



# PLAYFUL PLAYS

VOLUME ONE

David Farmer

## **Playful Plays (Volume One)**

This lively collection of short plays for children and young people is supported by inspirational drama games designed to bring creativity and fun to the rehearsal room. The stories are based on traditional folk-tales from countries including China, Ghana, Greece, Japan, Turkey and Scandinavia.

The plays can easily be performed by groups of children and young people on their own, or under the direction of an adult. They feature performance techniques such as mime, mask, freeze frames, audience participation, live music and song.

The author draws on his experience in the professional theatre world to provide helpful advice for the young director and actor including warm-ups, tips on line-learning and ideas for character development, as well as games to develop acting skills such as concentration, focus and working as an ensemble.

David Farmer is a freelance drama consultant, theatre director and author of several best-selling books on drama. His plays have been performed at theatres across London and the UK as well as in schools and festivals across the world.

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# Introduction

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This book is designed to encourage a playful approach to rehearsing and performing plays. The first part outlines a range of warm ups and activities that will help children and young people to explore drama skills and performance techniques. Of course, you may prefer to jump straight to the plays in the second part of the book if you are eager to get started.

The warm-ups are designed to prepare and “tune-up” the actor’s body, voice and mind. They can be practised in the order that you find them, or you may pick and choose whatever you need. The activities and drama games introduce simple techniques which can be used in performance. The games are designed to be fun and to encourage a creative and productive atmosphere during rehearsals.

Some plays are adapted from scripts previously performed by a professional theatre in education company, while others were written especially for this book. Every production of a play will be new, fresh and different depending on the actors, director, designers, musicians, prop and costume makers and everyone else involved. So make sure that you make your production one that the audience will not forget in a hurry!

Visit [dramaresource.com/playfulplays](http://dramaresource.com/playfulplays) to receive free resources including:

- ★ Music files to download and suggestions for other tracks to play
- ★ Artist illustrations to hang up or colour in
- ★ Even more drama games, tips and techniques!

## Warming Up

Just as musicians must tune their instruments, actors need to warm up their bodies and voices before a rehearsal or performance. The following exercises will raise your heart rate and ensure that your muscles are warm and supple. You will feel more awake in body and mind so that you can put your energy and concentration into your acting. If you want a full warm-up, do all the exercises in order. If you have less time, simply pick the ones that you think you need the most.

### Shake out

Stand with your feet slightly apart and shake your hands lightly. Continue by shaking both arms and hands together. Now, stop shaking your arms, lift one foot from the ground and wiggle it. Continue by shaking your whole leg. Swap over to the other leg. Shake your arms again and then your whole body, moving around on the spot. If you like, you can also gently hum while you are doing this – it makes a great sound and is good preparation for warming up the voice.



### Relax your shoulders

Roll your shoulders forwards three times, making big circles. Reverse the direction for another three rolls. Next, lift your shoulders high up towards your ears and breathe in deeply. Drop your shoulders as you breathe out. It helps if you make a sighing noise: Aa-aaa-ah! Do this three times. And once more for luck.

## Using the Stage

### Left, Right, Centre?

When you direct a play, you will sometimes need to tell the actors where to move to. If you ask them to move to the right, do you mean your right or their right? To solve this problem we talk about left and right from the point of view of the actor (see stage diagram on p.18). We use the terms *Stage Right* and *Stage Left* (or SR and SL).

If we ask the actors to move forwards or backwards, we come across the same problem and for this reason we use the terms *Upstage* and *Downstage* (in a traditional theatre the stage was always higher at the back than at the front to help the audience see all the actors).

If you combine these terms you can say things like “Please hop to Upstage Right” or “Exit dramatically Downstage Left”. If you make sure that you and the actors understand these instructions then rehearsals will run a lot more smoothly. You can make it fun to learn these names by playing the game *Upstage/Downstage*.

### Stage Pictures

An important job for the actors and director is creating the stage picture. This is the overall image showing what’s going on in a scene at any particular moment. When the audience looks at the stage they need to know where the focus is (which part of the scene is most important for them to look at). They should be able to see all the characters and their facial expressions so that they can understand what is happening between them.

The next couple of games help the cast to practise creating stage pictures, which can be used to inspire ideas for a scene.

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1 101 More Drama Games and Activities (Farmer 2012) p.42.



## Hot seating

Hot seating is a fun way of exploring the background and personality of characters. An actor playing a character is questioned by the rest of the group and makes up answers on the spur of the moment. This often brings unusual insights into the character.



One person sits on a chair in front of the group. Members of the audience start asking questions which may include facts like name, age and occupation as well as more personal issues such as likes and dislikes or reasons for behaving in particular ways. Some answers given by the actor may be based on known facts but it is likely that many responses will have to be made up. These are often the most interesting and amusing.

Hot seating gives the actor a chance to enjoy being in role and allows the audience to find out why a character behaved as they did. It doesn't matter if the actor doesn't know every fact about the character – it's not supposed to be a test of knowledge. If you encourage questions about personal feelings and motivations you may be surprised by how much detail can be invented at the drop of a hat!

## The Tug Of War

Based on a traditional story found in southern and East Africa.

Estimated running time: 6 minutes.

CAST: 4 (M/F)

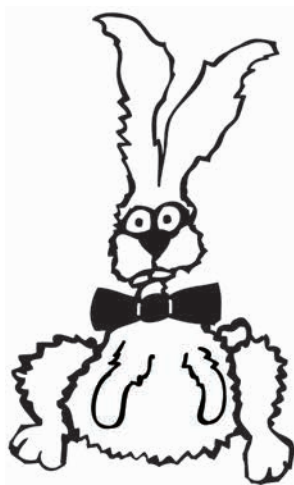
Hare, *a Trickster*

Hare's Wife

Hippo, *Hare's Aunt*

Elephant, *Hare's Uncle*

SAMPLE COPY



## Director's Notes

This short play is ideal for a small group. There is plenty of action and not too many lines to learn, so it shouldn't take long to rehearse.

**You will need:** A rope long enough to go across the stage. Simple costumes such as a shower cap and scrubbing brush for Hippo. Music for the tug of war and sound effects<sup>1</sup>.



### Tip:

#### *Playing Animal Characters*

The animal characters in these plays should be more human than beast. Think about the behaviour of the animals and the personality of the characters. Choose a couple of the animal's traits, such as a gruff voice for a dog, a hopping step for a hare or a twitchy nose for a rat. Read through the script until you have a clear idea of the character's personality.

Instead of using animal masks, try focussing on facial expression, voice and movement. Play *Follow your Nose* (p.24) to help you explore different ways of moving. Then choose a simple costume piece such as a hat, scarf, pair of glasses or jacket to help you express the character.

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1 See [www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays](http://www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays) for suggested music tracks.

*HARE is asleep. He wakes up, stretches and yawns.*

HARE: What a lovely sunny day! Time to eat a juicy carrot from my garden.

*HARE searches around his garden.*

HARE: What, no carrots? *(Looking at the audience.)* All I can see are weeds. Disgusting. *(Calls out.)* Wife, where are the carrots?

*HARE'S WIFE enters.*

HARE'S WIFE: There are **no** carrots left. You've eaten them all!

HARE: But I'm hungry!

HARE'S WIFE: Well then, you need to plant some more. You can start by digging up all those weeds!

*HARE'S WIFE exits.*

HARE: Dig up all the weeds? It's far too hot for that. *(Thinks.)* I've got a much better idea.

*HARE looks around and finds a long coil of rope. He puts it over his shoulder and walks off.*

*HIPPO enters, wearing a bath cap and holding a sponge or scrubbing brush.*

HIPPO: Here it is. The water hole. Wet and muddy as usual. Nice!

*HIPPO holds her nose and jumps in the water hole.*

*SOUND EFFECT: Water splash (cymbal crash).*

*HIPPO happily starts to scrub herself, humming a tune. HARE sneaks in.*

HARE: Boo!

HIPPO: Oh, Hare, you gave me quite a fright.

HARE: Sorry, Aunty Hippo. Would you play a game with me, please?

HIPPO: Can't you see that I'm busy right now? I'm having a bath!

HARE: I wondered if you would have a tug of war with me? I've got the rope here.

HIPPO: A tug of war? Don't be so silly. I'll soon beat you. Everyone knows a hippo is much stronger than a hare.

## The Strongest Person in the World

Based on a traditional story found in Japan, Korea and Europe.

Estimated running time: 10 minutes.

CAST: 6 (M) 2 (F)

Ratchel, *A teenage rat*

Scratchy, *Ratchel's cool friend*

Ma Rat, *Ratchel's mum*

Pa Rat, *Ratchel's dad*

Mr Sun

Mr Cloud

Mr Wind

Mr Wall

SAMPLE COPY



## Director's Notes

There is plenty of fun to be had with this play. The rats make excellent characters to develop, while Sun, Cloud and Wind give you opportunities to experiment with dance, movement and costume design.

**You will need:** Rhythmic journey music<sup>1</sup>. A cymbal or gong. The costumes can be simple or elaborate - it's up to you!



### *Staging the Journey*

Take time to experiment with the movement and dance sections in the play. Listening to different kinds of music can be inspiring. You can also try playing the game *Trickster* (p.15) as a way of coming up with ideas. You could set a journey theme before you start the game so that all the Leaders have to think of different ways of travelling when they are leading the movement. Soon you will have lots of suggestions to use.

As the rats go on their travels (p.47) make sure that different sections of the journey use mixed ways of moving and varying levels such as low, medium and high. Think about how you can show diverse landscapes and obstacles through mime and movement.

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1 See [www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays](http://www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays) for suggested music tracks.

*RACHEL and SCRATCHY enter, playing a chasing game. SCRATCHY leapfrogs over RACHEL.*

MA RAT: (Offstage) Rachel? Where are you?

RACHEL: You'd better go, Scratchy!

SCRATCHY: Oh, alright. See you later.

*SCRATCHY scratches himself, waves goodbye to RACHEL and exits.*

RACHEL: I'm here, Mum.

*MA RAT and PA RAT enter.*

PA RAT: Who was that, Rachel?

RACHEL: No-one, Dad. Just a friend.

MA RAT: Rachel, have you practised your tables today?

RACHEL: Yes, Mum. I gnawed through a table leg this morning.

PA RAT: Good girl! What lovely sharp teeth you have.

RACHEL: All the better to eat the piece of stinky cheese I found on the floor.



MA RAT: Good girl!

RACHEL: It was covered in green mould and dog hairs.

PA RAT: Delicious! Did you save some for us?

RACHEL: No, Dad, I ate it all up. Like a good girl.

PA AND MA: *(They smile at each other and say)* Good girl!

MA RAT: Off you go and play outside. Why don't you practise scurrying into dark holes?

RACHEL: OK Mum! I'll go and look for some under the old wall.

*RACHEL exits.*

MA RAT: Rachel is getting quite grown up now. I think it's time we found her a husband.

PA RAT: I'm sure that will be no problem. She has beautiful beady eyes, teeth as sharp as needles and a lovely long tail. She'll have young rats queuing up around the corner to be her husband.

MA RAT: *(Disappointed)* Young rats?

PA RAT: How about that friend of hers – Scratchy? He has such lovely long whiskers. He may be

slightly spotty but he's very good at jumping onto tables at restaurants.

MA RAT: He's just an ordinary rat. A girl as beautiful and talented as Ratchel deserves someone better than that. She should marry the strongest person in the world.

PA RAT: The strongest person in the world? I think I know who that is.

MA RAT: Well, what are you waiting for? Let's go and see him. We'll take Ratchel with us.

PA RAT: Ratchel!

RACHEL enters.

RACHEL: Yes, Dad?

PA RAT: We're going on a journey!

RACHEL: Where to?

PA RAT: To meet the strongest person in the world!

*MUSIC: Rhythmic journey music. MA, PA and RACHEL mime going on a long journey. Every now and then PA RAT points and they set off in a new direction. They get more and more tired until they finally arrive.*

## The Midas Touch

A Whoosh! storytelling performance based on the Greek Myth.

Estimated running time: 10 minutes.

CAST: 10-40 (M/F)

KING MIDAS

SILENUS, a satyr (half man, half goat)

SERVANTS

QUEEN

LITYERSES, Midas's son

DIONYSUS, a god

VARIOUS OBJECTS



## Director's Notes

This is a play that requires no rehearsal. That's because it is a Whoosh! storytelling performance, where one person reads the story and everyone else steps into the space to instantly create characters, objects and locations. (See p.22 for full details.)

The story can be read aloud, or the storyteller can tell it in his or her own words. The words in CAPITALS indicate characters and objects to be created by the players. The words in the story which are spoken by the characters can be repeated by the actors.

I have suggested moments when the storyteller can say "Whoosh!", although of course it can be said at any time that the action in the circle gets too busy.

**You will need:** A small bell or triangle to ring when objects turn to gold. Choose one reliable player who would like to do this.



### *Instant Scenes*

Warm up for this Whoosh! storytelling by playing *I Am A...* (p.20) or *Make Me A...* (p.21). These games will help the actors get used to creating scenes and objects very quickly so that they are ready to (literally) jump into the story.

## Why the Hippopotamus Wears No Coat

Based on a traditional story from Ghana.

Estimated running time: 10 minutes.

CAST: 4 - 10 or more (M/F)

NATURAL HISTORY TV PRESENTER

HIPPO

RAT

FIRE (DANCER)

FLAMES (DANCERS)

SINGERS



## Director's Notes

The play can be performed by just four people (TV Presenter, Hippo, Rat and Fire) or several more can be added as dancers and singers. There are opportunities for audience participation in the play as they help Hippo to remember the rhyme and he looks amongst them for ingredients for his party.

**You will need:** A fur coat for Hippo (which certainly shouldn't be real fur) and a tail for Rat. Fire and the Flames need to be good at dancing or movement. Their costumes can be bright fiery colours and they can wave ribbons on sticks (like Chinese ribbon dancing) to provide flame effects. The TV Presenter can speak into a pretend microphone. The River can be created by two actors or stage-hands rippling some nice blue material or with painted cardboard.



### Tip:

#### *Music*

The music can be live, recorded or a mixture of the two. Some African music or drumming would be good for Fire and the Flames to dance to. I have written a tune for the song (with sheet music on p.71) and you can download a recording of this at [www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays](http://www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays). Alternatively you can make up your own tune or simply chant the words.

The sound effects for the flickering flames can easily be made using maracas, shakers or dried peas in a plastic bottle.

## Fire's Coming

Words and Music by David Farmer

1. Par - rots squaw - king, Snakes are sna - king  
2. Jun - gle smo - king, Sparks are fly - ing

Mon - keys swing - ing Ground's a - sha - king  
Beasts have got no Place to hide - in.

Fi - re's com - ing Com - ing through the

Jun - gle

Fi - re's com - ing Com - ing through the

Jun - gle

The musical score is written in 4/4 time on a single treble clef staff. It consists of six lines of music. The first line has two verses of lyrics. The second line ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third line continues the melody. The fourth line has a large 'SAMPLE COPY' watermark across it. The fifth line has a double bar line. The sixth line ends with a double bar line.

## The Hungry Coat

Based on a traditional story from Aksehir, Turkey.

Estimated running time: 8-10 minutes.

CAST: 11-13 (M/F)

NASREDDIN

POSH LADY

POSH MAN

BOUNCER 1

BOUNCER 2

6-8 PARTY GOERS (They also play objects in NASREDDIN's house.)





## Director's Notes

This play and the following one are based on stories about Nasreddin (also known as the 'Hodja'), a famous character in Turkish folk stories. He is one of those people who is said to be a "wise fool" (perhaps one modern equivalent is Mr Bean). In this play you can have fun experimenting with transitions between scenes. At one point the Party Guests freeze and become objects in Nasreddin's home. This is a quick way of moving from one location to another without any need for scenery or prop changes.

**You will need:** Essential for this play are a posh coat and a shabby-looking coat. The food can be mimed, otherwise it may get messy!



### Tip:

#### *Transitions*

To help with ideas for the scene which takes place in Nasreddin's house, play *Ten Second Objects* (p.17) or *I Am A...* (p.20). These drama games will help the actors get used to creating objects quickly. Once you have decided how to create the objects you need, practise moving from a freeze-frame at the party to Nasreddin's house as smoothly as possible. It may help if you play some magical-sounding music to get the actors into the mood.

## The Talking Donkey

Based on a traditional story from Aksehir, Turkey.

Estimated running time: 5 minutes.

CAST: 6-16 (M/F)

*Aziz, a donkey vendor*

Nasreddin

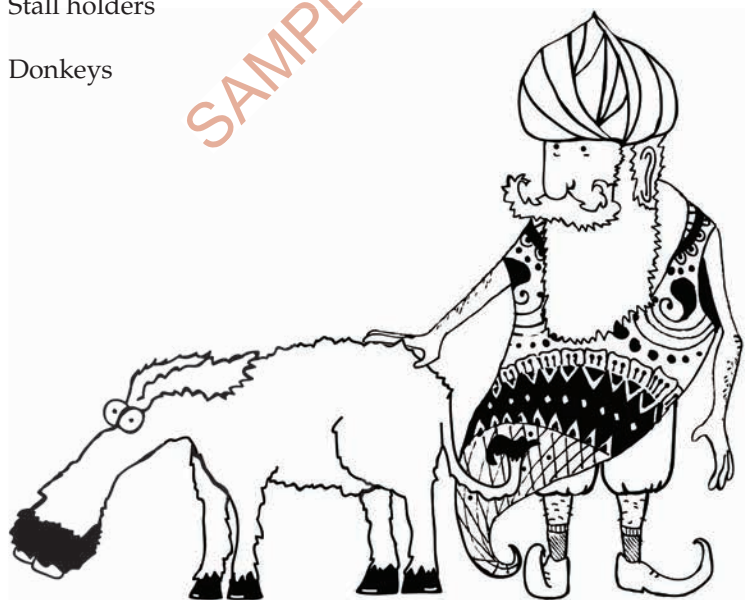
*Mustafa, a thief*

*Hasan, Mustafa's friend*

Shoppers

Stall holders

Donkeys



## Director's Notes

This play is based on another of the famous Turkish fables about the wise fool Nasreddin Hodja.

**You will need:** As there are donkeys in the play (as well as a man who pretends to be a donkey), it is useful to make some masks or donkey ears so that the audience always knows who's who! Don't forget that one donkey needs longer ears than the others. It's also good fun to add hoof sound effects using coconut shells.



### Tip:

#### *Crowd Scenes*

If you want to involve more actors then cast them as shoppers, donkeys and other characters in the market. Take time building up the market scene at the beginning and end. Even in a crowd scene each character should know why they are there - it's not enough to have a few people wandering around saying "rhubarb"! See how many different kinds of crowd characters you can come up with.

Scene One:           Market day.

*A few SHOPPERS, including MUSTAFA and HASAN, are walking through the market visiting the STALL HOLDERS. AZIZ enters, leading some DONKEYS. They make occasional braying sounds.*

AZIZ:               Donkeys for sale! Get your donkey here! Pull your cart! Plough your field! Free bag of carrots!

*One or two of the SHOPPERS look at the DONKEYS, stroking and patting them or looking at their teeth. NASREDDIN enters, carrying a big bag.*

AZIZ:               Good afternoon, sir. It looks like you've bought a lot today.

NASREDDIN:       Yes, enough for a hearty meal. Onions, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, bread, rice, melons....

*The SHOPPERS exit, apart from MUSTAFA and HASAN who quietly watch AZIZ and NASREDDIN.*

AZIZ:               Have you got far to travel? Your bag looks very heavy!

NASREDDIN:       It is quite a long way. About three hours'

walk to my village.

AZIZ: Just imagine if you had a strong donkey to carry your bag home for you!

NASREDDIN: That would be very nice. But I don't think I could afford one of your donkeys.

AZIZ: You'd be surprised! How much money have you got?

NASREDDIN: Well...

*NASREDDIN takes out his purse. AZIZ takes it and looks inside.*

AZIZ: You're Nasreddin, right?

NASREDDIN: That's my name.

AZIZ: You're well-known around this town. Many say you are a wise man.

*MUSTAFA and HASAN whisper to each other and giggle.*

AZIZ: For you we have a special price. *(Looks in the purse again.)* In fact, you have just the right amount in your purse. Would you like to take one now?

## **The Musicians of Bremen**

Based on a story from the Brothers Grimm.

Estimated running time: 12-15 minutes.

CAST: 9 (M/F)

DONKEY

DOG

CAT

ROOSTER

ROBBER 1: FIDDLESTICKS

ROBBER 2: TRICKSY

ROBBER 3: SNITCH

ROBBER 4: MUGGINS

TREE



## Director's Notes

This is the longest play in this volume. You will need more rehearsal time and to make sure that everyone keeps practising their lines (don't forget the tips on pages 28-9). The play gives the cast and director opportunities to have fun with the characters, action sequences and songs.

**You will need:** Half-masks to cover the eyes and nose would be good for the animal characters, or you might like to experiment with face make-up and some colourful costumes.



### Tip:

#### *Developing Characters*

There are two main groups of characters - the animals and the robbers. Take time to explore each character using some of the ideas on pages 24-6. Remember the animals are quite old so think about how to use your voices and bodies to show that.

All the characters can be played by boys or girls, so you may sometimes need to change "he" to "she" or the other way round.



*DONKEY enters slowly carrying a sack of corn on his back. The following can be sung to the tune of 'Clementine'.*

DONKEY: I'm a donkey  
In the farmyard  
And I used to be the best.  
But I'm old now  
And I'm wonky  
And it's time to have a rest.

*DONKEY puts down his sack and sits on it.*

FARMER: *(Offstage.)* Donkey! Have you finished that job yet?

DONKEY: I'd better carry this sack in,  
Or I'll get a whacking!

*DONKEY tries to carry the sack but stumbles. He looks at audience for sympathy. Brays.*

Ee-aw, ee-aw, ee-aw.

*FARMER enters.*

FARMER: Come on you lazy good-for-nothing donkey!



*DONKEY struggles with the sack and then drops it on the ground.*

DONKEY: Ee-aw. Ee-aw.

FARMER: I'm fed up with you! I'm going home for a cup of tea. By the time I come back, I expect you to have moved all fifty sacks of corn. Or else...

*FARMER makes a throat cutting sign and exits.  
DONKEY looks at audience and gulps loudly.*

DONKEY: What am I to do? I've been carrying sacks of corn my whole life. I can't help it if I'm old. I'm doing my best! And now he says...

*DONKEY holds his throat and gulps.*

DONKEY: At my age I should be munching away in a field of delicious green grass, not working like a slave. When I was young I used to dream of being a rock star. That's it! I'll run away to Bremen Town, to busk in the streets. Goodbye Farmer and goodbye corn!

*DONKEY kicks the sack of corn off stage and goes off in the opposite direction. DOG runs on and pants. He looks behind him.*

DOG: That's far enough. Hopefully, my nasty master won't bother looking for me now.

*(Listens.)* Oops! Too late, I think I can hear him coming.

*DOG pretends to be a tree, but he is still panting. DONKEY enters. DOG holds his breath. DONKEY walks past the tree then looks at it in a puzzled way. Eventually DOG has to start breathing again. He stops pretending to be a tree.*

DONKEY: Why were you pretending to be a tree? And why are you out of breath?

DOG: *(Panting.)* I've been running all morning - running away from my nasty master. I thought you were him. He says I'm too old to hunt any more.

DONKEY: And are you?

DOG: Well, I think I'm losing my sense of smell. Last time he sent me off to collect a duck, I came back with a cheese and pickle sandwich.



## Stone Soup

Based on a traditional story found across Europe.

Estimated running time: 6-8 minutes.

CAST: 6-30 M/F

THREE SOLDIERS

THREE NEIGHBOURS

VILLAGERS



## Director's Notes

The play can be performed by a small cast of half a dozen or a whole class, as you can have as many villagers as you like and maybe some extra soldiers. Just share the lines out. You could perform this play as a way of celebrating the harvest festival. Take your time with the section where the villagers are bringing lots of ingredients and setting the tablecloth for the feast.

**You will need:** A nice big cauldron or soup pot with a large spoon will provide a focus for the action. The ingredients can be real or simply painted on card. You will also need to make some special hats (see below).



### *The Neighbours*

Each NEIGHBOUR represents both a person and a house. One way to do this is for the actors to wear a hat shaped like the roof of a house. This could have a cardboard door coming down over the actor's face like a mask, or the actor could hold a cardboard cut-out of a door in front of his or her face. Another very simple solution is for the characters to simply hold up their hands like pages of a book in front of their faces. When the soldiers knock at their houses they can open the door (or their hands) to look out.

# Sources

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## **The Tug of War**

Based on a traditional story of the trickster Hare found in many versions across South and East Africa, including one told by Michael Rosen in *South and North, East and West* (Walker Books, London, 1992).

## **The Strongest Person in the World**

An adaptation of the traditional story *The White Rat* found in variations across Asia and Europe, retold by Michael Rosen in *South and North, East and West* (Walker Books, London, 1992).

## **The Midas Touch**

Based on the Greek myth by the poet Ovid, dating back to the 8th century.

## **Why the Hippopotamus Wears No Coat**

Based on a traditional story from the Krobo people of Ghana found in *West African Folktales* by Jack Berry (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1991).

## **The Hungry Coat and The Talking Donkey**

These two plays are based on the popular stories of Nasreddin Hodja, a philosopher and wise man said to come from Aksehir, Turkey – although many countries across Asia claim him as their own.

## **The Musicians of Bremen**

Based on a folktale recorded by the Brothers Grimm.

## **Stone Soup**

Based on a traditional story found in many variations across Europe and Scandinavia.

## Thank you for reading...

I hope you enjoyed these extracts and that you are ready to try out the plays!

- ★ Full details of '*Playful Plays*' can be found at [www.dramaresource.com/playful-plays-volume-1](http://www.dramaresource.com/playful-plays-volume-1)
- ★ Copies of the book may be purchased from [Amazon.co.uk](http://Amazon.co.uk) and [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)
- ★ The Resource Page (including colouring sheets and suggestions for music to use in your productions) can be found at [www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays](http://www.dramaresource.com/playfulplays)

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