

# Stages Theatre Company Theater Arts and Literacy Curriculum

Lessons for Pre-K to Grade 6

Developed in collaboration with the  
Mary McLeod Bethune Community School,  
Minneapolis Public Schools



[www.stagestheatre.org](http://www.stagestheatre.org)



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Becoming Animals	3	Students use initial letter sounds to select an animal and identify a first name with the same sound. Then they share their animal name with the class, using a complete sentence and creating the animal through sound and movement.	√		*	
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Rapping with Expression	14	Students develop and perform a short story as a rap, focusing on vocal performance skills and movement.	*		√	
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COMPREHENSION		Summary	Areas of Literacy Focus		
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# BECOMING ANIMALS

# VOCABULARY

## Summary

Students use initial letter sounds to select an animal and identify a first name with the same sound. Then they share their animal name with the class, using a complete sentence and creating the animal through sound and movement.

## Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary  
Decode / phonics ✓  
Interact / engage \*

## Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Initial consonants
- Sentences
- Speaking with expression

## Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Voice /sound  
Imagination  
Presentation

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

## Grade Levels

Pre K-K, Grade 1, 2-3

## Space

Classroom – open space

## Time

20-30 minutes

## Grouping(s)

All class

## Prerequisite Knowledge

- Letter sounds
- Animals (or other words used – see variations)

## Materials

- Photos/books with animals
- Cards with letters

## Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Shake Down; Making Shapes; Image Stretch; Ha Ha Hey Hey Hee Hee; Drama Hat

## Preparation

- Identify letters/sounds to focus on and create letter cards, one for each student.
- Gather pictures of animals for the letters used.

## Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To practice using initial sounds.
  - To explore animal characteristics (shape, movement and sound).
  - To get comfortable creating and performing together.
2. Go through the animal book(s) with students to learn or review at least one animal for each of the letters you are going to focus on. Identify the initial letter/sound of each animal's name and explore the animal's movement and sound, using student volunteers and/or working as a whole class.
3. Pass the letter cards to students, have them to think of a) an animal that begins with their card's letter/sound, b) a first name for their animal that begins with the same letter/sound, and c) how they would create the animal with their bodies and voices.
4. Students then take turns to stand before the others and complete sentence "I am \_\_\_ the \_\_\_" and then move and make sounds like their animal.
5. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - For which sounds was it easier/harder to find animals or names?
  - Discuss specific sounds and movements. What worked well? Which animals were harder/easier to do or to identify?

## Tips

- Have students sit once they have their animal and name. Those still standing share their letter/sound to get help.

## Variations

- Use other categories of words (vehicles, professions, things from nature).
- Have students do the movement/sound first and then the name so the class can guess the animal.
- Add a same-letter adjective to describe the animal, using the same letter (lazy lion). See if others can guess the adjective from the student's movement and sounds.
- Use students' first name letters to select the animals.
- Have students sort themselves by the environment in which they live, how they move, or other sorting category.

## Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students write/draw an animal, name, adjective, and picture for each letter.
- Have a small group of students move to the center of the circle to demonstrate how the animals move, eat, drink, sleep, and find safety.

# SYL-LA-BLE SYLLABLE

# VOCABULARY

## Summary

One student is sent into the hallway. The rest of the class is divided into groups and each group is assigned a syllable for a vocabulary word. When the student comes back into the room, he or she listens to the repeated syllables and tries to determine what the multi-syllabic word is.

## Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary

Decode / phonics ✓

Interact / engage \*

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

## Literacy Skills /Concepts

- breaking a word into syllables
- pronunciation

## Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting

Voice /sound

Social /Behavioral

Focus

Listening

## Grade Levels

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

## Space

Classroom – open space

## Time

15-20 minutes

## Grouping(s)

All class

## Prerequisite Knowledge

- vocabulary words - introduced/defined

## Materials

- a list of vocabulary words

## Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Ha Ha Hey Hey Hee Hee; Shake Out Your Vocal Range; Follow the Leader (focus on voice)

## Preparation

- identify the words to use; students may help create the list

## Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To break words into syllables.
  - To be able to recognize a word by hearing its separate syllables.
  - To learn and practice pronouncing new vocabulary words.
2. Have students stand in a circle or square and select one student to leave the room for a moment.
3. Have students identify how many syllables are in the first word. Create a number of student groups equal to the number of syllables in the word. Moving around the circle, assign each syllable to a group. Practice saying the syllables, both in order and with all groups saying their syllable at the same time.
4. When the student from the hall returns, have them walk around inside the circle listening to the syllables being repeated at the same time by the other students. Give the student in the center three guesses to identify the word.
5. Review the pronunciation of the word, it's definition, and how it is used in a sentence.
6. Then repeat the activity with another word until all the words are used.
7. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - What helped you to be successful in the game? (See tips.)
  - What if the syllables were from a word you had never heard of? Could you still guess?
  - When is it helpful to break a word into its syllables?

## Tips

- Have the student start the walk-around at different places in the circle or change directions.
- Post a list of words so students can make connections with the written word as well.

## Follow-Up/Assessment

- Do a pronunciation quiz. Show students each word and listen as they say them.

## Variations

- Experiment with different syllable stresses.

To increase difficulty:

- Choose longer words.
- Mix-up the syllable order around the circle.
- Assign individuals to syllables.
- Leave a syllable out and have students guess the word and syllable.

# ACTING A WORD LIST

# VOCABULARY

## Summary

Students physically define and explore words through movement.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary

Define ✓

Interact / engage \*

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Word definitions

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting

Movement

Imagination

Social /Behavioral

Focus

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Pre K-K, Grade 1,  
2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space

### Time

20-30 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Vocabulary words – introduced/defined

### Materials

- List of vocabulary words

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Ball of Sound; Follow the Leader;  
Shake Down; Mirrors

### Preparation

- Think through possible movements for each word.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To use your body, expression, and imagination to show what a word looks and/or feels like.
  - To develop a way of defining, exploring, and remembering words that will be used in a variety of other activities.
2. Begin with students in actor neutral. Lead the students through a physical exploration of one of the words, discussing and demonstrating for each other the meaning(s) of the word and movements that can communicate it/them. This can be done as a mix of student-volunteer and whole-group work. After trying out different movements and expressions, together select a movement and expression (or set of them) that will be the physical definition of the word for your class.
3. Repeat this process with all the words on the list, reviewing the list periodically to help refine and memorize each word's movement.
4. Use these movements/physical definitions in a variety of different ways:
  - In a call and response format (you call the word, they do the movement)
  - With flash cards (you show the card, they do the movement)
  - When giving a spelling quiz (you or a student show the movement)
  - Read aloud a story with the words, having students create the movements whenever the words are used (note: this could be the original story from which the words came or a new one you or the students write)
  - When students encounter the word in a new context
  - See the Follow-Up section for other activities.
5. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - Which words were harder or easier to show through movement? Why?
  - How does having a movement for a word help us better know and remember it?

### Tips

- Have students notice and describe what they and other students are doing with their faces and their bodies to show each word.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- During a spelling quiz on the words, include the movements.
- See other activities:  
*Word Charades; Acting Opposites; In this Place; Acting a Sentence.*

### Variations

- Add voice and sound to the definitions.
- Have student pairs or small groups create the movements for various words and present them to the class to learn.
- Use digital photographs to capture an image of the movement and create a vocabulary book with photo, captions, and/or sentences.

# WORD CHARADES

# VOCABULARY

## Summary

Students on each of two teams take turns acting out vocabulary words, working to see how many words each team can guess correctly.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary  
Define ✓  
Interact / engage \*

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- defining vocabulary words through physical movement
- identifying vocabulary words

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Imagination  
Presentation  
Social /Behavioral  
Watching  
Collaboration

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space

### Time

15-20 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- vocabulary words - introduced/defined
- acting out words (see *Acting a Word List*)

### Materials

- note cards; one vocabulary word written on each

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Follow the Leader; Shake Down; Snap Game

### Preparation

- Identify the words to use; students may help create the list.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To work with new vocabulary words.
  - To understand the meanings of the words.
  - To work together as a team.
2. Divide students into two teams and have the teams sit in horizontal lines with their backs to each other.
3. Stand at one end of the lines and show the first student in each line a vocabulary word.
4. Have the two students move to the front of their team and act out the word.
5. Call on students from each team as they try to identify the word. Once one side guesses correctly, have a student define the word and use it in a sentence.
6. Repeat until all the students have had an opportunity to act out a word.
7. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - Which words were easier/harder to act out?
  - Are there different ways to act out the same word? Show us.
  - What are the best ways to help a teammate who is acting out a word?

### Tips

- This activity works well for a large class.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- When giving words for a spelling test, include a physical movement for each word (done by the teacher or student volunteers).

### Variations

- This can be repeated over and over with different words.
- Increase the challenge by using harder words.
- Use phrases or events rather than words.
- Have students work in pairs to create a sentence using the word and act it out (see *Acting a Sentence* activity).
- Use two students at a time to increase focus on teamwork.

# ACTING OPPOSITES

# VOCABULARY

## Summary

Students physically explore words and their opposites through movement.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary  
Define ✓  
Interact / engage \*

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Word definitions
- Opposites

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Imagination  
Social /Behavioral  
Collaboration

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Pre K-K, Grade 1,  
2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space

### Time

20-30 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Vocabulary words – introduced/defined
- Opposites
- acting out words (see *Acting a Word List*)

### Materials

- List of vocabulary words
- Cards with words on them, enough for one per student pair

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Ball of Sound; Shake Down; Mirrors

### Preparation

- Prepare word list, selecting words that have clear opposites (e.g., “happy” works, “truck” does not).
- Create cards with the words listed.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To show with your body, expression, and imagination what a word and its opposite looks and/or feels like.
  - To explore how these words are different.
2. If necessary, review the vocabulary words and their definitions.
3. Begin with students in actor neutral. Lead the students through a physical exploration of one of the words, discussing and demonstrating for each other the meaning of the word and how to show it through movement. Then identify and discuss the opposite of this word and similarly explore this second word through movement. This can be done as a mix of student-volunteer and whole-group work.
4. Give student-pairs a card with one of the words on it and ask them to create the word and its opposite through movement.
5. Students then present the words, with one student doing the word and the other the opposite, or with students doing both words, going back and forth between the two. Have the rest of the class guess the words and then discuss how the movements helped show them.
6. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - Which words were harder to show/see? Which opposites were? What made these words more difficult?
  - Why is it important that we know what opposites are?

### Tips

- Ask the audience to describe what the actors were doing with their faces and their bodies to show each word.
- Post the words so students make the connection with the written words.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students make pictures of the words and their opposites.
- For a quiz, say a word and have students write the opposite or have them match opposites from two columns.

### Variations

- Vary the difficulty by vocabulary level.
- Use emotions (happy/sad) or directions (high/low).
- Act out homonyms with students spelling both words in the pair.

## IN THIS PLACE

## VOCABULARY

### Summary

Focusing on a particular place, students establish physical movements for various vocabulary words.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary

Define \*

Interact / engage ✓

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Defining words through movement
- Recall of vocabulary words
- Developing content knowledge related to a place

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting

Movement

Presentation

Social /Behavioral

Collaboration

### Grade Levels

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space

### Time

20-30 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Vocabulary words and place – introduced/defined
- acting out words (see *Acting a Word List*)

### Materials

- List of vocabulary words (7-10)

### Recommended Warm Ups

Image Stretch; Making Shapes; Shake Down; Zip, Zap, Zop

### Preparation

- Create the word list, selecting nouns or active phrases related to a specific place read about/studied such as various settings from a story.
- Think through possible movements for each word.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To develop content knowledge words about a particular place. What is the place, what do you see there, what happens there?
  - To reinforce knowledge of the vocabulary words.
  - To improve team building and collaboration skills.
2. Discuss the place and the word list, making sure students have some awareness of the place and an initial definition of each word.
3. Using student volunteers, demonstrate how to create a short set of movements focused on one of the words. For example, a theater's "ticket booth" could have someone selling tickets, someone buying, and others waiting in line. All of this is done in pantomime.
4. Place students in small groups (2-4) and have each group select one of the words that they will demonstrate for the class.
5. As student groups present, have the class identify the word and discuss details observed. Have the performers explain choices they made.
6. Identify which words were not selected and repeat with these words.
7. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - How is this place similar to/different from places you have visited?
  - How did you choose what movements would best represent your word?
  - Which word movements were easiest/hardest to identify? Why?

### Tips

- Have all students participate. If there are not enough "parts" have them be relevant things (e.g., a ticket booth counter)
- Using the same word set, vary the size of the groups to see how the movements change.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students draw the place, highlighting words from the list.
- Get digital photos of the movements; have students write captions.

### Variations

- Repeat with different places.
- Use before a field trip to expose students to what they might see and do.
- Add a conflict – something that happens in the place (a storm, season change, etc.).

# SOUNDING AN ENVIRONMENT

# VOCABULARY

## Summary

Using only their voice, students create various environments.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary

Define \*

Interact / engage ✓

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Content knowledge focused on a place
- Listening
- Observation

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting

Voice /sound

Imagination

Social /Behavioral

Focus

Listening

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space, desks

### Time

15-20 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Some familiarity with the environment

### Materials

- None

### Recommended Warm Ups

Ball of Sound; Big Face, Little Face; Follow the Leader (focused on voice); Ha Ha Hey Hey Hee Hee; Shake Out Your Vocal Range

### Preparation

- Decide what environment(s) to create. This could be from a reading selection or unit of study.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To learn about a particular place through sound. What is the place, what happens there, what do you hear there?
  - To listen with greater attention to detail.
  - To improve team building and collaboration skills.
2. Discuss details of the environment to ensure that students can generate ideas about sounds one could hear there.
3. Have students sit in a circle on the floor, and then lie down so that their feet are pointing into the center of the circle. Have students close their eyes and listen quietly to the sounds around them, identifying sounds they may normally ignore (e.g., clock, cars, fan, hallway noise, etc).
4. Have each student make one sound they might hear in the environment (e.g., for a library: keyboard tapping, people coughing, pages turning, etc.).
5. Have students repeat their chosen sound, discovering how it combines with those made by the other students. Once students have explored their sounds, have them be more discriminating about *when* they make their sounds. For example, a student creating the sound of the librarian would only make the “shush” sound once the noise level built up. Or, have students begin with no sounds, gradually build up the sounds, then taper off. You can “conduct” the class so different sounds get louder and softer at different times.
6. Reflect with students on the activity. Focus on specific sounds: Why did they pick it, how did they use it, what does it tell us about the environment? Discuss the overall environment and what the sounds tell us about it.

### Tips

- Repeat with different environments.
- Record students creating the sounds. After listening and discussing what they hear, record again and listen for changes.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students sit quietly at a place, writing about what they hear.
- Have students listen to videos without images to develop their listening and observation skills.

### Variations

- For students who need more direction: assign sounds to small groups and conduct them.
- With older students, let the students explore for themselves how to build up and fade away the sounds.

**Summary**

After reading a story, students discuss the specific environment/setting of the story, actions that happen in that environment, and objects that are used there. Students select an item from a bag, transform it into another object, and use it to create a scene in the environment.

**Areas of Literacy Focus**

Vocabulary  
Interact / engage ✓  
Use in new context \*

**Literacy Skills /Concepts**

- Use of vocabulary words
- Building content knowledge about a particular environment

**Areas of Theater Arts Focus**

Acting  
Movement  
Imagination  
Props /costumes  
Social /Behavioral  
Collaboration

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

**Grade Levels**

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

**Space**

Classroom – open space

**Time**

20-30 minutes

**Grouping(s)**

All class (or small groups – see variations)

**Prerequisite Knowledge**

- Knowledge of the story and setting
- Vocabulary words

**Materials**

- Bag of “anything props” (frying pan, wrapping paper role, piece of fabric, watch, basket, etc.)

**Recommended Warm Ups**

Drama Hat; Big Face, Little Face; Image Stretch; Silent Hello

**Preparation**

- Create the prop bag
- Think through environment objects and actions, including words from the story’s vocabulary list

**Directions**

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To develop content knowledge about a particular place.
  - To reinforce knowledge of vocabulary words.
  - To work with other students collaboratively.
2. Review with students the environment/setting of the story, brainstorming and describing a wide range of related objects/tools and actions that happen there and focusing on vocabulary words from the story.
3. Have a student select one or more items from the bag. This prop will be used as something other than what it really is to create a short scene that takes place in the environment of the story (e.g., a piece a fabric becomes a lake; a empty wrapping paper roll becomes a fire hose). The student may choose up to three people to help with their scene, presented to the class after a short planning discussion. They may use dialogue but may not say what the object has become (e.g., for the lake: “It’s so hot I think I’ll go for a swim.”).
4. After discussing the object and action, their relationship to the environment, and how the students created them, repeat with other students and prop items.
5. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - Review the specific objects and actions and how students used movement to present them. What was learned about the objects?
  - Discuss the overall environment and what the objects and actions tell us about it.

**Tips**

- Require new ideas to be used; no repeats.

**Follow-Up/Assessment**

- Have students write a detailed description of the environment/setting.

**Variations**

- Small groups get props to create a scene and then present.
- Remove dialogue to focus on movement.
- Add emphasis on plot and comprehension by having scenes focus on events from the story. When preparing for this, first discuss events and objects and actions that were related to each.
- Advanced: small group starts a scene and is handed a prop they must immediately incorporate.

# ACTING A SENTENCE

# VOCABULARY

## Summary

Student pairs are given a vocabulary word on a card. Each pair creates a sentence using the word, develops a corresponding physical action, and then acts out their sentence for the class.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary  
Define \*  
Interact / engage \*  
Use in new context ✓

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- use of vocabulary words in new contexts

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Imagination  
Improvisation  
Social /Behavioral  
Be audience  
Collaboration

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space

### Time

15-20 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class, pairs

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- vocabulary words - introduced/defined
- creating sentences
- acting out words (see *Acting a Word List*)

### Materials

- vocabulary words on cards

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Big Face, Little Face; Drama Hat; Image Stretch; Follow the Leader; Silent Hello

### Preparation

- create the cards with words on them

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To use our bodies to explore and show the meaning of words.
  - To use vocabulary words in new sentences.
  - To create sentences.
2. Give student pairs a card with a vocabulary word on it. Have students first create a sentence that includes the vocabulary word and then develop a physical action to go with it. The emphasis of the acting should be on the vocabulary word. Give students time to think and practice.

EXAMPLES: For “waddled” students used the sentence “The duck waddled around the lake” and then they waddled around to show it. For “concerned” students said “Mother was concerned when we were late” and used their faces and bodies to show concerned. Note that for both examples, the acted emphasis is on the vocabulary word (not the duck’s lake or the child’s lateness).
3. Have student pairs share their actions with the class and have the rest try to identify the vocabulary word. Then have the pair say their sentence. Have the other students repeat the sentence after them, refining the sentence if necessary. Review the pronunciation of the vocabulary word and it’s definition.
4. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - How did we use our bodies to help us understand the words?
  - Which words were easier/harder to communicate with actions? Why?
  - How did you work together to come up with the sentences and actions?

### Tips

- Pair students to ensure that at least one is strong in sentence writing/creating.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students write their sentences.
- Have students write new sentences for each word.

### Variations

- Give students more than one word to include in the sentence.
- To focus on acting, prepare the sentences in advance.
- Have students write the sentences on cards and then have other students act them out.
- For words with clear opposites, have students create a sentence scene with the opposite word too.

## COLORING A WORD

## READING WITH EXPRESSION

### Summary

After speaking a word in a neutral tone, students learn to “color” it with expression to show emotion and meaning. Then students add movement to further explore how the word might be expressed.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Vocabulary  
Define \*  
Reading with Expression  
Word color / emphasis ✓  
Presentation \*

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Reading with expression
- Vocabulary

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Voice /sound  
Presentation  
Social /Behavioral  
Be audience

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Pre K-K, Grade 1,  
2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – by desks or in  
open space

### Time

10-15 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Familiarity with the words

### Materials

- None

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Silent Hello; Follow the Leader (focus on voice); Ha Ha Hey Hey Hee Hee

### Preparation

- Prepare list of words to use: feeling words, action words, adverbs, weather words, or vocab words for which you can imagine a sound.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To express meaning and feeling through voice and movement.
  - To connect voice and body to show the feeling/meaning of a word.
2. Explore the differences between neutral and colorful words and expressions. Demonstrate saying common phrases in neutral – a non-colorful, monotone, boring voice – and embrace the humor of what it would be like if people talked like that all the time. Explain that you will be working on adding life and color to words with your voices and bodies.
3. Present the first word and review its definition. Give students time to think about the word and how they might convey its meaning and feeling with their voice. On a prompt, have all students say the word together, using their voices to color the word so it sounds like the meaning/feeling of the word. Example for “windy”: airy voice that changes speed and pitch. See Tips for coaching ideas.
4. Next ask students to add movement, using their bodies to become the word and show its meaning. Example for “windy”: spin around, wave arms, or pretend to fly around. Coach students to explore different interpretations. Repeat with other words.
5. Reflect with students on the activity, discussing the different ways in which the vocal sounds and movement expressed the meaning / feeling of the words.
  - How can the way we use our voices/bodies affect the meaning and feeling of words and sentences?
  - How can we use this activity everyday in reading and speaking?

### Tips

- Have individuals share their interpretation.
- Challenge the students to make it “bigger”.
- Try different tones, registers, and speeds.
- Have the whole class “try on” others’ interpretations.

### Variations

- Small groups prepare and present words to class.
- Expand work to phrases, lines of poetry, full poems.
- Write sentences with words that would be fun to “color”.
- “Color” opposite words to explore their differences.
- Apply process to reading poems.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Assess and encourage “coloring” of words during reading aloud work.

## READING PUNCTUATION

## READING WITH EXPRESSION

### Summary

Students use punctuation marks to add expression and meaning when reading aloud.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Reading with Expression  
Word color / emphasis \*  
Punctuation ✓  
Presentation \*

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Reading with expression
- Using punctuation to shape reading

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Voice /sound  
Presentation

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

PreK-K, Grade 1,  
2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – presentation

### Time

15 - 20 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Punctuation
- *Coloring a Word* activity

### Materials

- Sentences with punctuation marks missing

### Recommended Warm Ups

Follow the Leader; Big Face, Little Face; Ha Ha Hey  
Hey Hee Hee; Ball of Sound

### Preparation

- Create the sentences to be used.
- Prepare sentences in a format that students can see one at a time (white board, overhead, computer projection)

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To recognize the meaning and vocal use of punctuation marks.
  - To use voices to portray the meaning of a sentence.
  - To increase reading fluency.
2. If necessary, review the punctuation marks to be used and their meaning. Start with periods, question marks, and exclamation points. In subsequent sessions add quotations (narrator voice and speaker's voice), commas, and stressed words (underlined, bold or italicized).
3. Present the first sentence – missing the punctuation mark that you are focusing on. Read it together in neutral or monotone, with no punctuated inflection. Review how people use voice to color words and show meaning.
4. Discuss the possible meaning(s) of the sentence and have students identify the missing punctuation. (Note: there may be more than one for some sentences. For example: You lost your mittens. You lost your mittens! You lost your mittens?)
5. Read the sentence with the added punctuation (or have student volunteers read it) emphasizing or even exaggerating the expression noted by the punctuation. Repeat with other punctuation ideas, then with other sentences.
6. Reflect with students on the activity, focusing on the importance of punctuation as tool for comprehension and expression.

### Tips

- Make sure the students can see and focus on one sentence at a time.
- Exaggerate to show difference in inflections.

### Variations

- Have small groups prepare and present sentence readings.
- Have small groups “act out” the sentence as a group member reads it.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Assess how students use punctuation cues when reading aloud.
- Have students write a series of similar but different sentences, with punctuation marks changing the meaning.

## RAPPING WITH EXPRESSION

## READING WITH EXPRESSION

### Summary

Students develop and perform a short story as a rap, focusing on vocal performance skills and movement.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Reading with Expression  
Word color / emphasis \*  
Presentation ✓  
Comprehension \*

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Reading with expression
- Rhyme
- Rhythm

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Voice /sound  
Presentation  
Social /Behavioral  
Collaboration

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Pre K-K, Grade 1,  
2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – presentation,  
stage, desks

### Time

Multiple 15-minute  
sessions

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- The story to be told through the rap
- Vocal projection and diction
- *Coloring a Word* and *Reading Punctuation* activities

### Materials

- Story to be written as a rap
- Rhyming dictionaries for kids (online – see <http://poetry4kids.com/rhymes>)
- Rhythm instruments (optional)

### Recommended Warm Ups

Big Face, Little Face; Follow the Leader; Ha Ha Hey  
Hey Hee Hee; Zip, Zap, Zop

### Preparation

- Story knowledge.
- Some rhyming and chiming skills

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To create and perform a rap that tells a story.
  - To select words based on rhyme and rhythm.
  - To develop presentation skills.
2. Map out the key elements of the story, writing down all the ideas for future reference. Who are the characters? What happens in the beginning, middle and end? What is the main character's problem (conflict)? How is it resolved?
3. Write out simple sentences describing the story elements. As you write and read back the sentences, students will begin to see a simple rhythmic structure emerging. Edit to get the sentences and phrases into a pattern of 4 or 8 beats, to have rhyming words at the end of line pairs, and movements and sounds that "color" the words. (See example.) Do this over a series of work sessions.
4. Begin each work session with a review of the draft so far, focusing on the performance elements: expressive coloring of the words with voice and movement, clear diction, looking toward audience, keeping a steady pace.
5. Reflect with students on the activity, refining the draft, discussing progress on the rap draft and the students' delivery / performance elements.

### Tips

- See work session example on next page.
- Kids are really good at this activity. Trust them to help come up with good ideas.
- Clap hands to keep the beat or add percussive instruments such as tambourines, sticks, etc. Kids LOVE to play them!
- Say a line, pointing to yourself; then open your hand to students as the sign for them to repeat the line back to you.

### Variations

- Use this process for other stories or topics.
- Have older kids work on finding rhyming words between work sessions.
- Give students quiet work time to draft their own lines to add to the group rap. (This is for those who think better while writing quietly.)

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students perform the rap in small groups so you can assess and give feedback on individual students' presentation skills.
- Have students write and perform their own piece (or in small groups).

## Example for RAPPING WITH EXPRESSION

Here is an example of how one class started work on a rap. Note how the lines are simple and song-like and focus on unfolding the story and character.

Questions →	Draft of Rap
Who was the main character? How can we describe him? What did he sound like?	“Chicken Little was a chicken who was little! Bak bak bak bak bak bak!”
How does the story start?	“One day Chicken Little sat under a tree.”
What rhymes with tree?	“Everything was fine, as far as he could see.”
What happened next?	“But all at once, something fell and hit his head.”
What rhymes with head? What did he think about this? What happens next?	“He thought the sky was falling and soon he’d be dead!”

After brainstorming and drafting this much, they stopped writing and had the students explore sounds and movements to “color” the words. Before the next session, the artist and teacher refined the draft they had so far and presented it to the students. Together they worked on the presentation of this first section, honing the sound and movement, focusing on diction and presentation, and memorizing the lines. Then they started writing the next section of the rap, repeating this process until the rap was fully developed, well-rehearsed, and memorized.

## INTERVIEW – INTRODUCE

## READING WITH EXPRESSION

### Summary

Working in pairs, students interview and introduce each other to the class, focusing on presentation skills.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Reading with Expression  
Presentation ✓  
Interactive communication \*

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Speaking with expression
- Listening
- Recall
- Conventions of formal introductions

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Voice /sound  
Presentation  
Social /Behavioral  
Listening  
Collaboration

### Grade Levels

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – presentation

### Time

30-40 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class, pairs

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Audience behavior
- Note taking

### Materials

- Paper and pencils for writing notes

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Ha Ha Hey Hey Hee Hee; Shake Out Your Voice; Zip, Zap, Zop

### Preparation

- Develop whatever structure you want to use for the introductions
- Determine student pairs in advance, if necessary

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To learn more about other students in the class.
  - To improve listening and recall skills.
  - To practice social skills used by adults in formal and informal settings.
  - To practice speaking in front of a large group.
2. As a class brainstorm possible questions students could ask to learn more about each other. Establish that they are trying to learn something interesting that others might not know about each person. Identify how students are to be paired up and have them prepare 3-5 questions. (This allows them to tailor their questions to their partner.) Have student-pairs interview each other, taking notes and selecting 2-3 interesting things to share in an introduction.
3. Present to students an introduction format or script (or multiple ones from which they can choose). Have students use the information from the interview to prepare their script/notes and then quietly rehearse their introduction.
4. As each pair stands to introduce each other, coach students to speak clearly and loudly and to show enthusiasm and warmth in the introduction.
5. Reflect with students on the activity.
  - What it was like to “try on” a formal format for speaking? When might you use this type of introduction? How would you do it more informally?
  - What was the most interesting thing you learned about a classmate?

### Example Script

“Hello. It is my pleasure to introduce \_\_\_\_\_, a student in \_\_\_\_\_’s class. You may know her already, but here are three interesting things that may surprise you about her: ....”

### Tips

- Have students notice and reflect on introductions of classroom visitors and assembly speakers.

### Variations

- Repeat with varying levels of formality.
- Do the activity verbally, with no notes.
- Have students develop their own format for the introduction.
- Have students introduce characters from history or fictional stories.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Continue to work on the presentation skills with other activities.
- Have students introduce visitors to the class or school.

# TOY SHOP

# READING WITH EXPRESSION

## Summary

In the roles of toy-shop owner, customer, and 3-5 toys, students use voice and movement to create a shopping scene. Emphasis is on language and presentation.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Reading with Expression  
Word color / emphasis \*  
Presentation \*  
Interactive communication ✓

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Speaking with expression
- Varying voice to reflect character or situation
- Understanding roles and conventions in shopping situations
- Speaking in complete sentences

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Voice /sound  
Imagination  
Presentation  
Social /Behavioral  
Be audience

### Grade Levels

PreK-K, 1, 2

### Space

Classroom – presentation

### Time

20-30 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Audience behavior
- *Coloring a Word* and *Reading Punctuation*

### Materials

- None

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Shake Down; Image Stretch; Ha Ha  
Hey Hey Hee Hee; Ball of Sound

### Preparation

- None

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To use voice and body to become toys or characters.
  - To perform in front of an audience, being seen and heard.
  - To practice manners and behavior in a store environment.
  - To be a respectful audience member.
2. As a large group, have students become different toys through movement and sound. (See vocabulary / acting activities.) Have students create their toys and then freeze on command (a clap, snap, imaginary switch). Practice turning toys on and off, discussing student choices, sounds, and movement and coaching them to make big descriptive choices. (“Show me a floppy bear.”)
3. Brainstorm potential dialogue between a toy-shop owner and various customers, creating the context of a boutique-type shop.
4. Explain the structure of the scene, done with a customer, a toy-shop owner, and 3-5 toys. The customer comes in, is greeted by the owner, and requests to see some toys. The owner shows the toys one at a time, turning them on and off. Customer chooses a toy to buy, pays for it, says goodbye and thank you, and leaves the store. [For younger students, turn all on and off at one time so they don’t have to wait as long.]
5. Select students to play each role and coach them through the scene. Repeat.
6. Reflect with students on the activity, focusing on the choices the actors made, the presentation successes (who could be seen and heard; effective “coloring” with voice and movement), and the social conventions in a store environment.

### Tips

- Guide students through the scene, providing lines and prompts until they can do it on their own.
- To extend this beyond just a fun playground game, emphasize conventions of shopping and the performance skills.

### Variations

- Small groups plan and rehearse the whole scene with more dialogue and present to class.
- Two students create toy.
- Change to a pet store or zoo (students = animals) or an action figure store with (students = story characters).

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Write out the dialogue of the scene.
- Tape the scene and listen for how well the dialogue is heard and understood.

## GETTING A RESPONSE

## READING WITH EXPRESSION

### Summary

As they walk around the room, students say a sentence with expression and listen for peer responses.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Reading with Expression  
Word color / emphasis \*  
Punctuation \*  
Interactive communication ✓

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Reading with expression
- Using punctuation to shape reading

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Voice /sound  
Improvisation  
Social /Behavioral  
Focus  
Listening

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space

### Time

10-15 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

*Coloring a Word, Reading Punctuation, and Toy Shop* activities

### Recommended Warm Ups

Follow the Leader (focus on voice); Big Face, Little Face; Silent Hello; Zip, Zap, Zop

### Materials

- Sentences displayed on cards or on the board

### Preparation

- Prepare the sentences (questions and statements)

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To use punctuation as a guide reading with expression.
  - To use a conversational tone with peers.
  - To respond appropriately to peers' questions or statements.
2. Review previous work on reading and speaking with expression. Discuss how expressive reading and speaking impacts the listener and allows them to better understand and respond to the reader/speaker.
3. Present one of the sentences to the class and explore different ways the sentence could be said. Example sentence: *What did you just do?*
4. Then imagine what someone might say in response to this sentence, responding both to the sentence and how it was said. Sample responses if the example was said in an incredulous manner: *1) I didn't mean to. 2) It just slipped out of my hand. 3) I can fix it. 4) I finally got it to work!*
5. Divide the class into speakers and responders and present another sentence. Have the speakers move about the room conversationally stating the sentence with expression to the responders who listen carefully and then respond to the sentence appropriately. Students continue to move about the room, trying on their sentence and/or making a response with various partners. Then have students switch roles. Repeat with other sentences.
6. Periodically stop students to share and reflect on the exchanges, focusing on empathetic responses and those for which the response matches well with the statement.
  - Why is it important for us to listen before making a response to our peers? How can the meaning of our sentences change by how we use our voices?

### Tips

- Start with questions; they are often easier to respond to.
- Participate in the activity to model creative and appropriate responses.

### Variations

- Have students write the sentences from a word list.
- Do non-verbal acting of feeling words as the initial prompts. Example: First student shows they are sad. Second student asks "What's wrong?" First student says, "I'm sad because I miss my mom." "Don't be sad, would you like to play with me?" Write this as a scene for others to then read and present.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Assess expressive reading selections that are focused on conversation and dialogue.
- Write stories with characters having a conversation.

# WALKING THROUGH

# COMPREHENSION

## Summary

Students give the audience movement and sound clues as they walk through an imagined environment from a story.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Setting ✓  
Character  
Plot

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Reading for detail
- Awareness of setting

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Voice /sound  
Storydrama  
Environment  
Social /Behavioral  
Collaboration

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Pre K-K, Grade 1,  
2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom –in open space

### Time

15-25 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class, small group

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Familiarity with the story (stories) worked on
- See *Sounding Environments* activity (vocab) for creating an environment with sound

### Materials

- Reading(s) (one with multiple settings or a variety of selections with different settings). *Going on a Bear Hunt* is a good one to start with.
- Index cards with settings / environments listed

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Image Stretch; Ha Ha HeyHey HeeHee

### Preparation

- Select the readings and settings to be used.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To find details about a setting through close reading of a story.
  - To used sound and movement to create an environment.
  - To work cooperatively.
2. Discuss a particular setting from the reading selection, noting specific details about the place / environment described or referenced in the text. Refer to the story text as necessary. You and student volunteers demonstrate someone walking through the environment, showing through voice and movement (no words) as many of the details as possible. Try this with a series of volunteers to generate as many ideas and interpretations as possible. Keep the focus on a neutral character’s action in the environment, not a specific character from the story.
3. Divide students into small groups and give each group a specific setting from the story / book (or, if using a variety of single-setting stories, give each one a story). Groups then decide upon a series of clues they will perform by “walking through” the setting. Group members may all perform the same clues or each can create different ones; all must be involved.
4. Have each group perform their clues, walking through the performance space and have the audience guess the setting. After each performance, briefly discuss specific sounds and movements and how they helped identify the place.
5. Reflect with students on the activity, summarizing what was learned about each setting from the “walk through” and discussing how the details of a setting impact a story.

### Tips

- Refer students to the text for more information or detail about the setting.
- Challenge the students to make it “bigger”.

### Variations

- Do the activity as a whole class, repeating step two for multiple settings.
- Read illustrations for details about the setting.
- Repeat with other stories.
- Use for history or other non-fiction (e.g., ecosystems).

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students do descriptive writing about their setting.
- Have students identify setting details in a new reading selection.

# PANTOMIMING A STORY

# COMPREHENSION

## Summary

Students explore character, emotion, and plot as they pantomime key events of a story.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

Setting  
Character ✓  
Plot \*

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Reading for detail
- Character emotion and motivation
- Conflict, main events

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

Acting  
Movement  
Presentation  
Storydrama  
Plot / theme  
Characters

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Pre K-K, Grade 1,  
2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom –in open space

### Time

15-20 minutes

### Grouping(s)

All class

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Familiarity with meaning of the words

### Materials

- Story or picture book

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Big Face, Little Face; Image Stretch;  
Shake Down; Silent Hello

### Preparation

- Select the scenes to be used. Think through and practice how you might pantomime the scenes.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To read a story closely for information about characters and events.
  - To use movement to explore character emotions and story events.
  - To read like an actor, using words and illustrations to understand characters (describe this as the research that an actor does).
2. Begin reading the story aloud together. Focus on the first significant interaction or event in the story and identify details from the text and illustration about the characters, their emotions, and the specific event.
3. Have student volunteers pantomime specific actions to create the characters and the event. Using other volunteers, work through the scene multiple times, adding more detail. Example: in Jack and the Beanstalk, Jack and his mother are very hungry. Jack is very sad when his mother tells him to sell the cow.
4. Continue reading the story, stopping at the points you had selected in advance. Repeat the process of reading closely for detail and then translating what you have read into a scene focused on movement.
5. Reflect with students on the activity, focusing on the details of the story that were illuminated through the pantomiming. Also discuss the process of pantomiming. Which characters were harder or easier to show? When do you think actors pantomime? What can pantomiming show us about a character?

### Tips

- Encourage students not to move their lips and to let the body convey meaning.
- Animal characters are fun to act out and generally lead to stronger choices than human ones.
- Also have students be inanimate objects from the story or picture.

### Variations

- Use this with any book or story that has short, focused interactions between distinct characters.
- Focus on vocabulary words from the reading. Define the words and then have the students pantomime them in the context of the story.
- Once students are familiar with the process, have small groups to present a short story.
- Use to explore well-known stories or events from history.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students write a detailed description of one of the scenes/characters.
- With another story, have students do the scene/ character selection.

# FREEZE FRAME

# COMPREHENSION

## Summary

Students create a series of frozen scenes depicting main events of a story.

### Areas of Literacy Focus

- Setting \*
- Character \*
- Plot ✓

### Literacy Skills /Concepts

- Story sequencing
- Main events / plot / conflict

### Areas of Theater Arts Focus

- Acting
- Movement
- Storydrama
- Plot / theme
- Characters
- Environment

✓ = primary focus; \* = secondary

### Grade Levels

Grade 1, 2-3, 4-6

### Space

Classroom – open space

### Time

30 - 40 minutes

### Grouping(s)

Small group

### Prerequisite Knowledge

- Movement and pantomime

### Materials

- Story or picture book

### Recommended Warm Ups

Actor Neutral; Big Face, Little Face; Image Stretch; Shake Down; Silent Hello;

### Preparation

- Identify the beginning, middle, and end of the story.
- Think through and practice how you might show the scenes to prepare for coaching students.

### Directions

1. Discuss with students the purpose(s) of the activity.
  - To read a story closely for information about the plot / main events.
  - To use movement to explore story events.
  - To read like an actor, using words and illustrations to understand a story (describe this as the research that an actor does).
2. Read aloud and then summarize the story together, identifying the beginning, middle and end. (Or use more events, for older students.)
3. Work with student volunteers to create a freeze-frame for each of the events selected. The frozen scene should show the audience as much as possible about the event through use of a variety of levels, shapes, postures and spatial relationships. Students can serve as objects and furniture as well as characters.
4. Once students understand the process, have small groups create their own version of the three scenes. When they present to the class, have them freeze in each scene until you give a command (clap) for them to move into the next frame. Note details and artistic choices made.
5. Reflect with students on the activity, discussing interesting details that different groups chose and what you learned about the story.

### Tips

- Note and coach performers' break of the vertical line of the body in different ways. Even very small bends (ex. a slight head tilt, a bent finger) can show meaning.

### Variations

- Repeat with other stories.
- Use to organize student thinking about a story's essential dramatic moments.
- Once students are good at identifying the main events and creating the "frames", have them do the work in small groups and present their different stories to the class.
- Do activity as charades.
- Connect the frames with dialogue or narration.
- Add alternative endings.

### Follow-Up/Assessment

- Have students do the scene selection with another story and assess students identification of main events.
- Use a camera to take photos of the scenes. Have students used these to write captions or to refine their scene.

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