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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Rhubarb Theatre Company

Teacher Pack

Finding Chester

Touring across UK and beyond in 2023-24

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Finding Chester – Arts Pack

Introduction

Rhubarb Theatre delivers creative and original theatrical experiences. Our work is mostly based in areas with the greatest need for access to the arts. Offering a diverse community programme, we deliver high quality family touring performances, street theatre, workshops, online projects, training, storytelling, and bespoke arts projects.

Finding Chester was created in response to the lockdown. During that time, **Mental Health** became more recognised and talked about. It also became evident that a percentage of our younger generation were also experiencing mental health issues. **Isolation** was acknowledged as a huge challenge and those two issues became the starting point to Finding Chester.

The story focuses on a lady called Edith who owns a cat. Edith has agoraphobia and won't leave her house; therefore, she relies on her local delivery service to bring everything to her door. When Chester, her cat, gets accidentally shut in their van, Edith is desperate to find out where her cat has gone. Unfortunately, Chester gets parcelled up in the depot and sent off all around the UK on a whistle stop tour!

Over the last three years Rhubarb Theatre worked with

- Child Bereavement UK
- Parents and bereavement counsellors at the Edward's Trust, Birmingham
- Green Synergy
- Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust: Healthy Minds
- Stepping Stones Theatre Company
- Odd Arts
- Development Plus
- Lincolnshire Young Minds

Through mentoring and advice, we have found a balance of bringing serious issues into mainstream theatre and workshop content, without stripping away the joy of storytelling. Finding Chester is an original story that places these themes within the structure, but also encourages us to laugh and enjoy the experience, without labouring the issues.

In the same vein, this Arts Pack has a mixture of fun drama games and exercises AND more focused activities that encourage discussion. We also have included a signposting section at the end, where children and adults can make contact for further support and information.

If you have any difficulty understanding how an activity should run, drop Rhubarb Theatre a quick email on info@rhubarbtheatre.co.uk and we'll chat you through it. You do not require any previous experience of drama – this is a support resource, to be used in whatever way you feel suits the needs of your young people. We have provided a key, but many of the activities can be adapted for most ages.

Key:

Suitable for KS1

Suitable for KS2

Suitable for both KS1 & KS2

Warm-ups

Rhubarb Theatre like to use warm up exercises and games to put people at their ease, get them up out of their chairs and joining in. Many children learn better when movement is incorporated.

Name Games – even if you have a group who know each other well, name games are a great warm-up.

Name & Action: Sit the group in a circle and start by saying your own name and do an action. Explain that the action can be something you enjoy doing, like reading or your favourite animal. The group then repeat your name and action. Go around the circle and ask each person to say their name and come up with an action – if an action has been done, for example if more than one child chooses football, ask for a variation. One could be miming ‘kicking’ a ball, another ‘heading’ a ball. Go round the circle and see if you can remember everyone’s action.

(This exercise allows children to have their own creative moment and improves memory).

Extension of Name & Action: Once you have gone around and practiced everyone’s name/action, stand the group up. You start by looking at someone across from you in the circle, saying their name and doing their action. As soon as you have, you slowly walk towards them (you are aiming for their place). Before you reach them, that person has to look at another person in the circle, say their name and do their action, before they can start to walk towards them. This game is good for the memory and makes people think on their feet. You can add to the drama by saying that if the person doesn’t move in time, before you have slowly crossed the circle, they are out.

Change: Stand the group in a circle and tell them you are going to put some music on and do an action. It could be a dance move, a sporty move, large move or small. But whatever you do, they all have to copy you. Then you will turn to the person on your left and say ‘change’. As soon as you do, that person must do a different move and the group copies them. The command of ‘change’ will go around the circle, so everyone gets to come up with a move and we all copy. Only 2 rules, first – if a move has been done, it can’t be repeated, they can come up with a variation, but not the same move. Second – you can’t stand and do nothing. Explain that everyone is able to move some parts of their bodies or make a funny face (we have done this game with children with little mobility). Put some fun music on and away you go.

Mirror: Ask the group to get into pairs. Give each pair an A and a B. A starts by leading and B by copying, then change around so both have a go. Each pair must stand opposite the other and slowly move different parts of their bodies. Their partner must copy as if looking in a mirror. The aim is to watch the pairs and if you can’t tell who is leading and who is following, they have become the perfect mirror.

Magic Wand: Get the group into a sitting circle and find something to represent a magic wand. Give it to one child. They must wave the wand at their neighbour and say...

“I turn you into a...” Whatever the child says, their neighbour must act out. E.g. a cat, a frog, a bunny.

Find the Cat: If you have a cat toy or something to represent it, show the group. One person steps out of the room - they are the seeker. Hide the cat. The children in the room must know where the cat is hidden, but must not tell the seeker. When the seeker returns to the room, the children clap if the seeker is getting close or not if the seeker is moving away from the hiding spot. You can also do this with musical instruments. Playing louder if the seeker is getting close and quieter if the seeker is further away.

How the themes within 'Finding Chester' link into the Curriculum:

- **Science:** shadow, demonstrating 'light and dark'.
- **History:** journey around UK highlights historic landmarks and events, cultural references.
- **Art:** references to famous pieces of classic art.
- **Geography:** we travel up and down the UK looking for Chester.
- **English:** creative rhyming rap that explains the story, characters with different regional accents.
- **Music:** cross cultural generation sharing of music from 1960's to modern.
- **PSHE:** explores story of 2 very different characters learning to work together and caring for others.
- **Health:** explores story of lady with agoraphobia (mental health) and overcoming it.
- **Drama:** The show is a devised story using song, mask, puppetry, shadow, dance, lots of visual inventiveness and different character representations

And...

- The relationship between our main characters brings **intergenerational** connections.
- The show's multiple themes provide a perfect inspiration for **creative writing**.
- The show is very visual and reaches children with **communication** difficulties.

(Science) **Shadow** – source an old OHP, or make a shadow box (cardboard box, one side tracing paper, place torch inside to create shadows through the screen)

Put class into groups of 3-5.

Ask them to choose a simple story they all know – fairy tales work well.

Drama Activities to support shadow:

In the groups, freeze frame (FF) the fairy tale – 3 FFs that show 3 *key moments* within the story, taken from the beginning, middle & end.

Play with FFs to not just portray people, but things: (e.g. get them to create a washing machine just using their bodies. A fish in bowl, a rocking chair, a spooky house).

Now ask them to act the whole story out fast. They only have 1 minute to show the whole story.

Play with the characters (get them acting out a stereotypical Granny and then a Big Bad Wolf – get the 2 characters to meet and ask what might happen next).

Ask them to find the character voices – ask them to try to speak like a witch, a frog, a queen, a bear.

Small voices – at this point you may have some in the group who don't project their voices. In pairs ask them to line up opposite their partner and start to tell each other what they had for breakfast. Now make everyone take a step back from their partner and repeat. Repeat this process until they are having to speak much louder in order to be heard over the other pairs.

At this point you could introduce 'Revolting Rhymes' and discuss alternate endings to their fairy tales.

Now return to the shadow.

- List what you need to make and assign who is making what.

- Create a script – decide if you are having a narrator who tells the whole story or more than one person speaking parts.
- Break down what needs to be said – don't use 10 words when 2 will do.
- The story needs a beginning, middle and end – remind them of their FF's.
- And practise a performance.
- Share with the class.

(History) Although the show is set in present day, there are references through music and historic places visited that give scope for exploration.

Places we mention:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| • London | Houses of Parliament/Buckingham Palace |
| • Leicester | Space Centre |
| • Nottingham | Robin Hood |
| • Lincolnshire | RAF |
| • York | Romans and Vikings |
| • Newcastle | Angel of the North/Football |
| • Chester | Zoo |
| • Bath | Roman baths |
| • Devon | Smuggling |
| • Hastings | Battle of Hastings |

The above is just our journey in the show, (in rehearsal we had double the places, but had to simplify the story to keep to our time frame). There are hundreds of places in the UK steeped in history, for example Leicester with King Richard III in Battle of Bosworth.

The Historic Time Machine

- Choose a place and decide what time in history you would like to visit.
- Research either with the class, or beforehand, to keep it a surprise.
- Ask the class to create a time-machine: break this down, ask what they think a time machine would need to work. (You often get answers such as 'metal'. Use the example of a car... if you stripped all the metal panels away, the car would still work.) Ideally, you're after answers such as buttons/ levers/ dials/ engine/ electricity. Get them working in groups to create the different aspects of the time-machine (each need movement & sound). Put on some 'science-y-sounding' music and countdown to make the time-machine work.
- Wherever you have chosen to travel, you can now role-play. For example, Nottingham. You may find yourself in Sherwood Forest – explain that back in that time the forest was huge and covered much more of the country. You might start by joining the merry men, setting up camp, making tree house, hunting for food, making a campfire. From there, you could have a rich carriage coming through the forest. Ask the merry men what they should do. ETC.

(Geography)

Masterful Marketing

- Put the class into groups of 5's or more.
- Lay out a map of the UK.

- c. Each group chooses one person. They must close their eyes and randomly place their finger on the map. Whatever is the nearest town, city or place of interest, that group must find out all they can about it.
- d. Explain that each group is the marketing and tourism specialists for that place. They have 30mins to put together a presentation that the rest of the group watches. Whoever has the best presentation, where people are interested in going to see that place and learn more, is the winner.

Give them an option of different presentation styles:

- 2 presenters reel off what their place has to offer as the rest of the group madly mime it.
- Like an action film, one person with dramatic voice reads out a point of interest, e.g. 'Swimming pool' and the group create a 'short' drama at the pool.
- The group make banners saying the points of interest and do funny freeze frames to accompany them.

(English)

Writing a story: Where do our story ideas come from?

For Rhubarb Theatre, they come from an inspirational moment, for example for our first show, 'Travelling Trousers' was about two strangers sharing stories about their holidays, with the content getting taller and taller and more and more unbelievable as they went on.

Our next show 'Mr Blue Sky', we took inspiration from the ELO song and decided that Mr Blue Sky was an imaginary friend.

For 'The Flying Flapper', inspiration for the story came from a photograph of my grandmother as a young vibrant woman posing by an aeroplane.

For 'Granny's Game', inspiration came from a real person in history called Nellie Bly.

Whenever we are creating a story, we get a large sheet of blank paper (wallpaper will do), throw down lots of pens and invite our actors to write or draw one thing that they might like in a story. If they are choosing to write, ask for one word, not a long essay, e.g. rocket, argument, robbery, etc.

This is a great way to start putting down ideas and getting inspiration from each other's ideas. Now get a fresh piece of paper and divide up into the following:

Where (e.g. London Eye, the Moon, Tokyo, underground, on a ship)

When (e.g. Ancient Greece, 1960's, present day, future)

Time (how long does the action take place over – 1 day, 1 hour, 100yrs)

Who (e.g. robber, granny, pirate, hairdresser – don't have names, for example, don't take David Beckham, but you can have famous footballer)

What (all stories need a challenge, obstruction, disagreement, lack of understanding, something that drives someone to do something interesting)

With all this information now let the group choose 1 from each section. With this information you now have the bones of a story.

At this point the group could storyboard it or freeze frame it. You could give everyone the same selection and ask them to all come up with their own story from it, then bring them back together and share. Or you could explore it as a group.

Additional step: Character Journey: If you really want to add depth and quality to the story, think about each character's journey; how the character changes as the story unfolds. For example, it might be someone who begins quite fearful, but becomes very courageous. This encourages young people to think about potential, possibility, how their choices and actions affects others.

Creative Writing and storytelling exercises

- **No because, Yes but, Yes and** – great for generating ideas and showing how language matters. Work in pairs and ask, 'Will you go on holiday with me'. Your partner must start by answering No because and give a reason.
- **123** – building up a simple story structure or characters. For **KS1** talk about the farmyard animals in the show and get them to replace the numbers with the animals. For **KS2** this exercise can start to develop a very short story.
- **Whistle stop story** – 'Tell me about the...' in pairs one person starts to tell a story, the other can stop them at any time and say, 'never mind that, tell me about the...' choosing something they have mentioned. The storyteller must then focus on that detail, before returning to their story.
- **Who, where, what, when** – See above. Gives more detail to stories.
- **Headline from newspaper** – Start with a headline for your story inspiration.
- **Picture from newspaper** - What happened before/after/create story (add music).
- **Letter circle** – One word each; a letter home to mum.
- **Write best ending you can think of** – Now give to another group to create 5min piece.
- **Fortunately** – one person starts a made-up story, the next person starts with 'fortunately...' the next person starts their sentence with 'unfortunately' and so on.
- **Suitcase of objects** – put participants into groups and ask them each to pick 1 item and discuss what kind of person would this belong to, compare ideas with each group. What age is the person, why are these items packed, how do the items connect, why has the character collected these items, what might be happening in this person's life, etc. Now ask them to create a short story from information they have already gleaned.

(PSHE/Health)

Mental Health: due to the lockdown, we have all experienced isolation and for many this was a challenging time. Mental health is a subject that has become more open as a result, and one of the reasons we chose to have our central character 'Edith Tiddles' suffer with agoraphobia.

The following are some exercises and games that can gently approach the subject, (stress, loneliness, depression, worry) and start a dialogue if needed:

Questions to find out how the group are feeling:

- Question: If you were a weather/colour today, what would you be?
- Question: If you could open a door to anywhere, where would you go?

Although using their imagination, the answers can be very telling. If you feel it is right, ask why they chose that colour or place.

Expressions Dice

Make a large dice (square cardboard box) and put a different expression on each side (happy, sad, surprised, angry, etc). Start by throwing the dice and the child who has thrown it must make that expression. Once they are all comfortable with that stage, start to vocalise it “hello my name is ---- and I am very happy”. Go around the circle giving them different emotions and getting them to sound like that emotion as well as bringing it into their face. After that, get them moving around the room like that emotion, e.g. if they are sad, it should be a slow walk, shoulders and head drooped, etc. You can call out an emotion, so they get to try out different ones. Eventually I like to lead this into each child walking into a ‘stage’ area as an emotion, saying the ‘hello’ line in the voice and showing the right face, before moving off.

Finding out about people: Sit the group in a circle and ask them in turn to tell 2 truths and a lie about themselves. The group guess which is the lie.

Now put the group in pairs. Each must find out **2 similarities and 2 differences** they have with each other, then share with the group.

Swap pairs – repeat the 2 similarities & 2 differences, but this time the pair must show as images/freeze frames two of the things they share or their two differences. Share with the group.

Changing Places Game – (Ideally, come up with 20 questions in advance, such as ‘do you have a dog?’) Sit the group in a circle, ask a question. Any of the group answering ‘yes’ change places with another person who also said ‘yes’. If only one person answered ‘yes’, they can choose to have 30 seconds in the circle, telling the group about that subject.

Questions might include – ‘anyone felt sad about coming to school today’ (shared experiences and allowing you to pick up on a child’s concerns.)

Agree/disagree – give out statements, e.g.

- Pineapple belongs on pizza.
- People should be allowed to block roads to demonstrate.
- Only adults suffer with mental health.

DISCUSS

Challenges Paper – write out A4 pages with challenges the group might face:

- Schoolwork
- Friends, or are they?
- Family
- Bullying
- Worries at home.

Ask the group if there are any more you need to add, then place the pages on the floor or on tables. Ask the group to choose 1 that they most connect to and stand next to it. Discuss why they have chosen that one.

Dangers & Shields

Now talk about their danger zones (as in paper above). If appropriate, ask for more details, e.g. ‘family’ – my gran is in hospital.

Now discuss as group what they can do to make themselves feel better, ‘talking to someone’, ‘exercise’, ‘meditation’.

Sharing problems through a character

The group must create someone of their age, the character believably could be in their class.

On a large sheet of paper draw head and body outline of a character. Ask the group to build the character and come up with their background, for example:

- Name
- Age
- Where do they live?
- Where do they go to school?
- What are their hobbies?
- Who do they live with?

Write this background information next to the character outline.

Now work on the inside of the person – ask group ‘how the character is feeling and why’? Write this on the inside of the outline.

Start to work with the character – try out freeze frames and short scenes to show why they feel that way.

Talk about ‘what can Bob/Jane do?’ ‘What is a good outcome’?

Write monologue from Bob’s perspective / spoken word / poem.

Role play is a great way to help people connect with each other and understand something about themselves.

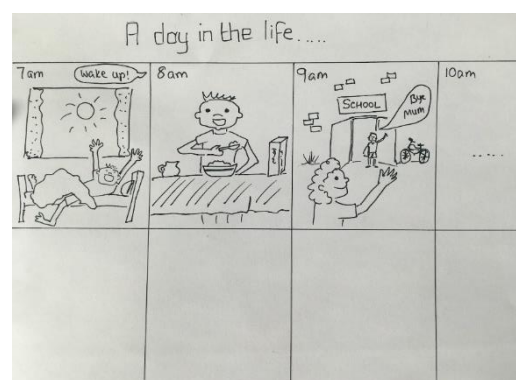
Start by asking the group what sort of big and little changes they are dealing with. Allow the children to discuss this for a while. It may be moving to a new school, best friend moving away, or something more challenging. Once the group have latched onto a subject, such as ‘new school’, lay out a piece of paper and ask them to write down concerns or thoughts they have about this change.

Talk through what has been written and take some of the ideas, i.e. there might be concerns about bullies or not being able to cope with the workload. Put the class into groups of 5’s and ask them to create a short scene to show the concern, e.g. a child goes into a playground and is surrounded by bullies. Make sure to ask them to stop the scene before it moves too far.

Show each scene and freeze the action – allow the class to discuss how to deal with the challenge, then play out the scene with the agreed ending.

A Day in the Life of: In the show we see a glimpse into Edith’s life in her flat. Can you write or draw a day in her life. What do you think she does from the start of her day to the end. Then think about a day in your life. You could use a timeline if you wanted or think of it as a film and draw it in scenes.

It could also be a diary entry with your own drawings.



(Drama) Finding Chester has a variety of **characters** within the story, play with the physicality and voices:

1. Get the group to walk around the room as themselves, tell them to use the whole space and be aware of not bumping into others.
2. Now ask them to think about how they will hold themselves differently when they walk around like...
 - A farmer (ask them to find the characters voice, what might they say)
 - A posh art gallery owner
 - A pregnant lady
 - An old lady
 - A dancer
 - A scruffy street cat

Now ask the group to think about *status*.

Kings breakfast: Sit the group in a circle. The person to your left is higher status, the person to your right is lower. One person is the king, and no-one is higher. One person is the rat catcher, there is no-one lower. The king starts by ordering breakfast. They only speak to the person on their right. That person must be very humble when talking to the king, but then can turn to the person on their right and be very bossy.

However, as the kings order for breakfast is being passed, the rat catcher might have problems, such as the oven isn't working, there's a flood in the kitchen... all of these problems must be passed the opposite way around the circle.

Is Trevor a higher status than Taz?

Is the Art Gallery owner higher status than Trevor?

Discuss as a group the different characters in the show and ask them to put the characters in status order, highest to lowest.

Characters: Bring out a big box of hats and ask the children to each choose a hat. Sitting in a circle, explain that each child has think about who they might be when they wear the hat, what's their job, what's their name, what's their age, what do they sound like when they talk. Now when they are ready, ask for volunteers to stand up and say hello as their new character. This is a great starting point once everyone has a new character, but it may take a bit of time for all the children to want to participate, so keep this gradual.

Slow mo: We play with different speeds in the show. Start by getting the group to walk around the space at their normal pace. They must not walk into each other. Ask them to find the group's pace. If they are faster than everyone else, they must slow down. Equally if they are slower than everyone, get them to speed up.

Now ask the group to 'stop'. Tell them that 'as a group' they will start to move, but no one will lead. See if you can get them to work as a team.

Once again, stop the group. Tell them that this time as they move around, it must be in 'slow mo' - demonstrate if need be. Once again, they will start together, no one leads.

Now do a slow mo race - this teaches them motor skills.

The Art Gallery: Within Finding Chester there is an Art Gallery scene where we show several famous paintings. Go online and choose/print out some famous works of art. They can have people in them, but equally, art without people works.

Put the class into groups of 3-5's and ask them to choose a picture. They must try to copy it as a freeze frame as closely as they can. For example, if one of the pieces was Monet 'The Bridge', they might have created the bridge using their bodies as the shape.

Now ask the group to look at each freeze frame and see if they can guess which picture each group decided to copy.

Mime: Finding Chester contains quite a lot of mime. It relies on the audience using their imaginations and means we can represent a van on stage or a block of flats, without actually having it there.

Mime game: sit the class in a circle. Someone is in the middle miming an action. It could be doing their teeth, painting a picture, making a bed, etc. One person in the circle asks, 'what are you doing?' The 'mime-artist' must then say something that they want to see the next person miming, for example 'I'm milking a cow'. They swap places and that person then becomes the 'mime-artist' in the middle, miming the action of milking a cow. Then the next person in the circle asks, 'what are you doing?' And they can now say whatever they want to see that person miming, for example 'I'm walking on the moon'.

Developing the Drama: Talk about street alley cats. Imagine finding yourself somewhere that's scary. Talk about examples. In groups, choose one and act out a scene. In the show Finding Chester, Taz finds the cat, which makes the situation safe. Now discuss what would make the situation better for your scene, how could you give it a happy ending.

Game 'Prisoner': Edith is a prisoner in her own home through her own choice – play the game. Place a circle of chairs, all chairs have a person standing behind them and some chairs have a player sitting in them. If the person standing has no one in their chair, they can wink at one of the players in another chair, which means that person must try to escape and run to the new chair. However, if the person behind their chair taps them on the shoulder, they have to remain in their first chair.

(Dance & Music) Back story - Edith Tiddles was a famous dancer, who danced in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical 'Cats'. That show was created from famous poetry of T. S. Eliot "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats". The poetry was turned into songs and dances performed by 'street cats'.

Cat Dance: Ask the group to imagine they are cats who live on the streets. If you need inspiration, show them a clip of Top Cat or Aristocrats. Get them moving around like cats, find a voice/meow. Now put on 'Stray Cat Strut' or one of the tracks from 'Cat's'. Put the class into groups and let them come up with a short dance or to movement to it. Share each and talk about what worked, what were the children's favourite moves. If time, bring parts of each group's dance together to develop a longer piece to perform for assembly.

It's a Rap: Trev and Taz journey around the UK looking for Chester. We show this through a rap. When we devised the show, we started by selecting places that interested us. We found out what we could about that place and then took our favourite parts and turned it into a 4 or 8 lined rap.

E.g. There's a big open sky of red, white and blue.
 Lincolnshire Red Arrows flying over you.
 Twisting and turning making a heart shape.
 Flying so fast, you'd miss it in a heartbeat.

In groups choose a place, research it and come up with a short rap. Perform to the rest of the class.

Finding Chester – Post Show Work

The show will provoke lots of questions from the audience. Here are a few questions that might be interesting to encourage discussion.

Who do you think Trev and Taz are, what is their job in the story? Maybe the class could come up with their back story.

What do you think will happen to Edith and Chester next? – continue the story. Or choose another character and continue their story.

What different ways did Rhubarb Theatre use to tell the stories?

Why do you think Edith wouldn't step out of her house?

Where did we travel to?

Where would you travel to if you could go anywhere?

How did 'Finding Chester' make you feel?

What was your favourite part and why?

Draw the design of the set and consider how it was made.

What other title might we have given the play?

Why didn't Rhubarb Theatre use many words?

Why did Rhubarb Theatre use masks?

If you are experiencing bereavement, mental health or loss, you are not alone.

There is support for you:

Child Bereavement UK

www.childbereavementuk.org or 0800 02 888 40

Childline

Helpline 0800 1111

Samaritans UK

Helpline 116 123

SHINE

www.lincsshine.co.uk/information-support

Lincolnshire Mental Health Helpline

0800 001 4331

Lincolnshire Suicide SAFE

www.left.nhs.uk/contact-us/need-help-now

Lincolnshire Young Minds

www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people/lincolnshire/home