

Play-ing with Language: Using Drama to Teach Speaking Skills

Why Drama?

1. Natural communication goes way beyond not making grammar and vocabulary mistakes. Pragmatics is the way we use a wide range of communication tools to make meaning and create an effect on our listeners. These tools include:

- Intonation
- Rhythm
- Volume
- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Rhetorical strategies
- Word choices
- Grammar choices

How many meanings can “I like you” or “Thanks a lot” have, depending on how you say it?

2. Playwrights and actors are experts at exploiting these communication tools and thinking about relationships and contexts to create natural, authentic-sounding conversations where characters do things with words. So drama is natural tool for language learners. Plus, it’s engaging and motivating and safe!

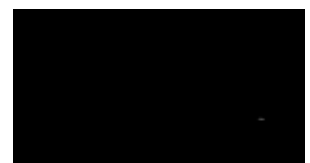
Lessons Built Around a Play

1. Experience a Play: The Confession

C: Ummm...
D: What’s wrong?
C: Well, I need to tell you something, and I want you to promise not to get mad.
D: Uh-oh. What did you do?
C: Do you promise?
D: How can I promise when I don’t know what it is? Just tell me.
C: Uh, it’s about your car.
D: Oh no! What did you do to my car?
C: Well, I sort of hit a gate.
(D exhales)
C: It wasn’t my fault.
D: I’m sure it wasn’t.
C: Don’t be mad.
D: I’m not mad!
C: Yes, you are.
D: I’m not mad. I’m just disappointed.
C: I feel so bad. My foot just slipped off the brake.
D: I see.
C: I’m sorry.
D: I know. It’s okay.

2. Analyze the Pragmatics

- a. **The context:** Who are the people? What is their relationship? What do they want? Who gets what they want?



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- b. **Useful language:** What strategy does C use to break the news? What words do they use? What are some other words or phrases for breaking bad news? Getting bad news? Practice the language with different tones and body language.

Intonation with Attitude

Pick a line from the play or useful language and make a list of emotions/attitudes. Students take turns in groups saying the line while others guess the emotion.

example: *I'm not mad!*

sincere, sarcastic, angry, cheerful, relaxed, surprised, confused, mischievous



Circle Pose

Call out a situation and have students show the body language for that situation. Discuss differences in poses, which emotions/attitudes go with which poses, and so on.

example: What do you look like when you are being scolded by a parent? Trying not to laugh? Waiting at the airport?



Other activities: Yes And..., Gracefully Yours, Secret Word

- c. **Strategies:** What are other strategies we can use to break or get bad news? Which language goes with which strategies?
- d. **Put together strategies, language, intonation, and body language to create short scenes.**

3. Language work

- a. **Grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, other language features**

Drifting Sounds Fishbowl

Pick some expressions that are often elided in English (fuhgeddaboutit=forget about it, don't worry, we'll take care of it). Idiomatic or expressions from the script work best.

Give students a short scene to act out, based on the script/theme of the lesson. In the middle of the scene, call out an expression that they have to use. (Or put expressions on slips of paper and make them periodically draw one out of a hat/bowl).

Other activities: Thought Group Stories, Stress Out, Grammar Search, If Stop

4. Roleplay in a new context

- a. **Students use the skills learned to create a role play with a similar theme (e.g. introducing Bad News), drawn from their real experience. Students can improvise or even write sketches or full-length plays!**

For more ideas, resources, and plays, go to <http://bit.ly/scr1pts>

