

TEACHING DRAMA IN CLASS

In the article the role of drama and theatre arts at school is discussed. The author stresses the importance of acquainting students with the fundamental structure of drama, its peculiarities as a special form of art.

В статье обсуждается важность обучения драматическому искусству в школе. Автор подчеркивает необходимость ознакомления учащихся с основными принципами построения драматического произведения, особенностями драматургии как вида искусства.

Key words: school, drama, character, structure, conflict, response.

Ключевые слова: школа, драма, герой, композиция, конфликт, отклик.

Drama and theatre arts are paid special attention in the National Curriculum in England and in Wales. At GCSE level students take examination in drama and theatre arts.

Drama plays an important role in the personal development of students. The skills and qualities developed in drama activities, such as teamwork, creativity, leadership and risk-taking are assets in all subjects and all areas of life. Drama stimulates the imagination, develops social and communication skills. Drama promotes self-esteem and provides all students with a sense of achievement regardless of academic ability.

To participate in a range of drama activities and to evaluate their own and others' contribution, students should be taught to: use a variety of dramatic conventions to explore ideas, issues, texts and meanings; use different ways to convey action, character, atmosphere and tension in analyzing plays through dialogue and movement; appreciate how the structure and organization of scenes and plays contribute to dramatic effect; evaluate critically the intentions of drama.

The objectives of teaching drama are as follows: to identify with characters and actions through role-play (for example, a dramatized story); to have the confidence and ability to formulate a particular point of view; to learn how to work with others to solve human and practical problems; to invent and develop convincing roles in specific situations; to be aware of the need for dramatic conventions (eg., light, dark, movement, pause, sound, silence); to be aware of and use a variety of dramatic forms and techniques to express ideas and feelings (eg., mime, movement, costume, make-up, props, set-design); to appreciate drama in performance, both as participants and as spectators; to understand the educational, cultural and social purposes of drama; to develop a vocabulary of theatre/drama; to explore the variety of human emotions through drama; to develop trust skills (respect and appreciation); appreciate the values and attitudes of their

own and other communities, recognize social conventions and stereotypes, be prepared to examine them.

Communication skills are of vital importance today. "The future of our nation depends on our ability to create and to be creative. During the coming decades our most important national resources will be human resources. If our nation is to continue to meet the challenges of the future, today's schools need to develop creative leaders", claims the American Association of School Administrators in the publication of 2012.

Dramatic Arts education is an important means of stimulating creativity in problem solving. It can challenge students' perceptions about their world and about themselves.

Dramatic exploration can provide students with an outlet for emotions, thoughts, and dreams that they might not otherwise have means to express. A student can, if only for a few moments, become *another*, explore a new role, try out and experiment with various personal choices and solutions to very real problems – problems from their own life, or problems faced by characters in literature or historical figures.

At the centre of drama is *communication*. Like all the arts, Drama allows students to communicate and understand others in new ways. Drama also helps students to develop tolerance and empathy. Drama can reinforce understanding of the ideas in history and current events. Students will be able to put themselves into the shoes of figures in history and literature, to understand the way human beings interact. The study of literature is impossible without drama. Students enrich their experience through art, it reinforces traditional academic subjects.

The influential American literary critic and professor Cleanth Brooks pays special attention to the dramatic form of art in his book "Understanding Drama". He is best-known for revolutionizing the teaching of poetry in American higher education and codifying the principles of close reading.

The primary task in teaching drama, according to Brooks, is to acquaint the student with the fundamental structure of drama, to teach the students to deal with drama not merely as literary history or the history of ideas or the expression of the author's personality, but as a special form with methods and characteristics of its own.

Such teaching can best be done by intensive analysis of specific examples.

The plays should be supplied by the commentaries, that offer a reading of the play, but not *the* reading of it. The commentaries raise central questions which need to be raised with regard to drama in general and with regard to the represented play in particular.

Brooks proposes the intensive reading methods. There should be cross references to other plays of the same period or from those belonging to literary his-

tory. Any discussion of the drama requires the knowledge of basic critical terms, the basic structural characteristics of it. The first problem is to read drama with appreciation and understanding. Only by careful examination of various plays can we really understand this form of art.

Drama shares some characteristics with other literary forms. At the same time it differs from them and possesses its own particular problems. The ability of fiction to describe settings of all kinds, to look both at the outer world of things and the inner world of the mind, to shift easily from present to past, means that it has a variety of resources with which to take quite a trivial situation and extend it into a much fuller and richer meaning. Drama has to present the conflict in an actual clash of characters, where the words are not just descriptive but are an accompaniment of action or indication of action to come [2, p. 301].

Drama and fiction have certain common elements. All the forms of literature "present a situation", which stimulates the reader's imagination and thus leads him to apprehend the meaning latent in it. The situation is specific, but the significance is more extensive, it is "general". The situation is meant to elicit certain emotional responses; it may be developed by contrast. As contrast is intensified, developed in emotional terms, and made overt, it becomes the conflict that we especially associate with drama. In drama and story, the situation involves characters talking and acting; the action may be inner or outer, physical or psychological, or a combination of both, with different effects.

There is an essential difference between drama and other literary forms. Drama is much less free in making changes in place. In Brook's opinion, "the presenting of a number of places is of more trouble than value. It can hardly be done unobtrusively and if not expert, it can interfere with the central dramatic effect by distracting attention from the human conflict" [1, p. 25].

There can be no direct comments by the author on the meaning of an action, a situation, an expression, a gesture and so on. If made by a character, such comments are likely to be very awkward. There is no one single method of giving clues, of suggesting deeper and richer meanings. There can be little direct use of action that is purely mental or psychological. Some direct mental *probing* can be done, as in Shakespeare's soliloquies, but in general this will have to be occasional and subordinate.

Eugene o'Neil tried to circumvent this difficulty by introducing a new convention: each character speaks not only the usual lines to other characters, but also speaks his own thoughts aloud addressing only the audience.

The drama has no convenient way of letting us see a person's mental picture, of letting us grasp the unuttered sensations and half-reflections, of presenting the whole substance of Burns's poems, of using the flashbacks by which both fiction and the movies can skillfully present, simultaneously, both present and

past time. But this does not mean that drama is not concerned with psychological action. However, this action must come in the outer forms of dialogue and action, and what lies behind them has to come only by implication. Poetry can deal directly with an inward situation, drama requires a more perceptible kind of movement.

The dramatist has certain problems in common with other writers: he must find concrete ways of saying what he has to say, he must find specific situations through which he can control the responses of the reader, he must explore and develop these situations, he must find and develop characters who give a sense of reality.

But because of the differences of drama from other forms, the dramatist faces certain problems. The problems arise out of the two main aspects of drama – the fact that it is limited in scope, and the fact that it works entirely through dialogue.

In theory, there is no reason why the drama should not be as long as a writer may choose to make it. In the twentieth century both Thomas Hardy and Eugene O’Neil have used the dramatic form in compositions which have far exceeded the traditional five, four, or three-act length. But these are exceptions to a consistent practice. The length of drama has always been determined by the two or three hours conventionally allotted for public performance. The influence of this form has been so strong that even writers of “closet” drama (plays not intended to be acted) have largely adhered to it. Because of this generally accepted limitation the drama has to take on some special characteristics. First of all, the dramatist must find a special kind of situation, compact in its own nature or that can be made compact without vital loss. Dramatist has to get down to the centre of a situation. *Hamlet* does not start with the original plot against Hamlet’s fathers, nor *Lady Windermere’s Fan* with the original difficulties of Lady Windermere’s mother. In both works the experiences of the parents are quite important, and a novelist might easily use them at full length. But the plays must stick closely to the present and bring in the past only by suggestion.

Drama works at the height of a situation, it must ignore earlier and later ramifications. If a situation does not have some high point, it is not a good one for drama. The dramatist must work with rapidity, he must use heavy emphasis in each step, he must cut out every possible suggestion of waste motion. It would be impossible, in Brooks’ opinion, to make a good dramatic version of Dickens’s *Tale of Two Cities*.

Similarly the dramatist is much more limited than the novelist in the number of characters he can use. In much fiction, of course, as in drama, the conflict shapes up between two, or among several, main characters. But while the novelist can choose some other forms, the dramatist has to centre his main action in a character or two.

Each character in a play bears a greater symbolic weight than in fiction. There is nothing to hinder the novelist from developing as many characters as he pleases. In Dickens we often find numerous "main" characters, and in our day there has been developed the "multiplicity" novel, involving the use of multiple points of view (e. g., Huxley's *Point Counter Point*). But the dramatist cannot do this. If, like O. Wilde, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, he wishes to present a group of people (Society) whom he sees as not homogeneous but diverse, he will need a number of different characters to indicate the diversity. He may use as many characters as he wishes, but they may be blurred because of inadequate treatment. He may use a small enough number to permit some fullness of presentation, but he may not create the variety he desires.

The more numerous the characters, the more subordinate most of them become. The idea of minor or "supporting" characters is one which we associate principally with drama. Such characters exist purely in relationship to someone else's situation. In Dryden's *All for Love* the Roman general Ventidius has little to do besides try to get Antony away from Cleopatra. He has no independent existence, such as he might will have in a novel.

References

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