Still Image and Freeze-frame

Through Still Image and Freeze-frame you can:

- hold a dramatic moment still for shared critical analysis, inter-thinking and interpretation
- offer a shared, common visual focus
- deepen engagement and concentration and focus attention on parts of and whole images
- support the critical analysis of key moments
- stop the drama moving on superficially at too fast a pace
- invite and generate curiosity and discussion around important moments and characters within them
- encourage individual and shared reflection and evaluation
- provide a memorable visual image
- stimulate the next part of the drama

Freeze-frame

A freeze-frame is a form of still image that is achieved by simply freezing action. Pedantically speaking, it provides a still image that is not pre-planned and can be likened to pressing a pause button to halt a film clip. The action is paused (usually by the teacher) for a purpose. The teacher may simply call ‘Freeze’ during the drama or use a signal, for example a drum beat, to halt the action. The children are expected to then keep perfectly still.

Very young children can find it quite challenging to stay very still initially but they enjoy the challenge and may already be practising this skill within games such as within the role-play game ‘What’s the Time Mr Wolf?’ It may be helpful to ask young children to ‘try and be as still as a photograph’. It is worth practising freezing action a few times as a warm-up activity at the start of a lesson if they need practice at being still. Once they are listening and responding well to the instruction the teacher may say ‘The next time I call “Freeze” it will be during our drama lesson and you will not be expecting me to call it. Remember that whenever I call “Freeze” you will need to try to be as still a photograph straightaway and try to keep as still as you can… I know this a bit tricky but I know you will get better and better at it if you try hard.’

The instruction to ‘freeze’ may be signalled in other ways, for example the teacher could say that when he/she moves towards group scenes they come alive and when he/she moves away from the scenes they become totally still (Unit 3 Activity 6).

Still image/Tableau

There are times when the children will be asked to devise, replicate or create a still image rather than just freeze action that is underway (Unit 1 Activity 12). This requires a different thought process than simply freezing the action. Devising still images or tableaux involves thinking creatively and critically. What and who will we put in this image? Where will we need to stand to convey meaning clearly? What am I trying to convey to my audience? What emotional response do I want to convey and evoke? What are some possible images and which will be most effective and why?, and so on. The children may be asked to devise an image individually, in groups or as a whole class.

Some activities/exercises for devising still images:

- A simple warm-up activity might involve the teacher calling out words and the children individually and speedily making a still shape that represents that word – the clown, the winner, sad, excited, and so on.
As above but representing the word collectively with a partner or group is more challenging.

A collective group or class still image can also be formed by the teacher calling a word or phrase and children speedily adding themselves one at a time to create one central image or growing tableau.

The teacher could add constraints or instructions, for example, that the people within the image each need to be touching at least one other person or that the people within the image should each be looking at another person.

The children could be asked to devise two contrasting images and move stylistically in slow motion back and forth between them.

The level of challenge can be stepped up as images of varying complexity and purpose are sought and teachers can ask for abstract or symbolic, rather than realistic, images, demanding maybe a more imaginative and creative response — for example, asking for a vivid and memorable image from a character’s dream or nightmare.

Devising still images within the context of an evolving drama is more meaningful and multi-layered than the exercises and activities above because there is a contextual reason within a drama for devising the image, which gives it meaning and purpose. Within a drama, for example, children may be asked to make a still image of themselves as villagers in their homes, about to tell a story (Unit 1, Activity 2). This is a way of getting them to engage with their roles in the drama and to engage with a fictional setting and situation. It also focuses the child’s attention clearly on the moment to which the image relates. Older pupils may be set a more complex task such as creating a group symbolic still image that represents the Native Americans’ fear for the future of their land (Unit 6, Activity 10).

**Examples of Still Image/Freeze-frame**

**Image Theatre**

Image Theatre was developed by the late Augusto Boal, a Brazilian theatre director, writer and theorist. Boal (1992) believed, like many drama in education practitioners, that anyone can act and theatre is not just the domain of theatre professionals.

Image Theatre is a specific form of theatre in which participants make still images that link directly to areas of importance in their own personal lives, feelings, oppressions and experiences (Unit 4, Activity 2). These themes are suggested and agreed by the participants – themes such as the family, school, bullying, illness. The group images are sculpted by the audience of ‘spectators’, who treat those within the image as compliant pieces of human clay to be sculpted into a thematic still image moulded by consensus. The image is then ‘dynamized’ (brought alive in various ways) in order to facilitate the making of meanings and to open up what lies behind the image. Image Theatre does not rely on words and therefore is culturally universally accessible, crossing language barriers. It can be linked to therapy. Some Image Theatre techniques are similar to those used in drama in education but the subject matter in drama in schools will normally be safely kept at a distance rather than personalized. However it needs to be acknowledged that children are bringing their personal experiences and understandings to any drama as well as their imaginations.

**Sequencing images**

Making and presenting a series of still images can enable children to focus on tagging, linking and making sense of a series of key moments in a drama. If the images represent different moments in time, then they can provide a chronological timeline visually (Unit 4, Activity 8). When a series of important historical moments in the history of a community are looked at in sequence, cultural heritage starts to emerge and greater cultural understanding results. The series of images as a whole will reveal more than the sum of the parts.
Multiple images

A single moment in time can be represented by a range of devised images all linked to a particular moment. This enables a single moment to be represented visually in a variety of ways – for example, devising images of the same moment in different places, such as the inside of many different houses in a village just as ‘story-time’ is about to start (Unit 1, Activity 3). We might ask older children to represent a character’s conflicting thoughts or feelings, through symbolic still images or shapes. Teachers could ask different groups to create still images to portray different characters’ viewpoints at a particular moment in the drama.

When images are looked at as a set or series, the whole will be greater in terms of sense and meaning than the sum of its parts.

Still and moving image

A devised still image in a drama can be activated and brought to life for a few moments (through improvisation) and then frozen again as a Freeze-frame image (Unit 1, Activity 3). This is a bit like starting with a paused film clip, which is played and then paused again. The moving images in drama can be rewound and replayed at different speeds. The image can also be played or replayed silently or with dubbed sounds or speech.

Thinking aloud in and through the image

A still image either devised or else arrived at through Freeze-frame can be linked to Thought-tracking, with the characters within the image being asked to speak their thoughts aloud at the exact moment depicted within the image (Unit 3, Activity 9).

Speaking aloud in and through the image

A devised still image or Freeze-frame (frozen action) can be developed further by holding the image still while each of the characters within the image is invited to speak aloud what they think their next utterance would be.

Both speaking and thinking aloud through the image

If characters at a particular ‘held’ moment are asked to speak a character’s next utterance and thought aloud then an incongruity of thought and utterance may be revealed. The reasons or motives for this can be considered and discussed with the class – for example, ‘Why is it that a character might be thinking one thing yet saying another at this moment? Confusion? Dishonesty? Fear of the sack?’

Asking questions of characters in the image

When a moment is held still through either a devised image or a Freeze-frame, those studying or ‘reading’ the image will begin to have their curiosity aroused and will try to interpret and make meaning of the presented image. Linked to Hot-seating, the characters within the image can be questioned by the audience at the exact dramatic moment portrayed and will answer in role. The still image holds the moment still to give time for the revealing of the different characters’ motives, thoughts and feelings at a particular moment.

Asking questions of objects within the image

Still images may contain objects (as well as characters) that are empowered to speak – for example, if the children become objects and/or geographical features within an imagined landscape (Unit 6, Activity 3) they can commentate on the action, characters and events as inanimate, longstanding eye witnesses.
Contrasting images

There may be reason to ask the children to devise and prepare two or more contrasting images for presentation together — for example, a still image that depicts a happy story-time before Mr Once Upon a Time arrives, and then a sad one, after Mr Once Upon a Time has been imprisoned (Unit 1, Activity 13). Older pupils might be asked to make two contrasting images, one depicting the land of the Native Americans and one representing the same land in the future, in the hands of the settlers (Unit 6, Activity 10). They might move from one image to the other to symbolize the change of occupancy or back and forth between images as in a repetitive nightmare. Contrasting images can be devised to depict contrasting attitudes, values, beliefs, emotions and moments in time as well as conflicting thoughts.

After having made a Conscience Alley (see page 130) that has made conflicting thoughts explicit verbally, the participants could then be asked to portray the two viewpoints visually by making two contrasting still images.

Sculpting images

Children can make each other into images, for example by using a partner as a piece of human clay and physically ‘sculpting’ them into a still image. Within dramas, contextual reasons sometimes arise that lend themselves naturally to this activity — for example, within a drama there may be a reason to commemorate someone by making a statue of them for posterity. A person could be moulded into a statue of a character, as a way of commemorating them at the end of a drama (Unit 6, Activity 14). One statue could be sculpted collectively by consensus. Statues can be of characters or can be symbolic shapes, using different numbers of people as the human clay.

Role sculpture

In turn children have opportunity to enter a central space and use their bodies to create a still image that depicts one characteristic of a particular character in the drama — for example, they could build up a role sculpture that shows various the characteristics of the Victorian mill owner in Unit 3. Together they can build one big character sculpture. Alternatively, they could work individually to show a series of images that portray facets of a particular character.

Forming, melting and reforming images

‘Human clay’ can be sculpted, collapsed into a ball, and re-sculpted repeatedly by a sculpting partner but once the human clay knows the shapes their sculptor has made them into, then they can re-form these shapes (without the sculptor) to create a performance sequence of images.

Captioning images

Images once arrived at can be given written or spoken captions either by the makers of the image or by observers who have not been part of the image-making process — for example, what caption would Chief Seattle’s tribe have placed by his statue, once sculpted? Conversely, a caption can be the starting point for the creation of an image that is made to match the caption (Unit 6, Activity 14).

Instructing images

Images can be created through physically sculpting and moulding people silently as if they are human lumps of clay or, alternatively, by giving the person verbal instructions and directions as to how they should look and stand. The statue of a character might be made through giving instructions to the human clay to ‘Stand in a proud manner and look directly forward with a raised chin’, for example.
Copying images

In drama children may be asked to look at an existing image such as an etching, a photograph, a sculpture, a painting or a tapestry, and to use their bodies to make themselves into someone in the picture (or some object in the picture). For example, a pupil may portray visually a character they can see in an etching of a Victorian cotton mill (Unit 3, Activity 4) or become the whip in the master’s hand (Unit 3, Activity 1).

Extending and elaborating the image

Any image, either real, devised or imagined, can become part of an imagined larger or more detailed image. For example, when looking at a photograph or picture book illustration or etching, the children can be asked to make a still image of what lies just out of view, beyond the edges of the picture or else to add something to the existing image (Unit 3, Activity 7). These additions might change the meaning of the initial image (Unit 4, Activity 1).

Generating still images across art forms

When there are existing images known to the children that link to the drama then it is possible to ask them to generate additional ‘missing’ images. For example, a story-drama based on a picture book might use illustrations and pictures from the book to stimulate a drama. During the drama the children may be creating new and additional scenes and plots. The children can then be asked to make themselves into the missing pictures from the storybook that could illustrate the additional scenes. These images could be photographed and stuck in to the actual picture storybook.

Children can be asked to produce or make themselves into objets d’art or artefacts – for example, to become the treasured photograph that a character has in his wallet, the painting that hangs in the character’s home, a tapestry (or wall painting) of a famous historical moment or a commemorative statue (Unit 6, Activity 14).

Once children have envisioned, imagined, generated, physically created, observed and analysed still images alone and with others, they are well placed to transform the images into a different 3D form through cross-curricular art and design work and to gain greater understanding of existing representations of art and culture.

Digital/moving imagery and photography/film

Any still or moving devised image within a drama can of course be photographed or filmed. Handy film cameras (not to mention some children’s mobile phones) add a new dimension in drama lessons, with still and moving images being recorded during the lesson and maybe being fed back into the lesson/s later. The camera can also of course capture a moment that involves movement and transform it into a still image that can then be used within the drama. Film and photographs can be introduced into dramas within the context of the fiction itself – for example, a photograph of a real person who has supposedly been reported as missing or has lost their memory could stimulate a drama.

Recording images through drawing

Sometimes a still image or series of still images from a drama may be recorded as a drawing or series of drawings and form a type of storyboard (Resource Sheet 10). Captions and/or thoughts and speech bubbles may be added that link to the image. This supports reflective thought and synthesis.

Presenting images as performance

When children are making and presenting their still images to others, they should hold the images as still as possible. The teacher sets the standard for the form and an insistence that individuals
and groups hold their images very still – ‘as still as a photograph’ – will set clear expectations and support focus and concentration, physical control and commitment. It will also make them more effective and engaging.

When children are showing their images to each other it is worth making the success criteria clear. It can make the difference between a shoddy and shambling presentation of ‘almost still’ images against a background of chatter or a spellbinding theatrical presentation which excites them, is memorable and which they are proud to be part of.

Teachers themselves would be wise to follow the same rules of presentation that they set up with the children. Once a presentation has begun it should be as if the teacher too is at the theatre. There should be respect shown for performance by all and the children should have a clear idea of how important it is to be an active and attentive class audience as well as participant. The theatrical atmosphere will be broken by teachers who move from group to group saying things like, ‘Right, that’s enough now, stop chattering because we are going to watch this group next. No, stop now because there is no more time to get your bit ready. You should have finished your image by now…’ and so on. This is not conducive to spellbinding theatrical presentation. The teacher should help build the dramatic tension and wait for silence and stillness before work is presented (making it like the moment of anticipation before the curtain goes back in the theatre).

How still images are put together to form sequences poses a theatrical challenge to be solved. Children can develop their own ways of linking and presenting images for an audience or the teacher might support the process in various ways. A narrative can be used to link images, or captions can be said aloud as links. Holding up written captions can also be a way of moving between images (as in the old silent films) (Unit 5, Activity 8). Appropriate and atmospheric music can also be used to bind a series of images cohesively into a performance.

The following strategies provide a clear structure that teachers may choose to provide to strongly support pupils in presenting a collective series of still images:

**Performance Carousel**

Each group has its image ready to present. The groups are given a performance order. The teachers explain that each group will start off seated on the ground together (like lumps of clay) and still. At an agreed signal (maybe a word, a sound, background music or a visual signal) the groups in turn will come to life. First Group 1 first will slowly grow into their still image together, hold the image for five silent seconds and will then melt back down into a still lump of clay again. Once Group 1 has completed this ‘grow – hold – melt – freeze’ sequence, Group 2 follows suit. All groups must remain very still and quiet as the others perform. The performance starts with the first group and is not over until every group has had its turn and all children are still again. They are told that they are all part of one bigger performance and they need to imagine that they are on stage throughout, whether or not it is their group’s turn to move. When they are on stage and not ‘spotlit’ they need to be still and quiet so that they don’t distract. This strategy will soon become established and will save ‘setting-up’ time and provide a known structure for quality presentation.

The same strategy can be used to link short scenes and short performances and improvisations, not just still images.

**Image ‘flashes’ or ‘bites’**

The groups create a series of still images (up to three usually, depending on the age of the children). The group has appointed someone as Director to give the audience instructions as to when they should open or close their eyes. The audience starts off with eyes closed. The performing group quickly gets into its first still image and the Director says ‘Open your eyes’ to the audience. After just a few seconds, the instructor says ‘Close your eyes’ to the audience. Once the audience all have
their eyes closed, the performing group forms the second still image and the instructor again tells the audience to open their eyes. The process is repeated until the full sequence of images has been seen by the audience. It ends with the audience with eyes closed.

This activity helps focus the audience who see only the still images and not the preparation or transition between them. If the period of time represented by the images is only a few seconds of time within the drama then the effect is of jumping frames of film – for example:

- Image 1: She reaches for the phone,
- Image 2: She holds the phone to her ear
- Image 3: She puts down the phone and still has her hand on it

The effect is spoilt if anyone in the still image moves while the audience have their eyes open. This gives a motivating reason to link drama form for very controlled movement and for giving and following instructions precisely.