

Technology and Reading

Acting Chat



Summary

In this activity, learners/readers recreate a conversation from a text they are reading as a group. They work in small groups to re-enact the conversation through taking different parts.

Aims

Within the context of promoting reading for pleasure, this activity aims:

1. To enable readers to develop a deeper understanding of a text containing dialogue; and
2. To practice writing dialogue based on an episode in a text.

Objectives

By the end of this activity, learners/readers will have:

- Studied an episode in a text in detail;
- Recreated the episode in their own words;
- Interacted with others in the creation of new dialogue; and
- Identified differences between direct and indirect speech.

Method

This activity is designed to be led by a tutor or other learning facilitator as a group activity.

Resources

A broadband internet connection, a PC or laptop per group of learners/readers and instant messaging or “chat” software is required, a data projector (not essential).

Context/background

This activity is a fun and interactive way to deepen understanding of a text and practise creating conversations. Chat is a friendly interface and by working in a small group to play their part, learners/readers can take turns and share ideas about the content. The online element introduces an element of surprise. However, this activity can be recreated in a number of paper-based ways. Most chat facilities enable a print-out of the conversation, and some enable the conversation to be recorded as a text file so it can be reproduced easily for all learners. This means the conversation can be developed more fully after the first interaction and typing and spelling errors can be easily corrected (if and when appropriate).

Example texts for this exercise from two of the Quick Reads series are a three-way conversation between Freddie and his friends Brown and Turner, with a small part played by the nurse, in Chapter 18 (pp85-91) of *The Cave* by Kate Mosse, and the first encounter between Gravy and Celine in Chapter 3 (pp20–21) of *A Cool Head* by Ian Rankin.

Acting Chat: Step by Step for teachers, tutors, trainers and learning facilitators

Before you begin

Set up the required number of accounts for the chat facility¹ in the names of the characters who will be acting out the conversation. You may choose to have an additional group as “audience”, in which case set up an additional account so they can log in. You need your own account as well.

In the initial part of the activity, each group of learners should be able to work around a PC or laptop where they cannot see the contributions of other groups except in the chat window. You may wish to log each character in before starting this session, especially if it’s the first time you have used “chat” with the group.

Use the data projector to display the finished conversation and discuss it with the group at the end.

1. Select an appropriate episode from a text that all the readers are reading.
2. Encourage the readers to focus on the episode by answering questions such as:
 - How many characters are involved in this episode?
 - Name the characters. What do you already know about them?
 - What happened in this “scene”?
3. Discuss the answers to these questions as a whole group; then divide learners into smaller groups – one group per character. An observer group can also play a role as ‘audience’.

¹ Chat facilities are freely available and can be used through providers such as Skype, MSN, Yahoo and Google. They are also available through learning platforms such as Moodle. Setting up an account usually requires a registration process and activation by email. Activation is usually instantaneous, but it is better to do this in advance, taking care to keep note of user names and passwords, as issues may arise with names. (Using the full name of a character, separated by an underscore, e.g. Lara_Croft should avoid issues with duplication). Once logged in, participants can be invited to join a private chat. Chat sessions can be printed out and may be held in a history facility.

4. Each group talks briefly about their character and what they said during the 'scene', making notes if appropriate. The aim of the chat activity is to recreate the original.
5. Ask the group who should start the conversation.
6. Invite that group to type the opening 'lines' into the chat window.
7. Encourage the groups to develop their conversation entirely through chat (not talking to other groups) if possible as it is more fun if spontaneous and has an element of surprise.
8. When the conversation has played out, display the entire chat to the whole group and invite comment from the "audience" or from all the group members.

Freddie:	Where am I?
Brown:	In the hospital
Turner:	We found the car
Freddie:	

Sample "chat" from Chapter 18, *The Cave* by Kate Mosse.

9. If necessary, "correct" the conversation so that the storyline is the same as the original. Ensure the group has a clear understanding of what happened in the original before going on to further activities.
10. If you are projecting on to a whiteboard/interactive whiteboard, you can write up new details, other ways of expressing the ideas, or other suggestions from the group alongside the "chat window".

There are a number of ways this activity can be extended:

- The group can build up the conversation, adding more detail
- Readers can re-enact the conversation as individuals, not groups.
- Readers can develop the conversation in different ways – what if?
- Readers can extend the conversation – what next?
- The conversation, or parts of it, can be written or described in indirect speech exploring verbs like "explain", "interrupt" and "exclaim" etc.

Discuss with the group if they like using chat. Are there any other ideas for how they could use it for fun with reading?

'Acting Chat' – a fun reading activity

1. Read carefully through the text in the book that your group has chosen.
 - How many characters are involved in this 'scene'?
 - Name the characters. What do you already know about them?
 - What happened in this scene?
2. Join a group to act as one of the characters. Talk about what they said in the scene. Make notes if you like.
3. Work with your group. In the "chat window", type what your character said.

Freddie:	Where am I?
Brown:	In the hospital
Turner:	We found the car
Freddie:	

Example of "chat window" conversation.

4. At the end of the scene, look at the conversation that you and the other groups have created. Is it the same as the book?

You can develop this activity by trying some of the following:

- Try this activity again but in a small group – each person is a different character.
- What if? – try this activity again but make some changes to the scene.
- What next? – try this activity again but continue the conversation from the end of the scene in the book.
- Talk or write about what was said in the conversation. Try to use lots of words like "explained", "interrupted" and "exclaimed" – not just "said".

Do you like using chat? Can you think of other ways you could use it?

The Reading for Pleasure suite of materials:

- CPD modules: Reading for pleasure in a number of contexts
- Storytelling: CPD unit with lesson ideas
- Families, Learning and Storytelling: Using archives for community cohesion
- Take Your Partner: Engaging emergent adult readers
- Technology and Reading: How to use blogs, wikis, iPods and e-books to promote reading
- Putting two and 2 together: Creating a bridge between literacy and numeracy learning
- Resources for libraries: Guidance on how to engage families to read for pleasure