

Introduction

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This must surely be the most useful book on drama to have come on the market. No other publication has managed, in the way this one does, both to stimulate dramatic action and to expose the dramatic principles behind that action. This is not a text merely offering a hundred ideas or tips for teachers which so many "practical handbooks" tend to do (leaving students high on action but low on understanding). And yet, paradoxically, it is essentially practical.

The format of the book is unique. Everything about it is double-edged. It is ostensibly aimed at students who want to take the initiative in conducting their own classroom drama and yet it will be a godsend to teachers; it seems to be about getting drama started, but the opportunity to sustain drama work of real quality and depth is also there; it is light-hearted in style inviting the students to "have fun" and yet is very serious in teaching the students that drama is the art of constraint; it seems to have an improvisational bias but suddenly we are working on scripts; we may think it's about a drama process but really it's about theatre. It is this latter paradox that is perhaps the key to the whole book for here, (at last!) we have a publication which demonstrates unequivocally the unity of drama and theatre and of process and product.

That unity pervades every section of the book for the authors, while introducing each chapter with attractive, easily manageable exercises, also cleverly illuminate the purposes of the exercises by reference to an excerpt from a play text, thus showing how a playwright (of both classical and contemporary genre) has followed the very same principles necessary to carrying out the most simple A and B pairs work. Improvisation and theatre merge into each other.

But it is the basis on which the sections are selected that gives intellectual rigour to the book. For the authors have modelled their sequence of chapters on a theory of drama which is set out in diagrammatic form at the beginning so that the reader can follow the rationale underpinning the choice of chapter headings. This is a brilliant conception for it means that the students are introduced to sound theoretical principles of drama/theatre irrespective of the level of their interest.

Those who subsequently take examinations in Drama will have been given a very good grounding. This is particularly relevant for GCSE students, for not only does the book provide insight into the nature of the subject, it provides the

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student with the appropriate language with which to discuss their own and other people's drama. They will absorb the language of dramatic criticism without realising it — the informality of the authors' unstuffy style belies the seriousness of their intent. Words such as tension, focus and symbolisation will not become artificial labels but vivid concepts rooted in experience.

Dramawise will give students an "academic training" in the very best sense of that phrase.

I believe it to be an astonishing achievement. If students, teachers, actors or academics really want to understand "the bones of drama" then this book is essential reading.