

The characteristics and conventions of children stories



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In my first lesson on fairy tales, we read through some stories such as “ The Rainbow Fish” and “ Going on A Bear Hunt” where we examined stories studying the similarities and conventions of the stories, which eventually, we performed to Year 1’s. The most obvious characteristics that we learnt were:

1. Struggle between Protagonists and Antagonists
2. Royalty
3. Magic
4.

Repetition
5. In-animate objects coming to life
6. Good is triumphant
7.

Morals
8.

Beginning - “ Once upon a time...”
9. Ending - “ They all live happily ever after.”
10. Quests
While understanding the characteristics of fairy tales and children stories, we, collectively as a group, figured the conventions of the story where we learnt it followed The Narrative Theory.

Mime and The Narrative Theory
Mime was the first technique that we attempted this year. The majority of the class had little experience. While learning how to mime, we quickly understood that all our other features as an actor would have to be exaggerated and emphasised, which was an obstacle for some members of our class including me. In our first fairy tale mime from our memory, we mimed the fairy tale “ The Little Red Riding Hood.

” We had to do completely different methods of portraying emotions. Me, as the wolf, I had to walk slowly and use long, slow strides to distinctly show an evil character. Also, I had to use succinct facial expressions and clear, obvious movements to make a sinister appearance such as the stroking of your chin/beard in a menacing way, and always keeping your head down but your eyes are looking up as seen in figure 1. After doing my first mime

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performance, we learnt different skills and techniques that we should use when miming since we evaluated each other's performance. If the performance happens too quickly, the audience would miss crucial elements of the plot and be confused for most of the story, since there is no audio to guide them.

This was the error in my mime. The Narrative Theory is what storylines follow, where it being a fairy tale or a movie script. In this case, we are using Todorov's Narrative Theory. It occurs in 5 stages but it may contain multiple struggles and epiphanies.

Stage 1 - Equilibrium: The scene is set and the characters are introduced; everything is balanced. Our mime was shortened so the equilibrium began where Red Riding Hood was running along in the forest to visit her grandmother. Stage 2 - Disruption: This is where an event or a character is introduced to unsettle the equilibrium. We mimed this where Red Riding Hood is skipping along in the mime and the wolf jumps out and speak to Red, then to portray the sinister character, I (the wolf) stroked my chin which suggested the meticulous planning and deep thought of the wolf. Stage 3 - Epiphany/Recognition: The protagonist or main character realises something is wrong. The story's tension rises since here is where a quest usually begins.

This was where Red noticed the change in features in her grandmother. We mimed this quite quickly where in the scene before, the wolf quickly hid the grandmother in the closet and pretended to be her in bed but as Red Riding hood was inspecting the wolf; the wolf quickly attacked Red. Stage 4 -

Struggle/Attempt to restore Equilibrium: The protagonist and antagonist come face to face and a new equilibrium is reached where it typically is a happy ending. In our mime, this was where the wolf tried to eat Red Riding Hood and the struggle to defeat the wolf began, until the woodsman heard the noise. Again, we mimed this quickly so the desired effect wasn't portrayed correctly but when reviewing, this was corrected. Stage 5 - New Equilibrium Reached: The good defeats evil.

The wolf is killed by the woodsman, the Grandmother is rescued and they live happily ever after. Again due to the action, this was mimed quickly and emotion was lost due to fast un-exaggerated movements but this was eventually corrected. Key Stage 1 Storytelling and Interacting with the Children Key Stage 1 teachers tell their stories using varied voices and tones. They speak softly to keep the children's attention because the children wants to listen to the story and at the end of the story, they were literally an arm's span away their soft voice makes, therefore this was a good technique to keep the children's attention for our devised performance. When we interacted with the kids, we asked questions such as what they liked in stories and most of the responses were princesses, castles, happy endings and all the other characteristics of children stories since this is probably what they have been told for most of their lifetime.

This interaction had the biggest influence on all the decisions for our performance and acting techniques from this point to the final performance.

The Journey to The Final Performance We split into two groups and then we discussed the storyline and the concepts for the performance. Choosing

these concepts were the most important decision since we couldn't include <https://assignbuster.com/the-characteristics-and-conventions-of-children-stories/>

any death because most children's stories are happy. We couldn't include subtle actions or difficult language since the children would not understand which we learnt from the Key Stage 1 students. One decision that was made and was set in stone was the rhyming dialogue because after speaking with the students; this was an element they enjoyed. After making the storyline decision, one member in the group made the bare bones of the script which rhymed but to get all of the words to rhyme was the obstacle in this performance.

Then, the script was discussed and we spent a lot of sessions discussing the rhyme scheme as well as taking into account the difficulty of language and ideas but including opportunities for us actors to have a chance of exaggerating the play. It was eventually decided to simplify things; there would be a narrator because speech for actors was difficult to write since we had different accents and the words were pronounced differently. At the end of all our discussions, we decided on an ABAB rhyming pattern. That left no margin for error and improvisation so learning the exact words was extremely important. At our first and second rehearsal, we distinguished two major problems as actors with our performance; we lacked energy and we had no idea how our characters were connected because we were just reading the script like words off a paper rather than dialogue.

To get the energy flowing we did a Levels of Energy exercise, hot seating and Stanislavski's " Magic If" Levels of energy

Level 1 - In A Coma - This lying on the floor, doing absolutely nothing

Level 2 - Just Woke Up - Still low energy, but moving around slowly and lethargically

Level 3 - Alert - Normal level of energy; ready to do a task. Level 4 - Baby Falling Out Window - High

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alert; running around panicking; very active and friskyLevel 5 – Opera – Highest level of energy, putting 100% effort into whatever you are doing. Doing this exercise, we began at level 1 and reached level 5 but after we randomly went into different levels to vary our energy. Our level before was at level two but the level an actor is always supposed to be at is level 4, continuously alert and always on the edge.

We then did rehearsals with the required energy level but our dialogue was just words on paper and no feeling. Hot SeatingHot seating helps us to understand their personality as well as their relationships between characters by questioning the actor about their character while they are still in role. This was the most successful explorative strategy. Some characters such as the narrator didn't even know their place in the play. After the hot seating and the spontaneity of his answers, he created a three dimensional character.

The same followed suit for the witch in our play, and soon as she sat in the chair, she placed her hair over her face and kept looking at us as seen in figure 2 which gave her an ominous appearance and her mannerism completely changed the atmosphere. When it was my turn to do the hot seating, I learnt from the other members that everything was about spontaneity of the character. As soon as I sat in the chair, I turned into this surprisingly happy person that changed to mood of everyone. I was optimistic and when I was finished, everyone was in such as happy mood and myself, couldn't stop smiling. This made the biggest breakthrough in my character.

Stanislavski's " Magic If" In our final rehearsals, we lost some spontaneity and we forgot our emotions that we acquired in our hot seating, so we did the Magic If's. This exercise is we were given a situation, and we need to react how our characters would. In my case, I was given that I was at my best friend's wedding, but I forgot something important, so I chose the rings. I started off as happy as I could be, finalising that all my possessions were intact.

I used my knowledge of mime to exaggerate the actions but again, at the ending when I realised the rings were missing, my change of facial emotion and body movement went too quickly but my character emotions were refreshed in my mind. What I Learnt In the Levels of Energy exercise, I learnt about the different ways we act in normal everyday life and the energy and emotion output into the subconscious activities and through the levels of energy, it allowed me to understand and funnel the energy that you would have at a level 5 where everything is done to 100% into my final performance since my character was always optimistic and happy regardless of the circumstances. Hot seating, without a doubt, was the actual breakthrough moment in the performance for every character, where each individual transformed out of their " comfort zones" and into an alternate universe. When the emotions from the levels of energy was incorporated into this, each character developed where they had an entire backstory on their life and a three dimensional character was created. The emotions from this point onwards were not just instructions on a piece of paper but actual feelings that had an impact on the audience to make them feel every sentiment as if they were involved in the play.

The Stanislavski's " Magic If" method was a necessary technique that we needed to learn because after continuing the rehearsals over and over, the script lost its spontaneity and became words on a paper again so with this technique, it made us react as if we were the character but in a completely unfamiliar scene to the play's storyline which overall, helped recreate the spontaneity in actors. The Final Dress Rehearsal Costume Choice: I had to go with something that reflected my character but not stand out as much as my friends in the play, so I chose a white and blue outfit which suited my character perfectly. Prop Choice: We tried to minimise the amount of props used onstage as well as by the characters because the audience loses focus on the story and focuses on the props instead, so we only used a potion book for the quest, a cauldron to emphasise the witch's cave, a shoe of the princess and a piece of paper which had to be there since it was included in the script. Movement and Gestures: Based on the character, each movement and gesture was different.

In my character, I was always smiling and optimistic, the one to carry on when the going gets tough. All our movements had to be exaggerated as if we were miming to make the story obvious for the children. We strutted when we boldly walked into the witch's cave to save the princess; we elongated our arms as far as possible when walking through the forest as well as swimming through the river. Use of Voice: Using the Key Stage 1 teachers technique, we didn't want too soft so they can't hear us, but not too loud as well as keeping in our characters. When speaking amongst ourselves, we had to be loud since we were facing each other and not the audience but when speaking directly to the audience, I lowered my voice. We only used

different tones when we were tired and confused, since they play had to maintain a happy outlook.

Tableau: We didn't do a tableau as a group, but at the climax, when we said the potion to transform the witch, I would freeze that scene where the witch was crouched on the floor in defeat and weakness, the 3 friends stand proudly above the witch with arms akimbo, and the princess lies on the floor. On the frozen image, levels portray status and power in that scene, were we (friends) have more power and control over the witch.