Introduction

What is drama?
Drama is much more than acting in a play or doing a role-play in class – it is a part of our daily lives. Whether you regularly include drama activities in your class or have never done them before, your classroom is already full of drama. Here are some examples:

- A teacher mimes the meaning of a new word for the children.
- A child pulls a face when asked to do an activity that they don’t like.
- Children mime the actions of a song, chant or poem.

The children in your class are already accomplished actors. The aim of this guide is to provide tools to help you use the natural acting ability of children. With a little preparation, drama activities can help your students take control of their learning, develop as individuals, and learn that English lessons can be both enjoyable and productive.

Macmillan Young Readers and drama
Reading isn’t just a receptive skill – it is also a productive one. By using his or her imagination, the reader brings the words on the page to life, using feelings, experiences and cultural background to build a unique picture in the mind. But in the classroom, this ‘bringing to life’ can be difficult to achieve. The struggle to understand the individual words – and sometimes the stress of having to read them out – can get in the way of fully understanding the story.

Drama offers a way of focusing on the meaning of the story as a whole: on the plot, the characters and their motivations, rather than on the specific words in each sentence. Drama activities greatly increase children’s enjoyment and understanding of the story. They also help children remember the words and structures that they have read.

Drama can be used in tandem with normal reading activities in the classroom. Traditional reading helps children prepare for drama, and drama activities help children get the most out of the story. This is particularly important for very young children, who have not yet mastered reading skills in their native language. For these children, reader-based lessons consist of storytelling and looking at pictures, rather than reading the words on the page. Drama is a natural extension of classroom storytelling. It helps reinforce the words and events of the story, and turns the story into a memorable and meaningful experience.

The stories in both Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers lend themselves perfectly to drama activities. The ‘speech bubble’ style of stories in Macmillan Children’s Readers provides learners with a ready-made drama script for the main characters, while the text above each illustration can be spoken by a narrator. The chants and poems in the Macmillan English Explorers are ideal for drama warm-up activities, while the longer texts in the higher levels of Macmillan English Explorers are easy to transform into longer plays. Many other drama activities can be based on the audio, the illustrations or the extra resources available with both Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers.
From short activities and role-plays to full costume plays and other drama projects, both series provide an ideal entry into classroom drama activities. In this guide, we will look at many of those activities. First let’s take a look in more detail at the Readers themselves.

**About Macmillan Young Readers**

Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers are specifically designed for young learners. Both series develop extensive reading skills through carefully graded, age-appropriate stories and topic-based factual pages.

Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers are written using high-frequency vocabulary – the most commonly used words for each age and language level. In addition, children are introduced to vocabulary that is specific to the topic of the reader. As far as possible, this new vocabulary is illustrated, explained in context, or in some cases included in a glossary.

Both Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers may be used as an in-class Reader or as part of a class library – to be borrowed individually or read in reading groups. Both series are also ideal for use at home. The Young Readers page on the Macmillan Young Learners website contains information to help parents read the books with their children: www.macmillanyounglearners.com/readers.

Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers are ideal for use in classroom drama activities. Teachers may use this guide to think about the drama activities that they would like to do, and then choose suitable Readers from both series. Equally, teachers who have already chosen a reader, or have one in mind, can use the guide to select and adapt suitable drama activities.

Before learning how to use Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers for drama activities, let’s take a quick look at the key features of each series.

**Macmillan English Explorers**

Macmillan English Explorers is an eight-level reading scheme designed with speakers of English as a second language (ESL) in mind. The Readers present a mix of original titles and adapted classic stories, such as fairy tales, myths and legends from around the world.
Underlying the *Macmillan English Explorers* series is the tried-and-tested methodology of the UK National Literacy framework – the extensive reading programme employed in British schools. *Macmillan English Explorers* adapts this programme to suit the needs of children learning a second language. This ensures that *Macmillan English Explorers* provides the perfect balance between exposure to real English and the support that non-native readers of English require.

Each Reader is illustrated in colour and contains one or more complete stories. The eight levels of *Macmillan English Explorers* are divided into three strands:

**Little Explorers** (Levels A and B) are for nursery children aged 4–5 who have not yet mastered reading in their native language. These Readers are designed for classroom or home-based storytelling. In addition to an entertaining story and full-page artwork, each Reader contains advice for parents, and a list of words and structures that appear in the book.

**Young Explorers** (Levels 1 and 2) are aimed at children aged 6–7 who are beginning to develop their reading skills. Depending on the title, *Young Explorers* may contain a list of words and structures, advice for teachers or parents, and factual text about a topic related to the story.

**Explorers** (Levels 3–6) are for readers aged 8–12 who are beginning to read more confidently. As the levels progress, cartoon-style text is replaced by longer continuous text to reflect the increasing ability and maturity of readers. Level 6 of *Explorers* also contains adapted literary classics, giving children a real taste of English literature. Each *Explorers* Reader includes advice for young readers, factual text about a topic related to the story, and information about the story’s author or source.

**Macmillan Explorers Phonics** are selected titles from *Little Explorers* A–B and *Young Explorers* 1–2 which contain activities based on the highly successful phonics approach to teaching basic reading skills. These Readers can be used alongside other *Macmillan English Explorers* and with any Macmillan pre-primary or primary course. The phonics approach to reading focuses on the relationships between letters, combinations of letters and sounds. Phonics is the recognized system for teaching reading in British primary schools, and is widely used by ESL and EFL institutions around the world.

The *Macmillan English Explorers* series is accompanied by a full range of support materials. Free downloadable audio, teacher’s notes, a class record sheet and an assessment pack for each title are available on the Macmillan English Explorers page of the Macmillan Young Learners website: [www.macmillanyounglearners.com/readers](http://www.macmillanyounglearners.com/readers). Overview teacher’s notes are also available for each level.
Macmillan Children’s Readers

Macmillan Children’s Readers is a six-level extensive reading series designed especially for primary EFL students. Macmillan Children’s Readers are carefully graded to use and reinforce the structures and vocabulary found in most primary EFL courses. As such, they can be used on their own to practise the skill of reading or alongside any primary course.

Each Reader is illustrated in colour and contains one complete story. The six levels of Macmillan Children’s Readers are divided into three strands:

- Fun stories designed to encourage younger children to read, such as The Frog and the Crocodile (Level 1).
- Stories that expose children to the culture of the English-speaking world, such as April Fool’s Day (Level 3), making reading informative as well as enjoyable.
- Titles that contain a mix of non-fiction and fiction, such as Great Inventions: Lost! (Level 6). Topic-based factual text is followed by a fictional story which continues the theme of the Reader, reinforcing the language and deepening children’s understanding of the topic.

As in Macmillan English Explorers, the stories in Macmillan Children’s Readers are a mix of original tales and adapted stories from around the world.

Each level of Macmillan Children’s Readers has been developed for a particular age group and level of English: from Level 1 (for readers aged 6–7) to Level 6 (for readers aged 11–12). As the series progresses, short chunks of text on the factual pages are replaced with longer passages, containing more information and more difficult structures.

Enjoyable activities at the end of each title in Macmillan Children’s Readers help children remember the topic, story and language that they have seen in the Reader. In addition, new words are highlighted in a picture dictionary (Levels 1–4) or a bilingual dictionary (Levels 5–6) at the end of each Reader.

As well as developing children’s literacy skills, Macmillan Children’s Readers reinforce the teaching of other school subjects and contribute to children’s world knowledge. As such, they are ideal for use in cross-curricular activities.

The Macmillan Children’s Readers series is accompanied by a full range of support materials. Free downloadable audio, teacher’s notes and worksheets are available for each level on the Macmillan Children’s Readers page of the Macmillan Young Learner’s website: www.macmillanyounglearners.com/readers.
How can Reader-based drama activities help my class?

There are many ways in which Reader-based drama activities can help your class – from developing children’s fluency and confidence to making English lessons more memorable and enjoyable. Let’s look at a few of the benefits of drama in the English classroom.

**Developing fluency**

Reader-based drama activities put meaning into the words on the page. When reading in class, children often focus exclusively on trying to answer questions – or trying to read out the individual words without stumbling over them. Attention is often on the language of each sentence, with little or no attention paid to the overall meaning. Drama activities encourage children to think about the words that they read, and understand both their meaning and the feelings of the characters in the story. This is a vital part of developing reading fluency in English.

**Building confidence**

The fear of making a mistake in English can stop children from wanting to speak. Reader-based drama activities where children have prepared lines, give everyone a chance to speak in front of their peers – something that they often do not feel confident enough to do. Because this is drama, children have the chance to ‘get into a role’ and be someone else. The words are being spoken by their characters in the Reader and not by themselves, and this takes the pressure off children personally if they make a mistake. Puppets can also be useful with younger children, as attention is similarly focused on the puppet rather than the child.

**Developing the whole child**

Inevitably, some children are more confident and more accurate users of English than others. The challenge for teachers is to avoid creating a classroom of motivated winners and demotivated losers (the children who make more mistakes, take longer to grasp things and often end up feeling frustrated). Drama activities redress this balance by providing everyone with the chance to demonstrate different skills. They also help to address the needs of children who learn in different ways. A child who doesn’t usually shine in English classes may be a fine actor, a great team leader, or a talented designer of masks, props, sets and costumes. By bringing out the varied skills of different children, drama allows everyone in the class to grow and be successful.

Reader-based drama activities also teach young children to understand the feelings, needs and motivations of characters in the story – and this can encourage them to appreciate the feelings of their peers in class. This is vital to the personal development of pre-primary children in particular. Pre-primary children are often the centre of attention at home, and when they begin their education they can find it difficult to share attention and respect the needs of others. These kinds of personal development messages are emphasized in the stories in the Little Explorers.

**Developing listening skills**

For young readers aged 4–5, who listen to stories rather than reading the words on the page, drama is an effective way of ensuring that children focus on the story. But drama is equally effective in developing listening skills in older children. Most drama activities consist of an active component (speaking) and a passive component (listening). Children need to listen carefully in order to speak...
Readers and drama in the primary classroom

and move at the right time, and not miss their cues. Drama also teaches children to respond to what is being said – verbally or through their body language. Without realizing it, children learn how to be effective listeners.

Audio for all of the stories in Macmillan English Explorers and Macmillan Children’s Readers is available on the Young Readers page of the Macmillan Young Learners website. All stories are recorded by native English speakers, and provide a good model of correct English pronunciation. It is often easier to understand text that is read out by a storyteller than to read it and understand it yourself. The storyteller’s use of pauses heightens awareness of punctuation, and pauses, stress and intonation help convey the meaning of the story. Students learn to recognize this stress and intonation, and listening helps them understand not only the spoken words, but also the unspoken emotions behind them.

Creating a purpose for reading

Many children are not used to reading in their first language, and in some cultures this can be a particular problem for boys. Most classes will contain children who have never been actively encouraged to read by their parents. For such children, enjoyable drama activities can provide the motivation to read. Drama activities also create a real purpose for reading: children need to really understand the story and the characters – and in the case of longer drama activities, they need to learn lines. Children who have enjoyed Reader-based drama activities may go on to read – and enjoy reading – more than before.

Creating real communication

Reader-based drama activities can help improve communication in the classroom. When children in a class know each other well, speaking activities that involve talking about everyday things such as what they like or dislike, or what they have done recently, can seem very artificial. Often there is no ‘information gap’ to bridge because the children already know the answers to the questions that they ask their classmates. For this reason, speaking tasks about children’s own world often finish very quickly.

In contrast, Readers create an alternative world with characters whose lives are often more interesting and varied than the children’s own. In order to prepare for drama activities, children have to discuss the plot of the Reader, and the characters’ actions and motivations. This brings up new information to discuss – and if different groups prepare different scenes for a drama activity, it creates a real information gap.

Fun, active classes

Drama activities help turn passive recipients of teaching into active participants in the lesson. They create a situation in which children are sharing information, making decisions and working together, rather than individually listening to the teacher. Drama activities create a non-threatening environment in which children can enjoy collaborating and expressing themselves. They are often memorable experiences for children – and anything that makes English lessons memorable and enjoyable will have real benefits.
The drama classroom

When introducing drama activities in class, both learners and teachers can face challenges. These may include:

- Getting used to new ways of working.
- Issues to do with confidence.
- External pressures from parents and school managers.
- Issues to do with classroom layout.

Let’s take a look at each of these issues in more detail.

New ways of working

Many children are used to being passive receptors in the classroom. Drama activities might be a completely new way of working for them, so it’s important to get everyone comfortable with taking a more active role in class.

If children don’t work in pairs or groups for other classroom activities, it will be difficult for them to suddenly switch to this way of working for drama activities. Slowly increase the amount of group and pair work that you normally do with children in class. They will soon get used to forming into groups or pairs. Children also need to get used to being assigned different roles, such as being a group spokesperson or being ‘interviewer’ and ‘famous person’ in an information gap pair work activity. After a time, this way of working will become natural. Without realizing it or being pushed, children will become more active in class.

Playing more games with children will help them to get used to working together in class. These can be flashcard games, warm-up games or games involving real objects such as boards and dice, blindfolds, objects in a bag, and so on. You will find many suggestions for games in the Teacher’s Books for all Macmillan primary English courses. Chants and songs are another great way to introduce a new atmosphere into the class, energize children and break down the barriers between children and teachers.

Confidence

If you aren’t used to doing drama activities in your classroom, it is very important to build your confidence. A lack of confidence can lead to problems, and a belief that drama is ‘too difficult for my class’ will almost certainly come true. The key to confidence is preparation. If you know that you and your children are well prepared, and you believe that an activity is going to work well, it probably will.

Being confident doesn’t mean being bossy and making all the decisions. In fact, being confident makes you more able to relax and step back. It’s very important to allow children to take control of the activity – intervening only when there’s a problem, and monitoring quietly when you see that things are going well.
Coping with external pressures

Parents who are used to a traditional, teacher-led classroom from their own school years may view drama activities as a waste of time. Similarly, school managers may be concerned about noise and discipline in the classroom. It is important to take these concerns seriously. Take time to explain what you are doing, how this will benefit children, and how you are in full control of the lesson. Drama activities often create noise in the classroom, but this doesn’t mean that the teacher has lost control. Point out that serious learning is taking place in the drama classroom. Research shows that at any age, our brains form more new connections when we are enjoying ourselves or doing something out of the ordinary.

Classroom layout

It is important to create a space for drama. This can be a temporary space, where classroom furniture is moved aside for drama activities, or a permanent corner of the classroom.

If your classroom is big enough, creating a dedicated ‘story corner’ for reading and drama activities is the ideal solution. This corner might have the following features:

- A carpet or soft plastic flooring
- Cushions for children sit on
- A large performance area in the middle, with enough room for performers to stand and move around easily
- A moveable screen which can be used to block off part of the performance area or hide props
- Enough space for all of your children to sit around the performance area in a semicircle (or circle, when the screen mentioned above isn’t needed). For safety reasons, seated children’s legs shouldn’t be too close to the performance area.

A story corner allows everyone to see what is going on, and it also changes the atmosphere in the classroom. Moving to the story corner signals a change of pace in the lesson and contributes to classroom management. When children are asked to sit in the story corner, they know what is expected of them.

If you don’t have room for a story corner, and your classroom is either small or full of desks, try pushing the desks against the walls so that you have a large space in the centre. It is much harder to tell stories and do drama with some children still sitting at their desks while others perform at the front of the class, as the listeners will be less focused, and not all will be able to see and hear what is going on. This can also make the performers more self-conscious.