

# Drama activities for primary schools

Add some medieval flair to your drama sessions with your class!

Primary drama specialist and author Barbara Henderson shares some of her top tips in celebration of her novel for children *The Siege of Caerlaverock*. They tie in beautifully with Castles or Wars of Independence topics!

Key benchmark: I enjoy creating, choosing and accepting roles, using movement, expression and voice. EXA 1-12a



## ACTIVITY 1: Medieval Charades

Ask your pupils to act out the following characters/objects to the class:



- Knight
- Castle
- Sword
- War
- Peace
- King
- Enemy
- Bow & arrow
- Horse
- Pope
- Church
- Prisoner
- Jousting
- Feast
- Bard
- Siege
- Catapult
- Drawbridge

Evaluate and praise good acting effort and perhaps evaluate one or two of the more accomplished performances, making reference to facial expression, movement, gesture, stance, posture, status and other drama vocabulary. I find that reinforcing these terms frequently leads to pupil confidence when using those terms

The novel *The Siege of Caerlaverock* is available to buy at the HES online shop.

[historicenvironment.scot/learn](http://historicenvironment.scot/learn)



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## ACTIVITY 2: The Lone Knight Game

The teacher asks three pupils to leave the room. Take care to choose kids who are not easily embarrassed as they are likely to feel a bit silly in a moment.

Once the door is closed, the teacher acts out the following story with specific movements – be disciplined about this as the game won't work otherwise.

Once you have performed it once to the class, they know the story and will find the next bit funny!



### The Lone Knight

- A knight was riding home from battle (**gallop on the spot**).
- In the distance he saw the castle of his beloved lady. She was waiting on the balcony (**still galloping, shield eyes, wave and urge horse to gallop faster. Keep galloping**).
- When he reached the castle, he dismounted (**mime**), tied his horse up (**mime**) and ran up the spiral staircase to the balcony (**run in a small circle clockwise**).
- At the top, he threw his arms wide and embraced his beloved lady (**mime**).
- But alas, he spotted his enemies in the distance! (**mid-hug, shield eyes, point and hands to head in shock**).
- He threw his beloved lady over the balcony (**mime heaving. Kids love this to be dramatic**),
- Ran down the spiral staircase (**run anticlockwise very fast**),
- Caught his beloved lady at the bottom (**mime**),
- Heaved her onto his horse (**mime**), untied the reins (**mime**), swung himself in the saddle (**mime**) and rode away (**gallop**) into the distance to fight another day.

One by one, invite the volunteers in. Say: "I'm going to tell you a story in movement. All you need to do is pay proper attention and then perform as much of it as you remember."

Perform ONLY THE ACTIONS to your volunteer. Invite them to perform once you're done with the whole story. This can often be hilarious, as kids forget to catch their beloved or to run down the stairs etc.

At the end, perform the story and actions together once more so everyone understands.

### ACTIVITY 3: Knights, Masons, Archers

Pupils should create 2 concentric circles and partner with someone. The participants will be in the same pair for the whole activity. Use medieval funky music, or Lily Allen's 'I'm a Knight'. There are three calls:

- **Knight:** when this is called, one partner sits/crouches/kneels as the horse, and the other stands behind and holds a pretend lance (long pole)
- **Mason:** when this is called, the partners should 'build' an arch together by putting their hands up and leaning them against their partner's hands.
- **Archer:** when this is called, one partner poses like they're firing an arrow and the other freezes in wounded agony!

To start, partners will go around in their assigned circle to the right, so both circles should go opposite ways. They keep going around the circle until the music stops and the teacher makes a call, then they must find their partner and get into position as soon as possible. If your class can handle it, the last pair in the right position gets put out of the game and they then help judge.

There can be adaptations made to avoid partner work – knights ride invisible horses, masons make an arch using both of their own hands, and archers fire their arrows.

### ACTIVITY 4: Scottish Wars of Independence Comic



Take a look at the Scottish Wars of Independence timeline overleaf. Gather as many suitable props and costumes as you can. Makeshift ones can add to the entertainment value – it's about having fun!

Think colanders for helmets, hobby horses, plastic cutlery for swords unless you happen to have medieval costumes!

For each event on the timeline, create a **dramatic freeze frame** and take a photo. These can then be collated into a comic, using the timeline sections as captions and adding speech bubbles etc. Printed out, the timeline comic makes an excellent wall display.

### ACTIVITY 5: Scottish Wars of Independence: Three-minute Play

**Benchmark:** I enjoy creating, choosing and accepting roles, using movement, expression and voice. EXA 1-12a Takes on a role.

Use the timeline on the next page as a basic narrator script. Cast the most important characters – Wallace, Bruce, Edward I (also known as Longshanks), Edward II, John Balliol, Alexander III, Margaret (Maid of Norway) etc. Assign the rest of the class to a group (Scots noblemen, Wallace's army, Edward's army etc)

Now devise a fast-paced drama for each of the events on the timeline so that it can be performed as the narrator reads it out. Depending on how keen your pupils are, you can add brief dialogue, instruments, props, costumes or sound effects – there is no limit to your creativity here! If you are happy with your version, why not perform it at an assembly, or to another class?

## Wars of Independence timeline



c1270 William Wallace is born. His father was a minor noble.

1274 (11 July) Robert Bruce is born at (probably) Turnberry Castle in Ayrshire. He is related to the Scots and English Royal families.

1286 The old King of Scots, Alexander III, falls from his horse and is killed. The next in line to the throne is three-year-old Margaret, known as the 'Maid of Norway'.

1290 Margaret, Maid of Norway, falls ill during her sea voyage from Norway to Scotland and dies in Orkney.

1292 John Balliol becomes King of Scots.

1294 The English King Edward Longshanks wants the Scots to join him in his war against the French. Instead, France and Scotland agree to help each other against England. Edward prepares to make war on Scotland.

1296 Edward's army invades Scotland and defeats the Scots at Dunbar. John Balliol is captured and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

1296 The Stone of Destiny is taken to England. William Wallace leads a rebellion.

1297 William Wallace beats Edward's army at the Battle of Stirling Bridge.

1298 Edward's army beats Wallace's army at the Battle of Falkirk.

1300 The Siege of Caerlaverock takes place.

1304 More and more Scots begin to support Edward, believing that he will win the war.

1305 Wallace is betrayed and killed.

1306 Robert Bruce fights his rival for the crown at Greyfriars Kirk in Dumfries.

1306 Robert Bruce is crowned King of Scots. But a surprise dawn attack means Bruce only just escapes. He becomes a fugitive. Bruce's wife, his sisters and his daughter are imprisoned by Edward Longshanks.

1307 King Edward Longshanks dies and is replaced by his much weaker son, Edward II.

1314 Bruce's forces defeat Edward II's army at Bannockburn. Bruce's family is returned to him.

1320 Bruce is in power. In the Declaration of Arbroath, the powerful lords and nobles in Scotland say: *'It is not for glory, nor for riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom itself, which no honest person gives up but with life itself.'*

## ACTIVITY 6: The Siege of Caerlaverock Shadow Puppetry

*Benchmark: I enjoy creating, choosing and accepting roles, using movement, expression and voice. EXA 1-12a Takes on a role, for example, a puppet show.*

**You will need:** card (ideally black) and sticks as well as scissors and masking tape. If you don't have black paper/card, you can cut up a cereal box or similar – it works just as well!

### 1. Making the theatre

You will need to cover a large frame tightly with white cloth or white tissue paper and have a strong light source to shine on it from behind.

To perform, the screen should be propped up in front of an audience, with the performers placing and moving their shadow puppets against the other side of the screen from the audience, and ducking down so the light source only outlines the shadow puppets. The rest of the room should be dark for maximum impact.



### 2. Making the shadow puppets

Pupils should create the following outlines as shadow puppets:

- Caerlaverock Castle
- The drawbridge
- The King on his horse
- Edward's Army (a big crowd, lots of heads)
- One or two of Edward's knights
- A Siege Engine for Edward's army
- Flaming arrows and rocks (these can be shown flying backwards and forwards)
- Soldiers for the castle
- The Lady of the Castle
- The castle dwellers (as a small group, a few heads)
- Sun and moon

### 3. Devising puppet stories

Using the script on the next page, in pairs or small groups, pupils can then create their own story performance and practise moving their puppets in front of the light to cast different shadows. Low-volume medieval instrumental music makes this type of performance look really professional! The script should be read very slowly so that performers can move the puppets in time.

## ACTIVITY 6: The Siege of Caerlaverock Shadow Puppetry (cont'd)

### Potential narrator script:

1. On St John's Day in the year 1300, the King of England set off from Carlisle towards Scotland, leading his army of over 3000 soldiers north towards the border.
2. On the ninth of July, he arrived at Caerlaverock Castle and set up camp (some of Edwards tents (pavilions) were incredibly grand, one for his great hall was 240 feet long)
3. Edward sent messengers to demand the surrender of the castle but the Castle dwellers pulled up the drawbridge and refused to surrender.
4. The King's knights tried to beat down the gate with battering rams and climb the castle walls but the defenders through stones and rocks at them
5. So the English army deployed their big siege weapons (trebuchets and catapults), and their springald (a heavy mounted crossbow). They catapulted rocks at the castle walls and shot arrows at the soldiers.
6. Another group of English soldiers tried to mine underneath the walls but they didn't get very far
7. The defenders inside the castle fought back but the castle was getting badly damaged. The siege carried on until one of the defenders was killed, which made the rest of them decide to surrender
8. The drawbridge was lowered and the small group of castle defenders surrendered.
9. The King and his army were astonished that there were so few of their enemies (sources say 60).
10. The King ordered granted 'life and limb' to the garrison and let them go. He then led his army north to their next battle.

### 4. Performing and evaluating your shadow plays as a class

First, find something positive to say about each of the groups who performed.

Then consider: Which group produced the most interesting show? Why was it good to watch? Clear narration? Gorgeous puppets? Was it well-rehearsed?



**Benchmark:** I can respond to the experience of drama by discussing my thoughts and feelings. I can give and accept constructive comment on my own and others' work.  
EXA 1-15a Shares views and listens appropriately to the views of others about what works well and what could be improved in their own and others' work, using some drama vocabulary.

## Activity 7: Physical Theatre -The Haunted Castle

Everything in this play is created using pupils' bodies only – no props or costumes. Spooky music is needed as a constant backdrop though! Ideal for Halloween time.

There is a lot of freedom for pupils to create their own versions of the play, and to devise each scene. The basic premise is that a family visits a castle. The children are let loose to explore, but something is not right. In each room/area something unexpected happens! The kids flee and find themselves in the next one.

### *The Haunted Castle Partial Script*

**Kid 1:** (Rolls eyes) Mum! Dad! Why do we always have to visit a castle at the weekend!

**Kid 2:** Are you kidding? I LOVE coming to castles. (Pretends to be a knight sword-fighting.) See? I'm a knight!

**Kid 1:** Oh PLEASE! (Rolls eyes again)

**Mum:** We're going to set up the picnic.

**Dad:** Yes. Why don't you two explore a bit! (Parents leave).

The parent actors can now become part of the castle. Devise and act out the following scenes. The kids should state clearly where they are and what is happening so that it is clear to the audience.

**The Gate:** opens and closes without being touched or whacks a kid as they walk in? Handle shakes as it is touched?

**The Courtyard:** a statue keeps moving? Castle walls move inwards? A fountain sprays water intermittently? A well magnetically draws the kids to it?

**The Castle Kitchen:** a pot tries to swallow a kid's hand? A table shakes as you sit down to eat?

**The Armoury:** suits of armour come to life and chase the kids? Weapons fly into the air and surround the kids?

**The Nursery:** an old rocking horse moves? The sound of a baby crying is heard even though the room is empty? A mirror reflects a ghost?

**The Dungeon:** a trap door shuts on the kids? A light goes out? The kids find themselves tied up?

The kids free themselves and run out of the castle, bumping into their parents.

**Mum:** Excellent! Just in time for the picnic.

**Kid 2:** I am NEVER going to a castle again!

**Kid 1:** Are you kidding? That was AWESOME!

*The End*

*The Siege of Caerlaverock* by Barbara Henderson is available to buy through the [HES online shop](#).

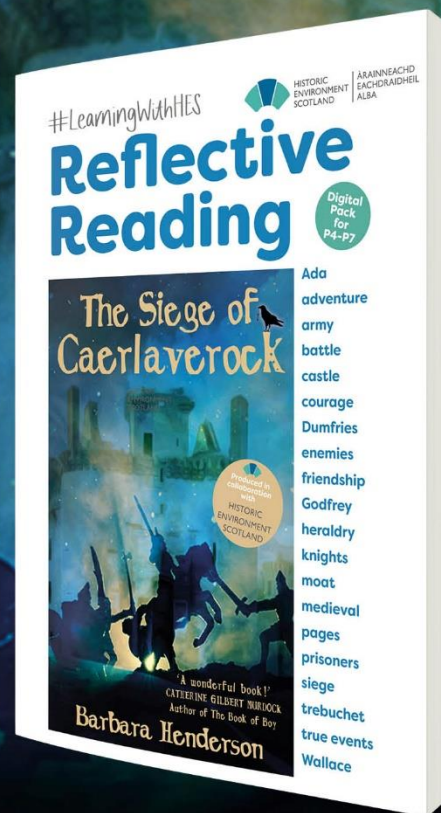
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Enemies without.  
Enemies within.  
Nowhere to hide...

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