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## ***The Sea around Us: Experiences in Creative Drama***

— a series of five lesson plans on a common theme —

Singapore is an island consisting of a mainland and about fifty small islands around it, yet most pupils take the sea for granted. The sea for them, and for many people here, is a place for swimming and recreation only. The general objective of this series of creative drama lessons is to help pupils to appreciate the sea, its value and importance for the economy of the country, its importance to the people living in the neighbouring islands, and also to make pupils aware of the dangers and threats of the sea to fishermen and sailors.

More significantly however, these creative drama activities are aimed at developing the imagination of the pupils and providing situations for movement and particularly language flow. They would thus help pupils to develop the ability to think and speak extemporaneously and achieve a proficiency and fluency in English.

The decision-making and problem solving activities in these lessons may be used in many practical ways. In the lesson on the castaways on the island, for example, pupils may discover for themselves how to survive on the island, how to build a hut or shelter, whether to explore the caves, how to protect themselves against wild animals, etc. Pupils will realize that there are various alternatives or choices to be made in solving a problem. For example, in learning to survive on the island, they have to decide whether to build the hut in a certain place on the island, which has some advantages, or to build it in another part which has other advantages.

As a long term objective, these activities may also help pupils to appreciate literature, and perhaps music, written about the sea. This would stimulate and motivate pupils and serve as a springboard and catalyst for pupils to attempt other creative activities like creative writing and art. Through experiencing the joy of creativity and using their whole being — sensory, motor and intellectual abilities — pupils would make significant progress in expressing themselves competently and fluently in English and at the same time appreciate the value and importance of the sea.

It is assumed that teachers who try out these activities in the classroom are aware of the principles and objectives of creative drama or educational drama. For teachers who are unfamiliar with this form of drama, a definition and a brief note may be necessary.

Creative drama or educational drama is informal drama which is created by a group of pupils; its dialogue and action are extemporised rather than written and memorized. It is an educational medium which allows the pupil freedom to explore and experiment and, "through searching and coming to terms with his experiences, make decisions and moral choices in the framework of play of a dramatic kind" (*Syllabus for English*, 1971).

One of the main reasons why creative drama is generally still not taken seriously and accepted by both parents and educators in Singapore is that the term "drama" is generally associated with theatre training and acting on the stage. This misconception has caused parents and teachers who are ignorant of the values and objectives of creative drama to frown upon the activity as a waste of time. This prejudice will persist until teachers are made to realize that the main purpose of creative drama is to produce a well-balanced personality, NOT an actor, and that

1. the pupil's personal experience of "doing" is the main value of creative drama;
2. the pupil's personal development rather than the satisfaction of an audience is the goal;
3. it is the act or process of creating rather than the end product that is important;
4. creative drama is a viable and extremely useful tool for teaching English as a second language since it provides abundant opportunities for pupils to express themselves in imagined or real-life situations.

See the Guidelines on Educational Drama in the *Syllabus for English – Pr. III and IV* for further guidance.

The teacher trying out the lessons should realize that the “journeys” taken in the activities

mentioned in the five lessons are imaginary trips and that the teacher or leader should invite and accept suggestions and ideas from the pupils themselves.

## THE SEA AROUND US

### Lesson 1 At the Seaside

#### *Suggested Materials*

Music: *La Mer* by Debussy. Pictures of caves, coves, etc.

#### *Motivational Activity*

Oral discussion.

“It’s so hot today, how about a picnic on the beach?” The preparation could involve the imaginary packing of lunch boxes, and all items pupils would like to bring for the picnic, e.g. towels, swimming costumes, fishing rods, etc. When they are ready to leave, the teacher could play the music by Debussy, in order to stimulate their imagination and evoke an interest in the improvisation.

#### *Main Activity*

“We are now at the seaside. What would you like to do?”

#### *Mime and improvisation*

Through oral questioning and motivation, the leader or teacher could encourage the pupils to do the following activities: swimming, making sand castles, collecting shells, fishing, playing with a beach ball, writing their names in the sand with their toes or with sticks. The leader should encourage all the children to participate in the activities. The leader may either take the children through all the activities or suggest some of them and encourage the pupils to choose which activity they wish to do. The leader could also suggest that they have a sand castle competition. When interest sags, or if they get boisterous especially in the games on the beach, the leader could suggest that they all have their lunch.

“Now, let’s take a walk along the beach. Look at that cave over there! Shall we explore it? We had better not go too deep inside, as it could be dangerous.” To focus on specific sensory processes such as seeing, hearing, smelling and touching, and on specific emotions such as fear, caution, curiosity, the leader could suggest, “Isn’t it wet and dark? Can you feel the slimy walls?” Or “Listen, can you hear anything?” Or “Do you know where that water is coming from?” The leader will allow the children to “explore” the cave for a while. Then he will suggest that they get back in the sunshine. “It’s time to go home now. Pack your things, change back into your clothes. Hurry now, otherwise we’ll miss the bus. Oh, look, the fishermen are returning with their catch! We won’t be able to see what they have caught. However, next time we shall return to this beach and perhaps we shall ask them to take us fishing with them. Let’s go now. Wave to them.”

#### *Evaluation*

The leader will encourage pupils to discuss activities they did in the lesson. They will also be encouraged to ask questions on the intent, the structure, the effectiveness and the worth of experience.

*Suggested  
Follow Up  
Activities*

*Art:* Draw or paint a picture of the seaside. Include some of the activities that we did there.

*English:* Reinforcing the language items . . . . past tense, e.g. What did you do at the seaside? How did you make the sand castle? What did you see in the cave? etc.

*Science:* What do you call that cone-shaped formation hanging from the roof of the cave? . . . . and what do you call the similar formation mounting upwards?

Do you know how they are formed?

Let's find out. Etc.

**Lesson 2      Going Fishing**

*Suggested  
Materials*

Pictures of a "kelong"  
a fishing net or pictures of one  
pictures of fishermen employed in various activities— mending their nets, hauling in the nets, sorting the fish, etc.

*Motivational  
Activity*

Before the children set out on today's activity, the leader will show them the pictures of fishermen, fishing boats, fishing nets, "kelong", and encourage them to talk about the various methods employed by fishermen in catching fish. Slides or a film strip of the fishermen at work in a "kelong" could also be shown to the children to stimulate and motivate them in the discussion.

*Main  
Activity*

"Do you remember in the last lesson, we watched the fishermen returning with their catch? Let's return to the seaside to see them at work. Don't forget to bring your hats to protect your head from the heat of the blazing noonday sun. Here we are at the seaside. Can you see the men? There's a 'sampan' returning, and look, here's an old fisherman mending a net. Some of us can help him."

Here, the leader should encourage the pupils to explore, experiment and improvise various activities, e.g. helping to drag the "sampan" to the shore; hauling in the nets; or sorting out the different fish; some children could be the wholesale dealers who arrive early to buy different fish in large quantities to sell at the market; some could be helping to dry the nets, etc.

Some pupils could play the role of the fishermen so that groups of pupils could be employed in various activities. The leader could then draw their attention to the "kelong" which is out in the sea.

"I wonder whether they have caught or trapped many fish in the 'kelong'? Shall we ask that old fisherman whether he will allow us to visit the 'kelong'? We must hire several 'sampan's, because there are so many of us." (Here, several activities can take place — getting permission from the head fisherman, deciding the number of boats to hire, hiring the "sampan's", and getting into them. As none of these boats have motors in them, there will also be opportunities for the children to take turns to row the boat to the "kelong".) "Are you all set? Let's go."

"Well, here we are at the 'kelong'. Be careful, the 'sampan' is rocking a lot. Tie the boats to the wooden posts so that they won't

float away. Go up the narrow wooden steps very carefully. Are we all here? Now, remember, a 'kelong' is only a rough shelter, some of the planks and floor boards are simply laid across and there are many gaps in between. So be very careful and don't fall in."

As the leader had aroused their interest and told them about the "kelong", the children playing the roles of the fishermen at the "kelong" would have looked up some information about the "kelong" and how the fish are caught in the entrapment. The other children would be encouraged to ask questions or improvise a situation, e.g. helping the fishermen to haul in the nets, fishing with rods from the platform, or helping to sort out the different fish, etc. The teacher could then draw the pupils' attention to the time, and the children thank the fishermen and return to the shore.

*Evaluation* Children will be encouraged to discuss the activities and ask questions. The leader will also discuss with the class the effectiveness and the worth of the experience.

*Suggested Follow Up Activities* The natural follow up for this "lesson" will be to ask the children to draw a picture of a "kelong" showing the fishermen catching the fish or some aspect of their visit to the "kelong". This may lead to some children constructing a simple model of the "kelong". Children will be encouraged to do further research on this very important method of catching fish, and to discover for themselves other methods and compare them with this one. The children at this level are already acquainted with some of the methods of catching fish from their geography lessons.

### Lesson 3 Shipwrecked!

*Suggested Materials* Pictures or paintings of shipwrecks,  
e.g. *Wrecked and Saved* by Anthony Paul Morlon  
Music: *Hebrides Overture* by Mendelssohn  
Literature: *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens

*Motivational Activity* The leader will play the music by Mendelssohn, and stimulate a discussion on the mood it conveys. The pictures and the chapter on the *Shipwreck* from *David Copperfield* will also help to motivate their interest and guide them in the improvisation.

*Main Activity* From the discussion, the children will decide for themselves the various roles – the captain, sailors, radio officer, etc.; the kind and size of the ship they are in; the time of day; the cause of the shipwreck; the cargo of the ship; where the ship is going to; etc . . . thus dealing with and answering the questions – *Who, When, What, Why, and Where.*

The teacher/leader will create the appropriate atmosphere by playing Mendelssohn's music. This will help children to imagine the storm arising, and visualize the waves dashing against the sides of the ship and on the rocks. The leader may step in to stir the imagination of the pupils through suggestions and oral questions, e.g. "The storm is getting worse. Shall we ask the captain to send an S.O.S. signal? Look at the dark clouds in the sky," or "There's a huge wave coming . . .

Watch out everybody!" Or "There's an explosion in the engine room down below . . . Someone please help the poor engineer . . ." etc. The climax of the music will also help the children to enact the disaster and create the hysteria experienced by the passengers.

The main activities and improvisation will be developed by the children themselves, and the leader will leave the decision, whether to abandon ship or not, to the captain and the crew. Perhaps they may decide to save the passengers by lowering the life boats. This will lead to other quick decisions to be made . . . whether women and children should be saved first . . . which could lead to chaos and hysteria resulting in some of the lifeboats being capsized . . . The ship could also be completely wrecked . . . The leader will leave the children to improvise the whole scene for themselves, *develop their own outcomes* and reach their own conclusions.

*Evaluation* The leader will encourage the children to discuss the various activities and the effectiveness of the improvisation.

*Suggested Follow Up Activities* **Literature:** The improvisation will be an impetus and an excellent motivation to widen the pupils' knowledge and enrich their experience in reading literature about shipwrecks.

The leader could arouse their further interest by introducing them to poems and stories written about the sea and shipwrecks, e.g.

*The Wreck of the Hesperus* by Henry W. Longfellow

*Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway

*David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens

*Youth and Gaspar Ruiz* by Joseph Conrad

**Creative Writing:** The leader could also encourage the children to write their own account of the storm perhaps from different angles or viewpoints, e.g. as a passenger, as a witness, as the captain, etc. The children may also wish to write a poem.

#### **Lesson 4 The Castaways on a Strange or Uninhabited Island**

*Suggested Materials* Music: "Play of the Waves" from *La Mer* by Debussy  
Literature: *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor

*Motivational Activity* The leader could guide the children to this activity through a discussion of the lesson on *The Shipwreck*, and further arouse their interest in the topic by introducing them to two novels of shipwrecked people. The leader will not read the stories to them, but will use them as a means of stirring their imagination and stimulating their interest.

*Introductory Mimetic Activity* To assist the children to "get into" the situation, and to link this with the lesson on *The Shipwreck*, the leader will play *The Hebrides Overture* by Mendelssohn, and allow the children to develop their own ideas of how they were cast on the deserted island.

*Main Activity* To create the atmosphere from the stormy music of *The Hebrides*, the leader will play "Play of the Waves" from *La Mer* by Debussy. This will help to create a contrasting peaceful setting and mood. To en-

courage character observation and sensory and emotional awareness, the leader will offer suggestions and ask questions, e.g.

"We are now washed ashore on this strange island. Shall we take count of people who have survived? And what of supplies? Have we managed to save any useful things – matches, knives? Is anyone physically injured? What kind of island is this? Are there any inhabitants? What do you suggest we do now? *How are we going to survive on this island?*" The questioning will be used to spark off the children's imagination. The leader will avoid dominating the scene. The leader will encourage the children to develop their own ideas through the enactment of the situation. The activity provides excellent opportunities for the children to solve problems and make their own decisions, e.g. How to build a shelter? Where to build the shelter? What do we use to build it? All these will not only require common sense, but also a knowledge of science and geography.

The leader will encourage the children to break up into groups, so that all the children can involve themselves in various activities: building a shelter, hunting for food, exploring the island, looking for fresh water, lighting a fire, collecting dry wood, etc. The leader will leave the children to improvise the whole scene and reach their own outcomes, e.g. the children may decide to stay on the island and not look out for ways to be rescued.

*Evaluation* Through oral discussion, the children will talk about the effectiveness of the improvisation, and the leader will guide the children to discover for themselves the ethical and moral values, such as co-operation, working together for a common goal, learning to survive, etc.

*Suggested Follow Up Activities* *Geography:* The children's attention may be directed towards the physical features of land forms: lagoons, creeks, lakes, rocks, hills, etc.  
*Creative Writing:* Write a story or a poem on your adventures.

## **Lesson 5 The Singapore Harbour**

*Suggested Materials* Photographs of Clifford Pier showing ships anchored in or near the harbour.  
A film strip or slides showing various activities, e.g. loading and unloading of cargo; the different ships, from "sampan" that provide transportation for the people living in the neighbouring islands to the large steamships and passenger liners.

*Motivational Activity* Applying the principle – from the general to the particular and from the simple to the complex – the leader will begin by discussing the ways by which children come to school. "How do you come to school?" "What are some of the other ways?" "What about the children living on the islands off Singapore?" (There are no secondary schools on these islands.) "Where do they 'disembark'?" The leader then encourages children to discuss the various activities that take place at the harbour. To stimulate their interest and stir their imagination, the leader will show them the photographs and the slides. After a brief discussion the leader will say, "Let's visit Clifford Pier."

*Main  
Activity*

“Here we are at the harbour. Look at the flags and names of ships in the harbour. Can you tell the countries they are from?” The children will decide on the roles they wish to play, and get themselves involved in the various activities. The following are some of the roles that the children could play:— customs officers who check the luggage of the passengers; the merchants and owners checking the loading and unloading of cargo; the stevedores who are employed for this work; the import and export businessmen who buy wholesale goods; captains and sailors who come on shore leave; the tourists and the many passengers who have come to visit Singapore, etc.

To stimulate further interest, the leader could then suggest that it is now a special holiday, e.g. National Day. The harbour would be decorated with buntings, the ships would also be decked with decorations and streamers and there would be a festive air and excitement in the harbour. The leader will announce that the Tourist Promotion Board is giving free or cheap trips around the Singapore harbour. This will give the children the opportunity to “tour” the harbour, and observe the activities at the wharves, the godowns, docks, etc. As in the previous activities, the leader will suggest that some of the children be involved in the activities at the wharves, the docks, etc. This would provide lots of opportunities for all the children to participate, and also provide situations for movement and language flow.

*Evaluation*

The children will discuss the effectiveness of the lesson and the leader will encourage them to make observations and suggestions for improvement.

*Suggested  
Follow Up  
Activities*

*Geography:* From this lesson, children may be motivated to carry out projects and research work on docks, harbours, the shipping routes, activities in or near our harbour.

*Creative Writing and Drawing:* Children may write a composition, draw a picture of the harbour, or write a dialogue between a tourist and a customs officer, or between a reporter and some of the passengers who have been on the tour around the harbour. ¶

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**Reference**

**Syllabus for English – Primary III and IV.** Singapore:  
Ministry of Education, 1971.

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