

## 'Florence Nightingale' as a context for writing in Y2/3

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This short, structured drama lesson for years 2/3 is designed to create audience and purpose for writing about Florence Nightingale. It works best when the children have some background information about the topic.

The lesson is suitable for all mainstream Y2/3 pupils and their teachers, regardless of their previous experience in using drama for learning.

**Working space:** - hall or cleared classroom space

### **WHAT TO DO**

#### **Introduction**

- Make the drama contract: - Ask the children to take part in a drama by pretending to be people who lived a long time ago. Explain that, when the drama begins, you will need the children to be the nurses and their helpers who have come across the sea in a sailing ship to help Florence Nightingale at the hospital at Scrutini. The nurses have come to look after the soldiers who were wounded in the Crimean war.
- Explain that the children will need to pretend that the classroom or hall they are in, is the hospital – describe the poor conditions they would see- agree what things in the space would not be there e.g. items round the room or wall bars in a hall – and stress that everything will need to be imagined and mimed.
- Make the teacher in role contract: - Ask the children to accept that you will play the part of a friend of Florence Nightingale, who comes to meet the nurses from the ship to tell them what to do. Explain that you will use a simple item of costume such as a shawl, scarf or apron to indicate when you are in this role.
- Explain that you will use the words *action* and *freeze* to start and stop the drama.

## Activity

- Start the drama on the word *action* and put on the shawl or item of clothing to indicate you are in role. (*Teaching tip: - when taking on a role, do not try to use a different voice or different mannerisms, as this will distract the children. They are used to pretending when they play and will have no trouble accepting you in this role as long as you present the information sincerely.*)
- In role as Florence's friend and colleague, tell the nurses how grateful Florence Nightingale is for their help. Florence is currently busy in another part of the hospital. But Florence sends some bad news - they will not be allowed to nurse the soldiers or look after them in any way– due to the jealous doctor in charge. He will only let Florence and her nurses clean up the wards. Stress the importance of the cleaning due to filthy conditions, such as food on the floor attracting rats and spreading disease.
- Explain that the doctor is always watching and checking up - so they need to do a good job with the cleaning, otherwise Florence will get into trouble and they could all be sent home. Ask them to work quietly and carefully so they don't disturb the sick soldiers. Stress how sick they are.

### *Job 1 Sweeping*

Using mime, show the nurses how to open the cupboards, get the brooms and sweep the dirt into a bin using a shovel from the cupboard.

Then ask the nurses to do the same. Ask any children who are reluctant if they will help you as you also do the sweeping. After a short while, ask the nurses to stop whilst you inspect what they have done so far. (*Teaching tip- Don't worry too much about the quality of the mime, as long as the children are working with integrity. If any children are not taking the work seriously, have a quiet word or ask them to watch for a while until they can join in properly. Stop the jobs as soon as you notice a few children have finished.*) Then walk round each area and ask who has swept each part. Give them praise for doing a good job.

### *Jobs 2,3and 4*

Ask the nurses to watch as you show them what else needs doing and then let them choose which they want to do.

2) *Washing the floor with mops.* Using mime as before, demonstrate how to fill the buckets by the sinks – and then get floor mops from the cupboard

3) *Wiping the tables next to the beds and round the windows* – tell them where the cloths are and check they can remember where the sinks are.

4) *Fixing broken beds and windows-* hammers and nails are in the cupboards but stress the need to work quietly so as not to disturb the soldiers.

Check and praise briefly.

- Take off the role costume and stop the drama using the word *freeze*. Come out of teacher in role to explain that the next time you say *action*, it will be 2 weeks later. Explain that, due to all the cleaning over the past 2 weeks, the wards are looking better and some of the soldiers are smiling, but Florence Nightingale and her nurses are cross because they are not allowed to nurse. Then one day Florence sent an important message to all her nurses.

### *Meeting + more jobs*

Restart the drama on the word *action* and resume teacher in role. Tell the nurses that because more wounded soldiers are coming into the hospital, there are not enough people to look after them. So the doctor has said the nurses will be allowed to help look after the soldiers from tomorrow. They must be prepared. They need to cut up sheets for bandages, tidy the medicine cupboards and scrub the operating tables. Use mime to indicate where these are in the room and let the children decide which jobs to do. You will probably not need to demonstrate these jobs, but do so if the children seem unsure.

After a while, call the nurses to one side and ask what they have done. Tell them that Florence will be pleased.

Tell the nurses about the term *Lady of the lamp* and explain why Florence was called this by the soldiers. Then tell them that she has asked them to do the same. They should check the soldiers by walking among them with lamps. Suggest what they might do as they go round, such as tucking in blankets, giving medicines and water and fixing bandages. Tell the nurses to collect their lamps from the shelves around the room and start their rounds.

After a while, use the word *freeze* to stop the drama.

### *Moving Time on*

- Come out of role and explain that several months have now gone by. The nurses have been doing such a good job looking after the soldiers, that several have got better and some have been going home.

### *Future plans for a new teaching hospital*

- Tell the children that Queen Victoria sent a letter to Florence and her nurses saying how pleased she was with their work. After that, the doctor did not dare to stop Florence and the nurses from nursing the soldiers. Tell them that Florence wanted to open a hospital in London when she got back home, so the nurses wrote to the newspapers telling them how good Florence and her nurses were. They also described what work they did there and how lots of soldiers got better because of their care.

### **Reflection and writing tasks**

- Explain that even though they have been pretending, some things in the drama were similar to what really happened. Go over the main events. Ask what parts of the drama they liked the best. Later, the children can write to the newspapers in role as the nurses who helped Florence Nightingale. Children may also want to sketch a scene from the hospital to go in the newspaper, along with a suitable headline. Other children may like to write a diary page to record a typical day as a nurse.
- The drama experience will thus provide a context for writing. Even though it has been an imagined experience, the children have actually experienced something tangible that they can write about.

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