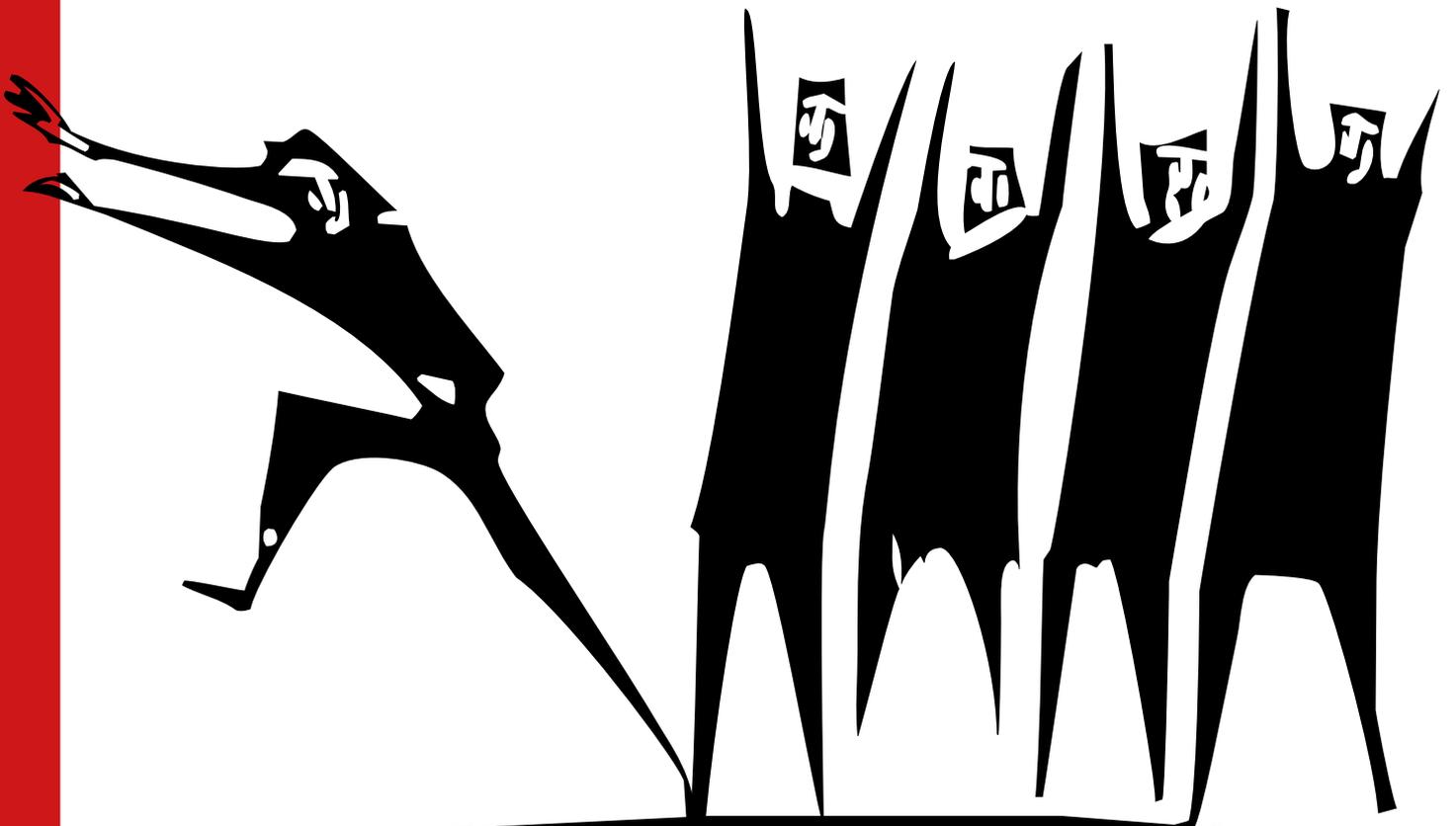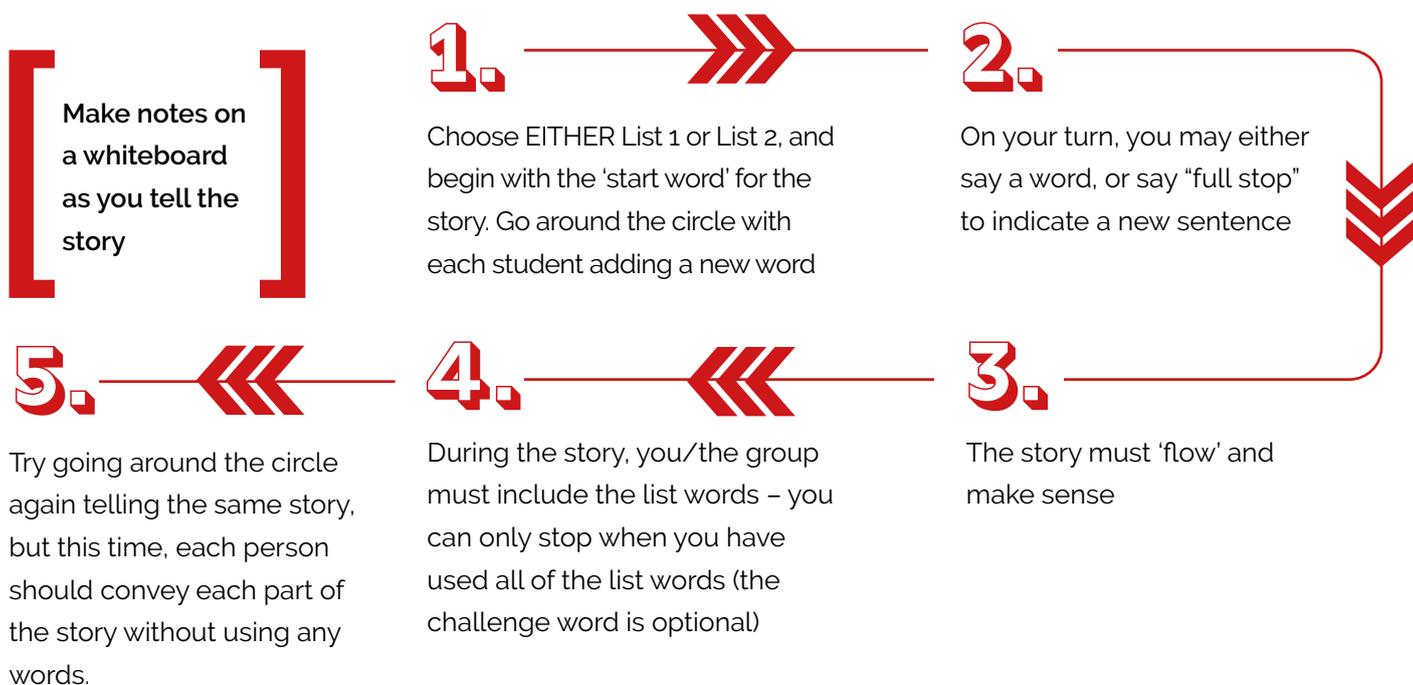# NON-VERBAL STORYTELLING

SIMPLE STORIES REVISITED

GIVE IT A GO

In the last session, we played this simple story game. This week, we're going to play the game again, but with a new twist. As a class, arrange yourselves in a circle.

[Make notes on a whiteboard as you tell the story]

1.
Choose EITHER List 1 or List 2, and begin with the 'start word' for the story. Go around the circle with each student adding a new word

2.
On your turn, you may either say a word, or say "full stop" to indicate a new sentence

3.
The story must 'flow' and make sense

4.
During the story, you/the group must include the list words – you can only stop when you have used all of the list words (the challenge word is optional)

5.
Try going around the circle again telling the same story, but this time, each person should convey each part of the story without using any words.

LIST 1
Start word: School

Words that must be included: Book, Uniform, Notes, Bus

Challenge word: Anomaly

LIST 2
Start word: School

Words that must be included: Daffodil, Spear, Potato, Piano

Challenge word: Velociraptor

?

- Do you think the story makes sense without using words?

- What are the challenges of trying to tell a story non-verbally?

PHYSICAL THEATRE

WATCH

What is physical theatre? One definition is:

Physical theatre is a form of theatre which emphasises the use of physical movement, as in dance and mime, for expression. It can be used alongside words, for example to bring out the emotional subtext of a performance, or instead of words. It is often abstract in style.

Watch the video about Headlong theatre company's production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time.* Then, note down three examples of how physical theatre can be used. Is there anything you would add to the definition above?

How can physical theatre be used?

1.

2.

3.

? Think back to any drama classes you might have done in or outside school (whether recently or longer ago). Have you used physical theatre in drama classes? What did you use it to convey?

GECKO THEATRE COMPANY

Gecko was founded by its Artistic Director Amit Lahav in 2001. The company creates bold, physical theatre that strives to capture human experiences.

Every element of a Gecko show is carefully crafted, from the physical movements of the performers to the costumes, the sound, the lighting and the stage design. Because they are so intricately crafted and do not have a traditional script, each production takes three years to make!

Gecko says that watching one of their shows should be like falling into a dream, with symbols and metaphors standing in for other experiences. Dreams are very personal experiences, so there is no right or wrong interpretation of a Gecko show – it is very much up to the individual audience member to find their own meanings.

HOW GECKO DEFINES PHYSICAL THEATRE

'Physical theatre is a broad term which can apply to a wide range of styles, from dance focused work that has a strong theatrical language, to text-based theatre that incorporates movement. For us physical theatre is a theatrical world that doesn't primarily use words to impart narrative or understanding. It is a world in which metaphor is central to the language. This allows us to use a multitude of theatrical devices including movement, puppetry, object manipulation and acted scenes that help to develop the journey.'

From Gecko Resource Pack (2021), pp. 9-10. www.geckotheatre.com/gecko-engage

THE OVERCOAT (2009-2011)

Main character Akakki works in a government department. The work they do there is boring and pointless. He is in love with his beautiful colleague, Natalia, but she does not reciprocate his feelings. Akakki thinks that she will like him if he is successful, so he competes to win the office prize of the overcoat.

Many of the physical sequences in the performance represent Akakki's fantasies and emotions, rather than telling a linear narrative. Each of the seven characters speaks in a different language, so that the emphasis is on the images and atmosphere rather than the words.

The show was inspired by Nikolai Gogol's short story, 'The Overcoat'. In the story, a clerk in a government department saves up for a new overcoat from his small salary, only for it to be stolen from him the first night he wears it.

Watch the clip from Gecko's show, *The Overcoat*. In groups, discuss the following questions:

What do you think is going on in this section of the show? Is there anything you can't explain? Is there anything else you notice about the performance?

Write down one image or movement that you found particularly effective. What do you think it was communicating?

YOUR PHYSICAL THEATRE

ACT IT OUT

Now it is your turn to try devising your own, 2-3-minute physical theatre piece.

1 **In your group, choose a scenario card. As a group, write a three-sentence story in response to the scenario with a beginning, middle and end.** There's space to write down your story on the next page, with an example. The story is not the focus of the exercise, so don't spend too long on this part and keep it as simple as possible.

2 **Next, as a group construct 3 freeze-frames representing the scenario – one each for the beginning, middle and end.**

The images in the freeze-frame can represent the story naturalistically like a photograph or be more abstract and use metaphors. For example, if you were creating a freeze-frame of a teenage character having to choose which of his/her parents to live with after a divorce, you could create an image of the teenager being pulled between his/her parents. This might focus the audience's attention more on the emotions of the character.

3 Once you have generated your freeze frames, your group should work on the transitions between the freeze frames to make them fluid movements. This should create a 2-3-minute performance piece. Make sure you rehearse the whole piece at least once.

Further Resources

If you're interested in finding out more about Gecko, or about physical theatre more generally, here are some additional resources you may like to explore in your own time!

Educational resources from Gecko theatre company: http://www.geckotheatre.com/gecko-engage

What's a Gecko Show like?: https://youtu.be/tJh4_uwl-yc

Top Tips on Making Theatre from Gecko: https://youtu.be/-G9fwO4RgpU

Other physical theatre companies you might like to research online: Frantic Assembly, RashDash, DV8, The Pappy Show.

EXAMPLE SCENARIO

The wedding

Beginning: Two characters are preparing to get married in front of their friends and family

Middle: The ex-partner of one of the characters has an objection to their marriage and tries to stop them getting married

End: The other partner storms out, leaving the wedding in chaos

YOUR SCENARIO

Beginning:

Middle:

End:

DRAW

If you like, you can draw a picture of your favourite freeze frame here: