British author Brian Woolland is as a highly regarded drama teacher, lecturer, director and award winning playwright. Woolland’s latest book, *Pupils as Playwrights: Drama, literacy and playwriting* reflects his passionate interests in learning through drama and his teaching. Woolland’s education, scriptwriting and directing experience places him in an ideal position to produce a work grounded in sound pedagogy, informed by practice.

*Pupil’s as Playwrights* uses clever ‘word play’ in the catchy title and cover, which in turn acknowledges the central nature of students to this work, while interweaving commentary on the nurturing role of teachers. The centrality of performers and students as playwright / creators and performers is guaranteed to grab the attention of both teachers searching for practical ideas and also those interested in the interface between literacy, theory and the performative.

One of the first things the reader notices about this title is the ‘eye-catching’ cover, featuring colorfully detailed eyes drawn by students. The montage of eye images depict a variety of imaginary scenes drawn by students, reflected in the eye’s pupils; this interesting design hook highlights Woolland’s focus on the ways of seeing and performing in different contexts to come later in the book. It also serves to position the book’s focus on the primary or elementary stages of schooling, a point that is reinforced in the introduction. However I believe that the book will most certainly be viewed as useful resource for all secondary Drama and English teachers.

The book is divided into four useful sections:-

**Section One: Dramatic Writing and Process Drama**
**Section Two: Play(ful) Writing**
**Section Three: Practical Projects**
**Section Four: Resources**

While the first section is quite short and possibility too short for some, I suspect that this is in acknowledgment of the number of other excellent texts in process drama and theory in the market place; it also reflects Woolland’s obvious desire to make this
book a user friendly and practical resource for those with different levels of experience with drama teaching. Woolland effectively uses the first section to briefly ground the reader in the underpinning philosophy of the teaching orientated sections to follow. He also uses this section to make some fundamental assertions:

The episodes in process drama should certainly be linked, but not necessarily in a linear way. The exploration of a situation is driven through the need to engage participants, stimulating a thirst for understanding, to create depth and to protect then form their own emotional vulnerabilities. (p9)

His second section is more comprehensive and expands on this beginning. Woolland explains with great clarity and passion the concepts of dialogue and voice, character and role, structure story and narrative, meaning beyond the literal and the power of observation. This section also serves to highlight the powerful pedagogical links between drama and the study of English and other subject areas such as history and psychology. The ability to reflect on issues through improvisation and the writing / creation of dialogue is powerful indeed. Making sure that students ‘as creators’ are not overwhelmed by teacher dominated scenarios is a fascinating aspect of the book’s content that I longed to engage further with; although in fairness to Woolland he does clearly comment of the importance of structure acting as a conduit to the response process.

A variety of structured scenarios are detailed in Practical Projects in Section Three. Lesson plans for primary and secondary students in developing scripts based on stories such as *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Years 1 and 3), *The Pet Cellar* by Michael Bragg (Year 2& 3), *The Kraken* (Year 3&4), *Wolves in the Walls* (Years 4 & 5) by Neil Gaiman and Dave Mckean, *The Dunce (Le cancre)* by Jacques Prevert (Years 5,6 & above) and Shaun Tan’s best selling graphic novel, *The Arrival* (Years 6 and above) and others are further expanded and supported by imagery.

While these suggested year levels are not prescriptive, I feel that many of these suggestions would certainly suit lower secondary teaching settings as well as the primary levels suggested.

Woolland grounds each lesson with key aspects of drama based language, familiar across curriculums - such as point of view, dialogue and voice, constructing character, descriptive writing, use of metaphor and symbols et al and this is sure to be appreciated by teachers seeking to document their teaching and learning planning.

These projects will no doubt also be extremely useful models for use in applying to other stimulus materials such as stories, poems and multimedia based inputs. Woolland strongly articulates the position and role of the teacher in the process by explaining that:

The teacher in a process drama is, like the children, both participant and audience; as participant taking a role or roles in drama, but also guiding it, crucially also function as playwright and director, structuring, focusing slowing things down to explore moments in greater depth, ensuring periods of reflection. (p10)
Another strength of this title that will be appreciated by teachers is the provision of resources related to the books sample lessons that are both user friendly and appropriate to good planning. The Resources Section provides photocopiable material, including dialogue extracts with quick and handy notes that will be appreciated by teachers on the run. It is also terrific to see more and more books suggesting useful online resources and links. A close read of each practical project highlights Woolland’s sound understanding of the drama curriculum and the use of language that supports outcomes is evident. The terminology and clear use of ‘drama’ terms & language will also allow this book to be used in multiple contexts and across systems.

In summary, this book’s insightful advocacy of the value of reflecting on life’s experiences through drama and it’s use of links to the visual and imagined in story, make it an excellent addition any educator’s and drama teacher’s professional library. University and school leaders would be well served to make this title prescribed reading for both primary and secondary teaching undergraduates and teaching professionals in the field.

Highly Recommended.

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