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Using children's picture books and process drama to develop students' critical literacy responses

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Abstract:

This workshop introduces a range of process drama activities to develop students' critical literacy responses. Whilst children's picture books and process drama strategies have not traditionally been seen as sophisticated resources and strategies for developing students' critical literacy responses, this workshop shows teaching strategies that can be used in language instruction in primary classrooms with diverse student groups. The teaching activities include ‘attribute lists’, ‘sculptures’ and ‘freeze frames’.
Using children's picture books and process drama to develop students' critical literacy responses

Beryl Exley, Queensland University of Technology

These activities are based around the children’s picture book, ‘Beware of the Bear’ (MacDonald, 2004). Although this book can stand alone as a read aloud, its ultimate pleasure is the way it extends the modern day version of Southey’s (n.d.) original fairytale ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears’ and introduces characters from other fairy tales, such as a wolf. This story begins with the bears arriving home to find that Goldilocks wrecked their home. They decide to seek revenge so the bears wait for Goldilocks to leave her home. They enter her home and wreck it. When Goldilocks returns home, instead of being upset, she tells them that it’s not her house! A double page wordless spread shows the bear family sneaking out the back door whilst a wolf enters through the front door. The wolf’s reaction is captured in a wordless double page spread on the last page. As is the case with post-modern picture books, the ending is deliberately left open and the reader must be involved with constructing the meaning both from the visuals and knowledge of other texts.

We engaged the students through a range of process drama activities. Heller (1995) made the claim that drama activities help transform school from a place where teachers tell students what to think to a place where teachers help them experience thinking. Process drama activities are improvised accounts that take form from the dramatic action, reaction and interaction of the participants (Bowell & Heap, 2005). To be clear, in process drama students are not involved with learning and presenting lines from a pre-written dramatic text, rather they are scripting their own presentation as the narrative unfold in their own spaces and over time (Bowell & Heap, 2005).

The following section documents the trial lessons introduced to the early years students.
### Activity One: Attributes List (focusing on adding adjectives to nouns)

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<tr>
<th>Lesson staging</th>
<th>Teaching notes</th>
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</table>
| **1** Starting with the students sitting in a circle so everyone has equal contributing rights, ask the students to think about what they know about Goldilocks. Pose the following questions but don’t ask for answers just yet.  
  ➢ How would they describe Goldilocks?  
  ➢ What does Goldilocks look like?  
  ➢ How does Goldilocks behave?  
  ➢ What does Goldilocks smell like?  
  ➢ What sorts of things does Goldilocks do? | Although the lessons are built on the picture book ‘Beware of the Bear’ (MacDonald, 2004), the book was not introduced until the introductory activities were completed. This is because it was important to build on the students’ personal experiences first. |
| **2** Ask the students to think of one word to fill in the gap: “A .......... Goldilocks”. Go around the group and ask each child to offer one suggestion. When all students have one suggestion, go around the circle again so students can repeat their suggestion, but this time encourage students to use an action and an expressive voice at the same time. E.g. if the suggestion is ‘a happy Goldilocks’ the student could show a happy expression and skip on the spot. | The focus is on building the noun group by adding an adjective. Note that the instructions did not include the technical grammar. Teachers need to know that the noun group can be expanded by adding an adjective before the noun, for example, ‘a messy Goldilocks’, ‘a carefree Goldilocks’, or ‘a kind Goldilocks’. Students’ suggestions can be photographed for a display of descriptive noun groups. |
| **3** Discuss similarities and differences of the students’ suggestions, especially if they offer opposing viewpoints, e.g. ‘a sweet Goldilocks’ compared with ‘a sneaky Goldilocks’. Ask the students to justify their suggestions. | The purpose is to make visible how language choices carry viewpoints. |
| **4** Once students have finalised their nomination and the action that accompanies it, get the students to line up and ‘perform’ their suggestions as a ‘Mexican Wave’. | This part of the activity can be videotaped to make a record of the event. |
| **5** Repeat for ‘Bear’ and then again for ‘Wolf’. | Bear and Wolf are main characters in the stimulus text, so this prepares the students for sharing the book. |
**Activity Two: Sculptures (focusing on different types of verbs)**

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<tr>
<td>1 Working in groups of 3, one child becomes a lump of clay and another becomes a sculptor. The sculptor sculpts the lump of clay into a statue of Goldilocks. The third student is the audience for the time being.</td>
<td>It might be more appropriate to get the sculptor to either give instructions or demonstrations rather than physically touching their lump of clay.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Take photos of statues and write an artist's statements using these two prompts:</td>
<td>The focus is on getting the artist to use an action verb to show the experience and a saying verb other than 'said'. Young children tend to overuse 'said', so we need to help them with other words so we can see what else they know about the character. If the artist knows what they want to sculpt but does not have the vocabulary to complete the sentence, the teacher can help them with the new words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- “Goldilocks is ...........” (insert action verb, e.g. Goldilocks is climbing.)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>- “Goldilocks said, “..........”” (using a saying verb instead of 'said', e.g. Goldilocks moaned, 'My tummy is full'.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Discuss similarities and differences of author choice. Who created a positive image of Goldilocks? What words made it seem positive? Who created a negative image of Goldilocks? What words made it seem negative?</td>
<td>The important point is that authors have the potential to create different sorts of meaning for their audience through the verb group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Swap roles so all students in the group get to be a statue, an artist and an audience member. Repeat the sequence so ‘Bear’ and ‘Wolf’ statues are made.</td>
<td>Bear and Wolf are main characters in the stimulus text, so this prepares the students for sharing the book.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 Show cover. What do you think this book might be about? Where do you think the Bears might be? Why would Father Bear be shining a torch? What sort of Bears do you think they are?</td>
<td>The purpose is to encourage the students to make predictions about the text they are going to share.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Discuss title, author, publisher, title page &amp;/or dedication page.</td>
<td>Interestingly, this text has a double page prequel before the title page. Discuss why an author would have set up the book this way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Read the book, first time without taking questions or comments from the students. The teacher can ask probing questions, but don't stop to receive answers from the students.</td>
<td>The purpose of an uninterrupted first reading is to allow the students to experience the book in its entirety. Stopping and starting discussions makes it difficult to remember the flow and logic of the story.</td>
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<td>4 Read the book again, this time, talking about the story and pictures and encouraging the students to talk about their own experiences. Ask the students: What do you think of that? Do you do that? Why did that happen? What do you notice about the pictures on this page? Why has the illustrator drawn the pictures like that? Why did the author describe the Bears as ‘hopping mad’? Why did the author use the word ‘ordered’ in the sentence?</td>
<td>Teacher questions can be planned in advanced, written on ‘post-it’ notes and added to the page. This will keep the lesson flowing whilst ensuring target questions are included. Focus on some descriptive noun groups (e.g. uninvited guests, the breakfast table, Mummy Bear’s best blouse, etc), action verbs (e.g. hit, sent back, splattered, etc) and saying verbs (e.g. sniffed, grumbled, gargled, etc).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 The second last page is wordless. Why did the author and illustrator agree not to explain what was happening in words? What meaning do you make of the image? How do you know? What might each character be thinking?</td>
<td>The focus is on how gestures make meaning and how to ‘read’ visuals, for example, concepts such as viewing angle, colour and focus. Praise the students’ efforts when using descriptive noun groups and appropriate vocabulary for noun and verb groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 The final page is a double page wordless spread of the wolf’s reaction at finding his home damaged. Why did the author and illustrator agree not to explain what was happening in words? What meaning do you make of the image? How do you know? What might the wolf be thinking?</td>
<td>The focus is on how gestures make meaning and how to ‘read’ visuals. Praise the students’ efforts when using descriptive noun groups and appropriate vocabulary for noun and verb groups.</td>
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### Activity Four: Freeze frames (action and saying verbs)

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<td>1</td>
<td>Set up groups of 4-6 students. Each group to decide on one scene from the text. Create a freeze frame. (Students can be characters or a prop such as furniture or a tree, etc).</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Each group presents their freeze frame to the rest of the class. Count the students in by saying ‘3, 2, 1 and freeze’. Tell students to remain frozen for up to a minute.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Use the ‘tap-in’ technique to bring one individual character to life. Ask the character or prop to say ‘I am ........’ (finish with an action verb, e.g ‘I am sneaking out the back door’). Teacher taps the student again so they return to the freeze position. Ask the students in the audience to say what an author would write (using a saying verb, e.g. The wolf sighed, ‘Home at last’.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Continue until all characters are tapped-in. Continue until all groups get the chance to present.</td>
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## References


## Acknowledgement

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