

# THE WORLD'S A CHILD'S STAGE

The value of dramatic play in developing crucial skills in children.



**What is 'Dramatic Play'?**  
A type of play where children pretend to be someone or something different from themselves, and act out situations based on their assigned roles.



The Esplanade's *PLAYtime!* interactive theatre series (shown here and above) is designed for preschoolers

## LEARNING THROUGH DRAMATIC PLAY

Dramatic play can be an excellent learning tool. "It lets them explore different ideas, experiment with different materials, and construct new understanding," says Ms Elaine Ng, who has been conducting ECDA-endorsed course "Instilling a Love for Language through Drama" since 2016. As an artist in the National Arts Council's Artist in School Scheme (AISS), she has coached educators on the teaching of drama.

Elaine is also the co-founder of The Learning Connections, which provides arts integrated programmes and arts education for children, families and teachers. She offers five tips to facilitate dramatic play in the preschool classroom.

- > **Be a co-player.** Use children's ideas and seize opportunities to extend or expand their narratives or stories.
- > **Take on different roles.** Bring the characters in the story to life.

Children love to play pretend. Inventing stories, conjuring up a make-believe world, imagining themselves as superheroes — such dramatic play stimulates their creativity and allows them to explore a range of emotions while developing cognitive, language and social skills.

## EXPLORING NEW WORLDS

Stories and theatre also help children develop a sense of empathy and see the world from different perspectives, says Ms Mimi Yee, Head of Community (Cultural Programmes) at The Esplanade Co Ltd. "As many children start to form their sense of self and identity, the arts is a way for them to explore our cultural heritage, express themselves and develop a sense of confidence."

"When children pretend to be someone or something else, they get to explore different scenarios, social interactions, characters or roles within the safe perimeters of pretence," says actor, director and educator Mr Daniel Jenkins. "It builds confidence, creativity, language and communication skills, cooperation, physical development, problem solving and empathy. Above all, it's fun!"

Dramatic play is effectively a mini laboratory for children to learn and practise these skills, particularly social skills. "How we interact with others is key to our lifelong success and happiness," says Mr Jenkins. "Play helps children learn to read social cues, recognise and regulate emotions, negotiate and take turns, and engage in a long-term activity that is mutually beneficial. There is no substitute for creative and imaginative stimulus when it comes to teaching and enhancing these abilities in children."



- > **Use picture books, songs or artefacts.** These are springboards for a dramatic adventure with children.
- > **Provide a variety of materials.** These can include, for example, scarves or instruments for children to create characters and devise a story together.
- > **Ask questions:** "What is happening?", "What if...?", "Why...?", "What does it matter to you? To me? To others?" Demonstrate genuine expressions of curiosity and accept whatever responses given by children.

## ENRICHING FAMILY TIME

"For families, the arts provide meaningful opportunities to spend time together and to bond," says Ms Yee. Families can just stroll into The Esplanade's dedicated children's activity space PIP's PLAYbox to check out what's on. They might come across storytelling sessions during key festivals, self-guided craft activities, free play activities with train sets, blocks, magnets and more. Or they can sit and read a book by local authors or illustrators. Look out for productions catering to children in Esplanade's arts calendar:



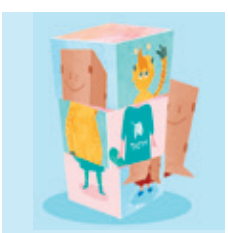
→ **Octoburst!**, a festival of music, dance, theatre and workshops for children and families was introduced in 2003 and continues to be an annual Children's Day highlight.



→ **The Dance Appreciation Series** is a regular collaboration with the Singapore Dance Theatre. It features excerpts from Western classical ballet with narration, which makes it more accessible for preschoolers. Kicking off the 2019 series is the hour-long *Introduction To Don Quixote* (9 Feb).



Puppet-making workshop conducted at The Esplanade



→ **PLAYtime!** is a series of original, interactive theatre productions created for children aged two to six. The 2019 season will feature three productions: *The Dragon's Dentist* (1 - 17 March), *Shaggy and the Trims* (3 - 17 May) and *Us* (10 - 25 Aug). Sensory-friendly performances are available for all three productions. For more, visit [www.esplanade.com/playtime](http://www.esplanade.com/playtime)



Artist Daryl Beeton interacting with children during Octoburst! — A Children's Festival organised by Esplanade



## Create a Safe Space

Ms Elaine Ng from The Learning Connections shares these tips on helping children overcome their shyness and build confidence in dramatic play.

- **Establish a safe and trusting environment.** Ask the child what he or she cares about or loves to do, and develop a drama narrative based on his or her ideas.
- **Give them time to warm up.** Break the ice with games and props such as puppets.
- **Focus on ensemble** rather than individual work as some kids are uncomfortable when the spotlight is on them.
- **For a reserved parent, assume a role with similar personality traits or assume a "low-status" role** (be a forgetful teacher asking for help, a shy lion who has lost its roar, a penguin who doesn't know how to dance). This shifts the child's focus to helping the adult and makes him or her feel important.





“Watching theatrical performances can help children learn more about life and themselves,” says Mr Jenkins, who is also the director and creator of *Us*. “In *Us*, I wanted to explore friendship: how we make friends, how we keep friends and what happens when that friendship breaks down or is threatened by another. By watching how the characters in *Us* experience the highs and lows of friendship in a safe, recognisable and entertaining way, children will hopefully be able to empathise and understand each other a little better.”

## win PLAYtime! SHOW TICKETS & STORYBOOKS

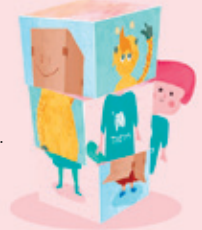
Simply answer this question:  
What are three *PLAYtime!* productions happening in 2019?

The Dragon's Dentist

→ One lucky reader will receive four tickets to *PLAYtime! The Dragon's Dentist*.

*The Dragon's Dentist* is about overcoming our fears while embracing new experiences.

Three other winners will each receive a *Timmy and Tammy at the Esplanade* book.



Submit your answer to [beanstalk@mediacorp.com.sg](mailto:beanstalk@mediacorp.com.sg) with your name and contact details.

Closing date: **15 February 2019**



## In Praise Of Play

Learning and bonding through fun and games.



### > Ryan: The Playground Expert

By *Pauline Loh*

Having muscular dystrophy does not stop Ryan from pursuing his dream of visiting different playgrounds in the country. As he discovers unique playgrounds, from riding on swings to climbing a pyramid of ropes, he documents the fun he has in a journal with photographs. This leads to him being asked by the Parks Department to contribute ideas to plan the perfect playground.

Contributed by *Nur Sadidah Binte Mohamad Said, Librarian, National Library Board*



### > 50 Traditional Toys To Make: Easy-To-Follow Projects To Create For And With Kids

By *Petra Boase*

Learn about the toys that define different cultures in this easy-to-follow guide that promises a world of fun. This read also encourages precious parent-child bonding time through games and the creation of toys commonly played in different countries, such as Mexican clay dolls, European decoupage toy boxes and Spanish star draughts.

Contributed by *Chen Wanying, Librarian, National Library Board*

## Cool With School



DVDs to prepare your child and ease first day jitters.



### Bubble Guppies: Get Ready For... School!

Created by *Jonny Belt and Robert Scull*

Join the Bubble Guppies on their sea-sational adventures as they go through the first day of school!



### WordWorld: It's Time for School

Created by *PBS for Kids / Produced by General Word LP*

Shark gets over his fears of the first day of school and learns that school is fun, after all!

Contributed by *Idzhana Kailani, Librarian, National Library Board*

## FOR YOUR DAILY DOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INSPIRATION...

Grow@Beanstalk is your one-stop early childhood (EC) resource portal for inspiring stories, useful tips and activity ideas, as well as the latest happenings from the EC sector.



Visit [www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk](http://www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk), or scan the QR code



You can also share your passion of “Giving a Good Start to Every Child” by “liking” our Facebook page for daily content, and engaging with other parents and EC educators.



Connect with us at [www.facebook.com/beanstalksingapore](http://www.facebook.com/beanstalksingapore), or scan the QR code

