

The School Drama Book

Drama, Literature and Literacy in the Creative Classroom

Robyn Ewing and John Nicholas Saunders



Currency Press, Sydney

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO

THE SMELL OF ENVY

Fox by Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks has been a favourite text of drama practitioners. A variety of dramas have been created using this text over the years with different purposes. Victorian drama educators Jane Bird, Kate Donelan and artist Noel Jordan have created drama experiences based on this text. Donelan and Jordan created a workshop while working for PETA (Philippine Educational Theatre Association) attempting to use drama to empower disadvantaged youth. Bird and Donelan's version was published in *Education in the Arts* (Sinclair et al. 2012). Queensland Drama educator Helen Radvan has also created a version of the drama and assessment to accompany this text, which is aimed at middle-years students.

Our version focuses on developing students' literacy and English skills, in particular confidence in oracy, descriptive language and inferential comprehension. The iconic Australian text allows a sensitive exploration of power and vulnerability.

Even though the characters in this text are animals (Dog, Magpie and Fox) the story explores the human context (role, relationships and situations) rather than the animals themselves. The students are never asked to 'act' like an animal, but rather take on the role of that character (their attitudes, thoughts, motivations etc.).

TEXT:	<i>Fox</i> (Margaret Wild and Ron Brooks)
YEAR LEVEL:	Appropriate for years 3-5
ENGLISH/LITERACY FOCUS:	Confidence in oracy; descriptive language and inferential comprehension
KEY THEMES:	Friendship; strength and weakness; power and vulnerability; risk; temptation and betrayal
AIMS:	To deepen students' understanding of complex characters and human emotions
RESOURCES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A copy of <i>Fox</i>• Art and writing materials• Butchers' paper• A costume element for Magpie (for example a black scarf)

WORKSHOP 1

DEVICE: Freeze Frame (depicting words)

Grouping: Groups of four to five.

Purpose: To embody key themes in the text.

Provide each group with a word from the list of themes below. After allocating a word, ask the students to create a Freeze Frame that represents that word. The Freeze Frames might not be literal; rather they may be symbolic or representational. The entire group must be in the Freeze Frame.

Words for groups:

- Friendship
- Power
- Weakness
- Isolation
- Temptation
- Betrayal
- Risk
- Rage
- Envy
- Loneliness

Once the groups have devised their Freeze Frame, ask them to present these to the class. You might like to use ask the class to close their eyes while the group prepares to present their Freeze Frame and then open their eyes to view. You might also like to play quiet music to help create focus and mood. Students can discuss the process afterwards.

DEVICE: Sculpting

Grouping: Pairs.

Purpose: To explore the physicality of the two types of characters in this text: vulnerable and powerful.

Ask the students to form pairs. Label each person in the pair, Person A and Person B. Ask the pairs to find a space in the room away from other groups.

Explain that Person A is going to be a 'sculptor' and Person B is going to be a 'piece of thinking clay'. Person A will transform Person B into a shape or representation of 'vulnerability'. The sculptor is creating their version of what vulnerability looks like and, as thinking clay, Person B does exactly what they are asked. There is no touching by the sculptor, the students can either describe and/or show their partner what they want them to do.

Remind the sculptors to think about facial expression, posture and levels, as well as where the thinking clay's eyes will focus.

Once all of the As have had time to sculpt their partner into 'vulnerability', introduce the students to the idea of creating a museum exhibition of the sculptures. Ask all Person Bs (sculptures) to stay frozen in their sculpted pose. All Person As (sculptors) can make their way around the room looking at all of the sculptures of what vulnerability might look like in the museum exhibition.

Ask the pairs to swap the roles of sculptor and thinking clay; B will now be the sculptor and A will be the thinking clay.

The sculptor is now going to mould their thinking clay into an idea of what 'power' looks like. Once everyone has had time to create their sculpture, ask all of the As (sculptures) to freeze in their frozen poses. All of the Bs can now walk around the museum looking at all the different versions of power.

You might like to discuss what the dominant ideas were in these sculpting activities. Start by asking the students: Was there a different mood in the presentation of the two types of sculptures?

WORKSHOP 2

READ from the top of page 1 'Through the charred forest ...' to the end of page 1 '... melting into blackness'.

DEVICE: Adjective Call Out/Word Circle

Grouping: Whole class.

Purpose: To collaboratively brainstorm a list of words (with vocal expression and gesture) to describe the two characters that we have met, Dog and Magpie. (You may need to discuss the fact that Dog is either a wild dog or a dingo.)

Sitting in a circle, ask the class to close their eyes and think of the character, Dog. Ask the students to picture Dog in their mind and think of a word or phrase that might describe him, for example big gentle mouth.

While the students are sitting in the circle, still with their eyes closed, ask them to:

- Think about how they can say the word (vocal expression) to emphasise its meaning.
- Think about a gesture or action (movement) that can accompany the word and add to its meaning.

Ask the students to open their eyes. Go around the circle and ask each student to share their word or short phrase, including the vocal expression and gesture.

After each student has had a chance to share their word or phrase, discuss their use of voice and gesture to accentuate meaning. To help the students get started, you could ask, 'Were there any descriptors that surprised you?'

Repeat the activity for the character of Magpie.

If time allows, the students may draw either Dog or Magpie and write a description of the character.

READ from page 3 'Days, perhaps a week later, she wakes ...' to the end of page 6 '... I will be your missing eye, and you will be my wings'.

DEVICE: Embodying Words and Emotions

Grouping: Whole class.

Purpose: To consider how Body and Movement can be used to embody and communicate feelings, words and emotions.

Resources: A copy of *Fox*, quiet music.

The students walk around the room and fill any empty spaces they can see. Call out simple words such as 'hot', 'cold', 'tired' and 'hungry'. When the students hear the word, working individually, they silently embody what they hear in a frozen pose. After a few seconds call out 'relax' and they relax from their pose and continue walking around the space in neutral. After a few examples, you can begin to introduce emotions such as happy, sad, frightened, rage, loneliness, envy, grief and joy.

Ask the students to embody/depict the emotion that Magpie might have been feeling when she woke up after Dog has taken her to the cave. After the students have embodied Magpie's emotion, ask the students to relax. Then ask the students to

embody/depict the emotion that Magpie might have been feeling while she was riding on Dog's back 'flying'.

FOLLOW-UP: Students write a diary entry as Magpie after her first ride on Dog's back.

WORKSHOP 3

READ from page 7 'And so Dog runs, with Magpie ...' to halfway down page 10 '... but Magpie shrinks away'. DON'T read the final sentence just yet.

DEVICE: Tableau and Tapping In

Grouping: Groups of three.

Purpose: To explore Character, Roles, Relationships and attitudes through Tapping In. This strategy requires students to interpret the illustrations (visual literacy), decide on a character and consider the character's motivation. This strategy also assists in developing inferential comprehension.

Resources: A copy of *Fox*.

Part 1: The Tableau

Students look at pages 9 and 10 of *Fox* depicting the first time Dog and Magpie meet Fox. In groups of three, the students are going to create a Tableau (a single Freeze Frame) depicting this scene in the book.

Ask the students to think about the following Elements of Drama:

- Role: who are you?
- Relationship: what is your relationship to the other characters?
- Space: what is the space around you communicating to the audience?
- Focus: what are you focusing on as the character at that particular moment?

Part 2: Tapping In

Ask a group to set up their Tableau and invite the other groups to become the audience. Once the audience has had a moment to observe the Tableau, you can 'Tap In' to each of the frozen characters. As you tap the students on the shoulder, you can

ask them a question. Questions may include:

- Can you say only one word describing how you feel at that moment?
- Can you say a sentence about how you are feeling at that moment?
- Can you say what your character's motivation is in a sentence?
- Can you tell me: 'Who are you?', 'What do you think about what is happening?', 'Do you trust the other characters?' etc. (Think about the information the text gives us, for example Fox has 'haunted eyes'.)

FOLLOW-UP: students can draw their character and include their speech bubble and a paragraph to describe what is represented.

READ from page 10 'She can feel Fox staring at her burnt wing' to the end of page 11 '... a smell of rage and envy and loneliness'.

DEVICE: Hot Seat - Magpie

Grouping: Five students to be 'hot-seated' and the rest of the class will be the questioning audience.

Purpose: To explore Magpie in greater detail. Hot-seating will require students to talk in role as a character and illustrate their inferential comprehension through filling in the gaps in the text to answer the questions.

Ask for five volunteers from the class to sit on chairs at the front of the room. These volunteers will take on the role of Magpie. Ask the class to think about some questions they might like to ask Magpie at this point in the story. Then, the five students who are sitting on the chairs will go into role as Magpie and answer the questions as the character, taking turns to answer. Ask the students who are being hot-seated to think about how they can represent Magpie, through the way they sit and speak, in a manner that doesn't mimic a bird. We want to explore her character. Perhaps ask them to imagine that if she was human, how would she sit and speak?

WORKSHOP 4

READ from the first sentence on page 13 'Magpie tries to warn Dog about Fox'. DON'T read the rest of page 13 just yet!

DEVICE: Role Play/Improvisation

Grouping: Pairs.

Purpose: To explore role playing (improvising) a very short scene that takes place between Dog and Magpie. This strategy requires students to consider Role, Relationship, Situation and Tension, as well as Voice and Language and Body and Movement.

Resources: A copy of *Fox*.

In pairs, the students discuss how Magpie might try to warn Dog about Fox. Encourage the students to think about the conversation that might take place between these two characters. Ask each pair to create a 30-second excerpt of the scene starting with Magpie saying, 'He belongs nowhere' (to Dog about Fox).

Invite each pair of students to share their scene with the class. You may wish to lead a reflective discussion following this activity.

RE-READ from the start of page 13 'Magpie tries to warn Dog ...' to halfway through page 14 '... leave Dog and come with me'. DON'T read the final part of page 14 just yet!

DEVICE: Conscience Alley - What Should Magpie Do?

Grouping: Whole class.

Purpose: To explore Magpie's conundrum and options. This strategy will help students consider different perspectives and possibilities.

Ask the students to imagine that they are Magpie. As a class, discuss the reasons why she might be tempted to go with Fox or stay with Dog. During the discussion, encourage the students to remember how much Magpie loves flying and that she is grieving the loss of her wing. Give the students time to think about this especially if it's the first time they have experienced Conscience Alley.

Ask for a volunteer to represent Magpie in this activity. The volunteer does not need to say anything. The rest of the class makes two lines facing each other. Ask students in one line to individually come up with a reason that Magpie *should* go with Fox. Ask

the students in the other line to think of a reason that Magpie *should not* go with Fox. Standing at the top of the Conscience Alley, the volunteer in role as Magpie considers their own opinion about this situation. In role as Magpie, the volunteer walks slowly up this Conscience Alley, listening to what everyone has to say.

As a class, discuss and reflect on the different ideas that were presented. Ask the student who was in role as Magpie what resonated with them. Did the arguments that the volunteer heard influence their own opinion about what Magpie should do?

WORKSHOP 5

DEVICE: Hot Seat - Dog

Grouping: Five students to be 'hot-seated' and the rest of the class will be the questioning audience.

Purpose: To explore Dog in greater detail. Hot-seating will require students to talk in role as a character and illustrate their inferential comprehension through filling in the gaps in the text to answer the questions.

Ask for five volunteers from the class to sit on chairs at the front of the room. These volunteers will take on the role of Dog. Ask the class to think about some questions they might like to ask Dog at this point in the story. Then, the five students who are sitting on the chairs will go into role as Dog and answer the questions as the character, taking turns to answer. Ask the students who are being hot-seated to think about how they can represent Dog, through the way they sit and speak, in a manner that doesn't mimic a dog. We want to explore his character. Ask them to imagine how he would sit and speak.

Following the Hot-seating, you might like to lead a discussion about any interesting points that came out of this activity.

DEVICE: Role on the Wall

Grouping: Three groups.

Purpose: To explore the three characters: Magpie, Dog and Fox. To ensure students have a shared understanding. To develop vocabulary and language skills.

Resources: Butchers' paper and art and writing materials.

Draw three outlines, one for each character, on some butchers' paper. Identify which outline is which character by writing their names above the head of the outline. Split the class into three groups, allocate them one character each and give them the character outline. Ask the students to think of words that describe their character physically and write these words outside the outline. Inside the outline, brainstorm words that describe the character's personality and their internal attributes.

Once every group is finished, ask each group to present their Role on the Wall to the rest of the class.

DEVICE: Three Freeze Frames

Grouping: Groups of three.

Purpose: To predict the next part of the story.

Resources: A copy of *Fox*.

Ask the students what they think might happen next in the story. You may need to re-read from page 13 to halfway down page 14 stopping at '... leave Dog, come with me'. You may wish to ask the class: 'What do they think Magpie will do?' Ask the students to get into groups of three and discuss what they think Magpie will do next. After a short discussion, ask them to create three Freeze Frames showing what Magpie will do next. All group members need to be in all Freeze Frames.

When the groups are ready to present, play some quiet music. Use the 'eyes open, eyes closed' convention to transition between the three Freeze Frames. You may choose to have a debrief or reflective discussion with the class.

READ all of page 14.

WORKSHOP 6

READ all of page 15.

DEVICE: Proximities

Grouping: Whole class.

Purpose: To examine students' attitudes towards the character of Magpie through spacial proximity.

Resources: A suggestive costume element for Magpie (such as a black scarf).

Explain to the students that the spaces and proximities between people have meaning. You may like to use a few examples by having two students closely facing each other, or facing each other at opposite ends of the room, and discuss the meaning created.

Ask one student to stand in the middle of the classroom. This student will take on the role of Magpie. You may wish to use a suggestive costume element such as a black scarf. Ask the rest of the class to sit along one of the walls of the classroom and explain to them that one by one they will enter the space and stand somewhere in the room in relation to Magpie. When the student enters the space they need to justify why they are standing in that area in relation to Magpie (the meaning created in the space between the student and Magpie). For example, a student who stands next to her might say, 'I am standing here as I support Magpie's decision to go with Fox' or a student who is standing far away from Magpie might say, 'I am standing here because I think Magpie is being selfish'.

Once each member of the class has taken their position, invite a reflective discussion following the activity. It might be interesting to ask the student who took on the role of Magpie to explain how they felt during the exercise.

FOLLOW-UP: As a class, look at the Positive, Negative and Interesting ideas that came from the Proximities activity.

DEVICE: Hot Seat - Magpie - Post Decision

Grouping: Five students to be 'hot-seated' and the rest of the class will be the questioning audience.

Purpose: To explore Magpie's decision to go with Fox. Hot-seating will require students to talk in role as a character and illustrate their inferential comprehension through filling in the gaps in the text to answer the questions.

This Hot-seating session will allow students to explore why Magpie has decided to go with Fox and leave Dog.

The five students who have been selected to be in the hot-seat are going to take on the role of Magpie.

Ask for five volunteers from the class to sit on chairs at the front of the room. These volunteers will take on the role of Magpie. Ask the class to think about some questions they might like to ask Magpie at this point in the story. Then, the five students who are sitting on the chairs will go into role as Magpie and answer the

questions in role, taking turns to answer. Ask the students who are being hot-seated to think about how they can represent Magpie. They could imagine, if Magpie was human, how she would sit and speak.

WORKSHOP 7

READ from page 17 'While Dog sleeps ...' to the end of page 22 '... She cannot tell if it is a scream of triumph or despair'.

Discuss the scream. Who might the scream have come from and was it a scream of triumph or despair?

DEVICE: Hot Seat - Fox After Abandoning Magpie

Grouping: Five students to be 'hot-seated' and the rest of the class will be the questioning audience.

Purpose: To explore Fox's decision to abandon Magpie. Hot-seating will require students to talk in role as a character and illustrate their inferential comprehension through filling in the gaps in the text to answer the questions.

This Hot-seating session will provide an opportunity for students to delve into the character of Fox and explore his background, why he wanted to separate Dog and Magpie, and why he decided to take Magpie and abandon her far away from Dog.

The five students who have been selected to be in the hot-seat are going to take on the role of Fox.

Ask for five volunteers from the class to sit on chairs at the front of the room. These volunteers will take on the role of Fox. Ask the class to think about some questions they might like to ask Fox at this point in the story. The five students who are sitting on the chairs will go into role as Fox and answer the questions as the character, taking turns to answer. Ask the students who are being hot-seated to think about how they can represent Fox. The students could imagine, if Fox was human, how he would sit and speak.

EXTENSION: Explain to the students that there are only two pages remaining in the story. Ask them to write and illustrate how they think the story will end.

READ from page 24 'Magpie huddles, a scruff of feathers ...' to the end of the book.

DEBRIEF: Following the reading, you may need to lead a debrief with the students about the themes and issues in the text. To start a debrief you may use some of the following questions:

- What did you learn from reading *Fox*?
- The author, Margaret Wild, has left the ending of the story open. What do you think happens after this book finishes?
- Why do you think Fox left Magpie in the 'hot red desert'?
- Do you think that any of the characters changed through the story?

To conclude, look at the illustrations on the inside covers at the front and back of the book and discuss the possible meaning of these illustrations. For example: Does Magpie find Dog again?