

Drama and Young Children



Drama involves pretending in a variety of situations. It helps children develop imagination, language skills, cooperation and other social skills, confidence, and creative expression. Here are some ways you can encourage the children in your program to engage in dramatic play. (See Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmarks 25.A.ECa, 25.A.ECb, and 26.B.ECa.)

Props and Dress-Ups

Provide ample props and dress-ups to create a variety of real-world situations: mechanic's garage, restaurant, grocery store, campsite, or shoe store, for example. Introduce props that go along with a project, a field trip, a visitor, or a special event. Offer props that appeal to boys and girls and ones that reflect diverse cultures.

Manipulatives and Blocks

Combine small toys with building blocks to encourage dramatic play. Farm animals, small cars and trucks, miniature people, and furniture are examples of small toys that can be used with blocks of all kinds—wooden unit blocks, cardboard blocks, small cubical counting blocks, and plastic interlocking blocks.

Participation Stories

Read or make up a story. Ask children to dramatize actions in the story from where they are sitting without using sound. A story about camping, for example, can include actions such as setting up a tent, gathering wood, fishing for dinner, and roasting marshmallows over a fire.

Make up a short story using sounds. Ask the children what the sounds suggest. "I was walking down the street one morning when suddenly I heard... [Make short bursts of scraping sounds with your fingers on a hard surface.] What was it?" Continue with the story. Include children's ideas and new sound effects with your hands, such as drum rolls, a light tapping sound with a single finger, or a loud steady beat with your full hand.

Pantomime Games

Have children dramatize familiar actions without using words. Write the ideas out on cards. Then read them in private to each child or pair of children. Invite other children in the group to guess what is being pantomimed. Ideas can be simple—brushing teeth, sawing wood, or talking on the phone—or more involved, such as playing soccer, grocery shopping, or getting ready for bed.

Creative Movement

Use a drum as a signal to stop and start movement. When you beat the drum, ask children to move around the space as circus animals. When you stop the drumbeat, ask children to freeze. When you beat the drum again, ask children to move as a character from a favorite fairy tale. Other movement ideas include snowmen melting in the sun, baby birds hatching from eggs, or members of a marching band.

For related Web resources, see "Drama and Young Children" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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