

FOREWORD BY ALIDA GERSIE

DRAMATHERAPY *with* MYTH *and* FAIRYTALE

THE GOLDEN STORIES OF SESAME



JENNY PEARSON, MARY SMAIL
AND PAT WATTS

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAMILLA JESSEL PANUFNIK



Jessica Kingsley *Publishers*
London and Philadelphia

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Getting into a Myth Session

Pat Watts

I have worked for many years with children and adults using fairytales and myths. As well as teaching on the Sesame course for the use of movement and drama in therapy, I have taken many workshops in the community.

People come to the session for a variety of reasons. Maybe they want to have the experience of working with a story, or perhaps they are looking for something they hope will be therapeutic. Whatever the reason, something is needed by way of an introduction to assist the group in working together on the story.

Myths are ancient stories which contain all human experience. The language of myth is image and symbol. In connecting with them, we can be surprised by the depth of feeling that is evoked. We can find joy and sorrow, embrace loss, find our ability to survive and create something we did not know was there for the making.

In coming together with others to enact myth, we are creating a special space. We cannot know what will happen. One person needs to be on the outside of the enactment to contain and assist the process of creativity. I will call this person the leader.

Although essentially working with improvisation, the leader needs to have chosen the myth with care, considering possible implications of the story and the effect it might have on the particular group. It is important that the leader does not take on a role but remains outside the action, though vigilant. Occasionally, it is necessary for the leader to step into the enactment (as briefly as possible to move the story on). This can sometimes be necessary when a group member becomes too identified with his or her role.

Before beginning work on the myth, the leader needs to place attention away from everyday preoccupations, worries or anxieties in order to give attention in a focused way. There is quite a skill in placing the attention in this way and sustaining it.

Depending on the nature of the group, members may know each other or be complete strangers to each other. Before beginning work on the enactment, it is important for the group to feel relaxed and ready for exploration.

It has been my experience that, although working with story, people can become more deeply involved if they do not use words. Instead, use voice sounds or basic instruments such as drum, cymbal or pipe. In fact, eventually a small group within the bigger one may choose to accompany the actions with sounds.

The first aim of the leader is to help the group become a creative entity, by becoming more aware of themselves in a positive way, open to each other and willing to take risks. To this end, I will offer a selection of possible introductory activities used to facilitate the group towards enacting the story.

1. Move around in the space, keeping as far as possible from others.
2. Move around in the space, keeping as near as possible to each other.
3. On a signal move quickly into a circle. Hold hands. Look at people standing on either side. Look at the group. Relinquish hands.
4. One at a time, move into the centre of the circle saying your name on a chosen rhythm. Everyone copy this. Go round the group in this way.
5. Select the name of one other. Repeat in the way it is introduced. Repeat your own name and movement.
6. Mirror partner, without using words.
7. Move into twos, A and B. A leads B with eyes closed on a journey in the space. Change over to B leading A with eyes closed. Talk about the experience to each other.
8. Without holding but using a hum or voice sound, A leads B on a journey. Change over to B leading A. Share this experience.
9. Work with a different partner. A to take a folded-up position, hold it. Eyes closed. B to open up A. A to allow this. Change over A to open up B. Discuss.

10. In a circle, leader to begin improvising on a sound and rhythm. Others join in. Suggest words – upset, relaxed, triumphant, sad and so on. Instruments can be used also.

At some point in the warm-up exercise I introduce movements or moods which are soon to be encountered in the myth enactment – for example, a dangerous journey, homecoming.

We come into the circle to hear the story, which to my mind is more living if it is told rather than read. The myth needs to be spoken clearly, simply with good energy. This is a time to be sure everyone is clear about the storyline and to select roles. Sometimes more than one person can improvise a character, in which case they must be sensitive to each other and work together. Some of the group may choose to work with the instruments and sit to one side of the main action.

Before enacting the myth, it is important everyone is clear about the story. Give time for the group to go over the sequence of events. Individuals choose their own roles.

The story needs to be enacted more than once. Each time, the group is offered time to share their experience and discuss.

The leader needs to be sensitively watchful. Sometimes when people are deeply affected they cannot talk about this at once but may be ready at the end of the session to share their feelings with the leader or one other. Always offer a space for this. Sometimes people find it impossible to put words to their experience at the time but quite some time later it may be possible for them to formulate their experience.