

# A LESSON IN CREATIVE DRAMATICS

By Eloise Hayes and Richard Via

Creative drama is not intended to produce acting skill, but rather to help children become more aware of life, see their physical surroundings with delight, develop empathy towards others, and develop more faith and confidence in themselves. The increased language flow and growth in vocabulary are outcomes of a process in which the mind becomes free so that ideas run through it easily and flexibly, and the body becomes

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**Richard Via, professional stagemanager on Broadway took *Hello Dolly* to Japan for the State Department.**

**He became interested in drama as a means of teaching ESL and returned as a Fulbright Scholar to Japan for five months - and remained for five years. He is currently a fellow with the Cultural Learning Institute at The East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii.**

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equally free physically. Children seem to learn quicker when movement precedes language. This may be because physical movement not only causes relaxation, enjoyment, involvement and individual expression, but also both causes and expresses thinking.

Much has been written and said about the wonderful results of creative dramatics. Unfortunately, there has not been enough simple, practical material developed for the teacher untrained in this special area. This sample plan then is to help the teacher develop her own material from her collection of favorite stories, poems or songs.

## THE STORY

Once upon a time there was a little old man who lived all alone in his tiny home near the forest. All day long he sat in the doorway of his little house and made caps. He made all kinds of caps, out of every kind of material and in every color you can imagine. There were caps with tassels, caps with visors, flat caps, pointed caps, feathered caps, red caps, orange caps, blue and green caps.

As the little old peddler finished each cap he packed it neatly into a bag he had sitting near him. When his bag was full, then he knew it was time to go out into the world and sell his caps.

One morning when he placed a cap in the bag he noticed there was no more room to put in anymore, so he tied his bag up and threw it across his shoulder. Then he was on his way to a town to sell his caps.

He walked and walked and finally arrived at the busy little village. He went into the center of the town and began to unpack his bag so the people could see his wonderful caps. Many people gathered around to look, but no one bought a cap. Soon the Mayor of the town came out to see what the crowd was looking at. The Mayor was a very important man, (at least he thought so,) so the little peddler presented him with his very best cap. The Mayor was very pleased and put it on his head and began to strut around the town square, feeling very important in his new cap.

When all the people saw the Mayor wearing one of the caps, then they too wanted a new cap, and soon everyone had on a cap and was walking about the square. The butcher, the baker, the store clerk, the

dentist, the lawyer, yes, the teachers all had caps on and were very proud. Naturally the peddler was very happy thinking that he would sell all of his caps.

Suddenly the Mayor took off his cap and gave it back to the little old man saying, "It's too hot to wear a cap." Of course everyone noticed that the Mayor gave his cap back, but they did not know why. However, if the Mayor did not want to wear a cap then neither did they. So one by one they gave back their caps with almost as many different reasons as there were different caps.

The peddler was very sad, but patiently packed all the caps in his bag. Once again he put the bag on his shoulder and walked into the forest to go to the next town. He was tired and hungry and sat down under a tree to eat his lunch. It tasted so very good, and he decided to rest under the tree for a while. He must have been very tired for soon he fell fast asleep.

High up in the trees some monkeys had been watching the little man, and like all monkeys they were curious and wondered what was in the bag. When they were sure he was asleep one by one they came down the tree, opened the bag, took out a cap and scampered back up the tree to watch the little old man.

It wasn't very long before the peddler woke up, rubbed his eyes and realized that he should be on his way if he was going to sell his caps in the next town. He stood up, stretched, and reached down for his bag. He couldn't believe his eyes, the bag was empty.

"Where are my caps?" he cried.

"Chee chee che chee" chattered the monkeys.

He shook his fist at them and said, "You give me my caps."

All the monkeys shook their fists at him and said, "Chee chee che chee chee." The little old man scratched his head and thought. All the monkeys scratched their heads just to copy the little old man.

"Please, little monkeys, give me my caps," said the man.

"Chee, cheche cheche, che che che che," said all the monkeys. Then the little peddler had a wonderful idea. He took his cap off and as he said, "give me my caps!", he threw

it to the ground. Immediately all the little monkeys took off their caps and as they said "chee che che chee!" red caps, yellow caps, blue caps and purple caps came sailing down to the ground.

Quickly the little peddler picked up all of the caps and put them in his bag. He looked up at the monkeys and said very kindly, "Thank you, kind monkeys." And all the monkeys said, "che che, che che."

The little peddler put his bag on his shoulder and started for the next town. The monkeys laughed and laughed over the funny trick they had played on the little old man.

## PREPARATION

Be sure you know your story thoroughly. Tell the story to your students; do not read it to them. It should neither be memorized nor recited, but rather told in your own words. Your changes and choice of words may actually improve the folk tale. Know your story so well that you are relaxed and can enjoy telling it. When learning and telling the story, be sure that your "monkey talk" (che che che etc.) duplicates the intonation, stress, and feeling of the lines said by the old man.

Add your own creativity to this story by giving the story a catchy title. You may also wish to change the story by adding other characters such as a wife, children, or trees. You, like the children, must be allowed to express yourself. A creative teacher, like a creative student, is a happier person.

## HINTS AND THOUGHTS

All conversation about the play must be conducted in English, both between students and between student teachers.

Stories used for creative drama should deal with subjects that the children know and wish to talk about.

Use "where-when-why-who-and how" questions. (All in English)

Listen to all answers then choose the ones you wish to use. There should be no "right" and "wrong" answers or movements. This builds up a sense of security in the child.

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Richard Via with a group of East-West Center students from Micronesia portraying some incidents in the story.

# CREATIVE DRAMATICS

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Insecure children tend to copy the teacher or their peers. If the teacher values individuality then the shy child will gradually move to unique ways.

Try to accept all answers and movement. Give special note to those that are unique, unusual, or personal. Answers which do not contribute to class thinking or action should be quietly ignored, but not in a way to cause unhappiness.

In creative activities, competition causes children to produce poorer work than when they freely respond to their thoughts and feelings.

Involved children are never a discipline problem.

Children, like everyone else, want to succeed. They are all capable of movement in their own way. This they can do, so they have tasted success early in the proceedings.

## WITH YOUR STUDENTS

### I. Warm up.

Before you tell the story have your students participate in some activity that is related to the story and will involve and interest them in the story to come. Some teachers prefer to have the students quiet at this stage, and do not encourage them to talk. If this is your plan you may ask these questions. Be sure to give students time to think.

### ASK

Think about the animals you like very much. What does your animal do that you like to watch? Close your eyes and see your animal doing something he enjoys.

If you wish to have them talk you might ask such questions as:

What kinds of animals do we have here?

What other animals do you know?

### DO

Everyone be an animal that he likes. Comment on different animals or ask the

class to identify animals they noticed. If someone was a monkey have that student demonstrate his actions.

Everyone be a monkey.

### ASK

What do monkeys eat?

What kind of sounds do monkeys make?

### DO

Be a monkey eating.

Sitting where you are, be a monkey swinging through the trees.

### ASK

(To quiet the class for the story)

Do people ever act like monkeys? How?

Do monkeys ever imitate people?

Do people ever imitate each other?

### II. Tell the Story.

### III. Discussion of the Story.

Sometimes it is better to omit the discussion, or to have it later.

### IV. Plan and play/rehearse monkeys imitating the Peddler.

### DO

Put on a "cap."

Ask several to describe their "caps."

Tell the students that you will be the old man and they are to be the monkeys. Say all of the lines that the peddler says and have them copy you in "monkey talk."

After you have done this, act out the entire last part of the story beginning with the old man sitting down to eat his lunch. It may be advisable for you to be the old man, but if one (or more) of your students shows

a desire to play that role, try it.

V. Plan and play/rehearse Peddler making caps.

**ASK**

What did the peddler's house look like?  
How many rooms?  
What was the roof made of?

**DO**

How does the old man work on his caps?  
How does he pack his bag?

As the students are "working on their caps" and "packing their bags," the teacher may be a visitor calling on some of them. Students may or may not be asked to listen to the conversations.

VI Plan play/rehearse Mayor and Villagers.

**ASK**

Where did the little old man go?  
Who does he see there?  
How did the townspeople act like monkeys?

**DO**

Be a townspeople doing his job.  
How does the Mayor walk?  
Put on your "caps."  
Walk about the room as the townspeople do.

**ASK**

How did the old man feel when everyone had on the caps?  
How did he feel when they gave them back?

**DO**

How did he walk through the forest when he left the town?  
Eat your lunch and fall asleep.

VII. Putting it all together. The Performance.

You have now discussed and rehearsed the

entire play. You are ready to perform.

Decide where the house, the village and the forest are to be. Use all available space. Depending on the size of your class, you may have the students select the parts they want to play. You will need:

- 1 (or more) old man
- 1 (or more) Mayor
- Townspeople (any number)
- Monkeys (any number)

If your class is small, then the townspeople and monkeys may double. You should have a part in mind to play in each phase in case there is a lull in the action and you need to get them started again. You could be a visitor or relative when the old man is making his caps, a villager in the town scene and a monkey in the last scene.

In creative drama you do not need costume or scenery. The students are most imaginative and will create more of this in their minds than you could provide. Good luck!