Drama Fest 2008

Dear all,

Kung Hei Fat Choi! I really enjoyed the workshops which were held in January in preparation for Drama Fest 2008. Thanks again to the participants for giving up their Saturday morning to come and participate so enthusiastically and energetically in these workshops, which used the beautiful Chinese poem *Mulan* as the basis for various drama activities. I hope you got some ideas for your own school performance, both in terms of what type of performance your students will work on and how challenging the students to work minimally encourages students to be more creative.

I have a few recommendations:-

Remember that the script, play or source for the play (i.e poem or song) need not be Western in origin. There are many wonderful Chinese tales. Perhaps students will read or learn these in Chinese class. There are interesting possibilities for cross-curricular work, that is, performing Chinese tales in English. However, you and your students are free to choose whatever type of story/source/script you wish.

You really can do and show a lot with very little. This was reinforced when the workshop participants played around with cloth and used it to show Mulan crossing rivers and mountains and fighting bravely as a warrior as well as with her family. You can also draw or paint on cloth and it is very portable as well as cheap!

In *Mulan*, there are many opportunities to show fighting, for example when Mulan is fighting for the Khan in the army. Any ‘fight scenes’ need to be carefully choreographed. A stage fight is like a dance and the actors need to know the steps of the dance very well so as to appear convincing and not to hurt themselves or others. Therefore, lots of practice is essential. A ‘slow-motion’ fight can work well on stage as the actors can also show lots of facial expression and the ‘fight’ can be ‘paused’ for the other characters or narrator to comment on the action. Slow-motion fighting can also be very funny! For the sake of safety, it is a good idea not to have more then one fight on stage at a time.

The *Mulan* video which was shown during the workshops was simply a guide. Your students are not expected to perform in exactly this way. What is interesting though, is that the actresses in *Mulan* used no props at all but still managed to create a play. They also used some movements from Chinese opera – an interesting cross-cultural performance!

A chorus in a good way to involve more students in your play. A chorus can play many roles, such as providing sound effects, commenting on the action or performing a gesture which adds to the impact of the main action on the stage. A chorus can be arranged in the static style used in the Choral Speaking category of the Hong Kong Speech Festival or in smaller groups in various locations around the stage. The workshop participants experimented with using chorus and used chorus to repeat key words in order
to emphasis dramatic impact, as narrators and to produce a wide variety of sound effects, including rain, a mother weeping, warriors fighting and horses galloping.

A participant whose students had taken part in Drama Fest 2007 noted that delegation of ‘stage manager’ responsibilities is very important. Having a student to act as ‘stage manager’ and remind other students of the dates and times of rehearsals worked well for this person, as he was then free to concentrate on the quality of the performance rather than reminding the students about coming to rehearsals on time!

The Readers’ Theatre texts by Aaron Shepard that the workshop participants looked at are available from Amazon. They are called ‘Folktales on Stage’ and ‘Stories and Stage’ and lend themselves to a 15 minute staging. Drama Fest entries are not supposed to be longer than 15 minutes long. Another two texts recommended by Stephen Russell (NET) were:
1. *Timesaver (Photocopiable) Plays (12 short Plays for the EFL classroom)*
   Published by Scholastic. Author: Jane Myles. Copyright: Mary Glasgow Publications (an imprint of Scholastic)/2001

Thanks for that Stephen!

I am looking forward to seeing the performances in April and wish you well with the rehearsal process. Best wishes to all!

Yours playfully,

Tanya Kempston