Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Foreword
  Cecily O’Neill ix

Introduction
  Thomas P. Crumpler, Theresa Rogers, Jenifer Jasinski Schneider xiii

1. Educational Drama as Response to Literature:
   Possibilities for Young Learners
   Thomas P. Crumpler 1

2. Story Drama Structures:
   Building Supports for Multiple Literacies
   Juliana Saxton and Carole Miller 15

3. The Antigone Project:
   Using Drama and Multiple Literacies to Support Print Literacy Among Youth
   Kari-Lynn Winters, Theresa Rogers, and Andrew Schofield 35

4. Identity and Imagination of Immigrant Children:
   Creating Common Place Locations in Literary Interpretation
   Carmen L. Medina 53

5. “I’m a lot like her”:
   Entering the World of Others Through Process Drama
   Karen S. Kelley 71

6. Full Circling:
   How Visual Literacy, Narrative Texts, and Students’ Imaginations Turned Urban Fifth-Graders into Architects of History
   Trisha Wies Long 89
CONTENTS

7. “Always Listen to Children”:
   Process Drama as a Site for Fostering Freedom, Voice, and Choice
   Jenifer Jasinski Schneider 107

8. The Dilemma of the Bystander:
   Using Literature, Art, Drama, and Poetry to
   Deepen Understanding
   Carmen Córdova 123

9. Drama, Diversity, and Children:
   The Art and Ethics of Advocating for More than One
   Beth Murray 139

Appendix: Drama and Multiple Literacy Structures and Strategies 155
Editors 159
Contributors 161
Acknowledgments

This book is a compilation of the work, teaching, and research of numerous classroom teachers and university researchers who have found ways to make learning meaningful for children. Through their imaginative, challenging, and innovative work with process drama, children are beginning to learn differently, think differently, and know differently.

We are indebted to Cecily O’Neill who introduced all of us to process drama as a tool for education. Her insight, challenges, and instruction on drama structures and possibilities have forever changed the way we view teaching and learning.

Jenifer and Theresa would also like to thank their husbands (Troy and Rob) and their children, Bethany and Mary/Shaun and Christopher, for all of the drama, process or otherwise, they bring to our lives. Of course we are always thankful for their unending support and love. Tom would like to thank his wife Kay for her love, support, and belief in the value of dramatic work as play. He is also thankful for his sons Dillon and Peter who do provide more drama than they know.
Foreword

Cecily O’Neill

For John Dewey, the continuing reconstruction of experience was at the heart of effective education. Writing in 1916, he insisted that nothing had brought pedagogical theory into greater dispute than did equating education with the provision of recipes and model lessons to teachers.¹ The methods outlined in this book have nothing to do with such reductive tactics. Instead, they aim at reconstructing the experience of students through powerful and generative approaches to learning. Built on sound theoretical foundations, this rich pedagogy engages students in multiple literacies expressed through various forms of representation. Process drama is a key element in these experiences, but almost every other art medium is involved. Alternative sign systems promote diverse ways of making meaning and elicit an impressive range of student responses requiring the exercise of their literary, visual, and dramatic imaginations.

Imagination is central to this kind of pedagogy. Although it is a necessary condition for almost all intellectual activity, imagination is insufficiently acknowledged as a powerful catalyst for learning. Where imagination is encouraged, a range of learning possibilities is immediately made available in the classroom. Speculation, interpretation, evaluation, and reflection, all demanding cognitive activities, are promoted. Opportunities arise for both teacher and students to make the kinds of personal, social, and curricular connections that transcend the traditional boundaries of the curriculum.

The innovative teachers whose work is so convincingly presented in these chapters invite their students to reflect imaginatively on a range of classic and contemporary texts. As they encounter the questions raised by these texts, the students enter into a dialogue with them and are challenged to bring the texts alive in their own minds. In work based on

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963, we meet students in a multiage elementary class who use their own experience of family life to take on the perspectives and tensions of a fictional family and another ethnicity.ii

The imaginations and understanding of these students have been enlisted in what Eco has called “a performance of meaning under the guidance of the text.” For Eco, every reception of a text is both an interpretation and a performance because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective.iii Responding to the promptings of the original, these students generate their own “texts” through writing, drawing, movement, drama, and film. Each of these responses invites further reflection, and their offerings are immediately validated and amplified by their teachers. We see the students modify their perspectives on the original, and begin to rewrite the text of the work within the text of their own lives.iv In Chapter 4, students who are themselves recent immigrants take on “the mantle of the expert” in response to a task set by the superintendent of the school district and work to develop a document aimed at helping new immigrants face the challenges they may meet in school. Generating these reflective “texts” requires that the students hold two realities in their minds. They place their imagined worlds inside the real world of their classrooms, constructing “common place locations” where imagination and reality are blurred.
v
Maxine Greene, whose work has influenced many of the teachers in this book, regards education through the arts as an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and moving. It signifies for her the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings, a learning to learn.vi Greene insists that in order to test out new forms of social order and reflect on their moral implications, young people need opportunities to project themselves into rich hypothetical worlds.

This book is full of hypothetical worlds arising from significant texts and from the imaginations of all the participants. The teachers in these pages know that if their students are to become independent thinkers,

iiKaren S. Kelley, “I’m a lot like her”: Entering the World of Others Through Process Drama (Chapter 5).
vCarmen L. Medina, Identity and Imagination of Immigrant Children: Creating Common Place Locations in Literary Interpretation (Chapter 4).
they must help them engage in the kinds of endeavors that will encourage serious critical insights into the society in which they live. If the students are unable to imagine things differently and consider the world from unfamiliar perspectives, they will be unable to bring about any change in their circumstances. The arts, and drama in particular, have always provoked these shifts of perspective. In taking on roles and projecting into problematic “as if” situations, students’ assumptions are tested and their values scrutinized. The assumptions of the fifth-grade students in Chapter 8 as they investigate the roles of perpetrators and victims of oppression are re-evaluated when they come to the conclusion that bystanders who do not act to prevent injustice become perpetrators of oppression themselves.\footnote{Carmen Cordóva, The Dilemma of the Bystander: Using Literature, Art, Drama, and Poetry to Deepen Understanding (Chapter 8).}

It becomes obvious from all of the examples in this book that participation in aesthetic experience is always voluntary. It may serve instrumental purposes but can never be entirely subordinated to them. Aesthetic experience is likely to develop an unpredictable life of its own. True participation in both art and learning evokes independent thought, imaginative freedom, and a commitment to one’s own ideas, but individual responses are modified by the recognition of the constraints of the context and by a growing responsibility to the group’s efforts. Students involved in a courtroom drama dealing with the future of the abducted animal in Shiloh determine that the dog belongs to its abusive owner because “he paid for it” until one child, obeying a higher moral imperative, forces the others to reconsider their decision by insisting that “this trial isn’t about money—it’s about love.”\footnote{Cordóva, The Dilemma of the Bystander (Chapter 8).}

The approaches proposed in this book are essentially inclusive. They build community. Social capacities are strengthened as students encounter one another in new roles, situations, and groupings. Though individual challenges and successes will arise, students are encouraged to think of themselves as people who might be able to work together to bring about justice and tolerance in their personal lives and in society. It is possible that the effects of the work described here may reach out beyond these classrooms and schools.

These profoundly courageous teachers and researchers will be an inspiration to others. Each of them is prepared to go beyond the prescribed goals, limited pedagogy, and restricted curricula that characterize too many classrooms. They understand that their ambitious
teaching objectives may not always be met in the ways they had anticipated. They are willing to deal with the unexpected. They take risks and are not afraid of failure. They choose texts and topics as locations of possibility, and for their openness to imaginative transformation and their potential for inviting students into active engagement with the work. The teachers bring themselves into the classroom as creative human beings while they build classroom communities that give students a voice in their own learning.

Above all, these gifted teachers respect and value their students as people. They work to offer opportunities for their students to grow as competent and complete individuals accepting responsibility for the society in which they live. The student who explored issues of betrayal, social status, and suicide in Antigone was reaching toward an understanding of this kind of responsibility when he produced this poetic fragment:

I will not tiptoe through life to arrive safely at death.  
Life lives in your blood, not your bullet.  
Love lives in your heart, not in your battle.  
Through my heart I feel and cry.  
Through your smile I learn to fly.\(^x\)

\(^x\)Kari-Lynn Winters, Theresa Rogers, and Andrew Schofield, The Antigone Project: Using Drama and Multiple Literacies to Support Print Literacy Among Youth. (Chapter 3).
Introduction

Thomas P. Crumpler, Theresa Rogers, Jenifer Jasinski Schneider

The vistas of process drama and literacy continue to shift as we gain deeper insights into the complexity of how learners rehearse and construct meaning. These rehearsals and constructions challenge our understanding of what constitutes a text, how we read and interpret multimodal images and signs, and how we compose and design artifacts that include linguistic, oral, and visual sign systems. As teachers and students seek to broaden these understandings in the context of “multiple literacies” (learning across a range of print and nonprint genres and media) and as part of an increasingly global society, process drama has emerged as a promising approach for exploring the multifaceted nature of literacy learning.

Conceptually, process drama draws on the theories of language learning of Vygotsky (1978), Bruner’s work in narrative as a paradigmatic structure for organizing experience (1986, 1990), Bateson’s notion of the importance of play in learning processes (1955, 1973), and other scholarship situated in sociocultural views of learning. Further, process drama is linked to the tradition of educational drama that began in the United Kingdom late in the nineteenth century and continues to flourish throughout the world today (Bolton 1998). Process drama is, as O’Neill has argued, “a mode of learning” that allows learners of any age to use imagined roles to “explore issues, events, and relationships (O’Neill & Lambert 1983, 11). Process drama has evolved out of the work of Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O’Neill, and others who were interested in developing ways to activate learners’ imaginations by using dramatic structures associated with a larger theatrical field to explore content area curriculum, texts, relationships readers have with texts, issues connected to texts, and other aspects of literacy learning in diverse educational settings.

Dorothy Heathcote’s pioneering work in educational drama, beginning in the 1950s in England and continuing today, has had a profound effect on the field of classroom drama both in the United Kingdom and
North America (Bolton 1998). Her unique approach, which she labeled “mantle of the expert,” is a complex pedagogy that uses “teacher in role” to facilitate and deepen learning with drama. Heathcote developed a way of building curriculum around drama work that she made look deceptively easy; however, it required careful planning, flexible implementation, and commitment to long-term learning goals (Heathcote & Bolton 1995). The structures of teacher in role, tableau, writing in role, and other terms essential for process drama have their origin in the work of Dorothy Heathcote.

O’Neill’s scholarship is critical for understanding process drama, because she has been its most eloquent and thoughtful theorist. In the introduction to the book that conceptualized a framework for process drama (1995), O’Neill argued that process drama developed in the 1980s as a pedagogy that was different from more improvisational approaches to classroom drama, yet was also informed by a tradition of theater. The result was an approach that opened instructional space for teachers who were willing to de-center themselves in classrooms and participate in drama as learning with their students. In such classrooms, teachers and students might use process drama to respond to a work of fiction in the curriculum, explore issues and ideas that emerge from classroom discussion, delve more deeply into literature through reading and writing in role, and pursue numerous other possibilities where learners enact meaning. Process drama is primarily social, because it is realized in the company of others and involves negotiation and renegotiation of meaning as participants interpret and reinterpret their own views in concert with participants in a drama sequence. To put it another way, it uses the real to inform the fictional and the fictional to inform the real, and balances both to enrich cognitive and affective learning (Courtney 1995). In summary, process drama is a tool for learning, and, used effectively, it offers a way to mediate and focus the multiple sign systems that inform literacy development.

For example, if we were to use process drama as an instructional tool to explore a literary text such as The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (see Chapter 5 in this volume), we might invite students to consider the relationships among characters through use of a teacher in role as one of the family members, who talks with the students about issues raised by this story. Further, we might place students in role as characters that could be in the story and ask them to journal as those characters. Next we might ask students to create a tableau, a frozen silent moment of human figures, that attempts to capture and extend some aspect of that writing, and then we might ask students to choose a melody or
song that could serve as a musical caption to that tableau. This sequence of process drama structures is not designed to create a play, although it draws on theater as both a conceptual and practical source. Rather, the goal is to begin creation of what O’Neill called “drama worlds” (1995) where learners can bring together personal, cultural, linguistic, musical, gestural, and other meaning systems and literacies to delve more deeply into relationships between the real and the fictional. It is provocative and potentially transformative work.

Conceptualizing an edited volume on the relationships between process drama and multiple literacies has been a provocative learning experience that has challenged us to explore and expand our thinking, teaching, and learning through drama. It has challenged us to reimagine the work of teaching and learning in schools, as so many stakeholders (parents, educators, politicians, and others) are concerned about testing, standards, and accountability, and so many others are concerned with school violence, racism, and character education. Schools must find new ways to educate students across multiple domains and contexts while also creating informed citizens who are respectful and thoughtful individuals. Process drama offers a possible solution to this challenge because it is a method for learning and teaching that can be used to integrate the content of numerous curricular areas while also developing the minds and the social consciences of students. Process-drama techniques allow students to view the world from multiple perspectives, involving them in situations in which they must make informed decisions and live with the consequences of their actions. Therefore, process drama is an educational tool for learning, thinking, and doing.

In this book we see drama as central to multiple literacy practices. Current theory and approaches to “multiliteracies” (e.g., Cope and Kalantzis 2000) often underestimate the power of the arts to support learners to move within “the increasing multiplicity and integration of meaning making” (p. 5)—a multiplicity that is evolving on an increasingly global stage. We feel that K–12 teachers can take that stage in classrooms with their students and use process drama as an educational tool to navigate the terrain of multiple literacies, which incorporates drama and other art forms into the process of rich multimodal meaning making. In fact, process drama has been documented as a tool for educating children across content areas and supporting their development in multiple literacies (see Wagner 1998). We have included chapters that articulate conceptual bases of process drama and connect it with other practices involving multiple literacies, as well as demonstrate the mutually enriching relationship between process drama and theater.
OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The chapters in this book present a theoretical orientation that recognizes the shifting nature of literacy away from a single view of literacy toward multiple literacies. Further, the chapters demonstrate how the practices of process drama facilitate the development of multiple literacies and multiple perspectives with diverse learners. Each contributing author discusses critical, multiple literacies issues and how they can be addressed through process drama work.

Structuring classroom drama for explorations in multiple literacies

We begin with Tom Crumpler’s chapter, in which he develops the theoretical foundation for a dramatic model of response to literature. Crumpler asserts that a dramatic model of reading response provides structures that help readers to question, critique, and evaluate the texts they are interacting within terms of the dynamics of power. Tom clearly explicates the ways in which process drama parallels the acts of reading and interpreting texts in that readers and drama participants position themselves with/against characters, process information, manipulate contextual factors, monitor their understanding, and engage in reflection. Next, Juliana Saxton and Carole Miller present their work with a particular story drama structure that offers students “opportunities to work with the multiple ‘languages’ that effective literacies explore.” They suggest ways to delve into what they call “self-literacy,” whereby learners gain insights into how multiple meaning systems shape their own identities. Saxton and Miller provide specific structures for teachers who are interested in using drama to uncover what their students are hearing, seeing, and doing with literacy as well as what lies underneath. Then Kari-Lynn Winters, Theresa Rogers, and Andrew Schofield present their work with struggling youth. Through drama structures in their “Antigone project,” which interwove multiple literacy forms, a group of adolescents received additional opportunities to improve their composing, decoding, comprehending, and revising skills, while emphasizing the negotiations of their social relationships and drawing on their cultural experiences to comment upon and critique multiple texts. Winters, Rogers, and Schofield highlight the stories of three adolescent males who maneuvered through drama spaces in individual ways to make sense of literacy and textual spaces.
Drawing on drama to build connections among students, texts, and the world

The next three chapters reveal the myriad connections that are possible through drama. We begin with Carmen Medina’s chapter, in which she explores common place locations and multiple sign systems. In her research with Latino/Latina students, she uncovers the ways students connected with themselves through literacy, literature, and drama. Further, her research makes visible how immigrant children used drama to navigate interpretive spaces that are informed by a convergence of historical, personal, and cultural meaning systems. The result is a detailed account of the ways these children related to and used literacy across languages, contexts, and borders. Next, Karen Kelley examines a classroom project in which students maintained the roles of literary characters (connecting with the text and self) while exploring issues within and around the novel *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. These explorations required the students to grapple with ways to enter the worlds of “others” across cultures. Kelley explores the workings of a group of Caucasian/Latina girls who take on the role of Joetta, an African American. She describes their attempts to bring their character to the forefront in a novel filled with issues of racism, delinquency, and violence. Trisha Wies Long’s chapter brings this section “full circle” with her examination of a process that allows students to read and interpret visual literacy, thereby engaging students in arts-based activism that connects them to the world. Using pictures of the segregated South, Wies Long describes how children can connect to injustices in the past and act on them in the present.

Creating critical stances with drama, texts, and society

In the last three chapters, the authors reveal the theoretical, practical, physical, and critical stances that students can take through drama. First, Jenifer Jasinski Schneider shares classroom examples of a teacher who used process drama as a site for negotiating freedom, voice, and choice with the students. The effects of student freedom are also examined through moments when the children learned to question themselves, their worlds, and even their teacher. Carmen Córdova presents a qualitative study in which children learned to care deeply for others and developed a sophisticated sense of morality through the exploration of literature through drama. In particular, she examines
how her students’ responses were reified through drama and how their imagination and engagement enabled them to develop seven sophisticated theories of moral reasoning. Finally, Beth Murray concludes the book with a chapter that summarizes where drama has been (in academic, artistic, and educational terms) and theorizes where drama might go. She explores how we prioritize our responsibility to and advocacy for drama as an art form and an educational tool for young people who are reflections of and participants in our complex, diverse society.

**THE EDUCATIVE VALUE OF PROCESS DRAMA**

We feel that this collection builds on O’Neill’s ideas of bringing together process drama practices and aesthetics of theater as outlined in *Drama Worlds* (1995) and extends that link in two ways. First, authors in this collection question how process drama can help learners examine their own subjectivities—or their ideological and personal meaning systems—and reposition those subjectivities to take multiple perspectives within the communities of their classrooms (Harre & Langenhove 1999). Curriculum and drama researcher Kathleen Gallagher theorizes about the role of community to link educational drama and theater (Gallagher and Booth 2003). She argues for what she calls “theatre pedagogy,” in which “we are—as players—to make manifest our own subjectivities in the world evoked through character and play” (13). Chapters in this volume evoke worlds and traverse real and imaginary communities to demonstrate how drama can help teachers and their students unpack their own meaning systems and ways of knowing.

For example, in her chapter on *full circling*, Trisha Wies Long writes, “as I walked solemnly around the room and tapped each child on the shoulder, some slowly and some quickly—a symphony of voices emerged” (Chapter 6). Wies Long explains that the children were able to use their voices as lenses to look more carefully at how identity shapes understanding of the civil rights movement. In addition, Carmen Medina theorizes about the ways in which immigrant children interactively read texts and themselves and explores how, through drama, children “begin to articulate multiple ways in which they perceive texts and self” (Chapter 4). Both of these chapters map practices onto theory and help reposition that theory within a context that illustrates a potential for process drama to create a space for students and teachers to think differently about literacy learning.
Second, the chapters in this volume redefine the nature of text by blurring the lines between the literary texts, the roles participants assume when involved in drama, and the audience for dramatic work. This redefinition aligns with what performance theorist Ric Knowles has described as “reading the material theatre” (2004), in which he argues for a multidimensional approach for analyzing dramatic performances that consider a text, the production, and reception of the event. These three aspects are mutually constitutive and shape the drama work in interesting and profound ways. For example, Kari-Lynn Winters, Theresa Rogers, and Andrew Schofield detail how reading and writing practices are transformed in drama based on the Greek tragedy Antigone (Chapter 3). In their account, the drama work framed and reframed the reading, writing, and meaning-making processes of students. They write, “In this project, we saw how students were drawing on their background knowledge and experiences, composing, decoding, visualizing, revising, and negotiating social relationships in the interfaces of drama, literacy, and multimedia.” The students, whose stories the authors tell in their chapter, performed other texts differently as a result of the drama work that they engaged in during the Antigone Project.

In another example of the power of voice, Jenifer Jasinski Schneider describes her work in one teacher’s classroom in which students used drama to perform texts that challenged the boundaries of teacher and student (Chapter 7). She writes, “The children portrayed characters and wrote as characters different from themselves. At times they were children, at other times they were adults. They were peacemakers and immigrants. They were Sondra’s students, but they were also her peers. And this unique relationship created boundary disputes in the classroom.” Schneider’s chapter lays out some of the pedagogical risks involved with using process drama as a feature of children’s writing instruction and explains how multiple roles can create unexpected turns. Yet she also demonstrates that the drama work facilitated the development of powerful multiple literacies in these same children.

There are other examples of the educative value of process drama in each of the chapters, making this book valuable on four levels. First, it situates process drama work within the changing field of literacy studies and demonstrates what process drama offers to recent conceptualizations of multiple literacies. Second, it provides practical examples of how process drama can work in a variety of contexts with diverse learners. Third, it challenges teachers who are considering process drama as an aspect of their literacy teaching to think deeply
about its potential for transforming curriculum. And finally, it suggests new theoretical directions for researchers who are investigating process drama as part of shifting landscapes of literacy.

REFERENCES


Seven girls sat huddled in their spot, reading a chapter from *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* (Curtis 1995). When I leaned down to join the group, I discovered that the girls were orally revising the chapter so that it was told from a completely different character’s point of view. Intrigued, I stayed with the group and asked if I could try it. It was HARD!—yet the girls did it with seeming ease. They possessed a motivation that I apparently lacked. To gain insight into their motivation, I asked Jenny (all student names are pseudonyms) why they were making the changes. She replied, “because our character, Joetta, the princess of the family, is the most important character. We want to be the center of attention” (Field notes, February 25). This group of girls in Toni Lazzaro’s intermediate, multiage class (third, fourth, and fifth grades) engaged in a five-week process drama unit based upon *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. Toni, the classroom teacher, and I, the assistant principal, conceived this project first as an investigation into the impact of process drama on reading comprehension. We were also concerned about increasing the students’ awareness of the relationships within the fictional family of the Watsons and the racial tensions existing in Alabama in 1963. However, as I observed the Joetta character group intentionally and spontaneously orally revising the text so it
would be told from their character’s point of view, I realized we were experiencing something much more. The members of this group of white and Latina girls from rural, central Florida came together to form the Joetta character group and connected with Joetta (an African American character in the story) in ways that crossed racial lines. The talk, the writing, the reading, and performances of the Joetta character are the focus of this chapter.

BRINGING THE WORLD OF THE WATSONS ALIVE

Three key concepts, discussed by O’Neill (1995), gave this particular process drama unit form: pre-text, structural devices, and the unique role of the teacher. Pre-texts, in this case *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*, allow a process drama event to begin to take shape. The selection of this pre-text provided a firm base from which the imagined world proceeded. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* had immediate implications for further action, including speaking, writing, and participating in process drama devices, because two themes—family relationships and racial tensions—run throughout the text. The story blends the fictional account of the Watsons, an African American family, with the factual events of the turbulent summer of 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama. Kenny, the younger brother and narrator, tells of hilarious episodes involving Daniel, the father; Wilona, the mother; Byron, eldest brother; and Joetta, the youngest sibling and only daughter, that reveal conflict within the family. The family members’ reactions to Byron’s juvenile delinquent tendencies allow the reader to understand the personalities of these five characters. The family travels to Birmingham to make good on a threat to send Byron to the Deep South to spend the summer with his strict grandmother, and they find themselves in the middle of the burning of the Sixteenth Avenue Baptist Church with four little girls inside. The text served as the backdrop against which the process drama devices proceeded.

The success of any process drama experience relies not only on careful selection of a pre-text but also on the selection of the mode of activity for each episode. Modes of activity are referred to as structural devices and include “watching, inquiry, games and contests, appearances, roles within roles, public and private dimensions, and rituals” (O’Neill 1995, 131). For our purposes, we identified two structural devices that put our students in positions to enter the imagined world of the Watson family in order to deal with both of the prevalent themes in the book. First, we
explored family relationships by formulating an inquiry in the form of a trial. Byron was placed on trial for his constant antics, and all other family members were called to the stand to testify. Next, we explored reactions to the racial tensions brought up in the second half of the book as we facilitated a ritual in the form of a family dinner. Neither of these process drama events occurred in the text; rather, we entered the world of the Watson family through these structural devices. We created dramatic moments beginning with a pre-text that propelled the action forward through the work of the teacher(s), in and out of role.

A teacher in role is able to model appropriate behaviors and becomes a part of the imagined world (O'Neill 1995). “The role presented by the teacher is available to be ‘read’ publicly, and, like spectators at a play, the participants are entangled in a web of contemplation, speculation, and anticipation” (O’Neill 1995, 61). Our challenge in this conception of the teacher in role came when we considered the issue of control. During the trial, I played the role of a judge, Toni played the role of prosecuting attorney, and one other teacher, Dawn, played the defense attorney. Thus we held three powerful roles in the drama. We met prior to the trial to outline a general order to the proceedings; however, the actual trial proceeded without a script for the teachers or the students. The drama unfolded in response to the students’ participation. During the family dinner, I was the only teacher in role. As the teacher in role, I assumed the role of Grandma Sands at the Watsons’ dinner table. My role in this drama was less involved than the trial because the students responded to each other at the table, much like a family dinner would proceed. The teacher in role in a process drama device is not to give a display of acting or to gain control; rather, it is one of participation in cooperation with the participants (O’Neill 1995).

GROUPING FOR LEARNING IN THE DRAMA CONTEXT

Students were organized into five groups, one for each of the main characters. The academic goals of comprehending the text, relating to the family relationships in the text, and understanding the racial tensions of 1963, along with the highly social nature of the classroom activities and structural devices, led us to consider several factors when forming the groups.

First, we viewed learning from a sociocultural perspective, and therefore, as a social enterprise (Vygotsky 1986). High-performing cooperative learning groups are defined as groups in which “students are given two
responsibilities: to maximize their own learning and to maximize the learning of all other group members” (Johnson and Johnson 1999, 24). Therefore, we wanted the group members to exhibit the highest level of commitment to each other.

Second, the social status of group members impacts the end result of the group thinking: ideas from students with higher social status are more likely to be valued, while ideas from students with lower social status are likely to be ignored, rejected, or absent (Matthews and Kesner 2003). “The nature and quality of the relationships between the participants in a group also contribute to the degree to which the interactions among the participants are successful” (Matthews and Kesner 2003, 230). Therefore, if the social relationships of participants are significant to the success of the group, those relationships should be considered when forming the groupings.

Third, academic goals must be a factor in forming groups for collaborative literacy events. For the purposes of this dramatic exploration, we considered our academic and social goals to form groups based upon existing social relationships.

As the basis for her decisions in forming groups, Toni conducted interviews with each of the twenty-seven students in her language arts classroom. The interviews allowed Toni to determine the students’ interests outside of school, friendships, common means of transportation to and from school, and past classroom experiences. An intricate web of relationships resulted. Together, Toni and I formed groups around the commonalities found in these interviews. For example, the group that assumed the role of Joetta was linked together by (1) being in the same team/classroom for several years and (2) participating in outside interests such as cheerleading and chorus. Each character group ranged in size from five to seven students. The Joetta character group was composed of seven girls, six white and one Latina. We hoped to lessen the impact that social status had on participation in the process drama events by forming groups around natural social connections. We were not naive enough to think we would eliminate the social factors at work during such activity, merely lessen their influence on these highly social events.

**THE WATSONS GO TO BIRMINGHAM—THE INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN**

The five-week unit included several classroom instructional strategies and structural devices (see Figure 5–1). The students participated in a
### Classroom Activities

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<th>Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>lessons from WebQuest</td>
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**Figure 5-1:** Outline of classroom activities and structural devices

WebQuest (Lazzaro 2003) developed by Toni in order to activate prior knowledge and build foundational knowledge about 1963. A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented set of activities in which most or all of the information used by the students is located on the Web (Dodge 1995). Throughout the project, students read chapters from the book.
individually, in small groups, and by listening on tape. Following each chapter, the character groups discussed the chapter from their character’s point of view and responded to the events in role in a simulated journal. In simulated journals, children assume the identity of another person in real life or of a character in a book and write from that person’s viewpoint (Tompkins 2004). In this case, the simulated journals became a place for students responding in role to record thoughts, feelings, and reactions.

From Lena’s journal, writing in role as Joetta

Dear Diary,

Today my smarty pants brother read in front of Byron and Buphead’s sixth grade class. Everyone (except the teacher) made fun of Kenny. I feel kind of bad for him, though. Only two good things happened to Kenny today. 1. Byron fixed his lazy eye, And 2. there was a new kid on the bus and everyone made fun of him instead of Kenny. I feel bad for the new kid and wish that he wasn’t made fun of but I also wish that Kenny wasn’t made fun of either. Kenny called him his savior but I don’t think he notices that this kid is going to get made fun of just the same as he was. Just think how bad Kenny felt, now this kid is going to feel just as bad.

Sincerely,
Joetta

Through her writing, Lena entered Joetta’s world and captured the tone and emotion of the text (e.g., “my smarty pants brother”). She carried Joetta’s voice into her response and went beyond the text to explore Joetta’s possible emotions during Kenny’s bus incident. Even though she was responding to an early chapter in the text, Lena’s familiarity with Joetta is evident in the empathy she demonstrated toward the new boy on the bus (e.g., now the kid is going to feel just as bad).

Similarly, Jenny entered Joetta’s world and applied her own version of Joetta’s voice in her journal entry for a later chapter.

Dear Journal,

We are back from Birmingham. I’m glad. The weird thing is Kenny keeps disappearing off somewhere. I wish I knew where he was going. The other day he was in the bathroom crying. Nobody tells me anything anymore. Maybe it’s because I’m little. When
Kenny is out he would play with me very little. It’s time for dinner. Bye.

Joetta, aka Princess of not knowing anything.

Jenny’s line of thinking is her own, but it is based upon her knowledge of Joetta and her world. Jenny’s response goes beyond a low-level connection and builds in an emotional understanding of her character. The simulated journals provided a space for the Joetta character group to connect with their character and enter another’s world. These types of connections set the stage for the Joetta character group’s participation in both process drama devices that were a part of the instructional plan for this unit.

The First Drama Event: Byron’s Trial

On the day of the trial, the room was arranged to imitate a courtroom. I sat before the audience of witnesses preparing to act as judge, with the two attorneys (teachers) facing me. All five students who were acting as the defendant, Byron Watson, sat next to the defense counsel, Dawn. The other character groups, for Kenny, Joetta, Wilona, and Daniel Watson, sat as witnesses in the audience behind the two attorneys. The bailiff sat to the right of the judge, prepared to swear in all witnesses, who would sit to the left of the judge facing out toward the audience. As the Kenny character group was sworn in, the Joetta character group squealed with distress at the pending doom of their brother. Each member of the Joetta group held a Kleenex in her hand to dab away her tears as the trial proceeded. The Joetta group became particularly distressed as the Wilona character group, the mother, testified to the many devious incidents in Byron’s past that led to this trial. At one point, the judge issued a stern warning to the Joetta group members, who were weeping above the testimony of the Wilona character group: “Prosecution, one moment please. Joettas, if you cannot remain quiet and orderly, I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to leave the courtroom immediately” (Trial transcript, April 4). The Joetta group quieted their crying, but continued to use their Kleenex to dab their wet, tear-filled eyes.

The Joetta group’s time on the stand was filled with tension. On one hand, the Joettas decided prior to the trial that they did not support Byron being sent away. On the other hand, when faced with having to testify regarding the facts of Byron’s behavior, they had to tell the truth. The tension between their personal feelings and telling the truth on the stand manifested itself in shy looks among the group members
and long hesitations before giving each potentially incriminating answer. They even tried to qualify their answers to make their responses seem more favorable toward Byron, their brother:

TONI (prosecuting attorney): Is it a fact that your brother, the juvenile, tried to burn down your house?

JOETTA: (all looking at one another) yes, no, yes, no, no

TONI: He tried to burn down your house with your pets in it?

JOETTA: No.

TONI: Tell us about that incident.

JOETTA: (One member dabbing eyes with Kleenex, long pause.) He lit the match, but then he flushed them down the toilet. He needed fire for his flamethrower of death and then flushed it.

TONI: Don’t you think your brother should be punished for his bad behavior?

JOETTA: (Some heads shaking yes, others no.) He has been punished already by mom.

(Trial transcript, April 4)

Although the students worked together to form the Joetta character, two members did not provide verbal responses during the trial. Students who do not participate verbally during a process drama event may very well participate internally. Both of these students provided evidence of their engagement in the events of the trial in their letters composed after the trial. Becky, writing as Joetta, drew upon her familiarity with her character when she wrote to Judge Kelley.

Dear Honorable Judge Kelley,

You should not take my brother Byron to Juvenile Deliquent Center, because he is my big brother, and who is going to stick up for me if he leaves. Prosecutor—Ms. Lazarro was wrong. She wants to take Byron to that place that has all the Juvenile Deliquent Kids. Defense—Mrs. Gwuynn [defense attorney] was accurate, he was doing all this terrible mess because he was misunderstood. Court today was scary. But if he went we won’t get to see him for a very lengthy time. punishment for Byron is to never leave the house except going to school and studing.

Sincerely,

Joetta Watson
In her letter, Becky summarized the events of the trial while taking sides with the defense attorney. Yet, she did not communicate these thoughts during the trial. Writing the letter to Judge Kelley was the outlet through which Becky processed the information in the text and the events of the trial in order to support her opinion regarding Byron’s future. Similarly, Beth, writing as Joetta, supported Byron and wanted him to remain with her family.

Dear Honorable Judge Kelley
I really do not want you to send Byron to juvie cause theen I will not have anybody to keep me warm or to keep me from getting hurt from some old ugly bully. When Kenny gets older and I get older and Byron is still in juvie Kenny probly will not take care of me. I will miss Byron so much and I really want hime to stay.

Both Becky and Beth synthesized, analyzed, and evaluated the characters’ plights during and after the trial. Both Beth and Becky saw the long-term ramifications of the judge’s decision, however, they did not share their opinion verbally during the trial. The opportunity to write a letter to the judge gave both students the venue to reveal their thinking indicating that both had actively participated during the trial. While the Joetta character group noted Byron’s faults, the group valued their family member and realized that without him their family unit would not be whole. They also recognized that Byron’s absence would greatly impact Joetta’s (their) personal safety.

The day after the trial, I returned to hand down the ruling in Byron’s case. After considering the testimony and the written input from each witness, I found Byron guilty of being a juvenile delinquent and sentenced him to travel to Grandma Sands’ home in Birmingham, Alabama—the same outcome followed in the book. By allowing the trial to parallel the book, I felt the outcome would support their remaining reading. When I handed down my decision, some character groups yelled a controlled “yes” (e.g., the Joetta character group) while other character groups tried to protest (e.g., the Wilona character group) (Field notes, April 5). The reaction from the character groups was mixed, but they followed the same emotional tendencies exhibited during the trial.

The Second Drama Event: The Watson Family Dinner
At the conclusion of the book, individual students from each character group met in a family group for a Sunday dinner. We conducted five family dinners to allow each student a chance to participate individually
in character. As was true for Byron’s trial, the family dinner did not actually occur in the book. Instead, it was a structural device categorized as a ritual (O’Neill 1995). Toni and I created a family setting at the dinner table in the media center. To add to the feel of this ritual and draw students into the imaginary world of a family dinner in the Watson household, we provided a meal of some small snacks and a drink. Our goal for the family dinner conversation was to give the students an opportunity “in character” to debrief the dramatic real-world events the family experienced while in Birmingham. During the family dinner, I worked in role as Grandma Sands to establish the context for the drama. I began each family dinner by explaining my presence in Flint, Michigan. “I rushed to Michigan to be sure my precious family was okay. You [the Watson family] left Birmingham so quickly I was worried and had to know what you thought about what happened there” (Family dinner transcripts May 5). During the dinner, I asked probing questions about the social conditions in Birmingham and specifically about the bombing that occurred, prompting the family’s quick retreat home to Michigan. In a true family dinner fashion, other family members interrupted conversations, disagreements among family members were exposed, and in some cases, minds were changed about conclusions of the events in Birmingham:

**GRANDMA SANDS:** Daniel, why did you insist on bringing your family back to Birmingham so quickly?

**DANIEL:** I was afraid one of us was going to get hurt.

**GRANDMA SANDS:** Joetta, what do you think your dad is talking about?

**JOETTA:** Well, the whites and blacks weren’t getting . . .

**DANIEL:** (interrupting) That’s right, the whites and blacks. Whites aren’t very fond of us blacks, but we aren’t very fond of them either.

**GRANDMA SANDS:** Well, I’ve got to tell you how sorry I am that I even suggested that you come to Birmingham. When Wilona called to tell me about the problems with you (points at Byron), we came up with the plan to bring you down to Birmingham; my neighborhood was as safe as could be. I am so sorry about bringing you down there.

**BYRON:** Sorry mom.

**WILONA:** Sorry, what for?

**BYRON:** For, um, being so bad that all of us had to go down there. My baby sister almost got killed.

**GRANDMA SANDS:** Ain’t that something? He just apologized for putting your lives in danger.
DANIEL: I really appreciate it, but we didn’t know until a few days after we got there, so it’s not all of his fault (patting Byron’s shoulder as he talks)

JOETTA: I accept his apology. I didn’t want him to go in the first place!

(Family dinner May 5)

This family group responded to the danger in Birmingham by drawing upon events that occurred throughout the text and during the trial. Joetta drew upon her participation in the trial when she stated that she hadn’t wanted Byron to be sent away. Byron’s apology was also something that did not happen in the text; however, it reveals a level of understanding of the character that developed over the course of the unit. During a different family dinner, another Joetta offered opinions based upon her experiences with the WebQuest and drew upon connections she made between the text and other classroom experiences.

JOETTA: I don’t think Birmingham would be such a good idea with the whole church thing.

GRANDMA SANDS: Out of the mouths of babes. The youngest one in the family is the only one who realizes how serious the situation is. Daniel and Wilona, do you have anything to say about some of your family wanting to move to Birmingham?

WILONA: Well, they have friends in Flint and in Alabama, well, there’s . . .

DANIEL: (interrupting) It’s dangerous down there. I just don’t like the idea.

GRANDMA SANDS: (interrupting) Oh, that was just a one-time thing. It’s all right.

BYRON: You think it’s the same way as when you were growing up. We see it different, the bombing, Kenny almost drowning.

JOETTA: You’re talking to Grandma that way? Sassing. Ummmm . . .

BYRON: I’m talking to mama.

GRANDMA SANDS: Such disrespect. I thought you’d changed, Byron?

WILONA: Do I need to get some more matches? (The eyes of every family member widened with the mention of matches, and a long silence followed.)
GRANDMA SANDS: Daniel and Wilona, knowing what you know about Birmingham, would you want to raise your children there?

WILONA: Well, no. They could die of heat flashes. They have black crusades. I don’t really like that too much. We might get into danger down there. We already did. In Flint, the kids have their friends.

BYRON: But living in Birmingham might not be too bad because where we live at it is too cold. (Wilona looks as Byron inquisitively.) All those clothes you put on Kenny and Joetta, that’s a shame.

JOETTA: We fit in better in Flint.

KENNY: I think Birmingham because Grandma Sands spoils us.

JOETTA: If you were going to spoil us, you could put five air conditioners in our rooms.

GRANDMA SANDS: Oh, you guys are tougher than that.

JOETTA: You know this whole thing was white people trying kill all us in that church.

GRANDMA SANDS: And that is some place you’d want to raise these children?

DANIEL: No.

WILONA: I think we are fine in Flint. I’m not proud of my decision to take everyone to Birmingham.

KENNY: Yeah, I guess we need to stay here. (Family dinner May 5)

In the end, Kenny changed his mind about wanting to live in Birmingham. Just as in the simulated journals, the opinions captured in these transcripts are evidence that the students entered the world of the Watsons and came to know their characters. The comments made by Joetta and other family members are evidence of extensions made beyond the text based upon knowledge of the characters.

At the conclusion of each family dinner, I asked the family if they would ever agree to return to Birmingham to see me, Grandma Sands, again. Four of the five groups agreed to see Grandma Sands again despite the social situations that existed there. The one family group that did not agree felt it was just too dangerous and that Byron had definitely learned his lesson. To appease Grandma Sands, they invited her to visit them again in Michigan.
CREATING SPACES TO CONNECT WITH CHARACTERS

Entering the world of the Watson family came easily for the Joetta character group. The process drama devices, combined with the simulated journals, created spaces in which the girls made text-to-self connections that helped them make sense of difficult issues in the text (Keene and Zimmermann 1997). The act of making text-to-self connections emphasizes the role of the reader in making intertextual links (Bloome and Egan Robertson 1993). From a semiotic perspective, intertextuality, or the juxtaposition of different texts, includes the idea of text not only as literary texts, but also the text of one’s own life (Kristeva 1980). In the following interview excerpts, the Joetta characters revealed their use of the texts of their lives to relate with Joetta, making text-to-self connections that crossed racial boundaries.

LENA: “As we started to know each other a lot of us had things in common with each other and with Joetta.”

HANNAH: “I liked being Joetta. That is kind of my part in real life. I am the little sister to two older brothers. My older brother is kind of the troublemaker.”

JENNY: “I wish I would have been Byron because I’m more like Byron because I get in trouble sometimes by my mom and Joetta did not.”

[Lena asked me to read her journal today. She commented that this family was just like her family and Heather’s family. She emphasized that she was not a princess like Joetta, but she, Hannah, and Rachel are both the youngest girl in their family, just like Joetta.” (Field notes February 25, 2003)]

Despite the fact that the family dinner, the WebQuest, the simulated journal, and character group discussions addressed the extreme racial conditions that existed in Birmingham in 1963, those racial concerns are absent from the text-to-self connections made in the Joetta character group. Towell, Schulz, and Demetrulias (1997) suggest that students identify with characters in children’s books based on plots and similar interests rather than relating to ethnicity. The case of Lena and Hannah specifically confirms the proposition that text-to-self connections are made without reference to ethnicity. They related to Joetta as the youngest sibling and only sister in a family with two older brothers. They related to Joetta as the princess of the family.
Role-driven writing (Booth 1998) contributed to the creation of a space in which students could connect with characters and enter the world of others. Writing in role in simulated journals and acting in role during the two process drama structural devices allowed students to enter a “sphere of attitudes and feeling” (Booth 1998, 73). The frequency with which the Joetta character group expressed feelings beyond the level of a basic retelling is evidenced in the degree to which the Joetta character group entered the sphere of attitudes and feelings surrounding the Watson family in their journals.

From Kathy’s journal

Da Da Da Hear comes lipless wonder to save the day. I thought I was going to pee my pants when my brother or should we say lipless wonder got his little lips got stuck on the winda. All us could not help but laughing that big bad Byron was stuck to the big brown turde [family car].

From Lena’s journal

Today was the scariest day of my life because Byron almost burned. I just couldn’t help crying and blowing the matches that momma lit. Byron was playing with fire again so mommy lit a match and stuck it real, real close to Byron’s finger and he was screaming and crying like a little kindergardener. He was crying just as bad as I was! Boy was he scared and finally mommy gave up because I was extremely scared, too! Now I’m even kind of scared of momma and I think that Byron and Kenny are too!
Extremely Scared,
Joetta

From Becky’s journal

Lord oh Lord oh Lord. Thank God or an angel like Kenny saved me from going to church. there was a bomb explosion, also I feel terribly sorry for those 4 little girls that died. Kenny is a life saver.
Sincerely,
Joetta

The social nature of these process drama events and the intentional grouping strategies we used during this collaborative literacy project (Matthews and Kesner 2003) did impact the connections the Joetta character group made.
LENA: “Sometimes we couldn’t find a certain part. So, we looked and discussed a lot of things together to help us understand it more.” (Interview May 28)

BECKY: Working with my group “helped because you knew these people and you knew you could discuss it with them all the stuff you have learned and help refresh their brains.” (Interview May 28)

JENNY: “I know them (the girls in my group) because we were all in the same class and I knew them for years. It helped because when you know someone then it is a lot better than if you don’t know anyone and they are trying to explain something to you.”

RACHEL: [It was a good thing to be in a group with people I had a connection to]

“because you know them better and you can express yourself more and say about what you think and not have worry about what they think.” (Interviews May 28)

Our purpose when intentionally grouping students to participate in the collaborative literacy events was to lessen the impact of social status within the group on the degree to which students participated in the process drama devices and other classroom activities. The comments from the Joetta character group indicate that the grouping did impact their participation, thus allowing them to fully enter the world of the Watsons.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The two-tiered instructional goals that Toni and I set out to accomplish blinded us to the potential of process drama as a point of connection with characters across racial lines. Our goal to improve reading comprehension (tier one) and our goal to increase awareness of larger societal issues (tier two), while noble, missed the mark. The Joetta group showed us that “process drama gives us the ability to wear other people’s shoes and see the world from a different point of view” (O’Mara 2002, 30).

Lena, one of the white members of the Joetta character group, commented in her final interview, “I like being Joetta. I’m a lot like her. The Watson family is just like my family. I have two older brothers and I am the youngest and I am the girl. Then I have a mom and a dad who, both of them are a little strange, just like the Watsons. Now that I have read this book, now I call my family the weird Watsons just like in the book” (Interview, May 28). Lena’s connections with Joetta, like those of
her group, showed that she had entered the world of the Watsons but had not connected with the racial references. While “we all notice color in just about every situation we are in” (Kivel 2002, 13), Lena’s affective and physical involvement drew her into the fictional world of the Watsons, where she could engage with the moral life being explored within it and come to know Joetta as a young girl, rather than as an African American (Winston 1999). Lena’s memories of this character were not shaped by issues of color. In a moment of honesty, I must confess that Lena’s connection, and those of all of her group members that did not mention issues of color, excited me. I saw this group coming to know Joetta as a girl—just a girl; however, noticing color is the only way to counteract the negative effect that racism has on people (Kivel 2002). Had this group truly entered the world of others? Had they noticed the racial issues that Joetta faced throughout the text and come to fully understand what it was to be Joetta during 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama? I want to believe that they did, but am left wondering.

By entering the world of the Watsons through the eyes of Joetta, a character with whom they easily identified, the Joetta character group was connecting with a character with whom they shared experiences and traits. Perhaps the Joettas easily adopted a point of view they had already identified with or personally experienced, thus limiting their potential for understanding (Edmiston and Wilhelm, 1998). We initially believed that issues of race might impact the connections the group would make. The converse occurred: The group connected with Joetta in many ways but did not look past the commonalities to explore the more difficult issues of race that Joetta faced in the text. It is not only in the realization of the connections between their own lives and the lives of others that complex understandings develop (Edmiston and Wilhelm 1998), but also in noticing and valuing the differences between their lives and the lives of others. There is no doubt that facilitating the type of work in which students enter the world of others is difficult, but it is definitely worthwhile.

REFERENCES


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