

## Jack's Story: a drama using cross-curricular integration



by Mary Howard

The drama can be used with a class from 3<sup>rd</sup> up. As is often the case in drama, a teacher can make adjustments as s/he deems to be age appropriate.

**Note a)** it is not essential to do all the drama episodes. The teacher can 'narrate in'/fill in the gaps by narrating to the children what has happened in between one or other of the episodes chosen to work on.

**b)** examples given are suggestions only - teachers are free to develop the steps as the drama unfolds and ideas develop.

**Possible areas of curricular integration: Drama for Learning and Development:** self-advocacy/seeking help/stereotyping - people who seem different/ generosity/what is a home?/listening to others' views

**Language and Literacy:** Oral, Reading and Writing

**Identity and Belonging:** What is a home?/When do I know that I belong?

**Science:** Environment, nature study, Mapping the area before & after the development (should it go ahead) –related captions/summaries/reports

**Music and Rhythm:** the kind Jack plays/what kind of music he listens to/names of lesser known instruments/percussion/ making instruments/ One Man Bands – are there any in Ireland now?/could we have a group?/could we write a short piece?

**Materials:** Scarf for TiR as Jack/ card/paper, markers /pen & paper

**Source:** This drama came about when the lively short poem below was offered to a 4<sup>th</sup> class as a choral/group speaking piece using plenty of movement, voice-work and body percussion. The students loved it. On impulse they were asked 'Who do you think this character is?' What follows is some of what eventually became a drama around Jack (the class's name for him)

**J is for Jazz Man** Eleanor Farjeon

Crash and CLANG!  
Bash and BANG!  
And up in the road the Jazz-Man sprang!  
The One-Man-Jazz-Band playing in the street,  
Drums with his elbows, cymbals with his feet,  
Pipes with his mouth, accordion with his hand,  
Playing all his instruments to beat the band!  
TOOT and *Tingle!*  
HOOT and *Jingle!*  
Oh, what a clatter! How the tunes all mingle!  
Twenty children couldn't make as much noise as  
The howling pandemonium of the One-Man-Jazz!

**Section 1 Entering the Fictional World: building context, belief and commitment:**

This is where the children learn about Jack - It is well worth spending time on this stage – it will enrich the quality of the drama and give rise to a more confident class who feel they ‘know’ Jack and will be more ready to take ownership of his story and the drama. The **strategy of Role on the Wall** can be useful here, recording briefly what we learn about Jack as we go along (see **Display. Drawing and Writing** below) keeping focus on the drama.

**Teacher initially gives basic information:** Jack is a One man Band (or regular street musician). He lives in a caravan situated near the river (or any scenic, quiet area) just outside a town - not in his home town. He used to be a musician in the army band but retired early to look after his aging father (his mother died when he was quite young). He eventually sold the family home (which was his) to pay for nursing home care for his Dad who has since died. His two sisters are married in America, they keep in touch with Christmas & birthday cards etc. but he doesn’t see them often. Jack is not very old.

**Building belief and deepening engagement:** Teacher moves from narration to discussion as the story builds further. To foster the character and avoid stereotyping, clues/ prompts/ suggestions can be obliquely ‘dropped’ to encourage children’s thinking and build the kind of profile for Jack which is positive and respectful. *This is important for the path of the drama to come. For example:* Jack’s army background – would he be tidy or not? Is he generous? What makes you think so? While he gave up his house he does love living in his caravan – why? – some discussion about different homes – boats, caravans and so forth.

**Further characteristics and details** about Jack are elicited (*and came from children originally*)

- Jack keeps his caravan very clean
- is always nicely turned out, clean and tidy (reference that caravans have ‘proper’ toilets too, etc.)
- he has a little dog who is very friendly and a good watchdog (children will name the dog)
- is interested in the natural environment- he knows the wild flowers and trees and what creatures live in & around them
- would never throw rubbish in the river
- sometimes he finds wounded birds or wild animals and nurses them to make them better.
- uses empty food cans and things like that to make new musical instruments

**Creating and depicting Jack’s imagined past - Still image:** teacher guides the discussion to focus on Jack’s past: Music became Jack’s great love: how/when did he learn?

**Some possible moments** to depict in groups of about five children (*each child should be quite sure who they are in the image - who else would be in the image? Are his friends happy for him? etc.*)

- a teacher notices that he is really good at tinwhistle (or any other portable instrument)
- Jack has formed a group with his friends at school/playing for a special event/receiving a prize for music
- Later on, leaving for the army (*who is there waving him off?/what is he carrying?/what is he thinking?/what are the others thinking?*)
- some years later as a street musician (*who is listening?/why do people like to listen to Jack’s music?*)

**Mapping Jack’s Caravan: Strategy - Paper Placement in groups of 4-5 children**

This activity **deepens engagement**, there is plenty of conversation in the groups around Jack as the children make decisions about him, developing their ownership and sense of authority on his story.

**Resources:** If sitting on the floor - a piece of fabric (size of average tablecloth) in front of each group, paper or cards (A4 card cut in quarters works well), coloured markers. Children (*who may need to be assured that the quality of drawing is not the point here*) are asked to draw some of the things they think would be in Jack's caravan. Teacher asks that they include *3 special things* that are very important to Jack and that he would never want to part with. The 'objects' (drawings) are placed *on the fabric* whether they belong on the wall or floor. It takes some children (and adults!) a few minutes to get used to this. The children discuss and share out opinions and tasks. **Note:** a) It is very interesting if at the end of the task the groups exchange information - particularly about what their chosen 'special things' are and why.

b) **Display, Drawing and Writing:** This work can be displayed, the children caption them in as much or little writing as appropriate - this has an added bonus of keeping the drama in mind between lessons.

## Section 2 Bad News for Jack

Teacher narrates that Jack comes on a conversation between 2/3 townspeople (who don't notice he is there) looking at the local newspaper and discussing the news that the local council has plans for the area where his caravan is - a new road and a development of "a whole lot of beautiful big houses with a great view of the river".

**Teacher pauses** here to discuss this (all out of role), prompting the children to think carefully about a) how this will affect Jack and b) who in the area might want the development and why and conversely who would not. It is a good idea to develop **multiple points of view** here and to *avoid splitting the class in two*, 'for and against'.

**1. Strategy: Overheard Conversation–Spoken Improvisation:** In groups of 4 (3 townspeople and Jack, who is always unseen by them and *does not join in the conversation – it can help if Jack happens to come on this when the conversation has started*) children improvise this (decide *who* the three are in the town/mothers/shopkeepers etc.). The newspaper is mimed. **Locate** each group - perhaps a quiet moment as Jack prepares to play on the street/in a cafe/library/Vet's waiting room...

**Note:** It is usually best for the children if the teacher uses **briefing** in this kind of improv., explaining to them that it will make the drama a lot more interesting if *each one of the three in each group would take a different viewpoint that arose in the discussion – or another that hasn't been mentioned and adds to the debate*. The improvised conversations should be short - about 5 minutes max. per group. Children get a little time to prepare their improvs, and to observe what they found interesting in each others' work which they will afterwards discuss briefly.

**1a. Optional second/alternative strategy: Town residents meeting** chaired by the Chairperson (TiR) to air their responses to the plan. A number of differing points of view similar as above. Children may sit in groups of similar point of view or not (teacher's decision). *Jack does not attend*. It is also worth briefing groups, again to develop listening to, and commenting on a variety of responses and avoid over-simplistic direct oppositions.

**Related Literacy task(s):** Poster to advertise the meeting/drop-in leaflet advertising the meeting (concerned groups will want to urge support)

**Extended Language:** News reporters interview townspeople before and/or after the meeting – (paired improvisation, always some time for preparation).

**Writing:** In role, write to the Council on the point you feel strongest about.

Write a short report of the meeting for the newspaper/parish newsletter etc..

**2. Jack's Thoughts: Strategy - Teacher in Role (TiR) as Jack** sitting at a table outside his caravan with paper and pen writing to his sister (wearing a particular **scarf** which should

always be worn as a role signifier for him any time s/he is being Jack). Children watch and listen – best if in the school hall sitting on the floor but can be done in classroom.

**TiR** as Jack speaks aloud as he writes (*he doesn't notice the children*), telling his sister of his worry and sadness that he may lose his home by the river.

- He relates how kind the people have been to him over the years, how he can understand that they might like the new development but it will break his heart to leave and to see the place changed (for ex. what will happen the wrens who nest in the hedge near his van?... he always prevented the cats from getting the nestlings in Spring...)
- *He hasn't gone to the meeting because he doesn't want to complain or make a fuss and anyway, people mightn't like him to do so.*
- He reveals that the Council has offered him a house in a big estate of 200 houses. The idea baffles him as he cannot imagine how he would settle there with so many houses around him....he trails off by saying that there's a **circus** coming to town, he plans to go, and play a bit of music outside the big top first – it will cheer him up.

**2a Option:** He turns his head and sees the children who he addresses as his friends from the town: he is delighted to see that they have come to talk to him. He asks them to advise him on what he should do, and to ask any questions they may have.

**2b Option:** Jack was so upset that he forgot to seal the letter. The postman found it out of its envelope in the postbox, read it and shared it with the neighbours in the town who didn't realise how upset Jack was. What do they do?

**Writing:** As his sister, reply as Jack's letter (children will name her initially).

### Section 3: Possible “resolutions” and final activity - Still Image

**Note:** The drama should not be resolved too easily. It is good if through whole-class discussion (in or out of role) a number of possibilities arise, each group picking their own choice of resolution to depict in **still image**. Some possibilities:

- a) the development goes ahead with a park. Jack is asked to stay on as caretaker with a small stone-built house built in keeping with the area.
- b) Jack moves to a house in the estate of 200 houses – he finds it far nicer than expected – the neighbours hold a little welcoming party for him
- c) Jack busks outside the big top as planned and draws the crowds. The ringmaster knows that the circus needs a musician, sees that Jack is a draw and invites him to join the circus. That way at least he can keep his caravan, can continue to play music but he will have to leave the town and people he knows, and move with the circus from place to place.
- Or?...

**Second set of still images** – this time of Jack ten years from 'now' can also be fruitful.

**Section 4 - Reflection:** As in most lessons, teacher will have had summing-up, reflective and acknowledgment moments with the children at the end of their drama episodes. The final reflection here will ultimately depend on how the drama developed, these are some ideas from the children's work:

- People are sometimes very different from we might think at first just by looking at them, or where they live.
- Is it a good idea to jump to conclusions before we know anything about someone?
- Things don't always turn out as we think we would like but
- Compromise can work
- If we think and try hard enough we can often solve problems.

- is it difficult to speak up when something important is not right?
- It's important to talk –
- We often need other people either to speak up for us or to show us how to speak up for ourselves.