

The Suitcase Kid: Using drama to explore Andy's world

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KS2

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Introduction

Jacqueline Wilson is one of children's literature's bestselling authors. Her work is enduringly popular, and she is renowned for tackling head on the real-life issues faced by many young people. *The Suitcase Kid* is a fine example of this, and many KS2 students will be able to identify with the issues, decisions, and layers of complicated emotion that protagonist Andy faces.

Exploring the book through drama will give students a chance to really look behind the actions and words of the characters, thereby enabling them to reach a greater understanding of how Andy is gradually able to come to terms with her parents' divorce, and the challenge of living between two new families.

This scheme is written in chronological order, and can therefore accompany a classroom reading of the book. A variety of drama games and exercises are used to explore and expand on the text, with a focus on getting to know and understand the characters. It broadly covers the KS2 National Curriculum drama objectives, as well as aligning with the speaking, listening and group discussion and interaction objectives within KS2 English.

Learning objectives

By the end of this scheme the students will:

- ▶ Have used a range of dramatic techniques to explore the characters within *The Suitcase Kid*, as well as the issues presented through the storyline
- ▶ Have experience of working collaboratively in pairs and in small groups
- ▶ Have actively explored the use of body language and facial expression
- ▶ Have experience of improvising, devising and of scripting drama
- ▶ Have experience thinking, moving and speaking in character
- ▶ Have experience of participating in group discussions.

Lesson 1: Living between House A and House B

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have considered Andy's situation at the start of *The Suitcase Kid*, including examining her thoughts, feelings, and the decisions she faces
- ▶ Have worked together in small groups to consider the character of Andy
- ▶ Have participated in classroom discussion
- ▶ Have worked collaboratively to create tableaux
- ▶ Have considered the use of body language and facial expression to convey feelings.

Students should be familiar with at least Chapters A–F for this lesson.

Warm-up: The A - Z of Andy's life (10 mins)

Jacqueline Wilson cleverly writes *The Suitcase Kid* as an A–Z. Let's warm up for this scheme of work by creating an A–Z of our own!

Ask students to stand in a circle. Choose one student to start. He or she should step forward in the circle, and say, 'A is for...', completing the sentence with something beginning with A that they associate with the story so far. At the same time, the student should perform a mime that brings their chosen word to life.

The mime should be something that everyone can do, as after it has been performed everyone will copy exactly what has just been said and done: 'A is for ...', along with the mime.

The next student in the circle will continue with 'B is for...', and so on, until everyone has had a go.

Helen Day is a performer and teacher of performance, and has delivered workshops for numerous theatre companies and arts education organisations. She is co-founder of H2oh! Education, who run a range of curriculum-linked performing arts workshops in primary and secondary schools across the South East of England, and she ran weekly workshops for the Beacon Arts Youth Theatre in Brighton for more than twelve years. She is currently touring the world with *Cirque du Soleil*.



Resources needed

- ▶ A large roll of paper from which strips can be used for the Role on the Wall exercise
- ▶ Marker pens.

It doesn't really matter if someone chooses a word that is the same as a chapter title. There will be enough words that do not match up, and hopefully some creative and unexpected ideas too.

Role on the Wall (1): Andy at the start of the book (15 mins)

This is an exercise that will be repeated in the fourth and final lesson of this scheme, in order for students to examine how Andy grows and changes throughout the book.

Divide students into groups. Around four or five students per group should work well. Explain that everyone is now going to consider the character of Andy carefully, and ensure that, if anyone is familiar with *The Suitcase Kid* to the end of the book, for this exercise they only think about Andy as we see her in the first few chapters.

Give each group a strip of paper and some marker pens. One student from each group should lie on the piece of paper, and the other students should draw his or her outline on the paper. This outline will now represent the character of Andy.

Around the outside of the outline, students should write the facts that they know about Andy. Examples might be 'Parents are divorced', 'Lives one week with Mum and one week with Dad', etc.

Next, they should write Andy's thoughts, feelings and emotions inside the outline. They should write these in the first person, and add as many as they feel are relevant.

Take a few minutes to discuss what each group wrote at the end of the exercise, and ask students whether doing it has helped them to understand Andy in greater depth.

Decision Alley: Trying to decide where to live (15 mins)

In the prologue, we see Andy's dilemma when she is asked at the family counselling session whether she would prefer to live in house A or house B. In this context, the Decision Alley exercise can be used to demonstrate how difficult it can be to choose between two options when there are many pros and cons for both.

Divide the class roughly down the middle, and ask half the students to think of all the reasons they can that Andy might prefer to live with Mum, and the other half to think of reasons to live with Dad.

Now ask the two groups to stand opposite each other, in two parallel lines.

Select one student to pretend that they are Andy, trying to make the decision. 'Andy' will walk slowly between the two lines, and as she does so, students on either side will whisper the reasons she should choose their side.

For this version of Decision Alley, ask the students to speak in the first person, as they are essentially being the voices inside Andy's head.

When 'Andy' emerges from between the two lines, ask her to reflect on how that made her feel. Did it make coming to a decision any easier?

If time allows, repeat the exercise, with a different student being 'Andy', and asking each line of students to swap to the opposing point of view.

Classroom discussion: Andy's decision to stay at both homes (10 mins)

Having completed the Decision Alley exercise, can students understand how difficult it is for Andy to choose one home, and why, in the end, she chooses both house A and house B? What particular factors make this decision very difficult for her?

Improvised tableaux with thought tapping: The Baby (15 mins)

Remind students about the end of Chapter E, when Andy's Dad and Carrie tell her that she is going to have a baby sister.

Select five students to enter the playing space, and to form a tableau that represents this scene.

Next, select five more students. Each should go and stand behind one of the characters in the scene. One by one, they should gently tap their character on the head. When they do so, their character speaks whatever they are thinking, in the first person. The 'thought tapper' then has the opportunity to add to those thoughts if they choose.

Repeat the exercise a few times, and see how many variations students can come up with.

Plenary (5 mins)

Draw this first lesson to a close by reflecting on Andy's situation at the start of the book. Why do students think she is struggling to adapt to her new life between two homes? What factors make the situation more difficult for her than it might otherwise be?

Keep hold of the Role on the Wall outlines until the final lesson of this scheme. If you have space to display them, they could provide useful inspiration for work moving forward.

Encourage those participating in the tableaux to be as expressive as possible with their body language and facial poses. How well can they show the dynamic of the characters within the scene, just from the frozen image?

Once the characters have spoken their thoughts, encourage the 'thought tappers' to try to go beyond them. What might the character be feeling that perhaps even he or she does not realise?

Lesson 2: Zen and Crystal

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have considered the family units in Andy's life and worked collaboratively in small groups to create freeze frames
- ▶ Have focussed on the characters of Zen and Crystal, using the text as a starting point for further imaginative work
- ▶ Have experience of working in pairs to create duologues, and of committing that work to paper in script form
- ▶ Have experience of performing in front of their peers.

Students should have read as far as Chapter L for this lesson.

Quick-fire frozen images: This is Andy's family (15 mins)

This is a quick-fire tableaux game, to get everyone on their feet, moving, and thinking about the characters in *The Suitcase Kid*.

In each version of this exercise, you will call out activities that a family could do together. Groups have ten seconds each time to arrange themselves into a tableau of the family in question doing that activity. Encourage strong choices in terms of body language, facial expression, and how each character positions themselves in relation to the others.

Round 1

Ask students to get into groups of five, and to cast themselves as Andy, Carrie, Dad, Zen and Crystal. Try to make each group have five members. However, if the numbers don't work, they can add a 'family friend' or choose a character to be absent.

Call out a few activities, each time starting the sentence with 'This is the family ...' and finishing with the activity the family will be doing.

Round 2

Rearrange the groups, this time asking students to form groups of six. Try, where possible, to mix the groups up, so that students gain experience of working with other classmates. This time, they should cast themselves as Andy, Mum, 'The Baboon', Graham, Paula and Katie. Again, if the numbers can't all add up to six, adjust the casting accordingly.

Once more, call out some activities, challenging the 'families' to arrange themselves into tableaux.

After both rounds are complete, take a moment to reflect with students on anything they discovered through the exercise. Are there any key differences in the dynamics within Andy's family with Dad as opposed to Andy's family with Mum? Were there any activities that the families enjoyed doing together, or any that were particularly disastrous in the tableaux images?

Classroom discussion: Zen and Crystal (5 mins)

Ask students to reflect on what we know about the twins Zen and Crystal. What are their characters like? How differently does each of them interact with Andy? Are there any key moments in the book that reflect this?

Improvised duologues: Zen and Crystal discuss Andy (15 mins)

Divide students into pairs. Ask one in each pair to take on the role of Zen, and the other to take on the role of Crystal.

Challenge the pairs to improvise a conversation between Zen and Crystal in which they discuss Andy. They can take a few minutes to prepare by discussing where they might set the conversation, and how it might come about. However encourage students to improvise after that, and to see what comes out of the conversation.

Writing up the duologues (15 mins)

Following on from the improvisations, ask students to commit their duologues to paper. A script template is included as a resource at the end of the scheme, should you find it useful.

This is the time in which students can really think about the words they choose. Can they find many differences in the way in which the two twins might use language?

Remind students that it doesn't matter if girls play Zen and boys play Crystal for this exercise. We are seeking to explore the essence of their characters, therefore anyone can give a voice to either of them.

Performing the duologues (20 mins)

Next, we are going to hear some of the duologues performed.

However, to make things more interesting, pairs are going to swap papers and perform each other's work.

Once papers have been swapped, give students around five minutes to rehearse their duologue (including asking the writers to clarify any words that are difficult to read!).

Now listen to as many pairs perform as possible, time allowing. Allow a few minutes for discussion at the end. Which duologues resonated most with students? Were there any particularly interesting interpretations of Zen and Crystal? Which performances brought the duologues to life the most, and why?

Lesson 3: What Katie really thinks**Learning objectives**

By the end of this lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have used facial expression and body language in the portrayal of character through the 'Madame Tussauds' exercise
- ▶ Have experience of thinking and speaking in character
- ▶ Have experience of using the hot seating technique to explore the inner thoughts of a character
- ▶ Have participated in classroom discussion, sharing ideas concerning the character of Katie
- ▶ Have experience of writing in role.

Students should be familiar with the book at least as far as Chapter R for this lesson.

'Madame Tussauds': The people in Andy's life (15 mins)

This fun tableaux and improvisation game is a great way to get everyone back into the world of *The Suitcase Kid*.

Explain to students that they are going to create a waxwork exhibition of the characters and situations in Andy's life. But this is a magical waxwork museum. As the visitor to the museum (i.e. the teacher) moves around it, and taps the waxworks on the head, they come to life, along with any other waxworks in their tableau. If they are tapped twice, they freeze again, once more becoming waxworks. If the visitor says 'Madame Tussauds', all the waxworks come to life at once, and continue to live and interact with each other until you call out 'Freeze'.

For this exercise students can choose whether to work alone, in pairs, or in small groups.

Give them a few moments to think of the people in Andy's life that they would like to depict (this can of course include Andy herself). They should then arrange themselves into a statue or tableaux, as if in the middle of thought or action.

Play the game as above, allowing students to come to life for as long as it takes them to establish their characters or scene, before freezing them again. It is always nice to end this exercise by calling out 'Madame Tussauds' and allowing everyone a few minutes to improvise without the spotlight on them.

Hot seating (20 mins)

Use Madame Tussauds to springboard into a hot seating exercise.

Ask students to close their eyes, and take a couple of minutes to think about one of the following characters:

- ▶ Mum
- ▶ 'The Baboon'
- ▶ Katie
- ▶ Graham
- ▶ Paula
- ▶ Dad
- ▶ Carrie
- ▶ Zen
- ▶ Crystal.

Ask them to imagine that they are that *character*. How did Andy come into their life? What do they think about her? Thinking about their home life right now, what are they happy about? What would they change?

Next, place five chairs in the playing space. These chairs become the 'hot seats'. Explain that you are going to invite someone who has thought about each character to take one of the seats. Once they do so, they must think, act and speak

as that character. They will be asked questions by their classmates, and they must answer in the first person.

First, you will invite Mum and her side of the family up to the hot seats. See who has been considering each character, and ask one student for each to take one of the seats. It is useful to have good improvisers for this exercise.

The audience will now get to quiz the family about life at home, how they feel about Andy, etc.

Repeat the exercise with Dad and his family.

Listening (10 mins)

Read aloud the extract from Chapter N that begins 'Doesn't she get tired like other people?' and ends 'I won't'.

Classroom discussion: The trouble with Katie (5 mins)

Invite students to discuss what they have just heard, and how that might affect Katie's behaviour. What issues does Katie have to deal with that might help explain the way she behaves towards Andy?

Writing in Role: A diary entry for Katie (20 mins)

Challenge students to put themselves into Katie's head through writing a diary entry for her. They should set it the day after the episode that happens at the end of Chapter N – when Andy invites Katie for a cuddle but she refuses. Students can make up some information about what happens the next day, if they like.

The listening exercise and classroom discussion should provide good springboards into this work. However, you may also want to discuss ideas as to how Katie might feel, before students start writing. This would provide an opportunity to build a vocabulary bank for this exercise on the IWB.

Lesson 4: Life has moved on

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- ▶ Have worked collaboratively in small groups to create tableaux that consider both what Andy wants, and the reality of her situation
- ▶ Have considered Andy's development as a character throughout the book, including the resolution of her situation
- ▶ Have experience of developing short scenes for presentation
- ▶ Have experience of performing in front of their peers, and of discussing their own work.

Students should have finished the book before taking part in this lesson.

Tableaux exercise (20 mins)

Divide the class into groups of three.

Remind students of the things Andy dreams about while she is unconscious (Chapter U). These include:

- ▶ Having tea at Mulberry Cottage with Mum and Dad
- ▶ Enjoying the delicious mulberry pie with Mum and Dad watching
- ▶ Andy and Mum each receiving a present from Dad
- ▶ Everyone doing the washing up together, playing games as they do so
- ▶ All watching *The Wizard of Oz* together
- ▶ Dad reading to Andy while Mum looks on
- ▶ Being tucked into bed by Mum and Dad.

Each group will now choose a scene from this chapter to depict in tableau form. They must try to use their faces, body language and expression to really show how Andy envisages the scene in her head.

Give the groups a few minutes to devise this tableau.

Next, ask the groups to devise a second tableau. This one should show how the scene would *actually* look if Mum, Dad and Andy all moved back to Mulberry Cottage now and undertook this activity.

For the last few minutes, allow the groups to perform their tableaux, one after the other. Depending on class numbers you may be able to split the class in two in order to present the work. One half can perform their two tableaux in front of the other group, all together, before swapping to become the audience whilst the others perform.

The idea of the hot seating exercise is to dig deep into the thoughts of the characters under question. Encourage students not to ask factual questions – this is not a quiz to see who knows most about a particular character. Rather, they should ask questions about how the characters *feel*. Those asking the questions have as big a part to play in this exercise as those acting. How well can we get to know the characters in Andy's life?

Remind students that the purpose of writing a personal diary or journal is usually to share one's innermost thoughts, feelings and secrets. Encourage them to explore the things Katie could not say to anyone else in the diary entry. What are the emotions that she hides from the rest of the world?

Resources needed

- ▶ A large roll of paper from which strips can be used for the Role on the Wall exercise
- ▶ Marker pens.

Role on the Wall: Andy at the end of the book (15 mins)

Ask the class to arrange themselves into their groups from the Role on the Wall exercise in Lesson 1.

Repeat the exercise, this time asking students to consider Andy as she is at the very end of the book. Distribute the completed outlines from last time, so that groups have the opportunity to look at what they wrote before. Ask them to consider which things have remained constant, and which things have now changed.

Classroom discussion: How has Andy changed? (5 mins)

Use the Role on the Wall exercise as a springboard for discussion. In what ways has Andy changed by the end of the book? Are there any episodes in the story in particular that students can identify as having helped Andy to learn to cope?

Scene creation (15 mins)

Arrange students into groups of four or five (you may wish to keep them in the same groups as they were in for the Role on the Wall exercise).

Ask them to work together to pick any scene from the book to bring to life. It can be from any chapter they like, however they must be able to say how that scene influenced/changed Andy's story, and how it helped her to develop.

The scene should only be short (maximum three minutes long). Remind students that they are showing us a 'moment'.

Showing the scenes (25 mins)

Allow each group, one at a time, to show their scene.

By this point in the scheme, students should be well-versed in considering their facial expression and body language. However remind them that, when using their voices in their performances, they should now also consider vocal tone and projection, in order to convey how their character feels and to ensure that their audience can follow the scene.

After each scene, ask students to comment on why they chose that moment of the story to bring to life, and how it shaped Andy's development.

Plenary (10 mins)

Bring this lesson, and scheme of work, to a close by asking students to reflect on Andy's story. Do they think many children go through similar feelings and situations when their parents separate? What are the key lessons the book teaches us about how children in Andy's situation can learn to cope?

Extension exercises

A few additional ideas for exploration include:

- ▶ Can students build a home for Radish, as Andy does in the Peters' garden? Find a suitable nook in the classroom, and ask students to bring small items from home that could contribute to the miniature set-up. These could include scraps of fabric, small pieces of wood, etc. that could be used to furnish the place, as well as any items that could serve as tiny cups and saucers etc. Work collaboratively as a class to decide what goes where.
- ▶ Spend a lesson looking at haikus. Explore the structure of a haiku, and challenge students to write their own. These could be about *The Suitcase Kid*, or you could choose an entirely different topic altogether.

If students need reminding about Andy's state of mind for this exercise, you could consider recapping what happens in the very final chapters of the book, and/or reading aloud the section from Chapter Z that starts 'I went to see the Family Counselling lady the other day' and ends 'It's as easy as A B C. Really.'

Help students with time management during this exercise. After 3–4 minutes remind them that they should have decided on a scene to work on. After 6 minutes remind them that they should be up on their feet rehearsing their scene. After 10 minutes ensure that they are on their final rehearsals getting ready to present the scene to their classmates. Without such guidance KS2 students have a tendency to discuss for too long. These regular check-ins will help them to keep the project moving forwards, and to be decisive.

RESOURCES

Script Template

Where is your scene set?

What are Zen and Crystal doing at the start of the scene?

A represents:

B represents:

Write stage directions within the brackets, and speech below

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

A: ()

B: ()

How does the scene end?