

image to come

IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY TEACH CHILDREN TO READ;
WE HAVE TO GIVE THEM SOMETHING WORTH READING.
SOMETHING THAT WILL STRETCH THEIR IMAGINATIONS—
SOMETHING THAT WILL HELP THEM MAKE SENSE OF
THEIR OWN LIVES AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO REACH OUT
TOWARD PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES ARE QUITE DIFFERENT
FROM THEIR OWN.

KATHERINE PATERSON (2005)



DRAMA AND CONTEMPORARY PICTURE BOOKS IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

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INTRODUCTION

Earlier chapters have provided sound and compelling justifications for embedding drama within the secondary English curriculum. Sustained use of drama teaching and learning strategies positively affects students' engagement and motivation in learning (Heath, 2000; Fiske, 1999) while enhancing language and literacy development in imaginative and creative ways (for example, Ewing & Simons, 2004; Miller & Saxton, 2004; Baldwin & Fleming, 2003; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002; Wagner, 1994). Imagination and creativity are inextricably intertwined, and are our most important capacities (Greene, 1995). In 1976, Bader (1) wrote that the picture book 'hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page'. In this chapter we have extended the idea of the 'drama of the turning page' to one in which drama is used not only metaphorically to turn the pages of the story but to bend space and time to create a third facing page of display (Greenwood, 2005) on which we, through enacting, draw and write our own versions of the story. Through such interaction dialogues, confrontations, risk-taking and unplanned discoveries, we engage with something new.

Our chapter builds on these premises by focusing particularly on how drama used with richly interpretive picture books can foster the development of middle years students' imaginations and creativity in the secondary English classroom. It adds enacting to the understandings of narrative as both *making* and *doing* (Benjamin, in Peterson & Langellier, 2006:174). As Peterson and Langellier suggest: 'The turn to performance enlarges this understanding of narrative by recognizing that the creative potential or force of such "makings" is not limited to the aesthetic realm of literature, ritual ceremonies, dramatic productions or festivals.'

The middle years of schooling (years 5–9) correspond to the developmental period of prepubescence, puberty and early adolescence. While a growing body of research (such as Hill & Russell, 1999; Prendergast & Bahr, 2005; Smith, 2006) suggests that this time frame in students' school lives has the possibility to be a peak in personal, social and educational development, large numbers of students, particularly boys, do not necessarily achieve this potential. Middle years students need a wide variety of intellectually challenging integrated collaborative tasks about subjects and issues that matter to them and engage them in deep learning. Deep learners are able to develop a rich understanding of key ideas by building on previous knowledge and personal experience. Both teachers and students themselves need to set high expectations for strong academic achievement (Smith, 2006). The learning experiences described in this chapter specifically address these needs.

Initially the chapter considers some reasons why picture books can play an important role in middle years English classrooms. It then provides some exemplars of how drama strategies¹ have been used recently, exploring how several contemporary picture books in Australian and Canadian classrooms help to foster students' imaginations and develop critical literacies. In an

age when the internet has created a democratic forum for discussion and information—much of it without provenance—critical literacies are imperative for students in the twenty-first century. Students must be able to penetrate the surface meanings of any text to understand it and interrogate its deeper meanings. In addition, students need to be able to understand how a text has been constructed, and how it can function and be interpreted in different cultural contexts and for different purposes (Lankshear, 1994; Rowan, 2001). At the same time, opportunities to engage with picture books through drama can enhance students’ visual literacy skills as well as their oral reading. Both will also be examined through the exemplars later in the chapter.

WHY PICTURE BOOKS IN MIDDLE YEARS’ CLASSROOMS?

A picture book opens up new worlds of wonder and magic letting your mind wander from everyday life. The pictures tell the story. Sometimes complex, they send your mind reeling for answers (Jacob, middle years student after sustained study of *The Watertower* by Crew & Woolman, 1994).

Like Katherine Paterson, eleven-year-old Jacob knows how important it is to have our imaginations stretched in ways that enable us to find sense and meaning in our own lives and also help us empathise with and reach out to those who are different. Bennett (1991:93) asks the question: ‘After all isn’t imagination—“What if ...”, “Suppose that ...”—at the heart of all learning developments, whether scientific ... technological, [or] artistic?’. Nonverbal ways of communicating draw on a multitude of understandings that transcend the verbal. As Eisner (2001) asserts, nonverbal ways of communicating enhance our feelings towards the quality of a particular experience because they enable us to craft it aesthetically. In addition, recent work in the areas of neurobiology and physics emphasise the importance of visual arts engagement in broadening neural circuitry in the brain (Heath, 2000). Visual images can engage participants in recalling or recreating or finding a new expression for their own experiences and understandings, especially those that cannot easily be expressed in words (Orland-Barak, 2001; Weber & Mitchell, 1996).

Picture books are ‘unique arts objects’ (Keifer). They combine images and ideas that ‘evoke an emotional response’ (Jalongo, 1998:67), engaging students in a holistic encounter with a story. In a world increasingly laden with multimodal texts, picture books have enormous potential to enhance students’ literary, aesthetic and literacy learning (Doonan, 1993), and opportunities to explore texts and images together take on heightened significance (New London Group, 1996).

Despite the fact that many contemporary picture books are consciously created to share experiences, thoughts, ideas or dilemmas with children, adolescents and adults alike, there are still some who continue to regard them only as opportunities for shared reading aloud with younger age groups. While not wishing to downplay the unquestionable value of the shared reading of picture books in every English classroom, it is our contention that engagement with the pictures can have much significance for older students. As Jane Doonan (1993:9) writes:

Almost without exception an older child begins by assuming that reading a picture book is a very soft option, largely because she has not reflected on how much there is to consider ... She is the beholder of the pictures, looking at what is being depicted and being affected by the interwoven arrangements that meet her eyes ... And there is the synthesis of the picture-book experience, with object, words and images uniting in the composite text—the work that exists only in her mind.

In past years, picture books were often only used in the secondary classroom to help multilingual learners examine story structure in English, as a precursor to students designing such a text for younger students, or to introduce students to the difficult concepts of satire and irony (Watson, 1998). Words and illustrations were treated separately. Such limited conceptualisations of the picture book can also lead to the perception that an illustrator develops images that play only an ancillary role in the story by merely supporting the words of the book. Working from such limitations will mean that more time and emphasis will be accorded to a close reading of the words. While it may be true that the illustrations in some picture books are mainly decorative, it is equally the case that a number of early picture books now thought of as classics (such as Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* and *In the Night Kitchen*) were created with multiple audiences in mind. Sendak (1987:366–9) himself asserts that, 'Illustrations are so linked to words that they should be inseparable from them ... I will illustrate only those things I have a special affinity for ... the pictures and words are married as they are in no other form.' Shaun Tan's newly published 112-page wordless picture book, *The Arrival*, is highly sophisticated, and as multilayered as many novels. Tan had originally intended to accompany the drawings with text, but the decision not to has resulted in a very compassionate narrative now being termed a graphic novel.

Over the last three decades an increasing number of picture book authors and illustrators have deliberately used image with and without text to offer a range of voices, meanings and interpretations to the reader and viewer, regardless of age or stage. For example, there is a wonderful section in Paterson's novel, *The Same Stuff as Stars* (2002), where astronomy-loving eleven-year-old Angel initially turns up her nose when the librarian suggests she read *Starry Messenger* (Sis, 1996:186), which tells the story of Galileo. She immediately becomes absorbed in the story itself, its illustrations and what was written in script in the illustrations as well. She is able to handle the derisive comment of others—'You're not checking out a picture book are you?' (185)—and thinks deeply about Galileo's battle to share his insights

about the solar system and the irony of the pardon he received 350 years later—‘That was the crazy part. They forgave him for his own mistake. It didn’t make sense ... Yes it did in a crazy kind of way ... Wasn’t she always wanting Verna to forgive her?’ (185). This is a turning point in Angel’s story.

Consider the work of Anthony Browne, Armin Greder, Stephen Woolman, Colin Thompson, John Burningham and Lauren Child, to name just a few. In their books pictures, images and illustrations are constitutive rather than ancillary, and often actually take the lead in the narration or provide the reader with a totally different direction as an alternative to the written text—‘Why draw a picture when the words already say everything?’ (Greder, in Gleeson, 2003:11).

Unheard of in the past and still an infrequent practice, there are now authors and illustrators who collaborate rather than work in isolation. Armin Greder (Gleeson, 2003), for example, discusses the critical moment when he and Gleeson decided to omit the last half of the written text in the award-winning *The Great Bear* because the words were too prescriptive and Greder could find no ‘spaces’ to illustrate. Many contemporary picture books belie their simplicity.

It is these contemporary picture books—those that are rich in words and images and allow a range of interpretations that provide gaps or ‘spaces’ (Williams, 1987) or ‘places’ (Gleeson, 2006) for the imagination to play—that this chapter focuses upon. Text and images are deliberately constructed in a holistic or integrated way to offer metaphors for living, and for the characters who live these lives. In his recent monograph about his own journey, Shaun Tan (2006) builds on the often quoted ‘life is a work of art’ (Rank, 1932) to liken picture books to photo albums, in that picture books provide metaphors for life issues, dilemmas and feelings. Just as many creative works remain unfinished, Tan suggests that such picture books require readers who are also viewers to bring their own understandings and experiences to ‘finish’ them in a meaningful way. It is our assertion that using drama forms, strategies and techniques with picture books allows students to enact situations and empathise with the characters as they explore the unfinished as well as the taken-for-grantedness of their own experiences and feelings. In so doing, students challenge the ‘saturated consciousness’ (Apple, 1990) that can often cloud beliefs and attitudes. Opportunities to story, challenge, and question and interpret from multiple perspectives build students’ capacity for deep understanding and so enable them to become more critically literate (Lankshear, 1994).

Choosing picture books

The crowded nature of the curriculum ensures that teachers will only have a limited number of opportunities to work closely with picture books, and so choices are critical. Choices need to be based upon the relationship of the book to important themes or issues being studied, and the knowledge that it will engage students because it is congruent with the life issues they

face regularly. Kempe (2001) recommends choosing picture books that connect with other stories or reveal ambiguities that encourage students to explore other possibilities. Linguistic and aesthetic qualities of the book itself must also appeal to the teacher, because his or her own enthusiasm for particular books can be infectious.

We have chosen several picture books as exemplars that, in our opinion, meet the criteria outlined above and the activity shown in the boxed section below.

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PRINCIPLES FOR CHOOSING PICTURE BOOKS

- Is the book interesting enough to be read more than once?
- Are the text and illustrations suggestive rather than defining; innovative rather than expected; intriguing rather than decorative?
- Does the text suggest multiple levels of meaning and/or different, competing meanings?
- Does the style of illustration enhance the story, themes, setting and text?
- Do the images add to the meanings of the story or merely support them?
- Does the language of the writing offer its own visuals for the mind's eye?

SOME PICTURE BOOKS THAT ILLUSTRATE THESE CRITERIA

- Anthony Browne's *The Tunnel* (1990) examines sibling issues while demonstrating the power of narrative to release us from gender stereotypes, and can provide a contrast to an exploration of parent-child relationships in *Gorilla* (1983) and *Zoo* (1992) or Brown's retelling of *Hansel and Gretel* (1981).
- Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree* (2001), a beautiful and brilliant 122-word exploration of anxiety and depression that begins: 'Sometimes the day begins with nothing to look forward to'.
- Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (1985) is an extraordinary collection of stand-alone, somewhat mysterious illustrations with provocative captions, and *The Polar Express* (1986) reasserts the power of belief as something that belongs to adults as well as to children.
- Libby Gleeson and Armin Greder's *The Great Bear* (1999) is much more than the story of an abused dancing circus bear who escapes both his shackles and the confines of a narrow world. *The Princess and the Perfect Dish* (1995), a traditionally structured fairy tale to celebrate assertive large princesses who enjoy food, was written deliberately to challenge Walt Disney's stereotypical princesses.
- Gary Crew and Steven Woolman's *The Watertower* (1994) and *Beneath the Surface* (2004) question normalcy on a number of levels through implying that a sinister presence has overtaken first a town's watertower, and perhaps the world.

Getting started with picture books: drama from a picture

This first activity offers a safe starting point, particularly for students who are not used to drama in their classroom. It is important that they can see the relationship between the picture book or books and the theme or issue being addressed; for example, through close study of a novel or historical or contemporary events.

Have enough books for students working in groups of three or four. In their small groups, students 'read' the illustrations without reading the words. They must then agree on one picture that 'speaks' to them and, as a group, create a still image (tableau or depiction) that represents it. If desired, one of the group members can be selected to be the director to ensure that the visual representation accurately reflects the image depicted. In turn, the groups present their representation to the class. The teacher or another student, by laying a hand on the selected student's shoulder, can tap into an individual's thoughts in the moment of representation. After the class discussion of this initial embodiment of the images, and the contribution that the depiction has made to their interpretation of what was happening in the picture, students can return to their picture book to read the whole story. They can then, if desired, review their chosen image to examine the illustrator's choices about such matters as colour, perspective and symbols in the illustration (Callow, 1998; Simpson, 2006), and how each choice contributed to the meanings conveyed. Students thus begin to see how rich and complex even the simplest picture books might be, and that there is much more to pictures than a supportive description of text. Students could then engage in reflective discussion, in small groups, pairs or as a whole class. Questions could include:

- What questions did you have from the image that were answered by your reading of the text?
- How significant do you think the chosen image was in the story itself?
- How much did the depiction and tapping in contribute to your understanding of the illustration you chose?

If desired, the still images, tapping in and reflection can be repeated with other illustrations. Students can also draw or paint and annotate their own version of the image they represented.

This activity can provide a valuable introduction to the next strategy we discuss.

TEACHING STRATEGY

Using picture books as a starting point for readers' theatre

Readers' theatre or scripted adaptations of literary texts enable students to use their voices to explore different readings of the same words (Cusworth, 1991; Ewing & Simons, 2004; see also Hughes's chapters in this text). Through the collaborative scripting process of a chosen story or poem, students become aware that all readers bring their own past experiences to the meanings they make from texts. Picture books can provide a useful beginning for the scripting process. Sometimes an author's use of font types and organisation of the text on the page can provide a particularly helpful beginning in understanding what the author intended. Illustrations often convey an irony or emotion, left unsaid in the written text, that needs somehow to be translated to the script, either through voice inflection, facial expression, simple gesture or by the use of percussion instruments. Sometimes there are no clues, offering spaces for students' interpretation in both their scripting and in their performance.

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One group of twelve-year-olds recently scripted Lauren Child's picture books *Beware of the Storybook Wolves* (2000) and *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (2002), having initially discussed at length the cues for different characters and how the text should be read. Each small group then took up one of the incidents in the story. Members of the group first underlined the spoken text and allocated it to the relevant character. They divided the narration between three or four narrators, ensuring that no one had more than a sentence or so. Child's portraits of the characters helped them decide how each part was to be read, and the students learned a great deal about inflection, pacing, pause, rhythm and idiolect through the process. Later, their own brand of humorous asides were inserted, with local references, and the scripts were annotated with a range of sound effects before presentation.

Such presentations offer further opportunities for the audiences to interpret, question and extend their understanding of the meanings offered by the text.

Using picture books to encourage the development of empathy

Feeling part of a group—fitting in—is a concept that resonates with most middle years students and adults. Chosen by Miller and Saxton (2004) for this reason, the picture book *Joseph: A Prairie Boy's Story* (McGugan & Kimber, 1994) is set over a hundred years ago in a Canadian farming community. The story is narrated by a younger child who is befriended

at school by Josepha, an adolescent immigrant. The story evokes what is still a reality for many of today's immigrant and refugee children: building a new life in a new country. In the following example, students reflect on current issues around immigration in a way that provides distance, yet allows them to use their knowledge and understandings about education, learning and relationships.

Miller and Saxton (2004) suggest that the students take on roles as early career teachers called to a meeting as they are about to embark on their first teaching job in a one-room school on the prairies a century ago. As they have already heard from the *teacher-in-role*, 'life on the prairies can be very hard and the Inspector of Education is concerned about the number of children who leave school early, often with less than a grade 4 education. He feels that too many of our students, particularly those from immigrant families, are leaving school before they have become familiar with the English language or with the culture of our nation. I am sure that you may have met some of these children on your teaching practice' (104). Photos of schools a century ago—some in isolated rural contexts—are used as a trigger for discussion around the needs of immigrant children, and the struggle to help them learn and the language difficulties they faced. Later, after the first part of the picture book is shared, the illustration of the adolescent, Josepha, is projected or shared to explore what Josepha's thoughts might be. The teacher-in-role says:

While we can never really know what is in a child's mind as teachers, we need to understand what a child such as Josepha might be thinking and feeling as he sits in the primary row day after day. Take a moment to consider his perspective. If Josepha could speak his thoughts in English, what might we hear? Close your eyes and we will hear his thoughts. When you feel my hand on your shoulder, just say those words aloud (105).

The teacher moves around the room, gently touching individual students on the shoulder and leaving her hand there until each child has spoken. Then, still in role, the teacher offers these reflective questions:

- What new insights have you gained?
- What do we know or can infer about Josepha's learning or home situation?
- What for you, as new teachers soon to be in similar situations, are the key issues in this case study?
- What kind of future do you predict for Josepha?

Through these questions, the students will be drawing not only on the story but on their own classroom and life experiences. It is the illustrator's use of perspective and deliberate lack of detail that help to generate the imaginative leap into the shoes of some else—the action of empathy (Goleman, 2006).

TEACHING STRATEGY

Hot seating

The interrogation of a character in a drama or other form of literature, whereby one person takes the 'hot seat', speaking as that character, to provide information, background or advice to the other participants.

Exploring ideology with picture books and drama

Any ideology, or particular way of looking at the world, can be contested because it is only one worldview of many (Smith & Lovat, 2003). These ideologies are always embedded in our language practices and in the teacher and students themselves. Picture books can be unpacked with drama activities to help students understand how important it is to interrogate messages received through words and images.

Hot seating characters can be used when participants have a need to expand their understanding by questioning a character or group of characters in role. This strategy allows us to begin to understand motives that underlie particular actions through the use of questions.

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For example, read Jon Sziecza's *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by A. Wolf or *What Really Happened to little Red Riding Hood, The Wolf's Story* (Forward & Cohen, 2005). Hot seating the wolf can help students question the taken-for-granted. Hot seating challenges us to hear the wolf's side of the story.

Lisa Paull's *Reading Otherways* (1998:16) provides a useful set of questions students can use in coming to terms with ideas, themes and ideologies in a story:

- Whose story is this? Who is the reader?
- When and where was the reading produced?
- Who is named and who is not?
- Who is on top?
- Who gets punished? And who gets praised?
- Who speaks? Who is silenced?

TEACHING STRATEGY

A workshop structured around Anthony Browne's *A Walk in the Park* (1976) and *Voices in the Park* (1998) can provide an excellent source for questioning. These picture books, written nearly two decades apart, illustrate how much the author-illustrator himself changed in that time in his own art-making as well as in his representation of different voices. The events in the first book are narrated by a third person, while in the later book the four characters narrate their own stories. Before reading the text, it is effective to use images of the four characters alongside Browne's illustrations of the park as a backdrop to the character to initiate students' thoughts about who these character are, why they feel as they do and how they got to be this way.

Later, contrast, for example, the trees in Mr Smith's park with those of Mrs Smyth or Charles. How are the trees behind Smudge different from those behind the other three, and what is Browne telling us about her? Each character can be hot seated to explore the initial impressions created through the images, and students can choose one of the characters to develop further.

TEACHING STRATEGY
CONTINUED...

Conscience alley is another drama strategy that can provide an opportunity for students to appreciate multiple perspectives by becoming the voices in a character's mind. In this strategy, the person who must make a decision walks slowly between two lines of participants with opposing viewpoints. As the person making the decision moves between the two lines, participants in turn comment or reflect on the difficulty of choice.

In the following example, *Herb the Vegetarian Dragon* (Bass & Harter, 1999) is about to be beheaded by the knights, who are fed up with being eaten by dragons. The only problem is that Herb, being a vegetarian, is not guilty of this crime. His carnivore nemesis, 'Meathook', offers to rescue him if, in return, Herb eats a piece of fresh boar. Set up a conscience alley. As Herb walks the alley as the student in role, half the class find reasons why he should eat the meat and the other offer reasons why he should not. This can stimulate a lively reflection on stereotyping. Questions about relative values might include:

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- When does life become more important than your beliefs?
- What might make a person go against his or her values or beliefs?
- What connections can you make between Herb's dilemma and what is happening in today's world events?

The final section, below, details a whole series of workshops around one picture book to draw together the ideas discussed thus far in this chapter.

DRAMA WORKSHOPS FOR *BENEATH THE SURFACE* (CREW & WOOLMAN, 2004)

Beneath the Surface is a powerful, enigmatic and disturbing picture book that continues the story of *The Watertower* (1994). It is appropriate for upper primary, secondary and adult readers alike. Water and the eye are recurring images throughout the book. A number of important possibilities are suggested through the story, and there are a number of other potential stories within the story. It is rich in metaphor and spaces for exploration through the juxtaposition of text and image.

TEACHING
STRATEGY

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BEFORE READING *BENEATH THE SURFACE*

- Before reading this picture book, read its predecessor: *The Watertower*.
- Examine photos of watertowers.
- View the local watertower and photograph or sketch it. Note its measurements.
- View illustrations in *Watertower* and discuss what has happened to Preston's inhabitants. What could have happened to Bubba? What leads students to this conclusion?
- Compare the covers of both books, looking for similarities and differences.

Alternatively, *Beneath the Surface* could be read without reference to *The Watertower*, and the earlier book could be explored later.

AFTER READING *BENEATH THE SURFACE*

The suggestions for drama activities and related talk opportunities have been organised around some of the openings of the text, but it will not be relevant to use each one—it's always important to remember not to overuse a book.

Opening 1–2

Spike feels he is being watched from the time he arrives in Preston. Is it only the typical small-town kind of watching? How does Woolman create this feeling of being watched? What moods or feelings do the colours convey?

Drama: Students can sculpt Spike, with townsfolk arranged around him, and then the sculpted Spike can be hot seated to discover what she or he is thinking.

Opening 3–4

Drama: Students script the interaction between the clerk and Spike. What suspicions may already be present? Students reflect on why they think Spike avoids the question about who he is?

Opening 4–5

The illustrator suggests that Spike is tossing and turning with nightmares. What could it foreshadow?

Drama: Students each write down one of Spike's nightmares in three sentences or less, and read them aloud in turn. These can be orchestrated with percussion. Discuss how the voice collage reflected the illustrator's intentions?

Opening 5–6

This almost all white observatory provides a stark contrast to the black framing. What does this illustration tell us about these two scientists?

Drama: In pairs, students sculpt the two scientists to illustrate their relationship. These pairs are viewed, and students reflect on the similarities and differences as they enrich the meaning.

Opening 9–10

Look at the scene in *The Watertower* where Spike and Bubba wished to swim in the watertower. Note this scene in *Beneath the Surface*. Look at the eyes of the Aboriginal girl. What might she be thinking? The text says, 'The gate opened as if he were expected.' Who might be expecting Spike?

Drama: In small groups, students create the next scene, either as a script or through improvisation.

Opening 23–4

In the illustration, the boardroom is dark. Each board member stares directly at the viewer, conveying a powerful sense of foreboding. Who might the board members be?

Drama: After discussion, each student takes on a role as a board member and prepares questions for Spike. The teacher in role as Spike then fields their questions. What have the students now learned about themselves? About Spike?

Opening 27

The text says, 'Which was both his end and his beginning.' What could this mean? Students write their own version of what happened to Spike and share their stories with a small group.

Drama: Each group incorporates an aspect from each story and presents its interpretation of this phrase to the class, either as a tableau or as an improvisation.

Other reflective activities to explore the spaces offered by the text include:

- In small groups students, create an improvisation around the news that aliens have landed in a small country town. This could be preceded by research into alien sightings and involve pair interviews about residents' experiences.
- Students develop a dialogue between the adult Bubba and Spiro.
- Members of the Preston community are hot seated about the notion that the watertower is really not what it seems.
- 'The eye is a window to the soul.' Through tableau, students visually represent their interpretation of this quote in small groups. What does its use throughout the book imply?

CONCLUSION

The picture book ... is essentially a dynamic form with ebb and flow, its thrusting movement counterbalanced by reflection ... For older children such books can be both an aesthetic experience and a source of unexpected enjoyment ... All good illustrations must emanate from the mind, and the quality of the illustration reflects the intensity of the imaginative experience (Hein, 1987:306).

Middle years students can produce interesting and sensitive written and oral work as a result of working collaboratively in drama. Used with picture books, drama strategies such as hot seating, still image, improvisation, thought tracking, role walking, readers' theatre and conscience alley enable students to put themselves into the shoes of different characters, frame the world from alternative perspectives and rehearse different ways of being, seeing, thinking and feeling. Drama enhances students' ability to empathise with characters, which is particularly important for adolescent identity formation. Writing in role from the perspective of different characters or narrators, and thus imagining alternative stories that retell the same event from multiple perspectives, can result in a variety of outcomes and responses that generate thoughtful discussion.

Tapping in

A strategy by which participants in a freeze frame speak aloud a short response to the dramatic situation when tapped on the shoulder.

Tapping in enables students to play with words and give particular attention to the words they choose to use. Looking at their peers' depictions also helps them honour each other's work and at, the same time, realise that there are many alternative meanings and interpretations—not just one 'right' way of thinking or being. In a number of the above sequences, students move through talking, enacting to drawing and writing and back again—from the concreteness and responsibilities of oral language to the more abstract nature of written language and the complexities of representing that language through embodiment and action. For boys, particularly in the middle years of schooling, concrete experiences through drama activities can become scaffolds to help them translate thought into written words.

Drama used with rich, evocative, interpretive picture books provides important opportunities for middle year students to develop their imaginations, see beyond surface meanings and expand their use of language as they use drama to work in the 'third space' that is offered by the story (Deasy, 2006). The development of students' imaginations, creativity and identity can be facilitated through the coupling of drama strategies and forms with quality literary texts that provide places of possibility in which students can come to understand more about who they are, see new potential in themselves and others and envision the transformation of their worlds.

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NOTE

- ¹ Each of the drama strategies in the chapter can be further explored through a number of drama texts including Miller and Saxton (2004); Ewing and Simons (2004); and O’Toole and Dunn (2002).

RECOMMENDED READING

Gleeson, L. (2006). *Places to Play: Stories as an Adventure Playground*, paper presented at National Conference on Future Directions in Literacy, Sydney: University of Sydney, 3 March.

A very helpful and readable discussion of the importance of exploring the spaces in a story from an author’s perspective.

Lankshear, C. (1994). *Occasional Paper No.3: Critical Literacy*, Belconnen ACT: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.

An effective summary of the basic tenets of critical literacy, with some useful examples.

Miller, C. and Saxton, J. (2004). *Into the Story. Language in Action through Drama*, Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Carefully planned and structured story drama lessons, based on picture books, focused on drawing students into language, deep understanding and critical inquiry.

Rowan, L. (2001). *Write Me In: Inclusive Texts in the Primary Classroom*, Sydney: Primary English Teaching Association.

A very insightful book which enables teachers and students to challenge the stereotypes that often try to tell us who we are and who we should be. It includes many practical ideas to help us ensure the texts we use in the classroom are truly inclusive.