

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.

	Extract from a newspaper
Early Stage 1	Choose a news picture with human figures that will appeal to the group. (e.g. a family at the show; a group in flood waters). Students “sculpt” each other into shapes represented in the picture. When tapped on the shoulder, students say what the character may be thinking.
Stage 1	Choose headlines from the paper relevant to the news of the day (e.g. "record crowds attend the show" or similar comments on the Olympic Games, or Christmas celebrations, etc). Discuss the things that might happen at the event, and who might be there. Students create paper plate masks attached to a stick, which they can use when presenting a news report for television.
Stage 2	A "squib" is a filler sometimes used in newspapers to briefly outline an unusual story. Choose an ambiguous one with "general" characters who are not famous, so there is room for students to be creative. For example: <i>"A man has admitted to stealing \$ 6327 from his employer's safe. However, he hid the money in the local dump, where it was accidentally destroyed by workers burning off the rubbish. The man was arrested at the scene when he went back to collect the money".</i> Discuss: What questions is the reader left with? What might be some answers? In small groups, the students decide upon three still images to express the story. Reflect on how the story was "told", comparing and contrasting the interpretations.
Stage 3	Discuss a controversial news or provocative topic, such as the need to quarantine animals during outbreak of disease, or the possession of drugs by a swimming coach. Decide upon people who would have a vested interest; name fictional characters. Allow the students time for more research if needed. Adopt a high status role as the Minister for Health, and hear representations from the students in role on both sides of the issue.