INTRODUCTION: Stretching Drama Across Boundaries

Drama in education is amazingly ‘stretchable’; the same source material with thoughtful modification can be used across age and ability boundaries to evoke rich responses. As for source material, we’re spoilt for choice – inspiring picture books, intriguing photographs, a folktale, museum or gallery exhibits, a random collection of household objects, a tree with an interesting shape on the school grounds – we’re limited only by our imaginations.

In this lesson planning guide we use a well-known folktale, The Emperor’s New Clothes. Folktales are powerful texts for drama in education. Coming from the oral tradition, a story’s bare bones have strong structural principles that allow flexibility in devising one’s own version, or creating parallel events and additional characters. Also, folktales being ageless and universal, contain fundamental themes that engage people of all ages.

This guide shows how activities can be developed for primary and secondary levels, with links across the curriculum to extend learning into other media and disciplines. This is therefore not a sequenced lesson plan, but a set of activities demonstrating how material can be used at different levels and how you can involve teachers from other subject areas.

Why Integrate Across the Curriculum

Engaging students both cognitively and affectively helps them learn with greater confidence and motivation. Inter-disciplinary learning experiences do just this; students apply ideas learned in one area to enhance learning in another in active and meaningful ways. Drama-in-education is a productive centre from which to generate inter-disciplinary learning. Collaborating with teachers from other subjects, we can create rich learning experiences for our students. When ideas and reflections generated in drama are revisited, revised, and transformed through other mediums or subjects, students are engaged in sustained exploration which deepens learning. The concept of truth and points of view in The Emperor’s New Clothes, can be extended from drama into moral education, social studies, art and visual representation, digital media, creative writing, history, even geometry. Exploring this common theme in these different mediums and subject areas, students develop communication skills (written, oral, visual), interpretation, comprehension, opinion and response, group skills, research skills, as well as values awareness and discoveries about how best they learn. And they have fun!

How to use the activity ideas

Each activity idea presented can be used by itself as single drama unit after presenting the story to the students. You can also link activities to create a sequenced drama module to suit your needs. Whichever you choose, where possible enrich students’ learning by extending explorations into other subjects or mediums of expression like creative writing, visual media (painting and other visual arts), photography and film. We present suggestions at the end of this unit to get you started, but they’re really the tip of an incredible iceberg of ideas – keep exploring and you’ll find truly multi-sensory, multi-media experiences for your students.

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1 This lesson plan was first published in the Singapore Drama Educators Association (SDEA) in 2006.
ACTIVITY IDEAS

SOURCE TEXT: The Emperor’s New Clothes

The Emperor’s New Clothes, best known as a Hans Andersen fairy tale, shares universal elements with tales from other cultures. Sri Lanka has a village tale, The Invisible Silk Robe. Turkey’s version is The King’s New Turban, and the Indian version is The King and the Clever Girl. (http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type1620.html)

Key Themes
• Truth & Lies, Seeing Clearly
• Flattery & Admiration, Hypocrisy
• Self-Perception, How Others See Us, Point of View
• Following the Crowd – Standing Up for One’s Views, Going Against the Majority
• Courage, Integrity

These are life skills and themes students deal with in both primary and secondary school, and they also come up in school subjects like Civics, Moral Education, Social Studies, History, Literature, National Education.

Presenting the Source Text

Learn a version of the tale and tell it to the students before you show them books. Storytelling engages students imaginatively at both primary and secondary levels. After the storytelling:

(works for both primary and secondary levels)

• Have students name their favourite part of the story is. Lead students in re-telling the story.
• Have students name all the actions in the story (asking, persuading, convincing, measuring, weaving, cutting, sewing, trying on clothes, walking, announcing, looking, parading, pointing, blushing, laughing etc.)
• Let students draw their favourite scene. Share the drawings and recall the story. Write captions or speech bubbles. Students (or groups) take turns giving one sentence each to re-construct the story.

Literacy Link: Have book versions of the story in class, especially picture books which get imaginations sparking. Let students take turns borrowing books for a day. But, only share book versions AFTER the story-telling. It’s more exciting for students to have first had their own imaginative response to the story before seeing how an author and artist has interpreted the tale. There is a stronger reading motivation as a result.

DRAMA ACTIVITY IDEAS

Character Development - Exploring Physical Archetypes

➤ developing imagination, interpretation and expression of characters (words, movement, visual expression, music, physical expression), vocabulary development.

Archetypes are recognisable characters with definite qualities - physical or behavioural; they may live in different cultures and times but they have similar traits. We recognise them instantly because of our life experiences as well as the influence of books, television and films. What character types appear in The Emperor’s New Clothes?

Discuss: Have students name the story characters including those who might be in the story but are not mentioned (the Empress, their children, a cook etc.) List character traits for main characters as well as for those not mentioned in the story that students have come up with.
Explore Physically: Stand like an Emperor. Think about your head, body, feet. Make them like an Emperor’s. What about the eyes? Move the way you think an Emperor would move. How does he interact with the Empress, a servant, courtiers, a young child? Can you find a voice for the character? Use Still Images to share these physical interpretations. Similarly, explore the other characters: the Empress, cunning tailors, a servant, an innocent child, ministers.

• Primary School: It may take longer to explore the types. Eliciting describing words while exploring characters physically will make character types more concrete and help students link movement and physical expression to ideas and imagination.

• Secondary School: Explore archetype combinations, for example, an innocent King, a trickster Servant. Students work in groups to develop a pose, a walk, a gesture for each character.

Character Interpretation: What I Say – What They Say

Interpreting character, story comprehension, exploring points of view.

Students explore how characters see themselves and how this differs from the opinions of other characters.

• Primary: Students work in groups; each group chooses one story character. Each student in the group writes 1 sentence as their group’s character starting with ‘One good thing about me is …’. Then as a group they make 2 sentences about the characters of each of the other groups; one starting with ‘One good thing about you is …’ and the other starting with ‘One thing we don’t like about you is …’. Collect and distribute so each group has sentences from all the other groups about their character. Groups compare their sentences about themselves as the character, with other people's opinions about the character.

• Secondary: Each student chooses a character. In role, they write 3 statements about themselves. Still in role they circulate and write statements about all the other characters – i.e. the tailors write statements about the emperor, empress, boy etc.

Discuss what they’ve discovered about the differences between how we see ourselves and how others see us. This activity can be expanded into scene building activities for example The 6 o’clock News (see page 5)

Theme Exploration: True or False?

Decision making, risk-taking, persuasion, expressing oneself

• Primary: Have statements written on slips of paper in a box. (Create a mixture of facts clearly true/false, and subjective or opinion based statements, e.g. I have 10 cats, Pineapples are the best fruit) Students take out a statement and read it aloud as persuasively as they can for their classmates to decide true or false.

• Secondary: Sit in a circle. Each student makes a statement either true or false. They must present it as persuasively as possible to get their classmates to believe them. For example, ‘I have 10 cats,’ OR ‘There are 364 days in a year.’ Once a statement is made, take a poll: Who thinks the statement is true? How many think it’s false? After the poll, the student reveals the truth. Move on to the next student. If necessary, start first with a few examples, before students have a turn.

Reflect with students how they felt about making their choices. Was it easy to decide if something was true or false? Did they think they were influenced by how their friends voted? With older students, you can then apply these questions to issue in their own lives.
Theme Exploration: Persuasion

- **Persuasion, expressive ability**

Role play the tailors – how do they persuade the Emperor to let them make the invisible clothes?

- **Primary**: Show students a box (highly decorated and magical looking); tell them it contains magical gems that grant wishes. In groups, they try and persuade you to give their group the box. Facilitate their attempts, coaching them to be specific, use logic, persuasive words, and body language. Take a class vote to award the box to a group. Make sure there’s something in the box (stickers of gems maybe?), that everyone can share. Discuss what makes persuasion tactics work.

Then discuss how the tailors persuaded the Emperor. Let students role-play in groups, side-coaching them as they do. Alternatively, role-play the Emperor playing the scene with half the students as ministers, half as tailors. Facilitate persuasive thinking and tactics by asking leading questions. Let students work in small groups to play the scene again on their own.

- **Secondary**: Have a student sit on a chair. Another student tries to persuade the seated student to vacate the chair. The persuader can do anything except have physical contact with the person sitting. Once the seated student feels convinced he/she leaves the chair. Set a time limit for each persuader, after which someone else must try. Also ensure the student seated isn’t being perversely difficult; use your judgment to award the chair to the persuader if appropriate.

Discuss what makes persuasion tactics work; how might the tailors have persuaded the Emperor? Students work in groups and role play the Emperor, ministers and tailors. Groups present their role play – discuss persuasion tactics, pointing out the use of verbal, vocal, and physical expression in persuasion.

Scene Development: A Moving Photo Story

- **Narrative understanding, sequencing, scene building**

Re-tell the story with students.

- **Primary**: Divide the story into key parts with your students. Working in groups, students create a single freeze frame of each key part. Each group presents their freeze frame in sequence as you narrate the story.

- **Secondary**: Ask students to define the story parts – where each part begins and ends. Divide the parts among groups. If there are more groups than parts, it’s fine to have more than one group work on the same part. Each group creates a freeze frame to show the beginning and ending of their story part. Show, then have groups discuss the freeze frames to help improve clarity and expression. Then groups create a middle so they have a beginning-middle-end structure for each story part. They can present this with or without narration.

Scene Development: Sewing a Suit

- **Story comprehension, physical interpretation, coordination, rhythm**

Students develop a rhythmic presentation of tailors creating invisible clothes. Discuss with students the different actions in making clothes – spinning thread, weaving cloth, measuring, cutting, sewing, embroidering, trying on clothes.

- **Primary**: Let students move freely in the space, stopping when you call ‘freeze’. Before the next move signal, call out one of the actions – students now move but also do actions they think represents the action you called out. Call ‘freeze’ again, and have them continue the actions while standing in place. After trying all the actions like this to generate ideas, students
work in groups to create a group piece showing tailors making invisible clothes from start to finish. Play appropriate music to support them.

• **Secondary:** Each group is assigned a different action to create. Groups show their actions and discuss to improve clarity of movement, use of detail, variation and patterns in rhythm, dynamic stage picture. Put the whole tailoring sequence together by having each group do their actions in turn. For an added challenge, the groups can find music that supports their actions, or come up with percussive sound effects to capture the rhythm and quality of action.

**Scene Development: What Happens After?**

> Developing story logic, story interpretation, scene building skills, imaginative extrapolation.

In groups, students work out what happens the moment after the story ends. What do the characters do? Create a freeze frame of the last moment of the story, then develop it to show what happens next, ending in a new freeze frame. What is said after the little boy speaks the truth?

• **Primary:** Work out all together what everyone does after the boy speaks the truth – the Emperor, the Empress, the Ministers, the boy, his mother, the people? Facilitate students’ focus on specific actions. Then let them work in groups, each group choosing one action to show in a freeze frame.

• **Secondary:** Different groups consider different possibilities that impact on the way the moment after transpires in their freeze frame - what if the King was loved and respected by his subjects? What if he was a tyrant and disliked by his people?

**The 6 O’clock News**

> Role-play, story and character interpretation, dialogue skills

Students role-play TV reporters covering the parade. They interview characters played by other students about what happened and how they feel, their opinions of the Emperor, his ministers, and the tailors. Some students can have exclusive interviews with the tailors. You can play the cameraman so you can coach them in role to interview and present the news on site.

• **Primary:** Generate interview questions as a class. Do this in role as the editor of the newspaper briefing reporters before they go out to do interviews about this famous incident.

• **Secondary:** After the reporters interview on site, use material they’ve generated and develop a television Talk Show. Students (or you) role play the talk show host, and interview the various characters in turn – first the Ministers, then the Emperor, and then (in a surprise twist) the tailors!
EXTENSIONS INTO OTHER MEDIA AND SUBJECTS

English Language: Vocabulary, Grammar, Comprehension

Word Collection - developing characters in drama, we generate many describing words and actions. Get students to write adjectives and verbs generated in drama sessions on pre-prepared coloured paper slips (always have a bunch handy with coloured markers) and paste them on permanently located sheets of mahjong paper to make Word Walls. Groups can be assigned to find and add synonyms and antonyms over a period of time. Encourage use of the Word Walls in creative writing work. Incorporate the words into collage work for art/media projects.

List Making – create a list of things in the Emperor’s closet. Extension to art work – make a collage of the Emperors wardrobe, exploring fabrics and fashion design.

Crosswords– students make crosswords about the story to challenge each other

Story Sequencing– re-assemble a cut up version of the story. Create storyboard/cartoons in groups, cut them up, exchange, and groups race to re-assemble correctly.

Creative Writing

Script Writing – from scenes developed in role-play, have students scribe their improvised dialogue. Compare the scribed scenes and consolidate into a single scene. You can develop key scenes or even the entire story into a play-script in this manner.

Role-Play Diary Entries – write diary entries for selected characters. With primary levels, create diary templates to fill in, or a character’s appointment book page. Older students can play a character for a week, writing 3 entries that week for the character at 3 different points of the story.

Role-Play Letters – characters write letters to other characters outside the story. The Emperor writes to his cousin The Frog Prince to boast about finding these amazing tailors, or to his wise friend Gandalf after the story ends, tailors write to their friend The Shoemaker in the middle of the story, the mother of the boy writes to her sister Mother Hubbard after the story ends etc. This can be a trigger activity to lead into a drama session, or a follow-up after a drama session. Using characters to write to from other stories encourages further reading.

Poetry - write the chant or song the tailors use as they weave. With older students studying literature write poems using forms they’re studying in literature (Ode to Invisible Silk, A Sonnet About Persuasion, The Ballad of The Cunning Tailors, Free Verse on Vanity etc)

Add dialogue - with younger students, create a written version of the story with space at selected parts for groups to create and add dialogue. Older students can decide where to add dialogue to the story. Transform from story to play script complete with stage directions.

Book Making - using photos of their freeze frames students make a book writing their version of the story as text, designing a cover, and researching the proper format for publishing details and inside cover pages etc. Present this book to the school library, and arrange for students to tell the story to younger classes using their own book.

Newspaper – use interview material from The Six O’clock News activity. Create the front page of The Imperial Daily with headlines of the famous parade, interviews of key characters and bystanders. Study newspaper register and styles to develop a good simulation.

Debate

Explore issues of truth. Possible debate motions – ‘The boy should not have revealed the emperor’s nakedness.’ Or ‘Tailors deserve punishment for cheating the Emperor’.

Younger students can discuss and present their ideas for each side in groups. Older students can use the formal structures of debates. With older students incorporate real-world examples as
analogies and evidence for points presented in debate. Or, run a court of justice where the Emperor is prosecuting the tailors, with students role-playing judges, Emperor, tailor, boy, lawyers etc.

Music
What kind of music best suits each character type? Bring in a range of music and let students play their characters – physical shapes, gestures, movement – to the music. Students can also use percussion instruments to find each character’s signature sound or rhythm. Build interpretation - working in groups to find music for each character type. Have them show their characters with accompanying music, and discuss each other’s choices.

Art & Visual Media:
Students enjoy expressing their understanding, interpretation, and responses in visual media. An art class can use elements generated in drama to extend engagement with the story, or create visual interpretations that can be taken back for use in drama sessions, while delivering the demands of the art syllabus.

Visualise Characters. Make cartoon portraits with a collaged word border about the characters. Older students work in groups to find portraits by famous artists that might represent their characters – discuss reasons for choices. Create character finger puppets and use them to re-tell the story. What does everyone say when the truth is revealed - the boy’s mother, the Empress, the Emperor, the Ministers, the tailors, the palace cook etc.? Make drawings of faces showing their reactions with speech bubbles.

Costumes. Draw costumes for each character. Older students research period costumes for their characters – each group works with a set period, e.g. Elizabethan, 19th Century Balinese, Ming Dynasty, Victorian England, Peranakan, contemporary Hip Hop etc. Create a group portrait of the characters in each style.

Collage: Given outline versions of the main characters, colour or decorate them, using them in a collage of words, pictures and other material.

Design: Make a book cover for the story. Make a poster for the movie version of the story – cast contemporary actors; give reasons to justify choices.

Electronic Media
Film students’ freeze-frames and record a narration over to make a mini-movie.
Create a slide presentation combining photos of students’ freeze frames and art work with narration.
Create a web-site with photos and video clips from drama lessons, as well as other lessons where the theme is explored. Students can research the story, have an electronic journal for reflections, as well as other segments they feel are relevant (folktale links, jokes, cartoons, music etc.)
Create a TV News Programme clip by videotaping ‘live’ interviews in a drama segment ‘The 6 O’clock News’ (see above) and editing with voice overs, studio presenter links, a music theme and news graphics to create a simulation of a TV news show. Extend themes by linking to social studies or history - add real clips from the internet about ‘related’ news (contemporary or historical) that feature similar themes about truth and cover-ups. Alternatively, students can use all the above but add music and edit it to be an MTV style video clip.
Reflections
In doing inter-disciplinary work, we must remember that within the drama sessions, the primary aims are drama based; the drama should not be reduced to becoming simply the means of achieving objectives within the other subject. Then drama’s essential role as a meaning-making process in its own right is compromised. The drama work must maintain its own conventions and processes. What we weave into the other subject are the ideas, language, reflections, and insights drama work raises. Inter-subject collaboration when done well, enhances both drama and the other subject without compromising either.

Getting started creating your own drama-based lessons that engage other subjects and mediums of expression is a challenging process, especially coordination with other teachers, matching schedules and objectives. It is a notoriously messy process! It’s important to start modestly with a link to just one other subject, preferably with a teacher who’s excited and motivated to collaborate with your drama process. Allow plenty of time for exploring and experimenting, and set expectations realistically. With enough persistence and commitment to inter-subject collaboration, it can only grow.

References

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