

*Act*

*Speak*

*Listen*

Drama Activities for the Classroom

Jenny Rudd O'Neill

**SAMPLE PAGES**

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# Contents

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Introduction	5
<b>SECTION 1 BASIC SKILLS</b>	<b>7</b>
Relaxation exercises	8
Posture exercises	9
Stage skills	10
Different ways of walking	10
Warm-up games	12
Short fill-in games	13
<i>Managing nerves – student worksheet</i>	15
<b>SECTION 2: MIMING</b>	<b>16</b>
Individual mime showing care	17
Individual mime without change	18
Individual mime with change	20
Group mime with a change	22
<i>Planning a mime – student worksheet</i>	23
<b>SECTION 3: GROUP IMPROVISATION</b>	<b>24</b>
Scenes from stimulus	25
Positive advertisements	26
Scene from a scaffolding outline	27
Hello, who are you?	28
<b>SECTION 4: INDIVIDUAL IMPROVISATION</b>	<b>29</b>
Bag of clothes	30
Reacting to an emergency	31
Street interviews	34
<b>SECTION 5: WORKING WITH CHARACTERS</b>	<b>37</b>
Facial expressions	38
Frozen photograph	39
Character-based plays	40
<i>Creating characters – student worksheet</i>	41
Monologues on favourite stories	42
<i>How to plan a monologue – student worksheet</i>	44
<b>SECTION 6: PAIR WORK</b>	<b>45</b>
Basic skills in pairs	45
Telephone dialogues	47
Duologues – realistic	49
Duologues – fantasy	51

<i>How to plan a duologue – student worksheet</i>	53
<b>SECTION 7: BEING PERSUASIVE</b>	<b>54</b>
Convince an audience	55
Convince another person	57
Convincing jobs — street interviews	59
<b>SECTION 8: PANEL WORK</b>	<b>61</b>
Life questions	64
Job interviews – ‘hot-seating’	65
<b>SECTION 9: PUPPETRY</b>	<b>67</b>
Script for a puppet play	70
<i>Acting with puppets – student worksheet</i>	72
<b>SECTION 10: DIFFERENT KINDS OF PLAYS</b>	<b>73</b>
Radio plays	74
<i>Making radio plays – student worksheet</i>	75
Medieval plays	76
<i>Performing a medieval morality play – student worksheet</i>	77
<b>SECTION 11: CREATING CLASS PLAYS</b>	<b>78</b>
Short play from first line	80
Proverbs on which to base a play	82
Poems for acting	84
<i>Turning a story into a play – student worksheet</i>	85
<i>Writing your own play – student worksheet</i>	86
<b>SECTION 12: EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCES</b>	<b>88</b>
<i>Review or critique – student worksheet</i>	89
<i>Analysis of group performance – student worksheet</i>	90
<i>Individual analysis of own performance – student worksheet</i>	91

## The ideas

Teachers can use the ideas in this book in ways that suit the needs of their class. It can provide a course of work over a whole year, or single lessons that can be used in any order. It is a good idea to start each session with some of the relaxation exercises, basic skills or warm-ups.

## The student worksheets

These can be copied and given as part of class work or as home exercises. Students will need to refer to some worksheets several times, so ask them to store them in a book or folder kept for drama.

## The topics

The different sets of topics are divided into Beginner and Advanced levels. The beginner topics will suit primary students. The advanced topics are for more experienced, older or more confident students. There are 30 at each level, so that every student in a large class can have a different subject.

## Rules

Establish rules so that everyone feels safe and accidents are avoided. Mention respect for the bodies of others (and their own) and being aware of furniture, rugs and doorways that might hinder safe movement. You might need to have no-go zones. Point out that cooperation as a group is crucial in drama. Stop activities that degenerate into silliness. Incessant giggling is usually a sign of nerves.

## Space

An ordinary classroom can be used for all the activities in this book, but it is better if you can remove some desks and make a space where students can move around. A hall or larger room booked for regular times will mean you can cover a greater range of movements and will make the drama class special. If possible,

students should be dressed for ease of movement. Sports uniforms are ideal. Otherwise take off ties, blazers and jewellery as far as practical. Barefoot is good if the floor is not slippery.

## Desirable equipment

- stopwatch or timer and bell
- thick cardboard and black marker pens
- tape recorder/computer/music player of some kind
- microphone/s if possible with both a desk stand and a floor stand
- portable speaker for the microphone and an extension chord
- video recording facilities if possible, even if only once or twice a year

## Props

Although students will use their imagination to show most things, it is worth collecting some props to set the mood. Props worth collecting are:

- cardboard boxes of different sizes
- old advertising brochures and books and telephone directories
- old telephones of any description (or realistic toy telephones especially mobiles)
- household items such as small brooms, toy irons, teapot, feather duster
- percussion instruments, sirens and other noise makers
- toy camera, binoculars, telescope
- alarm clock, old keys, large showy jewellery
- ribbons, belts, scarves or strips of brightly coloured material
- teddy bear, rag doll, baby doll, baby's bottle, rattle
- a few Christmas decorations

## Costume

Full costume is impractical and can be restricting (except in rehearsed plays), but one or two symbolic items can help actors feel they are part of a situation. Worth keeping in a box or cupboard are: scarves, neckties, hats, caps, large belts, skirts/pants (large, long), belts, aprons, vests, shawl, jacket, strip of material such as velvet, unusual tee shirts, hats, large shoes, dressing gown, wigs and hairpieces, large feathers.

Hats, wigs and masks are available from chain stores, and party and bargain shops – or make your own. A request in the school newsletter for discarded fancy-dress costumes can be worthwhile. An old shop dummy or large doll, preferably not dressed as any particular character, is useful in many situations.

## Integrating technology

Access to computers is invaluable. Script-writing is easier if authors can make running changes as they rehearse. Multiple copies of scripts can be printed.

This book does not cover detailed film-making, creating virtual drama and similar, because schools vary so much in the resources available to them. There are special CDs available, for example from NIDA, that allow students to create scenes and add costumes, backdrops and various special effects. State education departments also provide resources online. Where possible, link these with drama work.

## Observation notebooks

It is useful for drama students to keep a notebook to write observations that might be useful when acting as another character. For example, actors could sit near a playground to observe toddlers, go to a shopping mall to watch old people and note *precise* details (avoid generalisations) of how they walk, sit, wait in line, use public transport. They should have a folder or larger book for storing scripts, worksheets and other notes.

## Speaking voice

Clear speech is important. Mumbling, mispronunciation and swallowing syllables mean others will not understand the performance. Keen actors should hone their speaking skills and perhaps enter speech competitions for experience.

# SAMPLE PAGES

# Section 1: BASIC SKILLS



Basic skills that can be practised regularly include relaxation techniques and ease of movement exercises, particularly movement and walking used in performance. Do some at the beginning of each class and encourage students to practise at home.

The student worksheet on managing nerves, at the end of this section, gives instructions for relaxation exercises students can work on as a follow-up after class.

Knowing how to relax helps manage anxiety. It is a skill for life. Like any skill, relaxation becomes easier the more it is practised. Relaxation exercises are especially useful for calming nerves before performances. If possible, students should lie on the floor without touching others for the relaxation exercises. If not, most exercises can be done sitting on a chair or beside their desks.

The warm-up and fill-in games in this section can be used at any time in a classroom, a hall or an outdoor space.

For stage skills and walking exercises, students will need more space. It might be necessary to stack desks and chairs to one side of the room or go outside.

## SAMPLE PAGES

# Different ways of walking

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## *INSTRUCTIONS*

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The following exercises can be done by a whole class walking in a large circle or up and down in a hall or playground. If you wish, make the walks entirely silent.

Explain to the class that the way a person walks will tell the audience a lot about their age, health, fitness or the mood they are in at the time. Then read the following:

“I will give you a statement about a character. When a character is announced, you should get a mental picture of the kind of walk this person would have in this situation. Decide if you should walk in a lively way, a shuffle, stiffly, with large steps or small steps. Keep your arms by your side, don't fold or cross them (except if an action is called for). Keep your head up. Do not fiddle with your clothing. Then I will ring a bell (or click my fingers). This is the signal for you to walk around the room as the character. When you hear the signal a second time, stop where you are, stand still and listen for the statement about the next character. Then do the same as before.”

## *Beginner*

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1. A happy child skipping to a party.
2. Person crunching their way through a pile of autumn leaves.
3. A farmer who has done hard physical work all day.
4. A mother pushing a double stroller up a hill.
5. An old person going to the end of their street.
6. A person with a sore toe that hurts whenever it touches the ground.
7. A proud prize-winner going on stage to accept a prize.
8. A singer about to take the microphone for a song.
9. A person your age trying to get across a very busy road.
10. A child pulling a large, overweight dog.
11. A pirate walking onto captured ship.
12. A six-year-old with a kite on a windy day.
13. A busy nurse going through a hospital ward with a tray of medicines.
14. A person carrying heavy picnic basket up a grassy slope.
15. A student in a school hall they are not meant to be in.
16. A space traveller who has landed on new planet with soft squashy ground.
17. A fire-fighter who has just been called to an emergency.
18. A person with their leg in plaster.
19. A parent trying to leave the baby's room without waking the baby.
20. A dancer practising dance steps.
21. A footballer who has just been disqualified, walking off the field.

## Reacting to an emergency

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### ***INSTRUCTIONS***

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The teacher chooses a situation and reads it out in a dramatic way. Students have to show how they would respond to the situation. They can do this individually or in pairs, taking turns, depending on time available. They should use both words and actions as appropriate to develop a short sketch of about 1–3 minutes. If you prefer, they can be mimed. If you have less time they work well simply as verbal explanations. Answers will be amusing, but they should still be clever.

### ***Beginner***

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1. You were playing with a mirror and it caught the sun. Suddenly a fire starts.
2. Whenever you go past the driveway next door the dog always rushes up and barks fiercely. Deal with the dog!
3. You've dropped a bottle of bright red ink on the new paving that was just put in last week. Your parents will be furious.
4. You are looking after your cousin. She falls and cuts her arm and it's bleeding.
5. You are last to leave school. There's only one bag left and it is not yours. Somebody has taken *your* bag by mistake.
6. The clock stopped in the night. You wake up at 10 a.m. and it's a school day!
7. You were with your parents in the big new shopping mall but you get lost. You can't find the seat where they said they would be.
8. Angry magpies fly down and pull your hair when you go outside to play.
9. The drink machine only takes coins and all you have is a \$10 note.
10. All your team is coming over, but at the last minute your rabbit eats the chocolate slice you specially made and the shops are closed.
11. You are carrying groceries home and a yogurt container cracks and breaks. Yogurt pours out over everything including your shoes.
12. The bottle of drink you put in the freezer has exploded. Everything is sticky.
13. On a stormy day you get home to find the window broken and rain pouring into your bedroom where you keep the expensive new computer.
14. The shop assistants keep serving older people and you are in a desperate hurry.
15. As you are walking to school you see a huge tree has come down right on top of your classroom roof.
16. You're already in the bathroom when you realise that the whole roll of toilet paper is around the garden again, thanks to the new puppy.
17. Through your classroom window you see that a crazy horse from the next paddock has escaped and is destroying the playground equipment.

18. For fun, you tipped a bottle of hair shampoo into the bath and now you've broken out in lumps all over your body.
19. It's dress rehearsal for the play but you forgot to bring the false moustache you must wear. The producer will be angry because you forgot last time too.
20. It's library day. When you find your library book you discover someone at home has spilt tomato sauce all over it and it's ruined.
21. Someone throws a match out of a car window. Suddenly the grass right next to your front gate bursts into flames.
22. When you go into your bedroom you find the jar of tadpoles you collected has broken and the water is all over the floor. Catch them!
23. Your tennis ball has just knocked the vase of flowers on the top of the TV and you were told not to play ball games in the house.
24. When you get to the party, everyone is swimming in the pool but you forgot to bring your swimming costume.
25. You are caught in a cave with a huge sleeping kangaroo blocking the exit.
26. The next door house is on fire and all the fire brigades are away at a big bushfire in the next town.
27. Those mice from Year 3 room have escaped again and are running around behind the assembly hall stage. Catch them!
28. You are out on the lake in a small rowing boat with a friend. The boat develops a leak and is rapid filling up with water.
29. You are walking along the footpath with your 2-year-old cousin. Suddenly the child gets his foot stuck in a grate and starts to scream.
30. A friend asked you to mind his dog for a week. The trouble is it follows you everywhere, even to school and into the classroom.

### *Advanced*

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1. You've just slipped on a banana skin in a crowded mall. You are not hurt but you feel silly and people are laughing.
2. Everyone in the cricket team scored a duck and now you are the last bat. You only need six to win but you know your strength is in bowling, not batting.
3. Neighbours singing loudly woke you up at 2 a.m. It's the third time! Last time when you complained it only made the noise worse.
4. Your hands and feet are freezing cold and you can't get into the house because you've lost the key. Nobody else is home.
5. When you are shopping, a runaway car crashes through a shop window right next to where you are standing.
6. You are standing on a crowded train on a wet day. The person next to you has their dripping umbrella stuck in your shoe.
7. The baby has dropped grandma's expensive spectacles into the toilet and you were meant to be watching him.
8. You're late leaving school. As you go out the gate a man snatches your wallet.

## Duologues – realistic

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### *INSTRUCTIONS*

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Two people are needed for each topic. Each acts as one of the characters in the topic they are given. They must have a conversation in character that suits the situation. Preparation time can be allowed, but it is fun to improvise.

For preparation: suggest that students first make a point outline of they want to cover. Then they should write their last line and memorise it. This prevents a weak or dragged-out ending. Then they should write and learn their opening lines. They can ad lib or improvise the rest of the sketch according to the points they have made. They should not try to memorise every word. Hand out copies of student worksheet *How to plan a duologue* (p. 62) if they do not have it.

### *Beginner*

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1. Two parents watching a match boast about how good their children are.
2. A person answering the phone and a caller who insists, for the fourth time, that this is not the number they want.
3. A student at a front door trying to sell chocolates for the school to someone who is very busy.
4. A local newspaper reporter trying to convince the principal to let them write a story about your school.
5. Two children each insist it is their turn on the swing.
6. Contestant on a television quiz and the judge disagree on an answer.
7. Neighbour and owner of cat that uses neighbour's prize flower garden as a bed (or worse!).
8. A pageboy and the flower girl he says tripped him up at their aunt's wedding.
9. Dentist with someone who eats too many lollies.
10. The postie trying to explain to a home owner that their letter box is too small for the large magazines they order.
11. Two students argue about who is going to sit next to the new person in class.
12. Father with a child who refuses to wear a raincoat because it isn't raining yet.
13. Two members of a gang plan a crime together.
14. A student who gave a speech in class and student who kept pulling faces during the talk.
15. A coin collector and a stamp collector each insist that their hobby is the best.
16. A person who wants to have a proper swim and a friend who keeps going underwater and grabbing the person by the ankles.
17. A waiter and a customer who won't pay a bill because he says the bread was mouldy.