of approximately 30 minutes as appropriate to the needs of their students (Smilansky 1990, p. 38).

**TABLE 2** Creating a Drama Play Space in the Classroom

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Structures</b>	<b>Costumes and Props</b>	<b>Other Materials</b>
Castles and dragons	cardboard “castle” created from a large appliance box; paint box grey and paint black lines to create stones; cut top of the box to resemble turrets plastic or wooden blocks in various sizes for building furniture	cloth swatches in shades of silver; gold and other fine fabrics costume jewellery paper or plastic crowns soft plastic swords (optional) helmets, “armour” half-masks* representing dragons and other mythical creatures	tape and/or glue blunt scissors paper markers cardboard or tag board (for making shields or other props) clips or clothespins to fasten “costumes” picture books about castles and dragons thematically related dolls, puppets, and stuffed animals
Space travel	cylindrical recycle bin rocket ship covered with tinfoil or painted silver; cut a hole for the door plastic or wooden blocks in various sizes for building furniture	space suits—(Halloween costume variety) alien half-masks soft plastic lasers (optional) swatches of varied fabrics	tape and/or glue blunt scissors paper markers cardboard or tag board clips or clothespins tinfoil thematically related books, dolls, puppets and toys
House and home	playhouse blocks in various sizes for building furniture toy stoves, fridges, table, and chairs	hats, ties, aprons, suit coats, shawls, dress-up shoes briefcases, brooms, telephones, toy dishes, telephones, toy appliances	as above, plus a variety of books about families and dolls of various sizes and shapes puppets

\*Half-masks, which cover only the eyes or the top half of the face and allow full peripheral vision, are more appropriate than full masks for young children. They help the child assume a role in a concrete way but do not interfere with speech, breathing, or movement.

Teachers can support sociodramatic and dramatic play periods by planning for a rich, stimulating, and frequently changing environment in the classroom dramatic play centre. Table 2 describes how a classroom space might be designed and transformed to meet the changing interests of children.

A well-equipped drama play space will encourage dramatic play and sociodramatic play as an integral part of the young child’s school experience. Oral and written language growth is encouraged in such an environment. Children experiment with levels and functions of language as they adopt powerful roles like the queen of the castle or the captain of the spaceship (since queens must use the language of royalty and captains must adopt the technical jargon used by astronauts and space explorers). Booth (1987) reminds us “language is not just a by-product: it grows from the play, because of the play and structures the play, all at once” (p. 22).

Literacy experiences also occur naturally and purposefully in the dramatic play area. The props children create to concretize their imagined contexts or situations will often involve pretend writing: grocery lists for the pretend family, posters warning the people of the kingdom that a dragon is on the loose, spaceship repair books to take along on the journey through the galaxy. Often picture books and informational books must be consulted to ensure that the details of the imagined world are accurate or to resolve conflicting opinions among the players. These are purposeful opportunities for reading and writing that emerge from children's involvement in voluntary play rather than literacy lessons imposed by the teacher.

The potential power of dramatic and sociodramatic play to bring children together across cultures and in spite of learning disabilities or special needs is great when the teacher is sensitive to the rich diversity of experiences, abilities, and cultural backgrounds present among the players. The drama play space allows students to learn from each other in a safe and nonthreatening environment as they work out roles and negotiate "how the world works" among themselves. Books, toys, structures, and other materials that celebrate the cultural backgrounds of all students should be available in the drama area. Children may be invited to bring materials from home or they may be consulted about how the teacher might include toys and props to enhance their episodes of "let's pretend." The sensitive teacher, although maintaining distance from the play, will be prepared to interrupt or join in the play when feelings are at risk or racist stereotypes are being perpetuated. Through careful teacher questioning and thoughtful reminders, children will expand their understandings of themselves and their peers when they engage in dramatic and sociodramatic play experience.

## PROCESS/IMPROVISATIONAL DRAMA

### Historical Foundations

During the past century, educational theorists and researchers have begun to explore how children's natural tendency to learn through games of "let's pretend" can be understood and transformed into a pedagogy of drama in the school classroom. Readers who are interested in tracing the development of drama in education pedagogy may wish to consult the work of pioneers such as Peter Slade (1954) and Brian Way (1967); theorists such as Gavin Bolton (1985; 1992), Cecily O'Neill (1995), and Jonothan Neelands (1984, 2000); and foundational practitioners such as Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995).

Canadian drama educators have contributed important practices and theories in the development of drama pedagogy, especially by exploring connections between drama education practice and English language arts. David Booth's (1987; 2005) story drama model explains how the conventions and strategies of process drama may be used to engage children's involvement and understanding of poetry, stories, and other forms of children's literature. Booth's research has also explored the impact of drama work on children's writing (Booth & Neelands 1998). Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton (1987) provided a detailed and teacher-friendly resource for the classroom teacher to use in planning drama work. Patrick Verriour's and Carole Tarlington's (1991) *role drama* is a practical approach to working with drama and traditional stories in the elementary grades. Most currently, Carole Miller and Juliana Saxton (2004) provide classroom teachers with well-structured and organized drama units developed from popular and recently published children's books.

Although the teaching resources developed by these drama educators and others provide classroom teachers with an excellent selection of process drama lessons plans and units, teachers who know how to create their own dramas from stories and poems will be able to directly address the needs and interests of their particular group of students. The remainder of this section will address practical questions of planning process drama work for the elementary language arts classroom. We'll begin with the story of one process drama developed from the popular picture book *The Paper Bag Princess* by Canadian children's author Robert Munsch.

## On Dragons and Drama

The children in Ms. Grey's third-grade class have been reading books about medieval times: knights in shining armour, jousting tournaments, castles with drawbridges and, of course, fire-breathing dragons. Ms. Grey invites her students to think about what it might have been like to live in a castle in the make-believe world where dragons flew through the air and knights and kings did battle with these creatures. A discussion about pretend creatures ensues, and children offer their experiences with books and movie creatures such as *Shrek* and his friends. Ms. Grey asks them to think about how people might warn each other about threatening dragons during a time when there were no phones or computers or cell phones. Since no one suggests a daily newspaper, Ms. Grey interjects that writing might be used to communicate warnings and other information. She then inquires if her students would like to do some drama with her, and explains that she will take on a role (pretend to be someone else), and help them take on roles as well by giving them information and asking them questions. Most students are eager to participate in "let's pretend."

Ms. Grey explains that she will briefly leave the room, and when she returns act as if she is someone else. Students are to listen carefully so they can learn who they will be in the drama. When Ms. Grey returns as the Assistant Editor of the *Castle Times*, she brings with her a special memo (see Box 2) from the Editor-in-Chief, Fester Grunhilde, which she reads to the class. (Students may also be given the "memo" and asked to read it for themselves.) A brief discussion about the memo follows and students in role are free to ask questions of the Assistant Editor.

The students are assigned to groups of three or four, and are asked to prepare for the meeting by recording what they know about fire-breathing dragons from books they've read, stories they've heard, or films they've viewed. Some groups decide to design their own "dragon-proofing kit" to show Mr. Grunhilde. Ms. Grey has a "*Castle Times* dragon file" of pictures of different kinds of dragons that students can borrow to help them generate ideas.

Ms. Grey circulates among the groups in her role as Assistant Editor and encourages the students to prepare carefully for the meeting with Fester Grunhilde. They are supplied with markers and chart paper so that they can record their ideas and diagrams. This work takes almost the entire lesson time, so Ms. Grey decides to hold the "staff meeting" on the following day. She makes sure to tell her students when she is coming out of role and responding to them as their teacher again. She asks them to come out of role and tell her a little bit about their group work or ask any questions they might have about the drama so far.

The following day, the class re-enters the drama world to share their group work in role. Just as the last group has finished showing their work to Fester Grunhilde (the teacher has taken on

**BOX 2 MEMO TO THE NEWSPAPER STAFF***The Castle Times*

*"What discriminating Royals Read"*

**MEMO**

**FROM:** Fester Grunhilde, Managing Editor  
**TO:** Reporters and Photography Staff members  
**RE:** Sightings of fire-breathing dragon

As we all know by now, there is a fire-breathing dragon loose who has been targeting castles in neighbouring kingdoms for immolation purposes. According to your reports and photographs, this dragon has created much destruction and has so far eluded capture. My sources tell me that it is now heading for the Castle of the King, Queen, and Princess Elizabeth in our very own kingdom.

It is essential that the *Castle Times* cover this breaking story as quickly as possible. We need a concerted effort from reporter/photographer staff teams to prepare the readership for the probable arrival of the dragon in this kingdom.

Before our next staff meeting (to be held within the hour), I will ask you to meet in your 5–6 member reporter/photographer teams to outline any information you have gathered about this dragon and the havoc it has wrought in other kingdoms. Pictures and news stories will be much appreciated. We also want information on the newly available “dragon-proofing” kits that are becoming so popular. I understand that some of you have collected some information and pictures about several different kinds of kits. We will need to buy some for our staff, so we also would like some of this information brought to the staff meeting.

Thank you!

this role for the “staff meeting”) and answering questions from the other *Castle Times* reporters and photographers, there is a knock on the classroom door. Ms. Grey has asked an older student from another classroom to play a special role for her during the drama session. This person wears a large medieval hat and carries a scroll (see Box 3) that is unrolled and read to the students.

The reporters and photographers of the *Castle Times* ask the messenger questions about what happened, but unfortunately the messenger isn’t very helpful, and explains that he must leave immediately, since there are others who must hear the news. Fester Grunhilde then announces that the meeting is adjourned because this new development creates a more pressing concern. “He” leaves and Ms. Grey comes back as herself. She asks the children if they are ready to hear the story of what really happened and gathers them together to hear *The Paper Bag Princess*.

**BOX 3 THE MESSENGER'S SCROLL**

Hear Ye, Hear Yel

A news bulletin from the Royal Castle.

The Fire-Breathing Dragon has broken through all the Royal defenses and has burned down the Royal castle. It is known that the King and Queen were away on a hunt at the time of the burning. Princess Elizabeth is said to have escaped the fire. Royal informants assure us that no human remains have been found, so we are quite sure Prince Ronald also escaped.

Luckily the royal court and servants were down at the summer castle in the south cleaning it up, so no one else was injured.

Further information will be forthcoming as soon as it is available.

The drama continues for three more class periods following the reading of the story. During these sessions, Ms. Grey assumes a new role as the Royal Chancellor to Princess Elizabeth and her parents, the King and Queen. Students choose hats that confer upon them the roles of advisors to the royal family, ladies-in-waiting to the queen, palace guards, and friends of Princess Elizabeth. In these roles, they engage in tasks such as designing tests of skill to help the King find a successor for Prince Ronald, planning and designing a feast and royal ball to help the Queen entertain tournament participants and spectators, and acting as advocates who will convince the King to allow Elizabeth to rule the country by herself. Students work in small groups to prepare their plans and designs and then share their work in an audience with the royal family (volunteers from the classroom groups). This meeting begins with much pomp and ceremony and demands that the courtiers defend their decisions and choices. Spirited debate breaks out between the King, Princess Elizabeth, and the members of the court, and so the teacher comes out of role and asks the students to decide individually whether they think Elizabeth should be allowed to run the kingdom on her own. Students voice their opinions by standing along an imaginary line, with one end for people who agree with the King and the other end for those who agree with Elizabeth. Most of the students choose Elizabeth, and the out-of-role discussion that follows this activity demonstrates that most students believe girls like Elizabeth can run kingdoms on their own without any help from princes or kings. This discussion closes the drama.

## Planning a Process Drama

It should be evident from the *Paper Bag Princess* drama that the purpose of process drama work is *not* to have children reenact or retell stories that someone else has already told. We will explore this type of work in the interpretive drama section of this chapter. In process work, children create, extend, and improvise their own story episodes from a source or idea.

Although the students are the creators, classroom process drama work requires careful planning and preparation on the part of the teacher. In addition to preparing the *Castle Times* memo, the scroll for the messenger to read, and collecting or creating hats for all the students in the classroom, Ms. Grey needed to think about the choices and possibilities she would offer to her students. She wanted her students to own their work, solve the problems, and use their imaginations throughout the drama; but she also realized that she would not maximize the language learning opportunities inherent in the source (storybook) if she sent the students off by themselves to “make a play” about *The Paper Bag Princess*. Her challenge was to balance opportunities for creative freedom and student ownership with the safety of a structured plan that would allow children to move forward along a purposeful and focused pathway of drama activity and experience.

There are many ways to approach the planning of a process drama for elementary students. The following planning approach evolved from ideas I collected and adapted from a variety of sources (O’Neill & Lambert, 1982; Morgan & Saxton, 1987; Booth, 1987; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Neelands & Goode, 2000). The steps in this approach are guidelines rather than prescriptive: every classroom group is different and every teacher has different strengths and talents that must be factored into the planning process. The steps are listed in Box 4, and then elaborated in reference to the planning of a process drama from the children’s book *Silver Threads* by M. F. Skrypuch.

#### BOX 4 PLANNING STEPS FOR PROCESS DRAMA

**Step 1:** Select a source that is relevant to the needs and interests of your students. Possible sources include: picture storybooks, newspaper clippings, photographs or paintings, songs, short stories, poems, Internet resources, etc.

**Step 2:** Find a dramatic focus for your drama that is suggested by the source. Some questions that may help you identify the focus are:

- ▷ What problems, challenges, or conflicts are suggested by this source?
- ▷ Where might these problems, challenges, or conflicts be explored?
- ▷ Who might be involved in exploring the problems, challenges, or conflicts? You want to find a group of roles rather than specific roles.
- ▷ If you plan to use teacher-in-role, you will also need to think about specific roles for the teacher.

**Step 3:** Establish the dramatic context. Develop one or two context-building activities that will introduce students to the drama and allow them to think about their roles within the drama. These activities should:

- ▷ identify the initial group of roles and give each student time to think about what role he or she will play within this group
- ▷ identify the situation or location in which the drama begins and give students time to think about what this location is like
- ▷ identify and describe the problem, conflict, or challenge that the group will have to solve

(continued)

**Step 4:** Begin to build the narrative thread or story line. Develop one or two narrative activities that move the drama along. These activities develop the initial context further and raise new issues and events for the group to face and consider. These activities should:

- ▷ supply information that will enable the students (in role) to solve problems, create new possibilities, and engage more deeply in the issues that emerge from the source
- ▷ allow the students to create the story inherent in the drama through their joint and individual contributions and suggestions
- ▷ offer the students the opportunity to take on different roles so that they can see the conflict, challenge, or problem from a different perspective

**Step 5:** Develop one or two poetic activities to help students' construct their understanding of issues at a higher level of meaning. These activities should:

- ▷ take the students out of an overconcern with the plot or "what will happen next" and get them thinking about the symbols or lessons in the drama
- ▷ deepen the students' emotional involvement in their work

**Step 6:** Include one or two reflective activities so students can consider the meaning of their work in role. These activities should:

- ▷ invite students to stop and consider the meaning of what has happened so far in the drama
- ▷ sometimes occur "out of role" so that students can step out of making the story and think about what the story means
- ▷ bring the drama to a successful conclusion and give students an opportunity to reveal their understandings about the dramatic work

**Step 7:** Review your plan to make sure you have:

- ▷ Whole-group activities in which all the students are involved. These activities should be used when everyone needs common information to proceed with the next episode of the drama.
- ▷ Small-group activities in which students work in groups of three to six. These activities develop cooperation and problem-solving skills.
- ▷ Pair activities involving two students. Sometimes pairs of students can take on problem-solving tasks more efficiently than a small group can.
- ▷ Individual activities where children work alone. Writing-in-role or drawing-in-role are activities that give students the chance to imagine possibilities for themselves before negotiating these possibilities with the group. These activities can be used throughout the drama to slow things down and to create a variety of possible directions for the next episode.

**Step 8:** Review your plan to ensure you have addressed the learning objectives you wanted to achieve.

## Step 1: Selecting a Source

The story *Silver Threads* by Marsha F. Skrypuch (1996) might be an appropriate choice of book for fifth- or sixth-grade students who are exploring the cultural experiences of Canadians from various cultural traditions. Anna and Ivan, a young couple, emigrate from the Ukraine to avoid political persecution and homestead in western Canada. As they struggle to establish their farm with little

money and little support, Ivan is conscripted into the army and shipped overseas to fight in the war. Anna tries to carry on without him, but life becomes increasingly difficult as the years pass and Ivan fails to return home. Then, one Christmas Eve, just as Anna is about to give up any hope, a spider spins a web in the Christmas tree that miraculously glows with the candlelight through the window and beckons Ivan as he returns through the cold December night to his home and his bride.

This book explores issues of persecution, prejudice, and courage in the face of overwhelming odds. It invites students to look at these issues from the safe distance provided by a historical setting.

## Step 2: Finding the Focus

A careful reading of the story suggests that there are a variety of problems and challenges that might provide a focus for drama work:

- bureaucratic injustice toward cultural minority groups
- facing hardships alone far from home and family
- good-luck charms and beliefs—the subplot of the spider

The teacher considers setting the drama in an internment camp, but realizes that students who are totally unfamiliar with such an experience might be confused or might respond in a superficial way to this context. Instead, s/he chooses the rural community where Anna and Ivan live as the setting, as the classroom group is studying Canadian history. Since there are only two main characters in the book, the teacher needs to create a group of roles that could be implicated in Anna's and Ivan's story. The following possibilities are considered:

- neighbours in the farming community
- the spiders who spun the web
- the bureaucrats who conscripted immigrants from the Ukraine to fight in the war

As the teacher considers what role s/he might play within the drama, the following ideas come under scrutiny:

- a neighbour who has heard of Anna's plight (an intermediary role that confers the opportunity for leadership and decision making upon the students)
- the Captain of an international spider communication system that monitors how Ivan and Anna treat spiders and decides to show gratitude with the Christmas tree web (a leadership role that provides security if students aren't sure what to do next)
- a bureaucrat who is responsible for conscripting Ivan into the army (an opposer role that encourages children to confront and challenge authority)

The teacher considers all of these possibilities and decides on the following focus for the drama. The focus is most helpful when stated as a "what if" question:

**Focus:** What would happen if pioneer neighbours offered to help Anna and she was too proud or too frightened to accept their help?

Once the focus of the drama has been selected, the teacher decides she will introduce the pre-text for the drama (O'Neill 1995, p. 38) by reading the story to the students up to the point where Ivan is conscripted and leaves Anna to run the farm alone.

## Step 3: Establishing the Context

All of the conventions suggested in the following steps are described in Neelands and Goode's (2000) *Structuring Drama Work: A Handbook of Available Forms in Theatre and Drama*. Conventions are bolded and page numbers included to provide readers with easy reference within this helpful resource.

The teacher decides to help students establish their roles in the drama by using the role-on-the-wall convention (p. 22). Students will self-select into groups of three or four, and will be asked to create charts that describe the members of a farm family living in Anna's community. There will be as many people in the family as there are members of the group, since everyone in the class must have a role. Once these charts are completed, students will be asked to create a family portrait with their bodies using still image (p. 25). The images will be brought to life so that each member of the group can introduce him or herself to the rest of the class.

The next episode of the drama will see all the families in the community gathered at a town hall meeting (p. 35). The teacher-in-role (p. 40) as Anna's neighbour informs them that she found a letter in the field that must have blown away from Anna's house. The letter comes from Anna's mother (unfinished materials, p. 28) and advises Anna to go to her neighbours for help while Ivan is away, and not be so proud and determined to do everything for herself. The "neighbour" says she had no idea Anna was having so much trouble, and asks the members of the community for ideas about how they could help.

## Step 4: Building the Narrative Thread

The teacher will then invite the students to come out of role and discuss how there might be different opinions among members of the community. She will suggest that there would probably be some people who would *not* want to help Anna. The out-of-role discussion that ensues should help to create tension, an ingredient that engages students more deeply in the dramatic situation and provides further problems for them to solve. Bolton (1992) reminds us that tension is essential to drama and may evolve from conflict between characters or from constraint where characters experience but do not act out the internal conflicts they feel (p. 53). If no tension exists, problems are solved too easily and the drama may lose its impetus.

The next episode of the drama utilizes the overheard conversations convention (Neelands & Goode, 2000, p. 37). The teacher will invite students to divide into two large groups. One group will represent the people of the community who do *not* want to help Anna, and the second will be those who do want to help her on the farm. Within each group, students will pair up and interview (p. 33) each other about the reasons for their character's decision. Once the students have generated reasons for both perspectives, one group will conduct their conversations in an imagined venue, such as coming out of church or meeting at the general store, and the members of the other group will be the listeners. Then the groups will trade places and hear the opinions and ideas of the group that holds the opposite viewpoint. This strategy suggests how gossip and hearsay might operate to affect how people respond to someone in the community who is different or in difficult circumstances.

## Step 5: Poetic Conventions to Look at Symbols

The teacher decides it would be a good idea to have students stop and consider all of the characters in the story and think about what motivations drive them to act as they do. She might invite the students to use fun foam or maché to create half-masks (p. 61) that reveal the emotions or feelings that drive the characters they've met in the story or created in the drama. As these masks are shared with the group, others may try to guess which character is being revealed (i.e., Anna's might be sad; the government official might be evil or angry; the spider might be concerned; etc.). This episode or activity takes the students away from the plot of the drama and presses them to think more deeply about why some people act as they do in certain situations.

Instead of masks, the students might design a gift they would give to Anna to help her with her struggles on the farm. This gift might be a real object, like a plow or a team of oxen, or it might be a symbolic gift such as friendship and kindness. Students need to find a way to represent their gift in a concrete way (possibly as a picture or diagram, p. 19, or as an object of character, p. 20) so that they can present it to Anna in a ritual (p. 69) gift-giving ceremony. The teacher will take on the role of Anna for this episode. Students' characters who do not want to help Anna may create still images to demonstrate their disagreement or displeasure during the gift-giving ceremony. Rituals are excellent ways to engage students at a deeper emotional level in the dramatic context.

## Step 6: Reflecting and Concluding the Drama Work

The teacher wants the students to consider their work carefully and predict what will happen next in the story on the basis of the work they have done (since the drama has focused on a midpoint in the actual unfolding plot of the book). The teacher decides to use the narration convention (p. 85) to consider possibilities. Will Ivan come home or not? Will Anna accept help or not? How will the story of the spider enter into the ending of the story? Possible endings will be charted or listed on the board; then students select small groups according to which ending they believe will happen. Each group creates the ending and either tells it to the others as a group or has one or two narrators and the rest of the group acting out the ending (mimed activity, p. 63). Students try to decide which ending is the most plausible and consistent with the story as written so far.

When this activity is completed, students will be eager to find out which ending is the "right" one! The teacher will read the remainder of the story to her students.

## Step 7: Reviewing the Plan

The episodes of this drama have been mapped, but the teacher needs to ensure that s/he has used a variety of groupings across the episodes of the drama. S/he creates the following list to demonstrate her attention to varying her grouping practices:

### Whole Group

- the town hall meeting where the families hear about Anna's plight from the concerned neighbour
- the ceremony where Anna receives the gifts from those who wish to help her

## Small Group

- the creation of the role-on-the-wall family groups
- the still-image episode, in which students create family portraits
- the narration episode, in which groups create their predicted ending for the story

## Pairs

- interviews in which students decide if they want to help Anna or not
- overheard conversations, in which community members discuss why they do or do not want to help Anna on the farm
- creation of the masks to represent characters or the gifts to present to Anna

This teacher realizes s/he doesn't have enough individual activities to give balance to the drama, and so decides to have the students individually write the letters from Anna's mother at the beginning of the drama (Neelands & Goode, 2000, p. 16) rather than preparing this letter herself ahead of time. This episode will be added between the role-on-the-wall activity and the town hall meeting, and the teacher will insert a shared reading time to choose the letter that will be read.

## Step 8: Learning Objectives and Assessment

Because provincial English language arts curricula are specific to each province in Canada, the precise wording of learning objectives in these documents will vary. But there is general agreement among drama educators and researchers that process drama work creates a variety of opportunities for students to use language in purposeful and meaningful ways and to practise both oral and written language skills (Booth, 1987; Tarlington & Verriour, 1991; Wagner, 1998; Smith & Herring, 2001).

In this process drama unit, students have been immersed in language learning opportunities. They have used both oral and written language in purposeful ways to become more deeply involved and engaged with a children's storybook. Table 3 details the opportunities for purposeful language that have emerged in the two process dramas described here. Halliday's (1969) functions of language model (as described in Chapter 2) provides a framework to demonstrate the variety of oral language purposes that are addressed.

The process dramas we have explored in this section are constructed from a variety of teaching strategies or conventions. Although the following list (Table 4) summarizes the strategies that were used in both dramas, readers may wish to consult the work of Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode (2000), Carole Miller and Juliana Saxton (2004), or David Booth (2005) for a more detailed description of ways of working in process drama.

Teachers may address issues of inclusive teaching practice and social justice in process drama through both the content of books they select as sources or pre-texts, and the kinds of questions they ask their students to consider during episodes of reflection that occur both within and outside the dramatic fiction. By framing dramatic work in fantasy or historical contexts, students are afforded the opportunity to explore positive and negative ways that people treat each other apart from their own lives and experience. It is safe to talk about ways that some

TABLE 3 Purposeful Language in Process Drama

Halliday's Language Functions	<i>The Paper Bag Princess</i>	<i>Silver Threads</i>
<b>Instrumental</b> (asking for help or assistance)	The teacher-in-role asks for help in meeting the requests of the royal family.	The teacher-in-role asks members of the community to help Anna.
<b>Regulatory</b> (language to control others' behaviour)	The King, Queen, and Elizabeth make demands on the members of the Royal Court for contests, a party, and a voting campaign.	Students in role as Anna's mother write the letter that will advise Anna to seek and accept help from others.
<b>Interactional</b> (language to establish and maintain relationships)	The members of the Royal Court present their work to the royal family in hopes of pleasing them.	The members of Anna's community ask for permission to give her the gifts they have made.
<b>Personal</b> (language to tell about ourselves and our feelings)	Elizabeth's friends tell about themselves as they explain to each other why they became friends with Elizabeth.	The members of the community participate in interviews to tell about their feelings about Anna and whether they want to help.
<b>Heuristic</b> (language used to find out why and ask questions)	Reporters and photographers of the <i>Castle Times</i> must research dragons and find out what they are like.	Students (out of role) must find out who the character behind the mask really is, and will need to ask questions to do this.
<b>Imaginative</b> (language used to create new ideas and stories)	The dragon-proofing kits are created and explained by the reporter, photographer groups.	Students create the gifts—real or symbolic—for Anna from their own imaginations.
<b>Representational</b> (language to communicate information)	The staff of the <i>Castle Times</i> reports their work to Fester Grunhilde.	The community members tell their reasons for wanting or not wanting to help Anna.

members of that community long ago may have been cruel to Anna even though she was alone and needed help. It is not safe to talk in class about the ways you have been isolated and bullied on the playground. You may play the role of a victim in a drama when you are, in reality, a perpetrator of injustice against your classmates, and thus you may learn how it feels to be on the receiving end of power abuse without any direct instruction or lectures from your teacher. Conversely, you may be given the opportunity to play the powerful role of king or queen in a drama, when biases engendered by disability, race, or gender interfere with your performance of powerful roles in real life. The sensitive teacher is alert to opportunities provided by process drama work to indirectly teach powerful lessons about the human condition and exemplify practices of fairness and kindness that can be applied to real-life situations.

Both dramatic/sociodramatic play and process drama focus on participants as improvisers and invite them to draw on their experiences, imaginations, opinions, and speculations to improvise and create their own stories and dramatic representations of the understandings they wish to communicate. But the art form of theatre also includes aspects of interpretation, and theatre artists, as readers of scripts, are invited to interpret the ideas or understandings of the playwright through their directing, acting, and technical theatre skills. Drama as interpretation will be the focus of the next section of this chapter.

TABLE 4 Process Drama Strategies/Conventions

Process Drama Source	Strategy/Convention	Description
<i>Pied Piper of Hamelin</i>	<b>Reading-in-role:</b> Students read prepared documents when they are playing roles within the dramatic fiction.	The families of Hamelin who have lost their children each receive a letter from the Pied Piper giving them information, making demands, and setting conditions for the children's return.
	<b>Writing-in-role:</b> Students are asked to write as if they are someone else within the dramatic fiction.	The families compose letters to persuade the Pied Piper that they really have reformed and will take better care of their children in the future.
<i>The Paper Bag Princess</i>	Reading-in-role	The students, in role as reporters and photographers, read the memo from Fester Grunhilde, Managing Editor of the <i>Castle Times</i> .
	Writing-in-role	Reporters from the <i>Castle Times</i> share charts and other forms of written information about dragons they have written.
	<b>Teacher-in-role:</b> The teacher takes on a particular type of role (leader, intermediary, opposer among others) so that s/he can guide students and provide information within the dramatic context.	The teacher takes on three different roles in three different episodes of this drama: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the <b>intermediary</b>, Assistant Editor of the <i>Castle Times</i></li> <li>the <b>leader</b>, Fester Grunhilde, who approves the work</li> <li>the <b>intermediary</b>, Royal Chancellor to the royal family</li> </ul>
	<b>Mantle of the expert (Heathcote):</b> Students may keep their own names and personas within the drama but they act as if they have specialized knowledge or expertise.	Students take on the expertise of photographers and reporters and do the research, draw the diagrams and pictures, and report their findings as if they were actually on the staff of the <i>Castle Times</i> newspaper.
	<b>Drawing maps/diagrams:</b> Students create visual representations within the drama to make it more concrete and establish shared understandings.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The "photographers" draw or reproduce pictures of dragons to accompany the dragon reports.</li> <li>2. The ladies-in-waiting draw dress designs and make diagrams of decorations for the Queen's party.</li> </ol>
	<b>Meetings:</b> This strategy pulls the whole group together to provide information and gather opinions within the drama.	The Royal Chancellor calls all the members of the royal court together to give them information about the wishes and requests of the King, the Queen, and Princess Elizabeth.

Process Drama Source	Strategy/Convention	Description
	<b>Rituals:</b> These are whole-group improvisations in which everyone in role repeats an agreed-upon phrase before performing an action. These deepen engagement in the dramatic focus.	The members of the royal court address the members of the Royal Family with a "By your leave, your Majesty" or "By your leave, your Royal Highness" before they can share their ideas and plans.
	<b>Props/costumes:</b> Simple costume pieces (such as hats, masks, or capes) and simple props (a magic wand for example) are used to make the drama more concrete for students.	All of the students receive hats (prepared ahead of time by the teacher) to identify them as belonging to a particular group within the royal court.
	<b>Guest roles:</b> Someone from outside the classroom group is asked to enter the drama in role to provide information or create tension.	The Messenger arrives at the door to tell the photographers and reporters of the <i>Castle Times</i> that the dragon has burned down the Castle and Prince Ronald has disappeared.
	<b>Prepared documents:</b> The teacher creates documents such as letters, memos, posters, or reports ahead of time that are used inside the drama.	The teacher creates the memo from Fester Grunhilde to the staff of the <i>Castle Times</i> and the news scroll read by the messenger that announces the deed done by the dastardly dragon.
	<b>Spectrum of difference:</b> Students demonstrate their agreement or disagreement with an opinion or decision by placing themselves along an imaginary line in relation to both extremes.	The students indicate whether they want to elect Elizabeth as sole ruler of the Kingdom by placing themselves on a continuum from Completely Agree to Completely Disagree.
<i>Silver Threads</i>	Writing-in-role	The students write the letters that might have come from Anna's mother.
	Teacher-in-role	The teacher is a concerned neighbour who wants to help Anna.
	Drawing maps and diagrams	Students represent their gifts to Anna as diagrams or pictures of what they want to give to help her on the farm.
	Meetings	The people of the community gather at a town meeting to talk about Anna's plight and if/how they should help her.
	Rituals	Anna's gift-giving ceremony requires each student to repeat a line such as "I give you this gift to help you _____ because _____" (or something similar).

(continued)

Process Drama Source	Strategy/Convention	Description
	Props/costumes	Students create half-masks that represent the different attitudes of different people in the community where Anna and Ivan live.
	<b>Role-on-the-wall:</b> Students are supplied with chart paper and asked to describe the attributes of characters (imagined or from sources) they will play in the drama. These may be posted on the wall for later reference, to help them play characters consistently.	The “family” groups describe each member of their pretend family in a list of attributes. These lists will help them decide whether the person will decide to help Anna on the farm (depending on the attributes of the character they already created).
	<b>Still image:</b> Students use their bodies to create pictures or to freeze a moment of action in time.	Families in the pioneer community where Anna lives create family portraits with all the members of the family posed for the camera.
	<b>Tapping in:</b> The teacher can “unfreeze” people inside a still image one at a time to provide individual perspectives or information.	The teacher taps the shoulder of each member of the family portrait and this person is allowed to unfreeze and introduce him or herself to the whole group.
	<b>Interviews:</b> Students interview each other in role to help them make their roles more concrete and uncover their characters’ motivations and opinions.	The members of the community interview each other to find out who supports and who does not support the plan to help Anna. Interviewees must explain why they hold this stance or opinion.
	<b>Overheard conversations:</b> Students “eavesdrop” on each other in role to find out information and to practise careful listening skills.	Members of the community listen to conversations conducted by people who hold the opposite point of view as a way of identifying the problems created by gossip.
	<b>Narration:</b> These are bridges of storytelling that replace dramatic action and help move the drama along. This strategy allows students to condense events in the drama if time is a concern. Teachers may also prepare bits of narration to introduce new ideas or information.	The students create the endings of Anna’s and Ivan’s story based on the information in the first part of the book and the work they have done in the drama. This episode becomes the summary or reflection on the work that has gone before in this drama.
	<b>Pantomime:</b> Actions without words are used to communicate information or ideas.	Some students mime the activity as others narrate the stories about how Anna’s and Ivan’s story will end.

## INTERPRETIVE DRAMA: THE WORDS OF OTHERS

### Drama Meets Text in the Elementary Classroom

The importance of story in promoting children's growth and development as creative language users is illuminated in the following passage:

Children play out their lives through story. It tells them that life will go on, and gives form to what has happened, what is happening, and what may happen, ordering their experiences through gossip and anecdote and tale. They need stories from us to give reassurance to their inner stories, the ones that demonstrate their curiosities, fears, and concerns. (Barton & Booth, 1990, p. 18)

The "stories from us" are the orally told traditional stories, the films, the TV shows, the children's storybooks, the poetry, the plays, and the novels that we introduce to our children at home, in movie theatres, in libraries, but perhaps most often in school classrooms. Too often, we assume that if we teach children how to decode the written symbol system of their mother tongue and how to comprehend the structures of written language, we have given them all the tools they need to engage with recorded story; perhaps that assumption should be challenged.

The oral tradition of storytelling has been a part of teaching and socializing the next generation in every culture since humans came together in community groups. Cultural groups with written symbol systems inevitably recorded stories for the young as part of their legacy. When oral and written story traditions come together in the classroom, we harness powerful traditions to help our students order their experience and construct meaning in their lives. Although the play script may be the most easily recognized combination of oral and written storytelling traditions, there are other ways we can invite our students to bring the written word to life. This section explores forms of interpretive drama that may be more appropriate to the elementary classroom than the traditional play.

Lundy, in her very practical description of interpretive drama teaching strategies for the elementary classroom, reminds us of the importance of allowing children to make their own meanings from texts:

As literacy teachers, we need to know how and when to use various teaching techniques to help our students grapple with complex texts that have multiple meanings. We need to make a shift in the kinds of literacy tasks we ask our students to undertake, the kinds of thinking we invite them to do, and the kinds of responses we prompt them to make: they can become literate by talking themselves into understanding and writing to understand as well as to be understood. (2007, p. 99)

When children use their bodies, their minds, and their voices to concretize and enliven written words, their own experiences, imaginations, and beliefs become a part of the story and something new is created that belongs only to them. Thus, Rosenblatt's (1978) reader response theory finds concrete representation in the work children create from this interaction of text and their own lives.

Teachers may draw upon several dramatic forms to engage their students in interpreting texts that have been written by others. Forms that are most familiar and/or appropriate in the elementary classroom context include:

- reenactment of stories
- storytelling

- story theatre
- reader's theatre
- choral poetry work

Teachers may also invite students to orally interpret student-written poetry, prose, and plays, thus including both writing and reading in the interpretive experience. The following section examines interpretive teaching strategies that support work with children's literature in the elementary classroom.

## Exploring Text Through Drama

### Reenactment of Stories

Many teachers equate educational drama with students making and performing plays from traditional or contemporary children's stories. Heinig (1993) details her approach to story dramatization by emphasizing the importance of selecting simple stories with plenty of action, so that children will not become confused by details of plot when they bring the story to life. She suggests teachers add crowd scenes or groups of roles to the original story so that everyone has a part to play in the final production. She also recommends that teachers double- or triple-cast the main roles so that more children have the opportunity to play these parts.

In spite of the popularity of reenactment or story dramatization as a classroom activity, many educational drama specialists caution against overuse of this form of drama in elementary classrooms. Booth (1987) suggests that asking children to retell stories they have heard or read does little to engage their imaginations (although this work may challenge children to remember sequences of events in a story). The work of Bolton, Heathcote, Neelands, O'Neill, and other drama education theorists discussed in the previous section is founded upon the belief that students should use story as a source or pre-text for improvising and building their own stories. The too-frequent retelling of stories as student-performed plays is often discouraged in circles that support and encourage process drama work.

Most young children do not possess the mastery of language needed to become polished and proficient actors who can make a dramatized story interesting to an outside audience. Frequently the memorization of lines, the blocking of movements, and the staging of plays become tedious and time-consuming for student actors and teacher directors. Ask any teacher who has been in charge of directing the annual Christmas pageant! Although we find it endearing when a grade 1 child breaks character and waves to Grandma in the middle of bringing gifts to a swaddled Cabbage Patch doll, audience laughter can be misinterpreted by that child as ridicule. Many people have become terrified of public speaking as a result of just such an incident.

However, some learning opportunities are afforded by involving children in the reenactment of well-known stories in the safety of the classroom rather than in front of parent-packed auditoriums. Students become acquainted with the power of dialogue to communicate information indirectly, and may integrate more dialogue into their writing as a result of turning stories into play-script form. The technical aspects of theatre may receive more focus when

the story is known and children can turn their attention to creating costumes, sets, and props to help them bring their play to “the stage.” Story structures and elements must also be carefully considered and addressed purposefully when children write plays from stories they have heard or read.

When children use puppets to reenact stories or perform student-written plays, teachers may avoid the pitfalls of putting children in front of audiences as actors too early in their development. The puppet is less likely to be self-conscious, wave to Grandma, or forget lines (since its operator can have a script to read out of sight behind the puppet stage). Students may create their own puppets or use the commercial or teacher-created variety. Puppet collections and puppet stages are valuable additions to the elementary classroom drama corner. Classroom resources that describe puppet construction and use are available and include the Walkers’s (1989a, 1989b) teacher guides. These very practical resources are still available for purchase.

## Storytelling

Since the oral tradition of storytelling has been explored in Chapter 10 in some depth, readers are invited to review this work. Drama strategies that can support storytelling and storytelling strategies that support drama in the classroom include:

- *Soundscapes*. The teacher as storyteller invites students to create the background sounds as they occur in the story to create mood and atmosphere (Neelands & Goode, 2000, p. 73).
- *Guided tours*. The teacher as storyteller retells or creates a story to provide students with background information and visual details about the dramatic context or setting for a process drama. Often students are given time to relax and close their eyes as they listen to the story that sets the stage for the drama work to come (p. 18).

When storytelling is supported by pantomimed action, it becomes the interpretive approach known as *story theatre*, which we will now discuss.

## Story Theatre

Story theatre is similar to storytelling except that “all the actions and movements in the story are played out” (Lundy & Booth, 1983, p. 87). Story-theatre stories should include extensive dialogue, strongly defined characters, and many opportunities for simple action and movement. Lundy and Booth suggest the best choices for this work are myths, legends, folk tales, and other stories from the oral tradition.

Students and teachers can make choices about how they will interpret a story using story-theatre techniques. They may decide that the narrator(s) will read or tell the story, including the dialogue spoken by the characters. This might be the best approach to take with young children whose reading skills are emerging. Older students or the teacher will read or tell the entire story and the younger students will pantomime the action as it is described. This approach helps primary level children to develop listening skills, as they must attend closely to the words of the story in order to know what actions to perform.

Older students may choose the more complex and traditional approach to story theatre in which the characters who play out the action also speak the dialogue written in the text. Sometimes the narrator reads everything that is not actual dialogue, as in the following example:

**NARRATOR:** Little Red Riding Hood skipped through the forest on her way to Grandma's house. Suddenly she stopped because she noticed something moving behind a tree.

**LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD:** Oh my—is that wolf I see?

**NARRATOR:** ... she cried in terror. The wolf became very, very still.

The reading or telling of the story may be smoother, however, if characters speak not only the dialogue but the entire sentence that includes the dialogue:

**NARRATOR:** Little Red Riding Hood skipped through the forest on her way to Grandma's house. Suddenly she stopped because she noticed something moving behind a tree.

**LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD:** "Oh my—is that wolf I see?" she cried in terror.

**NARRATOR:** The wolf became very, very still.

Story theatre requires that students engage more thoroughly with the text of a story in order to uncover approaches to staging the story as drama. They may have to edit or abbreviate parts of the text that do not work well with this form. They may need to insert direct dialogue where it does not exist in the original story. Adapting a book or story for story theatre requires students to practise both oral and written-language skills.

Again, teachers are reminded to consider carefully before producing story-theatre work for large audiences in venues such as the school auditorium or gymnasium. Often students will be eager to show their work, but small voices and fledgling performers operate best in the classroom or drama room context, performing for small and supportive audiences of parents, teachers, or fellow classmates.

## Reader's Theatre

Because it requires little attention paid to staging or the other technical aspects of the traditional play, reader's theatre has become a popular strategy for working with play scripts in the classroom. Teachers may also create opportunities for students to write plays. Motivation to write may increase when students know their written work will lead to a reader's theatre performance. Finding stories that can be turned into play scripts may become a meaningful activity for students to help them analyze character, plot, and dialogue in short stories or storybooks.

The conventions of reader's theatre focus primarily on vocal interpretation. Players must consider how they will bring characters in the play to life using their voices and facial expressions. Elements of the spoken word, such as intonation, pitch, pace, volume, and juncture, can be discussed and explored in purposeful ways when students are discussing how to communicate mood and subtext with their voices. Lundy (2007) adapted to the needs of English-as-a-second-language learners in her classroom reader's theatre work by putting this

group in charge of creating the sound effects or soundscape for the performance (p. 49). This important contribution created a brilliant theatrical effect.

Certain conventions define traditional reader's theatre performance:

- Players are seated on the stage or in front of the classroom on chairs or stools. When someone turns his/her back to the audience, it usually means that this character is no longer present in the action.
- Players may stand or gesture to emphasize their lines but characters do not face each other or play to each other during the performance: all lines are played to the audience.
- Often students use a music stand or podium to hold the script so that their hands are freed for gestures.
- Players wear black or some type of uniform costume so that the audience is not distracted from the oral interpretation of script.

Numerous collections of reader's theatre scripts are available for classroom work. Dixon, Davies, and Politano (1996) include preparation exercises, staging ideas, learning objectives, assessment suggestions, and cross-curricular connections in a very practical reader's theatre resource.

## Choral Poetry Work

The power of poetry to engage children in drama is matched only by the power of drama to open up the delights of poetry for children. Drama and poetry both highlight the melodies and rhythms of oral language and both genres find their appeal in the actively spoken interpretation of words. Evocative poetry creates an excellent pre-text for process drama work, because good poems are usually both intense and condensed distillations of human emotions and story.

One of the most powerful process dramas I've developed to work with my pre-service drama education students was based on the pre-text of a Stan Rogers song, "The Northwest Passage." This song tells the story of the men who sailed into the Arctic Ocean with Sir John Franklin in search of the fabled sea passage to the Orient—a trading route sought by the early explorers to North America. The ships were lost and the men died in the frozen Arctic wasteland. The song compares this journey with the poet/songwriter's journey across the expanse of Canada to find his fortunes in the west. The process drama episodes that follow my sharing of this song with the students are characterized by their sincerity and eagerness to explore this place and time in Canadian history. Rogers's words communicate so powerfully a spirit of both adventure and loss that the work of building belief and creating context is almost accomplished before the drama even begins.

Although poems or songs that tell or suggest stories are most effective as sources for improvisational or process drama work (Fleming, 1994), poetic genres extending from the epic narrative to the lyric and the nonsense rhyme may be considered when teachers are searching for interpretive possibilities. When children interpret poetry with their voices and their bodies, they bring the words of the poet to life. Just as songs are meant to be sung, poems are meant to be read out loud. When the oral reading is enhanced by dramatic use of voice and gesture, the students' work becomes choral reading, choral speech, or

**TABLE 5** Inviting Students to Interpret Poetry

Question	Vocal Element
How do we want the people who are listening to us say this poem to feel when we say it for them?	<b>mood</b>
What do you think is the most important thing the poet is trying to say in this poem? Can you say it in just one sentence?	<b>theme</b>
Where are the places in the poem where we should read more quickly? More slowly?	<b>pace</b>
Where are the places in the poem where we should pause or take a little rest before we continue reading?	<b>juncture</b>
Where are the places where we need to make our voices soft or very soft? Loud or very loud?	<b>volume</b>
Are there any places where we need high voices? Low voices?	<b>pitch</b>
Are there places in the poem where we want only one voice saying the line? Two voices? A few voices? The whole class?	<b>colour</b>
Are there important words in the poem that we should make stand out for the people who are listening?	<b>emphasis</b>

choric drama. Choral speech is the term that defines poetry that has been memorized by the children so they no longer depend on the printed page. Choric drama includes pantomimed action or gesture, so that the interpretation of the poem is relayed through movement as well as voice.

Some excellent resources are available to support teachers' work with choral poetry work. Lundy's (2007) book *Leap into Literacy: Teaching the Tough Stuff So It Sticks!* includes an extensive component of student-created poetry as well as suggestions for inviting students to interpret the poems of others. Lundy and Booth (1983) detail a variety of approaches to working with poems in the drama classroom. Fleming (1994) provides examples of poems that work well for process as well as interpretive work. The number of children's poetry anthologies that are available to teachers is growing rapidly. Interpretive drama work can make poems—and poetry as a genre—both memorable and magical for children.

It is most important to empower students to create their own interpretations of a poem rather than impose the teacher's interpretation as the "correct" way to say it. Some questions that teachers may ask to invite student interpretations are detailed in Table 5. Of course, the teacher will not ask all of these questions at once. Children should be given many run-throughs to experiment with what their voices can do to enhance or interpret the meaning of the poem before they "set" and practise their interpretation.

The following poem by Lewis Carroll provides one example of how a poem might be interpreted dramatically by a year 4 or 5 class.

### My Fairy by Lewis Carroll (1845)

I have a fairy by my side  
Which says I must not sleep,

When once in pain I loudly cried  
It said “You must not weep”  
If, full of mirth, I smile and grin,  
It says “You must not laugh”  
When once I wished to drink some gin  
It said “You must not quaff.”  
When once a meal I wished to taste  
It said “You must not bite”  
When to the wars I went in haste  
It said “You must not fight.”  
“What may I do?” at length I cried,  
Tired of the painful task.  
The fairy quietly replied,  
And said “You must not ask.” (1845)\*

Students have been reading *Alice in Wonderland* and are interested in Lewis Carroll’s particular brand of humour. The teacher introduces this poem and asks them to think about how Carroll wanted people to feel when they read or heard it performed. The students decide that he was trying to make people laugh. One student offers the idea that this fairy sounds just like a parent who is always telling you not to do things you want to do. The others agree that this is just how it feels sometimes. There are few giggles about the poet wanting to drink gin, but the teacher suggests that Carroll was an adult when he wrote this poem and perhaps this is why he included this line. She asks if there are any words that the students are unsure about and students mention *mirth* and *quaff*, but are able to decide what these words mean by the context clues provided in the poem.

Students suggest that there should be a combination of groupings of voices to provide the vocal colour in the poem. They decide to have each of the fairy’s first five lines read by five individual voices. The whole group will read “What may I do?” at a strong volume and the small group of five “fairy” voices will whisper in unison “You must not ask.” The students decide this poem would benefit from some sound effects so they appoint a small group to inject snoring sounds, yelps of pain, laughter, “glug glugs” for the drinking line and “ouch” for the fighting lines. The rest of the students divide themselves into small groups to read the “When” lines in the poem. Someone suggests that they should start out slowly and then read faster and faster as the poem continues. They try this suggestion out and discover it does little to enhance the meaning or mood of the poem for them, so they elect to keep an even pace throughout the reading. Someone else believes that the word “must” should be strongly emphasized every time it occurs in the poem. A second student responds that the word “not” should receive even more emphasis than “must.” When students experiment they all agree that this phrase should jump out at the listeners, with “not” receiving slightly more emphasis than “must.”

Students read through the poem several times and are delighted with the way their voices bring out the humour and naughty mood of Carroll’s work. Someone suggests that they should practise and perform this poem at the upcoming school assembly. The teacher is confronted with the classic dilemma of the classroom drama teacher: To perform or not to perform? This question leads us into the final section of this chapter.

\*Lewis Carroll. ‘My Fairy’, 1845.

## PLAYS AND PERFORMANCE

### The Play's the Thing—or Is It?

The high-school drama club is often recognized as an important venue for students with acting or other theatre talents to gain their first experiences of what it means to be a theatre artist. The question of how old children need to be to perform scripted plays for outside audiences has often been raised. Of course there are child prodigies for whom acting is as natural as breathing, but does this mean that all children should participate in theatrical performance as part of their elementary school experience? This question has evoked the concern of drama educators over several decades of research and writing in educational drama.

Slade (1954) and Way (1967) strongly advocated for the importance of dramatic *experience* as the primary purpose of drama in the elementary school context. They suggested that conscripting young children into memorizing lines and *performing* plays was antithetical to the goals of humane and progressive education and that it would result in “showing off” and “artificial” performances. Drama educators of the Slade and Way school of thought argued that children younger than 12 or 13 did not have the maturity or language skills necessary to rehearse and perform at a satisfactory level to hold the attention of an audience, and should be spared the experience of performing badly.

In the 1980s and 1990s, educational drama theorists who had initially agreed with the “anti-performance” approach to classroom drama began to more deeply examine their understandings of what is meant. Gavin Bolton (1992) explains that young children “need the foundation offered by the existential experiencing and, for them, too much early emphasis on credibility, repeatability and communicability to an audience can be damaging” (p. 23). But he also suggests that theatrical elements (such as tension, symbol, and contrast) and sharing of work with classmates are essential components of classroom drama. Morgan and Saxton (1987) address the students’ requests to put on plays: “They see showing as a major part of drama. Of course, some just want to show off, but others have a genuine need to test out the validity of their work” (p. 129). These authors define this type of performance as sharing rather than as theatre.

Fleming demonstrates the evolution of Bolton’s understanding of performance and distils the changing perspectives toward performance and classroom drama that characterize current thought:

The distinction between “process” and “product” created false trails in thinking about drama teaching. The assumption that a performance in a theatre to an audience constituted a “product” and that improvised work in a drama studio amounted to a “process” does not stand up to scrutiny. As Bolton (1998:261) suggests, it is mistaken to give the impression that “process” is to be seen as an alternative to “product” for they are interdependent not polar concepts. (2001, p. 115)

If performance to an audience is considered a natural part of the process when senior elementary level students express the willingness and the need to “put on a play,” how can teachers maximize the learning potential of this experience for their students? The literature suggests the most meaningful approach might be to have the students create their own play rather than memorize lines from a prewritten play script. Play-building or collective creation is an approach that may meet the developing need to perform that occurs most often for middle-years students.

## Making a Play

The term “collective creation” (Goffin, 1995) identifies both a collaborative process undertaken by actors/students and their director/teacher and the creative product or “play” that results from that process. The collective creation differs from the traditional play in several ways: (1) it is “written” by a group of individuals rather than an individual playwright, (2) it usually encompasses a variety of viewpoints or “episodes” around a theme or idea rather than telling a plot-driven story, and (3) the collective participant assumes all theatre roles (set designer, director, actor, script writer, technical designer) at one time or another during the collaborative process.

Collective creation work supports students’ understanding and skill development in the art form of theatre and in social interactions with peers (Horn, 1992). Using the collective creation model with adolescents may invite students to gain objectivity, break out of old patterns of thinking, and gain different perspectives (Berk & James, 1992). Collective play-building also provides an excellent forum for the exploration of social justice issues (Gallagher, 2000; Grady, 2000; Belliveau, 2004; Conrad, 2004).

The instructional process of engaging students in making a play on a topic of their own choice demands that teacher/directors be patient, willing to live with ambiguity, and possess at least a rudimentary knowledge of theatre and theatrical conventions (Lang, 2002). The teacher must allow a considerable amount of time for students to explore ideas dramatically, to discover how to present these ideas so they will be interesting to the audience, and to rehearse their work for performance. Often collective work is improvised rather than scripted, since young performers can lose momentum when the additional challenge of script-writing is added to the already demanding experience of creating and performing a piece of theatre.

The pedagogical implications of working in collective creation with elementary-level students have barely been considered in the drama education literature: most of the research and writing in this area has been with students in secondary- and postsecondary-level settings. Although students in seventh or eighth grades who have considerable experience with drama may become successfully engaged in the collective creation process, the elementary-level teacher may want to focus on providing students with a variety of process/improvisational and interpretive drama experiences, so that students are grounded in the “basics” of drama before they enter the world of theatre at the high-school level. Showing or sharing interpretive and process work with small audiences made up of parents or classmates may provide important beginnings for collective and theatre work in high school.

## THE CHALLENGE OF ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN DRAMA

### Learning in Drama

Drama educators have been struggling for decades with the characteristics that make student assessment and evaluation in drama challenging for teachers. Some writers have approached this topic by exploring the kinds of learning that occur in classroom drama. Davies (1983) suggests that students learn in four different areas when they engage in classroom drama activity:

- *Improvisational skills used to seek meaning* (the ability to suspend disbelief, concentration, use of imagination, group process skills, imaginative action)
- *Understanding of themes and topics* (learning of concepts and information in other subjects through drama: includes adopting other points of view and problem-solving skills)
- *Theatre presentation skills* (voice, interpretation of script, characterization, technical skills)
- *Appreciation of theatre* (understanding of acting, play script, and the technical aspects of theatre from an audience point of view)

He maintains that the improvisational skills are the most difficult to assess in relation to student progress, and advises teachers to address theatre presentation and appreciation skills at the secondary-school level (pp. 96–104).

Morgan and Saxton (1987) state: “No systematic approach to evaluation in drama has evolved because the subject itself operates in a curriculum model which is heuristic (the pupil is trained to find out things for himself) rather than technological (the students are trained to assimilate a defined body of knowledge)” (p. 189). This statement, made in reference to process drama, prefaces their classification of learning objectives in the drama classroom. They suggest that summative evaluation in drama is possible only when you are addressing student progress in the measurable areas such as

- *Administrative behaviours* (attendance, punctuality, respect for space and equipment, completing assignments, following instructions)
- *Content knowledge* (knowing the rules of the game, the vocabulary, history, and literature of theatre)
- *Skills* (mime, memorization, improvisation, use of costume, mask and props, knowing when to speak and when to be silent, maintaining role) (pp. 191–193)

They suggest that the more *important* areas of learning and growth (self-discipline, willingness to trust, initiation and extension of ideas, sensitivity to the contributions of others, risk-taking, skills of cooperation, and personal engagement, to name but a few) are more difficult to measure, because growth in these areas is not readily apparent to the outside observer (pp. 195–197).

Bolton (1992) also emphasizes that the most important learning that occurs in process drama happens when students construct meanings for themselves from dramatic experiences. He suggests that teachers look for evidence of credible understandings, intellectual effort, coherence, and significance (p. 141). Evidence of this kind of learning is almost impossible to measure with any degree of objectivity. Wagner (1998) ties the challenges of assessment in drama to English language arts when she suggests “part of the problem in assessing the effects of drama on reading is the use of standardized tests. They are not sensitive to the kinds of language gain that facilitate deep understanding and empathy; in other words, they are not valid tests for measuring the effect of drama” (p. 177).

Another assessment/evaluation issue arises because drama is such an active and experiential approach to learning. When teachers are so deeply involved in participating in drama work with their students, they don’t often have the opportunity to observe the evidence of growth that these drama theorists emphasize is important. We need to explore more accessible approaches to assessing the impact of drama activity so that we can make informed decisions about the progress of our students.

## Addressing Issues of Assessment in Drama in the Language Arts

Because our context is drama in the English language arts classroom, we will focus specifically on language learning that may be enhanced by drama work. The following list of questions would be used informally to help teachers reflect on students' response to drama. Because drama is primarily a group activity that emphasizes cooperation rather than competition and individualistic achievement, I frame the questions to assist teachers in assessing the progress of the classroom group.

### Reading

1. Are students expressing an interest in reading books that may have themes or authors in common with books introduced or used as pre-texts for drama work?
2. Are reluctant readers more willing to read “in role” than they are when they are engaged in daily reading routines?
3. Do books used in drama come up more frequently in “favourite book” lists, book talks, or other places where children reflect on their choices in literature?
4. Do students express more interest in reading poetry or plays?

### Writing

1. Do students include more dialogue and action in their written work?
2. How does the writing-in-role work compare with out-of-role written work completed by the same student in terms of length and complexity?
3. Do students suggest that they would like to write plays or poetry in response to process or interpretive work with these genres?
4. Are students willing and motivated to keep drama journals or records of their work with drama?

### Speaking

1. Do you notice new vocabulary (that was introduced in drama) being integrated into students' conversation inside and outside the classroom?
2. Is students' oral reading becoming more expressive outside the context of drama activity?
3. Are students moving more easily among formal and informal registers of oral language (e.g., sentence structure and complexity, use of vocabulary)?

### Listening

1. Are students listening more attentively to directions and instructions since participating in drama activities?
2. Are students able to retain and sequence ideas that they have heard more easily since working with process drama?

This list of questions is both informal and limited in scope, but it may provide you with one approach to assessing the impact of drama work in your English language arts classroom.

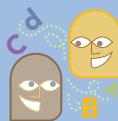
## SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the place of drama in the elementary English language arts classroom. We began with an examination of the role of unstructured dramatic and sociodramatic play in early childhood learning experiences. Secondly, a discussion of the purposes and foundations of process drama established a context for describing how to plan dramas from selections of children's literature. Instructional strategies and conventions for process drama were described.

Descriptions of interpretive drama strategies (including story theatre, reader's theatre, and choral poetry work) extended the discussion of drama work in the English language arts. Appropriate grade levels and purposes for working with plays and performance were explored (including a brief description of collective creation or play-building for senior elementary students). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenges inherent in assessing and evaluating drama and offers an informal list of questions that teachers may use to reflect on the impact drama has on students' language growth and development.

Although drama is an excellent support to English language arts teaching practice, it is also a valuable and important area of study in its own right. Readers are encouraged to read some of the resources listed in the following reference section to better acquaint themselves with the myriad of learning opportunities offered to students in drama work.

## TALKING POINTS



1. Select early, middle, or late elementary. Create a semantic web that shows your emerging understanding of what you as a classroom teacher could do to help children in this division learn to read. Following the creation of this web, highlight the aspects of your web that you feel most comfortable implementing and the parts of putting together reading instruction about which you feel most nervous or unsure. You might want to structure this last part as a series of questions.
2. Reflecting on your semantic web, think about the various circumstances that might alter your plans. For instance, how would your web need to change if you were teaching children of a different age?
  - ▷ The text of the story includes or suggests groups of characters who interact with the protagonist in an active way.
  - ▷ The supporting characters in the story may be flat or stereotypical so that children can use their imaginations to round out the characters themselves.

- ▷ Stories that are located in geographically distant or fantasy worlds allow children to discover “universal truths” while maintaining a safe distance from their own world.
- ▷ The theme of the story should be implicit rather than explicitly stated so that children can discover it for themselves through their work with drama.
- ▷ Stories that contain some element of magic or fantasy may ignite children’s imaginations and invite them into the make-believe world of drama.

Select a favourite picture storybook that would be appropriate for a grade level you would like to teach, and assess it as a source for drama using these criteria.

3. When you have found a storybook that does meet the criteria outlined in point 2 above, draft a plan for a process drama using this book as a source and using the eight-step process that is outlined in this chapter. Compare plans in small groups of four or five. Which steps were the easiest to complete? Which were the most difficult? What would you need to know/do in order to make your plan work in a classroom situation?
4. Find a popular children’s poet and choose a poem to interpret chorally in a small group of four or five. Use the questions in Table 5 to focus your choral interpretation.

## SELECTED PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

Some practical resources that elementary teachers will find helpful for drama work are included below. All four resources may be ordered from Theatrebooks (<http://www.theatrebooks.com>) in Toronto.

- Neelands, J. & Goode, T. (2000). *Structuring drama work: A handbook of available forms in theatre and drama* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This coil-bound resource catalogues 71 different approaches or conventions that teachers may use to involve students in process drama. Each convention gets a one- or two-page treatment that includes: (1) a description of what to do, (2) cultural connections, (3) learning opportunities provided by the convention, and (4) examples of the convention as part of a specific process drama. The conventions are organized into four main classifications: context-building, narrative, poetic, and reflective. Since I have used Neelands’s categories in the eight-step planning process outlined in this chapter, this text would be especially helpful as a complement to that process.

The following three resources are current, are written by Canadian drama educators, and include many practical drama activities and well-researched ideas for teaching.

- Booth, D. (2005). *Story drama: Creating stories through role playing, improvising and reading aloud* (2nd ed.). Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers.

This is the second edition of Booth's classic text that explains how drama work supports literacy learning and growth. The new edition includes excellent examples and suggestions for involving students in a variety of literacy experiences (including reading, story creation, and writing in and out of role). Booth addresses the entire spectrum of drama work—including performance—while retaining several stories about his own experiences working with children. His very practical chapter on assessing drama work includes checklists, criteria, and suggestions for assessing both drama programs and the progress of students in drama. This is an excellent resource from one of the leading scholars in both literacy and drama education.

- Lundy, K. G. (2007). *Leap into literacy: Teaching the tough stuff so it sticks!* Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers.

Although this brand-new resource includes many strategies that develop from current drama education pedagogy, students' literacy growth and development is the central focus. Lundy includes planning strategies, teaching ideas, and practical suggestions for working with poetry, reader's theatre, photographs, scripts, and objects as part of a "drama-rich" literacy program. The book includes checklists, assessment suggestions, and a variety of examples to support the integration of drama into the elementary language arts classroom.

- Miller, C. & Saxton, J. (2004). *Into the story: Language in action through drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Carole Miller and Juliana Saxton have created a resource that is incredibly supportive and clear for teachers who are just beginning to work with process drama approaches in the English language arts classroom. They offer 10 detailed, structured, and clearly explained process dramas based on current children's books that were published in the 1980s and 1990s. Each drama includes explanations of why the book was selected, key understandings and questions that will focus learning for students, and between 10 and 17 episodes per drama that ensure students explore the story in depth and over a period of several lessons. They also include a large extensions list for each process drama, a variety of grouping strategies, and lists of all materials and supplies that will be required. I highly recommend this book for beginning teachers.