

*NB These drama lessons are based on the siege of a castle during the English Civil War but can easily be adapted to suit castles in other historical contexts with different problems.*

This drama is set around 1646 in the middle of the English Civil War and is based on real life events recorded in the history of Skipton Castle in Yorkshire. The castle in the drama can be given an imaginary name, but in this example it is ruled by a Baron who is a Royalist.

### **INTRODUCTORY WORK IN THE CLASSROOM**

#### **MAKING THE DRAMA CONTRACT**

- Version 1) Ask the children if they will pretend to be actors rehearsing a dramatic reconstruction about ordinary people who live and work in an imaginary castle during the English Civil War. (Option – you may want to actually film parts of the rehearsal). Make it clear they will not need costumes or a set as this is a rehearsal
- Version 2) Ask the children if they will take part in a drama about ordinary people who live in a castle during the English Civil War.

#### **PREPARING THE ROLES**

- Explain that this castle is based on one of the Royalist held castles in the English Civil War. It is ruled by a baron who is a Royalist, even though some of the occupants might not agree, they have to follow his lead.
- Explain that the drama will begin on an ordinary working day in the castle community so they must prepare for their roles.
- Organise the children into groups of 2-4 and allocate each group an occupation – include armourers and smiths who work in a separate building due to fire risk, carpenters, beekeepers, potters, farmers etc. Then ask them to find out what kind of work is involved in their occupation, using whatever information or resources you have available. Each group should produce a folded A4 card showing the name of their occupation, to be placed over the back of a chair to indicate their working area when the community is set up.
- Ask each child to make a role card with their new name, age and occupation, detailing 3 things they do first thing in the morning with regard to their occupation. Pupils can work in pairs to support each other when writing these. Mixed ability pairs may be useful. Children may also like to include a sketch of themselves working. When the cards are completed, they should choose the activity they will do first in the drama.

### **DRAMA LESSON 1 - BUILDING BELIEF**

In a hall or cleared space with sufficient room for groups to mime their occupations and visit other groups.

#### **DEFINING THE SPACE**

- Set out the space with the chairs positioned around the room, so that each chair is in the centre of roughly the same amount of space.
- Ask the children to imagine that the space in the hall represents their chosen historical community. Explain that each chair represents the back of a dwelling/workplace for each occupation. Put one A4 card on each chair to allocate each group a working space.
- Specify any areas and/or items of equipment that are not to be used in the drama e.g. wall bars, PE equipment, musical instruments.
- Ask groups to sit in front of their chair signs.

## **EXPLAINING THE RULES/ SETTING UP TEACHER IN ROLE**

- Explain to the children that they will need to mime everything they need to do in the drama. Give a few examples by demonstrating e.g. how carpenters might saw wood. Make it clear that they will need to talk to each other as if they really were in that community at that time.
- Then, after reminding them that the drama will start with their first task as highlighted on their role cards, allow them a few minutes to discuss how they might mime their work and where they keep their equipment/tools etc. Make it clear that they live and work in the area around their chair. Tell groups to sit and fold their arms when they have decided on their mimes.
- Tell the children that they may also visit other groups in the community, to exchange goods or help each other e.g. a carpenter might offer fire wood to the blacksmith as payment for shoeing a horse.
- Set up Teacher-in role: Explain that whenever you wear a particular item of clothing such as a scarf, waistcoat or shawl, you will be playing the part of one of the community who keeps hens. Use this role to integrate with the children by asking for things they produce in exchange for eggs. Make it clear that if you are not wearing the item of clothing signifying the role, then you are not in role and you are observing.

## **STARTING WITH A FREEZE**

- Tell them that you will need them to start in a frozen position; (Version 1 -as if the film was on freeze-frame or a pause). Explain that when everyone is frozen, you will give a signal for them to start to move and speak.
- Allow groups a minute to decide on the frozen positions they will take up as they start their first task in the community. Then invite the children to take up their freeze positions two groups at a time, until they are all frozen. Then, on the word *Action* from you, they should come to life as agreed, until you say *Freeze*, when they must stop as if the film has frozen again.

## **USING DRAMATIC PLAY/OCCUPATIONAL MIME**

- Once the action has begun, let it run for as long as most children seem to be engaged or for a maximum of a few minutes. Visit each group as teacher in role to help build belief and offer support. Go out of role whenever you need to.

## **REINFORCING CONTRIBUTIONS**

- Stop the drama. Ask the groups to return to their signs. Ask half the class to show the other half the kind of jobs they were engaged in. Tell them to start with their original freeze positions and demonstrate some of the jobs. The children watching could guess what the jobs were. Then the observers can have a turn. Keep these demonstrations and discussions fairly short.

## **FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES**

- Draw a plan of their castle and surrounding woods & farming land/ (make a model/ sketch a view of the castle from the village outside/ or sketch view of part of the inside.
- Create a webpage and/or printed leaflet about the castle – use real websites and leaflets as models to identify persuasive writing to attract visitors – then adapt to own version- and/or each child writes a Day in the life of – whatever job they had.
- Create a coat of arms for the shields – look at bold, bright heraldic tinctures- items superimposed on the main background e.g. tower, weapon, thistle, rose, eagle, dragon- use different ways to divide the shield- quarter, thirds, chevron, wavy line, zig zag, diamonds, diagonal lines.
- Invent a heroic, (exaggerated?) story linked to the coat of arms e.g. killing bears or dragons
- Invent or recreate stories, songs, ballads, poems - for entertainment or to keep spirits up during siege e.g. St George and the Dragon or travellers' tales meeting strange beasts, giants, monsters etc- or courageous deeds. Exaggeration as part of the genre.
- Read and illustrate folk songs and ballads when people lived in castles-e.g. Greensleeves/ Summer is a cumin in/The Lady of Shallot/Ned of the Hill etc

## **DRAMA LESSON 2 – POSING A PROBLEM**

**This can take place in the classroom if you ask the children to imagine it is one of the rooms in the castle where a meeting is taking place amongst the ordinary people- but a hall set out as before is best.**

- Use the item of costume to set up teacher in role and use the word Action to restart the drama.
- In role, call the people to an important meeting - tell the castle people that you have some important news. An attack is imminent – The enemy Roundheads are only half a day's march away - They must prepare – Suggest and ask for more ideas on how each group might prepare e.g. carpenters chop down trees outside for better view of the enemy approaching/ smiths sharpen and prepare weapons / spinners & weavers- throw sheepskins over battlements to reduce impact of canons/ pottery prepare large pots for pouring water on attackers/ beekeepers and farmers must move inside castle for protection – pack up belongings and as much food as they can put on carts- also prepare for a siege– bring in as much as they can, including hens. Harvest crops but only those that will keep – any seeds etc..
- Ask the people to return and do the things they agreed and anything else they can think of. Agree to meet in Great Hall later to report back.
- If you are in the hall, children can return to their group places and mime their preparations. If in a classroom, Stop the drama and ask the children to talk about what they will do and make a list.
- Hold another meeting to report back.

## **NARRATION TO MOVE ON**

- Stop the drama. Move time on and restart the drama at another meeting a few days later. Tell them that the Roundhead attackers camped outside woods – no movement – what are they up to? Discuss. Plan what to do. Carry out any plans in mime if appropriate. Stop the drama.
- Move time on again and narrate that the castle was under a siege for several months – not much food – not much fire wood – The well was untouched so they had water.

## **COLLECTING SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM**

- Restart drama to discuss what to do – give them some options. Explain that each has consequences. Create a diversion so some escape – but may be seen  
Surrender and join Roundheads – some soldiers not paid – will they believe us?  
Try to fight our way out – we are outnumbered.  
Surrender as Royalists and suffer consequences. What might happen to us?  
Carry on for longer – may not get help and could die.  
Any others?  
Stop the drama.
- Narrate that in the evening, the people talked about what options they preferred as they sat in their houses around fire. Give children a few minutes to think about what option they prefer. Then bring the drama to life as each group talk to each other about the options but make it clear that they should ask everyone in their group what they think. When everyone has expressed an opinion, they should sit warming their hands over a fire -as a sign they have finished. When most have finished Stop the drama.

## **SPOTLIGHTING**

- Ask the children to imagine a spotlight coming over to each group in turn, to bring their talk to life so other groups can listen in to a snippet of conversation. They will only perform a snippet when you point to them, and stop when you say Freeze.

## CONCLUDING THE DRAMA

Narrate what happened next: The Baron heard what everyone said but he was the ruler and so he made a decision – He wanted to surrender with dignity. He was still proud to be a Royalist. Everyone had to do what he said. How does that feel? Did people accept this more in those days than now?

Luckily the Baron talked to the Roundheads and surrendered on good terms – Finally he paraded out of the castle in a procession through the streets as if in defiance.

(optional) Create a class freeze-frame of this moment or sketch it or research the moment from the history of Skipton castle online.

## REFLECTION

- **Specific** -This ending was based on a real event in Skipton Castle. How close was our drama to what often happened to other castles in the Civil War?
- **Universal** Do things like this happen today in other ways? Talk about questions of loyalty e.g. What does it mean to be loyal? Do you remain loyal and suffer or change sides? Is loyalty always the best thing to do? Is it always worth it?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW UP WORK

- Write a script. Write the conversations about the siege decision as a short script lasting up to one minute. Perform as an audio recording or a play. Collect the scripts and present in a booklet for the class library.
- Create a tapestry - Look at the Bayeux tapestry - Make 3 freeze frames to depict/record the night before battle/ during the attack/ during the siege – add thought bubbles – then draw a version that would make a tapestry (without the bubbles).
- Write poems about each of the above stages– with feelings of the castle dwellers and how they changed.
- Record a soundscape of a battle – crackle paper for fire sound/ whoosh sound for arrows/ ruler along ratchets on radiator or metal basket for catapults, metal spoons clashing for metal weapons in fighting, footsteps for running, cries of battle and wounded/ cries of commands.
- Write an information plaque about the siege of their castle, to go on the wall for visitors – in 100 words.
- Create a statue. Use a freeze-frame and/or sketch –to commemorate the siege with an inscription below to explain concisely in 100 words. Then draw it.

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