

The Borrowers Schools Activity Pack

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Polka Theatre

240 Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW19 1SB

+44 (0)20 8543 4888 www.polkatheatre.com

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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.



The Borrowers, adapted by Charles Way from Mary Norton's novel, is for ages 5 - 11. Most of the exercises in the pack can be used with Key Stage 1 and 2. Some adaptation might be necessary in some cases.

WARM UP GAMES

The following Borrowers themed games can help develop a range of skills with your class such as speaking and listening, turn taking and teamwork.

Make Me A...:

This game is a great way to help the children recall key moments from the play. It also encourages teamwork and spatial awareness.

Divide the class into groups of around five or six. Call out, 'Make me a...' and then choose an object or scene that relates to the play.

For example, 'Make me a...
....scary looking screwdriver.'
....dirty old boot.'
....working grandfather clock.'
....hungry crow.'

The groups then have to the count of ten to use their bodies to make that thing. They should be encouraged to work in silence.

With older groups, encourage the children to think about where they'd like their audience to be and what will make their poses interesting (such as using different levels and making physical or eye contact with one another).

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When they are ready, they should freeze in position. Give the groups an opportunity to look at each other's work.

Extension:

It can be fun to bring the object or scene to life on the count of three, encouraging the groups to think about appropriate movement and sound.

Borrowing from Mrs Driver:

In the play, we learn that Borrowers must wear light shoes so that they can sneak around upstairs undetected. This is a fun game in which players try to outwit Mrs Driver!

Ask the group to sit in a circle. Choose one person to be Mrs Driver. They should sit on a chair in the centre of the circle, wearing a blindfold. Place a bunch of keys (or similar small noise-making object) under the chair.

Silently point at someone to indicate that they will be the Borrower. The chosen person must walk all the way around the outside of the circle, before approaching Mrs Driver's chair and attempting to grab the keys. The aim is to 'borrow' the keys from Mrs Driver without being heard.

Each time Mrs Driver hears a noise, she must point towards the sound. If she points directly at the Borrower, their turn ends and somebody else can have a go.

What's in the Bag?:

When the Borrowers are forced out of their home, they don't have long to grab as many of their possessions as they can. This game encourages the children to recall this part of the play, and imagine what else might be packed in the bag.

Ask the group to sit in a circle. One person volunteers to be in the middle. Ask everyone to imagine that in front of them is the bag that the Borrowers packed hurriedly as they ran away from the smoke-filled house. The child in the middle must pretend to pull items from the bag in quick succession, naming each one as they go. Anything can be in the bag, and the items don't have to be related. For example, they might say:

'Some string, an acorn, a broken teacup, an elastic band...'

As soon as they hesitate or repeat a word, everyone else in the group must shout, 'What's in the bag? What's in the bag?' and the person in the middle should try to carry on. It's harder than you might imagine!

When the person in the middle has had enough, or completely run out of things to say, somebody else can have a go.

(Here are some of the things the Borrowers pack in the play. You could read this list to the class first: A candle, a thimble, a change of underclothes, an extra jersey, some tea, a hat pin, three lumps of sugar, two knitting needles, salt, pepper, soap and some hair curlers.)

Scary Cat:

Borrowers must always be careful not to run into a hungry cat! The aim of this game is to build a sense of tension. Tell your group that, in order for this to happen, they must work hard at being quiet and focussed.

Choose a volunteer to be 'Scary Cat'. Scary Cat stands in the centre of the room.

Everyone else should stand touching a wall.

Explain to the group that when you start to say 'tap, tap, tap' (or bang a slow beat on a drum) they must approach Scary Cat and make some form of physical contact.

Once everyone is making contact, choose a moment to shout 'Scary Cat!'

When this happens, Scary Cat comes to life with a loud 'meow!' and tries to tag as many people as possible before they can reach the safety of the wall.

Note: Make the group aware that you will only ever shout 'Scary Cat!' when everyone is focussed and quiet. Be prepared to wait!

Everyone who gets tagged, becomes part of Scary Cat. For round two, all the people making up Scary Cat should work out how to make the shape of her with their bodies (like in the 'Make Me A...' game above). They should all be in physical contact with each other.

Repeat the process until there's just one survivor left, or until everyone has become part of Scary Cat!

The Props Game:

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The Borrowers are adept at taking objects from the human world and putting them to a new use. This game gives the children the opportunity to think in a similar way. It will help children to think laterally and imaginatively and to take turns.

Before the class begins, gather a selection of simple props. For example, a scarf, a ball, a piece of paper etc. Try to find things that are very different in terms of shape, material etc.

Sit your group in a circle, with the props in the centre. Invite the children to take turns to enter the circle, choose a prop and demonstrate a new use for it. For example, a scarf could become a snake to be wrestled, or a giant's dental floss; a ball could become a crystal ball showing someone's future or the earth from far, far away.

Encourage the children to give a physical demonstration of their idea, rather than simply explaining it. If you would like to build confidence and establish a positive group dynamic, you could invite the class to give each idea a rapturous round of applause.

The Humans are Coming!

Borrowers have to learn how to escape detection from the dangerous humans. This is a fun warm up game that encourages children to practise being still and focussed.

Choose two people to be humans. They should stand at one end of the room, facing the wall.

Tell the rest of the group that they are Borrowers and should tiptoe around the room as though on a borrowing mission upstairs.

Instruct the humans that, once everyone's had a chance to tiptoe for a moment, they should say:

"I hate little things that creep and crawl!"

As soon as the group hears the words, everyone should say:

"The humans are coming! The humans are coming!" and run around in panic.

The humans should then turn around and come further into the space. When this happens, everyone must freeze. The humans then have 30 seconds to make as many people laugh as they can.

There are a couple of important rules to stick to:

Humans MAY NOT touch anyone!

Frozen Borrowers must have their eyes open and may not stand right against the wall.

After 30 seconds, anyone who laughed also becomes a human. The whole thing is repeated until there is one outright winner.

EXERCISES

The following longer exercises will help your pupils to recall and explore the plot and themes of *The Borrowers* through writing, speaking and listening, physical theatre and designing and making.

Rumours:

This game enables children to describe the world of the play, whilst adding their own imagined embellishments.

At the beginning of the play, Arrietty is desperate to explore the world upstairs. Everything she knows about it is based on rumours and snippets of information. This game explores that idea a little further.

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Explain to the group that you'd like them to imagine that they are Arrietty, curious about the world up above them. Ask everyone to think of one piece of information that they might have heard (or misheard) about that world. For example:

'I heard that cats have teeth that are bigger than a Borrower.'

'I heard that Human Beans like to eat Borrowers for their supper.'

On your command, everyone should find a partner and tell them their rumour. Everyone should then change their own rumour, merging it with the one they've just heard. For example:

'I heard that Human Beans have teeth as big as a Borrower and they eat Borrowers for their supper.'

The participants then keep switching partners, listening to each other's rumours and adapting their own each time.

At the end of the exercise, come into a circle and ask the children to share some of their rumours.

Extension:

You could use these rumours as a starter for some creative writing about Arrietty's view of the upstairs world.

Town and Country:

The action of *The Borrowers* takes place inside a house and outside in the country. The following exercises will encourage your class to think about the contrasts between the two locations.

You might choose to begin with a game of 'Make Me A...' (see above), choosing objects from inside and out.

Soundscapes:

First, ask everyone in the group to close their eyes and imagine the world underneath the floorboards from the beginning of the play. In particular, ask them to think about what sounds they might hear there.

Tell them that, in a moment, you would like them to make one of these sounds; this could be vocal, or made using the body or the floor. When you give the cue, ask everyone to make their sound and to keep repeating it until you tell them to stop.

When you have finished, discuss the impact of the soundscape with the group. Was it effective? Did anyone have a particular picture in their mind when you heard the sounds?

Now repeat the process for the countryside. Is there a big contrast between the two soundscapes?

Conducted soundscapes:

As above, but using a conductor. The conductor will point to people when it's time for them to start making their sound and will agree a signal for 'stop'. Other signals can be built in along the way if appropriate, for example raising and lowering volume, speeding up or slowing down.

In this version, it is easier to hear contributions from individuals before building up into a whole group soundscape.

Once signals have been agreed, you can pass the responsibility (and power!) of conducting to members of the group.

Small Group Soundscapes:

After the initial whole group soundscape, split into smaller groups of around five. Each group should build on the earlier ideas to rehearse a soundscape that will introduce the audience to one of the locations.

Ask each group to consider the emotion or atmosphere they would like to evoke. Encourage them to play with where they place the audience. How close will they come to the audience? Do they perform behind the audience members' backs? Could the audience be enclosed by performers? There should be time to play with lots of different ways to make sounds, perhaps introducing simple instruments too.

Once the audience is seated each time, ask them to close their eyes and listen carefully to each group's performance. Ask for feedback on what was successful, what images or feelings came to mind etc.

Postcards:

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Give each child a postcard sized piece of card. Ask everyone to choose whether they would like to be a town or country Borrower.

Ask the children to write a postcard to a Borrower who lives in the other location (town Borrowers write to the countryside and vice versa). In their postcard, they should describe life in their chosen location. They might also like to ask some questions.

The children can decorate the other side of the postcard with a drawing, painting or collage of their chosen location.

Adverts:

Divide the class into small groups of around four. Assign either 'town' or 'country' to each group. The challenge is to create an advert for that location, persuading other Borrowers that theirs is the very best place to live.

Encourage the groups to be as physical as possible in their performances, perhaps drawing inspiration from the 'Make Me A...' exercise. It can help to give each advert a strict time limit, say 1 minute.

Preparing to Go Borrowing:

In the play, Pod teaches Arrietty some of the rules of being a good Borrower. Begin by talking to your class about this to see what they can remember. How does one prepare for a borrowing trip? You might want to remind them of some key bits of advice from the play such as wearing light shoes and bringing two bags.

Working individually, ask the children to think of an action that a Borrower might do as they prepare for a trip upstairs. This could be lacing up their shoes or packing a bag. Give everyone a few moments to practise repeating their action over and over.

Repeat this another two times so that each child has three repeatable actions. Encourage them to think about varying levels and speeds to make their three actions interesting and suitably different from each other.

Once the group has practised all three actions, ask everyone to stand in 'neutral' (feet shoulder width apart, arms by the sides, standing up straight and ready to work). Explain that when you clap your hands once, everyone should do their first action, repeating it if necessary. Clap your hands twice for the second action, three times for the third.

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You can develop this into a movement sequence, grouping the children together in your performance space. It can be very effective to set this to music.

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 Arrietty meets the boy for the first time.

Divide the group into pairs. One person is Arrietty, the other is the boy. The person playing the boy should hold out his or her hand and imagine that tiny Arrietty is standing on it. The person playing Arrietty should stand a little distance away; their job is to provide a voice only.

Ask the pairs to have a go at re-creating the dialogue from the scene in the play, drawing on what they can remember. The actor playing the boy's job is to convince the audience that s/he is talking to a Borrower in the palm of their hand.

Ask the group how they might show this (for example, look at their hand, not the person speaking as Arrietty).

If the pairs show their work to each other, find an off-stage place for Arrietty to stand.

A Day in the Life:

Ask everyone in the group to choose a character from the play that interests them. Explain that everyone should work alone for this exercise. They must find a space and do their best not to interrupt what others are doing.

Tell the group that they are going to act out one day in the life of their character. Explain that you will talk them through different times of day and that they should act out what their character would be doing. Ask them to choose a day in which something unusual or exciting happens to their character.

Start the exercise at around 5 o'clock in the morning (this is your best chance that all the characters will be in bed!). You will need to talk the group through the day. Offer prompts at each stage, encouraging the children to think about all of the senses. For example:

'It's 5 o'clock in the morning. Find a space and get into the position your character would be in. Are you in bed? Are you asleep, or have you woken up already? If you're awake, what woke you? Where are you? Think about whether it's warm or cold, light or dark. Are there any sounds? What does the room smell like?

Now it's 6 o'clock. A few of you are waking up I see. How do you feel? Is this the time you always wake up, or is today special? What do you do now? Do you see anyone else? What do you have for breakfast?

It's 7 o'clock. Are you still asleep? What are you dreaming about? Maybe some characters are leaving their house already. What is the weather like outside? Where are you going? Do you want to go there? What can you smell and hear when you get outside? How do you feel today?

It's 8 o'clock. Where are you now? etc.'

Allow the exercise to go through a whole 24 hours. There will be times of day that you can skip through faster than others, when most people are asleep for example! Try to tailor your prompts to what you can see happening in the room.

When you have finished, give everyone the opportunity to give you feedback. Did they learn anything interesting about their character?

Diary Writing:

This is a good follow on exercise from the one above. Arrietty is a very keen diary writer, even persisting when she's lost her journal. Here are some extracts from her diary:

'Something's happened – happening – or about to happen. I feel so – different – I've seen the outer world. The great gleaming golden floor stretching away into the distance. It was like I dreamed of a gateway to a magical land. I've seen the sun – shall I never see it again? I talked to a human bean. It makes me wonder, who am I?'

'Its a glorious day – sunlit and rain washed. Here's a yellow buttercup – sticky and gleaming. Here is a whole hedge of roots and grasses, tiny ferns, with small sandy holes, with violet leaves and in there – are groups of crimson strawberries – wild and –'

Using the ideas from the 'Day in the Life' exercise, ask the children to create a diary entry for a particularly exciting day in the life of their chosen character.

And Finally...

We need you to help us create an underground world to make the Borrowers feel welcome during their stay at Polka.

Ask your class to get creative and make their own miniature object that might be found under the floorboards, using recycled, reused or 'borrowed' materials. They could also use a shoe box to create their own miniature 3D Borrower world or habitat and help us create a secret, underground home here at Polka.

Send their creations directly to us at **The Borrowers, Polka Theatre, 240 The Broadway, Wimbledon SW19 1SB** or drop them off at our Box Office next time you visit. We can't wait to include some of them in our exhibition; make sure you pop into Polka to visit the world you have helped us create.

The show is on from 16 June – 20 August and each week one of our Borrowers will pick their favourite item from the world and if your pupil is chosen they could win free tickets to a Polka Theatre production.

Please make sure each child includes their name, age, address, telephone number and email address as well as the name of a parent / carer so we can contact them if they win.

Please note we will be unable to return the items to you after the display.