

Chants and rhymes

In this unit students work in improvisation, movement and reader's theatre to develop and present a performance based on a selection of chants and rhymes being explored in the class program. These may be traditional chants and rhymes, or those from cultures and languages other than English, contemporary chants or student-devised chants and rhymes.

The students will begin to:

- take on roles
- notice and respond to drama elements
- use movement and language skills
- express feelings about drama.

- Drama forms**
- improvisation
 - movement
 - reader's theatre

Resources Books

- Cousins, Lucy (1996). *Jack and Jill and other nursery rhymes*. Macmillan Children's Books, London,
- Cousins, Lucy (1996). *Humpty Dumpty and other nursery rhymes*. Macmillan Children's Books, London,
- N.S.W. Board of Studies (1994). *Raps and Rhymes: English K-6 Teaching Kit, Stage 1*. (This document contains additional lists of resources in this area)

CDs

- Bananas in Pyjamas (1996). *It's Singing Time: A Collection of Nursery Rhymes*. ABC Music.
- Chamings, Franci (1994). *Favourite Nursery Rhymes*. Broad Music Pty Ltd.

Learning activities

Getting started

- Review or teach a selection of chants and rhymes. When using traditional English rhymes in a multicultural classroom consider the use of translations for multilingual students.
- Students warm up by saying, singing and chanting texts in different ways, using different voice patterns, intonation and rhythms as modelled by the teacher. Add simple actions, clapping and other body percussion to these sequences.
- Students listen to recordings of chants and rhymes and join in through singing, chanting and moving.

Taking on roles in situations • Developing drama • Performing

- Organise students into groups and have each one select a chant or rhyme. Explain that they are going to bring it to life. Class forms a circle. Students work with one group at a time inside the circle as the others watch.
- Allocate the roles and talk about the situation. Ask students: *Who are you? What are you doing? Where are you? Why? When is this happening?* Decide on the space to be used and the location of characters and other significant items in the space. Experiment with ideas inside the circle.
- Teacher or audience says the chant or rhyme to accompany the action as the students share their work and continue to try other ideas. Repeat with other groups and other chants or rhymes. Examples...
 - ♦ *Working in improvisation*. Allocate the roles and make the situation clear. Students improvise dialogue and action as they proceed. *What can we find out about the characters?*
 - ♦ *Working in movement*. Allocate the roles and make the situation clear. Students experiment with movement only to tell the story.
 - ♦ *Working in reader's theatre*. Select narrators for each group. They speak in unison or share lines. Use volume and pausing in ways to create focus and



build tension. The others in each group improvise an action sequence to correspond with the narration. They experiment with different types of movement and stillness to create focus and build tension. They practise along with the narrators. The teacher works with the groups, assisting with ideas.

- Each group presents its performance piece. Teacher takes photographs.

Variations:

- Use recorded chants or rhymes to develop movement pieces only in small groups or as a class and perform as a movement sequence.
- Each group selects a different form of drama to portray their rhyme or chant e.g. improvisation, mime, movement, reader's theatre, storytelling etc.
- For students of a non-English speaking background use some of the suggested approaches to explore and perform rhymes in their own language, with assistance from the community languages teacher where appropriate.

Responding

- Discuss the presentations with students. *What did you enjoy? Why? What worked well? Talk about the narrators' voices and the movements of the performers. What grabbed your attention?*
- Write about the performances. Create images to represent them. Include the text with the images and display in classroom, along with photographs of students performing their pieces.

Assessment of students

- Teacher observation of students' drama work and their process of working.
- Photographs of students working together and performing.
- Analysis by the teacher of students' oral and written comments, drawings and other responses to their drama work.
- Consideration of the following questions about students' learning in drama:
 - ♦ How well are they able to become involved in a make-believe situation and take on roles?
 - ♦ What evidence is there that students are beginning to notice and respond to drama elements as they work with others to develop drama? How effectively are they working together?
 - ♦ How effectively are they using movement and language skills as they perform?
 - ♦ What learning is evident as they observe and respond to their drama and the drama of others?

Extension activities

- Use the hot seat to interview students in role as characters from chants and rhymes. Pose questions which explore beyond the known plot.
- Use teacher-in-role to seek help from the class. Take on the role of someone related in some way to a character portrayed in a chant or rhyme e.g. Humpty Dumpty's mother seeking advice about safe ways and places for her boy to play. Class makes list of suggestions and provides advice.

