

Suggested activities for directing the play

1. Identify and practise key movements

Key movements in 'The Magic Paintbrush'

- a. Working hard in a field
- b. Painting a picture
- c. Having a good dream
- d. Stretching out the arms
- e. Jumping up in surprise
- f. Being chased by a snake/animal

Here is the story that incorporates all the key movements in the play.

'The Children's Dreams'

Some children are visiting a farm in the New Territories. They help the farmer by clearing the weeds and digging in the field (*key movement a*). Some of the children are painting a picture of their friends working in the field (*key movement b*). They are very tired after their work and they sit down in the shade. They fall asleep and dream (*key movement c*). At first, they dream that an old man is offering them some fruit and they stretch out their arms to take the fruit (*key movement d*). But then the dream turns into a nightmare. The fruit turns into a snake. The children jump up in surprise (*key movement e*) and run away. The snake chases them (*key movement f*) and all the children scream for help.

2. Identify and practise key dialogues

- a. Dialogues which convey the meaning of the play to the audience

e.g. **Emperor:** I'm rich, I'm rich! I'm the richest person in China!
With this paintbrush, I can have anything I want.

(While the Emperor and the soldier are talking, Liang continues to paint. He paints a big gold snake that chases the Emperor and the soldier away. Nobody ever sees them again.)

Liang: My gold snake has chased away the greedy Emperor forever. I'll use this magic paintbrush to paint beautiful pictures and help poor people. It'll always be a special brush to me.

This dialogue conveys the most important lesson in the play: the Emperor is punished for his greed and Liang has accomplished his dream of becoming a very good painter.



b. Dialogues which convey the nature of the characters

e.g. **Liang:** I want to buy a paintbrush. I must work hard to make enough money to buy one. Then I will become a painter and paint pictures all day long.

Villager 2: You have a very big dream, Liang. Your pictures are always so beautiful and look so real. I want to help you make your dream come true.

We know from this dialogue that Liang dreams of being a painter and that his friends will try and help to make his dream come true.

c. Dialogues which include the language focus

e.g. **Liang:** Amazing! The old man in my dream said that this paintbrush was special. It's really magic. As soon as I finished painting my picture...

Villager 1: It came to life...

Villager 2: And jumped right off the stone!

Liang: Now it's gone.

This dialogue helps pupils to practise using the simple past tense to talk about past states and activities.

3. Prepare the sets, props and sound effects

The first two scenes of 'The Magic Paintbrush' are set in a field and the third scene is set in the Emperor's Palace. To set the third scene, an ordinary chair raised on the platform can serve as a throne.

The play can be performed in the classroom, the school hall or the covered playground. A larger space would be an advantage because the teacher can always add more villagers in the field and soldiers in the Palace so that every pupil will have a chance to act.

Props are very important in this play. The most important prop for this play is, of course, the paintbrush. This has to be a Chinese paintbrush which can be bought easily from any stationery shop. However, for a good effect, the brush should be a larger one. Perhaps teachers could borrow this from their colleagues or friends. Pupils could also be asked to make one using their creativity.



Other important props in this play are:

- the stone from which the frog jumps off and the bird flies off
- the mountain of gold
- the gold snake which comes to life and chases the Emperor away

Teachers can easily make these props with their pupils.

To make the flat stone, just use a piece of brown or grey wrapping paper to wrap round the desk.

To make the animal come to life, such as the frog, bird and snake, simply find a picture or photo of the animal. Cut out its shape on a piece of cardboard. Glue the cut-out onto a thin bamboo stick (the kind used for paper lanterns). To move the animal, place a pupil behind the desk, which has been turned into the stone. The pupil holds the animal on the desk. When the animal jumps off, the pupil merely pulls the cut-out animal off the 'stone' and walks off, shaking the animal to denote its movement.

The mountain of gold is made by a desk covered with gold paper. Liang paints on the desk with his back to the audience and when he is ready, he simply covers the desk with the piece of gold paper and steps back to reveal the mountain of gold.

There are no sound effects in this play. But if the teacher has time, he/she can choose simple Chinese rural music to suggest that it is a Chinese play.

