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## DRAMATIZATION OF FABLES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

*Abstract:* Drama activities draw their EFL potential from the natural imaginative energy of young learners and from enjoyment dramatization easily provides. Used at different levels as mime, puppet show, role play or script writing, dramatized fables respond perfectly to teaching learners of a variety of language levels, ages and learning styles. Dramatization of fables is the activity that actively involves learners in the text of a fable and makes communication in a foreign language meaningful, allowing children personalization through emotional involvement.

The paper studies how dramatization of fables can be exploited in the classroom to practise language structures and functions, and to develop creative thinking, problem solving, language fluency and communication skills. It also aims to examine the potential of drama activities to make learners reflect on own production and develop language learning skills and autonomy in learning.

### INTRODUCTION

To stimulate interaction in the classroom EFL teachers need to use activities that secure communication in a meaningful context. Drama activities prove to be suitable to get young learners speaking with ease and motivation. Drama play comes naturally to young learners as they are used to play-acting in which they pretend to be someone else (a superhero, mommy, daddy, a favourite sports star). Research<sup>1</sup> has shown that make-believe play, puppetry and role-play enhance retention and creativity, help develop children's social and emotional intelligences, and influence their upbringing in a positive way.

Benefits of using drama and drama activities in language learning are obvious: children are encouraged to speak, and both their verbal and non-verbal skills are developed; active involvement in a text through personalisation makes

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<sup>1</sup> The issue has been researched by students of the Faculty of Education in Jagodina in the last few years, the research results have not been published.

language more meaningful and memorable (Phillips 2007: 6); mixed ability classes benefit from group work and dramatization as a cooperative activity; role plays help children develop imagination and boost their confidence in using a target language. Drama becomes a very powerful tool in language teaching/learning as it involves learners through their bodies, minds, emotions, language and in social interaction (Phillips 2007:6).

Fables are suitable for dramatization in EFL classrooms for several reasons: they are very short stories in prose or in verse, they tell the adventures of one or more animals, they are simple and depict an event which turns out quickly. Few elements are needed to settle the situation: a particular story soon gets to an end because what matters is not the tale, but its moral, a teaching which the reader gets from the story. The fable matters for its contents, its wisdom and also because it takes the liberty of saying indirectly what in some circumstances would not be easy to say openly. The moral helps to let the reader reflect; “brevity” and “moralistic ending” are the main elements of the fable and after the narrative texture (the plot), the fanciful atmosphere turns over, and the meaning of the story is made clear.

The potential of fables in language teaching lies mainly in common characteristics of this literary genre in all cultures. There are well known fables (like Aesop’s fables) with animal characters (ant, cat, mouse, wolf, sheep, lion, etc.) who “think” and “speak” in order to “educate” the reader to behave according to the rules accepted by most people. In the fables the animals represent the men with their faults and virtues; the nature, which is the setting of the various events, has a secondary role. The fables’ author is interested in describing behaviours in order to remind the reader of the rules of living which regulate human society. Each fable must include a moral truth or a teaching of practical wisdom, often clearly expressed in a maxim. This strengthens the didactic value of the fables and their potential to contribute to development of children in more than just linguistic aspect.

## LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH DRAMATIZATION

Dramatization activities are suitable for all age groups, but young learners respond to them most naturally. Young learners are aged 5–10/12 and are distinguished from adolescents as they are social, need to be physically active, learn through play, are very creative, need a lot of repetition, are self-centred and respond emotionally to learning activities, possess natural curiosity and willingness to learn, have a short attention span, are still developing both cognitively and physically, and show considerable individual differences; as language learners, they have more advanced oral than literate skills and can formulate their own language rules if they receive a comprehensible language input (Opp-Beckman & Klinghammer 2006: 128).

Dramatization responds favourably to most of the young learners' characteristics: it offers oral practice through play, physical action, repetition, creativity, emotional involvement and personalisation. Performed as group work and cooperative activity, dramatization provides opportunities for different levels of linguistic development by settling individual differences and using the strengths of each member of the group (Phillips 2007: 7). It also appeals to all kinds of learners: aural learners benefit from rehearsal and production stages, visual from script writing and preparing masks, props and costumes, while kinaesthetic learners learn through non-verbal communication, like miming, facial expressions and body movement.

Moreover, dramatizing a text is enjoyable and motivating, it relieves children of their inhibitions caused by shyness and embarrassment at speaking a foreign language. It is sometimes the shyest children who show greatest potential in drama activities (Scrivener 1994: 69). Puppets and masks can further contribute to confidence raising. However, without trust and respect, drama activities can easily lose their potential for language learning.

A very important aspect of drama activities is the fact that a foreign language is used in context. Instead of using isolated words, children practise whole phrases and language 'chunks', structures and functions. Language is used for communication between drama characters, which stresses the communicative aspect of dramatization. Listening and speaking can serve as a powerful tool to provide practice in specific grammatical, lexical, functional and phonological areas (Scrivener 1994: 69).

In the preparation stage, script writing or rehearsal, children may take initiative and creatively use the language they know, depending on characters and situations. The characters can be puppets or children wearing hats and masks that put them in the role, and the dialogue can be constructed by students and a teacher working together (Cameron 2008: 70). Script writing activities inspire language production and learning. What is more, they offer opportunities for social and emotional development by building empathy and ability to write for the audience (Cameron 2008: 155). This aspect is further developed by explicitly stating a moral of a fable being dramatized.

## DRAMATIZATION ACTIVITIES IN EFL CLASSROOMS

Elements of dramatization should be introduced gradually over a period of time to prepare children for longer drama activities. Scrivener (1994) lists six types of drama activities used in teaching English:

1. Roleplay – acting out small scenes, either using own ideas or the ones on role-cards;
2. Simulation – a large-scale roleplay based on role-cards and background information;

3. Drama games – games which involve mime and imagination;
4. Guided improvisation – children play characters who join in in a scene that is improvised;
5. Acting play scripts – children act short sketches or scenes;
6. Preparing improvised drama – working in small groups, children invent and rehearse a short scene and perform it for the others.

To get ready for dramatization and for acting a variety of characters, children should first be involved in highly controlled warmers: standing up or walking around the classroom as a character of their choice or in the manner of the word (*happy, young, sad, tired, cold, tense, irritated, anxious, old*, etc) to practice body language: gestures, stance, facial expressions. They should also be given practice of exploring the power of their own voices: saying words or sentences softly, loudly, quietly, angrily, sadly, happily, slowly, fast, etc, thus practising different voice elements: volume, diction, tone, pitch, articulation, pace.

To prepare for script writing, children can get ready by completing a dialogue in scripted improvisations. Working alone or in small groups, children first write out the missing role-cards and then act them out. Teacher may write prompts/key vocabulary on the board to guide children. Later, they can try writing their own improvisation starters after discussing in pairs or groups what the characters' exact words might be. Key phrases can be elicited from the class as a whole. Script writing can be done as a parallel writing using a model. After checking the language of the scripts, the teacher arranges a time for each group to perform the play. This can be done over several weeks, with five to ten minutes of a lesson being used for these activities.

Dramatization can be performed with ready-made dialogues which children prepare in groups of three and perform in front of the class. Preparation involves reading, practising expressive language, re-reading roles in turn, memorising own parts of the dialogue, acting them out, rehearsing without script, and performing in front of the others, hopefully retaining natural fluency. This can be done with the use of puppets or masks, made specially for the performance.

## DRAMATIZING WELL-KNOWN FABLES IN EFL CLASSROOMS

We will explore dramatisation activities related to three very well known fables: *The Lion and the Mouse*, *The Ant and the Grasshopper* (at two levels – elementary and pre-intermediate), and *The Fox and the Crow* (at elementary level).

Masks and props should be very simple, and scenery can be made by drawing on large pieces of paper and hung on a wall or a curtain. In case of using puppets, they can be stick puppets, simple drawings stuck on sticks.

Follow-up activities: retelling the stories in narrative form, discussing the moral of the story (fable), describing characters, creating masks for the animal

characters in fables, creating cartoons based on fables, choosing appropriate moral for each fable:

1. Little friends may prove great friends / No act of kindness, however small is ever wasted.
2. He who prepares lives / He who prepares survives
3. Don't get fooled by compliments / Flattery is often trickery

Scripts can be used for teaching new lexis (individual words, common expressions), figures of speech, like similies and metaphors, and devices like personification, humour and exaggeration.

### 1. The Lion and the Mouse

This can be an activity performed in small groups with more advanced learners. Children first read the fable, and then dramatize it by writing a script of the play.

Once when a Lion was asleep, a little Mouse began running up and down upon him; this soon wakened the Lion, who placed his huge paw upon him, and opened his big jaws to swallow him.

“Pardon, O King,” cried the little Mouse, “forgive me this time, I shall never forget it. Who knows but I may be able to do you a turn some of these days?”

The Lion was so tickled at the idea of the Mouse being able to help him, that he lifted up his paw and let him go.

Some time hunters who desired to carry him alive to the King, tied him to a tree while they went in search of a wagon to carry him on.

Just then the little Mouse happened to pass by, and seeing the sad plight in which the Lion was, went up to him and soon gnawed away the ropes that bound the King of the Beasts.

“Was I not right?” said the little Mouse.

Moral: Little friends may prove great friends

(Retrieved from

[http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Aesop/Aesops\\_Fables/The\\_Lion\\_and\\_the\\_Mouse\\_p1.html](http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Aesop/Aesops_Fables/The_Lion_and_the_Mouse_p1.html), in January 2009)

### 2. The Ant and the Grasshopper

In a field one summer's day a Grasshopper was hopping about, chirping and singing to its heart's content. An Ant passed by, bearing along with great toil an ear of corn he was taking to the nest.

“Why not come and chat with me,” said the Grasshopper, “instead of toiling and moiling in that way?”

“I am helping to lay up food for the winter,” said the Ant, “and recommend you to do the same.”

“Why bother about winter?” said the Grasshopper; we have got plenty of food at present.” But the Ant went on its way and continued its toil. When the winter came the Grasshopper had no food and found itself dying of hunger, while it saw the ants distributing every day corn and grain from the stores they had collected in the summer. Then the Grasshopper knew:

It is best to prepare for the days of necessity.

(Retrieved from [http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Aesop/Aesops\\_Fables/The\\_Ant\\_and\\_the\\_Grasshopper\\_p1.html](http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Aesop/Aesops_Fables/The_Ant_and_the_Grasshopper_p1.html), in January 2009)

### THE ANT AND THE GRASSHOPPER (elementary level)

NARRATOR: One day, the Grasshopper meets the Ant.  
GRASSHOPPER: What a beautiful day! I love to jump and sing. He he he!  
Ho ho ho!  
ANT: I carry wheat all day. I'm tired!  
GRASSHOPPER: Why work? Sing with me!  
ANT: I have to do this. it's for the winter!  
GRASSHOPPER: That's a lot of work for nothing!  
ANT: I must work now.  
GRASSHOPPER: Boring!  
NARRATOR: When winter comes. The ant is happy.  
ANT: I have enough wheat. I can take it easy.  
GRASSHOPPER: It's cold. Poor me! Nothing to eat, nothing to drink.  
Good-bye!  
NARRATOR: The moral of the story: He who prepares lives.  
(Prepare for days of necessity.)

(Retrieved from I:\WRITING\Play Scripts for School.mht)

### THE ANT AND THE GRASSHOPPER (pre-intermediate level)

*Sun rises over stage*

*Ant enters slowly dragging food, Grasshopper bounds in behind him*

NARRATOR: One day, Grasshopper was out for his usual hop, skip and jump across the grass when he met industrious Ant who was dragging a big hunk of wheat up the side of his anthill.

- GRASSHOPPER: Hey there Ant, beautiful day, isn't it? It just makes me want to jump and sing and play in the rays!  
(sings)  
Every day  
Is a day to play.  
Life is fun  
When you jump and run.  
*(sings again trying to get the Ant to dance with him)*
- ANT: *(Annoyed with Grasshopper)*  
I have to do my work first! After carrying food supplies all day, I'm too tired to play!
- GRASSHOPPER: Oh c'mon, grumpy, lighten up! Why are you working so hard on such a beautiful day? Remember the saying, "All work and o no play makes Jack a dull boy!" Sing with me! Hop with me!
- ANT: Not now Grasshopper. I have to collect this food.  
It's for  
winter!
- GRASSHOPPER: Winter! That's months away, you're doing all that work for nothing!
- ANT: I know what I'm doing. Now is the time to get ready for the cold, frosty winter. You'll be sorry if you don't prepare. Now, leave me alone. I must get this work done today.
- GRASSHOPPER: What a bore! You just have to learn to chill out and enjoy life,  
Ant.  
*(exits singing)*  
Every day  
Is a day to play.  
Life is fun  
When you jump and run.  
*Sun goes down, clouds and snow flakes rise over stage*
- NARRATOR: With an icy blast of cold air, winter grips the land.  
*(Ant is seen in his home at one side of the stage with lots of food piled up)* Ant is happy, warm, cosy and safe in his home.
- ANT: Ahh ... this is the life! I have enough to eat to last the whole winter. Now I can put my feet up and take it easy. I wonder how that silly Grasshopper is doing - hope he did a little work before it was too late.
- GRASSHOPPER: *(sitting outside, shivering at the other side of the stage)*

I -I- It's s-s-s-so cold! Poor me! Nothing to eat, nothing to drink. Life just isn't fair!  
(sings weakly)  
Every day  
Is cold and gray.  
No food, no sun,  
I think I'm done!  
Good-bye, cruel world! (*falls over right off the stage*)

NARRATOR: The moral of the story: He who prepares survives

(Retrieved from I:\WRITING\Play Scripts for School.mht)

### 3. The Fox and the Crow

A Crow, having stolen a bit of meat, sat in a tree and held it in her beak. A hungry Fox, seeing this, envied the crow and wished to have the meat for himself. So he came up with a cunning plan.

"How gracious you are," he exclaimed, "how beautifully your feathers shine! Oh, if only your voice were equal to your beauty, you would deserve to be called the Queen of Birds!"

The Crow was really flattered by these words, so, anxious to be called the Queen of Birds, she gave a loud caw and dropped the meat. The Fox quickly picked it up, and thus addressed the Crow:

"My dear Crow, you have a nice voice, indeed, but I'm afraid you have no wits."

Moral: Do not trust flatterers

(Retrieved from  
[http://www.kids-pages.com/folders/stories/Aesops\\_Fables/page3.htm](http://www.kids-pages.com/folders/stories/Aesops_Fables/page3.htm),  
in January 2009)

### THE FOX AND THE CROW (elementary level)

NARRATOR: Here is the beautiful Crow. She has a piece of cheese in her beak.

CROW: Mm mm mmm!

NARRATOR: She can't speak with a piece of cheese in her beak.

*Fox enters.*

NARRATOR: Here comes the Fox. He is very smart.

FOX: What a lovely bird! What wonderful colours! What feathers!

NARRATOR: The Crow can't answer with a piece of cheese in her mouth.  
CROW: Mmmm mmmm!  
FOX: Sing for me, O Queen of Birds!  
NARRATOR: The Crow is so flattered that she decides to sing for the Fox.  
She opens her beak!  
CROW: Grak! Graaak! Grak! Oh no, I dropped the cheese!  
FOX: Thank you for the cheese, madam. You have a voice; you don't have any common sense. Mm! It's delicious!  
NARRATOR: The moral of the story: Don't get fooled by compliments.  
(Flattery is often trickery.)

(Retrieved from I:\WRITING\Play Scripts for School.mht)

## CONCLUSION

Dramatization of fables in EFL classrooms can be used effectively to increase students' motivation. Adding animal characters who think and talk inspires children's imagination and increases their interest. In dramatized fables language is used in new contexts and for new topics. Moreover, in drama we use something children naturally enjoy – when they play games they often imagine themselves in different situations and roles (Doff 2008: 240).

Script writing requires children to visualise events, characters and settings, contributing to development of creative thinking and problem solving skills. Dramatization of fables can be exploited in the classroom to practise language structures and functions, and to develop creative thinking, problem solving, language fluency and communication skills. Visualization is necessary when rehearsing and performing on stage, preparing props and scenery, creating masks and costumes. Working towards a common goal, children interact with each other in groups and share enjoyment over the final product. Getting them more personally involved in classroom activities like drama, teachers definitely work towards more effective teaching/learning process.

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## ДРАМАТИЗАЦИЈА БАСНИ У НАСТАВИ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА НА МЛАЂЕМ УЗРАСТУ

*Резиме:* Драмске активности имају значајан потенцијал за коришћење у настави енглеског језика на млађем узрасту првенствено захваљујући својој способности да активирају природну имагинацију коју деца на том узрасту поседују, као и стварањем могућности да деца осете задовољство које играње улога омогућава у настави. Драматизација басни може се користити на различитим нивоима наставе страног језика и у различитим формама, као мимика, глума уз помоћ лутака, играње улога или писање сценарија, и то у раду са ученицима различитог предзнања, узраста и стилова учења. Учествовањем у драматизацији басни ученици се активно укључују у рад на тексту басне путем сврсисходне комуникације на страном језику и емоционалним ангажовањем. Допадљиви ликови животиња из добро познатих басни помажу стидљивим ученицима да савладају сопствену нелагодност коју обично осећају при употреби страног језика у комуникацији. Драмска активност се, стога, не посматра као производ у настави, већ као део процеса учења који интегрише лингвистички и социјални развој, побољшава памћење и јача самопоуздање.

У раду се истражују могућности драматизације басни у настави енглеског језика и њихово коришћење за увежбавање граматичких структура, језичких функција, развој креативног мишљења, способности решавања задатака, флуентности и комуникативних способности. Испитује се и потенцијал који драмске активности имају у развоју аутономије ученика тако што пружају могућности да деца размишљају о сопственој употреби страног језика и развоју језичких вештина. Закључује се да драматизација басни има много предности у настави енглеског језика на млађем узрасту, како у погледу лингвистичког, тако и социјалног развоја ученика.

*Кључне речи:* драматизација, басне, настава енглеског језика на млађем узрасту, глума, драмски сценарио.