

# Drama Activities for “*The Snowy Day* and the Art of Ezra Jack Keats”

## 1. Book-specific activities

### *The Snowy Day* (1962)

#### Pre-reading questions

- Based on the title, what do you think this book is about?
- Who is the person on the cover? Where is he? What is he doing?
- What season are we in right now? Imagine it is winter.

#### Suggested reading questions (during reading)

- What happens when there is a lot of snow where you live? Have you ever seen a lot of snow? Do you remember a time when there was a lot of snow?
- What do you think Peter is going to do in the snow?
- Let’s move our toes the way Peter did, out and then in. Let’s drag our feet slowly, just like Peter. Let’s smack the tree (clap). Let’s feel the snow plopping on our heads.
- Blank page – what is happening on this page?
- Do you ever have snowball fights? What are they like? Why did Peter feel too young?
- Let’s make snow angels in the air.
- What is your favorite thing to do in the snow?
- What happened to the snowball? What is the dark spot?
- Is the snow going to stay?
- Look at Peter’s face. How do you think Peter feels about the snow?
- In many parts of the world, people have never seen snow. How would you describe snow to someone who has never seen it?

#### Drama activities

- **Walking game** (based on walking in the snow)
  - Everyone stands up and starts walking around the room normally. The instructor asks everyone to walk around and say hello to other people participating and introduce themselves.
  - The instructor then poses a series of challenges to the people participating, who need to keep milling around the entire time.
    - Pretend the ground is covered in snow. How would you walk in it?
    - Now the ground is covered in ice.
    - Now the ground is covered in grass, lava, molasses, sand, water, honey, hard cement, etc.
    - Now it is very cold outside, very hot outside, etc.
    - Now it is snowing, drizzling, raining, misty, hailing, etc.
  - This game is very physical and it gets groups on their feet. The talking at the beginning is to get the visitors comfortable interacting with each other and being silly. This game also allows visitors to experience the book in a really tactile and physical way.
- **Sculpture game** (based on Peter’s snowman)
  - Activity in pairs, with person A and person B.
  - Person A is the sculptor, and person B is the sculpture. Person A can move person B’s body to create a unique sculpture, possibly using props from around the

museum or inspired by a particular exhibit. For example, the instructor could say, “Make a sculpture of a person who would live in the tenement. Think about how they would stand, how they would dress, and how they would act.”

- The pairs then switch roles and person B sculpts person A. Once everyone is done with a sculpture, they can share with the class or with the instructor. This can start off with the snowman idea but it can go anywhere.
- This game is very physical and it’s very important to set boundaries before starting; make sure it is clear that the sculptor doesn’t do anything that the sculpture is uncomfortable doing. This game can also branch out into the machine game.
- **Machine game**
  - Everyone sits down in the audience, and one person stands up and starts acting out one part of an imaginary machine. They should move part of their body (or their whole body) in a repeated motion and can make the sound that their portion of the machine makes.
  - As people feel comfortable, they can go up one at a time and add to the machine, each person acting out another part of the machine.
  - The only rule is that everyone must be touching at least one other person at all times (this prevents people from being shy and standing in the corner). Eventually, the entire class will be involved in an enormous machine.
  - Follow this game with a discussion: What is the name of the machine that we made? What does it do? Where would it be?
  - The instructor can relate this machine to the conglomeration of materials in *Jennie’s Hat*. This game can also be used to describe Keats’ art – the machine ends up being a collage of different sounds and movements, like Keats’ works are collages of different textures and patterns.

### ***Whistle for Willie (1964)***

#### Pre-reading questions

- Based on the title, what do you think this book is about?
- Who is the person on the cover? Who is the dog?
- Who is Willie?

#### Suggested reading questions (during reading)

- Peter can’t whistle – can you whistle?
- Why does Peter want to whistle?
- What do you think Willie will do when he hears the whistle?
- Do you have a friend like Willie? Do you think you and your friend are like Peter and Willie?
- Is Peter going to be able to whistle?
- Do you ever do things to make yourself feel more grown-up?
- What do you think is going to happen?
- What would you whistle while you were going to the grocery store, home, to school, to bed, on vacation, etc.?
- Do you whistle to your pets?

- Have you ever worked really hard to accomplish a goal?

#### Drama activities

- **Mirror game** (based on Peter's shadow and the image of him looking at himself in the mirror)
  - Activity in pairs, with person A and person B.
  - Partners stand facing each other.
  - Person A begins by doing a series of movements that person B needs to copy as they are happening. The idea is that, from the outside, no one will be able to tell who is the leader and who is the follower.
  - The partners can switch and person B can lead person A as well. In addition, the instructor can announce that no one is leading or following, the two people are simply moving in unison.
  - The game should be done in complete silence, which makes it much more challenging to play.
  - This game is great for teaching communication and concentration.

#### *A Letter to Amy (1968)*

##### Pre-reading questions

- Based on the title, what do you think this book is about?
- Who is on the cover?
- Who is Amy?

##### Suggested reading questions (during reading)

- Why did Peter write a letter to Amy and not to anyone else?
- How do you mail a letter?
- Do you think Amy will come to Peter's party?
- What do you think is going to happen?
- Would you have given Amy the letter or mailed it?
- Do you think that Amy will come to the party now?
- How will the boys react to Amy being the only girl at the party? Why? Should they react that way? How would you react?
- Is Amy going to come to the party?
- What was Peter's wish?

#### Drama activities

- **Party quirks** (based on the party in the book)
  - One person plays the role of Peter, the host of the party. The other people enter the party one at a time when the doorbell rings (the instructor can be the doorbell to control traffic onstage).
  - The guests are given distinctive personalities or characters as dictated by the index cards that they select and keep secret before going onstage. The guests need to act out these identities without ever saying what they are.
  - Peter (the host) and audience members who don't feel comfortable acting are responsible for guessing who the characters are. Peter should not break character

to guess who the people are. For example, Peter could say, “Here are some bananas for your monkey, Ms. Zookeeper.”

- The instructor should make sure that no more than four or five characters are onstage at once. Once someone’s quirk is guessed, they leave the stage. The instructor should look at the cards beforehand in order to give hints if Peter is not very good at guessing.
- This game is an improv standard because it’s an escalated version of charades that involves more people at once. It is also a great way to involve the whole class, even people who aren’t comfortable acting or improvising.

## 2. General ideas for all of the books

- **One-word story** (creating a new story as a group)
  - Everyone sits in a circle. Group members tell a story by going around in a circle, and each person can only say one word. For example, “Once – upon – a – time – there – lived – a – very – big – frog – who – lived – in – a – pond – that – was – guarded – by – an – evil – witch.” The story can continue for as long as time permits, and the instructor should participate.
  - This is very challenging and will be better for older groups. The instructor can encourage the group members to use Peter as a character or let the story be more open-ended.
- **Narrative pantomime**
  - The instructor reads the book out loud while the class members are spread all around the room, each in their own personal space.
  - Each student acts out the events of the book alone, in silence, as the instructor reads the book aloud.
  - This game allows the students to experience and act out the character’s journey without the pressure of an audience.
- **Ending the story**
  - This game takes the form of a simple question-and-answer session.
  - The instructor reads the last page of the book and states, “This is the end of the book. But pretend there is another page. What happens? What does the illustration look like?”
  - Students will be eager to fill in what they see as the blanks in the story and create their own endings to the narrative, or continue the story for several more pages.

## 3. Resources

### Drama and improv games

- [improvcyclopedia.org](http://improvcyclopedia.org)
- [www.creativedrama.com](http://www.creativedrama.com)
- [dramaresource.com](http://dramaresource.com)