To remember key aspects of planning, I think of the ABC. Then I recall that in drama we **ALL** need to agree to face a **BIG** problem that we all **CARE** about.

Firstly, ALL begin in the same role. It is much more effective if everyone imagines, for example, that they are zookeepers rather than all the different people who might work in a zoo. You can simply ask the students “Can we all agree to imagine that we look after animals in the zoo?” At the same time you can reveal “our problem,” for example, that a tiger cub has escaped. You may want to begin by adopting a role which is different from the students in order to present the problem to them. For example, you may be a person who thinks she has seen a tiger in a city park. However, even if you do initially take on a different role, you will soon want to take on the same role as the students in order to explore implications of the problem with them. The initial shared role is likely to be one which will remain central if drama work is sustained over time. However, everyone need not stay in the same role throughout. Students may adopt different functions or roles later if these are needed. For example, some may imagine that they are those responsible for handling the animals, those who speak to the press on behalf of the zoo, or people in the city who think they have seen the tiger cub.
Secondly, find a **BIG problem** to face.

Problems feel bigger when, for example, they are urgent, difficult, dangerous, mysterious, or secret. Zoo keepers who have lost a tiger cub feel they have a much bigger problem to face than zoo keepers who feed animals or who plan a new feline enclosure. This is not to say that these latter examples could not engage a class. I am making the point that big problems can sustain work over several hours or even weeks. In drama we want students to think deeply and consider alternative courses of action and their implications for others. The bigger the problem, the more difficulties there are to deal with and the more possibilities there are for action and reflection. If a tiger cub has escaped, then where might she go and how many ways are there to recapture her without anyone getting hurt? The problem will be more acute if the cub is hungry, if she is injured, or if we do not want to alarm the public. Dilemmas are inherent in the complexities of problems. What if the tiger cub is seen sleeping in the bushes in a children’s playground? How will we make sure that the children are moved to safety without them discovering or provoking what they may think is just a big pussy cat?
Thirdly, make sure that the whole class CARES about the problem they face. They must feel deeply enough about the problem to want to explore it together in imagination. Everyone cares about their own safety or survival. Nearly everyone cares about animals or people (especially children) who are in danger or in need. So a tiger cub who might injure humans is a problem nearly any class would care about. It is essential both to plan round what students care about and to check that students continue to care about their work, because if the students do not care about the problem they are pretending to face then the drama will soon be over for them. If some students seem to care less about one aspect of the problem than others, then try to find out what they do care about; some may care more about getting toddlers in a playground to safety than those who are working out how far the tiger cub might jump. It is also important to remember that one group may only care slightly about a problem that another group cares deeply about. A group of young children who love looking after animals in their preschool might care a great deal about how zookeepers would feed animals in the zoo. High school design students might care much more about planning a new enclosure for tigers than they would planning to capture an escaped cub.
I always plan more engaging work when I remember to keep these three ideas in mind.

I hope you find the ABC of drama useful.

Photo Note

The children in the photograph are drama students at the Delaware Cultural Arts Center. They are “A” David Myers, “B” Lindsay Tabor, and “C” Victoria Baker.