

Putting a Ding in the Universe:  
Creative Arts and the SolarSPELL

by

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### Abstract

The SolarSPELL is an offline, ruggedized, digital library, created by Dr. Laura Hosman for the U.S. Peace Corps. It has thousands of pieces of educational content that can be accessed through a self-contained Wi-Fi hotspot on the device itself. Currently, there are more than 200 deployed in several Pacific Island nations. After visiting one of these nations, Tonga, in December of 2016, I learned that almost all of the Peace Corps volunteers stationed around the Pacific Islands suffered from a lack of resources due to a variety of reasons. While the SolarSPELL helps to remedy that, the device is lacking classroom activities and resources for creative work and educational drama. Furthermore, for many students in these environments, schools are for learning information and producing high scores on exams, not for learning about creative strengths and identity. After researching curriculum development and the use of drama in an educational setting, I compiled over 50 pieces of content to include on the SolarSPELL involving art, drama, music, movement, and most importantly, imagination. These resources will allow Peace Corps volunteers to explore additional ways to teach English in their schools, while also creating a classroom environment that allows for creative expression. All the content is compiled into one folder as “Teaching Resources”, and is then broken down into seven sub-categories. In the first sub-category, Art Projects, there is a collection of several hands-on projects, many of which involve recyclable or readily available materials. These projects will allow for a greater understanding of conservation and “green” living, concepts that are crucial to the stability of these island nations. The next 5 categories are Drama Readings, Music, Movement, and Video, Group Exercises, Creative Writing, and Worksheets. The second sub-category is a collection of beginner-level “Reader’s Theater” scripts. The third sub-category involves music and video to engage students in movement activities. The fourth sub-category is a

compilation of group games and activities to help students express themselves and learn social skills. The fifth sub-category includes a collection of activities such as fill-in-the-blank story worksheets and journal prompts which will aid in creative thinking and the practice of the English language. The sixth sub-category involves a collection of worksheets that mainly focus on self-reflection and identity. The seventh and final sub-category, Content Guide and Information, works to explain the benefits of using of drama and creative play in the classroom, as well as strategies teachers can implement in order to further engage their students in dramatic learning and play. Overall, these pieces of content are meant to be used as resources for the Peace Corps volunteers in order to provide alternative ways to practice reading, writing, and speaking the English language, a critical part of education in the Pacific Islands.

## Introduction to “Creative Arts”

This content has been curated and compiled into a category for the SolarSPELL, a library used by U.S. Peace Corps members in remote communities around the world. The content has been put into its own category within the library, “Creative Arts,” for use in the classroom and beyond. This category comes at the request of Peace Corps volunteers in the field who were looking for alternative ways to include creative and dramatic play into their curriculums.

While this content provides many teaching ideas that can be used in the classroom, it can also be adapted—if there is a piece of content that you, as a Peace Corps teacher/volunteer, are interested in using, but you do not feel that it is usable in its current state, you should change it and modify the activity/exercise/worksheet in whatever way you see fit!

The beauty of creative content is that it can be easily adapted to fit almost any classroom, any scenario, and any subject. The power of creativity can be utilized in a variety of ways, and it can be especially beneficial to students who may have trouble working with material or certain ideas in a more “traditional” way.

There is no wrong way to imagine.

There is no wrong way to create.

There is no wrong way to dream.

I hope that this content can help students and others learn to feel comfortable with themselves, and hopefully, they can come to understand that creative expression is something to be desired, not something to be feared—it is a tool for success. Allowing students to explore their own thoughts, feelings, ideas, and dreams in the classroom will improve their educational experience and create more well-rounded and thoughtful contributing members of society.

—Amanda Taylor

### Content Overview

I have compiled 52 pieces of content that I would like to include on the SolarSPELL in a new category. Below is the created image that would be found on the home page with the rest of the SolarSPELL content that users would select:



After selecting this category, users will be taken to another page that has just one category: Teaching Resources. After selecting that category, users will be taken to a page that has seven sub-categories: Art Projects, Drama Readings, Music, Movement and Video, Group Exercises, Creative Writing, Worksheets, and Content Guide and Information. The majority of content was compiled from the Internet, but some are pieces of content I created myself after extensive research on the use of educational drama in a classroom setting, as well as knowledge I have learned through my education classes (for a minor in Early Childhood Education). I also edited certain pieces of content that were created for a classroom in the United States, and I removed the “Western” statements, making the content more general.

## Art Projects

In this sub-category, there are 9 creative projects meant to engage the students in hands-on learning to practice certain skills, as well as teach them about themselves. Six out of the nine projects can be done with recyclable materials. The other three projects focus on the English language specifically.

The Peace Corps volunteers are stationed in classrooms all around the world, and many of those are in remote locations. In the Pacific Islands, Peace Corps volunteers find themselves working in schools that barely have enough paper to print worksheets, let alone do any additional projects. There are not enough resources, such as construction paper and markers, for students to create “typical” classroom art projects. This collection of projects is meant to help the Peace Corps volunteers utilize their available resources, which are mostly natural resources and recyclable materials. Furthermore, in these environments, the discussion of climate change and taking care of one’s environment is crucial to island sustainability. Instead of simply burning trash or recycled materials, throwing them outside, or putting them in the ocean, students can use what they have around them to make projects. This in turn will allow for more creativity within the classroom, benefitting both the students and teachers alike.



## Drama Readings

This section is a collection of 8 “Reader’s Theater” scripts to be used in the classroom. These scripts are easy-to-read, beginning-level English scripts with basic stories. These stories are compiled from a collection meant for English language learners.

There are numerous benefits to using and participating in these activities in the classroom. These scripts involve multiple students at once, so students will have an opportunity to collaborate. Additionally, by practicing English out loud with one another, students will not only improve their speaking skills, self-confidence, and social skills, but the spoken practice will aid in retention. Peace Corps volunteers admit that it can be difficult to engage students in learning English because the students are so used to being told to memorize and then regurgitate information for exams. These drama readings will provide a healthy variety to a classroom and provide alternative exercises for English language learning.

### My Dog Skip

**1: I have a dog.**

**Narrator:** Brown Bear, Brown Bear. what do you see?

**2: You have a dog?**

**Brown Bear:** I see a red bird looking at me.

**1: His name is Skip.**

**Narrator:** Red Bird, Red Bird, what do you see?

**2: I like dogs.**

**Red Bird:** I see a yellow duck looking at me.

**1 and 2: We like dogs.**

**Narrator:** Yellow Duck, Yellow Duck, what do you see?



## Music, Movement, and Video

This section includes the MP3 files from a CD and a companion lesson plan with movement activities to go along with the music. This lesson plan is meant to help students, specifically those just beginning to explore drama, feel comfortable with their bodies and come to understand space and movement. Each song has a story associated with it, and it gets read while the students are listening to the song and dancing.

Additionally, there is another movement lesson entitled, “Ocean Dance.” This activity once again involves students exploring their body movements and the space around them, but in the context of being part of an ocean. This activity is useful because among the Pacific Islands, the ocean holds much historical and cultural significance, so helping students imagine themselves as part of it is another way to immerse students in their cultural identity within the classroom.

Finally, there is a video entitled, “Bobby the Fish.” It is an example of digital storytelling, and could be used in a variety of ways, and is meant to offer educational professionals and Peace Corps volunteers an alternative way to engage students in English language learning.

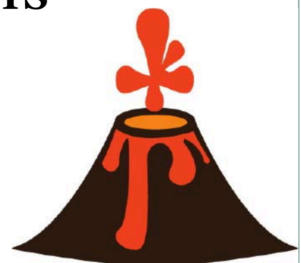
### Wind

10  
Minutes

- You are a kite blowing in the wind.
- Blow this way and that.
- Eventually you get stuck in a tree.
- You try to wiggle a bit to get free.
- The wind has picked you up, you are free.
- You fly around a little more.
- The wind dies down. You settle slowly on the ground.

### **Movement to Music**

#### **– ELEMENTS**



## Group Exercises

This section contains 7 pieces of content meant to engage students in collaborative activities. Most of these activities involve interacting within imaginary scenarios, as well as working together to achieve a common goal. Additionally, these exercises involve using speaking and listening skills, and will benefit students who are learning English as they can practice together in fun activities.

One of the activities involves students creating a news or radio station with one another and reporting on different happenings, real or imagined. Another activity involves students picking a character, either real or imagined, and having to describe the character in front of the class. Then, the students listening have to draw the character being described, and when the description is finished, everyone shares their drawings with one another and the character is revealed. These activities are meant to increase classroom collaboration and allow students to exercise their creativity with one another, while also improving listening and critical thinking skills.

These activities, along with the others, allow for students to improve their social skills in the classroom and can be used in different subject areas, not just in the context of an “art class.”

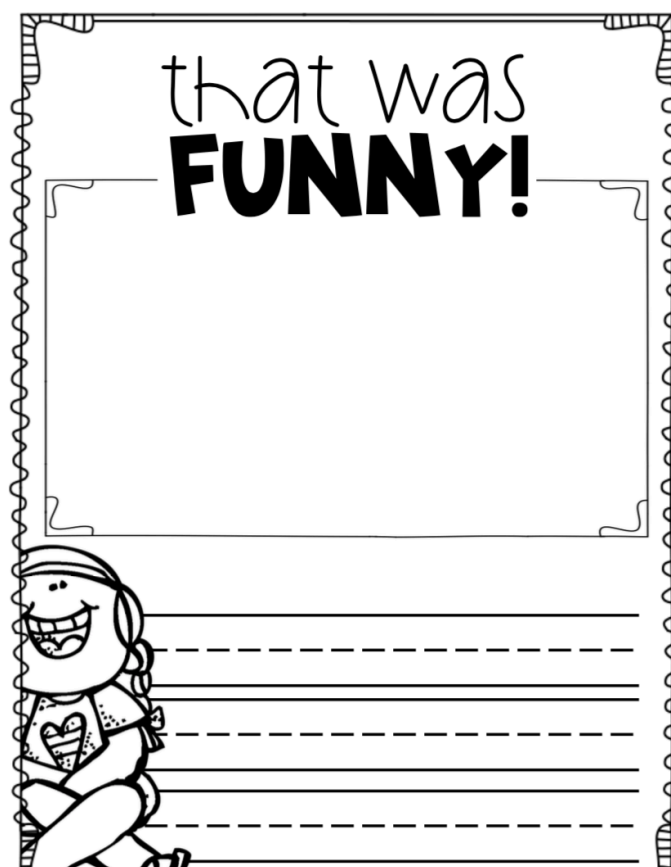


## Creative Writing

This is the largest sub-category with 11 pieces of content. These pieces of content are meant to allow for creative self-expression in the form of writing, while also allowing students to practice English grammar and language. These writing activities allow for imaginative and personal answers or responses. Allowing students to express themselves on paper and share ideas will help their individual development as well as their understanding of their own creativity. Furthermore, the students will be more engaged in learning and practicing English if they are writing about their own ideas and feelings.

Some of the activities in this section include writing prompts for students, such as writing about a future career and writing a “silly story” based on a selection of characteristics. Other activities involve fill-in-the-blank worksheets where students are asked to construct sentences and eventually stories in their own words. Overall, these activities are allowing for the exploration of ideas and feelings that students may otherwise not be able to express, especially in English. These activities also help students practice their English writing skills.

What job would you like to do when you grow up? Write a sentence about your job and then draw a picture of yourself doing the job.



## Worksheets

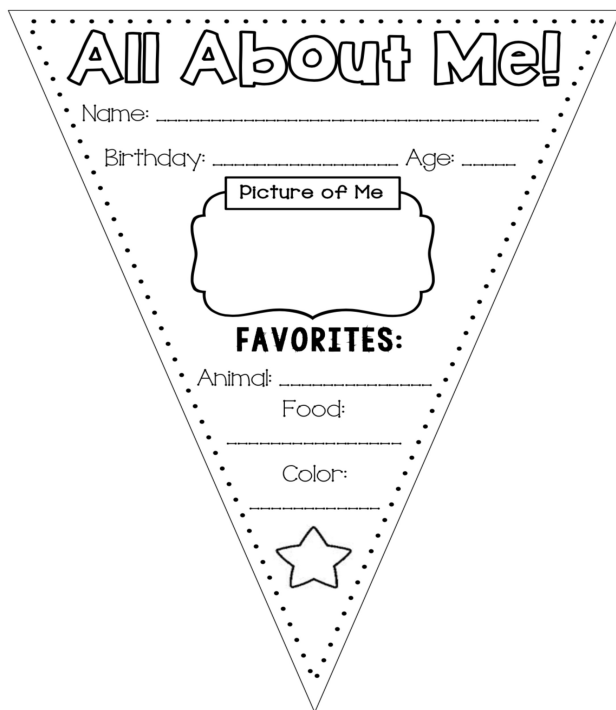
In this section, there are 7 worksheets that focus on identity and self-expression, as well as sensory experiences. Students will be able to reflect on themselves and their feelings, while continuing to learn how to express those thoughts and feelings in writing.

Activities include “All About Me” banners and worksheets in which students are asked to write down their own personal traits and characteristics. Another activity is called “Using My Senses” and involves students selecting an object from a box of objects and describing what they feel, smell, see, etc. Another activity involves writing down feelings that students have about themselves, such as a quality about themselves they like, and then being encouraged to share what they have written with their peers. This collection of activities is meant to help students feel comfortable with themselves as individuals. Additionally, these activities will help students understand their own thoughts and feelings, and they will learn that anything that they feel is valid. This will allow them to engage more fully in the classroom because they will feel that they are allowed to be themselves in the classroom and not conform to a certain standard.

## Using My Senses

Directions: Chose one item from the box and complete the following questions

1. What color am I? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What shape am I? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What do I smell like? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What do I feel like? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What do I taste like? (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_
6. What am I? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Draw a picture of your item!



**All About Me!**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Picture of Me

**FAVORITES:**

Animal: \_\_\_\_\_

Food: \_\_\_\_\_

Color: \_\_\_\_\_

Star

## Content Guide and Information

This sub-category is meant to provide additional resources for teachers in order to help them better tailor certain activities for their individual classrooms while also break down new and possibly unfamiliar concepts as well. Since the SolarSPELL can be used as a community tool, it is important to include information for more than just students.

There are 6 pieces of content in this sub-category. One piece is a “How-To” Guide for the Reader’s Theater activities that are found in Drama Readings. Two pieces focus on the use of drama in teaching English, one of which I created myself. Since a primary goal of the Peace Corps volunteers is teaching English to students in remote locations, it is important that they have a variety of resources in order to help them do that. Two pieces of content address using drama strategies in writing and highlight the impact creative writing has on English language learners and retention. Finally, one piece of content is Chapter 14 of a book entitled “Implementing the Primary Curriculum: A Teacher’s Guide,” and it discusses the advantages to using drama activities in a classroom setting.

These resources will allow educational professionals and community members alike to learn new information about educational drama, as well as strategies they can take to incorporate educational drama in any classroom environment.

### **How can drama help us as writers?**

We know that drama is:

- highly motivating and enjoyable
- stimulating and novel
- social and collaborative
- physical and kinaesthetic
- emotional and empathetic
- personally challenging
- excitingly risky at times
- different to other lessons (novelty)
- inclusive and supportive
- verbal and non-verbal.

## Conclusion

This collection of content has been curated to allow Peace Corps volunteers, and eventually, other educational professionals and community members to use educational drama and art activities to help students explore new ideas and feelings in the classroom, and later, beyond. By allowing students to express themselves creatively in a classroom, either through speaking, listening, or writing activities, students become more well rounded. They will feel more comfortable with themselves and view the classroom as a place to be continuously explored, instead of as a place where knowledge is forced into one's head.

Every student learns in his or her own unique way. Through the incorporation of educational drama, art, and creative play, students will discover traits about themselves they may not have ever known they possessed. They may also discover a passion of theirs, and that could generate so many possibilities for that child.

School is about learning information and learning about oneself. When one is given a safe environment to learn about his or her own identity, he or she becomes comfortable with his or her own skills, beliefs, and aspirations. He or she learns that any feelings or thoughts are valid, because they are part of a unique experience that only he or she as an individual can attest to. When a student is given the chance to grow as an individual, that student comes to recognize his or her own potential. That student realizes that it is possible to make a difference, and he or she will strive to do that—and the only person in the way is that student himself or herself.

When we get out of our own way, the possibilities are endless, and all students, even those in the most remote parts of the world, deserve to feel like they can accomplish anything. Anyone can change the world—and it only takes one moment to realize.

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