

Dramathemes

Classroom literacy that will excite, surprise, and stimulate learning

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4th edition



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An Overview

CHAPTER/ DRAMATHEME	GAMES FOCUS	DRAMA EXPLORATION	DRAMA STRUCTURE USING A SOURCE	ASSESSMENT PROFILES
1: Revealing Identity/ Connections	Names	Choral Dramatization	“Hector Protector” (nursery rhyme)	Choral Speaking
2: Planting Hope/ Sustainable Environments	Still Images	Creating Tableaux	<i>The Promise</i> by Nicola Davies (picture book)	Tableaux (self- assessment) Developing Comprehension through Drama
3: Sparking Imagination/ Fantasy Worlds	Creativity	Creating Art	<i>The Judge</i> by Harve Zemach (poem)	Group Participation (self-assessment)
4: Learning Lessons/ Animal Tales	Movement	Movement	“The Lion and the Mouse” (fable)	Movement Storytelling (rubric)
5: Confronting Bullying/ Relationships	Building Inclusion	Role Playing	<i>The Shape of a Girl</i> by Joan MacLeod (script)	Role-Playing Skills
6: Recognizing Homelessness/ Community	Personal Narrative	Storytelling in Role	<i>Mr. Stink</i> by David Walliams (novel)	Storytelling Skills
7: Moving On/ Immigrant Experience	Communication	Interviewing	<i>The Arrival</i> by Shaun Tan (graphic novel)	Writing in Role (self-assessment) Writing in Role (rubric)
8: Accepting Others/ Belonging	Embracing Diversity	Questioning	<i>Wonder</i> by R. J. Palacio (novel)	Drama Participation (rubric)
9: Posing Possibilities/ Journey to the Future	Improv and Spontaneity	Mime	<i>The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory</i> by Salvador Dali (painting)	Drama Profile (self-assessment)
10: Staging Worlds/ Cultural Encounters	Interpretation	Short Texts	<i>Sultans of the Street</i> by Anusree Roy (script)	Interpretation Drama Reflections (self-assessment)

About This Resource

Drama promotes literacy growth, and literacy growth promotes drama exploration.

Dramathemes was written to give teachers a travelling companion as they embark on drama journeys in their classrooms. Since the first edition was published in 1988, many teachers across the continent have expressed appreciation for the practical ideas and structures that this guide has offered them. Teachers have ranged from those just beginning to explore drama and literacy links with their students to those, far more familiar with the structures provided, who have readily shaped their own work around them. They have used *Dramathemes* to help introduce their students to the world of “Let’s pretend.” I thank you all.

This fourth edition has been thoroughly revised to provide a freshly considered set of games, activities, and resources on 10 key themes. I have endeavored to weave together favorites from the first three editions; I have also revised the descriptions and framework in light of current curriculum initiatives. The foundation of this resource remains the same, however. I still hold the belief that literature can be the focus of and springboard for drama explorations and that themes provide a “hook” for the teacher in making connections to story and to students’ classmates.

At the heart of this resource, drama promotes literacy growth, and literacy growth promotes drama exploration. In this book, I have included a variety of literacy genres, such as nursery rhyme, picture book, poetry, fable, novel, and script, not only as a means of suggesting ideas for activities, but also to engage the imagination and to enrich the creativity and thoughts of our students.

The 10 chapters are based on popular thematic explorations in literature for young people:

- Connections
- Sustainable Environments
- Fantasy Worlds
- Animal Tales
- Relationships
- Community
- Immigrant Experience
- Belonging
- Journey to the Future
- Cultural Encounters

Lucky me to have the opportunity to both choose and revise strategies outlined in previous editions and to create new material to include in a fourth edition. Revising this book is somewhat like refurbishing a house, a great project that invites one to change furniture around, add new decor, and paint the walls for a clean, fresh look. Writing this book has led me to critically examine, update, and renovate *Dramathemes* (1988), *The Completely Revised Dramathemes* (1995), and *The New Dramathemes* (2002). I have kept some favorite items, cut some activities, shifted some strategies, and provided additions to help make *Dramathemes*, 4th Edition, both contemporary and well founded on past strengths.

The pages that follow describe some of my own experiences working in classrooms in the Peel Board of Education as well as with the hundreds of children I met in past decades in my role as drama consultant and instructor to beginning and experienced teachers. It is my contention that these “dramathemes” can be used at all grade levels. Each group of students is unique, and it is the students who create the action. You are invited to select and modify ideas within the units

1 / Revealing Identity

I too require passion in the classroom. I need the intense preoccupation of a group of children and teachers inventing new worlds as they learn to know each other's dreams. To invent is to come alive. Even more than the unexamined classroom, I resist the uninvented classroom.

— Vivian Gussin Paley, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon* (1997, p. 50)

And suddenly that name,
will never be the same
to me.

— Stephen Sondheim, from *West Side Story*

Dramatheme — Connections

Theme Overview

Everyone has a name, and our names offer a glimpse into our identities and our stories. Through names, we can connect with those around us — as well as fictional characters — to unpack the stories we all carry in our life knapsacks. Our names therefore seem a good place to start our drama journey. In this drama-theme, students explore names as markers of identity and begin to see how they connect with who they are. Similarly, in the pretend world of drama, participants dig past characters' names to answer the question "Who are you?" In this chapter, students can delve into motive, character, and human relationships by turning to the elliptical rhymes of childhood. The unusual situations in which rhyme characters find themselves invite students into a world where their imaginations — and story minds — can take charge. They can invent new worlds.

Featured Source: The nursery rhyme "Hector Protector"

Learning Opportunities

- To participate in games that can be used for getting acquainted and that develop a sense of belonging to a group
- To learn the names of others, the stories behind the names, and ways to present those names in dramatic contexts
- To practice the skills of interpretation and experiment with different ways to read rhymes chorally
- To familiarize students with the rhythms, rhymes, patterns, and themes of a variety of nursery rhymes
- To contribute ideas to a choral presentation and to support the contributions of others
- To unravel meanings of a short text by raising questions, hypothesizing, role-playing, and improvising
- To explore the stories within the stories of playground and nursery rhymes

Drama and Literacy Extensions: Comprehension Strategies Linked to Drama Conventions

The chart below highlights the connections between literacy and drama, in particular, between comprehension strategies (see the introduction to the drama structure on page 35) and drama conventions.

Comprehension Strategy	Drama Convention	Context
Determining important ideas	Tableaux	Students create a community garden. Each student becomes something that might appear in the garden by forming a still image and saying, "I am . . ."
Visualizing	Story map	The girl went on to plant throughout the world. Students create illustrations to show a green, utopian environment (could be a large mural in contrast to the dark, grey environment created in the drama).
Asking questions	Interview	The teacher in role as grandmother who was once the young girl tells her story to grandchildren (students) to explain how she changed the world. The grandchildren interview the grandmother.
Making inferences	Improvisation	Citizens meet to discuss how to change their "sorry city." What can be done to make the city less dirty, less mean, less poor? How might the citizens work together to create a cleaner, pleasant city?