

The Giant Who Threw Tantrums

A drama about facing our fears

Level 1

Adaptable for ages: early childhood to 8 years old



BACKGROUND PLANNING AND REQUIREMENTS

Purpose and learning

From within the protection of a fantasy about a make-believe village threatened by a tantrum throwing giant, this drama gives young children the chance to consider how people respond when they are afraid. In particular, it explores what happens to a group of people living in a small village called Thistle Mountain who become fearful when they discover that a very large giant is throwing tantrums up in the hills near their homes. Eventually they discover that the giant has fears of his own, and that the tantrums might be partially a result of these fears. The drama provides lots of opportunities for critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, mapping, drawing and writing. It is therefore a very useful cross-curricular unit.

Pre-text



Helping teachers work with children when they first return to education following major traumatic or life-changing events

An excerpt from the story: *The Giant Who Threw Tantrums* (source unknown)

Focus Question

What makes people (including giants) feel afraid?

The 5 Ws

What's happening: A giant is throwing tantrums and making the locals of Thistle Mountain fearful.

Who's it happening to: The people of the town of Thistle Mountain, a Giant who lives at the top of the mountain, and a Giantologist.

Where is it happening: The town of Thistle Mountain.

When is it happening: In fairy tale time.

What's at stake: The safety of the local people who are living in fear and the happiness of the Giant.

The Hook

Children love reading and speaking about giants. The term Giantologists is also a big hit with children of this age group.

The teacher-in-role

- * The mayor.
- * The Giantologist.
- * A hermit who is a friend of the giant.

Don't be concerned about your multiple role changes; the children will accept them readily so long as you clearly signal which role you are in.

Resources

- * The story of the giant who threw tantrums.
- * A prop each for the mayor, Giantologist and Hermit.
- * The class dress-up box, for props for each of the children as townspeople.
- * A letter from the giant.

UNIT PLAN

Step One – Introducing the context and roles (storytelling)

* Share the following pre-text for *The Giant Who Threw Tantrums* with the children. It is the first part of a much longer story but is all we need to launch our process drama.

** At the foot of Thistle Mountain there lay a village. In the village lived a little child who liked to go walking. One Saturday afternoon he was walking in the woods when he was startled by a terrible noise. He scrambled quickly behind a bush. Before long a huge giant came stamping down the path. He looked upset! 'Tanglebanged ringlepox!' the Giant bellowed. He banged his head against a tree until all the leaves shook off like snowflakes. 'Tanglebanged whippersnack!' the Giant roared. Yanking up the tree, he whirled it around his head and knocked down twenty-seven other trees. Muttering to himself, he stalked up the path towards the top of Thistle Mountain. The child hurried home. 'I just saw a giant throwing a tantrum!' he told everyone in the village.*

* Discuss the word 'tantrum' and invite the children to share stories of tantrums they have witnessed, eg: baby brothers and sisters, themselves when they were younger etc. This discussion should be fun and you should not be judgmental about tantrums.



The language the Giant uses is very funny, but complex, so it is good for the children to see it as well as hear it. Throughout this drama, visual prompts showing the new and unusual words the students come across would be useful.

* Ask the children to lie/sit on the floor with eyes closed while you narrate, or the class listens to, an [atmospheric description of Thistle Mountain](#).

** Thistle Mountain had always been a very quiet place and there had never been any trouble there. Not many visitors came to the town, for it was not on a main road. There had never been anything to be afraid of. The village at the foot of the mountain was a very pretty one, with a few shops and houses. The mountain was quite steep and covered with trees. The local people liked to walk in the forest and look down on their town. There were several large caves to be found at the top of the mountain, but they were dark and mysterious and most people stayed away from them.*

Step Two – Building belief in the fictional context (collective drawing and role creation)

* Invite the children to create Thistle Mountain collaboratively through collective drawing. This can be done by first recalling any of the geographical features mentioned in the story extract or description of Thistle Mountain and then brainstorming any additional features that the children might wish to include such as lakes, creeks, rivers etc. The collective drawing can be done on a very large sheet of paper that is then displayed in the classroom for the duration of the unit.



You may choose to look at maps and other diagrams to select the style the children wish to use. This can be incorporated into a visual literacy lesson or in conjunction with a study of their local area.

* Explain to the children that during this drama they will be in-role as people from Thistle Mountain. Ask them to decide what job they do in the town. Now ask them to draw their house and/or place of work on to the map of Thistle Mountain. Here they decide where they would choose to live if they were residents of this area, e.g. up on the mountain, by the stream, in the town itself etc. The children write their characters' addresses on large envelopes (using supported writing) – e.g. 'Sarah by the lake', 'Tom in the town'. These envelopes will be used in Step 9.



The children should all be encouraged to take role as an adult. This results in drama work that is of a higher quality and also provides opportunities for them to adopt the 'mantle of the expert' – for example as a police or army officer; forest worker; farmer; teacher; shopkeeper; doctor; scientist; hairdresser; hotel owner; fireman; waitress etc. These occupations will offer rich language opportunities for them and for you useful local discussions about the people who work in our local communities. Other good language options are offered as they complete their maps, especially with concepts such as by, near, up, down, beside, between, etc.

Step Three – Introducing the tension (teacher-in-role)

* Explain to the children that for this first part of this drama, you will be in role as the Mayor of Thistle Mountain and they will be the people from the town. Share with the children the prop you have chosen to signal your role.



The props you choose should be very simple. For example, a badge, a hat, a jacket or a gold chain of office would all be fine – and one or at most two is enough!

* Next ask the children to choose a hat, coat, beads etc from the class dress-up box for their symbol. Get them to put this item on and use the postcard strategy. In this strategy, each child introduces their character to the class saying who they are and what job they do in the village, while placing themselves in an appropriate place on a rough plan of the village (imagined on the floor space) that you have agreed on.



A dress-up box should be found in every early years' classroom. If you don't have enough simple props for this purpose, extra props can be brought from home or badges can be simply made.

* Tell the children to find a partner. Then tell them that it is Saturday morning and everyone is in the village square shopping and meeting friends. In role as the person from Thistle Mountain, each can talk about the Giant. Have you seen him before? Are you afraid? What might happen if the Giant comes down from the mountain and throws a tantrum in the village? Should we stay inside and lock our doors? Will we be safe?

* After a short time, enter in role as the Mayor.

** As the Mayor, ask the townspeople if they have ever seen the Giant and if so, what have they seen or heard? Explain to them that this is not the first time you have heard rumours about a giant living up in one of the caves, and suggest that although you do not like to admit it, you have seen and heard some strange things up on that mountain.*

** Still as the mayor, ask the townspeople to tell you how they are feeling. Are they worried? Are their families concerned? If so, about what?*

** Following this discussion, ask them to help you decide what should be done. Tell them that as Mayor, you are afraid the giant might come down into the village and hurt someone if something isn't done quickly. Ask the children to help you make a list of people/experts who may be able to resolve the problem. If the children don't beat you to it, suggest that a Giantologist (an expert in giants) may be useful.*



The children will almost certainly come up with this idea, but not the word. When they do,

explain that you have heard of these people and that they are called giantologists – like a geologist who studies rocks, botanist who studies plants etc.

* Cut the drama.

Step Four – The Giantologist arrives (teacher-in-role and whole group role-play)

* Explain to the children that you will be changing roles now and becoming a Giantologist. So that they can help you take this role, discuss this person and what their job would entail. What might their name and title be? (Doctor, Professor, Mr, Mrs?)



This character can be male or female, but if you are a woman yourself, be careful not to fall for the stereotype and immediately choose to be male, which the children will often assume, too. Why not discuss this aspect with the children? Also, remember that the name you select should be something simple and not funny. A funny or unusual name weakens the drama as the children drop role each time you mention it.

* Ask the children to think about the kind of equipment a giantologist might need.

These items might include binoculars, digital recorders, tape measures, a camera, notebooks, maps etc. Have some of these ready to place in an old briefcase or carry bag with the words 'Giantologist for Hire' pinned/glued to the side (or get the children to make these for you out of collage materials).



The Giantologist is best played as a relatively low status role – someone who desperately wants to be a successful giant catcher but who is inexperienced and, frankly, a little scared. For this reason, it is great if his/her equipment is old and outdated or even clearly not working – e.g. a very old mobile phone with no battery, an old camera that doesn't work. The children will want to take this role themselves outside this drama in their own child-structured dramatic play (see also Step 8) so if the props are old and no longer useful, they will be perfect for supporting that play.

* Ask the children to prepare the room for a town meeting – perhaps by putting all the chairs in a circle (adults wouldn't sit on the floor). Ask them to put their props on as well, and prepare to be the townspeople of Thistle Mountain attending the meeting. Once again show them the

bag you will use to signal when you are in role and remind them of how you will make the transition into role.

* Enter in role as the Giantologist and introduce yourself.

** Ask the children to tell you about what has been happening in the town lately and what they know about the Giant. Ask them about their concerns and why they might need you. Following this, and depending on how worried they appear to be, find out how much they are willing to pay you. To gain a higher fee, show them all your “great” technology and be prepared for them to challenge you about your experience (which you can concede is limited). Once the fee is agreed, explain that the work is dangerous and that it cannot be achieved by one person alone. Extra recruits from the town will therefore be needed. Will they help and become assistant giantologists? Not everyone will need to do the dangerous work though, only the brave ones. The others can stay in the town, but will be needed for other tasks.*



Give the children an opportunity to ask lots of questions about the job. Don't be too knowledgeable. Be sure to reinforce that you are not there to KILL the Giant or hurt it in any way, but rather, to catch it and take it away (relocate!). Be evasive about the tough questions like, “Won't we get hurt?”

Leaving gaps and mysteries helps the dramatic tension, and ensures that the children do not just rely on you knowing everything. Also, be sure not to dominate this discussion. Keep asking the children for their advice and help. This also builds tension because they tend to become frustrated by your lack of knowledge and wonder why they are paying you!

** Still in role as the Giantologist tell the townspeople that the work needs to start straight away, beginning with a plan to trap the Giant. Reinforce once again that as a giantologist you are certainly against killing giants as they are very rare and quite valuable too. The townspeople's plans will need to be carefully designed so that the Giant is not harmed.*

* Cut the drama

Step Five – Planning to trap the Giant (whole group role-play)

* Out of role, ask the children to work in groups to come up with a way to trap the Giant while still staying safe. They need to plan their strategy. They may do this individually or in groups, and may record these plans on paper as a series of frames/steps. To share their plan, they need to create a 'photo' (a freeze frame) or series of these (if they are in the upper end of the age band) that show how they would capture the Giant. Prepare these out of role.



Give the children plenty of time to discuss their plans, but once they begin to make their freeze frames, keep the time short. The group size will be dependent upon the children and their experience with group work. Pairs or even individual freezes may be better for those who are challenged by collaborative work.

* Back in role as townspeople who are helping the Giant, the children are interviewed by the teacher-in-role as Giantologist. Children must share their photos and plans and persuade him/her that their plan will work and that they are brave enough and prepared enough for the task ahead. The Giantologist will accept all appropriate plans.

* Out of role, initiate a discussion about the images presented. Invite the children to comment on the images in terms of what they show. Do the people look calm and confident? Can you see what they plan to do? Are they working together? Do you think these plans will work?

Step Six – More about the Giant (gossip mill)

* Suggest to the children that the next step is to find out more about the Giant. We need to understand this giant a little better if our plans are going to work.

* Revisit the story used at the beginning of the unit. Discuss the tantrums thrown by the Giant and make special mention of the language that he/she uses.



The language is lots of fun and the children could try making up some of these made-up words themselves and recording them or saying them for the teacher as scribe.

* Using the convention of The Gossip Mill discuss reasons why the Giant might throw tantrums. The children each think of one reason and prepare themselves to share it with the group. They can all begin every time with “I’ve heard that the Giant throws tantrums because...” The children mill around together in the space, and on a signal from the teacher (such as the beat of a tambour), the children stop moving and share their gossip with one other person. Repeat this process a number of times (usually about six).



Making the start of the sentence a repetitive ritual helps control the action. An important part of this gossip mill convention is that you can change your bit of gossip as you go. If you hear gossip you like better than the gossip you've made up, spread that information instead. This is useful for the less confident children who may feel their idea is not as good as the others.

Step Seven – Bringing the giant to life (connected curriculum tasks)

- * A number of cross-curricular tasks can now be usefully included in the unit. They are listed here as possibilities for you to choose from. If you don't have time for all of them or even to do any of them, don't worry. Their omission will not damage the drama. However, if you have time, any or all of them would improve it and provide important links to key cross-curricular priorities.
- * The Giant can be used as the focus for visual arts activities. The children could paint/sculpt what they think the Giant looks like, or they could use colour, line and shape to represent his/her mood.
- * The class could create a shared big book about the story so far. In this way the children are recalling the sequence of events and reshaping them to make their own text.
- * Create a soundscape of the Giant moving down Thistle Mountain towards the village. This can be done using the children's voices as sound effects, or tuned and untuned percussion instruments.

Step Eight – Playing at being Giantologist helpers (creating a dramatic play space)

- * At this point in the drama unit you have the perfect chance to provide the children with opportunities to generate child-structured dramatic play in response to the drama experience. (This step is not essential, but it will add significantly to the children's experience while offering you the opportunity to observe their dramatic skills in a context free of direct adult involvement.) A play space designated for this purpose can be set up in a corner of the room. Place a sign on the wall announcing that this is the Giantology HQ (Headquarters). Again, talk to the children about what might be found in this headquarters and invite them to make these items or bring them along to school. Old mobiles (batteries removed), old telephones, old laptops (or just an old keyboard attached to a cardboard box!), books about giants, notebooks and pencils, and most importantly the props used by the teacher in role as the Giantologist and mayor need to be available for the play. The map of Thistle Mountain, together with images of the Giant created by the children, can also be placed on the walls around this space (possibly with the word WANTED added). Working in groups of no more than four children at a time, the children can be given opportunities to play out aspects of the search and capture of the Giant – to create their own versions of what might happen as the people try to track down the Giant. They will enjoy this freedom and their play will be worth observing.

* Literacy opportunities for writing (including more early role-play writing) can be offered here by including writing materials in the play space.



Child-structured dramatic play offers children at this level a rich opportunity to create their own versions of the story and try out their own individual ideas. This is best offered during a free-choice activities time. Remember though that NOT ALL children will choose to use this space and not all children will play out this story in that space. It doesn't matter! Keep this play space available for as long as you like. It doesn't need to shut down just because the drama moves on. The children will enjoy coming up with endings that are different from those explored within the drama.

Step Nine – Creating empathy for the Giant (whole group role-play)



Before this step, you must do some preparation. Retrieve the envelopes the children addressed in Step two. Next, print the letters and place one into each of the envelopes. Use A3 paper if you can spare it, and giant font. If you have the time, it would be much richer to create one of your own that includes ideas already discussed in the drama.

* Announce that you are all going to go back into role as the townspeople of Thistle Mountain with yourself as the Mayor again, who has called a meeting. You and they don your props as before.

* *As the Mayor announce that you have received a bundle of letters in the envelopes created during Step two. You don't know what's in them. Let the children tell you the contents of the letters (working together, if necessary, to read them).*

* The letters reveal that the Giant is very hurt by news he/she has heard that the townspeople are planning some kind of trap. The Giant wishes to speak personally to the townspeople when the Giantologist is not present.

* *Discuss the letter in role. Are the children surprised by its contents? Is what they expected? Do their fears seem a bit unnecessary now? Given the Giant's own fears, are the people now prepared to meet the Giant in person? Find out who is no longer afraid and willing to meet with the Giant.*

* *Tell the characters as Mayor that you are too frightened to meet the Giant yourself, but are glad that some of them ARE brave enough. This will absolve you of a tricky double-act – see below! Assure the children that you will NOT tell the Giantologist about the letters or the meeting – although you are sure that the Giantologist has nothing sinister planned and the Giant has nothing to fear. The plan was always to trap the Giant to talk to him and convince him to stop throwing tantrums and scaring everyone.*

* *Suggest that the children write back to the Giant responding to his comments, assuring him that the Giantologist won't be told about the letter or the meeting and how it will be organised. Where will it*



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be? What time? Are there any conditions – e.g. no tantrum throwing, no tree throwing, no bad language? What else do you want to say to him? This letter may be collectively developed by the whole class or by individuals if they have the literacy skills to complete this task. The letter/s can then be used as a starting point in preparing to meet with the Giant. Once completed, the children can address envelopes and “post” their letters back to the Giant.

* Cut the drama.

Step Ten – Building the Giant/Introducing the Hermit (puppetry or teacher-in-role)

* You need now to choose between two alternatives:

~ A. Making the Giant, with you playing the Giant’s voice;

~ B. If you do not feel comfortable about playing the Giant, or preparing the theatrical effects described below, an alternative would be for the Giant not to be seen at all, with you taking another teacher-in-role as ‘The Hermit’ – a friend of the Giant who lives in one of the caves on Thistle Mountain.

The Giant’s voice role is more fun though, and perhaps better for the ending.

Alternative A:

* Discuss with the children how you are going to bring the Giant to life for the drama. Let them know that they will be able to play the Giant later in the drama, if they want to, but that firstly we must make the Giant as big and scary as possible. Introduce the notion of how much more frightening a voice is if you cannot see its owner. Experiment by letting a couple of the children practise scary voices firstly in the open, then from a hidden position.



You could discuss fiction and reality in other mediums: for example books, films, computer games, etc. Introduce into the discussion aspects like height, loudness, muddled-up language etc.

* Explain that you will be the Giant’s voice, because you know the kinds of things that the Giant would say, but that though you are bigger than they are, even you aren’t big enough to play a giant. Next, let them help you decide what your biggest and scariest voice is.

* Then prepare one of the following three giants:

~ 1. Build a giant statue, getting ideas and materials from the children – perhaps hanging cloth, cushions and outsize clothes on a screen and tripod, or a hat rack, with a big painted cardboard or cloth face;

~ 2. Rig up a big sheet with a light behind it (an old OHP is excellent for the purpose). Then experiment with the children how you can make a shadow bigger by positioning a person – you or a child – between the light and the screen;

~ 3. Create and practise using a giant puppet using two broomsticks and painted cloth hung between them, with a giant face painted on the cloth (so that the Giant is really nothing more than the face, and sinister rags hanging and waving).



Be careful – this rather abstract puppet can be quite scary!

Alternative B:

If you choose to play the Hermit, this needs to be a low-status role, with the Hermit being shy and timid, but protective of his friend. This Hermit might live in one of the caves up on Thistle Mountain. He knows a lot about what the giant feels and how he thinks and plenty about why he throws tantrums. He reports that the Giant has not come to the meeting because HE is afraid, and is worried that the meeting might be a trick designed by the Giantologist to trap him. The Hermit advises the children that he can pass on any messages or advice the children might be able to offer to help the Giant with his tantrum throwing and to prevent any damage to the village or its people. Once again you will need to choose a prop to act as a signal for this role – but don't share that with them this time as you want to surprise the children when the Hermit arrives instead of the Giant.

Step Eleven: Meeting the Giant or Hermit (resolving the tension)

* Once again, set up the town ready for meeting the Giant. Since you are not playing the Mayor, stress to the children as a last reminder that their main job is to try and stop his tantrums, and the fear and damage they are causing. Then count the drama in ('When I say 3 – 2 – 1 – The drama will start').



Should you choose the 'Shadow' option for the Giant, you may feel more comfortable if you enlist the help of the teacher aide or fellow teacher to be a townspeople and sit with the children on the other side of the screen.

** The townspeople meet with the Giant or the Hermit who appeals to them to keep the Giantologist away. The Giant is scared and wants the people's protection, especially from the Giantologist who he fears is planning to trap him and place him in a zoo or put him in a*

circus to be stared at! The Giant or Hermit also explains that the townspeople are not the only ones who are afraid. The Giant is actually quite terrified of “small people like them” and only has one “small friend” - the Hermit. He then goes on to explain that the tantrums, are because of a whole host of personal problem, including: his fear of the townspeople, other giants laughing at his language problem, the fact that he has no friends, etc. The Giant or Hermit also reminds the people that the Giant is not the only one with a tantrum problem – lots of people throw tantrums and suggests that they probably do as well! The townspeople can ask any questions they want and offer suggestions to help with the problems. The Giant or Hermit should not be too easily persuaded by the advice given, but should clearly show that the tantrums are not meant as a threat to anyone in the town. The Giant or Hermit departs claiming that they have helped a lot and that if they keep the Giantologist away, things will be better and none of them needs to be afraid.

* Cut the drama.

Step Twelve – Wrapping up the drama (reflection in role)

* Once again in role as the townspeople, the children report to the Giantologist who was not invited to attend the meeting (remember - it was a secret).



The great advantage of you not having been present as the Giantologist or the Mayor at the meeting with the Giant or Hermit is that you can now, admiringly ask the townspeople to tell you what has transpired. As such, this is a lovely reflective activity, where the children will report earnestly all that has just happened, and you can know nothing about any of it!

* *As the Giantologist, discuss with the townspeople the fears the Giant has about “small people like them”, and about being trapped and put in a zoo! The Giantologist should at first be outraged! How dare they hold a meeting without him/her? This was his/her big chance to trap a real giant and to eventually create a new theme park full of giants where children could come and look at them on display!*

* Provide plenty of time for the children to discuss this plan and (hopefully!) explain to the Giantologist why this is unacceptable. Eventually the Giantologist should leave in a huff saying that the people of Thistle Mountain have ruined all his/her plans!

* *Re-enter the room as the Mayor (the children will be fine with this rapid switch, so long as you signal it clearly with your props and quite different demeanour and purpose). Once again, question the children about what just happened – at both meetings.*

* *Focus on what they think should happen next and encourage them to work with a partner to make a list of ways to help the Giant (especially as the Mayor now feels very guilty about getting the Giantologist involved in the first place).*



Provide plenty of time for the children to respond to this session in various ways. They might suggest a letter to the Giant apologising for planning to trap him, a letter to the Giantologist possibly refusing payment, a list of tantrum avoidance tips, a list of ways the people of the village could help the Giant. They may perhaps decide that they would like to invite the Giant to further meetings or events in the town or meet with him up on the mountain etc.

Early writers can be supported by teacher as scribe, but remember that these materials can be written using role-play writing and are just as valid as teacher-written materials. The choice of response should be up to the children, because what they write needs to give them the chance to generate a personal message to the Giant and to connect with him on an emotional level.

Step Thirteen – Reflecting on the focus question (reflection out of role)

- * Out of role discuss the focus question with a particular emphasis on why everyone was so afraid. It is important here to focus on the fact that not only were the people in Thistle Mountain afraid, the Giant was scared too. Why?
- * Next consider the causes of the Giant's tantrums and compare these to why children and sometimes adults throw tantrums. Ask the children if being afraid makes people throw more tantrums?
- * Discuss the list of approaches to overcoming tantrums that have been offered to the Giant. Consider whether or not these might work for real children and adults too.



This discussion is important to make the learning potential of this drama more explicit. Note that this reflective discussion comes immediately after the end of the drama – striking while the iron is hot!

- * Invite the children to think about what the future might be like for the Giant now that he is trying to stop throwing tantrums and is friends with the people of Thistle Mountain. Invite each child to draw a picture of the happier Giant – what can they see him doing? Perhaps also think about adjectives and phrases that might be added to their picture to describe how the Giant might be feeling about his new circumstances.
- * Ask the children to think now about the drama itself and about their involvement in it. What was the most exciting part? What was difficult? What feelings did the drama create for them? Were there some moments or periods when they really felt as if they lived in Thistle Mountain?