

ENTERPRISE TOPIC: SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Trial by fire



Heat up your literacy lessons and boost children's verbal talents with Gill Matthews' take on the Dragons' Den...

Dragons' Den is classic reality TV – find a group of sceptical millionaires who need to be convinced; mix with an eager group of eccentrics desperate to please; put them together in an empty loft with minimal props, and stir gently. Result – compulsive viewing (at least for some!).

Whether you like it or not, *Dragons' Den* is also an excellent context in which to develop children's speaking and listening skills, with a close eye on those key ingredients: form, purpose and audience.

ACTIVITY ONE

Get into character

SETTLE INTO THE DRAGONS' DOMAIN...

To make sure that you have a level playing field, you may first need to watch a couple of episodes with children, some of whom may not be familiar with the programme. On second watching, they will be ready to help you list some of the key elements they will later need to practise themselves:

- What are the Dragons like?
- What are they looking for?
- What kinds of question do they ask?
- Which of the 'contestants' was most/least successful and why?
- What makes a good 'pitch'?

You may also want to link this with some cross-curricular work by asking children to design and make a product which they can present to the Dragons – such as the eco-friendly DVD clocks on pages 50-51.

It's probably a good idea not to throw pupils into the activity too quickly, but to give them a chance to practise and hone their skills before using them. The 'Limber Up' exercises will help to get them in the mood. Let them try out roles of both Dragons and Prey so they can get 'under the skin' of their characters and see through different pairs of eyes.

Once they get the hang of life in the Dragons' Den, you might ask them to become a bit more adventurous. What might a Dragons' Den in Roman/Egyptian/Pre-historic times have been like – and what products might have been 'pitched'? ('You say it's called a potato? And you boil it, break it up and put it in your mouth? No, it'll never catch on – I'm out'.) You might even transfer it to a fairy story setting: 'so, Mr Stiltskin, it's a machine for spinning straw into gold you say...'

There is more to the *Dragons' Den* than meets the eye. Go on, breathe a little fire into your lessons!



ACTIVITY TWO

Limber up

PREPARE CHILDREN TO ADDRESS AN AUDIENCE...

The children need to get into the habit of speaking (and listening) confidently. Just as with any sport, it isn't wise to go into the Dragons' Den arena without warming up. Use these limbering up activities to get children used to speaking in public with little preparation or prior warning.

• *Just a Minute* is based on the popular radio show in which contestants must speak on a given subject for 60 seconds with no hesitation, repetition or deviation. It is challenging for the celebrities that take part, let alone the average KS2 pupil. A slightly shorter version, which I call *Half a Mo*, lasts for 30 seconds and is probably more achievable.

• *Would you rather?* is a quick persuasion activity based on John Burningham's picture book of the same name. Either use the book for ideas or create options with the children. For example, 'would you rather your dad dyed his hair purple or sang karaoke at the school disco?' In pairs, one child has to persuade the other as to which is the preferable option and why.

• Present the children with problem solving activities, for example, show them a collection of everyday items that belong to a mystery character e.g. a bus ticket, a cinema ticket, a child's toy, a key. In small groups, challenge them to build up a picture of the character based on all of the items. Encourage them to carefully examine each clue and to make links between them.

Give children the opportunities to work regularly with the same talk partner to build up confidence, to work in small groups and to be involved in whole class speaking and listening activities.

business

ACTIVITY THREE

Plan the pitch

MAKE SURE THEY GET THE MESSAGE...

The essence of *Dragons' Den* is the dramatic element of 'The Pitch' – trying to persuade a potentially sceptical audience of the value of your ideas. There are five key aspects to the classic pitch, some of which are interrelated.

AUDIENCE

At this point, the audience for the pitch is primarily the Dragons: what are they looking for? But I also need to bear in mind the audience for the product.

PURPOSE

What is the pitch trying to achieve? The main purpose is to persuade the Dragons that my product will work and that it is worth investing in. Wrapped up in this will be other minor purposes: to explain how the product works, to recount past successes, to instruct on its use; to escape with my dignity intact!

STYLE

This is very much connected to the audience. Do I go for a straightforward explanation of how the product works and why I need the money, or do I jazz it up a bit? Which approach is likely to be most successful?

FORM

There isn't much time, so I need to cover at least the main points of the product. Do I need some visual aids to prompt me and help to get my message across?

USP

What is the product's 'unique selling point'? What is ultimately going to make the difference and persuade the Dragons that my product is worth investing in?



ACTIVITY FOUR

Develop a structure

HELP PUPILS TO ORGANISE THEIR THOUGHTS...

After watching one or two examples, children should be ready to help you identify what to do and what not to do in structuring the pitch, and be able to produce a simple bullet point structure based on what they've seen, e.g.

- Introduce yourself
- Introduce the product
- What's it for?
- How does it work?
- USP
- What are your plans?
- What do you need from the Dragons?
- Killer finish?

ACTIVITY FIVE

Have a rehearsal

TIME TO POLISH THOSE PRESENTATIONS...

Split the class into Dragons and Pitchers.

DRAGONS WORK ON DEVELOPING:

- a list of criteria: what are they looking for?
- good listening skills
- key questions: to encourage and to challenge
- how to say yes (and no)

PITCHERS IDENTIFY A PRODUCT AND WORK ON DEVELOPING:

- use of prompts
- use of artefacts
- making eye contact
- sticking to time
- speaking clearly and slowly

Once the children have had an opportunity to rehearse, pair up Dragons and Pitchers and let them take turns in feeding back to each other about their performances. Now switch them round. When children have tried being both Dragons and Pitchers, carry out a whole class debrief, discussing what makes a good Dragon and a good Pitcher.

NOW YOU'RE READY FOR THE REAL THING!

ACTIVITY SIX

Enter the Den

GULP...

As an added challenge, Dragons can be recruited from beyond the classroom. Invite teachers, the head teacher, governors or people from local businesses to be on the panel.

And, as a reward for the successful Pitchers, create personalised 'I've persuaded the Dragons!' certificates.