

# The Benefits Of Drama Classes For Children

By Eleanor's Words

When you consider drama clubs and classes for children, what conclusions do you draw? Do you think of a room full of confident, extrovert young people with ruthless ambitions for Hollywood or television? Has your own child expressed an interest in the performing arts and been badgering to go? Have you spotted what you think might be a hidden talent, and can't bear to see it wasted - or do you have a realistic feeling that your child is probably not destined for stardom, but you are wondering whether drama club just might be beneficial in other ways?

## What Types of Children Go To Drama Classes?

In short, all sorts. My child has attended a drama club for the past five years, and I would say that in general, the class is filled with all different types of children. Most, I would say, are there for the enjoyment, rather than any lofty dreams or ambitions. At the club my child attends, the emphasis is certainly on learning drama through fun. There is no pressure, the environment is informal and the teaching both positive and inspiring. Of course, all drama clubs and schools are different - some are more structured than others - but I can certainly say that my experience of my own child's drama class is that the children are not competitive but quite the opposite. They are all having fun through drama and self-expression.



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## Self-Expression Learned Through Drama Can Improve Your Child's Life Skills

That's right. Attending drama classes can provide your child with many skills that will be of use to them throughout life. It is certainly not all about acting and dancing, though of course these elements form the basics of a drama class. Perhaps one of the most important skills your child can learn from drama is self confidence.

Some children are obviously shy and not at all confident about coming forward and standing out. However, improving self confidence is something that many children can benefit from, even those who, on the surface, may already appear to be quite sure of themselves. Think how many adults are gripped with varying levels of anxiety when faced, for example, with giving a speech or hosting a meeting. Even being invited for a job interview can heighten the nerves of many of us, especially as it is not uncommon these days for some companies to undertake interviews involving role play and thinking on your feet.

Drama can help your child to acquire skills to help in these situations because games and exercises used in many drama classes nurture spontaneity and the ability to 'think on your feet'. For instance, when my child was in the class for 5 - 7 year olds, one of the exercises was to pass a large ball around a circle. Each child, upon being passed the ball, had to say what the ball actually was - the idea was to be as imaginative as possible and all ideas were worthy and accepted, even the most way out. In fact, in drama 'way out' is often the best.

Though a very simple exercise, and only one of many for the younger children, this procedure really does encourage a child to think on their feet and use their imaginations, which is something they can carry through to many elements of life. And let's be honest, how many adults would be lost for words when faced with a similar dilemma.

## Part Of A Group

Some children are great at working in groups, and some are more focused on their own thing. Fundamentally, a drama class will teach your child how to be part of a group, and how to work with other children within that group. Some exercises may be solo, but for the most part, will rely on the cooperation of others.

This can be excellent for children who are not so good at fitting in and putting themselves forward within a group, as drama classes encourage input from every child and not just the confident few. A drama exercise, whether it be a fun, creative game or a solid piece of acting or dance, will give your child a platform to really come out of themselves and nurture their own imaginations. At my child's drama class, all ideas are welcomed and encouraged so that children have a sense of positivity which, again, brings about self confidence and self worth.

But learning to work in a group is not only beneficial to children who are shy or less forthcoming. Some children are already very confident, perhaps showing many signs of extroversion, yet can still struggle with team work. Team work primarily teaches children to work together; to consider the ideas and thoughts of others, sometimes sacrificing their own ideas for those of their peers.

## New Friendships

The nature of a drama class means that your child will be working for most of the session with other children of around the same age. This provides an excellent opportunity to make new friendships as the class itself provides common ground for relationships to flourish. Children who sometimes struggle to form friendships at school may find this easier - the very nature of most schools means that for a significant part of the day pupils are working on their own. Even when pupils are participating in group work at school, it will often be the case that one or



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two children overtake the entire operation, leaving quieter, less confident children no room for input.

In my child's drama group they focus a lot on creating sketches within small groups, which are then performed to the others. Everyone creates their own character; their own part of the scene. One of the most recent sketches which my child had great fun performing was a news flash. The children were not given any guidelines for this, so it was an excellent opportunity for them to express their creativity. There is no 'right' or 'wrong', and the drama coaches are great at getting everyone involved without pressure.

## Productions

Some drama clubs put on many productions throughout the year, some may only perform one. At my own child's club, his age range (8 - 10) only put on one main production for family and friends, whereas the older children put on many more. The emphasis on productions can vary considerably from club to club, so if this element is important to you and your child, you should enquire before joining up. The productions at my child's club are mainly about fun and enjoyment, and gaining experience of being on the stage. The children do not have huge scripts, though they do have some lines - the majority of the script is led by the older children.

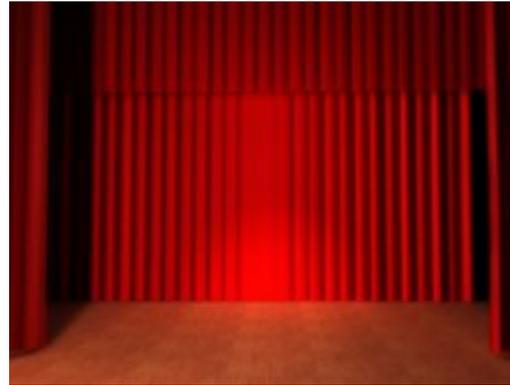


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Some children may feel nervous about performing in front of a large audience - my own child does, even though he is confident in the weekly classes. A certain amount of nerves is very common, however. Even on the big stage, well known actors can experience nerves after years or practice, especially before a live performance - some even forget their lines. Once the performance is under way, most children just get into the swing of things and really enjoy it. Afterwards, children feel a sense of achievement and pride which is excellent for their esteem. After all, in life we often have to push through certain barriers in order to achieve our potential and get the most out of life - it isn't any different for children.

## Is Drama Class Right For My Child?

Drama class can benefit any child, teaching them wonderful skills that they can carry through life and put to use in many areas. Drama instills creativity and self expression as well as nourishing the imagination. It can teach a child to 'think outside the box', which is a great skill for success in future endeavours. Drama helps children to think on their feet and helps them to both stand out from the crowd *and* to work within a group. Perhaps one of the most important skills it brings is an increased level of self confidence, plus the opportunity to make friends outside their usual circuit.

Drama is a very versatile hobby and in the main it should bring fun and enjoyment to your child's life. Some drama groups focus on a more structured approach, more of a stage school method of teaching. Other drama groups are much more informal. If you are looking for a drama club for your child, then it is useful to investigate several in your area before committing to one. Most drama clubs will let you sample a one-off session before committing to the whole term, so that your child can test the waters and decide if it is really for them. I would say,

however, that there is a drama club for everyone, whether you have a child who dreams of future stardom, or simply want to find a fun environment to nurture your child's self confidence. After all, 'Life is a stage,' so to speak...

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