

Ashes remembered

In this unit students work in improvisation and movement to develop a performance in response to a local environmental tragedy. Teachers should be sensitive to the circumstances of students who have been exposed to the sorts of personal experiences this unit deals with.

They will:

- consolidate and extend belief in roles
- manipulate drama elements to enhance meaning
- show the consolidation and extension of movement and language skills
- critically evaluate drama.

Drama forms

- improvisation
- movement

Resources

- Music suitable for a fire dance, e.g. Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite*, Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld* or Manuel de Falla's *The Three Cornered Hat*.

Learning activities

Getting started

- Students talk about and reflect on experiences during local bushfires e.g. fears and emotions, effects of smoke and ash on homes, what happened to others close to them. Students brainstorm relevant words. Students write poems. Students paint images.
- Discuss and research associated issues. For example mind map the consequences of arson, floods, fire or earthquakes. Discuss the way the media deal with tragic events. List key emergency services and volunteer organisations. Discuss and write about safety around the home in relation to fires.
- Students visit a nearby bush area to see what is happening to the flora and fauna following the fires. Observe environmental renewal and predict what will continue to happen.

• Taking on roles in situations • Developing drama • Performing

- Discuss how a fire could be performed through movement. Decide on how the fire will start and how events will be demonstrated through movement e.g. impact on animal and plant life and the process of renewal.
- Begin to develop a performance piece around a scene in which members of a crowd are being interviewed at the scene of a bushfire.
- Audition for...
 - ♦ three students to create a fire dance. Provide music and allow them to work on movements to depict a fire starting, spreading, raging, then being put out by fire fighters.
 - ♦ two students to take on the roles of members of a TV news team. They formulate questions and discuss ideas to encourage people to watch their news reports.
 - ♦ two students to take on the roles of fire fighters whose movement will complement that of the fire dancers.
- Other students form a crowd scene and decide on who they are, what they are doing at the scene of the fire and what they can say when interviewed by the media. They improvise ideas and begin to script some dialogue. These students assume roles such as police officers, volunteer helpers and residents who represent different age groups. Other students assist in the playbuilding process by formalising the improvised script and making multiple copies.
- Students develop and practise their piece. They use freeze frames with an emphasis on different levels within the space. They develop focus by making clear when characters are being interviewed and when the focus needs to be on the fire dance.
- Students develop and plan costumes.
- With the help of the teacher the class performs the piece. Teacher records on video.



Responding

- Whole class watches the video recording and discusses: *Have we addressed the issues we intended? Are our roles convincing? Are we focussed? Did the action grab our attention? Which movements are particularly effective? Is our message clear? How can we improve our performance?*
- Practise and prepare item for a wider audience.

Assessment of students

- Observe students' drama work and their process of working.
- Analyse students' oral and written comments, drawings and other responses to their drama work.
- Consider the following questions about students' learning in drama:
 - ♦ How well are they able to consolidate and extend belief in roles? How effectively do they use voice and gesture to characterise and communicate the roles? To what extent are they showing a serious commitment to their roles? To what extent are they able to depart from stereotypes and create new and challenging roles?
 - ♦ What evidence is there that students are manipulating drama elements to enhance meaning in their work? How are mood, focus, contrast and tension being developed and used in their work? To what extent are new techniques being sought out and tried? How is the use of symbol becoming more evident in their work? How effectively are students working together?
 - ♦ Which movement and language skills are being consolidated and extended as they perform? Which movement and language skills need further development?
 - ♦ How well are they able to critically evaluate drama? What else are they learning through their drama experiences?

Extension activities

- Students research other environmental tragedies e.g. oil spills, cyclones, floods. Assist the students to use playbuilding to investigate the impact of a natural disaster on a particular community. The students develop roles and situations to explore through improvisation and movement and build scenes which capture a mood or feeling at moments before, during and after the event.
- Ask students to collect newspaper articles and photographs about environmental disasters. Create depictions based upon these ideas and have individuals express in role their feelings at these moments in time.
- Use playbuilding to investigate a community ten years after a tragic event. With your students go back in time to capture events and move to the future to show the long-term impact on people's lives and the environment.

