

Animal stories

 30 minutes+  8+

 Inclusive mobility

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

- It would be useful to discuss a selection of animal characteristics with the group e.g. tortoises are slow and eat lettuce, elephants never forget, foxes are sly, dogs are loyal but stupid. 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 be playing 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 some sort of plot and dialogue. Students may be set the task of coming up with 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, the gates of heaven etc.
- 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/archetypes e.g. Commedia dell'arte, fairy-tale characters, melodrama, pantomime.