

TEACH CHILDREN ENGLISH THROUGH DRAMA



4 STEPS TO GETTING STARTED

By Miranda Flynn Legge



Table of Contents

I like the idea of teaching - but.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Why Did I start Teaching English Through Drama?	4
Before We Teach Children, Let’s Try to Learn From Them	5
If You Think Teaching Children is simple, Think Again!	6
Failures Can be Turned Into Opportunities	7
The Turning Point	8
Why Share Secrets of Success?	8
Four steps to getting started	9
Tip 1 - Warm-up games	10
Tip 2 - Clear classroom rules.....	14
Tip 3 - Teambuilding builds confidence.....	16
Tip 4 - Lesson Planning	20
Conclusions.....	25
Who are the training courses for?.....	26

2017 © Miranda Flynn Legge
[All Rights Reserved](#)

This book or any portion thereof
May not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever
Without the express permission of the publisher
.....

Illustrations: Galih Winduadi



I like the idea of teaching - but...

People often say to me, “I’d love to do what you do, but I have no idea where to start! I’m not an actor. I’m not a native speaker. What is a drama game? What do I teach a four-year-old? How long should a lesson be? How do I keep children engaged?”

Whether you are an experienced English teacher or completely new to the profession, the idea of setting up your first English theatre class can initially seem overwhelming; the enthusiasm is there but not knowing the simple practicalities of how to get started is holding you back.

The good news is there is someone out there who already does it, has made a career out of it, and can share with you her teaching experience and secrets to make you feel more confident in trying it for yourself.





Introduction

I'm Miranda Flynn Legge. I'm a professional actress and English teacher, and I specialise in teaching children English through acting and drama games.

I first started incorporating in my English lessons "acting techniques" that I learnt from some wonderfully creative school teachers growing up in the UK. I also used the professional training I received at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London during the early 1990s.

I started engaging **theatrically** with children in my lessons by adapting funny facial expressions to convey emotions for the children to imitate. I also included movement activities that had everyone, including myself, crawling on the floor under an enormous colourful parachute pretending to be farm animals or pirates; wizards or witches. Sometimes, I would bring to class a prop box with objects, masks and costumes to accompany story-telling time, giving the children the opportunity to dress up and interpret different characters.

Why Did I start Teaching English Through Drama?

I realised early on in my career that relying on a traditional book-based teaching curriculum and mechanical repetition for reinforcement and review was a very limiting approach. It didn't take into consideration children's different learning styles and preferences, and above all, it wasn't getting them excited about communicating in English.

It was necessary that I find the key to create an original classroom setting where everyone would feel passionate about English learning and not be shy or embarrassed about expressing themselves vocally.

So, I tried to put myself in their shoes and see the world from their imaginative, playful viewpoints to learn which learning styles children favoured most.



Before We Teach Children, Let's Try to Learn From Them

- **Active Play**

I realised that if children were at school all day sitting at a desk, I couldn't possibly expect them to behave for another hour in my English class without them getting restless and fidgety. They needed to release their pent-up energy and move around. So, I needed to find a teaching style that could help them learn by being **physical and active**.

- **Vocalisation**

It also came to my notice that conventional English teaching styles included lots of textbook-orientated activities, drawing and cartoon watching, which didn't encourage enough speaking interaction or practice. I needed to find a solution for making English learning predominantly vocal.

- **Body Language**

I observed that the children were naturally chatty and communicative in their native language before each lesson, but as soon as they entered the classroom, they froze up. I knew I needed to find different outlets for them to communicate through; not only through their voice, but using **their whole body and facial expressions**.

- **Picture Cards and Action Songs**

How could English vocabulary, grammatical structures and pronunciation be introduced to the children without boring them if they couldn't read or write? Integrating picture card games and action songs seemed a perfect idea to help the children learn and memorise new vocabulary in a natural and fun way, giving plenty of opportunities for practice and repetition.



- **Role-play**

Storytelling in English often became boring for the children because of its over-complicated language structures. However, the way the children's eyes lit up with excitement and curiosity every time I brought a costume or prop to class, helped me realise how stories could be brought to life by interpreting the characters and expressing their emotions.

- **Puppet Engagement**

One day in class, I introduced an English teaching assistant, in the form of a character puppet called Alex. I dressed him up in my son's baby clothes and gave personal details about him, his family, his likes and dislikes, and I immediately saw how mesmerised the children were by him. Often, even the shyest or most reluctant of the children would get excited and hug and kiss him and speak to him in English! Puppets became a great source for encouraging children to open and come out of their shell.

[If You Think Teaching Children is simple, Think Again!](#)

If you like the idea of working with children and think that you can simply improvise teaching English, think again!

Over the past 20 years, I have taught adults, teenagers and children. By far, children are the most challenging, demanding and at times simply exasperating learners I have ever had. However, they have also given me the most rewarding times of my teaching career. I am still moved to tears every time I see a young child get excited about performing in English on stage in front of hundreds of people or ex-students who have decided to further their studies in English in higher education.

The great thing about teaching children is that there is never a dull moment; they force you to be kind, generous, and patient and to give the best of yourself every



day. They love it when you play, sing and laugh with them. Children make you feel you are an important part of their lives, and you are! If your English teachings have a positive impact on them, they'll love language learning for the rest of their lives!

Failures Can be Turned Into Opportunities

I set up my own Kids' English Theatre courses while I was on maternity leave. I had extra time on my hands, and I wanted to use that opportunity to see if I could make my courses work properly.

Due to my lack of adequate funding to set up my own language school or to publicise my courses, I had to persuade some Italian friends to lend me their three young children for an hour each week after school to test-drive my new Kids' English Theatre after-school programme.

At the beginning, some lessons worked quite well. I included lots of drama elements and songs children loved, but many games weren't age or level appropriate. They were over-complicated and confusing for them to play and some didn't combine enough English language learning in them. They were simply patch-worked together without any didactic continuity to them. The result caused the children to feel muddled and unable to complete the exercises successfully, making them feel like they had failed.

Their self-confidence communicating in English was diminishing rather than growing.

I came home after sessions desperate, feeling the lesson was a flop. The children weren't learning enough English, they were disinterested, unfocused or rampaging around the class out of control. It was sometimes a nightmare!

I realised I couldn't simply improvise my lessons; I needed to **organise and plan them carefully**. I therefore started researching drama resources not only for their fun factor, but how they could be adapted specifically to teaching English.



It wasn't easy to begin with. There were few resources available at that time, but I did find some English teaching resource books for teachers. I also discovered some circle-time activities and children's dance and role-play books, all of which I tried to adapt and tie into teaching concrete simple English concepts such as animals, family, food, and numbers that children could learn easily,

Sourcing and adapting new materials and lesson planning was very time-consuming, and hours were spent preparing a single lesson not knowing if it would work successfully in class or not. It was a lot of trial and error.

The Turning Point

Slowly, despite the difficulties, my lesson planning efforts paid off. My lessons were more controlled and ran more smoothly. Above all, the children were enjoying themselves and started making fast progress. Parents also saw the enthusiasm and improvements their children were making, so they started mentioning my courses to other parents and, as word-of-mouth got out, my courses started growing from strength to strength. Since then, I have taught hundreds of children, and I currently have waiting lists of families wanting to join my courses.

Why Share Secrets of Success?

When I look back now, I wish I would have had a guide to show me the ropes in those early days and tell me where I was making all my mistakes. I would have felt so much more confident, and I'm sure I would have saved a lot of time and sleepless nights.

This is the reason I am sharing with you my teaching experience: to prevent you from making the same same unnecessary, time-wasting mistakes I made and to prevent you from experiencing the setbacks. The following four basic but fundamental steps are for beginner teachers. They are aimed at giving you a head-



start in organising your first drama and English lessons. They are practical solutions so you can apply and practice them straight away, even from your home, making your teaching a fun, enjoyable and educational experience for everyone.

[Four steps to getting started](#)

The following tips are based on my own teaching experience. They are aimed at giving simple, practical solutions on how to:

- Break the ice and open children up to the idea of working with theatre and active language learning
- Manage a new class
- Build positive group co-operation
- Plan lessons constructively
- Keep young learners motivated and focused and learning English to the best of their abilities.

For the purpose of this guide, I have included suggestions for groups of older children from 6-10 years of age.

The drama activities in this resource book are based on traditional drama games and children's party/playground games that I have used and adapted in my English lessons over the years.

The following practices have all been tried and tested hundreds of times.



Tip 1 - Warm-up games

When you start your first lesson with a group of children, try and avoid presenting them with a script on their first day and don't expect them to act in English straight away. This is a sure way to give a child complete stage fright (in particular the shyer children), and they'll be put off coming back to your lesson again.

Successful drama and English education is not just about the end product of a performance. It is more about the journey a child takes in exploring new ways of communicating in English using their whole bodies and voices. This path of discovery, over time, will gradually help them build their self-esteem and love of language learning, hopefully forever. So, don't feel pressured to "put on a show" for a while.

So, where do you start?

Start by "breaking the ice" and creating a friendly, playful and pressure-free environment, where children won't feel embarrassed or afraid to participate, open up and try new things.

When children feel happy, relaxed and safe, they start to trust their surroundings, and this is when they'll start to open up, work willingly in a group and express themselves freely.

To break the ice and help build a positive group atmosphere, always start with warmup games.

What is a warm-up game?

Warmup games are fun, and they help a new group get to know one another. Since they are simple yet engaging, they encourage even the shyest of children, and those with very limited language learning, to feel comfortable participating and connecting with one another in a group setting.



First steps to introduce drama games

- Choose a game that is age and level appropriate for your group.
- Don't choose exercises that can cause embarrassment. Make your instructions simple and easy for everyone to understand. If children find the instructions too difficult, to save time, explain in their native language.
- Show enthusiasm and participate in the activities and interact positively with children.
- If something is not working, it's not the end of the world. Don't drag it out till the end; simply move on to the next game.
- Never force a child to participate if they don't want to play a game. Let them sit and watch until they are ready to join in.
- Don't overplay an activity. Even if a game is working well, set a time limit and finish it while children are still enjoying it.

In my [Kids English Theatre](http://www.kidsenglishtheatre.com) course, I introduce and practice with all participants a multitude of games and exercises. Here is an example a warmup:

Islands and Sharks

This game frees children up and helps them connect and work together with children they have never met before.

Level: All

Age group: 6+

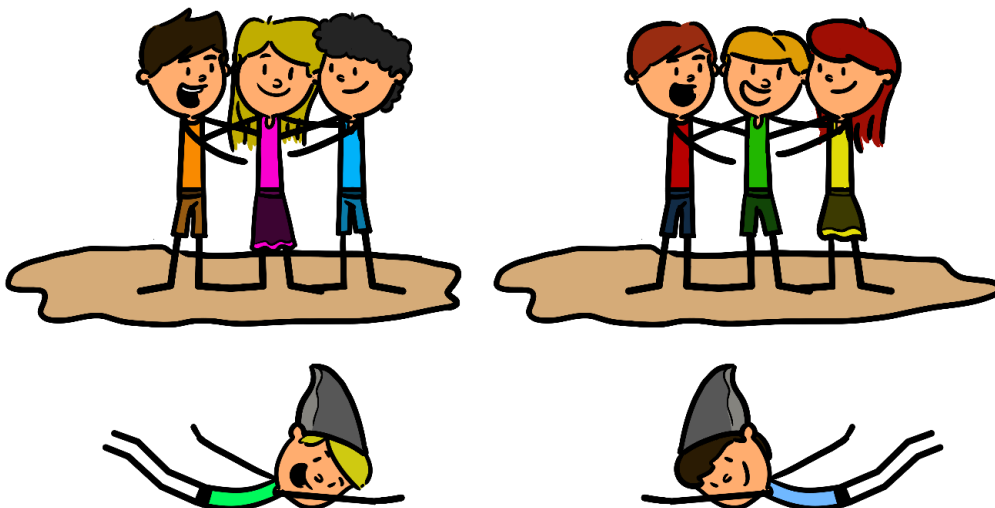
Time: 5 mins

Aims: This is a useful game to play at the start of a new class. It helps children collaborate as a group and encourages counting practice.

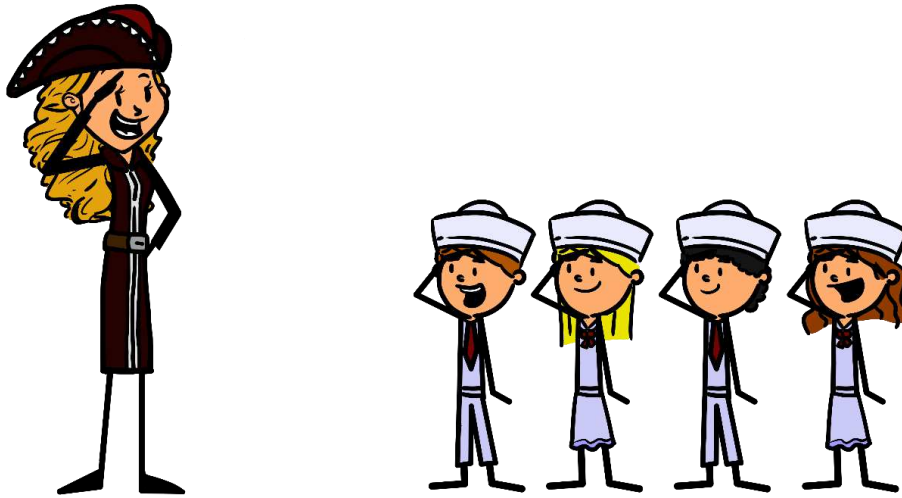
Instructions:

Call out a number, for example “two,” and get the class to form “islands,” groups of children that make up that exact number. Start with a pair and then increase the number. Each time children must form an island counting in English to check they are grouped in the correct number.

If there are not enough children to make up an island/group, the extra children must jump into the sea (lie on the floor and pretend to swim).



Captain Says



A physical theatre warmup; an alternate to Simon Says.

Level: All

Age group: 6+

Time: 5-10 mins

Aims: To introduce directions, action verbs and “sea” vocabulary

All the children stand in a space around the room. The teacher stands in front and pre-teaches the new vocabulary by miming the action that corresponds with each word. Exaggerate the actions, pull funny faces and encourage everyone to copy you. Gradually, add more vocabulary and as children become familiar with the actions, you can subsequently only call the words. The fun starts as you call out the words quicker and quicker.

Swim: (mime action) make swimming movements

Pirates: stand on one leg and cover one eye

All aboard: come to the centre and make a circle holding hands

Captain’s coming: everyone makes a straight line and salutes

Jellyfish: shake the body

Crabs: with your hands on the floor, walk sideways

Shark: find a friend, hug them, and shout HELP!

Left: run to left side of room and touch the wall

Right: run to right side of room and touch the wall



Front: run forward and touch the wall

Back: run back and touch the wall

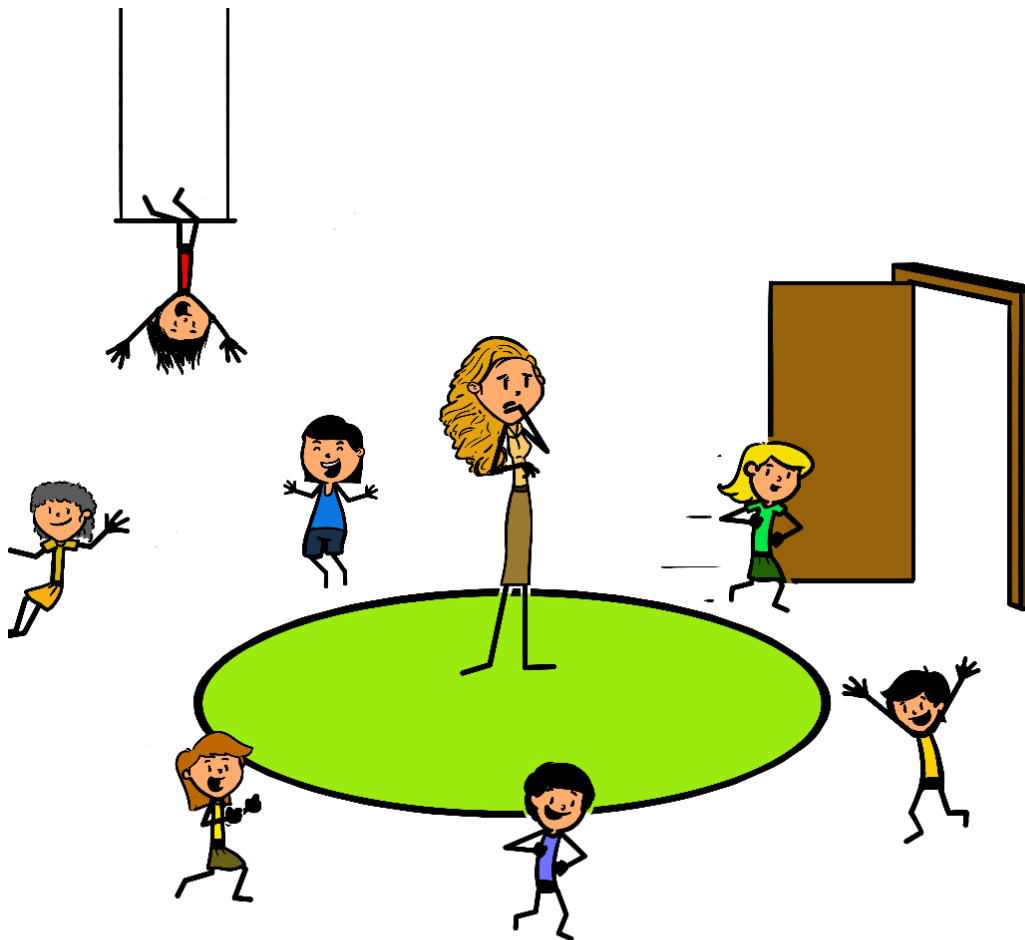
Clean: scrub the floor

Eat: sit and pretend to eat a sandwich

Drink: sit and pretend to drink

Tip 2 - Clear classroom rules

Drama activities work well in groups and can be enormous fun for everyone, but as with any group activity, it has to be structured fun to work successfully. Here are some tips to ensure the smooth-running of your lessons and avoid chaotic, out-of-control classrooms or children hurting themselves.





Help create a positive and cooperative group atmosphere by setting some basic classroom rules, making it clear from the start how you expect children to behave in your class.

Examples of basic classroom rules:

- ✓ Try to go to the bathroom before class.
- ✓ Always listen carefully and follow the rules of any game or activity.
- ✓ Always raise your hand and wait to be invited before speaking.
- ✓ Always respect your classmates and never deliberately hurt someone else (no wrestling matches, teasing, name-calling, etc.).
- ✓ Acting is all about team work, so be considerate and generous with each other.

Here are some tips for the teacher to keep in mind:

- ✓ Work in a clear open space to enable children to be move around freely without risking hurting themselves.
- ✓ Encourage and praise everyone as often as possible; it's not important to have perfect grammar or pronunciation. It's all about giving it a try.
- ✓ Introduce motivation-awards, for example, stickers, badges or crowns, to be given at the end of the lesson for children who have done their best in following the classroom rules.
- ✓ Motivate children by choosing the most well-behaved to carry out special tasks.



Tip 3 - Teambuilding builds confidence

Every new group of children will be varied. Personalities range as do ages, levels of ability and preferred learning styles. Some will be naturally sociable and extroverted and care-free about expressing themselves in English in front of an audience, while others will be shy and reluctant to speak for fear of making a mistake or looking foolish.

It isn't easy making sure that every child learns or practices new language collectively in a group setting.

Teambuilding games teach children valuable skills like listening, cooperation and concentration while also allowing them to develop their imaginations and build their confidence in learning English. Here are some tips on getting started:

- ✓ Organise games and activities in a circle. This will favour group collaboration and help children focus their energies. It will also enable you to engage eye contact and make sure that everyone follows your instructions and what you are doing.

- ✓ Singing bridges the gap with speaking. By singing in a group/chorus, you give everyone (even less-confident learners) the opportunity to have fun, to practice new vocabulary and pronunciation and to get a general sense of the musicality of the language within the safety of fellow company. Repeating songs will gradually build their confidence in standing in front of an audience and making the step to talking in English much easier.

- ✓ Try and avoid allowing young children to work in pairs until they are mature enough to work unattended. Young children can get distracted easily by fellow classmates or become over excited. A straightforward pair exercise that works perfectly with adults can often turn into complete chaos when played with younger groups.

My [teacher training courses](#), introduce and practice a multitude of games and exercises. Here are just a few examples:

Copy My Name

This activity is a good introductory listening activity. It also helps children verbalise simple presentation phrases using their bodies in imaginative ways.

Level: Beginner

Age group: 6+

Time: 10 mins

Aims: Personal introductions using "My name is..."

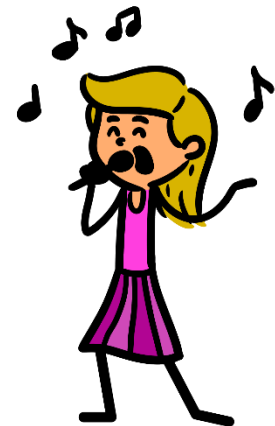
Get children to stand in a large circle. First give an example by introducing yourself: "My name is Miranda." Say it in a big voice and at the same time, step into the centre of the circle and make a giant exaggerated movement or gesture to accompany your name.

Encourage each child to express themselves with their gestures: skipping, jumping, whooshing, swinging arms, one-legged hops, tiptoe dancing, elephant stomps, funny faces, high-pitched squeaky voices, low bear-like grumbles, a soldier saluting, a ballerina curtsying...anything goes.

Meanwhile, ask the other children to observe carefully

and then try and repeat in

unison the same movement and name. Always try and give an initial example yourself, as children are a lot more willing to try new things out once they see you ready dive in and enjoy yourself.



Hungry Monster

This is another good concentration game for practicing classmates' names

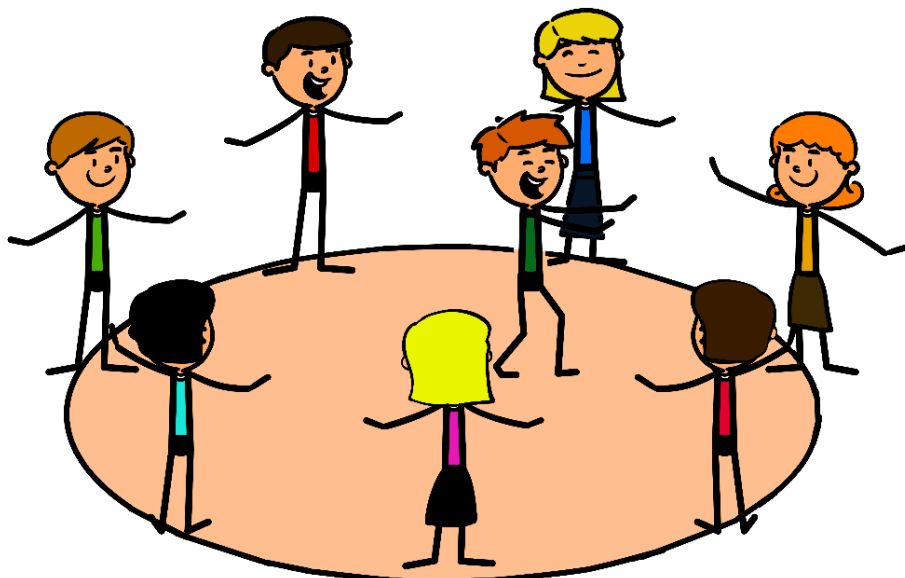
Level: Beginner

Age group: 6+

Time: 5 mins

Aims: To practice vocabulary "I want to eat you!"

Have the children form a circle and choose one child to be the Hungry Monster. The Hungry Monster points to a child, calls out his/her name and starts walking slowly towards him/her adopting a scary monster walk repeating the phrase "I want to eat... Maria!" Maria can save herself from being eaten by pointing to another child, calling out his name and saying "I want to eat... Tommaso!" The Hungry Monster exchanges places with Maria who, in turn, becomes the Hungry Monster and walks towards Tommaso. Repeat the game a few times until children become more familiar with each other's names and everyone has had a turn playing the Hungry Monster



Body Shapes

A teamwork, listening concentration game

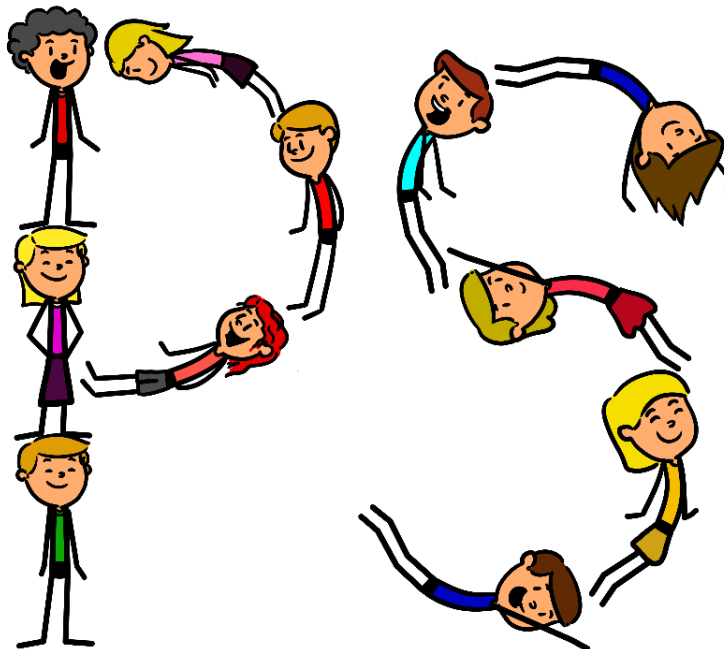
Level: Beginner

Age group: 7+

Time: 10 mins

Aims: To recognise and practice shapes and forms

Draw various large shapes or letters on some coloured paper, for example, a square, circle, oval, triangle, diamond, the letter "P", "B", "S" etc. Then familiarise the children with the name of each shape or letter by showing the diagrams. Instruct the children to work together to form each shape as a team using their bodies, either standing up or lying down. They mustn't talk but work as a silent group cooperating in unison.





Tip 4 - Lesson Planning

- The key words to all your lessons are **variation and organisation**. You need to plan and write down each lesson in advance and make a list of all the activities you want to cover during the lesson and the time limit for each one. Try not to improvise during the lesson because it will just come across as a patch-work mix of games with no clear educational value.
- Decide which **language vocabulary and lexis** you want to introduce or practice in each lesson, for example, vegetables, animals, colours, etc. You could even choose a general theme to explore over a period of a few weeks, for example, at the doctor's office, at the restaurant, etc.
- Based on the language topic, choose which games, songs and **activities you can comprehensively tie in to accompany** it. For example, a song about the body and aches and pains for the doctor vocabulary. Or role-play at the restaurant for the food vocabulary.
- **Length**. Be careful to frequently **change activities every 5-10 minutes**: by doing so you'll keep the pace and energy of your lessons elevated, you'll expose children to more English and most importantly, you'll prevent them from getting bored and fidgety.

Remember, children have short attention spans and can become easily distracted. So, it's important to try and stimulate and maintain a child's interest by choosing different activities you can alternate frequently and which focus and complement different **learning styles** and preferences.

- **Be well prepared**. Practice all your games and songs before your lesson. If you forget the rules of a game or the lyrics of a song, you will confuse the children and your lesson will flop.



- **Control Energy.** You may think a game or activity is ideal but try and observe how children relate to it. You can tell by checking their energy levels. If you see that children start becoming restless and unfocused, it's a sign they've had enough. In this case, try shaking things up by doing a physical activity, a drama/teambuilding game or role-play; this will help them release their energies and get their creative juices flowing.
- The same can be applied if you see that energy levels are peaking and children start getting too over-excited. This clearly signals it is time to bring the energy level down. Try introducing some "coolers": a circle game using flashcards/props, a storytelling activity, a puppet play or sit-down song/chant/poem.

Understanding children's learning abilities

The most important tip, to bring the best out of children, is to try and nurture their natural way of learning. The trick is realising that not every student learns in the same way. Research shows us; some students learn better through physical activities, while others are most engaged by songs. Others are far more visual and really grasp the concepts best when they see images or feel objects, while some students become most engaged during speaking activities, such as during story time and role-plays.

By understanding *learning styles*, you will find it easier to select appropriate *multisensory* drama activities to satisfy everyone's different preferences.

I organized this information into the chart below. It breaks learning styles into four categories: physical, aural, visual and verbal.

Different learning Styles		Exercise Type
Physical children who favour learning using their bodies		Movement, teambuilding games and role-playing
Aural children who are most engaged learning through music and songs		Action songs, rhymes, chants, beats, poems and raps
Visual children who prefer learning using images		Language games using flashcards real objects, theatre props and puppet engagement (suitable also for children who are too young to read and write)
Verbal children who grasp learning concepts through dialogue		Concentration language games, storytelling, poems, skits and plays

An example of a high energy group activity:

Mime the Action Verb

This is a simple but fun way for children to practise action verbs through a guessing game using mime.

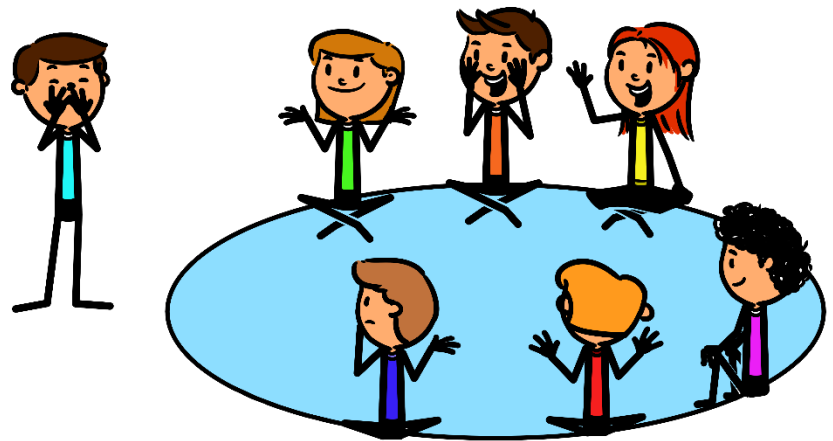
Level: All

Age group: 7+

Time: 15 mins

Aims: To introduce and practice action verbs

Make or print flashcards with a picture of a different action on each one. Actions could include run, jump, push, pull, read, write, brush your teeth, brush your hair, wash your hands, sleep, listen, talk, open, close, laugh, stand up, sit down.



Form a circle and pre-teach the vocabulary by calling out each word and miming the action that accompanies it. Exaggerate your actions, be bold and clear and encourage the children to copy you. This way, children use different senses to learn new vocabulary and have fun.

After repeating a few times, split the group into teams.

Choose a child to come forward and give him the first card. They mime the action on the card. The group has to guess what the mime is by calling out, the verb. If they guess correctly, their team wins a point. Take it in turns calling children forward to mime the action and at the end of the game the team with the most points wins.

An example of a concentration activity:

Random Counting

An ideal concentration game to focus energy, improve listening skills and encourage teambuilding.

Level: Beginner

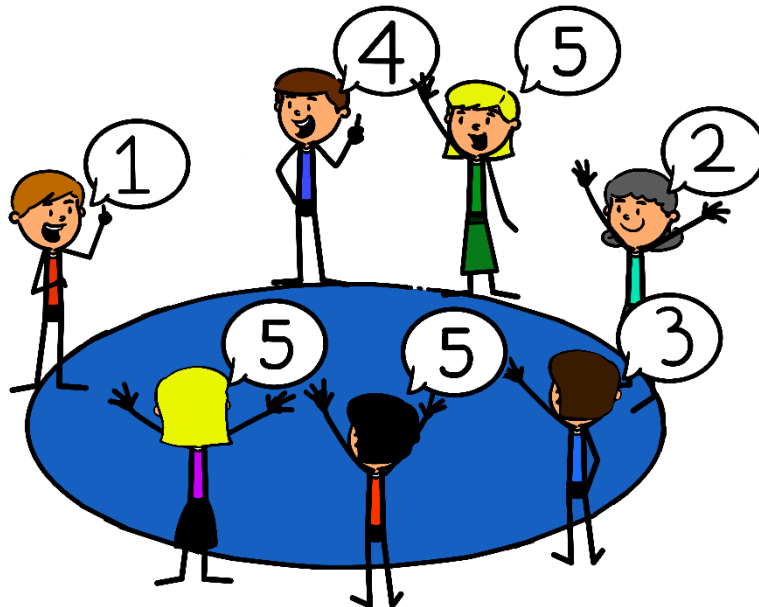
Age group: 7+

Time: 10 mins

Aims: To practice counting 1-20

Children sit/stand in a circle and count from 1-20. They can speak only one at a time. If two or more children speak at the same time, the count ends and they have to start again from 1. To slow the game down and help children concentrate and listen carefully, have everyone either close their eyes and call out a number or sit down and only jump up on their feet as they call out a number.

With older children try also: letters of the alphabet, days of the week or months of the year





- **Finish the lesson always on a high note** with an energy-releasing game and goodbye song. This way, no matter how the lesson goes, good or bad, children will leave the classroom smiling, feeling positive and satisfied they have accomplished something.
- Finally, try and always transmit a positive, upbeat energy. When you first start teaching children English through theatre, **what** you teach them is equally important as **how** you teach. Learning how to be a **good** communicator is fundamental for any new teacher. Smile, laugh, make fun of yourself, show enthusiasm and participate in the activities and interact positively with children. In return, they will only want you as their English teacher.

Conclusions

My theatre experience has helped me resolve lots of difficult situations in teaching children English over the years, I've learnt a fundamental method that has shown me how best to relate to young learners and how they learn best through active play. I've also learnt how to publicise my courses effectively, communicate with parents and families and resolve all the general ups and downs of running English theatre courses.

Teaching has not only brought me enormous joy and satisfaction, but it has also given me freedom and flexibility to dedicate time to my growing family and other interests. There is such a constant high demand for English theatre teachers, and since the possibilities are endless, I felt passionate about sharing my methods and experiences to allow others to be successful too.



Who are the training courses for?

The [Kids English Theatre](http://www.kidsenglishtheatre.com) Teacher Training courses are hard work and **not** necessarily suitable for everyone to participate. I don't recommend it for:

- People looking for simple and stable work
- People who have limited patience
- Individuals who have don't have a team spirit and have difficulty socialising and collaborating with others
- People who don't have an advanced level in English

Remember, to be able to teach children English, you must know English!

The Kids English Teacher Training Workshops are for people who:

- Love the idea of working with children
- Can speak English at an advanced level
- Are sociable, friendly and outgoing
- Are creative and open-minded

If you have some of the above characteristics, you'll find that by following my teaching tips, you will have a head-start to open up new opportunities. Don't worry if you come up against difficulties; you can always meet up and exchange ideas and opinions with me and other fellow teachers on Facebook. To discover more about exploring your understanding of the practicalities of teaching children English through drama, come and find us on <https://www.facebook.com/KidsEnglishTheatre/> or visit my website <http://www.kidsenglishtheatre.com/>

2017 © Miranda Flynn Legge

All Rights Reserved

This book or any portion thereof
May not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever
Without the express permission of the publisher

.....

Illustrations: Galih Winduadi



About the author

Miranda Flynn Legge is a professional actress and graduate from The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. She is an accredited English language teacher with a CELTA Certificate from Cambridge University and founder of the Kids English Theatre Method.

In 1994, Miranda moved to Italy after winning a scholarship from the Prince's Trust and co-founded an International Theatre Company in Florence. She has been teaching English through Drama to young children, adults, and teachers for over 25 years and is a mother to a bilingual child.

Over the years, Miranda has seen the benefits drama and music-based activities offer children learning English. In 2004, she utilized her experience and started "Teatro Inglese Per Bambini" after-school programme for children ages 4 to 10, aimed at boosting child development in English as a Second Language (ESL), using theatre-based techniques.

In 2017, Miranda opened The Kids English Teacher Training Academy, designed specifically for professional and non-professional teachers of English, and provides hundreds of simple step-by-step practical ideas on how to teach young learners successfully through theatre, action songs, fun, and games.

www.kidsenglishtheatre.com

www.teatroinglese.it

www.facebook.com/KidsEnglishTheatre/