

Drama & Dance in the Canadian Classroom

By Amy Spiers

This resource is written and edited by experienced elementary teachers. Drama & Dance in the Canadian Classroom meets the overall and specific expectations as outlined in the revised Ontario Arts Curriculum. Assessment and evaluation tools and strategies reflect the philosophy of the *Growing Success* document.

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Introduction

Welcome to *Drama & Dance in the Canadian Classroom*! This collection of drama and dance structures are designed to help you incorporate the arts into your program and to help you feel comfortable and empowered when it comes to teaching drama and dance.

Drama & Dance in the Canadian Classroom has six fully developed artistic structures (unit plans) that will engage and inspire your students. They will assist you in meeting your curriculum expectations in fun and meaningful ways. Each structure is a stand-alone experience; they do not necessarily need to be done in order of the book. Conventions and activities are sometimes used in multiple structures in different ways so that students can achieve mastery. This resource contains visuals for the Elements of both Drama and Dance which can be used in the classroom and throughout the lessons. It has 20 introductory activities for both subject areas that can be used as warm-ups, community builders, or energizers.

Each structure includes the following:

- step-by-step lesson plans
- a variety of engaging and meaningful activities for your students
- teacher hints for questioning and furthering exploration
- suggestions for extensions and cross-curricular connections
- assessment and evaluation tools

Whether taught as independent subjects or used as a means of exploring other curriculum areas, the arts are a powerful vehicle for teaching and learning. The more opportunity you give yourself (and your students) for practise, the more natural the processes will become.

This resource will help you move past the types of learning experiences that involve the 'one-time practice and perform' system. Instead, students are inspired by a source (e.g., literature, visual art piece, song, etc.) and encouraged to explore characters, themes and messages in a variety of ways. These extended and authentic learning opportunities allow students to reach a deeper level of understanding and meaning.

Exploratory Drama & Dance vs. Theatre

Drama and dance instruction at the elementary level is exploratory and open-ended by nature. It is *not* recommended that students at this level be given instruction in

formal drama or theatre techniques, such as memorizing scripts or taking on the role of specific, closed-ended characters. Instead, they should work through *process* or *exploratory* structures that allow them to think critically, solve problems on their own or cooperatively, and express their ideas successfully. Through these structures, students will assume a variety of different roles and explore themes using various drama conventions.

Similarly, dance instruction at the elementary level should focus on creative movement and the elements of dance, rather than the rehearsal of repetitive steps. Students should develop and create dance pieces that communicate the motives and feelings of various characters. "Dance is a non-verbal medium for learning about the self and the world." (Ontario Arts Curriculum, 2009)

Many educators feel intimidated with the prospect of teaching drama and dance. Do not despair! Elementary drama and dance do not require teachers to have any theatre experience. The fluidity, flexibility, and open-ended nature of exploratory drama and dance are what empowers every teacher to become a master!

Children Learn Best by Doing

An involved child is an interested child and interested children learn. Using drama and dance as a means of teaching will deepen the learning experience and make it personal and memorable for your learners. Providing students with rich, meaningful, and authentic experiences heightens not only their interest, but also their ability to understand and respond. There are many ways of knowing and communicating knowledge to others. The arts provide multiple means of expression (e.g., visual, oral, aural, gestural, etc.). Drama and dance require the involvement of the whole person. They involve an active and intentional engagement of both the body and mind, including emotions, intellect, imagination, and physical body.

Critical Literacy & The Arts

What is Critical Literacy?

- Going beyond simply decoding and understanding texts
- Appreciating and recognizing that texts contain certain perspectives and biases
- Evaluating multiple perspectives for bias, fairness, and reliability
- Understanding that one's point of view influences how a text is interpreted and understood

- Determining whose voices are present and/or absent

Critical Literacy and The Arts have a natural relationship. When we ask students to look beyond the literal written text, we ask them to question, predict, hypothesize, analyze and evaluate. Drama and dance provide a natural platform for this kind of exploration. Through the arts, students have the opportunity to assume roles of characters that differ from themselves. Exploring a variety of points of view allows students to be exposed to different perspectives.

A key component of critical literacy is the exploration of the missing voice. Through open-ended exploration, students are asked to consider questions such as: Whose voice is missing from this narrative? Who else should we speak to in order to gain a more balanced perspective? Does the story hold a bias in any direction?

Classrooms that practice critical literacy in the arts begin to shape the way in which students interact with one another. They begin to create a learning environment that holds empathy, human rights, and social issues at the forefront.

Growth Mindset Opportunities in The Arts

Assisting students in developing a growth mindset in the classroom is integral to their success. Children with fixed mindsets are afraid to take risks and make mistakes. This fear can sometimes lead them to become disengaged and less likely to participate. The largest deterrent in an arts classroom can be the fear of failure. This is why the open-ended, exploratory approach is so beneficial in the early grades. There is no right or wrong way to perform. Students are encouraged along a continuum to become more skilled, more comfortable, and therefore, more effective 'performers'. The journey and the process, however, are most important, not the end result. The activities in this book are designed to assist **all** students in finding success. Research suggests that students are motivated and therefore more successful when working in cooperative groups. The arts are a natural platform for these types of experiences.

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Getting Started in Drama

Introductory Drama Activities

The following activities can be used as an introduction to drama, as warm-ups to a larger activity, or as fun energizers when you have a few spare minutes! They are community building activities that make use of the elements in a variety of ways.

Have fun with them and explore how these activities can meet the needs of and challenge your students.

Tableaux

Tableaux is one of the most widely used drama conventions. It is important that students understand the components of successful tableaux so that it can be used most effectively (see p. 100-101). Tableaux goes far beyond staying still in a 'frozen picture'. The following are suggested ways to extend the learning with tableaux.

Guess Our Tableaux

Give small groups a tableau topic (or ask them to come up with their own). They should keep the topic to themselves. Groups should create a tableau depicting a scene aligning with the topic. One at a time, groups will present and the rest of the class will guess what the scene is about!

Thought-tapping

While students are frozen in their tableaux, the teacher and/or students can ask questions of the characters in role. Tap a student gently on the shoulder and ask him/her a question about the scene, his/her role in it, and/or what he/she sees the future holding. Attempt to pose questions that will not result in a yes/no answer. This convention allows students to move past the literal and obvious and begin to create a unique drama.

Tableaux Reporter

While students are frozen in their tableaux, the teacher and/or students act as a reporter and conduct short interviews with individuals in role. While being interviewed, the character may stay frozen in his/her pose OR break out of the pose and use gestures, tone, and vocabulary appropriate to the character.

Before, During, After Tableaux

This activity works well for checking understanding in a variety of subject areas (e.g., retelling historical events, life cycle in science, comprehension of read-aloud story, etc.). Choose a topic to use as a demonstration. The example below uses a hockey game.

Invite two or three students to join you to create a small group. The rest of the class will assist in the creation of the tableaux by offering suggestions. Tell the students that they are going to create a series of three tableaux during a hockey game. One to come *before* a big goal (i.e., wind up to take the shot), one *during* the goal, and the last showing what happened *after* the goal (e.g., celebration, crowd cheering, etc.).

Work together as a class to build the series of three tableaux. When everyone is satisfied, you will perform them as a slow motion sequence. The group will move in slow motion to get into their first tableau (before) and hold for five seconds. They will then move in slow motion into the *during* pose and hold for five seconds. Repeat with the final pose.

After students understand the process, send them off in small groups to create their own sequence. Remind them that their tableaux should include a variety of levels and appropriate facial expressions and body language. Set aside time for all groups to share their final sequences.

A Big Wind Blows

Sometimes referred to as "I like my neighbour who...", this game is a great way for students to learn about one another. Begin by clearing an open area and having students place their chairs in a large circle. One student will stand in the centre as the *caller*; he/she does not need a chair. The caller declares something true about him/herself by saying, "A big wind blows for those who _____" (e.g., "A big wind blows for those who have a pet"; "A big wind blows for those who have been on an airplane", etc.). Everyone who shares that trait must rise out of their chair and race to find another empty seat. One person will be left in the centre; this person is the new caller.

Extension

In a large open space, have the class stand at one end while one student stands at the opposite end. The person at the other end declares something true about him/herself (e.g., I have a brother, I like pizza, etc.). Anyone who shares that trait, moves over to join him/her. The game continues until all students have made it over to the other side, thereby finding commonalities among everyone.

Line Up!

Students will organize themselves into one straight line according to the terms you have called out. Come up with a list of ways for students to line up before starting the game. For example:

- ✓ Line up according to shoe size
- ✓ Line up according to height
- ✓ Line up according to month of birth
- ✓ Line up according to number of siblings

This challenge is to be done without talking! Students need to use gestures to communicate and decide upon their position in line. When the class thinks they have been successful, walk down the line and check for accuracy.

Getting Started in Dance

Introductory Movement Activities

The following activities can be used as an introduction to dance or movement, as warm-ups to a larger activity, or as brain breaks when you have a few spare minutes! Although dance exploration does not need to be done in a large space, such as a gym, it is best when students have an open space. Simply move the desks off to the side of the classroom and you will have the perfect sized area.

Have fun with these movement activities; explore how they can meet the needs of and challenge your students.

Body Shapes & Levels

Allowing students to explore body shapes and levels is essential for developing body awareness, movement vocabulary, and level of comfort. Use these basics and build upon them with your students.

Most body shapes in dance are rooted in three basic shapes: *bent*, *straight*, and *twisted*. All other shapes are a combination and/or variation of these three. Invite students to move around the space to a piece of music. Ask:

- How does the music tell you to move?
- What kind of a mood does it evoke?

When you pause the music, ask the students to make a particular shape with their body. For example: "Please make a bent shape with your body". Encourage students to engage every body part when creating their shape. Repeat with all the different body shapes a number of times, challenging students to create different shapes each time.

Next, introduce the concept of making these shapes at different levels. Ask:

- What are the three levels we can use? (i.e., high, medium, low)

This time when the music stops, combine a shape and a level. For example: "I want you to make a low, twisted shape" or "I'd like to see you make a high, bent shape with your body." Try all different combinations!

Nose to Knee!

Invite students to spread out around the room and begin moving freely. When the leader (teacher) calls out, "People to People", students should pair up with the person closest to them. Next, the leader will name two body parts such as "elbow to knee". Students must attach one person's elbow to the other's knee. The leader then calls out two more body parts such as "wrist to shoulder". Pairs must maintain their first position (elbow to knee) while they make the second connection. Clap your hands or ring a bell to break poses and invite students to begin moving again. Repeat with different combinations of body parts.

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It's Great to Be Me!

Materials

- Music
- Music player
- Sticky notes
- Pencils
- *A Bad Case of the Stripes*, By David Shannon
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Stakeholder Role Cards (p. 35-36)
- Drama & Dance Movement Cards, ©Learning Tree Educational Store
- List of Suggested Movement words (p. 37)
- Tableaux Checkbrick (p. 38)
- Partner Movement Checkbrick (p. 39)
- Writing in Role rubric (p. 40)
- Blank Rubric (p. 41)



Engage

Atom Game

Tell the students that today they will start out by playing the *Atom Game*. Play music and invite the students to move creatively around the classroom. When the music stops, call out the number of 'atoms' that should join together (e.g., atom 4, atom 2, atom 6, etc.). Students should gather in groups of that size as quickly as possible. When they have found the correct number of people, they should link arms and squat down. When all groups have been established, pose a question for them to answer.

Suggested questions/prompts include:

- What is your favourite movie?

- Where is your favourite vacation spot?
- When is your birthday?
- Talk about a time when you were very excited.
- Talk about a time when you were very scared.

When everyone has had a chance to share, start the music again and repeat the activity with a different sized group. Pose another question for students to discuss and share. Repeat the activity several times.

Congratulate the students on their listening and sharing during the *Atom Game*. Ask:

- What did you learn about a friend in the class?
- Did you find something in common with someone else?
- What was a difference you discovered?
- Is it hard to get along with someone who is different from yourself? Why? Why not?

Sticky Note Secrets

Teacher Note: If students are not able to write the facts themselves, scribe for them.

Tell the students that they are going to play a guessing game called *Sticky Note Secrets*. Hand each person a sticky note and instruct them to return to their seats and take out a pencil. Ask them to write a fact about themselves that no one in the class knows (e.g., something about their family, when they were younger, something that happened on a trip, etc.). When they are finished, invite them to bring their sticky note to the front and stick it onto the chart paper.

When all secret stickies have been posted, assemble on the carpet in front of the chart paper. Tell the students that you are going to read the facts one at a time. Their job is to guess who the fact is about. Remind them that these are facts they most likely do not know about their peers. Ask them to have their detective ears ready! Begin reading the first sticky note and ask for guesses. Write the name of the student on the sticky note when the truth is revealed!

Upon completion, ask:

- What was an interesting fact you learned about a friend in our class?
- Did anyone find that they had something in common with other friends?
- Why is it important to get to know the friends in our class?

★ Inspire

Read Aloud

A Bad Case of the Stripes

By David Shannon

A Bad Case of the Stripes is a powerful book about personal identity, bullying, and staying true to oneself. Camilla Cream is a young girl who loves lima beans, but she never eats them because she is afraid the other kids at school will think she is strange. Camilla is always worried about what others think of her. On the first day of school, she looks in the mirror only to find that she is covered in colourful stripes! A host of professionals try to help cure her. In the end, Camilla discovers that the remedy is simpler than anyone thought.

Hold up the book, *A Bad Case of Stripes*, by David Shannon and tell the students that this story is going to be the inspiration for our drama and dance exploration. Ask:

- By looking at the cover, can anyone make a guess as to what the book is about?
- Has anyone heard this story before?
- What do you notice about Camilla's appearance on the cover?

Begin to read the story. Stop when you reach the page wherein the students are laughing and pointing at Camilla.

☞ *Teacher Note: It is often a good idea to read only a portion of a story when working through process drama/dance. The students then have a chance to create their own storyline instead of adhering to the one that is prescribed for them. This empowers students and gives them ownership in the structure. Although it is not necessary to complete the story, you may wish to do so after the structure is complete.*

Tableaux in the Round

After pausing the book, ask the students to stand up and get into a circle. Ask them to consider the scene in Camilla's classroom at that moment. Ask:

- How might you describe the students pointing and laughing at Camilla?
- Describe how she might be feeling at this exact moment.
- If you were in the classroom, where would you be standing? What might you be doing?

Teacher Note: This is a good opportunity to remind students that when we explore through drama and dance, we sometimes play roles or characters that are unlike ourselves. If they are asked to act like a 'bully' or someone who is unkind, it doesn't mean that they are that way in real life. Reinforce that this is a safe space to explore. Students may need multiple opportunities to practise role play before they become comfortable with this idea.

Tell them that they are going to create a 'frozen picture' or *tableau* that illustrates one of the 'bullies' or children who are being unkind to Camilla. Ask them to picture Camilla standing in the centre of the circle. Discuss how they might show strength and power using their bodies. Suggestions include:

- Powerful stance
- Strong body
- Upright position
- Pointing finger or body leaning forward
- Mean face, open mouth for shouting

When all students have established their pose, tell them that you are going to count backwards from five and then ask them to freeze silently in the *tableau* they have created. Count "5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and freeze". As students hold their poses, wander the classroom, highlighting students that have captured the essence of the antagonist.

Next, have the students create a pose that expresses how Camilla is feeling at that moment. Ask:

- How might Camilla's body look different from that of the other characters?

Give students a few minutes to establish their second tableau and then count “5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and freeze”. Again, wander and highlight effective poses. Next, ask students to return to their first pose (bully) and freeze. Tell them that in a moment, they will transition to their ‘Camilla’ pose; however, you want them to move very slowly as though they are transforming into another character. Explain that you will count backwards from five very slowly as a guide. Try the pose-to-pose transition a few times. Then, invite half the class to view while the other half shows. Switch roles and repeat.

Thought-tapping

Invite students to think of a word or phrase that would complement each pose. Ask them to consider the kinds of things that Camilla might hear and say in this situation, as well as the tone of voice used (e.g., strong and loud vs. quiet and upset). Some possibilities include:

Camilla: “Please leave me alone.”
“So lonely.”
“Why do I have to be so different?”

Bully: “What’s the matter with you?”
“You’re weird!”
“Ugly.”

Ask students to move back into their first pose. Tell them that you are going to wander around the classroom while they hold still in their tableaux. When you tap them on the shoulder, they are to say their word or phrase out loud. After everyone has had a chance to speak their word or phrase, transition slowly to the second pose and repeat the thought-tapping.

Extension

Extend the thought-tapping by asking students questions about their role in the scene. They will remain frozen in their tableau while they answer in role.

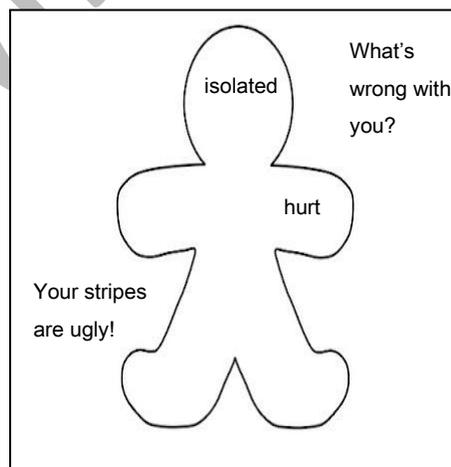
If students are comfortable, invite them to bring the scene to life on cue and improvise the scene.

Role-on-the-Wall

Role-on-the-Wall is a wonderful springboard for many other drama conventions, as well as literacy extensions. If this is the class' first experience with the convention, you may wish to complete one as a whole group. Otherwise, students can complete the charts in small groups.

Hang a piece of chart paper vertically on the board with masking tape. Draw a figure to represent Camilla (e.g., 'gingerbread' outline, her head with hair, etc.). Explain that this image represents Camilla. The space around the outside of the figure is where they will record the words, phrases, and sentiments she hears from outside influences (e.g., parents, teachers, friends, bullies, etc.). Inside the figure, they will record the corresponding feelings that come as a result of hearing those words or phrases. Remind students that Camilla might hear both positive and negative sentiments.

Ask for a student to volunteer the first response. Continue until all students are comfortable with the activity, then, separate the class into small groups of three or four. Hand each group a piece of chart paper and some markers and ask them to draw their own image to represent Camilla Cream. They will then work cooperatively to fill their chart with words, phrases, and emotions. Hang the finished charts on the walls of the room for all to appreciate. An example has been started below.



★ Explore

Group Sculpture

Begin by asking the class to stand in a large circle. Explain that in a moment, the whole class will work together to create a giant sculpture using their bodies! There are a few rules when making a group sculpture:

1. This is a silent activity.
2. Only one person can enter the circle at a time to add his/her contribution.
3. If two people step forward at the same time, they must have a silent negotiation as to who will step into the circle and who will wait.
4. You must attach yourself to the existing sculpture in some way (e.g., hand, heel, elbow, etc.) as it has been carved from one piece of clay.
5. When you enter the circle, carefully consider where the best spot is for your contribution. Consider:
 - a. What level is needed?
 - b. What direction should you face?
 - c. Is the sculpture evenly weighted visually?

Choose a word or phrase to be the title of the sculpture from the Role-on-the-Wall charts created earlier. Invite one student to begin in the centre and ask him/her to take a pose that aligns with the title (i.e., If the title is *Leave Me Alone*, he/she may crouch down low and cover his/her head). One at a time, students will come into the circle to join the sculpture. If there are students who do not choose to join the sculpture, they can make edits/changes/adjustments when the sculpture is done.

Extension

Add music to the experience and notice how it affects the movement and choices made by the students.

Create & Consolidate

Word Sort

- ☞ *Teacher Note: If you do not have a pre-made set of Drama & Dance Movement Cards, ©Learning Tree Educational Store, use index cards and a marker to create your own set. Write a different verb on each card; try to choose words that are rich in vocabulary and that are evenly split between movements most likely done by Camilla and the 'bullies'. See the List of Suggested Movement Words for ideas.*

You have provided students with a variety of opportunities to explore Camilla and a host of other characters and themes. Tell the students that today, they will begin to think about the characters in a different way and use movement to express themselves.

Show students the pile of movement cards and explain that in a moment they will be sorting some words into two piles: 1) actions most appropriate for Camilla, and 2) actions most suited to the bullies in the story. Students will work in small groups to complete the task. Before a word can be placed in a pile, the whole group must be in agreement. If there is a word that can be argued for both categories, simply create a third pile in the middle. You may wish to use a venn diagram for this purpose. Separate the students into small groups and hand each group a pile of 10-20 cards to sort. Ask them to find a quiet spot to work around the room. As students sort the words, be sure to wander and listen in on the conversations. You will hear very rich discussions and defending of choices.

Extension

Create a verb chain with the sorted piles of words. In their groups, ask students to choose three to five words and place them in a line. They should consider the order of the cards before rehearsing their movements. Then, as a group or a 'group of individuals', invite students to perform each of the movements on the cards. Remind them that one should flow smoothly into the next. Challenge them to try the movement at different levels, facing different directions, with percussion, etc.

Cat & Mouse Dance

This is a wonderful dance convention for exploring the relationship between two characters, in this case, Camilla and the bullies in her class. In partners, students will

decide who is Partner A (Camilla) and Partner B (bully). Partner A will begin by performing a movement series while Partner B remains frozen. When A is finished, she/he will freeze; this is B's silent cue to begin her/his series. The communication continues back and forth until the 'conversation' is complete. Remind students that they are not playing charades, but rather, communicating through movement. If students struggle getting started, invite them to use the movement cards that were just sorted as a springing-off point.

Extension

Translate the silent communication of dance into spoken word. What would the characters be saying to one another?

Corridor of Voices

Students will form two lines facing one another, creating a corridor. The teacher (or chosen student) will walk through the corridor while the other students offer suggestions and/or advice.

Discuss how making a decision is sometimes difficult as we often hear different voices telling us what to do. Ask:

- Has anyone ever had a hard time making a decision?
- Did you feel like there were different voices in your head telling you what to do?
- How did you eventually make your decision?

Remind the students that Camilla is having a very difficult time at school and she needs help deciding how to handle the situation. Ask the students to think of a piece of advice they would give Camilla. Tell them that in a moment, a student will slowly walk down the *corridor* or hallway they have created here; he/she will represent Camilla. As that student passes them, they are to give their piece of advice by speaking it aloud. Repeat this activity with as many students as wish to try.

Afterwards, reflect:

- How did it feel to walk down the corridor and have all these voices speaking to you?

- Was the advice all positive or were there negative comments as well?
- If you were Camilla, would this experience have helped you? Explain how.

Writing in Role

For closure to this structure, students will choose a form of *Writing in Role* to complete. You may wish to choose a single form for response or allow the students to choose the one most meaningful to them. As a class, brainstorm forms of writing that are appropriate to Camilla's situation. Remind them that writing in role means that they are not writing as a Grade ___ student at school; rather, they are writing as a character in the drama they have been experiencing (e.g., Camilla, her mother, doctor, principal, etc.).

Record the list of writing forms on a piece of chart paper. Suggested forms include:

- Journal entry from Camilla
- Note from principal to parents expressing the school's position
- Letter to Camilla from a student who is sorry for being unkind
- Doctor's report

Share the *Writing in Role Rubric* with students before they begin their first drafts. Alternately, create a list of shared criteria and make your own rubric using the *Blank Rubric* provided.

Provide students with the necessary tools and time to complete the writing in role. If students are comfortable, invite them to share their pieces upon completion.

★ Assessment & Evaluation

Use the *Tableaux Checkbrick* to evaluate the Tableaux in the Round. While students are exploring the Cat & Mouse dance convention, use the *Partner Movement Checkbrick* to record your anecdotal observations and assess their partner work. Finally, use the *Writing in Role Rubric* to evaluate the written pieces completed by the students. If you have chosen to co-create success criteria, use the blank rubric provided.

Self-reflection should happen throughout the drama structure. It does not have to be formal every time, though it is helpful for both the teacher and student to have a written account of thoughts and feelings, if the children are able. This can be done as a group or in small conferences, as well.

SAMPLE LESSON