

The idea

The idea to write a book came about three years ago. I had no aspirations to write a book before then, I was just happy to spread the word and let fellow English teachers know there was this subject called drama which could benefit people. Having worked in the public education system in Japan I have always felt there was something missing in the way English is taught in classrooms, and as drama, like language learning, is a communicative art, I thought perhaps it could be utilized to fill that gap. Of course, the Japanese are not blind to drama - they make great films and have wonderful actors - and several teachers I have met are aware of drama practices. However, these practices are under appreciated and do not reach as many classrooms as they should. With seventeen years of teaching drama practices in classrooms and rehearsal rooms, I know the positive (communicative, psychological, social) that drama brings and wish more teachers would use these with their students.

The trigger

What prompted me to start writing a book were two drama workshops I facilitated. In February 2018, I was asked to share my practices at a JALT conference. My presentation was called 'Demonstrating 20 drama games in forty minutes'. As I waited outside the presentation room, looking in through the glass window at the handful of participants in the presentation before mine, I was slightly concerned that my ideas would not be reaching as many people as I had hoped. However, after the talk had finished and the room cleared, and as I began moving aside the tables and making a circle in the space with chairs, people began spilling in and filling up the room. By the start time, it was standing room only; my doubts turned to excitement and my adrenaline was at a high as we played the first game. To be honest, it was mad to even think about covering so many games, but the crowd of teachers were totally with us and thoroughly enjoyed the absurdity of it all. And the most satisfying thing was that you could hear the participants in the corridors afterwards saying "I'm going to use that game in my next class". As a result of that, I was asked to present some more drama ideas at one of my university orientation sessions. This time I settled on a more moderate number of games - seven - which gave specific focus to the use of speech communication. The session was productive and several of the participants asked for my slideshow data afterwards. These two events made me realize two things: teachers were open to using drama ideas in their classroom and I still had a lot more ideas I could offer.

Distractions & additions

The biggest distraction to getting the writing done was a side project. Throughout 2018 I managed to put together a list of games for the book and start fleshing out descriptions and procedures. I wanted to keep things brief and to the point so teachers could dip in and know exactly how to play a game in a flash, and by the end of the year I had over 100 games. However, at the beginning of 2019, I set myself the task of writing a play about the Olympics for my theatre company Black Stripe Theater. The play which was given the title *The Complete History of the Olympic Games Abridged* was a retelling of the summer sporting event from the inception of the modern games in Athens in 1896 to Tokyo 2020. After researching and choosing the key stories of the events, I shaped what I had into a play to workshop with my university class for their drama festival. After the performance, I then had to rework the play to fit a smaller cast of 4 actors. By then it was spring 2020, Covid had hit and our tour was cancelled. So, I found myself with time on my hands and, for some reason, an itch to do more creative writing. All along I kept adding more and more games to the book, but my main focus became writing short plays which I thought might supplement the games. My model for these short plays was a collection of skits (by Case & Wilson) which, although outdated and out of print, had always been a source of amusement with my students. The one thing I didn't like about the collection was the sheer number of extension activities which I hardly ever used. Also, I wanted my plays to be plot and character-driven, and not driven by a few grammar points. So, I jumped straight into writing them and set myself a deadline of writing two plays a week. By May 2020, the first draft of the plays was complete and a Zoom read-through with a few actor friends was arranged, where I received useful advice for my next draft. By the end of the summer I had added the extension activities and there was enough material to try out on my students.

The test

Testing the plays on my students at Daito Bunka in fall term of 2020 was invaluable. Students were graded on their model reading, and hearing the small casts read their play, even in a remote setting, helped me simplify and clarify the work. I noticed the words which students were finding hard to grasp or pronounce, the idioms which weren't quite sinking in, and the sentences which were too long for them to maneuver around. I, and some students, even

picked up on a few grammar issues and other inconsistencies that had so far gone unnoticed. Also, doing this allowed me to assess the difficulty of the extension activities and see whether they were varied, useful and engaging enough. By the end of the term, the students had covered everything, and material was ready to join the games, which by this point had reached 152, making the book a whopping 315 pages long.

Publishing

The process of getting the book published was not as straightforward as I had thought. There were 3 options: self publishing, going with a small publisher, or with one of the leading publishers of English language materials, for example, Asahi Press, Kinseido and Ikubundo. I sought advice from various colleagues about the book, which had acquired the title *152 Drama Games for the Language Classroom and Beyond - Plus 10 short plays!* and they said I should at least try a leading publisher as with them I would get the most exposure. Another question raised by a few colleagues was, "Who is this book for?" I hoped the book would be for anyone interested in applying drama techniques in the language classroom, though I hadn't thought hard about its target audience. This may have been one of the reasons why I didn't get much of a response from publishers. Of those who did reply, one publisher wanted to change the whole thing, and another said it would probably take two years for me to get it published. Unsure what to do next and not wanting to wait so long, I contacted a colleague at Aoyama Gakuin University who, unbeknownst at the time, had his own publishing company. His advice was priceless and he also agreed the book had two target audiences: the book of plays was for students and the book of games was for teachers. Furthermore, if I choose to publish through his company, he would sort out the isbn number and barcode to give it a professional finish and all the printing. It was a good offer, so I forwarded the manuscript of the plays - which by February including the two extra I had written in January as this ready for publication - and gave the green light for 200 copies. With 10 days wait for the batch to arrive, I had enough time to reduce the book of games to no more than 100 pages which meant having two games per page instead of one and saying goodbye to 22 of the games.

Obstacles

There were several hiccups in the last stages before publishing. Firstly, when the 200 books arrived, I noticed a mistake with the print. For some reason, the company had printed the word document instead of the PDF that was sent! Although this setback delayed the delivery by a week, it was a blessing in disguise as it gave me one more chance to comb through and make some last-minute corrections. Another issue I had was meeting several of the specifications on Amazon. You can't just upload it and hey presto it's ready to go, there are a large number of checkpoints to navigate past. When uploading the manuscript of the plays to the kindle application, because of the way I had presented the dialogue, most of the text got skewered in the transfer, so I had to go back and alter the whole book. Similarly with the book of games, I had to remove all tables (since Amazon's system was unable to handle table content) so the layout of the kindle is very different to the paperback version. The biggest obstacle was something seemingly trivial: fixing the size of the spine of paperback covers. Both book cover submissions were rejected 5 times by Amazon on the grounds that they did not fit the requirements.

The end?

By April 2nd, three years after the idea of writing a book came about, I had hard copies of both of the books and approval from Amazon to sell kindle and paperback versions.

Getting this book published has been a long journey and it would not have been possible without the help of three people: Danielle Long for her eye catching bookcover design and her work on the website, Tim Harris, for his shrewd editing of the plays, and Andrew Reimann for his help getting the books to print.

But the journey is not complete. Now the hard work starts: selling it!
Chris