

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 039 219

TE 001 307

AUTHOR Adland, David
TITLE Drama as a Social Activity.
INSTITUTION South Australian English Teachers Association,
Burnside.
PUB DATE Aug 68
NOTE 13p.
JOURNAL CIT Opinion; v12 n2 p7-18 Aug 1968

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents, Creative Activities, Creative
Development, *Creative Dramatics, Creative
Expression, *Drama, Dramatics, Emotional
Development, *English Instruction, Group Activities,
Group Discussion, Group Dynamics, *Secondary
Education, Secondary School Students, Self Directed
Groups, *Social Development, Student Leadership,
Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Social contact through informal speech, a basic adolescent need, can be most effectively developed in secondary schools through the learning, working, and creating situations of drama activities. Since drama is conflict and living language is action, the process of making a play is as important as the play. Thus, drama creation within a small group provides the basis for eventual development toward individual dramatic involvement in writing and in major dramatic roles. Subject matter should be related to the student's development, with first year drama exploring fantasy and nonrealistic events, and second year drama moving more toward realism. In the third year, the drama should be related to the student's emotional growth by his working in original open-ended incidents, sketches, old theater styles, symbolic drama, or experimental approaches using tape-recordings, chants and choruses, masks, paintings, basic movement and spectacular lighting effects. The fourth year drama activity may focus on current events and contemporary problems, and original work should be supported by material from all genres of literature, especially extracts from modern plays. (JM)

ED039219

TE 001307

Opinion

IS THE JOURNAL OF THE
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
ENGLISH TEACHERS'
ASSOCIATION INC.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED
MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED
BY *S. Australian Eng. Teachers Assn.*
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER
AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION.
FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM
REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Editor

Miss Alison Dolling
23 Garden Avenue, Burnside
Telephone: 79-5053

AUGUST, 1968

Volume 12, No. 2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE
PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION
POSITION OR POLICY.

Drama as a Social Activity

by David Adland

Master-in-Charge of Drama at Corner Hall Secondary School
Hemel Hempstead, England.

Probably like you, I was taught English and English Literature in the standard traditional manner: we had our set texts and we studied them; we learnt so many lines of Keats and Wordsworth till we could knock off an Ode or "Westminster Bridge" at the drop of an iambic pentameter.

What remains now is the memory of the three men who taught me at various examination levels. The first was a huge, grey Scotsman, grey-tweed suited, grey faced with bushy grey eyebrows which he could lower like a drawbridge. He read us the epic tales of Homer . . . and gave us a mythology of personal combat and honour which every playground scrap ignored, and an appreciation of super-power when the gods intervened in the action that led us straight to the comic heroes of our everyday reading, Superman and Batman; above all, he ensured our willing attention by the leather tawse which hung, a god-like symbol of authority, from a nail at the side of his desk.

The second was a little Welshman who would walk into the classroom as though half his body were under the floorboards, give us his "Good morning, boys" and cross the room without a glance at us. When he wasn't in the trenches with the War Poets, he would take us in English Grammar: he could parse a sentence with the skill of a surgeon and with about as much pleasure.

The third was a Yorkshireman who dwelt lovingly on the follies of Lear cast out by his daughters as if it were a re-enactment of "trouble at t'mill". But his greatest delight was to direct his Chaucer quotations at my long and emaciated adolescent frame:

Full longe were his legges, and full lean,
Y-like a staff, there was no calf y-seen.

All three worked hard and professionally, with what I now recognize as a profound love of English; what they failed to do for so many of us was to communicate — and I admit our indifference, our idleness and our chewing gum — to communicate their understanding and enjoyment to us. Chaucer remained an antique figure with a marvellous idea which never came off, and he didn't finish anyway. Wordsworth was an idiot who skated until he was dizzy and thought the mountains were moving; and Lear's terrible cry, as he comes in with his daughter dead in his arms,

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all?

moved us not at all.

Were we really so insensitive? So stupid, so wrapped in our smug adolescence? I may have exaggerated my teachers' mannerisms, but not their failure to excite, to stimulate us, to involve us in the experience so that it extends our limited experience and becomes part of our total selves. We were taught well: but we learnt badly. We did not absorb the experience of the story or the poem or the play, but stood aside, looked at it with one eye and puzzled its value as a quote for the Exam. The word remained a leaden lump with the image trapped within it.

For too many children, academic and non-academic, contact with literature in general and drama (I've mentioned the word at last) in particular is a second-hand, non-involving study of words. And the read-experience and the read-situation is closed, complete: it may be precis-ed, it

AUGUST, 1968

7

may be paraphrased, it may even be "comprehended", but it cannot be— or is only rarely — explored, felt in physical movement and emotion, developed, pushed out of shape from one starting point to an original conception, related to one's own personal experience in one's own vocabulary and that of one's peers.

You can resolve any doubts you have about my points so far by a simple classroom experiment, which will not — Headmasters please note — result in riot. "I think your class is rather noisy, Miss Chance, though doubtlessly they are enjoying themselves" — and the bitter tag — "And learning something, too." Nor will this experiment result in a funeral pyre of desks and other inhibiting furniture: "Vikings this week, Miss Chance?"

Resolve your doubts then by taking two classes of similar ability levels or divide one class up, and begin your passionate exposition of Chaucer's "The Pardoner's Tale". The story alone will hold their interest while you make earnest references to absolution, the iniquities of the Catholic Church, the gullibility of Mr. Average Sinner, and, of course, a neat note on the Reformation. Round off with a piece of translation into good modern English ten questions on comprehension, a little dash of dictionary, and glossary work on obscure words and phrases, a pinch of character study, and top up with a summary of the plot in five hundred words.

Now take the same text with your test class, pausing only for a "quick wet". You begin by hiding all the books, throw a sack of wood on the floor, and ask three pupils to improvise the finding of gold. Follow this first exploration, which may last two or three minutes, with a class discussion, inviting a full range of possible and fantastic outcomes — would they share it, would they quarrel, would they be afraid or overjoyed . . . until you (that is, the class) need to know what kind of men they are in order to work out how they are likely to behave. So sketch a character for each man and play the scene through again. Now, in discussion, you will need to know — in order to play in depth as well as in character — the pressures of their times: poverty, the fear of the plague, the solid fact of death and sickness, and the standards by which they live — particularly that life was cheap, it was hard and unsophisticated, it was often just a matter of physical survival. Now the class can break up into smaller working units — groups — to prepare their version of this situation in the light of what they now know about the background and the characters; and they act out the possibilities as they seem to them then.

New elements are introduced, the aim being to dig deeper into the original story and come out with more of the total experience. So the figure of Death is brought in, and the theme of greed and self-destruction, the ideas of guilt, sin and punishment, are revealed, giving the story a new dimension. This, too, is acted out after the groups have discussed it. The whole story is performed, the books appear: here, now, is the story as Chaucer wrote it.

Either way the teacher works hard and professionally; either way the pupils will know the story, the essential references, and obtain a picture of its meaning. But I will argue that only the second method will tend to involve all the pupils and stimulate them to respond to the original with enthusiasm. And if this will work with the academic stream, who can now the more knowingly retrace their steps in detailed study, how much more is it going to appeal to the non-academic, the low-achiever, the tough nut who doesn't want to know?

Perhaps I haven't spelt out the social nature of this kind of approach,

and I ought to, oughtn't I? Take it at its lowest level: if the class sits before you, eyeless in Gaza, such barren, barren leaves, then there is little legitimate opportunity for social contact. Who meets who, who says what to anyone else? Oh, yes, tomorrow's evils and today's horrors may be planned and discussed — "I'll get you after" — but the teacher-class relationship is only at the briefest of moments of a real or social nature. No more than a Head addressing a Staff meeting; but get him with a drink afterwards . . . Contact in the classroom is on a ratio of about 1—30, teacher and taught, speaker and listeners. Now if English is concerned with communication, the sheer hard business of learning how to get something across to the next fellow, even it's only what he wants to drink, or what a great car/house/wife/dog you've got, then it's words, but it's words plus you, your personality, you making contact, your concern with what you're saying.

You will know that your pupils speak several kinds of English depending on the situation and the company. One level with his friends, the "playground chat" level; another at home, related to how the family speaks and behaves and its general environment; and another with special adults — visiting strangers, relatives, policemen, officials . . . and school-teachers. All right, we all have different kinds of speech, even as adults — casual, informal and formal. In practice we enjoy and employ the second level, "informal" speech, more than the others. Not so the child. His informal speech with others is debased in hectic survival play in the playground and the holidays, neglected at home, and unwanted or unrecognized in the classroom.

English — communication — contact — informal speech. That is the train of thought, but what is "informal speech", when can it be used — and is it worth having around?

If we look at the kinds of speech I have already mentioned, you will see that each is an area of communication; they overlap but they are largely self-contained: to family, to adults, to friends. Between friends would be a better description. A child expects a pretty fast return service from his friend. He knows that most adults will leave him to pick up the ball. He is most involved, in terms of speech anyway, with his peers. Contact in his world is vital to him: it is essential for his normal growth, to his self-confidence, to his own self-respect. This acceptance which he gains through the informal speech of social contact with his peers is the basic need for every child: for the aggressive and dominating, for the shy and withdrawn, for the "nice" kid, for the physically weak, for the inhibited, for the rejectee and for the isolate. Their social needs are met more by their friends than by anyone else. And the key to this need is social contact through informal speech.

If this need can be allied to a learning, working, creative situation . . . In the classroom there are two great opportunities to employ and develop informal or conversational speech between pupils. The discussion in English . . . and drama. I've already described some discussion work in connection with drama, and you'll remember it was not only teacher-pupil, but pupil to pupil, a face-to-face encounter. It was not in the more formal language of debate or lecture or even panel game; it did not have to be propelled across the room or directed to a row of grins. It was the language normally employed by children amongst themselves, adult-excluding, full of half-thoughts, split infinitives, grammatical errors, slang, and careless phrasing. But it had purpose and point: they have information to work on, they have an objective to reach — the construction of their play.

They need to look at ideas and evaluate, judge one better than another for their present purposes, and they need to unify, to bring together all the fragments of the discussion into a whole that can be explained to the dimmest and performed by all with confident ease. What others will think of it doesn't really come into it: if they like it and it looks as if it'll work, then that's fine.

Are these things the work of the English teacher — and that includes drama work — or are they not? The social niceties, as you will have them, can be introduced to raise the tone of discussion: that correct, accurate language agreeably put, will make a point better and enable the group to work more efficiently. But there is no need to fear: you have all the real weapons on your side. They want to talk to one another; they want to be with their friends; they like doing work in this way — it seems, and is, natural; and they are in an environment you have created by your contact with them, working in the classroom. To that they will respond unconsciously. They will know what is acceptable in terms of language, noise, behaviour and attitude.

If you have trouble with a class on the usual basis, then don't do it. They will simply feel let off the reins and gallop away. If you are not getting across to a low-stream leavers' class, mainly because they are bored and waiting to leave, try it in small doses — say ten minutes before the end of the lesson. But if you have the normal, happy, confident relationship most teachers achieve with their classes, then jump straight in.

No one need argue the place of plays and acting as a means of enjoyment and of understanding words and character and emotion; and the social values of drama are clear enough. What I am now saying is that not only is the play important, but that the process of making a play is important. Drama is not only conflict in action — that is the play itself; it is also living language in action — that is the pupil himself. The personality is involved the whole time, from the first sketchy, preliminary idea to the final performance. And this is personality in contact with others, not an individual, isolated performance like reading or set study or homework.

Whatever the language of the play — the old English of the Miracle and Morality play, Shakespearean, Restoration, Victorian, Melodrama, Modern or Absurd Comedy — the language of preparation is informal speech used by small group of "friendship-attracted" children working together with a common aim in their own "controlled" language. And if the play itself is improvised, uses language made up by the pupils to suit the character and the situation, then the conversational speech of preparation is carried right through the lesson; but again it is controlled — partly by their unconscious response to you, partly by the demands of the play. You may want them to improvise on Chaucer as I suggested earlier, or on Shakespeare. They won't improve on it — though they can improve on the dialogues in most text books — but they will use what is directly meaningful to them, odd words and phrases, and sometimes they will maintain the "flavour" of the whole thing; but most of their improvised version will be theirs, in their language: direct, contemporary, understood.

The social nature of the drama lesson is apparent from the start. The teacher has made his normal contact with the class in his introduction to his material, whatever it is and however he may do it, and now the class has broken up into small groups to work on it. The circles form, some five or six heads leaning together. Not all, perhaps; some leaning back, not yet involved, hesitant or indifferent, — but wanting to be drawn in.

And his friends, or at least people who accept him, are there. They've got to get something across to him, he's with them, taking part: he must know. An idea catches fire and unites them . . . or a blank wall. Nothing seems to work. Every forward path is blocked by some person, some difficulty. The heads come up, the eyes search, the supporters begin to twitch, the leader struggles to regain interest.

You stroll by and have a word with the leader . . . informally. What would you say? Got stuck then? . . . You don't seem to be getting on hm? . . . You've only got a minute, you know that, and I expect . . . Of course it depends on the tone you use and your whole attitude. But in you go with your casual, "Let's here your story then" and you listen . . . to painful hesitations and minute difficulties, just as in any other lesson. You don't solve the lot with a brave sweep of the hand. You try to find one element which they've thought of and make it lead somewhere. Otherwise, if you can't, there's nothing for it but to deliver your complete fool-proof beaut of a story you've saved up, which now appears in false colours as a brand-new straight-off-the-cuff, specially for us, story. Oh, we're a devious lot!

A social activity? These small groups — even before the play or rehearsal has begun — are interacting in close, face-to-face relationships, relating words, argument, emphasis and enthusiasm to the understanding and judgment of their peers. The play is then an extension of the beginning, and vital because it completes it, and satisfies the group drive that began it.

Of prime importance at all stages of the lesson is the function of the leader of the group. Usually he is an accomplished performer as well as the mainspring of original ideas and developed situations. He is more "popular", accepted with more warmth by more members of the group than any other, and he is as eager for the role of leadership as the others are that he should lead them. As leader he knows (we know) that he owes his authority and power and success to them: they are essential to his role. But his value to them is far greater, because he has the qualities they lack, and because they gain from contact with him within the structure of the group. Oh, they may realize that he's "good at acting", or "he's funny," and that he makes their plays work. From him they get that initial "kick" to activity, a dynamo to their needs; he is able to break down lethargy and indifference and lack of confidence. How? By his given role of leader; by stimulating them with ideas they will be able and willing to accept; by his attention to each of them; by a positive guarantee of success.

In a child's group, a natural, spontaneous grouping of four, five or even six members, each has an opportunity (which is difficult for him to reject without leaving the group of overcoming the basic fears which beset us all. The ingrowing fears of being wrong, of being "noticed", of being "shown up", of embarrassment and failure. And to control the outgoing fears that often conceal the former: aggressiveness, boasting, attention-seeking, sullen withdrawal, general anti-social behaviour. In a common working unit he can grow socially and emotionally. Engaged in dramatic activity this growing process — apart from the other values of the activity — is given room for growth which every teacher will know to be of fundamental value.

If you relate the subject matter of the plays to the child's development you strike several blows at once. Apart from how well that kind of phrase looks on a Drama Syllabus if you're compelled to draw one up,

you won't end up with a casual hotch-potch of suggestions and play material which has no continuity, no unifying thread; the Oh my God, what shall I give 4X today? situation. Next, your classes will feel that drama has as coherent and logical a framework as any other subject. They will understand that though there is apparently "no work" — in the way Primary schoolchildren get home and say to their mother's questions: We didn't do any work today, we just played — and no lesson to be learned, that it is possible to develop the range and scope of ideas and the style of playing; that the themes can be such as interest and concern them, their age-group, and themes which reach out to touch the concern of all men.

It's only fair, I think, for me to give an example of this kind of syllabus, and it may make useful talking ground later. I am going to start at the Secondary level, aged about 11-12, and add a note about Primary work later.

1st YEAR:

all kinds of fantasy and non-realistic events, employing magic, surprise, co-incident, chase, capture, virtue triumphant, happy ending; comedy, especially simple family situations such as holidays, camping, moving, getting a pet — historical and Biblical subjects; high adventure involving search, discovery, danger, rescue, triumph; plays based on the books they are reading; basic conflict situations as robber-police, hunter-warden, pursuer and pursued, rich and poor, master and servant.

Basically this is a time for the exploration of the innocent "dream self" when all things are possible, yesterday's troubles forgotten and tomorrow's a million miles away. There is likely to be total absorption in the situation, but only a passing nod to characterization, while emotional response — outgoing, that is, is limited. This should be a period of steady "building-up" of the child's confidence and of his ability to manipulate ideas; an awareness, at least, that further development or change of direction is always possible, and sometimes better. That is something he will learn in the discussions afterwards and by watching the work of his peers. Finally a recognition that life isn't always so simple, so easy of solution, so neatly tied up, so clearly right and wrong; that it is, unfortunately, not fair.

2nd YEAR — 12-13:

a general move from fantasy to realism shown in a more observant and detailed reflection of how people behave in shops, at home, buying, selling, making, working, playing; more concern about revealing character and emotion in action — not the blind old miser fumbling in his box, but the lonely old man longing for company, full of memories of the War and his distant family. Much can be a more sophisticated mixture of the first year's work, perhaps re-working some ideas previously only sketched in, and some pupils will always want to return to the simplest of situations. But for most, a deeper concern for people, getting beyond the cardboard heroes to flesh and blood. You can deal with all kinds of play — comedy, thriller, adventure, domestic, science-fiction, whatever, but the aim is to encourage them to reflect their growing maturity and awareness of how things actually are in their approach. I think a great deal can be done here through situations and characters drawn from literature, especially where there has been an obvious refusal by the author to simply skate the surface. The child's reading has, as always, a vital part in Drama.

The third year, and puberty: that peculiarly difficult year to teach, that awkward, unsettled age to be. Drama can again relate to their social needs, to an exploration of conscious self, that awful awareness that one is a distinct and separate identity which hasn't quite jelled. It can ease the business of gaining acceptance as you suddenly outgrow your fellows, get hairy or pimply or become round-shouldered so that your changing frontage is less noticeable.

Some connecting links, then, with earlier work for the less mature, and now a study of self in a variety of known and unknown situations all keyed to reality: at home, particularly, but also the factory, work bench, shop, business, bus stop, restaurant and cinema. Above all, a study of self and emotion: embarrassment, "nerves", anxiety, frustration, anger and all his wicked brethren from resentment to bickering; the associated emotions of pleasure and happiness; greed — from avarice to "fair shares"; in fact, all the vices and virtues in terms of emotion; all the disturbing conditions that puberty seems to highlight, involving social contact, self-awareness and sex.

You will not need to direct them to these emotions and these subjects. They will arise spontaneously — because they need to say them and explore them openly — if you give material which leads to them. This material should, in the main, be drawn from their own experience in discussion, begun as a class and completed or made specific in group discussion.

Work at this time is largely original, from their experience, their ideas, their treatment and story-line to what the whole thing says. And this is where, I think, the conventional image of the play can begin to curl a bit at the edges. I mean that there is no need to tell a complete here-comes-the-happy-ending story. It can, like life, be an "open-ended" incident . . . this may happen, that may happen, who can tell? It can be a series of sketches centred on a single theme: work, success, violence, the family, travel, money, romance . . . a kind of revue. It can use old theatre styles like Melodrama and Kabuki or the techniques of modern Absurd Comedy. It can be symbolic in the manner of *Everyman* and *The Fire Raisers* and *Rhinoceros* and *Waiting for Godot*. And it can be frankly experimental using tape-sound, chants and choruses, masks, paintings, basic movement and spectacular lighting effects.

This kind of drama involves the teacher more personally than any other kind for any other year. It is only possible if you have a good working relationship built up over the past years. You will get to know each other in the way that happens in a school camp, or travelling abroad together; the demarcation-line between you goes — there is no room — and no need — for the authoritarian attitude.

You should be pleased if your Head comes in and says, Miss Chance, where are you? And this relationship is vital for the kind of work they want to do; you offer informed suggestion rather than authority-backed fact, co-operation rather than direction: like them, you get involved.

Their original work is supported by, again, material drawn from their reading, including poetry: and by play material which will help them look at areas which interest them but of which they have little or no first hand knowledge: crime, war, strikes, personal heroism and sacrifice, and the ability, like Raleigh, to "outface every danger".

So the fourth year: more out-going, turning from self-examination to the problems of others; from large issues like ambition, death, divorce, money, class, sex, immigration, colour, the Bomb, drugs, poverty — all of

of which must be "personalized", given an image which they understand and accept. And all the minor ills that flesh is heir to: loneliness, old age, illness, accident, cruelty . . . All the ideas and issues which interest you enough to stimulate them so that they gain not only sympathy but empathy with their subject; and all the events and present concerns that rouse them.

A lot of this work can be encouraged by using brief extracts from plays, and particularly modern plays. Apart from leading the pupil on to the whole play and other plays, it gives him chance to experiment with scripted material and to get from it whatever he wants — not, in fact, to learn the words, but to be led on to his own conception. I think you will find some of your pupils deeply interested in attempting the complex characterizations of traditional literature, but for many it is a time to explore and explode ideas, so that plays of N. F. Simpson, Ionesco, Beckett, Arden, Shaw, Wesker, Brecht and Frisch will have great appeal.

The beginning of all this work is in the Primary school; all the fundamentals of dramatic work — movement, gesture, speech, music, the use of space and heights, costume and props, these, and the excitement and joy of creative work are first tentatively explored here. These young children fill their need to create with words and ideas and movements as naturally and spontaneously as they create with wood or cloth or paint. To them an audience is unnecessary, superfluous. The moment of doing and being is all. Primary teachers are well aware of this. They will select a subject which will involve a good proportion of the class most of the time; they all work together on one large project with large groups of villagers, knights, sailors and slaves. They rely on a good background of story telling, discussion and narration (often by the teacher) to hold the work together and maintain control over large numbers all active at the same time. They use one or two outstanding pupils for the main roles, perhaps changing these for different parts of the play. If I may illustrate this kind of work and draw some conclusions on the kind of activity it is.

I attended a Theatre Workshop organized by Miss Marjorie Sigley in the Palace Pier Theatre, Brighton, shortly before I left England for Australia. I bought my 3/6 ticket for the morning Workshop and strode briskly up the pier, out across the water like some eager Chichester . . . and came to berth in the theatre. It was empty. And cold. And silent. Then something strange happened, and everything changed. Two hundred children arrived. One said to another: No, it's not the pictures. Music played. The Beatles sang — and reminded them, without pomp, of familiar things. They settled, ruffling their duffel coats like feathers . . . and waited. Good morning boomed an actor. Good morning feebled back. Then like a Punch and Judy man he warmed them up to a howling response. Tension fled. He introduced a row of actors and actresses who, he said, would help them make their play. After all they hadn't come just to watch, had they?

He told the story of Odysseus returning from the siege of Troy — O memories of a repent youth! He keyed in their minds the principal incidents, Circe and the pigs, the Lotus-eaters, Cyclops, the Sirens, Penelope and the suitors and the drawing of the bow. The story gripped them; they were ready. But he recapped, introduced taped music for each incident: sea music, and harp music for Penelope, and Indian music for Circe — which he had played about with so that the sitar suddenly produced odd honking, pig-like noises. Then they divided up, each actor or actress taking ten, twenty children and disappearing into the bowels of the theatre to rehearse their part of the story. Here the actor reminded them

(much as a group leader would) of their part and encouraged them, mainly by working with them, to get the feel of the basic movements. The Lotus-eaters, all girls, tripped lightly together in a circle, lifted their coloured paper flowers into one enormous head and murmured, Eat me, eat me, eat me . . . Meanwhile brawny lads rowed away lustily and repeated the calls and the chants of the sea.

They worked like this for nearly an hour and then came together in the auditorium again. On the stage, now lighted, was Penelope and her ladies and her beastly drunken seven year old suitors. In the gangways the sirens, and lotus-eaters, and Circe and her maidens; and in the Circle the sailors rowed and chanted . . . and the play, as a performance began.

I needn't say how good it was; that really, if ever has anything to do with it, except as a token of their involvement and enjoyment. Homer's old tale lived again in their minds and in their every action. A ninety minute birth.

Be critical though. What had happened?

From that cold, tense beginning, when each was hugging the other for some kind of protection from the unknown situation, emerged radiant confidence, a warmth of feeling and excitement from the act of taking part in one vast and glorious enterprise. That is what had been communicated to them, and though they cared not, they communicated to us, the irrelevant audience.

But young children are still asked to perform to parents, to put on the school play. The teachers flog themselves into the ground to get the thing "ready"; by which they mean, in all good faith, to reduce the opportunities for disaster to a minimum. They know the kids look forward to it with a kind of joyful terror, and talk of nothing else for weeks. Is it really so bad? You've seen, as I've seen, those rigid, mechanical, soulless, joyless, face-the-front and honk it out travesties. The teacher has not prepared it this way: the occasion, the audience inhibits and reduces. They are performing for them — and somehow it is no longer the same, no longer theirs . . . and the life goes out of it.

Then there are the splendid little morning Assembly plays with Daniel positively torn alive by ferocious top Juniors. Why? Why does this work? I think here they are able to ignore the audience; they know it; it's a relaxed, familiar situation. They can still play for themselves — you just happen to be lucky enough to watch them.

You can see from my picture of Primary play-making that the social activities include the class working together as a unit on one idea, and then a number of smaller units each developing their part of the story and combining their efforts with the others. It is an embracing, non-excluding situation where the demands on any one person are not too great and others can do more if they can and want to. And until they are absorbed and contained by the play, the class is largely teacher-controlled and teacher-directed.

The same is not true of the Secondary child. His play-making becomes out-going, requiring, demanding an audience. Look at this model! Did you see that great goal I got? I can jump six feet — watch! I can do things, I can make you laugh, I've got a smashing idea — look! Of course you get this attitude from Primary schoolchildren as well; but when you do watch, you don't concern them any more. But the Secondary attitude is if it's good then it's worth letting everyone know. There's a pride in self, in self-achievement; there's an increased desire to be recognized and accepted. For the sporty, it's getting into the team — and thirteen year

olds will cry if they're dropped; for girls it's appearance and conformity and friends — that fateful, I'm not friends with you! For others it's their pets or their skills or their crimes which gain and excite admiration. So with the play: it must be seen. An audience of their peers, their classmates, or of others in the same year or lower; not older, O no, and they will give you plenty of reasons why not, all based on the fear of criticism.

Here, then, is a just pride in showing a prepared piece of work to their friends. If only they were as willing to stand before the class and read out a good piece of written English. But here again is the important point: drama is both an individual and a group activity: no one is isolated, held distinctly apart from the others as sole performer. The individual has the sure protection of his friends, a "verray parfit" defence for shyness and tension of all kinds.

The individual will emerge from the group. He will, at first, probably be the leader, and I have discussed his role already. But he will light up the play the moment he appears, relishing the limelight, showering confidence in all directions. Here's one.

The play was called "The Stuffed Dog", an original improvised play that began with the idea of something lost being recovered. This is how a second year "C" stream boy dealt with the climax which I scribbled down as he spoke it.

"I'm Merlo the Magician and I have heard you have lost your dog. I need complete silence. Right, now keep still while the great Merlo performs. Just sit there and wait — Pow! Dead silence for for the great Merlo. Hullo therel The great Merlo is saying a spell in thin air . . . I see into the darkness . . . a pale figure . . . he walks holding a stuffed dog . . . yes, he's walking — no, he's riding a bike with the dog hooked over the handlebars — Alacazam! I change this man into a dog! Officer, take this dog away. As soon as the key turns he will regain a man. Now my duty has been performed. Merlo will go. You nice people have called me here for the first time in 80 hundred years so as a favour I will change the stuffed dog you have into a live dog and Merlo will disappear. Alacazam!

Or this duologue by fourth year boys. Using the direct, very brief, almost staccato style of modern playwrights, they looked at the father-son relationship in their own way. The scene is a breakfast table. They used a prop wig.

Dad: "Get it cut!"

Son: "What?"

Dad: "Your hair."

Son: "What's wrong with it?"

Dad: "Do you want me to tell you?"

Son: "I like it this way."

Dad: "You look a scruff."

Son: "It may be long — but it's tidy — and it's got style."

Dad: "Style! Is that what you call it?"

Son: "You wouldn't know — you're out of date."

Dad: "Old fashioned."

Son: "Old fashioned."

Dad: "Not with it."

Son: "Square."

Dad: "Get it cut."

And if a group is really pleased with their improvisation, they'll write it down for you. Here's part of one on the theme of Unusual Thefts, called, A bit of Pilfering.

Lady H rings the bell and the butler appears.

James: "Yes, m'lady."

Lady H: "I want a tomato juice and a large Scotch. Is that all right by you, Claude?"

Lord H: "Yes, dear, anything OK by you."

Lady H: "Don't use that vulgar expression."

Lord H: "Yes, dear."

James: "Will that be all?" (He leaves and returns with drinks.)
"Here's your drink, sir."

Lady H: "No, no, James, that is mine. The tomato juice is Claude's."

Lord H: "You know what, Gertie?"

Lady H: "Tut tut, Claude."

Lord H: "You know what, Gertrude. I fancy a railway carriage seat."

Lady H: "You mean a real railway seat?"

Lord H: "Yes, dear. Another unnecessary necessity."

James: "Would you like me to indulge in the—er—pilfering of a British Railway seat?"

Lady H: "Yes, of course, James."

James: "I believe there is a train at 11.25."

Lord H: "Good. It's 11 o'clock now. I'll 'phone the station to secure a carriage where we will not be disturbed."

Lady H: "A wonderful idea, Claude."

Here's some improvised dialogue, later recorded, which was a senior group's version of a scripted play called *The Dice*. Three political prisoners use the dice to settle all their differences; finally the dice become symbols of power to be placated and worshipped. One night the old man slips out of bed and kneels before the blanket-covered table on which lie the two dice.

Old man: "Dice, dice, listen to me, please. I've had a rough time. 32 years in this hole and nothing's ever gone right for me. Give me twelve tomorrow! We'll show them, we'll show them who's master . . . you back me up and I'll back you up. We'll go together all the way. I won't have a bad thing said against you if you give me twelve tomorrow. I beg of you: I'm down on my knees begging, begging . . ."

The second prisoner wakes up and the old man gets back into bed.

Old man: "I know I'm going to win! The dice will give me twelve! I know it, I know it!"

Contrast that with the style — and power — of this speech by another boy for the second prisoner.

Second prisoner: "Ah, haa! The silly old fool thought I was asleep. I heard him trying to win your favour. You can't trust him. He came from a bad family — he's no good. He wouldn't use your power properly if you gave it to him. And there's another reason why you can't trust him: he's a foreigner. That's why you should give me your power. I'm the only one who's got any sense — besides you, that is, because you're God. Between us we'll show the old scruff . . ."

Whereas Primary school drama is mainly a class activity because of the needs of the children at that age, Secondary drama rapidly becomes a group activity and, eventually, an individual one through writing and main roles. The break-up of the class unit means a change in the teacher's role. You can't anyway, direct and influence half a dozen different plays or different versions at the same time. And the group must be directed from within, by its members, by its leader, or it will lose all the power that the group structure tends to generate. You train them in responsibility by offering opportunities for choice, for decision-making, for working towards a given end on their own, for success. Your former role of director and controller is reduced to whatever minimum is necessary for that class in the drama lesson.

The play itself may be watched or not, but what matters most is how those taking part are involved and affected. And what is involved is the personality of each pupil working in association and in conflict with others. So the lesson concerns itself with relationships — in the plays and in the method of working; as a social activity it cannot be excelled in schools — and outside, when most of us are reduced to the passive role of observer, it is surpassed only by dancing, drinking and sex — though not necessarily in that order.