

Drama Workshop Plan: ages 7 - 10yrs (approx. 1 hour 15mins)

The following workshop is a structure that can be added to, elaborated upon, and words changed according to the needs and understanding of your group and which particular elements evoke interest and discussion among the children. It is important to pause after each section of the workshop for a group discussion to illicit the children's ideas about the themes of slavery, such as being told what to do without reward, power and control.

Each section has directions, explanations, possible wording and ideal timings. Those in italics are for group leaders to think about themselves. It is written as an aid to leaders who may not have used drama as an educational tool before, therefore some sections may seem more detailed to those that do use drama already.

Resources: A4 paper, coloured pens/writing pens.

Introduction: (in a circle)

Leader Questions: We are going to be thinking about slavery. Who knows what slavery is? What do you understand by the term slavery?

Rene Cassin definition: 'Slavery: being forced to work without pay, under the threat of violence and being unable to walk away.'

You can choose whether or not to read the above definition to the children or to use your own words, or better still a combination of what you discover from the children in your group.

We will be using games and drama to think about slavery, but because we will be working and thinking together we need to make sure everyone feels safe and comfortable.

Group Contract: Stand in a circle and hold hands. The leader sends a 'pulse' around the group (squeeze of the hand next to you and then that person squeezes the hand next to them and so on until it gets back to the leader) making the following statements. 'We will look after ourselves!' (one pulse) 'We will look after everyone else!' (another pulse) and 'We will look after the space!' (another pulse).

Warm up:

(Warming up the body and mind are important when doing a drama workshop and help to prepare the children to use their imaginations. The following game is also an attempt to let the children bond and ground each other a bit before they move into the work around slavery which may evoke uncomfortable feelings.)

Can I help you? Children stand in a circle. One person goes into the middle of the circle and mimes doing something that they need help with (digging a hole, doing up a shoelace, buttering some toast) and one person goes into the circle to help them saying “hello (e.g.) ‘Amy’ can I help you?”. They then proceed to help and the original person goes back to the circle, saying “thank you for the help”. Now ‘Amy’ mimes something else, and another person comes in to help her, etc. It is important that people are named when approached with help and that they say thank you as they leave the circle. The children can come into the circle when they want to as long as it is one at a time. If people are shy, then the leader may have to join in to help keep the ball rolling.

Leader Questions: Notice how polite everyone was being to each other. Do you think that those who use slaves are as polite? What kinds of words might describe those who are slave owners? (*Encourage thought and discussion around the ideas of power and control.*)

(15 mins)

The Clay and the Sculptor:

As this exercise may involve touch the leader has to make it very clear that the children must be very careful with each other.

The children get into pairs and decide who is going to be ‘A’ and who is going to be ‘B’. The leader explains that initially ‘A’ is going to be the sculptor and ‘B’ the clay. The sculptor has to ‘mould’ his clay into a statue of a ‘slave’. Encourage the children to describe how they want to see the clay take shape rather than move them physically. I.e. can you crouch to the floor, your head needs to be down, your eyes need to be looking to the left etc.

The pairs of children will all be doing this at the same time.

When the statues are ready, ask the children to leave their works of art and imagine that they are in an art gallery and that they can go around the art gallery and look at all the statues. But, as when being in an art gallery for real, they must not touch the works of art or make any noise or laugh at them etc.

Then ask all the children to let go of their poses and shake out their bodies.

‘A’ and ‘B’ now swap places. This time the sculptor has to make a statue of the ‘slave owner’

Again when the statues are finished encourage the children to look at each one as if in an art gallery.

Now encourage all the statues to relax and shake their bodies to de-role.

Group Discussion:

Leader Questions: What was that like to see all those statues? What kind of words were you thinking of as you walked around the art gallery? What emotions? What is it like when you are used as an object?

When we think of slavery we think of the Jews in Egypt, or the story of Joseph. Those stories belong to the Old Testament and help us to think about our freedom, but slavery is still happening and it is happening today, in many parts of the world.

(20 mins)

Forum Theatre: The day in the life of....

(Forum Theatre is a type of community theatre exercise that allows the whole group to participate if they want to. Members of the 'audience' can stop the action onstage and suggest lines for the actors to say, swap with one of the actors to take on the role, or suggest a plot line. As this type of exercise is very open and improvisational, the leader will have to make sure that they are directive when they need to be to prevent the story/characters from veering off course, and to keep to time restraints.)

Arrange the children in a semi-circle and explain the rules of the exercise. One person speaking at a time. The children will have to listen to what is happening on the 'stage' and put their hands up if they want to stop the action and make a suggestion or take over a role.

The leader must introduce a time, place and initial characters of their choice. As all will be familiar with the story of the Jews in slavery in Egypt it may be easier to work within that context. There should be an exploration of what a day in the life of is like, so the action will start in the morning as the characters wake, and move through to what they spend their day doing. It is useful to think about detail. For example, is the slave woken aggressively and put to work straight away? Does the slave owner have a big breakfast? Do they interact at all? Are there other members of the household that are more sympathetic to the fate of the slaves?

Gain as many ideas from the children as you can.

At the end of the forum theatre exercise it is important that all characters are de-rolled properly. You can ask them to walk around the room and shake out their bodies and most importantly to state their actual name out loud.

(30 mins)

Group Discussion:

Leader Questions: Using the characters in the story the children created, encourage them to think about how the characters might have been thinking or feeling. What might the characters have wanted to change in their lives? Etc.

Reflection Time:

It is really important to give the children time for some reflection around their feelings about the drama they created and witnessed.

Write a letter: Ask the children to collect a piece of paper and a pen and find a space on their own to write a letter to one of the characters in the story. This exercise must be done in silence to give the children the thinking space to really focus. When the group return to the circle, children can decide whether or not to read out their letter. *(It would be a nice idea to collect the letters, they could be used for a display about the project or to help the children think about slavery in future workshops.)*

(15 minutes)

Closure: Stand in a circle holding hands. The leader should recap on the work of the session and talk about some of the feelings that arose out of thinking about slavery.

Send one more pulse around the group to say thank you and well done for the work that they have done. Remind the children that if they have any more questions about this topic they can always speak to their families about it and that slavery is something that needs to be spoken about so not to feel worried about asking questions.

Written by Susanna Kester (Rosenberg)

Susanna Kester (Rosenberg) is a much experienced Drama Therapist, Clinical Supervisor and Theatre Practitioner, working within schools, hospitals, and Jewish community settings. In parallel with her eighteen-year career as a therapist in private practice with children of all ages and adults, she has also facilitated social and educational drama workshops around Jewish values at Finchley Reform Synagogue, and is currently working with the youngest members of that community.