

Documentary drama and collage drama

A documentary drama begins with a *document* of some kind, for example, a newspaper article, a magazine story, a news item or an historical document. This document provides ideas for making a *dramatic statement* about an issue.

The resulting production can include readings, skits, speeches, scenes, songs, dances, tableaux — in fact, any kind of action or speech that can be performed on stage. However, the whole show will have as its theme the *idea of the original document*.

Collage drama is similar to documentary drama, but the production usually stems from an *idea or theme* rather than from an actual document.

An example of documentary drama

Document used: A newspaper article reporting a football final and the on-field violence that occurred

Topic of drama: "The Sporting Spirit of Fair Play"

Outline of programme:

Curtains open. * * *

ITEM 1: *Frozen image* — two football players and three cheer-leaders are frozen in suitable action positions.

ITEM 2: *Chant and dance* by cheer squad — they come to life after a whistle is blown.

ITEM 3: *Poem* — individual and group reading of a poem that conveys the excitement and atmosphere of a big match.

ITEM 4: *News report* — a section of the document is read as part of a TV news report.

ITEM 5: *Interview* — a football player is interviewed about his part in a brawl that broke out during the match.

ITEM 6: *Mime and movement* — short choreographed section of a football match with taped crowd noises as background.

ITEM 7: *Script* — brief scene involving three football players after the first half of the game (the action takes place in the locker room).

ITEM 8: *Persuasive speech* — a short speech about how violence ruins the spirit of the game.

ITEM 9: *Reading* — group and individual reading of "The Ten Commandments of Sport".

ITEM 10: *War cry*
ITEM 11: *Song and dance*

Curtains close. * * *

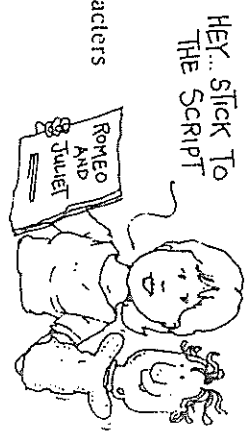
Producing your own documentary drama

Planning

1. First you need to discuss possible topics and find your document. Browse through newspapers and magazines, but don't decide on a subject too quickly; compile a list of options. (If you are really stuck you may be able to write your own document on a subject that interests you. For example, you could create a newflash, an interview or a diary entry.)
2. Discuss the "presentability" of a topic. Can you think of sufficient ways of bringing it to life? Are there enough aspects to the subject?
3. Brainstorm the topic — think of as many different ideas as you can that are related to it. For example, if the document is about drugs at school you may wish to explore aspects of the drug problem outside school, or other non-drug-related problems experienced by students. Use the document as a *starting point*.
4. Consider which forms of dramatic presentation would suit the topic. Aim for *variety* in the forms you select. You should choose from at least three of the following categories:

(a) Drama

- short improvised scenes
- segments of a scripted play
- original scripted scenes
- mime
- conversations between two characters
- puppets
- short monologue by a character
- impersonations.



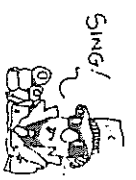
(b) Readings

- solo or group reading of prose and/or poetry
- readings with sound or visual effects such as slides and lighting
- readings combined with mime work or dance
- chants
- joke or story telling.



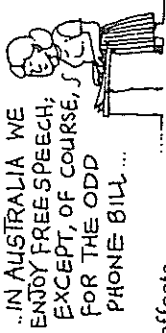
(c) Music

- live or recorded music to provide atmosphere
- musical pieces accompanied by expressive movement
- songs
- music or songs with choreographed dance.



(d) Speeches

- an informative speech
- a persuasive speech
- a demonstration
- a descriptive speech
- a commentary
- a speech combined with slides or sound effects.



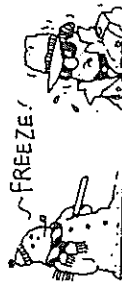
(e) Interviews

- street interviews
- TV or radio interviews
- panel interviews.



(f) Stage pictures

- frozen images using music or lighting
- slow-motion sequences
- expressive movement.



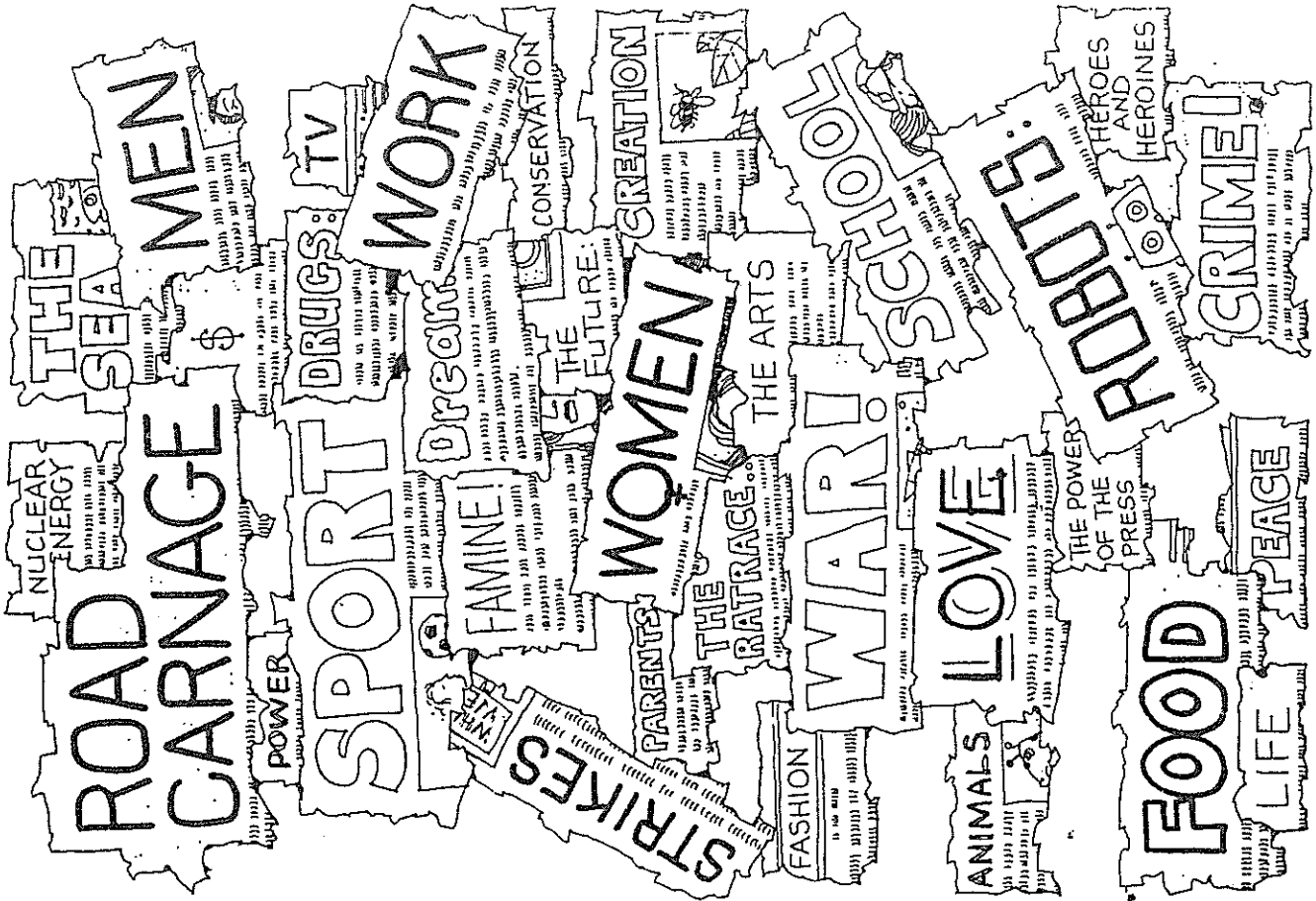
5. Consider the *order* of items in your show. Ensure that the programme is balanced; for example, the musical items may be more effective if they are spread throughout the programme rather than appearing one after the other.
6. The responsibility for preparing the items must be *shared* among all the members of your group, so you will need to be very well organised. The major tasks will be to
 - find or write suitable scripts, prose extracts, poems and songs
 - block (plan) the movements of actors on stage
 - choreograph dance or slow-motion sequences
 - select or create music and sound effects
 - design and obtain suitable sets, props and costumes
 - obtain the equipment needed (e.g. tape recorders, slide projectors).Draw up a task sheet like the one on page 112 and fill it in so that everyone knows what is expected of them.
7. When this has been done, the members of the group should decide on the *cost* for each item.
When casting, it is important to consider these factors:
 - the need for equal involvement of *all* members of your group
 - the individual talents and interests of people in your group
 - the duration of each item
 - the time needed for costume or make-up changes between items.

Rehearsal

For an entertaining and polished performance it is vital that you rehearse often. You will need to agree on a rehearsal schedule that provides occasions for practising *individual items* as well as the *complete programme*. Read the section on rehearsals on pages 146–47.

For your programme to be a unified statement, the items must run smoothly together. There should be no more than a ten-second pause between one item and the next. Rehearsing frequently is the only way you will achieve this.

Themes for collage drama



Performing a programme of prose and poetry

One way of performing poetry and prose for an audience is to present a *programme of readings that explore an idea or theme*.

An example of a programme of prose and poetry

Theme: War

Outline of programme:

* * *

Curtains open.

(Stage is lowly lit. The light of an oil lamp can be seen at centre stage. It rests behind a pile of sandbags arranged as a simple barricade. A siren sounds and the noise of guns firing is heard. A soldier runs across the stage and dives behind the sandbags. Spotlight on soldier.)

Item 1: Reading of a poem entitled "Men in Green" by soldier.

(Downstage left is spotlight, revealing a newsreader sitting behind a desk.)

Item 2: Reading of a newspaper article reporting the results of a battle.

(Downstage right is now spotlight. A woman sits in a lounge chair.)

Item 3: Reading of a poem entitled "To My Son" by woman.

(Stage lights rise.)

Item 4: Reading of a diary entry by soldier.

(All three — soldier, newsreader and woman — move to centre stage in front of the sandbags.)

Item 5: Group reading of a poem entitled "Battle Remembered".

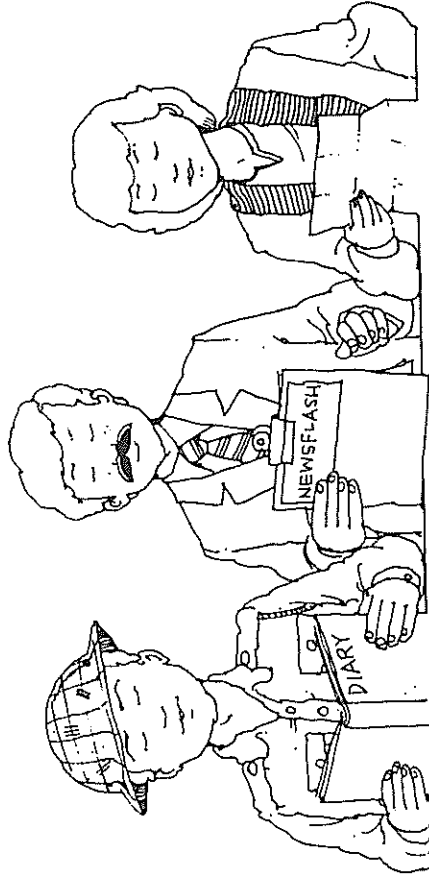
(Stage lights fade. Sounds of battle are heard again. Torches held by each of the three readers are flashed on and off. Woman moves downstage right to chair and is then spotlight.)

Item 6: Reading of a letter advising the woman that her son is missing in action.

(Lights fade. Bugle plays Last Post.)

Curtains close.

* * *



To produce a programme that is both interesting and entertaining, you will need to:

1. Discuss possible themes in a group. You could choose a *general* theme such as

- Love
- The Future
- Fear
- or a more *specific* one such as
- Humorous Literature
- The Australian Outback
- Eccentric Characters.

(There are more ideas in the list of themes on page 143.)

Remember to choose a theme that will appeal to you *and* your audience.

2. Select a *variety* of prose and poetry that provides an opportunity for both group and individual readings. You could choose poetry from both modern and classical anthologies, and prose from a variety of sources, such as novels, newspapers, magazines and non-fiction books.

3. Consider how to present each item so that the *meaning* and *mood* of the literature are conveyed clearly to the audience. Readings can be presented with

- sound effects
- visual effects such as slides and lighting
- mime or dance
- planned movements or "frozen images"
- background music (either performed live or recorded)
- simple costumes and/or set.

4. Decide on the *order* of the readings so that the programme is balanced (for example, the poems shouldn't all be read one after another). The opening and closing items need to pack some punch, so give special attention to them.

It is essential to prepare and practise your readings so that you are totally familiar with the pieces. You should be able to look up at your audience frequently during your presentation. Read the section on expressive reading on pages 105-9 and use the verbal and non-verbal techniques outlined there to make your reading entertaining and interesting.

As you will be working in a group, you will need to be well organised and rehearsed. You could draw up a task sheet like this one to decide who will be responsible for the various tasks.

TASKS	PERSON/S RESPONSIBLE	TO BE COMPLETED BY
1. Costume design and construction	Kathryn	21 April
2. Props	Paul	21 April
3. Set design and construction	Kathryn and Mario	21 April
4. Music/sound effects	Mario	17 April
5. Lighting	Mario	25 April
6. Booking of rehearsal areas and arranging of rehearsal schedule	Paul	5 April
7. Blocking	Paul (mostly)	8 April
8. Obtaining copies of programme items for group	Kathryn	7 April

TODAY'S DATE: 1 April

PERFORMANCE DATE: 1 May

TIME AVAILABLE: 4 Weeks

You will also need to agree on a rehearsal schedule that provides occasions for practising individual items as well as the complete programme. (Read the section on rehearsals on pages 146-47.)

In a small group, choose a theme or idea that you would like to explore in a programme of prose and poetry. Prepare it thoroughly and present it to an audience.



Using Theatrical Conventions

Using Theatrical Conventions

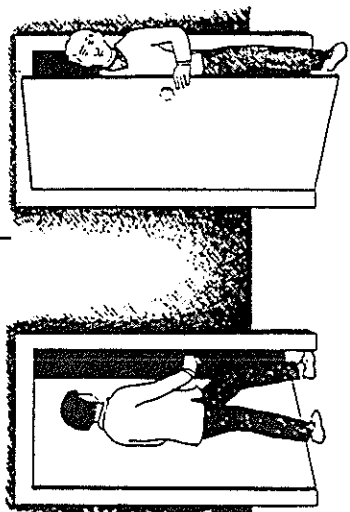
UNITY OF TIME

Keeping your play running in continuous 'real' time will strengthen it enormously. If you must shift time then there has to be a clear cause and effect link between scenes. Playwrights try to convince audiences that they are 'in the moment' of the action together with the characters. On television frequent changes of scene can help to build up tension, but for audiences watching plays this can lead to total confusion, a lack of involvement and a lot of time spent waiting in the dark for something to happen next! If you're new to play writing it's a good idea to keep a scene going for as long as possible so that the audience has time to get involved with the characters and time to distinguish one character from another. With student productions it can also take a while for audiences to stop seeing the actor as a familiar friend, rather than an entirely unknown character.

UNITY OF ACTION

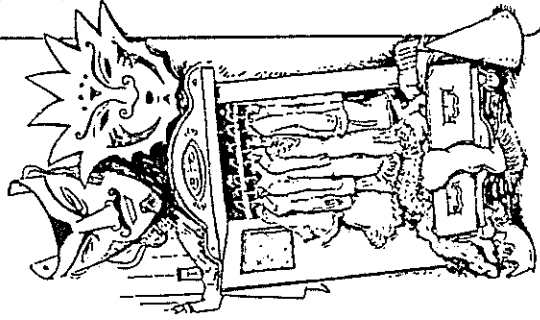
One key difference between stage plays and television is that the audience chooses what they want to look at in a stage play. It is, therefore, up to the writer to signal in the script what the particular focus is at any one time. Actors and audiences want to know what motivates characters to behave the way they do at all times. A continuous focus on the central action in moving the story forward, rather than a stop start approach, will help. If this is not clear then actors will be asking, "What am I doing now?" and technicians will say, "So when do I start or finish the lighting, (or sound) cue?"

In television we often see characters who may say only one line and then disappear. Ask yourself if you would enjoy coming to play rehearsals endlessly for one line, or if you only came for one rehearsal would you know what to do? In writing one act plays it is important to try to give the actors enough to do. Sometimes they can double as other characters, but often in a one act play this will either be physically impossible or look ridiculous.



OTHER THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS

- Rituals - from domestic - the guilty washing their hands, to the religious - prayer and genuflection.
- Ceremonies - marriage, prize giving.
- Mimed activities - this doesn't necessarily mean silent.
- Still or frozen images - a tableau depicting a moment e.g. to give emphasis to the moment of victory when the flag is raised.
- Choral speaking - all saying the same thing at the same moment to give emphasis.
- Synchronised movement - all of the boys look at the girl and wolf whistle together - often used for humorous effect to point out something.
- A ripple effect - all the boys look at the girl ... or girls look at boys ... in the same way one after the other as she/he walks past - again can be used for comic effect.
- Repetition of words for effect.
- An echo - something comes back later in the play to echo something seen or heard earlier.
- Story telling or relating anecdotes within the play to build character.
- Reportage talking about something that has happened off stage or previously, again to build up the story and to talk about people's characters.
- Using key symbols or images in the stage design.
- Masks, puppets - human sized or makeup design to draw attention to extraordinary or highly symbolic characters.
- Costume or props of symbolic significance, e.g. a peaked cap to suggest authority.
- Defining space on the stage through the use of lighting or key elements of the set, e.g. a throne.
- Lighting and music which suggests mood, atmosphere or significant moments, e.g. the use of a warm pink light and romantic music at the moment when the lovers first see each other at the night club, contrasting with the harder night club flashes of colour and hard edged music.



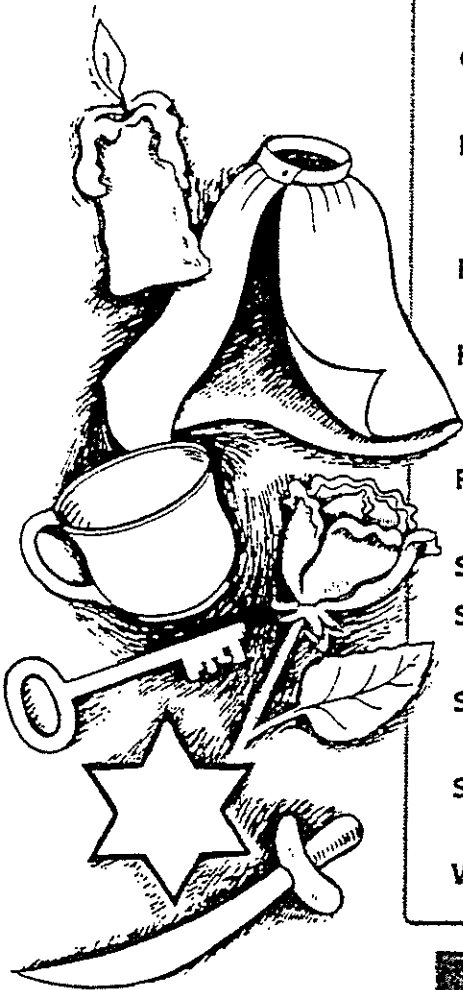
Symbols

There are some universal symbols which can be employed in a variety of ways to give layers of meaning to your plays. You might like to consider their use in art works which are familiar to you. Symbols are very powerful and they provide a sort of 'shorthand' for audiences watching your play.

SYMBOL: SUGGESTED MEANINGS AND SIGNIFICANCE

- Bowl:** *Need, receiving, home.*
- Candle:** *Security, calm, light, solemnity, faith, loneliness, knowledge, shelter, fragility, time.*
- Chest:** *Wealth, travel, secrecy, security, mystery, inheritance, burden, ownership.*
- Cloak:** *Authority, travel, comfort, power, strangeness.*
- Coffin:** *Loss, protection, faith, mystery, journey, destiny, ritual, vanity, preservation, eternity, death.*
- Cup:** *Group agreement, alignment, intrigue, sharing, hospitality, healing, ritual, heritage.*
- Fire:** *Sun, destruction, life, cleansing, eternity, faith, hope, consuming, magic, protection, superstition, passion, radiance, comfort, anger, warmth.*
- Flower:** *Life, growth, innocence, beauty, death in life, ritual, promise, cycle of maturation, fragility.*
- Key:** *Security, limitation, freedom, cordiality, opportunity, intrigue, maturation, punishment, discovery, power, privacy.*
- Ring:** *Union, power, the moon, feminine, womb, crown, eternity, power of another, magic.*
- Sheath:** *Trust, vigilance.*
- Staff:** *Authority, control, wisdom, defence, ritual, magic, guidance, age, dependence, tree, growth, male.*
- Star:** *Remoteness, mystery, guidance, steadfastness, enchantment, humility, aspiration, infinity.*
- Sword:** *Self-preservation, power, authority, conquest, ritual, honour, justice, retribution.*
- Water:** *Cleansing, baptism, life.*

(Source: Dorothy Heathcote)



JOURNAL WORK

Consider your play and link your ideas with some of the symbols mentioned on the previous page. Which interest you or look potentially 'useful'?

Script Writing

Writing your own scenes

At some stage during this course you may wish to create and write your own dramatic scene or short play. The following points will help you to do this.

1. Consider the audience for whom the scene will be performed. Think of what they would find entertaining or what they would benefit from seeing.
2. Decide on the purpose of your presentation. For example, do you want the scene to be thought-provoking, light-hearted or satirical?
3. Think of topics that you would like to explore in a scene. They could be related to ideas you have developed in class; they could be based on real-life situations you have observed; they might spring from your reading of newspapers, magazines, poems or novels. Discuss possible topics with others and make a list of several before deciding on one. Here are some to start you thinking:
 - Family Life
 - The Glamour World of TV
 - The Aussie Male
 - Life Beyond the Stars
 - Leaving School
 - Friendship
 - Living in Australia as a Migrant
 - Natural Disasters
 - A Bank Robbery
 - Loneliness.
4. Develop an outline of your scene.
 - (a) Decide on a *problem* or *conflict* that your characters must face. The problem could be one that the characters try to solve together, for example:
 - surviving in the outback
 - understanding the slang and customs of Australians
 - coping with being unemployed
 or it could be a problem associated with the characters' relationships, for example:
 - a disagreement between parents and a teenager
 - growing tension between friends who share a flat
 - a misunderstanding between a boss and employees.
 - (b) Consider what types of *characters* would best suit your scene. Remember that the number of characters appearing on stage at any one time will be limited by the number of actors in your group.
 - (c) Choose a location (a *setting*) in which your scene can take place.
 - (d) Think of a *climax*. The climax of a scene or play is the point where the action is most exciting or the emotions are most intense. The suspense is gradually built up to the climax, and the scene usually ends soon after it.
 - (e) Decide on an *ending*. The type of ending you choose will depend to a large extent on your aims in writing the scene. Remember that not all stories or

scenes need to end happily (that is, with the characters solving the problem in a constructive way). A sad or thought-provoking ending can be just as effective a conclusion.

5. Further develop the story. After deciding on a basic outline for your scene, you need to develop the story. One way of doing this is to act out (that is, *improvise*) sections of your story with others, writing down the best ideas at the end of each section.
6. Develop the characters. Form a clear picture of each character in your mind. Jot down details about his or her
 - personality
 - mental attitudes
 - style of speech
 - style of dress
 - relationship with other characters in the scene.
7. Write the script. When you are satisfied with the plot and the characters of your story, it is time to write the script. Follow the guidelines given in the next section.

The conventions of script writing

When writing a script for a play or scene, you should follow these conventions:

1. Show the title of the script and the author's name on the front page.
2. Provide a character list that lists the characters' names either by order of importance or by order of appearance. Next to the names, write a brief note explaining who the characters are.
3. Write a short description of the scene that provides details of the *time*, the *place* and the *set*. (If there are scene changes, only do this the *first* time each scene is used.)
When giving stage directions, refer to these sections of the stage:

	UPSTAGE RIGHT	UPSTAGE CENTRE	UPSTAGE LEFT
OFFSTAGE RIGHT	CENTRE RIGHT	CENTRE STAGE	CENTRE LEFT
	DOWNSTAGE RIGHT	DOWNSTAGE CENTRE	DOWNSTAGE LEFT
			AUDIENCE
			OFFSTAGE LEFT

Examples:
The Heist
 by J. M. Howe

SHARKEY — the leader of the gang
 CHARLIE — an expert in explosives
 CRACKER — Sharkey's right-hand man and safe-cracker

ACT 1: The time is January 1990. The curtain rises to show the interior of a derelict warehouse located in a dockyard area. The backdrop shows the rear wall of the warehouse with two small windows; one is boarded up and through the other the broken sign of the Mee-Ly Emporium is just visible. Piles of boxes fill the upstage area. Downstage left there is an old Chinese chest with a kerosene lamp on top and an ashtray overflowing with cigarette butts. Arranged around this table are three wooden fruit boxes and a battered armchair. The stage is lowly lit — it is dawn.

4. Next, give brief details of where the actors are positioned on stage.

The stage appears empty. Snoring can be heard from behind the boxes. After a few seconds the snoring stops and Cracker appears, yawning as he moves downstage towards the Chinese chest.

5. Whenever a character first appears on stage, give a brief description. This is usually enclosed in brackets.

(Cracker is unshaven and wearing a dirty pair of overalls, torn at the knees. His fingers are stained yellow with nicotine, yet they are as nimble as his mind. Despite his appearance, he is quick-thinking and shrewd.)

A noise is heard offstage right and Cracker dives behind the boxes, pulling a pistol from his overall pocket.

The voices of Sharkey and Charlie are then clearly heard offstage.

6. The dialogue of the play can now begin. The name of each character who is speaking should appear clearly at the left-hand side of the page. Throughout the script, stage directions should be included and enclosed in brackets.

CRACKER: Damn those two! They always come sneaking up on me. One of these days I'll have them jumpin' behind boxes. (He pulls the revolver away.) Jeez, I hope they've got some tucker. I sure am starved! Sharkey!

7. Throughout the script, indicate how the lines should be read and movements should be made wherever this will aid understanding.

BANK MANAGER (creeping towards desk): I'll just ...

SHARKEY (menacingly): One more move like that, mate, and I'll blow ya head off. (To Cracker:) Find that safe!

CRACKER: OK, OK. (Turning to bank manager.) You heard him, mister: ... where is it?

8. Finally, because a script has to be understood by people other than yourself, make sure that your ideas are clearly expressed.

PERFORMANCE FOR SNR DANCE DRAMA NIGHT

WHAT WERE THE BEST THINGS FROM THE GROUP PROJECTS WE CAN RE-USE FOR A WHOLE GROUP PERFORMANCE ?

TOPIC: eg CHOCOLATE

BRAINSTORM:

I N T R O	WORD / PHRASE 1 with TABLEAU		1
			2
			3
	WORD/PHRASE 2 with TABLEAU		1
			2
			3
	WORD/PHRASE 3 with TABLEAU		1
			2
			3
	WORD/PHRASE 4 with TABLEAU		1
			2
			3
	Monologue 1	(3-4 lines)	1

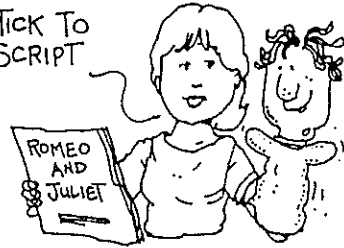
Monologue 2	(3-4 lines)	1
Monologue 3	(3-4 lines)	1
INTERACTION 1	LINES 1 2 3	ACTIONS
INTERACTION 2	LINES 1 2 3	ACTIONS
INTERACTION 3	LINES 1 2 3	ACTIONS
MOVEMENT & NOISE (repetition) (funny walks)	1 2 3	(WHOLE GROUP)
SONGS (snippets)(& Rhythm)	1 eg I like chocolate icecream (to La Cucharacha) 2 3	
INTERACTION 4	LINES 1 2 3	ACTIONS
INTERACTION 5	LINES 1 2 3	ACTIONS
Monologue 4	(3-4 lines)	1
Monologue 5	(3-4 lines)	1
MOVEMENT & NOISE (repetition) (funny walks) As you leave the stage.	1 2 3	(WHOLE GROUP)

FORMS OF PRESENTATION

(a) Drama

- short improvised scenes
- segments of a scripted play
- original scripted scenes
- mime
- conversations between two characters
- puppets
- short monologue by a character
- impersonations.

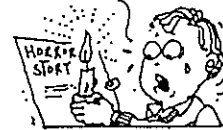
HEY... STICK TO THE SCRIPT



(b) Readings

- solo or group reading of prose and/or poetry
- readings with sound or visual effects such as slides and lighting
- readings combined with mime work or dance
- chants
- joke or story telling.

AND THEN ... AND THEN ...



(c) Music

- live or recorded music to provide atmosphere
- musical pieces accompanied by expressive movement
- songs
- music or songs with choreographed dance.

SING!



(d) Speeches

- an informative speech
- a persuasive speech
- a demonstration
- a descriptive speech
- a commentary
- a speech combined with slides or sound effects.

..IN AUSTRALIA WE ENJOY FREE SPEECH; EXCEPT, OF COURSE, FOR THE ODD PHONE BILL ...



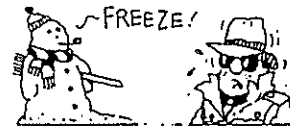
(e) Interviews

- street interviews
- TV or radio interviews
- panel interviews.



(f) Stage pictures

- frozen images using music or lighting
- slow-motion sequences
- expressive movement.



SEGMENTS
• VARIETY

INTEREST
GROUP
CONOUR
SOLO
LINK

ENTERTAINING

SILENCE
DWO
STORY

PURPOSE - AUDIENCE - SIMPLICITY

MESSAGE ?? REASON

Ritual: Same thing, same time, same place

When you go along to support your local team, whether it is a school team, a house team, a class team or an out-of-school team, it is not unusual to see a cheer squad. The purpose of a cheer squad is to show support and to keep up the excitement. Most cheer squads have their own chants with special moves to match the chant. These are usually kept quite simple so that they are easy to learn and copy.

Zigger Zagger, a play by, Peter Terson, tells about a young boy who is a keen supporter of his football team. In fact, all he wants to do is follow the team. This is the opening of *Zigger Zagger* and the whole class can be the Chorus (of football fans). Read it through once and you will be able to see what the tune is that the Chorus sing at the beginning.

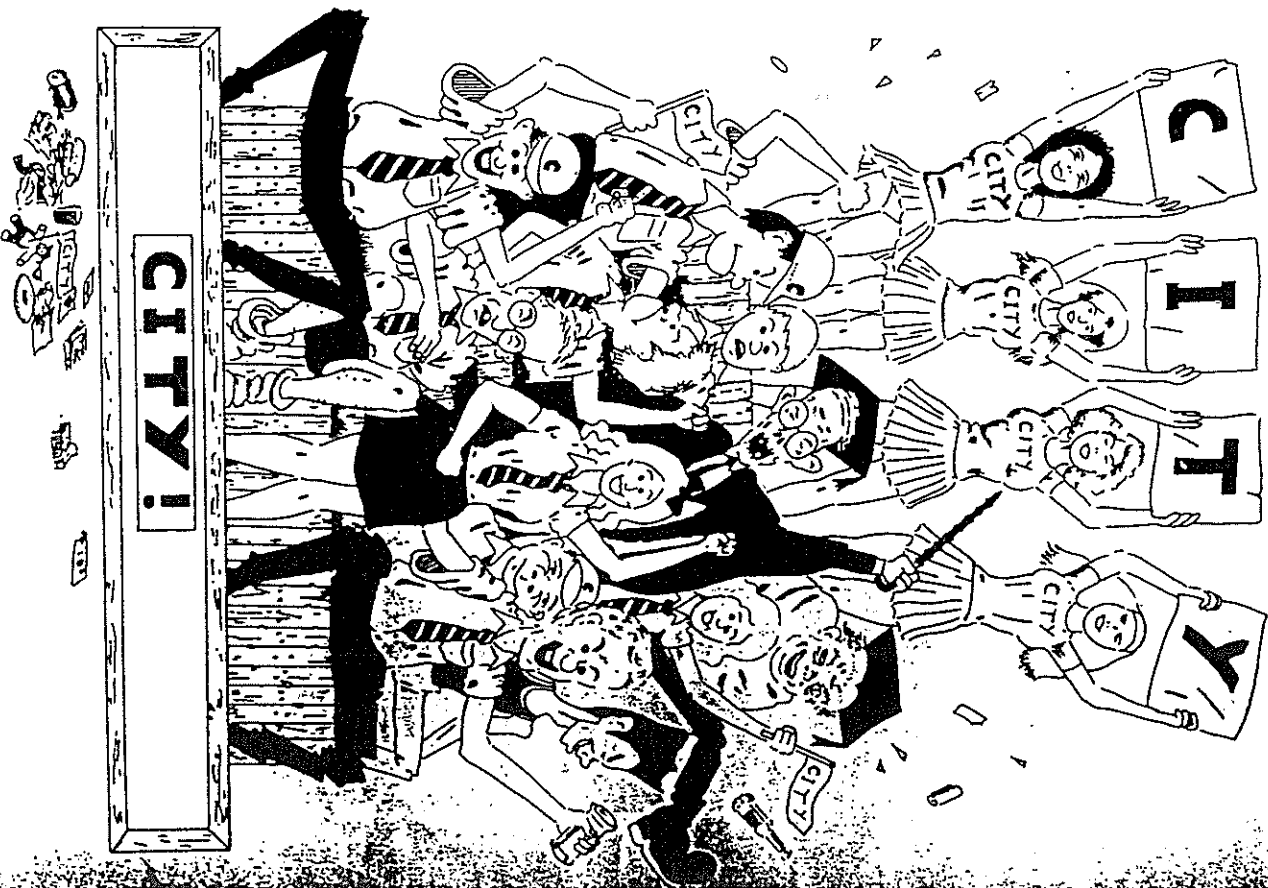
ZIGGER ZAGGER

Chorus: We all live at the back of City end,
The back of City end,
The back of City end.
We all live at the back of City end,
The back of City end,
The back of City end.

(Enter Zigger)

Zigger: I am Zigger Zagger, leader of the football fans. Listen to them sing. Listen to them spur the team on. Up, boys, up.

Chorus: We all live at the back of City end,
The back of City end,
The back of City end.



We all live at the back of City end.
 The back of City end.
 The back of City end.
 Zigger: I lead them. The whole living block of them. A dense mass
 of red and white. I'm lifted onto their shoulders and I start the
 cry: Zigger Zagger. Zigger Zagger . . .
 Chorus: City!
 Zigger: Zigger Zagger. Zigger Zagger . . .
 Chorus: City!
 One. two. three. four.
 Who do you think we're shouting for?
 C-I-T-Y
 City!

Choose a Chorus Leader (Zigger Zagger). With the Chorus Leader at the front of the class, work out some simple actions you can all do when you go through the script again. These could include clapping your hands, slapping your sides, stamping, swaying and moving your arms over your head. Go through the script again, letting your Chorus Leader lead you after counting you in. You should be doing the lines and the movements at the same time as everyone else. If it gets really noisy, it might be better to do it outside where you might really get the feeling of a football crowd. Build up the chant till the last word "City" is shouted out.

We always do it this way

When you were all doing the same thing at the same time as you were chanting together, you were performing a ritual. Ritual is a repeated pattern that everyone is familiar with so they know exactly what to do. You will know how important ritual is in a church. Can you suggest a church ceremony where it is used? Why do you think that the ritual is important to the ceremony? Could the ceremony work without the ritual? There are occasions outside the church where ritual is used. Can you name some?

If you have a school or house chant, say it out loud in different groups and hear the rhythm in it. The rhythm is the pattern of strong and weak beats that makes the chant exciting. For your chant to be really effective it should finish with the last word being the strongest and the loudest, as you did with the word "City". (If you haven't got a school chant, perhaps you could make one up.)

We all perform a sort of private ritual when we repeat actions in the same way each day. It may be that we do exactly the same things, at the same time, in the same order each morning before setting off for school. What is your private ritual? Do you put the radio on at a certain time? Do you always sit in a certain chair? Do you have the same thing for breakfast? And your parents — does your father sit in a special chair in a special place? Does your mother go through the same

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