# Drama Student Resource

##### Activity Title: Shine a light on us: stories to illuminate our heritage (1.2b)

##### Achievement Standard: 91941

##### AS 1.2 Participate in creative strategies to create a drama

### Drama conventions, elements, techniques, and technologies

#### Conventions

These are the established ways of working in Drama that explore meaning or deepen understanding or the established practices in the theatre.

**ACTION CONVENTIONS**: slow motion, Dance, Mime, and Ritual. These use actions to explain and support the story.

**STORY CONVENTIONS:** narrator, chorus, spoken thoughts, song, repetition, and audience interaction. These conventions add to the story by giving the audience more information about the character or situation, or by repeating parts of the story to give strength to, or explain a moment in, the story.

**STRUCTURE CONVENTIONS**: include story, time, and action conventions — still image, diagrams, maps, and montage.

**TEXTUAL CONVENTIONS:** interior monologue, dialogue, and stage directions.

**THEATRE CONVENTIONS:** include the actor-audience relationships, exits-entrances, and theatre technologies.

**TIME CONVENTIONS**: fast forward, frozen moment, flashback, and split stage. These change the time frames to allow the audience to see what happened in the past, what might happen in the future, or to freeze a moment in time.

#### Process Conventions

These deal with preparatory work towards character development, such as role on the wall — hot seating, mantle of the expert, teacher in role, visualization, telephone conversation.

**A day in the life:** a process convention that works backwards from an important event in order to explain or give clues about the event. Groups create freeze frames of significant moments in the past that cast some light on the event. These freezes are then examined by the participants.

**Alter-ego**: a process convention in which students work in pairs, one as the role, one as that role’s thoughts. The role plays out the action and dialogue and the alter-ego plays out the inner thoughts and feelings.

**Back-to-back:** a process convention in which two people explore ideas in drama while seated or standing back-to-back.

**Blanket role:** a process convention in which all the participants take the same role within a whole-group role play. It is often used with younger students because it is a non-threatening way for them to begin to work in drama.

**Collective character:** a process convention in which a group speaks for a character, with one person representing the character without speaking while the rest of the group improvises his or her words. Alternatively, an individual takes on the role while the rest of the group whispers advice and offers lines of dialogue to be spoken by the person in the role. It can work as a dialogue.

**Collective mapping:** a process convention in which a group draws a map together to represent the place where the drama is set, providing a concrete representation for the ideas that are being developed, also known as *making maps*.

**Circular role:** a process convention in which groups of participants choose roles as particular characters and a leader in role as a central character improvises drama with each group in turn, linking the characters and getting a variety of responses to a common concern, also sometimes called *circular drama*.

**Gossip chorus or circle:** a convention in which the group speaks the rumours about an event in the drama, sharing fragments of conversation which can be developed into a chorus work.

**Hot seating:** a process convention in which class members question or interview someone who is in role (for example, as a character from a play or a person from history) to bring out additional information, ideas, and attitudes about the role. The class members may or may not be in role.

**Improvisation:** spontaneous invention and development of drama without use of scripts or preparation.

**Interview:** a process convention in which a face-to-face meeting of two parties in role takes place to ascertain particular information for a purpose.

**News reports:** a process convention in which students, in role as either radio or television news readers, present a news item they have written.

**Reflective circle:** a process convention in which students stand in a circle and one at a time contribute a sentence reflecting on the drama work.

**Role on the wall:** a process convention in which an important role is represented in picture form “on the wall” (usually on a large sheet of paper) so that information can be collectively read or added to as a drama progresses.

**Teacher in role:** a process convention and teaching strategy where the teacher manages a class from within a drama by taking a role to deepen and extend students’ inquiry and learning.

**Thought tapping:** a process convention in which the action freezes and a leader moves among the participants, tapping individual’s shoulders to activate the speaking aloud of the thoughts of that role.

**Thought tracking:** a reflective process convention that reveals the private thoughts of roles at specific moments in the action.

**Vignette:** an improvised scene refined to capture a snapshot of a moment.

**Voices in the head:** a process convention in which a participant who is not in role speaks the thoughts of another person who is in role. It can be facilitated by a teacher freezing the action in a scene and nominating a student from the audience to stand beside, or make physical contact with, a student in the frozen scene and speak the “voice in the head” of that role.

**Wall of thought:** a process convention in which participants stand in two rows and, as a character walks between them, the participants speak the thoughts that may be in the character’s head or offer the character advice,or make comments about the character, either as themselves or in role as other characters (also known as *conscience alley*or*wall of conscience*).

**Whole-group role play:** a process convention in which all the participants are in role and in an imagined setting so that everyone is involved in the drama at the same time and shaping the drama while it is in progress. This strategy can be very powerful when a teacher works from within the action.

**Writing in role:** a convention that involves writing as the character, using the character’s voice to express their thoughts and feelings about the situation. The writing may take different forms — diaries, letters, reports, text messages, reviews, statements.

#### Performance Conventions

Established ways of working in drama that explore meaning or deepen understanding, or established practices in theatre (such as the soliloquy or aside).

**Aside:** a performance convention in which a line spoken by a character directly to the audience is not heard by other actors onstage.

**Chorus (of) movement:** a convention in which a group moves together with a sense of purpose to heighten the moment or to create a particular visual or spatial effect.

**Chorus or chorus of voice:** a convention used in performance and process drama in which individuals or groups provide spoken explanation or commentary on the main action of a drama.

**Collage of voice:** a convention used in performance and process drama in which participants, in role, select a line of dialogue and improvise layering of voices.

**Flashback or flash-forward:** a structural convention which involves shifting backwards or forwards in time so that participants or the audience can experience or investigate action or context from another perspective.

**Freeze-frame image**: a convention used in performance and process drama in which a person or the members of a group use their bodies to make an image capturing an idea, theme, or moment in time. Also called a *group sculpture*, *still image*,or *frozen image*.

**Mime:** a form of theatre performance in which action and character are suggested using gesture, movement, and facial expression without words or sounds.

**Motif:** a distinctive idea, image, or sound that is repeated throughout a work, or that underpins a work, so that the theme of the motif resonates through the work.

**Narration:** a performance convention in which a person narrates the action that occurs within a drama.

**Monologue:** a lengthy speech for one person. Often a monologue is required for an audition.

**Montage:** a series of brief scenes showing contrasting angles on a drama or story and juxtaposed to emphasise the different viewpoints and to add interest to the devised piece.

**Overheard conversation:** a convention used in performance and process drama in which a conversation that would not normally be overheard by others is disclosed in order to add tension or provide information. The conversation can be heard in a variety of ways — a telephone conversation, one side of a telephone conversation, in groups, in pairs, or individually.

**Ritual:** this convention used in performance and process drama involves stylised enactment bound by traditional rules and usually repetitious in nature. It is a powerful means of moving participants more deeply into the drama because it enables them to recognise the importance of their actions.

**Slow motion:** a convention used in performance and process drama in which movement, expressions, and gestures are slowed down and exaggerated to heighten tension or isolate an important moment.

**Soliloquy:** a performance convention where a speech delivered by a character alone onstage reveals that character’s innermost thoughts.

**Soundscape:** a sequence of sounds shaped to enhance action and mood in a drama.

**Split focus:** having two different dialogues or actions happening simultaneously on stage. Split focus can be used deliberately to strong effect but may also occur unintentionally in an improvised context.

**Spoken diary:** a convention used in performance and process drama for reflecting on the action in the drama, in which the character writes a diary or letter, speaking the content aloud, and thereby explaining their feelings to the audience or other participants.

**Speaking thoughts aloud:** a convention used in performance and process drama in which the action freezes and a character speaks their thoughts aloud in order to add tension, provide information, or for some other purpose. This also can be called *spoken thoughts*.

**Telephone conversations:** a one-way conversation where the group only hears one side of the dialogue, or a two-way conversation devised in pairs to illuminate a situation or to inform or to advance plot. Telephone conversations may be used to create outside pressure or to introduce new information.

**Use of signs, captions, and placards**: a process convention in whichaudience groups reflect on the image by creating a caption, headline, or title.

#### Elements

These are the core ingredients of any story.

As an actor, it is your job to understand how they are used in your performance and the ways you can highlight them in your performance.

**ACTION**: what happens. You may refer to the following within action: developing character, circumstances, superficial objectives, deeper (underlying) objectives, obstacles, physical, verbal, mental, and emotional action.

**FOCUS**: focus involves a moment in time, an action, or even a gesture, that indicates the essence of the scene — or a theme that drives the performance. Character, costume, and set can assist with focus. The audience can also be asked to focus on an actor or area of the stage through the use of lighting or positioning of bodies in the space.

**MOOD**: mood is the feeling a scene evokes. Mood can be assisted through the characters’ interactions with each other, or the audience, through lighting, music/sound, or even set.

**PLACE:** the placement of the action — to show the location or setting. Set, costume, and character can help convey this.

**ROLE**: the role is performed by the actor. It entails using imagination and skills to identify with someone else in order to explore and represent experience from another viewpoint. (Drama techniques and technology can be incorporated into the role through the use of costume and makeup.)

**SITUATION:** the set of circumstances at a particular moment in the action.

**SYMBOL**: a symbol can be used to represent an idea within a scene or play. It may stand for another object or idea.

**TENSION**: the use of mental pressure or intensity is used to provoke a response, focus attention, or heighten involvement. The use of lights, character change, and sound can all assist the creation of a tense moment or scene. It can be created by the pace of a play, by the pace of verbal delivery, by successive, quick-paced scenes building to a climax, the highest point of tension in a play. Drama is conflict and this drives a narrative forward. In your improv, look for where you can create tension through attitude, personality, and physicality.

**TIME**: this can be defined as the time of day or the period. For time of day, lighting can be used as an indicator of period, costume, character, and set, and props can place the scene in time.

#### Drama Techniques

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| VOICE:one of the main tools of an actor’s expression. The use of voice includes volume (to be heard), pace (to ensure you are not rushing dialogue), pitch, projection, pause, and use of breath. |
| Articulation | Clarity of voice. |
| Breathing | To allow a controlled use of voice to convey a feeling, such as a sigh or gasp. |
| Cueing | When to speak. |
| Emphasis | Choosing to stress particular words to convey meaning. |
| Inflection | The rise and fall of a voice. |
| Pace | The rate at which words are spoken. |
| Pause | Where sound stops, how often and for how long. |
| Pitch  | The highness or lowness of a sound. |
| Projection | Enables audience to hear the voice. |
| Repetition | Repeating a sound or words for emphasis. |
| Tone | The feeling or emotion in the voice. |
| Volume | How loudly or softly the words are spoken. |
| BODY:an actor can also show how they feel about a situation or person through non-verbal communication. This can indicate a character’s personality and the mood they are in and indicate the type of relationship they have with another character. This can be shown through gestures, eye-contact, facial expressions, and physical movements. |
| Body awareness | Ability to select appropriate use of body on stage, choosing to use the whole body, or isolated parts of the body expressively. |
| Eye contact | Establishing eye contact with another actor or the audience. |
| Facial expression | Using the face to show mood, emotion, feeling, and responses. |
| Gesture | Movement of any part of the body to express idea, feeling, or mood. |
| Posture | Stance or way of standing. |
| MOVEMENT:as an actor, we need to consider how a particular role or character moves, walks, stands, and sits — facial expressions and gestures. Our movement can be just as effective as the words we speak. We use it to show awareness of others and the space we are in.  |
| Direction | Where you are going: forwards, backwards, diagonally, or sideways. |
| Energy | How you move, the amount of force, and the mood expressed through movement. |
| Ensemble awareness | Moving as part of a group, proximity to other actors, and responding to other actors’ movement. |
| Pathways | The pattern of movement you create in the space, such as curved, straight, or zig-zag pathways. |
| Repetition | Repeating a movement or recycling a movement for emphasis. |
| Timing | Fast or slow tempo, when you move (kinaesthetic response), and duration (length) of movement. |
| SPACE: this is the appropriate use of the acting areas. Character relationships and status can be clarified by positioning in space. Levels, groupings, personal proximity, location, set, and costume can contribute. |
| General space | All other space in the room and how you use this space. |
| Groupings | How you are positioned with others on stage, grouped together or not (see ensemble awareness). |
| Levels | Low, medium, and high. |
| Personal space | Your own space, the bubble immediately around your body, and how you use this space. |
| Proximity | The amount of distance or space between actors and the amount of space between actors and audience. |

#### Drama Technologies

**Costume:** the style or dress of a particular person, class, or period. A costume can be a particular style of [**clothing**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing) worn to portray the wearer as a [*character*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Character_%28arts%29) or type of character.

**Makeup:** intended to be applied to the human body for promoting attractiveness or altering the appearance without affecting the body’s structure or functions. Can enhance features of the character decided upon by the makeup artist.

**Lighting:** the deliberate use of [*light*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light) to achieve a practical or aesthetic effect. Lighting includes the use of both artificial lights chosen in the production and designed by the lighting designer.

**Properties (props):** an object that supports the production, often belonging to a character and revealing something about them.

**Set:** placed on the stage to create an environment for the production. The details communicate a certain environment, era, period, mood etc.

**Sound:** created by vibrations, the noises we hear in a production to create an effect. For example, a certain mood or atmosphere. Can incorporate a fade in or fade out, transitions, volumes, bright or dim light, atmospheric, moody, live, recorded, and amplified.

**Special effects:** the illusions or tricks of the eye used in the theatre or [*video game*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video_game) to simulate the imagined events in a[*story*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative) or [*virtual world*.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_world) (Often abbreviated as *SFX*.)

**Stage design:** specifically designed by a stage designer to support the director’s vision of the production. The scenic design sets and scenery that aim to fully immerse the viewer in the production.

**Technologies:** equipment that helps to create, present, explain, document, analyse, view, interpret, or learn about dramatic work (for example, puppets, masks, lighting, props, sounds, costumes, and recording equipment).