

Drama as Power Project

There are other, perhaps untraditional, methods for engagement that facilitate a student's personal connection with literature. Rosenblatt (1978) asserts that "the benefits of literature can emerge only from creative activity on the part of the reader himself" (p. 276). Like drama, reading for meaning and exploration demands the reader's involvement and participation in the text. The connection between reading literature and drama is described by Rosenblatt (1978):

We accept the fact that the actor infuses his own voice, his own body, his own gestures—in short, his own interpretation—into the words of the text. Is he not carrying to its ultimate manifestations what each of us as readers of text must do? (p. 13).

Like actors, when we are engaged as readers, we allow ourselves to participate in the imaginary text worlds. Reading literature, according to Rosenblatt (1995), is the reader's participation in a "transaction" with text that produces meaning. For less engaged readers, who tend to have the most difficulty reading challenging literature such as the canon, creative dramatics can aid their understanding of the text. The act of reading is described as the creation of "secondary worlds" and the involvement and enactment of drama within these text worlds (Britton, 1970). If readers are placed into this secondary world through creative dramatics, then they are experiencing and reacting to the text from within. This kind of participant stance that the reader takes allows him or her to participate in this text world rather than be a spectator. Thinking of methods and strategies that catapult a student into the text is a primary goal for teaching literature. How can we help students visualize and experience the texts they read? Visualizing text through creative dramatics can nurture their engagement with text.

As a pre-reading activity, drama strategies do the following:

- Aid disengaged readers in the understanding of the canonical text
- Address the needs of the kinesthetic learner
- Allow students to evoke and exert control over the ideas, sensations, characters, and meanings
- Allow students to participate in the text world rather than be passive spectators

A strategy that Katie learned at the National Endowment for the Humanities Shakespeare Institute exposes students to major themes in *Hamlet* before they even crack the binding of the play. She says, "I have often found that students skim over lengthy passages where one character is the primary speaker." What students often don't realize is that important plot elements and insights into the characters are in these passages. This is particularly characteristic of Shakespeare's monologues and soliloquies, such as Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be" speech at the beginning of the play. This speech offers some important insights into the title character and foreshadows key conflicts and plot elements. Drama strategies, such as the exercise provided in Exhibit 2.11, can slow down students' reading speed so they can focus on

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what the character is saying. *What happens?* The students soon discover that Hamlet is very unhappy and is contemplating suicide. Before they begin the text, they already know the title character's main conflict in act 1 and are already considering sources for his unhappiness. They are using their reading skills, too, as they make predictions about possible events in the play.



Guidelines for Creating an Effective Drama Exercises Activity

Create inquiry questions for canonical text to create prompts, which should be

- Thought provoking and should tie the themes of the canonical literature with personal reflection
- Predict character actions and potential consequences of those actions
- Synthesize moral character conflicts with present or real-life situations

Guidelines for Follow-Up Discussion to Drama Exercises

- Ask for general responses first.
- Avoid sharing your opinion.
- Focus on the students' opinions and repeat what they say, in order to elicit further reflection.
- Encourage and model active questioning (*example*: "If Macbeth didn't kill Duncan, what would have happened?")

Exhibit 2.11 Drama-as-Power Lesson Plan

Pre-Reading Lesson	Drama as Power
Educational Benefit	Active exploration and manipulation of text
Example	Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be" speech from William Shakespeare's play, <i>Hamlet</i>
Materials	Index cards, each one with a line from a monologue from the play.
Time	15–20 minutes
Preparation	
Step 1	Identify the purpose for your pre-reading activity: What information are you looking for the students to learn from the activity? What issues do you want to clarify in the activity? Character motivation? Character conflict? Themes? Choose a monologue that conveys the information that students need to learn.
Step 2	Write each line of this monologue on a separate index card.
Procedure	
Step 1	Arrange the students in a circle.
Step 2	Hand each student a card with a line from the text, keeping the lines in sequence as you distribute the cards.
Step 3	In a circle, each student will act the line of the text.
Step 4	Have the group of students practice their lines of the monologues as a group a couple of times. These practice sessions can provide students with additional time to reflect on the text being read.
Step 5	The ultimate goal is to make it sound like one person is speaking.
Follow-up Discussion to Drama Pre-reading Strategy	
IRA/NCTE Standards	<ol style="list-style-type: none">Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

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