



## Drama activity

### Suitcase characters

Devise a character from scratch. Make him or her a character who directly addresses the audience. Make the character versatile – they might appear in a variety of performance situations, and portable – store the character’s costumes, props, and script in a suitcase.

### Building a character

#### 1. Starting points

- Choose any article from the newspaper. Identify potential characters from the story. List any of the characters’ physical or psychological aspects that interest you.

Or

- Take a writer’s walk to your local shopping mall, main-street, playground, or anywhere there are plenty of people. Record physical aspects of the people who interest you. Note their age, size, height, how they walk and talk, what they are wearing, and anything you hear them say and how they say it. Note anything unusual about them. Ask yourself why are they interesting, or funny, or sad.

Or

- Think what someone would be like if they were the opposite of you. What would they wear? How would they speak or walk? What would their personality be like – outgoing, shy? Make notes on your opposite’s characteristics.

#### 2. Exploring costume

- A useful first step in exploring costume is to think about disguising yourself – after all, you’re creating a character that might be very different from you.
- Assemble some costume for your character. Start at the feet – what shoes do they wear (if they wear any at all). Shoes will affect how you/your character walks, so they are a good place to start.
- Hats can also be an instant way to explore your character – the audience’s eyes is often drawn to an actor’s face and a hat can change the shape of your head, disguise your hair, and give a strong sense of character. Also experiment with costume that changes the shape of your face, like glasses and wigs.
- Gather as many jumble sale or op-shop clothes as you can and work with a partner to dress each other. This is fun and gives you an opportunity to play with the costume.

Drama activity

Accessed from: Te Kete Ipurangi, NZ Monologues for Years 11–13  
[http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/drama/nzmonologues/index\\_e.php](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/arts/drama/nzmonologues/index_e.php)

- Be adventurous with how you wear your costume – some characters may wear ordinary clothes in extraordinary ways or dress very simply. Even working with a length of fabric can be useful in exploring your character’s costume.
- Try changing the shape of your body with costume – make yourself seem bigger or fatter by stuffing the costume; make yourself look taller by stuffing a hat; give yourself muscles by stuffing your sleeves. You can also create deformities – a hump back, a swollen belly, a lump or a bump – by playing with your costume.

### 3. Exploring physicality and voice

- Walk around the space as yourself. This is called walking in neutral – just you being you. Walk with energy and direction, keeping your gaze up and out towards the rest of the space you are walking in. (Walking with energy is important because you’ll need to build up energy to explore your character physically.)
- Be aware of everyone else in the space and avoid bumping into them – think about working in your own world but be aware of others working around you.
- Now focus on your walk (the way you hold yourself, where you are looking, where you place your weight, whether you walk heavily or lightly, whether you walk fast or slowly, whether you swing your hips or walk stiffly. Do you have a spring in your step? Do you skip a little? What do you do with your hands while you’re walking?)
- Choose one aspect of your walk and exaggerate it.
- Go back to neutral.
- Choose a different aspect of your walk and exaggerate that.
- Go back to neutral.
- Choose either a third aspect of your walk to exaggerate or one of the first two and continue to push that exaggerated physicality as you walk around, but now greeting others whenever you make eye contact with them. Seek others out. Use your voice. How does this exaggerated walk affect the way you speak?
- Continue to explore and develop this character’s walk and voice by greeting and interacting with other characters.

### Animal extension

- Think of an animal that represents the character you’re developing.
- If you think your character walks like a chicken, for example, try moving around the space as a chicken – squawking, pecking, clucking, flapping – and then return to your character-walk.

- Try changing between animal, character, and neutral. Be aware of the differences between each.
- Find a way of integrating a few of your animal aspects into your character and toning down the more exaggerated aspects of your character-walk to create a character who moves and speaks in a way that feels natural without losing their particularities of their rhythm and speech.

#### 4. Exploring in a group

- Work in costume and with any props you've found useful for your character.
- Introduce your character to the others and tell them three things about you. This will help you find your character's name – if you haven't already.
- Go on another walk around the space and introduce your character to the group again, only this time reveal something about yourself – my biggest secret, for example, or the best day of my life. Improvise: don't be afraid to say anything that comes into your head. The more comfortable you are with your character the more you can explore their interests and obsessions. (It might help to have a friend "scribe" or record what you say since you might produce some character gems you'd otherwise forget.)
- Put your character in improvised situations where they have to interact with other characters; for example, the job interview, or at the bus stop.
- Have others hot seat your character by asking him/her specific questions to bring out more aspects of their personality.

TIP: If you feel you're losing your character at any time, go back to square one – take yourself on a character-walk around the space, exaggerating all physical and vocal aspects. This will help you re-discover your character's basis and energy.

#### 5. Putting it all together

- Write a monologue for your character, based, perhaps, on your earlier improvisations or on a new topic. Choose a topic that reveals something new about your character – regrets, successes, secrets, mistakes, ambitions, and lost loves are all excellent starting points.
- Write in the first-person.
- Remember the character is going to address the audience directly, although you may write as if they are talking to another character.
- Rehearse your monologue aloud and practice in front of an audience. Find the joy in performing your character.