

2 Experience the action

DESCRIPTION

This key:

- opens opportunities for students to explore a story by briefly taking on roles as people inside the story
- helps students remember stories, and empathise with characters' experiences and points of view
- moves beyond merely 'acting out' a story
- invites students to add something new, through the 'plus' aspect, which allows for creativity and inquiry alongside enactment

It is designed for use with storybooks where the story is written down or with traditional stories passed on orally without text or pictures. It's easy to use and often does not take a lot of planning. Teachers encourage students with the kind of language students use to invite each other to play: "Let's all be..."

Like 'Tackle a problem' this key explores a picture book, but here the original storyline is preserved, and the class reads the whole book.

PLANNING

- Select a picture book or story with plenty of action, and ensure the theme and tone are appropriate and safe for your class. Seek advice before choosing to work with traditional tales with cultural significance. If in doubt, stick to stories with human characters.
- If working with a book, look through the text for moments of action (characters *doing* interesting things). Mark these in pencil, or with sticky notes. If working without a written text, make a mental note of moments of action.
- For your first few attempts at using this key it will be useful to script instructions ahead. Pick a moment of action and consider who's doing what. Draft an instruction using the prompt "Let's all be... [insert name of character here] and describing the action they are carrying out]."
- Plan what the 'plus' factor will be for each action. Pick a small creative idea students could explore *based on the action they are carrying out and supplementing the existing storyline*. Take care your instructions don't encourage students to deviate too far from the original story. Details will depend on the context.
- To think of ideas, picture yourself within the imagined world (it often helps to join in the physical actions the students are carrying out), then think "What's happening here?" With practice you will find it easier to think of a question or pick a detail to explore further and extend the students.

METHOD



- 1 Read a book or tell a story up to a moment of action.
- 2 Pause.
- 3 Say, "Let's all be... [insert name of character here]," and reiterate what the character is doing.
- 4 If the enactment requires moving from the spot, working in pairs or groups or any other organisation, give instructions for this.
- 5 Start to model with your own body language the action carried out by the character. This will encourage the students to join in.
- 6 Add the 'plus' factor – as you and the students continue to carry out the action, feed in an additional instruction that gives room for a creative response. Often this will be a simple question from inside the story, inviting an improvised response in role.
- 7 After a few moments (keep it short), gather the students together again and continue the story up to the next moment of action.
- 8 As before, encourage students to enact the action by saying, "Let's all be..." then prompt a creative response (the 'plus' factor).
- 9 Continue reading or telling the story, with pauses for enactment and creative response at key moments of action, until the story is finished.
- 10 At the end of the book, or story, reflect on what it was like to be 'inside the story', predict what might happen next etc. Ask, "What can we take away from this experience to use in our own lives?"

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EXAMPLE ONE

CITY DOG, COUNTRY FROG

By Mo Willems*



- 1 Read the book up to the first moment of action, where City Dog is let off the leash.
- 2 Pause and close the book
- 3 Say, "Let's all be City Dog, the moment he's let off his leash!"
- 4 Clarify: "Let's do it without leaving the mat."
- 5 Model with your own body language the action carried out by the character. Move hands as if bounding; look around eagerly; open mouth to pant. Encourage the students with "Come on, City Dog – let's go!"
- 6 Add the 'plus' factor – as you and the students continue to carry out the action, feed in an additional instruction that gives room for a creative response: "Hey, City Dog – where shall we run to?" "Hey there – what's it like to be off the lead at last?" "What can you see over there?" "What shall we do next?" Etc.
- 7 After a few moments (keep it short), gather the group again and continue the story up to the moment where City Dog spots Country Frog sitting on a rock.
- 8 As before, encourage students to enact the action by saying, "Let's all be...", then prompt a creative response (the 'plus' factor): "Let's all be Country Frog sitting looking at City Dog – I'll roll up this blanket and put it here on the chair to be City Dog." Sit with the students on the floor and look at the blanket representing the dog. Whisper, "Wow, what's that strange hairy creature?" Add the 'plus' factor: "He looks friendly... what should we do to say hello?" Discuss this with the students.
- 9 Continue reading the story, with pauses for enactment and creative response at key moments of action, until the story is finished.
- 10 At the end of the book, reflect on what it was like to be inside the story: "What was that like?" Be mindful that this book touches on loss, so prompt with care. Ask, "So what do you think City Dog was thinking about when he went home to the city that night?" "What are you still wondering about?" "Dog really missed his friend the frog. Does this kind of thing happen to people as well?" "What ideas could we take away from this story to help us in our own lives?"

EXAMPLE 2

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

By Maurice Sendak*



- 1 Read the book up to the part when Max gets in his boat.
- 2 Pause and close the book.
- 3 Say, "Let's all be Max for a moment and help sail the boat."
- 4 Give instructions: "First, we'll need to put up the sail – stand up, let's all pull the rope, and climb up the ladder. Here we go!" Narrate: "And the wind picked up and soon Max was on his way, over the sea and far away."
- 5 As you say the words, model the actions and encourage the students to join in.
- 6 Add the 'plus' factor: "What if there was a storm! Shall we see what happens?" Narrate: "Suddenly the wind got stronger and great waves pushed Max's boat high up into the air – hold on everyone, it's going to be a bad one! Grab hold of a rope and tie everything down! The waves crashed against the side of the boat, sending spray into Max's eyes and filling the bottom of the boat with water – quick, get hold of a bucket, we're going to need to get this water out before we sink!"
- 7 After a few moments (keep it short), gather the students together again, and continue: "Then, just as suddenly, the wind disappeared, and the sea became calm." Signal to the students to sit down. Pick up the book and read up to the moment where Max first sees the place where the wild things are.
- 8 As before, encourage students to enact the action by saying, "Let's all be...", then prompt a creative response (the 'plus' factor): say, using the narrator voice, "Eventually, out of the mist an island appeared, a small island covered in forest, with a tall mountain in the centre. Let's see if we can find a safe beach to land our boat." Enact landing the boat and dragging it up on to the beach.
- 9 Continue to read and at different times step inside the story: looking at the Wild Things through binoculars; being the Wild Things stomping around the island; joining in with the 'wild rumpus'; etc.
- 10 At the end of the book, reflect on what it was like to be inside the story. Discuss what might happen next to Max and the Wild Things. Draw pictures of the Wild Things and make a map of the island.

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DEEPENING REFLECTION

Reflection is vital for students' learning, so every time you use a key, or sequence of keys, remember to include time for students to think about, talk about, write or draw about what their learning has been. Here's a list of four strategies you can use to take critical reflection beyond a simple discussion. These strategies almost feel like keys in their own right, except they don't stand alone and don't involve moving into an imagined world. Think of them as ways of consolidating the learning. Try adding one or more of these at the end of your sequence. They add a welcome sense of ritual and seriousness, and provide evidence of students' thinking for assessment purposes.

- * **Find an essence** Invite students to come up with a six-word poem or statement that sums up their response to the context. Share the poems or statements with the group, and discuss.
- * **Mark a moment** Invite students to stand somewhere in the space where they experienced an 'aha' moment, received assistance from another student, or grappled with a tricky idea. Share the moments with the group, and discuss.
- * **Think again** Invite students to think critically with questions such as: does this sort of thing happen today / in real life? Whose perspective have we focused on, and why? Whose stories did we not hear today? And who else might have a perspective on what we've been learning – what would their views be? Invite reflection on personal learning by asking: what could we take away from our story to use in our own lives?" Invite reflection on how particular groups have been depicted during the session, particularly if this tended towards archetypes or stereotypes: what stereotypes did we play into? What did our story say about ... [insert reference here]? How does this compare with what we see in other stories and the wider world? Ask: what are you left wondering about? What questions do you have? Is there anything else we should talk about before we close?"
- * **Speak some wisdom** Invite students to gather in a circle – standing is often best as it adds to the sense of ritual. Introduce an object or artefact that represents a character from the context you've explored. Invite students to give advice to the character, speak as the character (if appropriate), or give a short reflection on what they have learned from the character. To keep things safe, make it clear that it's OK to pass. Hand the item around the circle from person to person. Close the activity with your own words. Carefully put the item away.

We would love to hear how you use this key in your teaching

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