

A MIDSUMMER LITERACY + ARTS EXTRAVAGANZA



GETTING TO THE HEART OF A STORY WITH SOME GIBBERISH

Overview:

Nonverbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, body language) is a huge part of human interactions, providing much of the emotional context for any verbal content there may be. Good authors can convey a lot of this information through words alone, yet this is often lost on young readers who still aren't very comfortable with text, leading to a lack of engagement with reading. By bringing the nonverbals of a story or scene to life, youngsters are able to connect to the text in a very natural and human way, opening the door to a much deeper relationship with the story—and reading in general. This activity does just this by using a gibberish conversation based on parts of a story to distill things down to some raw, and fun, nonverbal communication!

Activity:

1. Decide on a story to focus on—perhaps one that a young reader is in the middle of.
2. From that story, select a scene or series of events that move through a clear progression of emotion.
 - a. For example, it could be a scene where two characters get into an argument and then resolve their issues (moving from calm, to increasingly upset, and eventually back to calm again).
 - b. Or else you could select a series of stages in the building and releasing of tension in the overall plot (e.g. the beginning of the story, when all is mostly calm; the introduction of the major problem of the story; a couple of steps along the way as the problem gets bigger or more involved; the climax of the story; and the resolution, back to calm).
3. Get into groups of two, if possible. If there's an odd number of participants, a group of three can still work.
4. Let participants know that they are going to have a conversation entirely in gibberish. That means no words from any language whatsoever—just noises like, 'blah blah blah, gooble blibbety bop.' Also, they should be sure to avoid any physical contact with each other.
5. Have them begin, allowing the energy of the conversation to build a bit (for about 30 seconds) as participants get comfortable with the activity and more animated.



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6. Then get their attention with a noticeable cue—a loud whistle, clap, or flash of the lights, for instance—and have them freeze.
7. Have them warmup further by doing gibberish conversations based on a couple of different emotions. For example, they can have a conversation (without words, of course) about something sad, or they can talk (in gibberish) about something really exciting. Use the cue from #6 to have everyone freeze when transitioning between different emotions.
8. Now begin moving through the scene or series of events you selected in #2, setting each successive gibberish conversation in each step along the way. To illustrate...
 - a. In the example (#2a) where two characters are in an argument, participants start with a calm, gibberish conversation; next they “talk” as the disagreement begins setting in; then a few rounds gibber through the growing argument from the story; and finally a gibberish conversation captures the resolution of the argument.
 - b. In the other example (#2b), the gibberish conversation starts off in the context of the beginning of the story; then when the problem is introduced; next, during a couple of key scenes as the tension of the story builds; and finally during the climax and resolution of the story.
9. Once participants have gibbered their way through the full sequence that you initially selected, you can stop here or select new scenes or sequenced events, from the same story or a different one.
10. After the activity is done, unpack the experience with participants by exploring what they noticed about their own or their partners' body language/voices/facial expressions during the activity. Also, have them consider how it was for them to dive into the story in this way and if it shifted how they felt about the story.

