

# 11. DRAMATIC PLAY

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Dramatic play is a spontaneous, self-directed activity through which children test, clarify, and increase their understanding of themselves and their world. Although the details of children's play vary in different parts of the world and in different cultures, the themes of their play are similar. In their play, children recreate places and scenes that are familiar to them, imitate the behaviors of family members, and appropriate the roles of various people in their communities. They reproduce the world as they understand it or as it confuses or frightens them.

From earliest childhood, children imitate the sounds they hear and activities they see. Delighting in make-believe, children respond to new situations through movement and sound. In short, they play. This play, when encouraged, develops into drama: an art form, a socializing activity, and a way of learning.

In *Understanding Children's Play* (1964), Ruth Hartley and co-authors define dramatic play in this way:

*Dramatic play is the free play of very young children. It is one way for them to explore their universe, imitating the actions and character traits of those around them. It is their earliest expression in dramatic form, but must not be confused with drama or interpreted as performance. Dramatic play is fragmentary, existing only for the moment. It may last for a few minutes or go on for some time. It even may be played repeatedly if the child's interest is sufficiently strong; but when this occurs, the repetition is in no sense a rehearsal. It is, rather, the repetition of a creative experience for the pure joy of doing it. It has no beginning and no end and no development in the dramatic sense.*

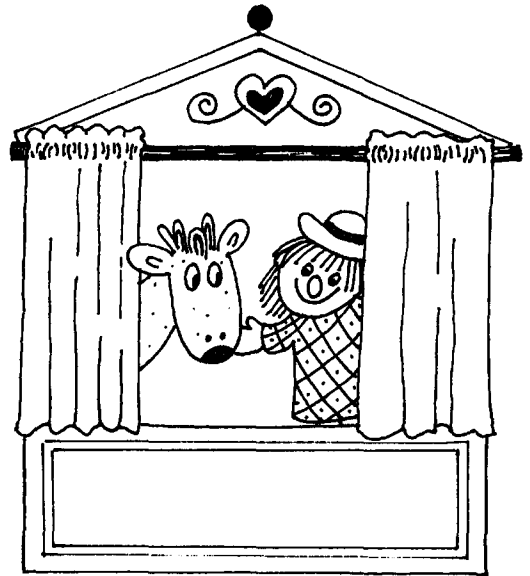
Creative drama and play, especially in young children, cannot be isolated or confined to a definite time and place. Creative drama and play, whether in the classroom, at home, or in the community, helps children to assume responsibility, develop new interests, and, particularly in classroom situations, seek new information.

Drama is one of the most completely personal, individualistic, and intimate learning processes. Creative drama, however, is not formal drama. It does not consist of performers who memorize lines and use props and costumes to entertain an audience. In creative drama, children can spontaneously invent, enact, and interpret familiar situations and themes for themselves. For instance, preschool children most often enact situations based upon real or imaginary roles they have experienced, such as taking care of a baby, driving a car, or

going to the zoo. In dramatic play, children create a world of their own from which to master reality. In this imaginative world, they try to solve real-life problems. They repeat, reenact, and relive these experiences. Thus, dramatic play helps the child develop from a purely egocentric being into a person capable of interacting with others.

## ***Impact on Developmental Areas***

In dramatic play, children often spontaneously take on a role or behavior of someone else (pretending to put out a fire as a fire fighter), use an object to stand for something else (sitting on a block and driving a “truck” through the streets), and use make-believe to act out familiar events (going to the market to shop for food). For the preschool age child, this is the ideal arena for exciting and meaningful learning. All areas of a child’s development are affected in dramatic play. If the teacher structures activities correctly, both mind and body are exposed to developmentally appropriate experiences.



In creative drama and play, the preschool child can experience activities that:

- Assist in the development of the five senses
- Foster expressive and receptive language
- Help them find patterns and understand relationships
- Make connections
- Facilitate creative thought and problem solving
- Enhance self-esteem
- Develop the expression of emotions and feelings
- Develop fine and gross motor skills
- Celebrate the joy and freedom of childhood

Through dramatic play, children learn to concentrate, exercise imagination, try out new ideas, practice grown-up behaviors, and develop a sense of control over their world. Likewise, children gain a heightened awareness of the beauty, rhythm, and structure of their environment and their bodies while learning more about communicating their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

## ***Social Development***

Dramatic play almost always involves other children; consequently, it can make a significant contribution to a child's social development. Drama often includes joint planning and cooperation: "I'll be the mother and you be the baby, okay?" or, "Let's pretend we're going shopping. Bobby can be the father." It also provides practice in conflict resolution: "I want to wear the hat with the feathers. You can't have it!" Although children may argue and become upset with one another, such struggle leads to the development of techniques for dealing with others. Children will learn that working and playing with others is a rewarding and pleasurable experience.

## ***Emotional Development***

Children bring to play what they know about life: information and misinformation. They may bring hopes, fears, and, sometimes, painful memories. Young children who do not yet have much facility with language often use play as a way of processing the world around them.

Children's play reflects their understanding of societal roles and relationships. For instance, they know through their own experiences what goes on in a family: who prepares meals, who washes clothes, who goes to work, whether their parents talk or argue, and whether their family life together is enjoyable. Likewise, children share knowledge about a variety of occupations such as doctor, nurse, teacher, and storekeeper. Children act out these roles as they understand them.

Children may also dramatize events that they have experienced or heard about. They may act out frightening events as a means of coping, or they may recreate fond memories in order to experience the joy once again.

During make-believe play, children may dress up and be anyone they wish. The child can become the all-powerful parent or the intimidating doctor. The fearful child can be brave, or child who has a new baby sister at home can pretend to be a baby again. Children portray people and events not only as they are, or as they seem to be, but often also in ways that may express their wishes, frustrations, or fears. Play gives children the chance to express negative feelings that they may not be able to put into words.

In dramatic play, children replay life experiences, selecting and arranging roles and events for emotional safety. Through dramatic play, children develop a greater awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes, their abilities to lead or persuade, or their tendencies to follow. Such an awareness contributes to a child's sense of self.

## **Intellectual Development**

Through dramatic play, children develop cognitive skills by learning to make connections, understand patterns, and organize information. They test ideas and learn through trial and error, formulate and execute plans, and develop ideas of past, present, and future. Children use memory to recreate people and events. They also use materials and toys in novel ways to suit their purposes. Thus, dramatic play encourages intellectual development not only by fostering creativity but also through the use of language skills critical to thinking and communicating.

## **Role of Dramatic Play in the Preschool Curriculum**

Dramatic play relates not only to abstract concept formation but also to subject areas we recognize as part of the school curriculum, such as social studies, math, science, and reading.

### **Social Studies Concepts**

Children develop understanding about people, their roles, and their behaviors. These, together with the development of interpersonal and social skills, are among the important contributions dramatic play can make to a child's living and learning.

### **Math Concepts**

Dramatic play affords children the opportunity to explore introductory math concepts. In the dramatic play center, children are readily capable of categorizing materials and equipment. They might place dishes in one subcategory of kitchen items and pots and pans in another. Piaget termed this "classification," and it is crucial to an understanding of logic. Since it is impossible to add (or subtract) apples and chairs, the child must understand what constitutes a set or category.

Children practice the concept of one-to-one correspondence when setting a table for a make-believe meal. Making sure that there is one chair, one plate, and one fork, knife, and spoon for each person leads the child to an understanding of concepts like *enough*, *too few*, *more than*, and *the same as*. Children also use concepts like *bigger* and *smaller*, *wider* and *narrower*, *taller* and *shorter*, and *heavier* and *lighter* while engaging in dramatic play. Clapping, chanting and marching all provide opportunities for children to learn patterns that will assist them as they learn counting, sequence and repetition.

## **Science Concepts**

Dramatic play also fosters concepts associated with science. Children may experiment in their play: “What would happen if . . . ?” or verify: “Would the same thing happen if I did it again?” Children learn through observation (a necessary scientific technique), by comparing items or events on the basis of similarities and differences. They identify problems and generalize from specific situations. Such behaviors will benefit children in their later encounters with science.

## **Reading Readiness**

Vocabulary and concept development are necessary for success in reading and comprehension. In dramatic play, children use language to communicate and exchange ideas, thereby increasing their fluency and vocabularies. Keeping materials and equipment in an orderly fashion, storing like objects together, and separating them according to similarities and differences help make children more sharply observant, and the recognition of similarities and differences is of utmost importance to recognizing letters and words in reading.

Children organize their ideas when they follow a theme in their play. This leads to greater reading comprehension where the understanding of plot and the logical order of events in a story are crucial.

Telephones in the dramatic play center show the letters of the alphabet. Empty food cans and containers, with either their original labels or teacher-made labels, help children make the connection between the written word and what the words represent.

## **Integrating Creative Drama and Play with Activity Centers**

Dramatic play need not be limited to the Dramatic Play Area; it can be integrated into other activity centers.

The **Literacy Activity Center** provides many opportunities for creative drama and play. Books, pictures, songs, toy animals, and other items from this center can be incorporated into drama activities.

The **Music Activity Center** supports creative drama and play by providing songs, musical instruments, recordings, and percussion materials.

The **Block Activity Center** supplies building materials for many creative drama and play activities. A simple pile of blocks can become a fire engine, a tower, or

a castle. Cardboard boxes and an old sheet can become a hide-out or fort. Materials from this center should be taken freely to support creative drama; later, they can be returned to their proper places.

Teachers and children will look to the **Art Activity Center** to decorate, enhance, and embellish drama projects. This center will provide paint for a make-believe castle, paper to make role-play hats, cardboard to make mustaches, and string that will become a tightrope for circus performers.

## ***Setting Up a Dramatic Play Activity Center***

There are any number of ways to arrange classroom space to provide an intimate, semi-enclosed space that invites children to engage in make-believe play, is easily supervised from any part of the classroom, and is flexible enough to adjust to the needs and interests of the children and the changing themes of their play.

The Dramatic Play Center is usually set up in a corner, a location that affords a convenient way of setting the center apart from heavy traffic and shielding it from distraction by children who are not participating in the play. Block play also fosters dramatic play, and there is often positive interaction between the two areas. It is, therefore, helpful to situate the two areas close to each other.

The space for dramatic play should be clearly defined. Boundaries should discourage children who are not involved in the play from inadvertently running through and disrupting those who are. Boundaries should give children within the center a sense of privacy; at the same time, they should leave enough of an opening to permit children who might want to enter into the play the freedom to do so. Boundaries can be formed by the walls of the room or by furniture or shelves. The furniture or shelves should be low enough to permit adults to see over them at all times.

Teachers should also support the movement of pretended play from place to place. Dramatic play often begins in the house area with “dress-up” and moves to the sand table, which then becomes a beach. Once children begin to pretend, they often discover that they need additional locations; therefore, they might “go to school” in the book area and “go to the store” in the manipulative area.

## ***Materials***

The major pieces of furniture in the Dramatic Play Center usually include a play

stove, a sink, and a refrigerator or icebox; a bureau, shelves, or a rack for dress-up clothes and doll clothes; a doll bed that is large enough to hold a child; a cabinet or shelves to store dishes, pots and pans, cutlery, and make-believe groceries (empty cans and containers); a table and four chairs; and a full-length, unbreakable mirror.

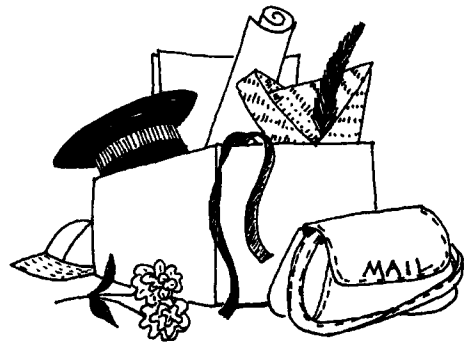
A dramatic play center should have several dolls, including one that represents a child with a physical disability. It should have two telephones. There should be a clock (it does not have to work). An unbreakable hand mirror as well as a full length mirror is useful. A plastic basin for bathing dolls or washing clothes is also useful.

### ***Dress-Up Clothes***

Every dramatic play center must have dress-up clothes. These should include men's and women's hats, men's vests and ties, women's dresses and skirts (cut to a length that children will not trip over), beads, scarves, purses, men's and women's shoes, wallets, keys, a briefcase or a small suitcase, aprons, and whatever else might be appropriate for playing family roles. There should also be doll clothes for dressing and changing the "babies," and a mattress and blanket for the doll bed.

### ***Materials for Food Preparation and Eating***

Child-sized pots and pans are good for make-believe food preparation; plates and cups, spoons, forks, and knives are necessary for serving and eating. A plastic baby bottle is required for feeding the baby. A kettle and/or coffee pot, wooden spoons, a ladle, a sifter or a sieve, an egg beater, measuring cups and spoons, mixing bowls, and a rolling pin may be helpful. Empty food cans, carefully checked to make sure that edges are smooth, with either their original labels or teacher-made labels with food names and pictures (for example, peas, beans, peaches) should be available, as should empty boxes from rice, noodles, or other dry foods.



### ***Cleaning Materials***

A child-size broom, a dustpan and brush, and a mop and pail are useful items in this center. Empty bottles of laundry soap can be used. These, too, should have their original labels or be labeled by the teacher. They should be well rinsed.

## **Collecting Materials**

One of the wonderful things about incorporating creative drama and play into the preschool classroom is that the needed materials can be introduced gradually. The class does not need a full complement of materials to begin. Collecting appropriate materials for use in the creative drama centers is a continual process that should involve parents, the community, and local businesses.

The materials for many activities will already be in the classroom, and a quick "call for help" will easily supplement what is available. Use the classroom bulletin board, positioned where families can easily read it, to request what is needed.

The following is a partial list of useful materials for creative drama and play:

Bells	Large mirror	Pots and pans
Blocks	Large, hollow blocks	Recordings of animal sounds
Boots	Make up	Scarves
Buttons	Masks	Shoe boxes
Capes	Mats for tumbling	Shoes
Cardboard	Mirrors	Socks to make puppets
Cardboard boxes	Musical Instruments	Sticks
Colored paper	Old jewelry	Storage boxes
Crowns	Old horn	Story books
Dolls	Old steering wheel	Straws
Dress-up clothes	Old telephone	String
Dresses	Paper bags	Ties
Drums	Paper plates	Tools
Funnels	Paper towel tubes	Water hose
Glasses or goggles	Pictures of animals	Wigs
Gloves	Pipe cleaners	Wrapping paper
Glue	Poems	Yarn
Hats		
Kitchen utensils		

Representational pieces for animal play (tails, ears, noses)

Recordings of songs (especially those with a strong rhythm)

## ***The Teaching Team's Role***

The teacher has a pivotal role in determining the quantity and quality of the dramatic play of children in the classroom. The teacher sets up the environment, provides time and space, and sets the stage so that children's imaginations are stimulated. The teacher selects and arranges materials so that they offer the most opportunity for development. The teacher's response to children's play determines whether they feel free to express feelings. The teacher can enhance children's play through thoughtful observation and guidance.

### ***Observation***

Children should choose the dramatic play center freely and should select their own themes and roles (in cooperation with others in the same area). Their play sometimes follows what, to adults, seems a logical progression. At other times, it shifts and follows unexpected directions.

The teaching team usually remains outside of the play area, yet near enough to see, hear and learn what is on the children's mind. The teaching team acts primarily as a resource, deciding which props will enhance play, or which curricular activities to plan for furthering each child's developmental needs.

The teaching team must be careful not to interfere with, or direct, what goes on in dramatic play unless it is a matter of physical or emotional safety. Any intervention may inhibit free expression and the spontaneity of the dramatic play. Be aware that what may appear to be faulty understanding in the enactment of a role or a theme may, in fact, be fantasy play that even the children recognize as such.

### ***Dealing with Problem Situations***

What should a teaching team do if children play at the same theme over and over, day after day? No one answer is right for all such situations. The teacher must know the children in order to decide whether the play is constructive or not. On one hand, the repetition may indicate that the area no longer stimulates ideas. Perhaps the teaching team should introduce new props to trigger new ideas. Repetitive play might also be an indication that the children are limited in their experiences and that the curriculum should provide new opportunities to enrich their experiences so that they may expand their play. Finally, playing at the same theme over and over may indicate that the children are troubled because of a traumatic event in their lives or persistent problems. In this case, the playing and re-playing of the theme is emotionally therapeutic. Should this be the case, teachers must be aware that they are not trained psychotherapists.

While teachers usually want to understand their children's needs, the school is not the place for psychotherapy.

What does the teaching team do when the play in the center becomes rambunctious and wild? Sometimes this happens because too many materials are out at the same time or that they are not well organized. Too many materials can be overstimulating and disorganizing. If that is the case, the teacher should unobtrusively remove some materials, reorganize them, or put them back where they belong. Creating order in the environment is often enough to reestablish order in the play.

How does the teacher help a child who is shy and is afraid to join in the dramatic play center? The teacher may intervene by helping the child enter (for example, knocking at the "door" and saying something like, "Aunt Mary has come to visit you," or "Your brother Tom is back from the country!"). The teacher should move out as soon as the child has been accepted in the play.

If children are destructive or hurtful to others, teachers must intervene promptly and stop the behavior. It is important, however, to recognize that behavior has causes, some of which the teachers (and the destructive child) may not understand. Teachers must set limits to protect children and property. They must also protect destructive children from themselves, from getting out of control, and from the feelings of guilt that result from such behavior. It is important not to call such children "bad" or to reject them. There are any number of possible causes for these behaviors. Teachers must be accepting of children who are difficult to manage in a classroom. Teachers must be accepting of the emotions children express, but they must not permit the behavior. The teacher should be firm and calm, accepting the child's need and redirecting it to other activities that provide a positive outlet (for example, "You may pound the clay, but you may not hit children," or "You may hammer nails at the workbench, but you may not bang the chairs").

### ***Recording Progress***

Over the course of the school year, the teacher's records should reveal growth in ideas and information, language usage, self-confidence, cooperation, and control of personal behavior in, and as a result of, the children's dramatic play. Observations should focus on the following activities:

- Pretending to be someone else
- Using one object to stand for another
- Using gestures, sounds, and words to define an object, situation, or setting
- Sharing pretend play with others
- Talking with others within the context of the role play situation

## ***How to Nurture Dramatic Play***

Books relating to themes in the children's play may be used in a number of ways. Once the children have shown interest in a theme, a book may expand that interest. If there has been evidence of anxiety or fear related to a theme (perhaps a visit to the doctor's office or a parent's hospitalization), a book may help children understand the situation and alleviate worry. If the play gives evidence of confusion or misconceptions, there may be a book to provide correct information. Books can also provide new experiences that may stimulate fantasy and make-believe play.

Brief trips within the community may stimulate dramatic play, provide information and concept development, and clear up misconceptions. Such trips might include a visit to a store, a bakery, a firehouse or police station, a dentist's office, a doctor's office, or a hospital.

Classroom visitors may be used as resource people if invited for a specific purpose. Almost any type of professional or community worker is of interest to children; the visitor may be a doctor, street cleaner, violinist, baker, or any other worker. If they tell the children about their job and bring related objects, the children will respond. Visits by parents or friends of parents and teachers whose work might be of interest to the children give children pleasure and pride as well as information and experience that may stimulate dramatic play.

Hang pictures illustrating aspects of the themes children choose for dramatic play. The pictures may also be used as the basis for discussion to enhance children's conceptual development. Pictures related to recent trips may add meaning to what has been experienced first-hand.

## ***Activities and Projects***

### ***Rhythmic Play***

Rhythmic play is a combination of fundamental movement and creative self-expression. It is an inseparable companion to music and dance.

The first stages of rhythmic play are bouncing up and down or swaying to music. From this, movement grows. At the preschool level, rhythmic experiences should emphasize the development of motor control and the expression of emotions and feelings. With time, self-assured, relaxed rhythms develop.

Early foundations can be established in such basic rhythmic activities as clapping, marching, skipping, galloping, and swaying to the regular beat of music.

## **Clapping**

### **Activity One: Clap to the Beat**

- Gather the children in a large group (sitting on the floor or standing in a circle).
- Tap and count a simple *one-two beat* out loud.
- Teach the children to clap on the second beat.
- Practice this with the children seated then as they walk in a circle.
- Allow one of the children to set the beat and have everyone else follow that child's lead.
- From this point, more elaborate rhythms can be tapped out with the children following the lead of the teacher.

### **Activity Two: Clap to the Rhythm of the Music**

- Play a recording with a strong rhythmic beat.
- Clap out the rhythm.
- Have the children join in.
- Play a different recording and let the children discover the rhythm on their own. (Encouragement, questioning and perhaps demonstration may be needed.)

### **Activity Three: Clap to the Rhythm of a Story**

- Read a familiar short story to the children that has both a strong rhythm and repeated words.
- Demonstrate clapping to replace the repeated word or the rhythm of the story.
- Have the children clap to replace the repeated word.

## **Marching**

Marches, parades, and processions should be an everyday occurrence in your classroom. These marches serve as wonderful physical exercise for the preschool child. They assist in the development of motor coordination and the expression of feelings. Marches can be inside the classroom or outside on the playground. They can be helpful in transitions from one activity to another. Marches can be to the beat of recorded music, to tapped out rhythms from sticks or drums or to the rhythm of student-made instruments (see *straw horns*).

Children can try many different marches:

- March in step, march with a high step/low step
- March with left foot slam, with right foot slam
- March and turn left, march and turn right
- March forward, turn and march back
- March with a clap, a stomp, or a yell on moving
- March with arms and feet moving together, moving in opposition
- March in a circle, in lines, or in rows
- March high and low (for example, an obstacle course)

### ***Skipping / Galloping***

Skipping and galloping need not be taught to young children. Both movements emerge in the developing child naturally. Children will skip and gallop as they pretend to be animals. Both movements can be incorporated into creative drama and play. They are best done outdoors or in large, open indoor spaces, for freedom of movement and for safety.

### ***Swaying***

Very young children love to sway to the rhythms of music, the beat of a drum, the pattern of words in a familiar story, and, at times, to the natural rhythms of life. (Just watch a child as she sees the wind move the leaves of a large tree.)

The rhythmic whole-body kinds of movements should be constantly encouraged in young children. Encourage them to use their arms and hands, their heads and shoulders, and their hips and legs.

## ***Finger Plays and Puppets***

### ***Finger Play***

Finger puppets and walking puppets are fun for children and offer unlimited opportunities for creative expression. Children like to act the role of the puppet using the sounds, actions and dialogue associated with the figure.

Children may use finger figures in pretend plays, make-believe and fantasies, or to act out a favorite story or song.

## **Finger Puppets**

Materials: Construction paper, scissors, crayons, and paste

Procedure:

- 1) From construction paper, cut a head of a person or animal. At neck level, cut strips extending to each side.
- 2) Color any necessary features with crayons.
- 3) Paste the extended strips together to form a band which fits snugly around one fingertip.
- 4) Place the puppet on the finger, and wiggle the finger to make the puppet nod its head or move as desired (Platts, 1966).



## **Walking Puppets**

Materials: Construction paper, scissors, crayons, and paste

Procedure:

- 1) Cut the head and torso of the desired character from construction paper. Cut strips that extend to each side at the desired hip level.
- 2) Draw in a face and any other features or decorate with crayons.
- 3) Paste the strips together to form a band that fits snugly around the index and middle finger. The child's own fingers then become the puppet's legs, so the puppet can walk, run, and dance. (Platts, 1966).

## **Puppets**

Puppets add life to the classroom. They are a natural vehicle for creativity, imitation, and self-expression. Puppets also make powerful teaching tools. Even though the word *puppet* comes from the Latin word for doll, puppets are more than dolls. They invite children to explore their imaginations and share their imaginings with others. Puppets are the perfect props for many forms of creative drama.

Creating their own puppets makes learning even more valuable for children. The puppets become their own as they focus on the creative process rather than on the product. When a child plays with a puppet, she has a chance to act out both sides of the conversation. She has a chance to play the part of a favorite character. She can act out for herself the things she has seen on television. She can play the part of parents or friends. Playing different roles gives a child many opportunities to use expressive language.

Occasionally the teacher has to demonstrate how a puppet can talk, move and act out a favorite story.

### **Suggestions for Class Work With Puppets**

- Create a puppet center with a box of puppet-making materials and a place to store finished puppets.
- Provide opportunities for children to play with puppets before they create their own.
- Provide a mirror so that children can watch themselves as they use movements, voice, and gestures to bring puppets to life.

### ***Easy to Make Puppets***

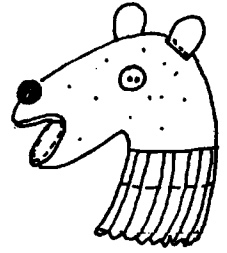
#### **Painted Hand and Scarf Puppets**

- 1) Make a fist. The tip of your thumb should touch the second joint of the index finger.
- 2) Using lipstick and washable makeup, draw a simple face on the side of your hand.
- 3) Decorate the top of your hand with yarn for hair. Cover with a bit of cloth as a scarf.
- 4) Make the puppet talk and show feelings by moving your thumb.

### **Sock Puppets**

Old white socks make wonderful puppets.

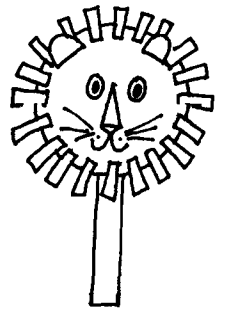
- 1) Split the seam of the sock foot and sew in an oval shaped piece of fabric to form a mouth.
- 2) Sew yarn for hair and add buttons for the eyes and a nose.
- 3) Embroider other details and stitch on cloth ears and yarn whiskers.



### **Paper Plate Puppet Masks**

Masks can be made by decorating the curved side of a paper plate.

- 1) Draw or paint a face onto a paper plate.
- 2) Decorate the paper plate with construction paper, yarn, or fabric. Glue cut shapes on plate.
- 2) Attach a strong strip (preferably wood) to fit on the back of the decorated plate. This enables the child to hold and operate the puppet mask.



### **Folded Paper Plate Puppets**

- 1) Fold a paper plate in half to form a puppet that resembles the upper and lower jaws of many animals.
- 2) Decorate by coloring and using construction paper.
- 3) Hold these puppets between fingers and thumb.



### **Foot Puppets**

- 1) Paint a face on the ball of the child's foot. Let his toes be the hair.
- 2) Have the child prop his feet up on a chair.
- 3) Use a mirror so the child can watch his own "foot puppet."



## **Pantomimes**

Pantomime is a type of spontaneous or informal drama. It is a good starting point for creative drama. In pantomime, children use only gestures and movements — never words or dialogue — to communicate ideas, feelings, and actions. For example, as a part of a unit on pets, some children might pantomime feeding their dogs and cats while others pretend to hold their animals.

Pantomime helps children feel comfortable with their bodies. Because it begins with a physical experience, it makes concepts more concrete.

Young children often need help to get started with pantomime. They need background and modeling to stimulate their imaginations before they can create their own interpretations. Good verbal cues are: “Show me with your body,” or “Show me with your face.”

### **Appropriate Mime Activities for Young Children**

- Acting out nursery rhymes
- Being a character or an animal in a favorite song
- Modeling familiar everyday actions such as washing hands, brushing teeth, making cookies, or throwing balls
- Imagining that they are animals in the jungle, walking, stalking and hunting

## **Charades**

Charades is a guessing game in which some children act out stories and others try to guess what they are acting. Children should be encouraged to act their favorite stories, complete with props and costumes. Try stopping the action at the high point so that the children can carry on with their play without narration (Isenberg, 1993). For example, if you are reading *Three Little Pigs*, stop whenever the big bad wolf “huffs” and “puffs” and let the children act out the part of the wolf, without words (Isenberg, 1993).

## **Mimetics**

Mimetic exercises are physical movements that imitate well-known activities, without the equipment usually required for such activities. Through mimetics, children may imitate a movement that some other person, animal, or machine performs. The children must use their imaginations to provide the necessary props.

Mimetic exercises can be based on numerous actions, such as:

Being a jack-in-the-box	Riding a bicycle
Catching butterflies	Rowing a boat
Chopping wood	Shooting a basketball
Climbing a wall	Singing like a rock star
Crawling like a snake	Skating
Digging a ditch	Swimming like a fish
Flying like a bird	Sword fighting
Galloping like a horse	Waddling like a duck
Jumping like a frog	Walking like a bear
Jumping rope	Walking like a spider
Kneading bread	Washing clothes
Leaping like a deer	
Picking flowers	

Start mimetic activities with simple imitative physical movements, next add imitative sounds. Combine movements and sounds to form more complex combinations with added emotion. For example:

- Show the children pictures of a dog, a horse, a monkey, and a tiger.
- Ask the children how these animals move and ask them to demonstrate.  
(The dog trots down the street. The horse gallops. The monkey swings from the tree. The tiger stalks.)
- Talk about the sounds that these animals make. Ask the children to imitate the animal sounds.  
(The dog barks. The horse neighs. The monkey screeches. The tiger roars.)
- Ask the children how the animals are feeling.  
(The dog is happy. The horse is free. The monkey is excited. The tiger is hungry.)

- Ask the children to combine the movements, sounds, and feelings.  
(The happy dog trots down the street barking. The horse gallops freely over the open field. The excited monkey swings from the tree and screeches. The hungry tiger roars as he stalks his prey.)

The possible mimetics combinations are endless. With practice, children will soon begin to incorporate them into their play.

Other good subjects for mimetics include: bears, birds, frogs, deer, wolves, clowns, cowboys, cows, ducks, pigs, snakes, cats, carpenters, cooks, pilots, tightrope walkers, fishermen, models, bakers, and high jumpers.

### ***Prop Boxes and Dramatic Kits***

Children love to imitate adults. Through imitation, they learn about roles, jobs, and how it feels to be an important person with special tasks to perform. Although playing house is one of the most frequently engaged themes in dramatic play, many other themes often develop spontaneously according to the children's interests and recent experiences or worries. The dramatic play center may become a doctor's office, a hospital, a store, a school, a firehouse, or a police station. It is not necessary to convert the whole area. It may be preferable to convert only one part of the dramatic play center so that the children may go from the "home" to the "doctor's office" part of the area. If there is enough space available, it may be desirable to move the office, store or other play setting out of the dramatic play center and set it up nearby so that the children can go from "home" to the place of interest and back.

To encourage a broad range of dramatic play, "prop boxes" or "dramatic kits" should be available.

Each prop box or dramatic kit contains items that are related, such as a beach blanket, sunglasses, an empty tanning lotion container, and a beach ball. Real items can foster and extend children's dramatic play. The prop boxes and dramatic kits:

- promote experiences with real materials and tools related to a theme.
- extend interest so that children can sustain their theme play.
- provide opportunities to enact familiar roles.
- develop career awareness.

The teacher's role is to encourage the children to try out new roles and new activities. The teacher supplies the props. The children will do the pretending.

Children especially enjoy these kits:

***Kitchen Kit***

Pots, pans, bowls, egg beaters, spoons, measuring cups, measuring spoons, cookie sheets, cake pans, etc. A cardboard carton turned upside down can become a stove.

***Market Kit***

Toy cash register, play money, price tags, sales slip pad, unopened canned goods, empty food containers, empty cake mix boxes, wax fruits and vegetables

***Restaurant Kit***

Plastic or paper cups, saucers, plates, tableware, napkins, empty food containers, tablecloth, handmade menus

***School Kit***

Paper, pencils, crayons, chalk, small blackboard, books

***Hospital Kit***

Adhesive tape, gauze, assorted bandages, stethoscope, small plastic bottles, cotton balls, nurse's hat

***Disguise Kit***

A pair of dark glasses, a hat, a false mustache, a false nose, makeup, a wig, a fake beard

***Police Kit***

Badge made from cardboard, a whistle, a magnifying glass, a two-way radio, pad of paper, pencil

***Cleaning Kit***

Several brooms, mops, sponges, dust cloths, paper towels

Young children need adequate props, space, and time to take part in dramatic play, even though their roles and themes shift frequently. Allowing the children to take an active role in the creation of these boxes and kits will make them more meaningful. Provide adequate background experiences such as reading stories and fairy tales, taking field trips, and getting to know the jobs of people in the community that will support their play with these materials (Isenberg, 1993).

### **Theme Corners**

Theme corners are activity centers devoted to a particular topic. They should contain materials focused on a high-interest topic that is familiar to the children in your class. Theme corners encourage children's spontaneous interactions with a variety of roles (Woodward, 1985). Theme corners make study units more real to children and add to their interest.

In *Creative Expression and Play in the Early Childhood Curriculum* (1993), Isenberg and Jalongo suggest that teachers use theme corners to encourage dramatic play. They recommend that teachers:

- Provide a variety of background experiences through pictures, stories, and discussion centered on the theme. Children need to be familiar with roles in order to enact them.
- Create an attractive physical setting with posters, books, and materials. The physical setting conveys a powerful message that can invite or discourage children from entering the area.
- Provide simple, durable props. They help children enact desired roles and behaviors.
- Intervene only when necessary. When introducing a new theme corner, teachers and children should set limits jointly. For example, the number of children who can play there at any one time.
- Encourage children to suggest ideas for themes and periodically plan new theme corners. Children can make and collect the necessary props.

One suggestion for a theme corner is the Toy Shop. The theme corner would be set up to resemble a small toy store. It would be decorated with posters and pictures of all types of toys. Toys and stuffed animals would be tagged for sale, and children would play the roles of shopkeeper and customer. An old cash register and play money would add to the excitement.

Children's dramatic play in the toy shop would include pricing toys for sale, counting items on the shelves, sorting and classifying toys, counting money and making change, and wrapping toys after they are sold.

The possibilities for theme corners are endless:

Airport	Circus	Market
Bakery	Clothing Store	Post Office
Bank	Drugstore	Repair Shop
Barber Shop	Fire Station	Science Laboratory
Beauty Shop	Flower Shop	Theater
Birthday Party	Gas Station	Train Station
Bus	Hospital	Zoo
Camping	Library	

## **Summary**

Creative drama nurtures children's expression from within. It contributes to every child's learning and is an important part of the early childhood curriculum. Dramatic play enhances the development of children's imaginative thinking, problem solving, and communication.

