

A-Z of teaching young learners: Acting out

What and why?

Most children enjoy the physical activity involved in drama and role-play, and there are opportunities throughout the course for acting out stories. Acting out requires practice in pairs or groups and should allow the children some freedom of interpretation so that they can include other language or other ideas if they want to. Acting out should be a creative task rather than merely a reproductive one. It provides a way of making learning more memorable.

Practical ideas

- After the children have heard the stories from you and on the cassette, write the key phrases on the board and practise them with the class as a whole so that they understand what they mean and how to say them.
- Acting out in groups means working together. It is not always easy for young children to work together, so it may be best to add a preparation stage to ease the process. Start by allocating each child in the class a character - so, for example, if there are four characters in the acting out, divide the class into four groups, each group having the same role. In pairs or threes, the children prepare their role together so they are working on the same task and providing ideas and support for each other. Ask the children to write their character's name or draw a picture, to show which role they are taking. Then, when they are ready, move the children so that they are with the other three characters. They can then prepare their drama together.
- Some children will want to act out their drama in front of the class with the use of props - dressing-up clothes, masks or hats - and others will prefer to stay in their seats and speak the dialogues. However, encourage the children to experiment with working with different companions.
- Acting out is really only of benefit for those doing the acting. Children generally like doing it, but the time they are waiting can be time they are wasted. It is best, therefore, to limit the amount of time for each performance.
- If you ask some groups to act out in front of the class, make sure that others have a turn next time - if they want to. You could put the names of groups in to a hat and draw one out at random, or you could have a rota so that groups know when it will be their turn.
- Some of the children feel very shy about acting out in front of the class. Sometimes they just need encouragement, as they really would like to do it. Sometimes, however, they really don't want to do it. In these cases, you have to be very sensitive to the feelings of the children and not push them too much.