

**POLKA  
THEATRE**

**World-class theatre  
for children**



# **Operation Magic Carpet Activity Pack**

**Dear Teacher/Parent**

**We do hope you enjoyed the show! Here are a few activities for you to do with your children after you have seen the performance. Most of these exercises are drama based and are good for developing speaking and listening skills.**



Polka Theatre's production of Operation Magic Carpet is for ages 6 - 11. The majority of the games and exercises in this pack are aimed at KS2, though it would be possible to adapt some of the exercises for an older KS1 group.

## **CONTENTS**

### **Behind the Scenes**

A note from Samantha Ellis, writer.

Page 3

### **Warm Ups**

Games to get you started.

Page 4

### **Exercises**

Exercises to help your group explore the play further.

Page 7



## BEHIND THE SCENES

### A note from Samantha Ellis, writer:

Like Nomi, I was born in London to Iraqi parents who were both nostalgic and bitter about Baghdad, but mostly nostalgic. I was homesick for a place I had never seen. And because we couldn't go, I had to invent a version of Baghdad for myself. When my parents left gaps in their stories, I filled them in; for a long time I imagined they travelled everywhere by magic carpet. Baghdad was my dream-world. As I got older, I started trying to confront the reality of why my family had left Iraq after having lived there for over two thousand years, and to realise that the grownups around me were bewildered, struggling and uncertain. By the time it became possible (just) to go to Baghdad, in 2003, I realised it had changed so much that I would never get to see the Baghdad my parents grew up in. But the Baghdad I imagined as a child, magic carpets and all, is still a place I go to in my dreams, and no less valid a homeland for being half imagined.



## WARM UPS

**Buy This...!:** This game is inspired by Sinbad the Merchant; he has a knack of selling any old rubbish in the market place by convincing the crowd it's something else.

You will need a collection of items such as a scarf, a book, a bowl, a hat. Whatever you have to hand!

The group sits in a circle, with the items placed in the middle. Participants take it in turns to go into the circle and choose an item. They should announce to the rest of the group what it is, making something up that is not the object's real purpose. Their job is to try to 'sell' the object to the group. What makes it wonderful? Why should everyone buy it? What can it do?

The idea is to get brains warmed up and imaginations working, so encourage the group to be as wild as they like with their descriptions. If they can demonstrate their object physically too, so much the better.

**Explain the saying:** In the play, the Caliph mixes up his father's wise sayings so that they come out as nonsense. The people in the crowd try to make sense of what he has said, coming up with their own meanings. Challenge your group to do the same...

Choose three volunteers at a time. Read out one of the nonsense sayings below. Your volunteers then make up their own version of what the saying means and try to convince the rest of the group that they are right (encourage them to elaborate on their answer and give reasons). You might need to give a few examples of possible meanings of sayings to show your volunteers that anything that make up is OK; these are nonsense sayings after all! After the group has heard three possible meanings, they could vote on which one is the most convincing.

Here's the example from the play:

CALIPH            If you're drowning, why be scared of getting wet?

They all look confused.

YASMIN            Huh?

GENIE             That means I kill you!

SINBAD            No, it means I live!

YASMIN            Clearly, it means we all go swimming!

Page 4

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Here are some of the Caliph's other sayings:

God gives pomegranates to people with no teeth.  
The monkey, in his mother's eye, is a gazelle.  
If you're wet, why be scared of rain?  
One day honey, another day onions...  
A drowning man will even grab a snake.  
A book is like a garden you can carry in your pocket.  
A hungry stomach has no ears...  
The lazy woman got up and broke the plate...

You could also ask the group to see if they can make up their own nonsense sayings.

**Kabish Kaboom!** This is loosely based on the rock, paper, scissors formula. The difference is that this game is played in teams, and is on a much larger scale!

First, you need to teach the group three animal poses, as follows:

Snake: Put your palms together and move your hands and arms in a snake-like way whilst hissing.

Eagle: Spread out your arms as wings and say 'pa-caw pa-caw!'

Wolf: Make your hands into claws in front of you and howl to the moon.

Explain that in this game snake beats wolf (it can bite its leg), eagle beats snake (it can swoop down and pick it up in its talons) and wolf beats eagle (it can pounce when the eagle's on the ground and eat it!).

The game proceeds as follows:

Divide your group into two teams. The teams stand at opposite ends of the room, touching a wall and facing each other. Give the teams a moment to decide which animal they will be (they all have to agree on this, but keep it a secret from the other team!).

Now, the teams need to face each other and say, 'kabish kaboom, kabish kaboom, kabish kaboom'. On each 'kabish kaboom' everyone should take one very big step forwards and clap on 'boom'. Immediately after the chant, the teams should strike their animal pose and make the sound.

Whichever team wins the round (according to the rules above) should then chase the other team back to their wall. Whoever they can tag before they get back to the wall is 'stolen' into the other team. The aim is to have the biggest team when the game ends.

Page 5

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If both teams do the same animal, everyone should return to their own wall saying 'mutter mutter mutter.'

Play as many rounds of the game as you feel is appropriate. It can be fun to give the teams less and less time to discuss things between rounds so they have to develop strategies for fast and effective communication.

**Serious Sinbad:** In the play, Sinbad tells everyone that they're not allowed to smile. Here's a game to put that into practise...

The group stands in a circle. Tell them that you are Sinbad's henchman and you will be making sure no-one smiles or laughs when Sinbad is around. Choose someone from the group to start; they become Sinbad (and should be encouraged to do their best impression of him).

'Sinbad' must walk across the circle and stand facing somebody else. The following dialogue should take place.

Sinbad: Who am I?

Person: Sinbad.

Sinbad: Sinbad the what?

Person: Sinbad the Merchant.

Sinbad: Go and tell ...(insert name of someone else in the circle).

The person Sinbad spoke to then takes on the Sinbad role (the original Sinbad takes their place in the circle) and goes to repeat the conversation with whoever was nominated.

Anyone who laughs or smiles (whether part of the conversation or standing in the circle) is out and must sit down.

If your group is really good at being serious, you could let participants start to suggest a manner in which the message should be delivered, e.g. 'In the manner of an angry dog.'



## EXERCISES

The following exercises can help your group to explore the themes and style of Operation Magic Carpet.

**Street Scene:** This is an exercise to look at Nomi's Baghdad, which is based on her fantasies and the stories she's heard. It might be interesting to talk to your group about this version of Baghdad and how it might differ from the real world.

Divide the participants into two groups, who should stand at opposite sides of the room, facing each other. Explain that the space in between them is a street (and also their performance space). Whilst they are standing against the wall they are off-stage. The job of anyone off-stage is to help the audience (you!) to be able to concentrate on the performers (so no talking, distracting movements etc.).

Explain that you will put some music on (I love the Amelie soundtrack or Penguin Café Orchestra for this). When the music begins, participants should cross to the other side of the space, as though they are someone on the street. They should aim to cross the space, not hang around in the middle for a long time! Once they reach the other side, they are 'off-stage' again. They can cross the space as many times as they like, trying out different characters. There are two other rules: The group should never let the space go 'dead' (i.e. nobody on stage) and there should never be more than ten people in the space at any time.

Play the music, and let the first street scene play out. Chat to the group afterwards about what they liked, any interesting characters etc. (if you have a big group, you could split them and let them watch each other do a street scene). Did they talk or make sounds? Would they like to? Did anyone co-operate with someone else to form a twosome or a small group of characters?

Now, repeat the exercise but explain that you will create the Souk from Operation Magic Carpet. Talk to the group first about what they can remember from this scene. What characters were there (spice sellers etc.)? What might the weather be like? What sounds might you hear?

Let this new scene play out and again, seek feedback from the group.

**Extension:** This tends to be a really popular exercise that groups want to repeat again and again. If this is the case, you can add in new variables such as time of day, a significant event about to happen, weather etc. You could also allow the group to set a few key pieces of furniture in the space to begin to build that world. If interesting characters form, you could also allow the children to stay in the space for longer, having conversations with other characters.



**If I Were Caliph:** The Caliph in the play is the ruler of Baghdad. He dresses up as a fisherman so that he can hear what his people are really saying, and see what their lives are like. Sinbad wants to take over as Caliph so that he can have the power and influence.

This exercise lets your group explore what they would do if they were Caliph for a day...

Divide the participants into groups of about four. Ask them to create three tableau (frozen images) that show what they would do if they were Caliph for the day. Some things to think about when they do this are:

Is it clear who is in the image and what they are doing?  
What will your facial expressions show the audience? What about body language?  
Is your image interesting to look at? Think about using different levels.  
Can you hold this image very still?!

Ask each group to share their images with everyone and get the rest of the group to guess what is going on.

Next, ask the groups to bring their images to life for a short time. Ask them to start from their tableau and to find another strong image to end with. They should show what happens when one of them becomes Caliph for the day.

Now, ask them to see if they can link their few scenes together. Encourage them to pick one member of the group to step out of the scene and become a narrator. Their narration should begin, 'If I were Caliph for a day...'

Some things to think about could be:

What kind of Caliph are you?  
Are your intentions good or bad?  
What do you think the people you rule would think about you?  
How would you like them to treat you?  
What would be the best and worst thing about being Caliph?

**Narrator Interpreter:** In the play, Nomi can understand Arabic, though at first her family doesn't realise this! To demonstrate this to the audience, she clicks her fingers so the audience can hear the words in English. This exercise will allow the group to try out this dramatic device for themselves.

Divide the class into groups of three. Each group should choose one person to be narrator. The other two should play a market trader and a customer who are having an argument (if you've done the street scene exercise, they could choose characters from this).



First, allow the pairs to practise their argument. Tell them that the customer is trying to return something and the market trader won't return their money. Encourage them to use their whole bodies as they act and to think about gestures and facial expression.

Now, they should repeat the argument but they may only use nonsense words and noises. This is their made up language that no-one else can understand. Challenge them to think about how they can show what is happening in the argument even though we don't know what is being said.

Now, the narrator comes into play. First of all, allow them to introduce the scene. They should tell the audience where we are, who the characters are and loosely what is happening.

The scene begins in nonsense language. However, every time the narrator clicks his or her fingers (or claps, if that is easier!), the language should change to English. Another click and it changes back to nonsense. The pairs should work hard to keep the flow of the argument going as they shift between languages.

Let everyone have a go at being narrator as the group gets used to the exercise. It would be good to watch a few groups' work and invite feedback from the audience.

**Extension:** If the group picks this up quickly, you could add another power for the narrator. As well as the finger click, they can say 'stop'. At this point the action freezes completely and the narrator should tell the audience something about what's going on. Perhaps it's explaining why the two are arguing, or expressing an opinion about who is in the right. When the narrator says 'go', the scene resumes.

**Little Voice:** This is quite a tricky exercise for groups who are up for more of a challenge. It takes its inspiration from the scene in which Nomi talks to the genie inside the mango pickle jar.

Divide the group into pairs. One person is Nomi, the other is the genie. Give the person playing Nomi something to hold that can represent the jar (a plastic cup will do). The person playing the genie should stand a little distance away; their job is to provide a voice only. Ask the pairs to re-create the scene from the play, drawing on what they can remember.

The actor playing Nomi's job is to convince the audience that she's talking to a genie in a jar. Ask the group how they might show this (for example, look at the jar, not the person speaking as the genie). If the pairs show their work to each other, find an 'off-stage' place for the genie to stand.

**Extension:** This off-stage voiceover principle can be used to create completely new scenes. Ask the group if they can think of other 'little voices' that a character could interact with.

Page 9

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For example, it could be a character walking in the park when a squirrel starts to talk to them, someone whose teddy comes to life or someone about to take a bite of a sandwich that starts talking! There could be all sorts of weird and wonderful possibilities. The key thing is that one person is off-stage and just provides the voice; the on-stage person has to create the illusion that they're talking to something small on stage. This is quite a sophisticated skill, so it will really help to use props that the person on-stage can talk to.

**More Stories:** At the end of the play, Nomi says that she will have even more stories now. Ask your group to write the next story in Nomi's life.

Does she go on another journey?

Who does she meet?

Are some of the same characters in this story?

Nomi is clever, brave and resourceful; where will this take her next?

We would love to hear some of your groups' stories!