TRINITY COLLEGE LONDON

Drama games: Texts

Animal stories

30 minutes+ 8+ people

A rehearsed improvisation exercise in which students take on animal traits (physical, vocal and personality traits) to develop a character for both text and devised work.

- It would be useful to discuss a selection of animal characteristics with the group, eg tortoises are slow and eat lettuce, elephants never forget, foxes are sly, dogs are loyal. There may not be total consensus on these, but it gets students thinking about how we can anthropomorphise animals.
- It is important to emphasise to the group at this point that they will not play the role of an animal. Rather, they will be taking animal characteristics and applying them to a human character.
- Students are put into smaller groups. Each student within the smaller group chooses a different animal to base their character on. They must be clear what their animal's character traits are.
- The groups rehearse a scene that involves their chosen characters and includes a plot and dialogue. Students may be given the task of devising the scene, or it can be defined by the teacher, depending on the ability of the group.
- The scene can be set anywhere and can either be chosen by the students or the teacher. An imagined context like a restaurant allows students to think about the types of food their character might enjoy, for instance. Other locations could be a classroom, a stuck lift or the gates of heaven.
- When showing back, the audience should watch for clues indicating which animal each character is based on. The more successful students will have their animal correctly identified by the audience.
- This exercise could be adapted to suit all sorts of character types or archetypes, eg Commedia dell'arte, fairy tale characters, melodrama, pantomime.