

Teawater Tea: *The play within a story*

A collaborative storytelling process and space where children make up and perform little plays. The main text is Owl at Home by Arnold Lobel; the plays and writing emerge from a rich mix of oral language and play; links can be made throughout the process between speaking, role play, writing, singing, moving, and reading. The playful ritual of tearwater tea empowers children to express and share sad things in an indirect, safe way.

Drama Conversations/Strategies: Choruses, circle games, hot seating, thought tapping, freeze frame, sculptures, role on the wall, setting the scene, guided tour, soundscape, group storytelling, inviting ritual, teacher in role, group roles. For a description of these see *“Playing our stories: classroom drama in years 1-6” Ministry of Education. (2006)* ., or *“Inspiring Writing Through Drama: Creative Approaches to Teaching Ages 7-16” by Patrice Baldwin and Rob John.*

Sharing Experiences. The teacher asks for, shares stories of a family picnic/outing/party that went wrong. Then makes a freeze frame/snapshot of the ‘crisis’ with a small group and/or writes a one sentence summary of the outing. Then in small groups, children share stories, even make a freeze-frame to bring back and share

Exploring the text: Show children the illustrations and ask them first what they can see, hear, and so on, in the familiar way. I then move on to ask them where owl is. Of course, I have the things ready. As they talk, I say let’s set up Owl’s living room. Here’s a piece of cloth or a rug for the floor, a chair,.a small table, a teapot and 3 cups...I invite some children to help me do this.. Watch the [slideshow of Miss Tingles reading Tearwater tea](#) on YouTube, with the sound off, discuss what’s sad about each object. Ask someone to be owl in the hot seat and get the class to ask him questions. Or you be owl

Playmaking: Who would be like Owl and make their own cup of tearwater tea. A class discussion- which animal would you like to be- gets everyone involved. I also suggest we add a soundtrack for the plays. With some children, it helps to provide them with stage directions for the main actions. Owl collects up sad things. Owl sits down and takes up a teapot. Owl names each thing and has a little cry into the teapot etc. Another little touch- when an animal has made their tea, I say I’m going to ring a little bell, and that’s a sign for you to invite some children to drink your tea with you. If some children are reticent about role play, you could play the role yourself

Writing & Reflecting: For some children, it helps to draw and/or write a list of their sad things first. Of course, the children may want to hold more tea-drinking sessions once the ritual has been established. For the children the audience, all the sharing involved provides them with ideas and language for writing, art, movement. They can go on to write tearwater stories in the roles they took in their plays, or write a procedure for how to make tearwater tea. With older children, you can use their stories to elicit questions and stimulate reflective discussions about what makes you feel happy or sad, why different people do different things when they are sad, and so on. To complement the sad side of tear water tea, make up a favorite things game or song, things that make me smile and laugh. As in Maria’s song. help them fit their favourite things into 4 groups of three, 123, 123 123. Pancakes for breakfast. A fort made from pillows, a game of deck cricket, a zoom with my nana.