

Role Plays

Description

Students work in pairs or small groups to act out a situation. Each student has a role. Students may work from cards or cues, or they may create their own situations. Role plays may be used in conjunction with other strategies and activities such as *Working with Scenarios* and *Reader's Theatre*. Role plays can be simple (*You lost your wallet on the bus and need to talk to Lost and Found.*) or complex (*You are a supervisor and need to tell an employee who is always late that she needs to shape up. She has sick kids at home and needs the money.*)

Purpose

The purpose of a role play is to give students an opportunity to work with others to act out a situation and explore how others may think, feel or respond in a situation. Role plays are meant to build communication skills as well as problem solving skills. They help students think on their toes because they need to listen carefully and respond to what they hear. They can't simply recite a memorized dialog. By putting themselves in real situations, students learn to think about what they might say and gain practice expressing thoughts and ideas in response to others. Role plays can be created from current events, short stories, novels, and screenplays to help students understand dramatic structure in texts. They also are useful in having students act out sticky or stressful situations that are part of their daily lives (your boss wants you to work late but you have a test the next day; some girls in your class are telling lies about you on My Space).

What to Do

1. Prepare students by presenting a situation or a problem and discussing the people involved. Highlight the different perspectives that each person might bring to the situation.
2. Select a situation and brainstorm what each person might think and feel. Use dramatization, chalk talk, or puppets to illustrate how an interaction might flow or role play the situation with one of the more mature students.
3. Use retelling or an event map to make sure that all students are clear on the situation or the problem and the various actors involved.
4. Delineate roles and discuss what each person is trying to accomplish in this situation. Assign roles and make sure students are clear on their "motivation" as actors in the role play.
5. Depending on the size of the role play, have students work in teams or in pairs and give them their own space to practice. Encourage them to be articulate, convincing and dramatic.

6. Circulate and observe but do not intervene. Then ask a few of the students to demonstrate their role plays.

Keep in Mind

Allow your role plays to emerge from themes or topics the students find engaging or show interest in. (applying for a job, reenacting an historic event, dealing with a tricky social situation with friends, an interaction with police).

Have students generate possible language they might use in a situation and demonstrate how differences in tone can signal differences in attitude (*Excuuuuuse me*) and serve to irritate or antagonize others.

Consider using Role Play Cards to assign roles to students. Spell out what each actor is trying to accomplish as part of the role (*You are a landlord and your young tenant has not paid rent in two months, and besides you think he smokes dope in his apartment and you don't like it. Tell the person he has to move by the end of the month*).