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Target students: 6th graders

A Drama Experience for EFL Children – “Noah’s Ark”

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Introduction

English teachers need to constantly improve teaching methods and techniques in order to help students learn and become more interested in learning the language. As an English teacher in a public elementary school in Taiwan, I have always wanted to find some creative ways to teach my students new materials. Among many of the teaching activities, drama appears to be more challenging and more rewarding for both the students and me.

After having tried putting “The Ugly Duckling”, “The Three Little Pigs”, “The Little Red Riding Hood” and some other original stories made up by my students into short plays in the past, the question is “What’s next?” Since most of my students are just beginning to learn the very basic vocabulary and sentence structures, it would be difficult for them to learn and remember difficult vocabulary and lines. It’s necessary to pick some stories that are appropriate for their levels, but I also want to teach them some new stories instead of the stories they are already very familiar with. There are many interesting short stories available, but this time, I decide to teach them some stories from the Bible and particularly adapt the story of *Noah’s Ark* to a drama in which they can all participate in. I think it is important for students to know some of the most famous stories in the Bible and become more aware of western cultures and civilizations.

Procedures

In order to produce a short play for *Noah’s Ark*, some preparations need to be done by the teacher before actual teaching:

Teacher’s Pre-Teaching Preparations

It’s important to plan ahead and prepare well before teaching. After having

decided the theme to be *Noah's Ark*, copies of picture books about the story were used as references. Also, some internet researches were conducted to learn more about the details of the story. The story was then turned into a script in simple words to suit the student's levels, as follows:

Script for Noah's Ark

Narrator: Noah was a very old man. He was a very good man, but the world was a bad place filled with bad people and bad things. God decided to send a flood so the world would be nice and clean again.

God: I am God. I am not happy with what I see. The men are evil, I will send a flood to destroy the bad people and the bad things on earth, but Noah and his family are good. I will save Noah and his family. I will save the good animals, too.

Narrator: So God told Noah to build an ark.

God: Noah, build an ark and fill the ark with animals.

Noah: OK! I will build an ark and save the animals.

(Noah takes out the ark.)

Noah: The ark is ready. The animals can go into the ark two by two.

(Two by two, the animals move into the ark. As the animals walk, they will say what animals they are.)

Animals: We are _____s. We are boarding.

(After they entered the ark)

Narrator: Then it began to rain very hard. It rained for forty days and forty nights. Flood was everywhere. The world was covered by water, but Noah, his family, the animals, and the ark were safe. One day,...

(A rainbow appears.)

Noah: There is a rainbow in the sky. The rain has stopped. Now I will send out a bird.

(A bird flies out of the ark.)

Narrator: The bird did not return.

Noah: I will send out another bird.

(Another bird flies out of the ark.)

(The bird comes back with a green leaf.)

Noah: The bird is back with a green new leaf. The water must have gone. The flood is over. Now, we can go back home. Thank God!

Oh! Thank God! Let's go, my animal friends.

(Noah lets the animals come out.)

Narrator: There will be no more flood again.

With the script ready, the play could be visualized in one's mind. It was clearer what characters and props would be needed; and it was clearer how things should be like.

Actual Lessons

The Noah's Ark lessons were designed for 6th graders. The teacher used one lesson a week for four consecutive weeks to do this project.

First Lesson

In the first lesson, the teacher brought in the picture books about Noah's Ark, told and explained the story of Noah's Ark in detail. The teacher made sure the students understand the story well. The teacher then asked each student to sign up for an animal to play. Each student would be responsible to make a mask over the

weekend for the animal of choice and bring the mask to class next time. Exactly two students signed up for a kind of animals. Also, some students volunteered to make the beard for Noah; to draw a rainbow on a poster; and to build a prop for the ark out of some cartons. The students did their masks, props, and posters at home over the weekend.

Second Lesson

In the second lesson, the teacher made sure each student had brought in their masks and props. Students presented their animal masks and said some simple lines such as “We are _____ (animal)s.” The students could make some sounds for the animals they were playing.

Each student learned what he or she needed to do in the play. The teacher and students tried to visualize in their minds how the play would be like.

Third Lesson

Each student was handed out a copy of the script. The teacher then led the students to read through the script one line at a time. Every time the teacher read a line, the students repeated the line together. The script was read this way two times. Since a class was composed by students of mixed levels ranging from beginners to very advanced students, not all students were expected to be able to read the whole script. For the beginners, they only needed to know some of the key words and be able to say what animals they played. For advanced students, they were encouraged to be able to read the whole script fluently. Students could audition with the teacher at an arranged time to become the narrator.

In this lesson, the teacher also tested students with their knowledge of the key words in the script. Twenty key words such as: God, Noah, world, ark, animals, flood rain, rainbow, save, leaf, ..., etc., were selected from the script and written on the blackboard. Students in mixed-leveled groups were asked to write down the English vocabulary along with the definitions in Chinese. The first group that completed the test was the winner.

Fourth Lesson

In this lesson, the play was rehearsed over and over again. Students were also

asked to practice the script at home after school.

The teacher could decide whether or not to have the students present the drama to other audiences in the future. With enough rehearsals and practices, the play could be presented to other students or audiences. Based on the original concept, improvements could also be made on the script, props, casts, etc., to make the play better or more formal.

Conclusion

I tried the *Noah's Ark* project in all five of my 6-grade classes. In some classes, the results were better, while in some other classes, the results were not as good. However, most of the students had met my requirements and expectations; some of the students even exceeded my original expectations by doing more than what I have originally asked them to do. For example, I only required the students to make some simple two-dimensional ark. It ended up some of them made more elaborated boats that were three-dimensional. Some students did spend a lot of time and efforts to do their props which really impressed the other students and me. Although most of my student's English is still quite limited, they have learned many new things through the whole new learning processes. In the future, we will continue to experiment more with English drama activities and try to make more improvements.

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Appendix:



Photo One: The ark built by the students



Photo Two: Teamwork



Photo Three: Animals and the ark



Photo Four: Masks made by the students



Photo Five: Student's products



Photo Six: Noah and pigs



Photo Seven: Noah, animals, and the ark