

DRAMA IN ACTION

Exercise: Humanimals

Grades: PreK - 5th

Time: 25 Minutes

Set-Up: Space to create and move

Supplies: Whiteboard, or large piece of paper and markers

Children love acting as animals; however, oftentimes when asked to play an animal, they use their bodies and voices in quite literal ways—primarily, crawling on all fours and making accompanying animal sounds. In this game, students will explore how actors use their bodies and voices to enact animal characters while maintaining their ability to use their body’s full range of motion – meaning, “how can I act out an animal without crawling around on all fours?”

Instructions:

STATUES

1. Introduce **actor neutral** and the concept of **freeze**.
 - a. “Walk around the class as yourself. In theater, we call movement without character added to it ‘neutral.’ With no voices and no touching anyone else, walk around the room.”
2. Guide students to **freeze** and move through space.
 - a. “Move through the room. When I call ‘Freeze!’ freeze wherever you are and turn your body into a statue. When I say, ‘Go!’ continue moving through the space.”
3. Guide **directional change**.
 - a. “Now, when I clap my hands, change direction and keep moving. I am looking for an instant change with focus and purpose. You can make a statue as quickly as changing direction. Now, move through the room. Freeze”
4. Lead **Statue Game**.
 - a. Cue students on which statues to make (examples: pencil, pineapple, fire fighter, teacher, pirate, wizard, fairy, etc.) Avoid animal statues at this point in the game. Continue moving through the room and making statues for as long as it feels right.
5. Now add **animals** to the mix.
 - a. Guide students to make statues that remain on two feet. Prompt students to not make statues on their hands and knees, or lying on the floor but try to keep them standing.
 - b. “Now make a statue of a dog. Show me what the statue would look like without touching the floor or being on your knees. Now, move through the room like a dog? Show me what a dog looks like without crawling. Can you be a dog without crawling?”

ANTHROPOMORPHIZED ANIMALS

1. “Many times, actors play characters that are animals—like in “A Tale of Peter Rabbit.” The challenge for actors is how to show an animal without crawling on the floor—because it can become very difficult for an audience to see and hear the character if the actor is crawling all the time.
2. How do they do that? First they start with **attributes and characteristics**—or what is the animal like? What actions does it do? What does it eat? How does it move? Etc.”

3. Explore the **character of a snake**. Using a large Post-it poster, solicit attributes from the students and compile a list. "We are all going to act and talk like a snake! First, all actors need information! Let's make a list of all the different attributes snakes have."
4. Write down **attributes**. Examples: slithers, hisses, swallows prey whole, sticks out tongue a lot, venomous, strikes fast, etc. Other attributes can be **personality traits** that are given to the animal, for example: sneaky, silent, crafty, sly, slippery, nervous, sleepy etc.
5. Lead class as they **activate the attributes** without crawling/rolling on the floor. "Let's move around like snakes but let's stay on our feet. How might you slither while moving through the room? What does sneaky look like? How might it look if you are sneaking up on your prey? What does a snake do with its tongue? Etc."
6. Add **vocal choices**. "Now, what might a snake's voice sound like? We wrote down that they are sneaky and that they hiss. Move through the room like a snake and add your best snakey voice. What might a snake say? Maybe, "ahhh, that little mouse looks delicious!" Etc.

PETER RABBIT

1. Repeat using the character of a **rabbit**. As well as attributes like, hops, has long ears, etc, lean into some descriptions from the play, such as twitches its nose a lot, eats carrots, freezes when afraid, etc.
2. Apply specific attributes/actions of the character of **Peter Rabbit** to the already explored character of rabbit: such as sneaking into McGregor's garden, etc.

Variations:

- For young kids (Pre-K-1st grade) keep the list of attributes short and simple. You could also draw pictures to represent attributes.
- Play a "charades" game of guessing what animal I am playing. Students (one at a time) will move and speak like an animal (without calling out what animal they are) while the audience guesses. The challenge: the actor must make specific physical and vocal choices that an audience can discern what animal you are.

Reflection Questions:

PRE-SHOW:

- Keep an eye out for the physical choices made by the actors to show us that they are rabbits. How do they move? What actions do they use?
- Listen for the vocal choices. What did a rabbit voice sound like?
- Some of the actors play multiple roles—how do they alter their voices when playing different characters?

POST-SHOW:

- What physical choices did you see the actors make to show their "rabbit-ness?"
- How did the actors use their voices to perform their character?
- How did the actors who played different characters change their voices?
- What was an action that you saw repeated many times in the play?