

Now Stage the Play

These notes are designed to suggest ways in which the script may be brought to life in performance, rather than just read as a text. How you use them will obviously depend on whether you are staging the play to be performed in front of a wider audience, or whether you intend the children to use the “Ready, steady, act!” notes from their play scripts to develop a performance by themselves, maybe in guided reading sessions.

Suggestions have been given for props, costumes and production techniques, but many are optional. There is still great value in performing the play without too much practical effort however limited your resources may be.

What you will need

- a box of Christmas decorations including a fairy
- a Christmas tree, real or paper
- the ladder will need to be mimed for health and safety reasons.

Choosing the parts

How you cast the play will depend on whether you are expecting the children to learn lines or to read the play while acting. You may want to give parts with more lines to children who will cope better.

The main acting challenge in *Christmas Catastrophe* is Milly, who needs to show a range of emotion from enthusiastic to really cross to whinging.

You may wish to ‘audition’ the children:

- Ask them to use body language to show enthusiasm, boredom, anger, etc.
- Ask them to say, “Me, Miss!”, “It’s not fair”, “I’m only trying to help.”

There are only six parts in this play. If you wish to include the rest of the class you could:

- add them as non-speaking classmates decorating the rest of the hall
- have a small group of theatre critics
- have a group responsible for costumes and props
- ask a group or individual to direct the play
- ask a group to design and publish a programme.

Characters

Explain to the children that *becoming* a character can teach us a great deal more about that character than just reading the part aloud.

- Have a child stand in the middle of a small circle as Milly and allow the other children to tell her what they think of her behaviour. How does this make her feel?
- Allow Milly to answer.

Setting the scene

The action takes place in a school hall at Christmas time. Talk about how school feels different at this time of year. The children enjoy the different activities but the adults may well be feeling rather stressed.

- Have a discussion about Christmas time in school. What activities do they do? What is everyone’s mood?
- What might Miss Bell say about Christmas in school? Ask some children to be her and to respond to this question.

Speaking and Moving

Speaking

Look at the cast list on pages 2 and 3 and ask the children what they know about the characters.

- How will Miss Bell’s speech differ from that of the children?
- The children are excited and enthusiastic. How will their lines sound?

Encourage the children to practise using their voices to show their feelings.

- The children get increasingly cross with Milly. Practise anger without shouting.
- Ask them to ad lib the scene when the tree falls.

Moving

The play takes place in a school hall with more space than a classroom. How will this affect the actors’ movements? They may use bigger gestures and move about the space more freely.

Discuss with the children how they should come on and leave the stage ‘in character’.

You may wish to:

- ask the children how they could show that they are climbing a ladder and teetering at the top.
- practise the mimed carrying of heavy boxes, individually and then in pairs.

Evaluating the Performance

		Teachers	Pupils
Drama Objectives	Present events and characters through dialogue to engage the interest of an audience	Were the voices audible and interesting? Did the children stay in character?	Did the cast feel that the audience were entertained?
	Use some drama strategies to explore stories or issues	Group discussion: Is Miss Bell fair or unfair in the play?	Discuss how Milly feels when she is not picked for the jobs she wants? How do the others feel when she ruins their hard work?
	Identify and discuss qualities of others' performances, including gesture, action and costume	Question and answer session to find out the opinions of the actors and the audience.	Ask audience members to write reviews of the play.

Further Ideas

- Compose sound effects – the scene where the tree falls would be particularly good fun.
- Improvise a scene where the children are eating their Christmas lunch. What do they talk about?
- Develop a short play based on the fairy's perspective of the catastrophe.