



Acting UP!

Introduce a little drama to your setting with help from Plop the Barn Owl and the Blunderbus Theatre Company...

Drama is an incredibly useful educational tool. It can help to develop children's communication skills and aspects of human behaviour, as well as relationships that can improve their social health. This is as true in the early years as it is once children make the step up to primary school.

Everyone who works with young children will know that the amount of time for which they can focus is finite. In their world, everything is new and exciting, and there is always something else to explore or learn. As such drama sessions need to appeal to as many senses as possible, so that children find them fun and interesting, and they shouldn't be overly long. If the session is interactive and well-thought-out, it only needs to be 20 minutes long – pre-school children will gain just as much from that as a longer session because they will have thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience, and will look forward to returning to it.

This does mean that to get the most out of drama in the early years a bit of planning and forethought is required. To get you started, here are a few suggestions based on the story behind the latest Blunderbus production, *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark*, which show how you can go about structuring an exciting and educational session in your setting.

Getting your act together

You'll likely have come across *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark*, but in case you haven't, it is a funny, gentle and reassuring tale written especially for young children (and grown-ups who still sleep with the light on!) about a Barn Owl called Plop and the adventures he has as he comes to terms with

his fear of the night time.

The story's central theme is one of learning to overcome your fears with support and love. It takes a fundamental challenge that most children will relate to, and helps them identify that if you learn to understand what you are afraid of, the fear goes away. It provides opportunities for children to be able to express their feelings as they empathise with Plop's dilemma and they see through the story, as Plop learns more, that he becomes more confident and grows up. It is an ideal story to use with your budding actors and actresses, but the following tips hold true no matter what you take as your theme.

1 Objectives

Drama-based activities often face the accusation that they have little or no educational purpose. At worst they can be seen as merely a time when the children involved can run around making a lot of noise. Such sessions can offer far more, of course, but it is vital that they have clear objectives to avoid this happening. (That doesn't mean that your children can't run around and make lots of noise – in fact, there are times that you should positively encourage it! – but when they do there should be a reason behind it.)

TRY: The objective of a drama session based on *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark* for your children could be looking at the SEAL theme of 'Being me'. For example, your goal could be that everyone in your group is able to identify one thing that they can learn to enjoy about the night time, in the same way that Plop does in the story.



2. Narrative

It helps to establish a clear narrative for your session to keep the children engaged – and every

good story needs to have a clear beginning, middle and end! Having a narrative will also help you work out exactly what you want to achieve, the importance of which is highlighted above.

From the beginning, you should also try to create clearly defined characters for both yourself (and any other members of staff involved) and the children, and to set an environment where the narrative begins. The middle of the story needs to have a conflict, which can allow characters to move from one setting to another whilst the end should offer a resolution and highlight the characters' success in achieving it.

TRY: For example, Big Owl welcomes all the little owls into his flying class, the problem is they can't fly! What can they do to get themselves airborne? Once the owls try different solutions to the problem, they finally settle upon an idea that helps them take to the skies.

Interaction & involvement

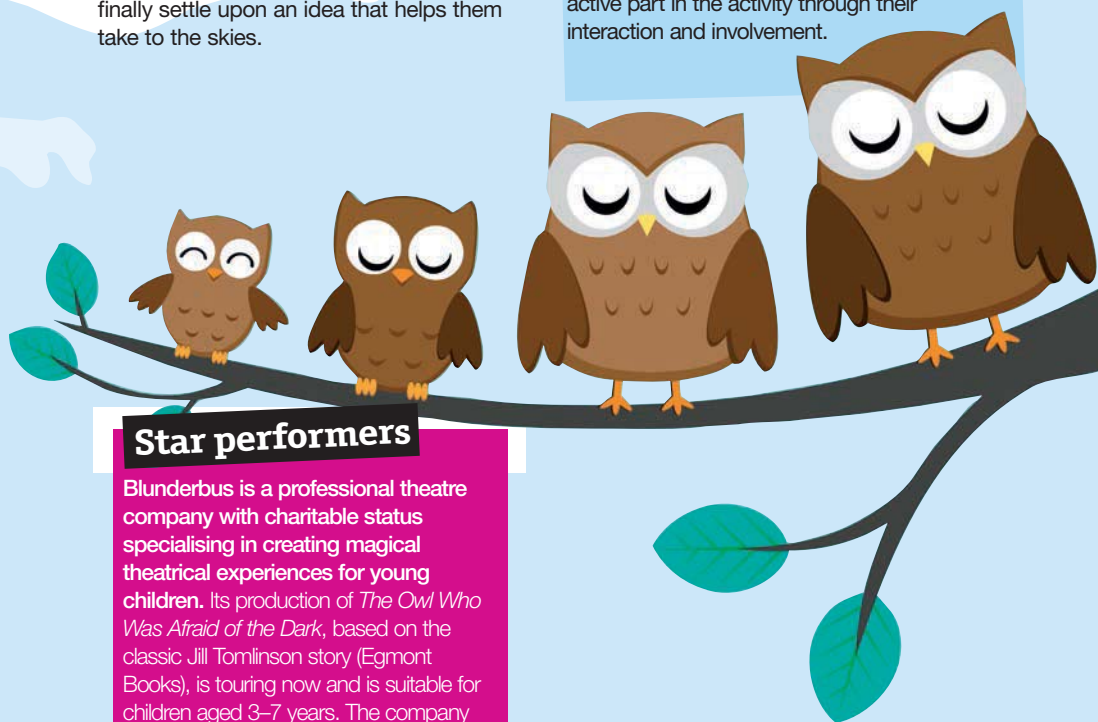
3.

Within the narrative you decide upon there needs to be a flexibility or freedom for the children to express

themselves. This allows the children to create their own goals and objectives, as well as giving them the responsibility to lead aspects of their own learning. At Blunderbus, we define these moments as interaction and involvement.

Interaction and involvement requires the members of staff leading the activity to be confident enough to allow the children to offer suggestions which may change the course of the narrative – or even change the narrative completely. This may present new objectives but don't forget the previous ones!

TRY: If you wanted to create an environment in which you might find owls, you could ask the children to describe their concepts of the night time. For example, a child might suggest a tree made of stars – in this case, you could try to physically create this starry tree and possibly learn more about it by collaboratively creating a new narrative about where the tree came from. With this the children would have taken a much more active part in the activity through their interaction and involvement.



Star performers

Blunderbus is a professional theatre company with charitable status specialising in creating magical theatrical experiences for young children. Its production of *The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark*, based on the classic Jill Tomlinson story (Egmont Books), is touring now and is suitable for children aged 3–7 years. The company also provides bespoke creative workshops and a complimentary teacher's pack in support of the production, full of educational activities and games, to help extend children's enjoyment and learning.

For more information about arranging for Plopp to visit your nursery, pre-school or school and the workshops on offer, visit blunderbus.co.uk, email admin@blunderbus.co.uk or call 01636 678 900.

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