



Soapbox

Introduction

Getting Started

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Schools often find teaching the subject of drama a daunting prospect, particularly when they have little or no experience of it. Not surprisingly, teachers are often wary when it comes to all things dramatic. For many, the thought of having 30 unruly children running around the school hall pretending to be one of their favourite superheroes is not particularly appealing!

As The Old Vic's Education Officer and a former teacher, I have witnessed many times how drama in school can be of great benefit to children. It can help to develop a child's reasoning and enquiry, concentration, confidence, teamwork and communication skills. Improving the latter is the ethos of Soapbox.

Background to Soapbox

How a child communicates not only influences the success of their day-to-day relationships but also their long term goals; be it introducing themselves to a stranger, presenting ideas to a group, or listening to friends; the ability to communicate effectively is the key to developing confidence, self-respect and to building rewarding relationships.

Following consultation with local primary schools, poor communication skills amongst pupils were identified as a prime concern. The Old Vic's Education Department set about devising a creative arts project that would strengthen communication skills and enhance the school curriculum.

The result was Soapbox: an innovative project which harnessed the skills of actors, writers, producers, directors and education facilitators in order to help children communicate more effectively in a stimulating and fun environment.

Over two months, The Old Vic's education facilitators worked in eight schools with some 250 pupils, aged 9–11 years, covering various forms of communication using a number of different theatrical techniques. This pack is the result of their work; explaining the ideas and techniques deployed lesson-by-lesson so that teachers with no drama training may recreate the Soapbox learning experience in their own classroom.

The Resource Pack: A User's Guide

This resource pack contains eight self-contained lesson plans. Each plan provides a challenging and unique learning experience for all those involved; improving both verbal and non-verbal communication through an inventive series of theatre exercises. There are often few opportunities to practise such skills in today's time-pressured curriculum, but in many ways we've done the hard work for you with a series of workshops that have been tried and tested.

Lessons 1–8

Forms & Themes

Each lesson a form of communication is identified and, through easy-to-follow theatre exercises, pupils explore the associated themes and learn to develop theatre skills that give them the confidence to reason around these themes.

The forms and themes are as follows:

1 Mime Time	Connecting without words	5 You Talking to Me?	Observing personal behaviour
2 What's Your Point?	Debating skills for children	6 Respect	Using Forum Theatre
3 Body Talk	Conversing with your body	7 Speaking Hands	Language without voice
4 Can't Hear You!	Tone and projection	8 In Black & White	Devised script writing

Performing

Once you begin teaching Soapbox, you will notice quite quickly that your class naturally improve as performers and will begin to want to demonstrate this. Their enthusiasm should be encouraged as it is the ultimate endorsement that their communication skills and confidence have improved.

Beginning

The style and structure of the lesson plans presume that the user has little or no experience of teaching drama. The specific aims and objectives of each workshop are summarised clearly. Step-by-step instructions are provided and the (limited) use of technical terms explained. Each workshop is designed to last one and a half hours with the suggested time spent on each individual exercise indicated in brackets.

Rules & Commands

Teaching drama successfully is all about ground rules and clarity. Each exercise is included for a reason, helping pupils to build specific skills within the context of the group learning experience. When leading the class, you need to convey that feeling of teamwork to your pupils. Rules and commands help immensely with this by giving structure and clarity.

We suggest the following techniques, which you should explain to the class before starting any Soapbox activities:

Go Command

The Go command is the indication that the class can begin what you have asked them to do. It should prefix any request and should be the one element that is constant. Giving the Go command is a good routine to get into, as it becomes a form of self-checking for you as leader – only say ‘Go’ once you feel that your explanation is of suitable clarity. eg; ‘When I say “GO”, and not before, I want you to get into a standing circle. “GO!”’

Countdown Command

A countdown from ten to one is always useful when working with a large group as it encourages a sense of focus and urgency. It doesn’t need to be used every time you introduce an exercise, but it is useful if the group is becoming lethargic or the pace of the workshop is not right. Tell the group that whenever they hear you start counting down from ten, they must get ready to stop whatever activity they are doing by the time you have reached one and focus on your next instruction.

Freeze Command

Drama exercises are often physical and less restrained than those normally found within a traditional classroom setting. The Freeze command is the ‘call to order’ where the class stops and focuses back on the teacher and their next command. Tell the group that whenever they hear you say ‘Freeze’, they must stay absolutely still, in silence, until you give the next instruction.

Hands Up! Rule

This may seem obvious, but all too often in a drama workshop traditional techniques are disregarded. A hand up is still the most effective way to gain feedback or control of a group discussion.

The Space

A clear, clean space is vital when teaching drama; generally the school hall or a large classroom is best, as it enables the group to move freely. Being out of the traditional classroom setting can create a sense of eagerness and interest which will help the sessions run smoothly.

Your First Session

If you are unfamiliar with using drama in school, your first session will probably be the most challenging. However, if you follow the lesson plans, we guarantee you will see amazing results from your pupils.

National Curriculum

PSHCE

Soapbox directly supports the aim of the PSHCE programme of study by helping pupils to learn about themselves as individuals, with their own experiences and ideas and unique creativity. The exercises directly develop the child's maturity, independence and self-confidence, and encourage the relevant social skills needed for productive team-work.

Specifically, Soapbox includes the following PSHCE syllabus elements:

- 2 Preparing to play an active role as citizens
- 2c Asks pupils to realise the consequences of anti-social and aggressive behaviours
- 2e Asks pupils to use their imagination to understand other people's experiences
- 2f Asks pupils to resolve differences by looking at alternatives, making decisions and explaining choices

- 4 Developing good relationships and respecting the differences between people
- 4a Asks pupils to understand that their actions affect themselves and others, to care about other people's feelings and to try to see things from their points of view
- 4c Encourages pupils to develop the skills to be effective in relationships
- 4d Encourages pupils to realise the nature and consequences of aggressive behaviours

English

Apart from fulfilling some of the Drama requirements of the English programme of study, the learning outcomes of Soapbox strongly reflect the aims of the KS2 Speaking and Listening programme as a whole. It asks pupils to experiment with, and reflect upon, the way they communicate in varying situations, and focuses extensively on both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication.

Specifically, Soapbox includes the following English syllabus elements:

- 1 To speak with confidence in a range of contexts, adapting their speech for a range of purposes and audiences
- 1b Asks pupils to gain and maintain the interest and response of different audiences
- 1e Requires pupils to speak audibly and clearly
- 1f Asks pupils to evaluate their speech and reflect on how it varies in different contexts

- 2 To listen, understand and respond appropriately to others
- 2a Asks pupils to identify the key points in a discussion and evaluate what they hear
- 2e Requires pupils to respond to others appropriately, taking account of what they say

- 3 To talk effectively as members of a group
- 3a Asks pupils to make contributions relevant to the topic and take turns in discussion
- 3b Asks pupils to vary contributions to suit activity and purpose

- 4 To participate in a wide range of drama activities and to evaluate their own and others' contributions
- 4a Requires pupils to create, adapt and sustain different roles, individually and in groups
- 4b Requires pupils to use character, action and narrative to convey story, themes, emotions and ideas in plays they devise and script
- 4c Asks pupils to use dramatic techniques to explore characters and issues

- 6 To understand how language varies
- 6a Asks pupils to vary language according to context and purpose