Creative Dramatics

A Workbook of Games, Poems, Improvisations and Acting Stories

By Vern Adix

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WHAT IS CREATIVE DRAMATICS?

Creative dramatics in many respects is simply modified play activity. It may be used with any age level group: pre-school, elementary school, intermediate school, high school, college, or post college. It may be used as a fun activity, as an educational device or as an actor training tool. It can be used as an in-class device that begins and terminates within the classroom period, or it can be used as a device to evolve and develop a drama that germinates, then grows gradually until it becomes a polished audience production.

The material in the following pages is concerned more with an elementary form of creative dramatics rather than an advanced, sophisticated form. It is concerned with participation exercises for the classroom rather than exercises developed for an audience.

Creative dramatics exercises have merit and values that frequently are lost when a group of people, or a class, performs them for an audience. In an audience situation, the overt participants frequently become “show-offs” and the introverted participants become self-conscious. When this happens, the exercises lose their value. Admittedly this can also happen with classroom exercises, but discipline is easier to handle in the classroom and the experience is usually less traumatic than when an audience is watching the exercise.

If the students are to have a truly creative experience, most of the ideas and concepts used in the creative dramatics exercises must come directly from them. They will need hints, clues, urging, pushing and even some gentle prodding to get them started, but ideally as much of the total effort as possible should come from and be generated by the participants.

At the very outset it should be understood that intellectual, emotional, and personal traits differ not only from one group to another, from one school class to another, and from one age group to another, but also from one individual to another. One person as leader of a group or teacher of a class will discover exercises and an approach to presenting exercises that works beautifully and effectively. Maybe you can copy and duplicate that person and be just as effective - and maybe you cannot - or maybe you do not want to - which is perfectly understandable. Do your own thing! Develop your own process to accomplish approximately the same results.

Although it was just suggested that the ideas and concepts for creative dramatics exercises should come from the participants, it is a good idea for the teacher or leader to have a good deal of “pump priming” material available to use when needed.

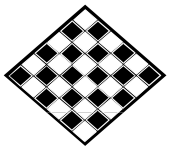
The material to be used for various classroom creative dramatics exercises may be roughly divided into four classifications. These classifications are here established merely to facilitate in gathering and arranging materials into a usable collection rather than because they are distinctly different in style and content.

The four classifications are:

1. Theatre-oriented games and exercises
2. Improvisations
3. Poems with a story line to act out
4. Stories to retell and act out

The following pages contain a brief description and numerous examples of exercises that fit into the above categories. It is to be hoped that most of these exercises will work for you. If necessary, adapt them to your own individual style. And add as many of your own as you can. Keep this a viable and usable collection of material for your own classroom.

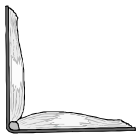
If you follow approximately the format indicated below in making out your exercises, they will conform to the exercises in this book.



Games:
Title of game
Number and type of participation: Total, teams, "it", etc.

Improvisations:
Title of improvisation
Number of participants
Details of situation that you wish to provide: beginning, end, outline, character traits, etc.

Poetry:
Title, author, publisher, date of publication, title of collection, etc.
Brief story line summary

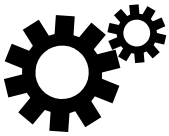


Story to Retell and Act Out:
Title of story and/or book in which it may be found
Author, publisher, date of publication, place of publication
Mood of story – comedy – serious – mystery – historical – etc.
Brief summary of story or of actable part or parts
Number of characters – possibly type of characters

NOTE: You will undoubtedly find it desirable to use "warm-up" games, "relaxing" exercises and "get-acquainted" games that are not strictly related to pantomime and acting.

CHAPTER 1 - THEATRE GAMES

There are literally thousands of games. Some games are musically oriented; some are athletically oriented; some are mentally oriented; and some are theatrically oriented. In order for a game to be theatrically oriented it should utilize physical pantomimic action, or descriptive action accompanied by vocal sound - all of which means that it should employ the elements of acting. The following are some examples of games of this nature:



Machine Game

Begins with one person - any number may join after the action is established.

Procedure: One individual in the group or class has an idea or is given an idea by the leader or teacher for a rhythmical physical motion and sound for the basic part of a machine. After this person has established the motion and sound, other members of the group are urged to create gears, levers, belts, hammers, cogs, switches, brakes, that connect to and/or are operated by the original or added parts of the mechanism. Each person tries to capture the original rhythm but at the same time establish an additional set of movements and sounds. Ideally everyone in the group of class will join in to build a complex machine with parts moving in all directions.

The Glob of Goop

One at a time in sequence around a circle.

Seat the group in a circle, either on the floor or on chairs. The leader has an imaginary Glob of Goop. This magical Goop can be shaped into any object of any size. It can be compressed until it is tiny or stretched and enlarged until it takes on enormous proportions - depending upon the desire of the person who possesses it at the moment. The leader carefully shapes an object, or shapes the parts of an object and assembles them, and upon completion of the object, shows how the object is used. The other members of the group guess the identify of the object. As soon as someone has guessed what the object is, the leader compresses the material back into a Glob and passes it on to the next person in the circle who in turn manufactures another object.

Variations: The game may be varied in any number of ways. The one who guesses the object may take the next turn. Two or three may take portions of the Goop and make objects that are used together in a scene. One person may request that another make a specific object.

Grandmother's Trunk

One at a time in some type of sequence - voluntary sequence or assigned sequence. The teacher or leader will carry in, or establish in some other way, the existence of a large, old trunk. The trunk and its contents are imaginary.

The teacher or leader may start the game or may select someone else in the group to start it. One by one the individuals of the group will then open the trunk, remove something from it. If it is clothing, the person will pantomime putting it on. If it is an object other than clothing, the person will pantomime its use.

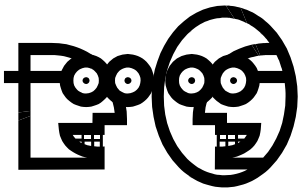
After the object has been used and identified, it should be returned to the trunk and the lid closed.

The teacher or leader might want to mention some of the objects that could be in the trunk such as: hats, scarves, pants, shoes, socks, mufflers, handkerchiefs, neckties, gloves, shirts, overcoats, food, candy, dishes, tools, paper objects, wooden objects, electronic objects, working equipment for a specific trade, etc.

Variations: A real trunk or real box may be used containing a variety of costumes, objects, etc. Each individual may be allowed to take one or more objects and from those objects create a character. The group with these few pieces of clothing or objects may then create a skit that utilizes the costumes or objects to aid in characterization and plot.

Mirror Game

Participation in pairs.



Pairs of students are placed face to face. One person is the mirror image of the other. The person in front of the mirror begins a slow movement, probably with one hand first. The other person, who is the mirror image, reflects as closely as possible the movement. Movements should not be too rapid or jerky. An observer should find it difficult to discover which is the mirror image. At any time the mirror may take over and become the leader and the shift should be so smoothly done that it is difficult to tell that it is happening. This game requires complete concentration.

What Is My Occupation

One by one participation.

The leader or teacher will probably want to discuss various occupations and probably illustrate what some people do when they are at work in their occupation. When the time seems right, one person volunteers or is selected to pantomime a person at work. The other members of the group should be given an opportunity to guess the occupation. The one who guesses correctly, will then take a turn and pantomime another occupation.

Variation: The performers may add vocal sound effects and/or conversation that fits the occupation.

End of Freeview

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