

# Critical Literacy, Dance, and Drama

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## WHAT IS CRITICAL LITERACY?

Critical Literacy is “a stance, mental posture, or emotional and intellectual attitude that readers, listeners, and viewers bring to bear as they interact with texts. Gee (2004) calls it “socially perceptive literacy.” Luke (2004) asserts that critical literacy “involves second guessing, reading against the grain, asking hard and harder questions, seeing underneath, behind, and beyond texts, trying to see and ‘call’ how these texts establish and use power over us, over others, on whose behalf, in whose interests.” (Connecting Practice and Research, Critical Literacy Guide, EduGains, 2004)

## WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN CRITICAL LITERACY, DANCE AND DRAMA?

Dance and drama invite students to develop investigate core critical literacy concepts. In these units explore point of view, identify and give voice to marginalized and missing perspectives, analyse texts, and examine and exercise power. Following is a detailed description of how these concepts are addressed through dance and drama:

**Point of View:** Critical literacy is based upon the notion that there are many sides to any given story. Students are provided with opportunities to assume roles of characters whose lives and experiences are different than their own. They engage with characters/texts which hold a different point of view than the protagonist/prevaling message in their stories.

**Exploration of the Missing Voice:** When it comes to analysis, one of the key messages of critical literacy is that a consideration of what is not said/explored/included in a piece of work is as important as what is included. Students are asked to consider: Whose voice is missing from this story? Does this account of the story seemed to be biased in favour of one point of view? Who might we want to meet to gain another perspective on this issue?

**Deconstruction and Construction of Texts:** Students will attempt to surmise the intended audience and purpose (and in some cases the author) of a variety of dance, drama, visual, and written. Similarly, students may be called upon to generate a text (letter, media text, dance text, visual text) for an intended audience and purpose, sometimes from the point of view of one of a specific character. Students may also analyze texts for bias.

**Call to Action:** Critical Literacy has strong roots in social activism. One of the goals of these units is to make explicit the connection between critical literacy and social justice. Students learn how to use their words, thoughts, and actions to assert their power and have their voices heard in the face of opposition or apathy.

## LINKING DRAMA AND DANCE STRATEGIES TO CRITICAL LITERACY CONCEPTS

Drama/Dance Strategies	Critical Literacy Concepts	Explanation
Role on the Wall	Deconstruction of Texts and Characters Inferencing	One aspect of examining texts critically is to consider the context in which they were written. Similarly, one way to come to know a character better is to consider the socio-cultural context that they live in. When completing a role on the wall for a character, spending time to consider the external stressors and influences on a person is a helpful way of getting to understand them on a deeper level.
Teacher or Stranger in Role	Missing Voices	Teacher/Stranger in role is an effective way to introduce a missing voice to a drama. If you are finding that the drama has been rooted in a singular point of view, coming into a scene as a character and bringing new information or a new way of perceiving the problem at hand can serve to challenge assumptions and deepen the complexity of the work.
Tableau Crossover	Point of View	Since this strategy pits two opposing points of view against each other, it's an ideal way to quickly concretize difference and for students to start to have a sense of what the issue literally looks like from another person's point of view.
Corridor of Voices	Point of View	When exploring a variety of points of view on a topic that a character in the drama is facing, have the students in the two lines call out their differing opinions as the character walks past. Or, if you're trying to help a character more clearly articulate their point of view about something, have the students in the two lines be the inner mind of the target character, offering up reasons as to why the point of view in question is valid.
Voices in the Head and Thought-Tracking	Deconstruction of Texts; Inferencing	These strategies introduce the concept of sub-text and layers of meaning. Students learn to listen deeply, observe closely and analyse carefully for the feelings, beliefs and intentions layered within a dance, drama, or visual or written text.

Inner/Outer Circle	Power Point of View	By design, this structure allows two opposing/different points of view play out simultaneously. When experimenting with issues of power, it may be most provocatively used when the inner and outer circles reflect voices of people at opposing ends of the power spectrum. Similarly, if examining the missing voice, it would be effective to have the dominant voice and the missing voice paired so that the juxtaposition will reveal tension.
Hot Seating	Missing Voices Point of View	Hot seating allows students to ask the questions of characters so that we may come to know them better. Often, illuminating details that an author has failed to provide helps to more clearly pinpoint the author's bias and flesh out a fuller story.
Writing in Role	Deconstruction and Construction of Texts Point of View	Part of critical literacy is learning how to break or deconstruct the codes used by authors / dramatists /choreographers so that we can determine meaning and detect bias. Writing in role provides students with an opportunity to use this knowledge to construct/ manipulate words, text forms, features and images to send a particular message to a particular audience from a particular point of view. It is an ideal medium in which to gauge students' emerging abilities to use the tools of the author/director's trade and to assume another's point of view.
Forum Theatre and Improvisation	Call to Action Point of View	These drama conventions allow students to safely explore a range of possible strategies for negotiating power, taking action, confronting oppression and addressing issues of social justice.
Dance Improvisation and Composition: Guided Improvisation Bodystorming Tableau with Movement Transitions Composition of Dance Phrases and/or Dance Works	Point of View Missing Voices Deconstruction and Construction of Texts Power	Various forms and approaches to dance allow students to investigate critical literacy concepts kinesthetically. Some examples include: communicating opposing or different points of view using gesture and/or movement dancing unspoken words, feelings, and ideas constructing movement phrases, layered with text and/or visual imagery exploring and negotiating power dynamics through movement critical analysis of dance works (own, peers, dance films, professional companies)

## CRITICAL LITERACY AND QUESTIONING

When teachers and students are engaged in critical literacy, they “ask complicated questions about language and power, about people and lifestyle, about morality and ethics, and about who is advantaged by the way things are and who is disadvantaged.” (Comber, 2001)

Questioning is central to excellence in drama, dance, and critical literacy. Rich, open-ended questions invite students to think and feel deeply about the topics, issues and characters and being explored through drama and dance. The following resources support the development of high-level thinking and questioning skills for both students and teachers:

### **The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8, The Arts**

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts18b09curr.pdf>

There are a series of excellent questions embedded in the front matter of the document pertaining to the Critical Analysis Process under the headings: Initial Reaction, Description, Analysis and Interpretation, Expression of an Informed Point of View (pp. 23-27). Questions are also provided to guide students to think critically about cultural context: Consideration of Cultural Context. (pp. 27- 28).

### **Tasmanian Department of Education Website**

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/standards/english/english/teachers/critlit>

This site has an excellent selection of questions that can be used to help students critically examine dance, drama, visual and written texts.

## CRITICAL LITERACY RESOURCE LIST

### **Connecting Practice and Research: Critical Literacy Guide**

[http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesLIT/CoreResources/Critical\\_Literacy\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.edugains.ca/resourcesLIT/CoreResources/Critical_Literacy_Guide.pdf)

The critical literacy guide defines critical literacy, identifies key messages related to critical literacy in action, and provides excellent questions to promote high-level thinking and engagement with texts.

### **Critical Literacy: Capacity Building Series (The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat)**

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/>

This document provides an excellent overview of the core concepts behind critical literacy and provides a variety of strategies and resources teachers can utilize to incorporate critical literacy into their classrooms.

## **Guides to Effective Instruction in Literacy Grades 4-6 Volume One (Ministry of Education, 2009)**

This guide provides teachers with a framework and practical resources for planning a successful literacy program that equips all students to grow as strategic readers, writers, talkers, listeners, and thinkers. It includes the following strategies which are used in many of these units: Questioning the Author, Ranking Ladder, Four Corners, Anticipation Guides, Value Line

## **Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches Grades 7-12, Subject Specific Examples Language/English, Grades 7-9 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004)**

These documents provide numerous structures, strategies and templates, used throughout these units, including: It Says-I Say-And So, R.A.F.T., Text Message Analysis Sheet, Anticipation Guides, T-charts, etc.

## **ITERACY AND NUMERACY SECRETARIAT RESOURCES**

### **Critical Literacy: A Lens for Learning: Capacity Building Series**

[http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Critical\\_Literacy.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Critical_Literacy.pdf)

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### **Critical Literacy Webcast: November 29, 2007**

<http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/november29.shtml>

This comprehensive webcast examines “what critical literacy is, why it is essential, and what it might look like in an elementary classroom”.

See additional webcast support materials on the above web-site including:

#### **Critical Literacy**

<http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/files/Nov29LessonPlans.pdf>

#### **Critical Literacy: What Is It, and What Does It Look Like in Elementary Classrooms?**

<http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/files/Nov29CriticalLiteracy.pdf>

#### **Critical Literacy – The Four Roles of the Reader**

[http://eworkshop.on.ca/edu/pdf/Mod08\\_four\\_roles.pdf](http://eworkshop.on.ca/edu/pdf/Mod08_four_roles.pdf)

#### **Learning Role Cards (Based on the Four Roles/Resources of the Reader)**

<http://www.myread.org/organisation.htm>

**Four Roles of the Reader Placemat**

[http://www.learningplace.com.au/uploads/documents/store/resources/res\\_45560\\_Literacy\\_Practices\\_in\\_English..doc](http://www.learningplace.com.au/uploads/documents/store/resources/res_45560_Literacy_Practices_in_English..doc)

**Robust Thinking: A Must for All Students By Camilla Martin & Jennifer Leclerc, Student Achievement Officers, The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat**

<http://www.cpco.on.ca/News/PrincipalConnections/PastIssues/Vol13/Issue2/RobustThinking.pdf>