

Introduction

- Using just your expressions, show a sad face. Ask students to identify how you're feeling. Repeat with different emotions; happy, angry, scared, sleepy etc.
- Now invite students to tell you how they knew the answer. Did you speak? What did you do instead?
- Continue this exploration of emotions but add full body movement to it. E.g. For angry, you might stomp around, hands on hips. For sad, you might sob into your hands, shoulders shrugging, and maybe sit down.
- Invite students to identify what you have added. Movement, walking around, your legs! (All acceptable answers.)
- Explain, or elicit, that we do not always need to talk to understand what is happening.

Development: With slightly older students, you can start with some activity actions like shopping, playing football, walking a dog etc. Can the children identify them?

Activity

- Find a short story your class are familiar with. (Little Red Riding Hood is a great one to use.) Elicit the main sections of the story as a class until you have 4 or 5 main points to focus on.
- Using pictures or sentences to help, ask students to show you what happens in the picture or to show you the sentence. (Be sure to demonstrate one first as an example.)
- Invite a few suggestions from different students and amalgamate the ideas into a solid action e.g. picking up a basket and going for a walk
- Repeat this process for each new picture/sentence.
- For really young students, maybe doing one picture/sentence a day is enough. Accumulate new movements as you go. By the end of a week you will have a class retelling of a story through movement!

It might look something like this:

1. Picking up a basket
2. Going for a walk/skipping through the woods
3. Creeping like a wolf, rubbing palms together
4. Knocking on a door
5. Point to eyes, point to ears, point to teeth (think Ballet Mime)
6. Screaming face, hands up by the side of the face
7. Running on the spot "...all the way home!"

A great way of reminding younger students that they are dancing a story is to ask 'What happens next?' between each movement or section of movement. This will help trigger the 'answer' through remembering the story and then responding with the appropriate movement.

Introduction

Students are going to make a never ending series of statues in an activity I like to call Chain Reaction. This activity actually flips our storytelling discussion into reverse, whereby students will be making movement first and adding a story element after.

The aim is to make improvised, two-person mini freeze frames for audience members to interpret as quickly as possible.

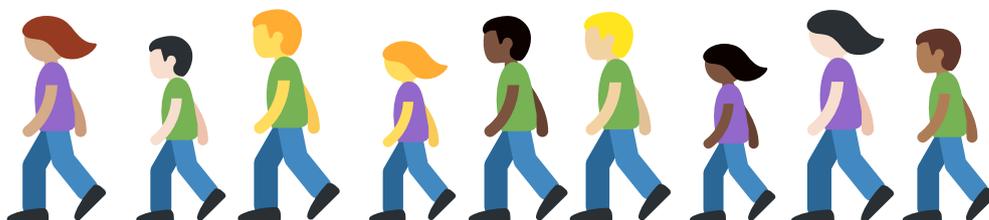
- Have a group of 5 or 6 students line up, facing their audience.
- Ask the first student to jump around, dance, shake, wiggle and wobble like crazy (on the spot!). When you clap your hands they are to freeze in the first statue they end up in. (This eliminates any thought process.)
- The second student then creates a statue somehow relating to the first one as quickly as possible!
- An audience member is to call out a situational idea that they think suits the frozen action the pair have created, before the next student can join in. e.g. Taking a selfie! Proposing! Walking the dog! Dropped something! Lost and need help!
- Once this story element has been announced, student 1 can peel off the line, running around to join the end of the line.
- Simultaneously, the third student creates a statue relating to the second student's statue.
- Again, a situational idea from the audience is called out.

The activity becomes a round-robin whereby there are always two students momentarily frozen, creating a mini freeze frame, and an almost constant stream of situational ideas being called out.

Students are learning how to interpret shapes of the body and apply circumstances to them.

Activity 1 - Creating Characters

Before dancing a whole story, students can benefit from exploring individual characters first. This activity uses different types of walking and adapting gestures to help establish how different characters might move in their dance.



Step One

- Invite students to walk around the space. Ask them what part of their body they think is leading that movement.
- Now ask them to lead with their nose, their knees, their hips etc.
- Ask students how each felt and what characteristics they might apply to that movement? E.g. Leading with your knees might cause the rest of your body to feel slouchy and heavy. Characteristics might be lazy, naughty, sleepy, bored etc.
- Give students the opportunity to watch each other and have them identify characteristics in each other's movements.

Step Two

- Resume walking normally.
- This time invite students to change just one thing about their walk. E.g. swinging their arms slightly higher, a small limp, their knees bend slightly, their walk is slightly quicker
- Ask them to think about what type of person or character might walk like this as they go.
- Every time you clap your hands students are to change their walk again. Only changing one thing at a time; not adding any movements, changing them.
- Again, have students watch each other and share their ideas about characterisation.

Develop: At each of these stages, you can ask students to walk like a particular character from a story. Which part of that character's body leads? Why? Do that have any traits in their walk you can apply?

Step Three

- Children stand in their own space in the room.
- Choosing a character from a selected story, ask students to find one gesture. E.g. waving 'hello', eating something, putting on a bag, tying their shoelaces.
- Invite students to explore choreographic devices* with this individual gesture. E.g. How big can you make it? How small? How fast can you perform it? How slow? What happens if you repeat it over and over again? Can you perform the same movement with a different body part?
- Can students identify the original gesture in each other's movements?

These exploratory exercises will help students understand where choreographed movement can originate. It will help them be more creative in devising their own movement as well as helping them portray particular characters and actions more clearly within a dance.

*Choreographic devices are the tools we use to manipulate movement in order to enhance, exaggerate and embody actions. [Find out more about them in our Guide to Teaching Dance Part 4 - Choreographic Devices](#)

Activity 2 - Telling the Story

Students are to use a story they are reading in class, or one they are familiar with in groups of 4 or 5.

- In groups, break the story down into its main, manageable sections. Within these sections students should identify the key actions and details necessary for telling the story.
- Allow time for students to simply improvise movement, trying to recreate sentences, events and plot lines. I find it helpful to encourage students to focus on the verbs in sentences. e.g. she ran, and kicked the ball right over the hedge.
- Here, students can focus on running, kicking and perhaps miming 'over the hedge'.
- Add emotion to the movement where necessary. If throwing your arms in the air, can you throw your arms up angrily, excitedly, lazily? Will adding emotion help an audience understand the story better?
- Encourage students to use choreographic devices like making a movement bigger, smaller, faster, slower, performed by one person or everybody, in unison or one at a time. How can movement be manipulated to make it more interesting for viewers?
- Focus on transitions between movements. Invite students to devise ways of linking movements so that they never stop moving. This, as well as developing movements with choreographic devices, are what help a piece really feel like a dance rather than a sequence of actions.

If needed, focus on one section a week, adding another section each week cumulatively.

Where possible, it's great to have different groups working on different stories. Using feedback sessions at the end of the process to discover if other students can guess other groups' stories, or at least approximate what happened in each.

Of course this won't always be possible, but make sure to leave time for feedback regardless. This gives students the opportunity to discuss the different plot highlights chosen for each performance, and the different ideas and qualities portrayed.