

Using written texts

Sometimes a drama class begins with a close examination of a written text. The literacy levels in the class will partly determine the choice of text type, and how it is used. In Early Stage 1 the class may begin with the spoken word, (for example the reading of a picture book or nursery rhyme) whilst older more experienced students could base their drama on poems, short stories or extracts from the newspaper. Picture books, where communication depends on the combination of picture and words, may be used in younger classes. In Stage 3 a playscript might be explored.

	<p>Poems</p> <p>Drama is an excellent method for analysing the meaning, and exploring the sound and rhythm of poetry. By using the body- feeling it in the bones- students can come to an understanding of the poem's affective qualities. The discussion of how to use the body indirectly promotes an analysis of the meaning.</p>
Early Stage 1	<p>Use a simple nonsense rhyme and adapt it for readers' theatre. Discuss the feeling in each line, and how it could be expressed.</p> <p>Each student can learn one line and speak it when directed by the teacher:</p> <p><i>Mother, Mother, I feel sick, Send for the doctor, Quick quick quick. In comes the doctor, In comes the nurse, In comes the lady with the alligator purse.</i></p> <p>"It's the end," says the doctor. "It's the end," says the nurse. "It's the end," says the lady with the alligator purse.</p> <p>From <i>Far Out, Brussel Sprout in Drama Anytime</i> p.60.</p>
Stage 1	<p>Read a narrative poem or nursery rhyme such as <i>Humpty Dumpty</i>. Extract the main movements (sitting down, falling, breaking, riding, mending, falling apart. Students explore these in pairs in slow motion and at different levels, using freeze part way through the action. Read the poem and use slowed movement to illustrate the actions of the poem.</p>
Stage 2	<p>Prepare strips of material, streamers, and percussion instruments. Read the following extract from Kenneth Slessor's <i>Fixed Ideas</i>.</p> <p>Students in groups of six, experiment with movements, heights and shapes appropriate to express the feelings. Share these. Reflect with the students: what might "loosen your bubbles" mean?</p>

	<p><i>Frail tinkling rush</i> <i>Water hair streaming</i> <i>Prickles and glitters</i> <i>Cloudy with bristles</i> <i>River of thought</i> <i>Swimming the pebbles-</i> <i>Undo, loosen your bubbles.</i></p>
<p>Stage 3</p>	<p>Students read and discuss the following poem. <i>At what levels are the objects described: which is highest? Which is lowest?</i> In groups of six, have students explore appropriate movements, use of space and levels, to accompany a reading of the poem by one of their group. Share all of the groups' interpretations, and then discuss the last two lines - do they agree? Extend the activity by writing a poem of "the country at night"</p> <p>City at Night <i>Oh what a view, eleven floors up, like a fair</i> <i>Like Fairyland. Layer on layer and beams of light,</i> <i>From storeys of windows, stories of neon,</i> <i>Rocking from harboured ships; Cars burrow the night</i> <i>Planes coming low to land send lights before them</i> <i>Whatever in aeons is changeless, this is a sight</i> <i>Only for twentieth-century eyes.</i></p> <p>Nancy Keesing</p>