

Scheme of work for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and other Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

KS3

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KS3

Introduction

Teaching Drama to students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) at KS3 can present challenges to some teachers of Drama who have only taught in mainstream settings. Students with ASD can struggle with some of the basic demands of Drama, such as making eye contact, communicating clearly, inhabiting other characters, improvising and using imagination in role play. However, even small steps towards success in any aspect of performance can be hugely beneficial and therapeutic for students with SEND, and is therefore extremely valuable for their personal and social skills development.

Although the ideas presented here are intended to provide a wide range of opportunities for students to expand their limitations and develop exploratory methods of challenging their preconceptions and preferences through dramatic projects, it may be that for certain individual students or groups of students, it would be better to try several topics in succession until they find one that they feel very comfortable exploring, and spend a longer time working through that topic. Many students with ASD enjoy a lot of repetition of certain games and tasks, and it may be beneficial to them to incorporate repeating an activity numerous times over a longer period, so that they become comfortable with it and can gradually be encouraged to vary aspects of it.

In general, these topics and activities will be easier for more outgoing students, and challenging for those with more intense conditions and limited social skills; activities should therefore be balanced to accommodate such a variety of needs within a class, and differentiated to allow all students to play a part according to their personal needs, abilities, and preferences. No students should be forced or challenged to take part in activities that may cause them upset or trauma; teachers must be sensitive to how far each student can be prompted to participate. This is why, if a topic is found that all students enjoy, it can be lengthened and its activities repeated, to allow students to have an enjoyable and fulfilling experience of drama activity, within a context that feels safe to them.

Expectations of what these students can achieve must be different from those of mainstream school students, and should focus on each student's individual qualities and interests, and how they can bring their unique skills and abilities to fruition in the context of dramatic performance. There is no point in trying to coerce students with ASD to work in ways that are not comfortable for them, as this may alienate them and make them feel distressed. Instead, the teacher must have an initial idea of the student's interests and ways of communicating, and work to encourage these aspects to bring out dramatic tendencies that allow each to feel a sense of success and ownership.

Learning objectives

By the end of this scheme, students will have:

- ▶ Experienced most of the key ideas and techniques of standard drama teaching, but in ways that are adapted to their individual needs, skills and interests
- ▶ Experienced approaches to drama based on existing strategies to help young people with ASD to improve their social skills and understanding of social interaction
- ▶ Gained wide experience in performing within a variety of genres and styles of drama
- ▶ Developed use of new techniques of communication using verbal and non-verbal methods
- ▶ Gained a sense of individual identity and independence
- ▶ Challenged their preconceptions of their own limitations

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- ▶ Co-operated with other students to improvise, devise and perform creative dramatic pieces
- ▶ Gained an ability to generate and act upon dramatic ideas, in solo, pair, and group performance situations.

This scheme of work assumes that students receive one lesson of Drama per week, of approximately one hour's duration, over the three years of their KS3 syllabus. Each topic described gives an outline of the ideas and approaches to be delivered, but it is up to the teacher to decide how these can be broken down into individual lessons. Each teacher and each class may need more or less time to work through aspects of the topics, so there seems little point in specifying how long to take on activities within a topic. Certainly each lesson should contain warm-up games and activities relevant to the topic, and definition of key words and terminology to encourage students to use the appropriate language when discussing their drama experiences.

Year 7

Autumn Term 1

Topic: Introduction to Drama

What is Drama? Brainstorm all possible examples, from all media types and performance types.

Half of this term should be devoted to games, for warming up, learning names, building trust, character development, exploring physical space, proxemics and body language, social interaction, mime, improvisation, concentration, listening, group cohesion, energising, etc.

Assessment: How do students interact socially with each other? How loudly can they speak/project vocally? Can they use facial expression effectively? Body language? Can they use imagination to create or develop a story or idea? Can they understand the rules of drama games and stick to them? Can they use space effectively, both their immediate vicinity and in relation to others around them? Can they change their voice to attempt accents or different styles of speech?

The teacher should create an assessment system that notes levels of students' abilities in these and other skills, which can be updated regularly with re-assessments to demonstrate progress over time.

Autumn Term 2

Topic: Developing a Story

Using Drama techniques to tell a story: creating a script using real life or imagined events; plot twists; structuring a story; surprises; characters and their relationships; improvisation; telling the story with enhanced aspects, e.g. freeze-frame, tableaux, mime, slow-mo, soundscapes.

Base stories on students' known experience, e.g. home or school events or scenarios or imagined events, e.g. adventure stories, or a mixture of these; or scenarios developed through games and improv activities. Explore directing, with one student having their story told, or creating a story and directing others in it in small groups. Can they structure a story to contain a start, middle and ending? Can the group follow instructions of a director?

Spring Term 1

Topic: Silent Movies

Students watch examples of silent movies and discuss the stereotypes of characters contained in them: the hero, the damsel, the villain, the old person, etc. Discuss how music can enhance a scene. Using written dialogue (as in old silent films, dialogue written on boards); using exaggerated actions and mime to tell a story and describe emotions, and define relationships in terms of power and authority; using levels to illustrate power dynamics. Students devise a range of possible scenarios involving these characters and aspects, and take part in acting them out in mime form.

Spring Term 2

Topic: Musical Theatre

Taking inspiration from classic (child-friendly) musicals from several eras (e.g. *Oliver!*, *Grease*, *Mary Poppins*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Lion King*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Bugsy Malone*, etc.), watching and re-enacting scenes with songs from musicals. Students describe staging and scenarios and choose roles based on confidence in singing, dancing and speaking. Learning about types of song in musicals: solos,

duets, ensembles and big crowd numbers, including choreography. Distinction is made between Opera, in which characters only sing, generally in a highly stylised way, and Musicals, which utilise a mixture of speaking voice and singing, and can embrace a range of more modern musical genres.

Summer Term 1

Topic: Puppets

Exploration of giving puppet figures character and voice, and relationships with other puppets. Use of ventriloquism to project voice, including giving voice to inanimate objects, e.g. stones, pencils, chairs, allowing students to imagine how an object might feel and think, and speak about its experience. Use of existing puppets of various types: hand/finger puppets (animals and humans, projecting voice styles and typical and atypical characters onto animals, and exploring vocal range and texture with human characters, e.g. old woman, young boy, baby); marionette puppets (developing fine motor skills to control strings to bring life and communication to puppets through gestures, posture, movement and relationships); whole body costume puppets (e.g. exploring animal movements and voices). Students design and make their own puppets of any type, imparting character through facial expression, clothing, posture, movement and voice. They improvise scenes in which puppet characters communicate in specified ways, e.g. differing emotional states, or discussing a topic, or arguing.

Summer Term 2

Topic: Superheroes

Students watch film clips of existing superhero genres, defining typical characteristics and special powers of heroes and villains. What defines a villain? Consider life stories of superheroes and villains, from childhood to adult, to old age; do they ever grow old? Students choose superheroes and villains to act as, and devise scenes with over-dramatic dialogue, exaggerated gestures and slow-motion fight and action scenes. Does the villain always have to lose? Is the story satisfying if the villain wins? How does it feel to overturn the expected narrative? Can the superhero have flaws or human foibles?

Students design their own superhero or villain, perhaps with imagined powers, or with powers that are an exaggerated version of the students' own special abilities. They improvise scenes involving villains committing crimes and superheroes saving the day, working out how the characters interact effectively to create a basic working storyline with characters.

Year 8

Autumn Term 1

Topic: Physical Theatre

Explore games and activities involving using the body as an object to be manipulated to tell stories, including use of dance and music. Using stylised, unnatural movement, e.g. bodies use machine movements. Students discuss relationships and define them by physical gestures and contact, with minimum of dialogue. Students in groups create moving objects with their bodies, with bodies representing parts of the object itself or the surroundings. Use still image techniques to freeze the objects, so other students can discuss the relationships between participants, what they represent, how levels and proximity impart meaning to parts of the scenario. Students stage short scenes involving some of these objects, with their bodies creating the objects, scenery and characters involved. Props can also be used, perhaps with symbolic significance, to signify meanings without having to resort to speech to communicate an idea or concept.

Autumn Term 2

Topic: Pantomime

Students watch examples of traditional pantomime stories, and identify key characters, stereotypes, and key traditions of panto, e.g. the dame, the hero, the fool, the romantic theme, the villain. Explore use of exaggeration in gesture, voice and facial expression for comic effect. Explore playing to the audience, and audience participation ('He's behind you!'), etc. Students devise their own story as a variation on an existing pantomime, or direct themselves in an existing story. Students take turns directing the action, trying different approaches and staging ideas and noting how this impacts on the effectiveness of a scene. Students explore use of costume, playing cross-gender roles (boys as dames, girls as

male heroes), and incorporate aspects of Physical Theatre, Silent Movie, Musical Theatre, Farce, and perhaps Puppets.

Spring Term 1

Topic: Comic Strip Conversations/feelings, emotions

Students are introduced to the idea of Comic Strip Conversations, in which simple cartoons are created to illustrate conversations and the barriers that can occur to effective communication, as well as people's intentions and feelings, and how someone can think something different from what they are saying. Students discuss situations that they find difficult, and create Comic Strip Conversation drawings to illustrate them. These ideas are then used as the basis of improvisations, in which students explore the different ways that social interactions can be problematic, e.g. when someone interrupts another's sentence, or says something inappropriate, or when people are both talking at the same time with neither listening to the other. Students turn these into longer scenarios, in which they work through a variety of communication issues, and use techniques of Forum Theatre to explore alternative strategies for dealing with these issues. They also use thought-tracking and monologue to explain how they are thinking and feeling about a situation. Improvised ideas can be written down and scripted, with coloured pens used to highlight different emotional states of characters and the emotional content of their statements, in the same way that colours are used in the cartoon drawings of Comic Strip Conversations to denote emotional meanings.

Spring Term 2

Topic: Adverts/movie trailers – filming topic

Students are introduced to using video cameras and video editing software. Once they have become familiar with using these, through taking some time to play with them and helping each other learn to use them, their task is to create a 60-second advert or movie trailer. They can choose any subject and any genre. Students must discuss and collaboratively decide how their video can be most effective, including decisions on length of scenes, viewpoint of camera, close-up versus longer distance shots, moving versus static camera, use of music or sound effects, use of titles, order of scenes (linear versus non-linear), lighting, filters, etc. Students create plans of who will fulfil which roles, both in front of and behind the camera, and the order of events necessary to create the video in a given time frame.

This topic could include aspects of animation if it is deemed to be useful for the students to experience this; this could be a valuable experience for students to use 'claymation' or drawn animation techniques to demonstrate emotional states, communication situations and social interactions.

Summer Term 1

Topic: Working from scripts

Students take roles in reading through a script that has a strong story, themes and characters. They impart emotional and dramatic content into their spoken delivery. As a group they discuss and make notes on their responses to the script, leading into interpreting it in a variety of ways. There are no right or wrong answers, just different interpretations and ideas. These notes and ideas can be collated into a single mind map showing categories of ideas, e.g. character motivations, environment, relationships, social or cultural context, etc., and inter-connections between these strands. Students pick apart the timeline of the script, and see if the narrative can be understood when the scenes are rearranged into non-linear order. Students also focus on one or more minor characters in the script, and consider how the story or characters are perceived through that character's viewpoint; they consider how that character could have their own story separate from the play, and create a sub-plot that uses that character as the main focus; this could be developed into another piece of drama entirely. Students also work out how to include cross-cutting in the performance of the script, i.e. having two scenes performed simultaneously on either side of the stage, either with both happening at once, or one happening while the other is stopped as a still-image, then swapping. Consideration should also be given to use of stage directions, with students exploring options for how and when to come on and off stage, proxemics of characters onstage, blocking and so on.

Summer Term 2**Topic: Social Stories/Forum Theatre**

Students discuss events from their own lives, where they may have struggled to understand how to do a task, or how to deal with a situation; a scenario in which a Social Story would have helped them anticipate and successfully navigate a potentially difficult situation. Alternatively they can discuss possible future situations that might cause difficulty for them, from day-to-day activities to wider challenging social experiences. Discuss the idea of Social Stories as tools to help them anticipate and successfully deal with potentially challenging situations, and recognise the feelings and intentions of other people, and then explore ways to bring these Social Stories to life through dramatic techniques. Students act out these scenarios, and are given a demonstration of Forum Theatre techniques, whereby the teacher stops the action at a key point, and takes over the part of a student acting, deciding to change the direction of the scene through making a different decision or taking a different approach to the situation. Students then follow the example of the teacher to stop the action and take on a role of an existing student actor, thereby changing the direction of the story again. In this way students explore what happens when alternative scenarios are played out, when people make unexpected decisions or find alternative ways to create solutions to challenging life situations.

As an example use the situation, 'A Visit to a Shop'. This situation can cause anxiety and stress for a student due to the unexpected events that can occur within the everyday activity. Who might be in the shop? Will anyone challenge them? What if they go to pay but don't have enough money? There are any number of unexpected difficulties that could be thrown into the dramatic scenario through the Forum Theatre technique, to allow the students to explore and learn how they might deal with such unexpected events in an everyday activity, within a safe and supportive environment.

Year 9**Autumn Term 1****Topic: Fairy Stories and Folk Tales**

Students read or have read to them a fairy story or folk tale (e.g. Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen story, or mythological story such as Robin Hood or King Arthur). They discuss elements of the story such as the structure, the moral messages, the characterisation, the geographical and historical context, the surprises or twists. They discuss and consider how sections or parts, or elements of the story could be removed from their original context and placed in new contexts, e.g. different geographical location or historical era, different social or cultural environment, etc. How can they change the dialogue and characterisation to match the new context, but retain the original story, message or theme? What type of theatrical techniques would work well to enhance the dramatic impact of this? Physical theatre? Puppets? Masks? Forum Theatre? Students in groups explore a range of options finding different approaches to the telling of the story through dramatic methods.

Autumn Term 2**Topic: Christmas-themed production – A Christmas Carol**

Students watch any suitable film version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. They discuss the historical and cultural context of the piece. Then they pick out the main characters and describe their characteristics, their role and significance in the story, their relationship with other characters. Students take on roles of the main characters, and discuss how to 'get into role', working on posture, gestures, facial expression, voice, etc. They improvise key scenes in the story, using some elements of original dialogue but also adding their own ideas and responding to each other in character. They discuss what aspects of their improvisations can be used effectively, and devise a script including these, along with pre-scripted scenes, into a coherent whole. Students try using techniques such as non-linear narrative, flashbacks, thought-tracking, cross-cutting, physical theatre, etc., to enhance the dramatic impact. They should experiment with a variety of such techniques and discuss whether each works, how it can be improved or adapted to work more effectively, demonstrating skills of reflection, appraisal and self/peer-assessment.

These explorations and rehearsed scenes should be collated into a final performance piece, perhaps performed in front of the school population, to

give students an experience of how to perform in front of an audience, and the pressure, intensity and excitement that that experience can generate. The performance should be filmed for assessment purposes. After this performance there should be a thorough 'debriefing' session, where students undertake self and peer-assessments and appraisals of their performance, what worked well and what could have been improved. This should go some way towards helping students analyse their own performances objectively, and gain confidence that they can work on points for development.

Spring Term 1

Topic: Masks

Teacher shows video examples of how masks are used in theatrical or dramatic productions, including cultural-specific ceremonies, e.g. Asian and African ceremonial storytelling and dance. Students discuss how a mask can allow the wearer to explore the character represented by the mask without resorting to changing their own facial expression or voice; the bulk of the characterisation can be inferred through a combination of the mask with the actor's body language. The mask can represent a static emotional state, but the interpretation of its meaning can be changed by the actor's body language and gesture. Students design masks representing as many emotional states as possible, and each student creates a mask using simple materials e.g. cardboard, paper plates, etc. Students can discuss and implement ideas around colour and texture to enhance capturing of the emotional state. Students then wear their masks and experiment with gestures and posture to bring out the emotional and characterisation potential of their masks. They go on to develop improvisations with each other, either with or without vocabulary, and also trying out using vocal sounds and utterances as a primal form of language.

Masks can be used to explore the idea of contrast, which can have strong dramatic impact. Two masks showing opposing emotional states can be used, with the actors improvising or devising contrasting behaviours, e.g. one moving quickly and one slowly, one low to the ground and one high, one active and one passive or static, etc. Students are encouraged to consider as many ways of contrasting behaviour as possible, and should then discuss the impact this has on a dramatic scene, whether improvised or devised.

Spring Term 2

Topic: Murder Mystery

Students are shown video clips of classic Murder Mystery stories, e.g. *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile*. Before the murderer is revealed the students should try to work out 'whodunnit' by discussing how suspects are portrayed: their backgrounds; their motives; their relationships with the victim and/or each other. They should try to spot if characters seem to be lying, or nervous, or acting suspiciously; how is this shown visually or in their manner of speaking? Students list the suspects by name, and for each one write down descriptions of their character – for this they can use Role on the Wall technique, with each suspect being drawn in outline on a separate large sheet of paper, then words and labels drawn on and around them to illustrate their inner feelings and motivations, and their outward appearance. Students can then explore taking on these roles, and improvise/script their own monologues to expand on the characters' inner lives and thoughts. Students should really try to inhabit the characters, and create details of their lives and backgrounds that make them believable, including their relationships, their feelings about themselves and others, formative events in their lives, etc.

Even after the films have been watched and students have acted out their monologues, with appropriate attention paid to physical characteristics too, they can then move on to devising and scripting their own Murder Mystery, with considerations of plot, flashbacks, motives, character backgrounds. They should work into their piece a sense of dramatic climax as the detective reaches his or her conclusion, and could also incorporate some anti-climaxes wherein the detective chases false leads, or the audience is led to believe something is about to happen that does not actually happen.

Summer Term 1

Topic: Final Performance, part 1

If students have been following the scheme of work to this point, including covering as many of the topics as possible, then at this stage they may be ready to devise and perform their own piece of work, taking inspiration from any or all

of the drama techniques, genres, elements and conventions they have learned about during KS3. The Summer 1 term of Year 9 could be used to explore ideas for the performance, with students collaborating as independently as possible to devise scripts, develop and explore ideas through improvisation, consider themes or plots, work on characterisation, and so on. Their piece could take inspiration from a small number of the topics covered, perhaps the ones they found most enjoyable or stimulating, or could combine many dramatic styles or aspects into a single piece.

Summer Term 2

Topic: Final Performance, part 2

This half-term continues on from the previous one, with students refining their ideas into a completed script with roles for all performers, and rehearsals, ideally directed by one or more of the students themselves. The act of rehearsing, along with the consideration of technical aspects such as staging, lights and sound, projections, audience placement, etc., allows students an insight into the rigours and intricacies of staging an actual performance. The final performance should be viewed as a celebration and culmination of all the skills and experiences they have undertaken during their KS3 Drama programme. Each student should be encouraged to take on roles according to their preference, their unique skill set and abilities, and a sense of teamwork and team discipline should pervade the rehearsals and the final performance.