

The tightrope game

Literacy/Drama

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To explore different points of view
- To identify conflict moments in the story
- To examine different uses of language and tone
- To understand different attitudes to war.

SKILLS TARGETED

- Speaking and listening
- Expressive use of voice
- Appropriate use of language
- Capturing the essence of an argument clearly.

SUGGESTED TIME SCALE

- Steps 1-4: 10-20 minutes
- Step 5: One session

WHAT THE CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW

- The story of the coin-flipping episode in *War Horse*
- Other significant decision-making moments in the story.

Step 1

Ask two children to stand at each side of the room – on either end of an imaginary tightrope. Another child stands between them, as though in the middle of the tightrope, with eyes closed. The rest of the class are the audience – ask them to watch closely!

Step 2

Explain that the person in the middle is Joey, standing in no man's land. The children at each end of the tightrope are German and English soldiers, each calling Joey to their side of the battlefield.

These two children can only use the word "Joey", and they must call repeatedly to try to draw Joey over to their side. They should vary their voice, volume and tone as much as possible to get Joey's attention and interest.

Joey must listen and respond truthfully – if s/he is drawn by a voice in one direction or another, then s/he can move that way.

When Joey goes all the way to one side, that side has won

Step 3

Ask the child in the middle about their choices, and why they moved in any particular direction. Ask the rest of the class what they observed, and what the German and English soldiers did that worked

Step 4

Repeat the exercise with different groups of three children, noticing each time any variations in vocal tone, volume, energy etc. Keep asking the audience "What Works"?

Step 5

Use the exercise to explore other decision-making moments in the story, eg Ted Narracott deciding whether to send Joey to the army or Friedrich deciding whether to desert

Step 4

Use the game as a recruitment exercise, with individuals weighing up their feelings for or against the war. One side is the recruiting officer/propaganda media, making the case for signing up. The other side is a soldier saying what it is really like in the trenches

Step 5

Media spin: develop the language and style of each voice into newspaper articles written for and against the war

Step 6

Variation: the children could also make line-ups across the room, in character, to show their feelings about participating in the war. Give each child a character to play, eg recruiting officer, young soldier, mother, general, politician, and ask them to decide how they think their character would feel about the war.

Explain that one side of the room represents pro-war feeling, the other side is anti-war. Children now position themselves along the line, according to how they feel. If they are a recruiting officer who is really positive about the war, they might stand at the pro-war side of the room. If they are an injured soldier who had a terrible experience in the trenches they might stand at the opposite side. If they are not sure, they stand in the middle.

In the classroom, you could run the same exercise using sticky notes in a line with a character's name on each one

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- Children will identify decision-making moments in the story
- They will see two sides of an argument in the story
- They will identify single words, phrases or sentences that sum up each side of the argument
- They will vary their vocal quality and explore range, tone, pitch, volume, etc.

War Horse Learning

War Horse drawings by
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warhorseonstage.com
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