



TEACHER PACK

NIPPON TV



JOE HISAISHI AND ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY PRESENT  
STUDIO GHIBLI'S

# MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORÖ

in collaboration with IMPROBABLE and NIPPON TV  
Adapted by TOM MORTON-SMITH from the feature animation by HAYAO MIYAZAKI  
with music by JOE HISAISHI | Directed by PHELM McDERMOTT

Improbable



## ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack supports Joe Hisaishi and the RSC's production of Studio Ghibli's *MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORO*, in collaboration with Improbable and Nippon TV, directed by Phelim McDermott. The pack is kindly supported by the Japan Society.

The activities provided in this pack can be used either as stand-alone practical approaches to this story or as supporting activities for students seeing the production. They have been designed with KS3 and KS4 students in mind but can be adapted for other age groups. Some are best suited to an open space such as a hall, but many can be used in a classroom.

CONTENTS	PAGE
About this Pack	1
About the Production	1
Exploring the Story	2
Introducing the Characters	5
Exploring the Themes	9
Exploring Theatre Making	14
Use of Puppetry	17
Japanese Origins	21
Resources	25

*These symbols are used throughout the pack:*



### READ

Notes from production, background info or extracts



### ACTIVITY

A practical or open space activity



### WRITE

A classroom writing or discussion activity



### LINKS

Useful web addresses and research tasks

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

*My Neighbour Totoro* is an adaptation of the celebrated 1988 animated film by Hayao Miyazaki. The story explores the magical fantasy world of childhood and the transformative power of imagination, as it follows one extraordinary summer in the lives of sisters Satsuki and Mei. This production has involved a major collaboration between many different companies to bring this well-loved and enchanting coming-of-age story to the stage, including the RSC, Improbable and Nippon TV, not to mention a huge team of creative people including original composer, Joe Hisaishi and of course, puppeteers to bring the famous character of Totoro to life onstage.

*"This is a favourite film for a lot of people and we're turning it into a beautiful piece of theatre."*

**Phelim McDermott**, director *My Neighbour Totoro*.

### NOTES FROM THE ADAPTOR:

Our stage adaptation of *My Neighbour Totoro* follows the story of the Anime film very closely. It is a much-loved tale so we haven't changed much. However, there are some differences to spot:

- The Soot Sprites are characters that return throughout the story.
- Kanta's character, who is mostly wordless in the film, is given much more to say.
- Kanta's father is also more present and has an important chat with his son about growing up.

# EXPLORING THE STORY



## SYNOPSIS

In 1950s Japan, a professor Tatsuo Kusakabe and his daughters, Satsuki and Mei, move house to be near the hospital where their mother Yasuko is recovering from an illness. On their way to their new home they meet the Ogaki family including their son Kanta. When they arrive, Satsuki and Mei are alarmed to find the old house full of tiny dust spirits called Soot Sprites but they are reassured by Granny Ogaki and when they start to feel at home and laugh with their father, the Soot Sprites leave to find another empty house. One day, Mei spots two small magical creatures who lead her to the hollow of a huge camphor tree where she meets a larger version of a similar spirit, whose roar sounds like 'Totoro'. Mei falls asleep on Totoro but later, can't find him to show her sister and father. Tatsuo says that Totoro must be the keeper of the forest and will reveal himself when he wants to. Together, the family pay a formal greeting to the forest spirits.

One rainy day, the girls wait for their father's bus. Mei falls asleep on Satsuki's back and Totoro appears, allowing Satsuki to see him for the first time. He only has a leaf on his head as shelter from the rain, so Satsuki offers him an umbrella. Totoro is delighted and gives her a bundle of seeds, then leaves on a giant Catbus. The girls plant the seeds and one night, spot Totoro and his two small spirit friends doing a ceremonial dance around the soil. They join in and the seeds sprout and grow in front of them. Totoro takes them for a ride on a magical flying top. In the morning, their father sees that the seeds have sprouted. The girls hear their mother's treatment has had a set back. Mei is upset and the girls have a row. Mei decides to walk to the hospital to bring some fresh corn to her mother.

Her disappearance prompts Satsuki and the neighbours to search for her. Eventually, Satsuki goes to the camphor tree and pleads for Totoro's help. Delighted to be of assistance, he summons the Catbus, which takes her to Mei, then takes both girls to see their mother in the hospital. The girls hear that their mother only has a cold and is actually doing well. They leave the ear of corn on the windowsill and return home on the Catbus which then disappears.

## ACTIVITY 1: THE ART OF STORYTELLING



### ACTIVITY 1: THE ART OF STORYTELLING

*"When the RSC asked me for an idea, the first thing that popped into my head was 'My Neighbour Totoro'. When you take all the magical creatures out of the story, it's about people, it's about families and there are no villains in it and I liked that. It's a story about good people in difficult circumstances."*

**Tom Morton-Smith**, Adaptor, *My Neighbour Totoro*.

As a writer, Tom Morton-Smith had the daunting task of adapting a very popular film into a script that would work for the stage. The final production is a collaboration between many artists. It contains Joe Hisaishi's original music and the essence of the film, the plot structure and much of the original dialogue are all faithfully there.

This is a performance and writing activity to help students familiarise themselves with the plot and narrative in *My Neighbour Totoro* and to explore different performance styles to tell story. **[You will need 'My Neighbour Totoro in 10 Scenes' in Appendix A in the Resources section of this pack and some pens and paper.]**

- Organise your students into 10 groups and give each group ONE of the 10 scenes from Appendix A and pens and paper. (With smaller numbers, you can give groups more than one scene or just select key scenes.)
- Explain that they will have 15 minutes in their groups to decide how to perform their scene and then to rehearse it. Add that they can add lines if they wish to expand their scene or improvise dialogue and action to bring it to life and they must use every member of the group.
- Suggest that each group read their scene through together and take note of the characters involved. There may be more characters than they have people in the group so how will they deal with this? Will they have one narrator or split the narration up between them? Or say it all together as a chorus?
- Remind the groups to think about the following:
- What is the most important piece of information in their scene?
- Who is the most important person/people in their scene?
- What action does the audience have to see?
- What should their scene feel like? Funny? Sad? Scary? Fantastical?
- Encourage them to be as imaginative as possible, especially if their scene involve spirits or fantastical action, how will they show this? Will they use more dialogue, mime, group tableaux?
- Invite each group to perform their scene in order of the plot points. After each scene, invite the audience to say what they liked most about the performance and what each group added to their scene.
- When every scene has been performed, discuss what kind of a story they think this is? A comedy? A drama? A ghost story? Who is it about? What role do they think the Totoro spirits play in the story?

#### Discussion:

- Discuss with the group the challenges of turning an animated film into a stage production. What things might a designer or a writer have to think about?
- How easy or difficult was it to bring their scene to life? What about the more fantastical scenes, with the Totoros and the Spirits? Did they wish they had extra things to bring their scenes to life?

### NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM:

*"There is a moment where the house starts to split apart and change and that's because the ensemble work together and move the scenery like something that is opening up so you can see what's inside. That's the act of theatre – to open the workings of the relationships so we can see them, we can share them."*

**Mervyn Millar**, Puppetry Associate, *My Neighbour Totoro*.



## ACTIVITY 2: MOVING HOUSE!

The story of *My Neighbour Totoro* starts with Tatsuo and his daughters moving house to be closer to their mother who is ill in hospital. They are moving from the big bustling city of Tokyo to a rural part of Japan where crops are grown in fields and small villages meet the mountains. It is a big change of scene for the sisters. Their new house is also a big experience – there is a lot more space and it has secrets...

### a. Mei & Satsuki's Tour.

This is a physical activity to help students awaken their senses, use their imagination and start to think theatrically.

**[You will need copies of Appendix B: 'Moving House' in the Resources section of this pack, pens and large pieces of paper.]**

- Discuss, as a whole group, the kind of life Satsuki and Mei will have had in a big city life Japan. How close would they be to their neighbours? What size house might they have had? What could they see from their bedroom windows? What was their journey to school like? Now discuss the changes they are facing in their new environment. What kind of village is it? How different will it look to Tokyo? How might they feel?
- Hand out pens and paper and ask for three volunteers to read the extracts from Appendix B out loud to the rest of the group. Explain that these are the stage directions from the production script and that the writer has kept everything very similar to the film.
- As they hear the first extract 'Old House', ask your students to jot down any interesting words they hear and write these down on a separate piece of paper – one word to each piece. Encourage them to think of their own words that might describe Satsuki and Mei's first impressions of the house and add to the pile.
- Place these pages around one corner of the room. Repeat this with the other extract until you have three areas of the room, carpeted with words.
- Organise your group into pairs and explain that one of them is going to be Mei and the other Satsuki and that they are going to take turns giving each other a tour of one area of the new home. The sister taking the tour will close their eyes and the other sister will guide them SAFELY from word to word.
- Encourage the tour guides to be as descriptive as possible when they give their tour, adding sound effects and extra words to describe what their sister is seeing and experiencing.
- When they have finished, ask them to swap round and move to another area of the room for another tour.
- Discuss the experience as a group. How did the sisters feel in their new home? Did they 'see' anything unexpected? How easy was it for the words to come to life and become pictures in their minds?

### b. Different Points of View.

Mei has quite an extraordinary experience when she meets the Totoros. When she is found asleep by her sister and father and can't find them again, it is frustrating for her.

In this writing activity, students get the opportunity to see a major plot point from different characters' perspectives and explore how these points of view come together to create a dramatic scene. **[You will need: Appendix C: 'Scene 12 – Mei Wakes Up' in the Resources section of this pack, pens and paper.]**

- As a whole group, read Scene 12 out loud and discuss this moment. What has just happened in the story? How is the audience feeling right now? Are we sorry for Mei? Do we find her frustration funny? Do the others think she is lying? Why does Tatsuo make his speech?
- Organise your students into pairs and ask them to each write a diary entry for ONE of the characters in this scene, written after the event. Explain that they will have 10 minutes to complete this. Encourage them to consider the following:
  - How they feel about the other people in the scene?
  - How they feel about spirits?
  - What they want to believe?

- Invite them to swap entries with their partner and ask for volunteers to read these entries out to the rest of the group.
- Discuss the results. How did all three characters feel? Were there any surprises?
- Now ask every student to imagine they are Satsuki or Tatsuo and to draw what they think Mei saw. Explain that they don't have to be an amazing artist for this. They just have to draw as their version of Satsuki or her father would.
- Ask your students to sign their drawings: Satsuki or Tatsuo and pin them up on the wall.
- Invite volunteers to imagine they are Mei and to spend a few minutes looking at the gallery of 'Totoro's'. Encourage them to feed back on how they feel about these drawings. Are they: Angry? Ridiculed? Impressed? Frustrated?

## EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS

*"The first time I watched My Neighbour Totoro was with my children and for me it was really great to see it through their eyes. It's incredibly sophisticated in its portrayal of those young characters, those two girls are so beautifully drawn and the idea that we could create a theatre show that had that same sensibility was really exciting."*

**Phelim McDermott**, director *My Neighbour Totoro*.



### ACTIVITY 3: SISTERS

This is a movement activity in two parts to help students explore Satsuki and Mei's relationship throughout the story and their feelings towards each other. **[You will need copies of Appendix D: ANIME SISTERS (edited) in the Resources section of this pack and a computer with the internet to play the [Official Trailer](#).]**

#### a. ANIMATED SISTERS.

- Ask your students to walk around the space, making sure they fill all the empty gaps on the floor. If they see a gap, walk into it – this will help them move with energy and not collide.
- Now say FREEZE. Ask them to get into groups of two and give them 5 seconds to create a frozen image of two sisters, one younger, one older. Compare the different images in the room. What kind of relationships are we seeing? Positive ones? Close ones? Warring ones?
- Repeat the exercise, saying FREEZE and forming a different pair. This time give them 10 seconds to create an image of two sisters who are close friends. Then give the same pairs 10 seconds to create a completely opposite image of two sisters who do NOT get on.
- Now ask the pairs to recreate their first image (friends). Explain that you are going to count to 10 and they are going to move from this image to the second image (enemies). Encourage them to find the most effective way to move between the two images so that the transition is smooth and interesting and so they really PING the image on the final beat, adding facial expressions.
- Explain that you are going to count down from 10 and they are going to reverse the image, so they are back as friends. Repeat this a few times back and forth so they get used to moving from one relationship to the other, in the same way each time, as if it is a rehearsed dance move.
- Give the pairs a few minutes to rehearse these transitions so that they are as effective as possible. Encourage them to discover moments in between the two images to tell the story: Does one sister pull the others hair? Do they make faces behind each others backs? Does one of them help the other off the floor or lift them up?
- Divide your pairs into two groups and let one group sit and watch the other pairs as you count them back and forth from friends to enemies. Try changing the tempo from fast to slow to see how this affects the storytelling.
- Swap groups and repeat!

## PRODUCTION NOTES:

### WHAT IS ANIME?

- Anime is a type of hand-drawn and computer-generated animation made in Japan.
- Although characters have very distinct features and their movement styles are deliberately simple, anime often involves complex storylines and characters.
- Our production is based on the Japanese anime, *My Neighbour Totoro*, written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki and produced by Studio Ghibli.
- Miyazaki's film received critical acclaim and amassed a worldwide cult following in the years after its release. The film and Totoro have become cultural icons.

### b. ANIME SISTERS!

- Discuss the meaning and origins of the word ANIME with the group and play them this clip of the [Official Trailer](#) to the anime film of *My Neighbour Totoro*.
- Explain that they now have 15 minutes to make a live animation of the sisters' journey through the story using just their bodies.
- Cut Appendix D: ANIME SISTERS (edited) into 4 sections, organise your students into 4 groups and hand each group ONE section. Explain that each of the 3 points they have represents a step in the sisters' relationship.
- Ask them to imagine that Satsuki and Mei are anime characters come to life and will be acted by 2 members of the group. The group must decide how to bring each step to life by having the sisters say their 2 lines to each other and the rest of the group providing the background and any sound effects. Encourage them to think about the following:
  - Making the facial expressions, voices and movement of both sisters really clear.
  - How they move on their lines: Are they far apart, very close, facing away from each other? How do they react to each other's lines?
  - What type of background you need: A spooky one? Sounds of the forest? Rain?
- Give the groups a couple more minutes to think about how they might move between the steps so that the movement is smooth and each member of the group knows what they are doing.
- Invite each group to show their 3 steps in order from 1-12. (Or, for older groups, jump to the extension below.)
- Discuss the sisters' relationship in the story: How close are they? How much does the age difference affect this? What did the background movement / noise add to the different stages of their story?

### Extension for older groups:

- Encourage your students to decide whether to use different members of the group to play the sisters or stay with the same actors but to make sure every member of the group is used. Maybe others can say the lines and the sisters act out the moves?
- When the group knows how they are performing each of their 3 steps, ask them to practise moving from one to the other by adding other movement and sound effects to link the steps. Eg: If one step is happy and the next scary, what happens in-between? Do the sisters hear a noise? Does one of them run away? Remind the groups that they do not have to act out whole scenes in between the steps, just create a link between them.
- Line each group up in order of the 12 steps and invite them to begin their live animation from number one, running right through to 12 without stopping.
- Once you have done this all the way through, think as a group how you might improve the flow of the steps. Could any of the first groups join in the others when they have finished to build on the background movement and sound effects? Can anything be simplified or extended to make it clearer or more effective?
- When these final touches have been developed and rehearsed into the whole piece, perform the entire anime from start to finish and discuss the results: What kind of an adaptation have they made?



## ACTIVITY 4: LETTERS TO MUM

The following is a writing and creative activity exploring the relationships that Yasuko and Tatsuo have with their daughters and the pressures that the illness is having on the family. **[You will need pens, paper, A4 envelopes, drawing materials, glue and access to an outdoor space if possible.]**

- Discuss the illness that the girls' mother has. Explain that Yasuko is in a Hospital. What does this mean for the family? Why have they moved closer to her? How long has she been in hospital. Do they expect her to live or die? Encourage them to imagine what it must be like for the family to go through this.
- Organise your students into pairs and hand out pens and paper. Explain that they have 15 minutes to write 2 letters to Yasuko, one from Satsuki and one from Mei about their new home and adventures so far. Encourage them to consider the following:
  - The different ages of the two sisters and what language this means they might use.
  - What both sisters have experienced together and individually.
  - Any pictures they might draw to illustrate their letters.
  - Things they may find outside such as leaves or chalk rubbings.
- Ask your pairs to put their letters into an envelope, seal it and address it to their mum in hospital. Ask the groups to place their envelopes in a pile together.
- Now ask the pairs to imagine they are Satsuki and Mei's parents, Yasuko who is in hospital and Tatsuo who is visiting her.
- Ask each Tatsuo to collect ONE envelope from the pile (not their own letter) and take it to his wife.
- Explain that Yasuko will now have 5 minutes to open the envelope and read the letters. Invite each Yasuko to decide if she would like to share the content with her husband or keep some things private and just for her.
- Now ask the pairs to share their experience of opening the letters with the group: How did it make them feel? Were there any surprises? Was there anything the Yasukos kept private? If so, why?

### NOTES FROM THE PRODUCTION:

#### The importance of identifying with characters...

*"There is an authenticity in this production with the whole cast being British East Asian or East Asian heritage. That has really enriched my experience as an actor within the company and I hope it comes across to the audience from us telling the story and beyond in terms of changing the colour culture of this industry. It has definitely been an empowering experience for all of us."*

**Haruka Kuroda**, cast member and puppeteer, *My Neighbour Totoro*, Original 2022 Company.

### Extension Activity: MUM'S REPLY

- Give your students some extra time to write a reply from Yasuko to her girls. How honest will she be about her illness and how she feels in her letter? How differently will she write to Satsuki and Mei because of their ages?
- Invite a few students to read out these letters from Yasuko and discuss their choices: Is there anything they left out of the letter and why? What does this tell us about the pressure on parents to care for their children? How important is this theme to the story?



## Extension Discussion: THE DARKER MOMENTS

- As a whole group, identify and discuss the darker moments in the story. Eg: The sisters' mum is very ill and they worry she might die. The house seems to be haunted. There are mysterious spirits in the wood. Satsuki and Mei fall out badly. Mei runs off and goes missing and the whole village searches for her.
- The production of *My Neighbour Totoro* tries hard to match the feeling and atmosphere of the anime film so that it never gets too dark but remains emotionally truthful and not too sentimental. What sort of things must the creative team consider to keep this balance and not let things get too scary or too light and silly so that we still get a deep message? The director, designer, composer for example?

## PRODUCTION NOTES:

Adapting a film for the stage is a great opportunity to spend more time with some of the characters. In our production, writer Tom Morton-Smith, expanded 2 characters in particular. In his words:

- *"Yasuko represents a 'good mother' in the film, what the kids are aspiring to. It was important for me to flesh her out a bit and expand the relationship between her and her husband."*
- *"Kanta is very inarticulate in the film which doesn't work well onstage. So, finding opportunities for him to talk – with the chickens for example and in the heart to heart with his dad, was very important"*
- *"Kanta's dad has little to say in the film so it was good to see more of him. Part of the story is about parents with children who are going through a lot and I wanted to show 'Good Dads' as that's something you don't see a lot onstage."*



## ACTIVITY 5: KANTA'S SECRET VOICE

Our adapter, Tom Morton-Smith thought a lot about how to fill out some of the characters in the film with less to say so they would have more impact onstage. The following is a writing and performance activity on how to develop the inner 'voice' of a character by exploring the thoughts of Kanta. **[You will need Appendix E: 'Kanta Character Study' and Appendix F 'Kanta's Inner Voice – Scene 5 (edited)' in the Resources section of this pack, pens.]**

- Ask for a volunteer to read Kanta's Character Study and discuss the character of Kanta from what the group know of the production and / or the anime film.
- Organise your students into groups of 3 and give each group a copy of Scene 5 and pens. Ask them to read the scene out loud within their group and discuss what is going on in the scene.
- Explain that they have 10 minutes to imagine what Kanta might be thinking during this scene and write these secret thoughts down on the blank lines provided.
- Now ask each group to cast themselves as Satsuki, Kanta and Kanta's Secret Voice and give them another 10 minutes to decide how to perform their scene, including the secret lines: will they be whispered? How will the two Kanta's behave? What will their body language be like? Will Kanta's Secret Voice be more free and expressive?
- Invite the groups to perform their scenes and discuss the results: What different ways did groups find to express Kanta's thoughts? Why is he so important to the story? How do we identify with him as an audience?

## Extension Discussion:

Our rehearsal room benefitted from a richness of the lived experience of BESEA artists, the different languages spoken and huge range of countries lived in and this has been a huge influence on the show.

- As a group, discuss the importance of using actors of British East Asian and East Asian heritage to play the characters in our production of *My Neighbour Totoro*.
- How important is it to see yourself represented onstage, eg. in terms of class or culture etc? How does it feel when this does not happen?

# EXPLORING THE THEMES

## THEME ONE – GROWING UP

### NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM:

Actors are big children!

*My Neighbour Totoro* is loved partly because it's a story about childhood. In our production, we have adults playing the parts of children due to safety restrictions and the physical demands of the show, such as clambering over puppets!



### ACTIVITY 6: LAUGHTER v FEAR

This is a physical activity exploring Tatsuo's tactics of overcoming fear through laughter with his daughters in their spooky house. Laughter is a particularly difficult thing to do on cue, indeed most actors find it harder to do convincingly onstage than cry. It is usually a response to something funny but how do we create laughter from nothing or when we don't feel like it?

- Organise your group into one big circle, all standing. Ask everyone to place their hand flat on their tummy above their belly button.
- Now ask everyone to let out a short breath by saying 'huh' out loud. Ask if everyone can feel a muscle beneath their hand kicking out when they do this? If not, try again until they can. This muscle is called the diaphragm and it is very important for an actor as it supports their breath and allows them to make big noises in a big theatre so the back row can hear them.
- Encourage them to explore different volumes so they say huh very quietly, then very loudly, feeling the muscle working each time.
- Ask the group to say 'huh' twice, then three times, feeling the diaphragm working each time. Now ask them to say 'huh' repeatedly until they come to the end of their breath and have to breathe in.
- Encourage them to try this a couple of times until the huhs become a laugh and their diaphragms are really working. Let them know that, believe it or not, this is how many actors fake laughter on stage, especially if they have to do it night after night.
- Explain that in the story, the sisters are afraid of their new house so their father, Tatsuo, points out random things to laugh at to make their fear go away. He says: "Laugh at the owl... laugh at the moon... laugh at the big spooky trees!" but they are going to find their own examples.
- Invite your students to walk around the space with their hands on their diaphragms and when you point at one of them, they must point at something OUTSIDE THE ROOM and say: 'Laugh at the \*\*\*' and everyone must stand still and 'huh' until they are all laughing.
- Encourage them to think of spooky things, things from their imagination or deliberately ordinary things to make the challenge harder.

#### Discussion:

- To complete this activity, sit everyone round in a circle and discuss when they last used laughter to make them feel better. Has anyone deliberately played a comedy programme to cheer themselves up? What other ways do people have of positively changing their mood?
- Why do they think Tatsuo uses this method of laughter to help his daughters? Would it work if they were older?
- Ask them to think about Mei's reaction to seeing the giant Totoro for the first time. He has a huge mouth full of teeth and a massive roar. Mei could have screamed and run away. How does she actually respond and why do they think she reacts like this? Would an adult have behaved differently and if so, why?

*My Neighbour Totoro* is described as a 'coming of age' story. This usually describes the age or occasion when a child becomes an adult or starts having to think like one. In *My Neighbour Totoro*, Satsuki and Mei are still children but have to deal with many grown up issues such as their mother's illness and the conflict between them.

There are many other stories that feature this theme such as:

- *Little Women*
- *Harry Potter*
- *The Lion King* (which is based on Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*)

Shakespeare also writes about 'coming of age' in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V*.



## ACTIVITY 7: OLDER v YOUNGER

*"This story takes childhood very seriously. In Japan, children are trusted to take in all of life. They are seen as inspiration, they point us in a direction. As adults, we lose a connection to something children have."*

**Ailin Conant**, Associate Director, *My Neighbour Totoro*.

The following is a physical activity in 2 parts to help students further explore the relationship between Satsuki and her younger sister and the responsibility that Satsuki feels towards Mei. **[You will need Appendix D: 'Anime Sisters' in the Resources section of this pack.]**

### a. PUSHING BACK.

- Organise your students into pairs and ask the pairs to stand back to back. Explain that you are going to give them 10 seconds to push against each other, back to back and when you say FREEZE, they are to stop.
- When this is over, explain that one of them is now going to be Satsuki and the other her younger sister, Mei. Repeat the exercise and discuss any differences. Did any of the Satsukis go gentle with Mei? Did any of the Meis fight back harder and if so, why?
- Hand out copies of Appendix D and ask them to read all of the quotes in character, 1 to 12, still standing back to back. Encourage them to use the lines as reasons to push against each other.
- Discuss the results. Which lines made them push the hardest? Which sister was pushing on which specific line?

### b. STEPPING FORWARD.

- Organise your pairs into two lines facing each other so the line of Satsukis is facing the line of Meis, each with their copies of 'Anime Sisters'.
- Ask the Satsukis to say their first line all together to their Mei (standing opposite). Explain that Mei will then respond by saying their line and so on, until they have exchanged all 12 pairs of lines. (If you run out of lines, start again from number 1.)
- Challenge each Satsuki and Mei to add ONE gesture or physical movement to go with their line as they say it. Encourage them to make this gesture as big as they can.
- When you have finished the 12 sets of lines, ask each pair of Satsuki and Mei to repeat this exercise in their pairs.
- Explain that all the pairs will be doing this together, but this time, either character must take a step forward when they feel they are 'in control' or to take a step back if they feel they are losing control in any way.
- When the 'line exchange' is finished, ask the pairs to examine the journeys made: Who has gained the most ground? Was it an equal journey? Which lines took the biggest or firmest steps? What do these journeys tell us about these two sisters? Are there any times when Mei had more control and why?

## Animism Elements

- The word 'animism' comes from the Latin 'anima', meaning breath, spirit, life.
- It is the belief that all objects, places and creatures all have an individual spirit or soul. This can include plants, rocks, rivers, human handiwork, even words and weather.
- This means that everything and not just humans can make decisions and do things deliberately. Eg: An innocent looking pond can rise up to kill an unsuspecting enemy. Or a bit of soot can invade an empty house with its friends.

## THEME TWO – RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRITS & ANIMISM

*"When we did the first puppet workshop at the Barbican in Christmas 2020, we were having a go with Soot Sprites and a chicken which was just a balloon on a stick!"*

**Haruka Kuroda**, cast member and puppeteer, *My Neighbour Totoro*, Original 2022 Company.



### ACTIVITY 8: LIVING OBJECTS

In our production of *My Neighbour Totoro*, just like in the anime film, the Soot Sprites are spirits with a life of their own and respond to things.

This is a physical activity in 2 parts designed to get students experimenting with giving ordinary objects a life of their own.

**[You will need: blank paper and coloured pens and, if appropriate, the students may use mobile phone cameras in part b].**

#### a. STILL LIFE.

- Discuss the general concept of animism with your students. Have they ever felt that an inanimate object had a personality and if so, why?
- Organise your students in a big circle, seated and ask them to volunteer ONE ordinary object to be placed in the centre of the circle. Encourage them to choose something that they are not emotionally attached to. Eg: a water bottle, a hair scrunchie, a sock, a chair.
- Give them a minute or so, without speaking, to examine this object from all angles. Encourage them to get closer if they like, to really study it.
- Now ask them to form the big circle again around the object and invite a volunteer to sit or stand somewhere in the circle. Add that it does not matter if they are looking at the object or not but they must not touch it.
- Ask the rest of the group to discuss the relationship between this person and the object from the picture they make together in the circle. Encourage them use their imaginations: What does their opinion seem to be of the object? Are they existing peacefully with it? Are they ignoring it? Why might this be?
- Now invite another volunteer to move the object to a different spot in the circle and to sit back down, leaving the original person with the object in this new position. Discuss this change. Have the two become closer? Can the person now see the object. Or not see it? What does this new picture suggest to us?
- Now ask the person in the circle to move in reaction to the object's new position WITHOUT TOUCHING IT. Add that there is no right or wrong here, they can choose to do something small and subtle but it must be a response to the object. Ask them to freeze in this position and, as a group, discuss this new picture.
- Repeat this exercise a few times and gradually, allow the person to move to touch the object or the object to touch them and then freeze in this new picture.
- Discuss the relationship that now exists between the person and object. Encourage them to think through all the different still images from start to finish. Has a story begun to emerge? If so, how did it start and what prompted it? What is our opinion of the object and has it changed from when it first appeared? What does the person in the circle think of the object or feel towards it and why? Does anyone feel the object has begun to have a personality?



## b. PAPER SPIRITS!

- Ask your students to form pairs and hand each pair a blank piece of paper and some coloured pens.
- Explain that they now have ten minutes to explore the life of this paper by taking turns to alter it in some way. They must not tell each other what they about to do when it is their turn, they must just change the paper. Eg: moving it, folding, tearing, scrunching, drawing or writing on it.
- Add that they must make at least 10 changes to the paper between them.
- If appropriate, ask one of the pairs to use their camera phone to photograph the paper on after each alteration has been made to record its transformation.
- When each pair has transformed their paper, invite the pairs to share their experience with the group: Did their transformations create a story of any kind? If so, what kind of story was it – a happy one, sad, funny? Did their paper develop a personality? If so, at what point did it come to life? Did anyone draw a face on the page and is this always necessary to bring the paper to life?
- If photos have been taken, swipe through them or share them via a class laptop to watch an animated development of the page!

### Extension Activity:

- Repeat the above exercise, giving the pairs extra time to plan their changes so that the paper can really develop a life of its own and follow a simple story.
- Encourage the pairs to create 10 steps for their story, giving the paper's journey a clear beginning, middle and end and of course, a title. They can involve other paper 'spirits' if they wish.
- Again, if possible, photograph the results and share or print out and pin up on the wall in order as a series of stills from an animation!

## PRODUCTION NOTES:

*"Japan has a very deep relationship between objects and the spirits and, although we don't lean on that explicitly in the production, it's explicit in the way it's told. The connection with nature is more prominent, the way the characters relate to things around them, the statues etc."*

**Mervyn Millar**, Puppetry Associate, *My Neighbour Totoro*.



## ACTIVITY 9: YOUR OWN PERSONAL TOTORO

This visualisation activity is designed to help students explore their senses by imagining their very own forest spirit. They will spend most of the activity with their eyes closed, listening to your voice so you can choose how long or short the visualisation goes on for by how much detail you suggest. **[You will need: paper and drawing materials. If you have the facilities, you might like to introduce music during this activity, to inspire the students' imagination.]**

- Ask your students to space themselves out so they have enough room to hold both arms out and turn full circle without bumping into anyone or anything. (With larger numbers, you can create 2 groups that take turns). Now ask them to close their eyes.
- Ask them to imagine that they are standing in a leafy forest full of trees. Encourage them to imagine how the air feels on their face and arms, how the ground feels beneath their feet, what sounds they can hear: Birds? Whispering leaves? Anything else? Let them know that they are standing in front of a particularly huge tree, a camphor tree. The camphor smells a bit like cough drops. Encourage them to visualise this tree in detail. To really make it their own special tree.
- Still with their eyes closed, let them know that living in the camphor tree is a friendly spirit – a spirit of the forest. The spirit is a bit shy and won't let them see it just yet. Ask your students to listen very carefully so they can hear their spirit breathing. What kind of breathing do they imagine they hear? Does the sound suggest anything in particular about the spirit? Its size? Its personality?

- Encourage them to decide what their tree spirit looks like. What shape and size is it? What colour is it? Does it have big features? Is it like an animal or a creature? If so, what kind?
- Now ask everyone to imagine getting their first glimpse of their spirit, peeping out from the tree. Let them know that this is a very rare and special moment, the spirit is letting them see it. Does their spirit emerge slowly or quickly? Are they shy? Do they smile or roar? Do they make eye contact? Do they run away? How do you feel being this close to a spirit of the forest?
- Now ask them to thank and respect their spirit by repeating the following words after you:  
**‘Spirit of the forest... thank you for watching over me... thank you for making me feel so welcome... please continue to watch over us all.’**
- Ask your students to get into pairs and describe their spirit to each other. Encourage them to ask each other questions to get as much information as possible. Tell them not to worry if you don’t have answers yet, make it up. Invite the pairs to tell the whole group about their partner’s forest spirit.
- Invite your students to make drawings of their own spirits, to give them a name. Display these spirit drawings in the room.

#### Extension Discussion:

##### [You will Need Appendix C: ‘Scene 12 – Mei Wakes Up’.]

- Discuss as a group how easy or difficult the visualisation activity was. How important do they think age is to this exercise? Is it easier for younger students and if so, why? Why do they think the spirits in the story only show themselves to children? What might this be saying about the differences between children and adults?
- Ask someone to read Tatsuo’s speech at the end of the scene to the rest of the group. Why do they think this speech is in the story? Why does Tatsuo choose this moment to tell his girls this?

#### Extension Writing Activity:

- Explain that, in the story, Tatsuo makes a point of formally greeting the forest spirit. Read the full speech out to the group:  
**“Spirit of the forest ... thank you for watching over Mei ... thank you for making us feel so welcome in our new home ... please watch over Mei and Satsuki ... please watch over their mother, Yasuko ... please continue to watch over us all.”**
- Discuss what the reason for the greeting might be? Is it to reassure the girls? Is it to ward off bad spirits and welcome the good? Is it a tradition he has learned? Where might this tradition have come from?
- In their same pairs, give your students 5 minutes to write a formal greeting to your partner’s spirit, keeping all the things they’ve discussed in mind.
- In their pairs, ask them to take turns leading each other to the giant camphor tree to deliver this greeting out loud to each other’s ‘spirits’. Invite any volunteers to share their greeting with the group.

## NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM:

What does it take to make theatre? The stage production of *My Neighbour Totoro* is the result of an incredible collaboration between many different artists across multiple countries, including:

- Director Phelim McDermott
- Creative collaboration from Improbable and Nippon TV
- Puppets from the Jim Henson Creature Shop
- The original anime composer, Joe Hisaishi
- Puppetry Designer and Director Basil Twist
- Writer and adapter, Tom MortonSmith

and many, many more...

It has taken a lot of people a lot of work to bring this extraordinary story to the stage!

# THEATRE-MAKING

## THE MAKING OF MY NEIGHBOUR TOTORO

### HOW DO YOU STAGE SOMETHING IMPOSSIBLE?

How do you create a stage production from an incredible film such as *My Neighbour Totoro*? Well, firstly, you gather a talented group of creative people to work together and one of these was IMPROBABLE, a theatre company that use improvisation to create magic from literally nothing!

### WHAT IS IMPROBABLE?

IMPROBABLE is a theatre company with improvisation at their heart. Whether in performance, rehearsals or development the practice and philosophy of improvisation is at the core of what they do, even when working on text-based plays or operas. In their own words:

*"Improbable has grown out of a way of working that means being prepared to create work by the seat of your pants and the skin of your teeth, stepping onstage before you are ready and allowing the audience to have an integral part in the creation of a show."*



### ACTIVITY 10: "THE ENSEMBLE TELLS THE STORY"

#### ENSEMBLE = a group of people working together

*"Right from the origins of this production, from the workshops and auditions we followed a philosophy of our director, Phelim McDermott (Co-Artistic Director of Improbable): that the ensemble tells the story. His first step in rehearsals is not to read the script but to start building this ensemble: their physical language and their reaction to each other, their sense of responsibility and shared endeavour."*

**Mervyn Millar**, Puppetry Associate, *My Neighbour Totoro*.

Improvisation is a popular tool for making theatre. For Improbable that means bringing together any technique or process which brings people into the present moment. The aim is to always be listening, noticing what's happening, what's really going on and taking that as a place to work from.

The following 2 activities are designed to help students explore the basics of improvisation, learning to trust and build story from their own imaginations, from nothing...

#### a. WORD BY WORD

This activity is often used by Improbable when warming up, devising or in workshops. It is literally a way to create story from nothing and one of the most ensemble storytelling games there is:

- Organise your students into a big circle, seated and explain that they are going to tell a story between them, one word at a time.
- As a volunteer to start by saying one word, then ask the person on their right to say the next word and so on round the circle, until some kind of a story starts to form.
- Add that they can say "full stop" if they feel a sentence has been completed but that person must then start the next sentence with a new word.
- After a few goes round the circle or when a 'story' has come to an end, discuss the results: did a story emerge? Were there hints of a story that then didn't happen? Was this frustrating?
- Ask your students to form pairs and repeat this activity between them, one word at a time. After 5 minutes, come together as a group and see if any stories really got going and maybe had an ending.
- Again, discuss the results: how did they find this way of working? Was it scary? Freeing? Fast or slow?

- If the word 'scary' came up, here's a tip from Improbable: "There's an old improv adage, 'try and make other people look good'. If everyone onstage is trying to make everyone else look good, it's better. No-one needs to see you trying too hard, don't try to be brilliant. Do the next obvious thing!" – Lee Simpson, Co-Artistic Director, Improbable.

## b. YES, AND...

This activity is based on a well-known improvisation game and is designed to get students to accepting each other's ideas and work with one another – a key principle of improvising.

- Organise your students into pairs and explain that they are going to create a story using the words "yes, and..."
- Demonstrate a simple statement, such as: "That tree is enormous." Explain that your partner must say the next sentence, but it must start with "Yes, and..." Eg: "Yes, and... we are right at the top of it".
- Ask for volunteers to say the next few sentences, starting with "yes, and..." When you have done this a few times, reflect on how the story grew from your first statement: "That tree is enormous." What would have happened if the next statement had been: "No it's not, it's quite small"?
- Explain that they now have 5 minutes to have a "Yes, and..." conversation in their pairs.
- Invite a few pairs to try a new "Yes, and..." conversation in front of the group.
- Discuss the activity as a whole group: What does it feel like at the very start of this game? Would it be more reassuring with a script or if you were told what to say? How does it feel as an audience watching people achieve a story in this way? Do we like seeing people invent things on the spot?



## ACTIVITY 11: ENSEMBLE STORYTELLING

The following 3-part physical activity builds on the anime activities and is designed to help students take their improvisations a step further by working as an ensemble to physically bring it to life.

### a. Improbable Journeys!

- Organise your students into groups of 5 or 6. Explain that they are going to work together to tell a story. One person is going to play the Narrator and must take ONE other member of the group on an Improbable Journey by making up the details as they go along. This journey can be anything from going to the dentist to escaping a volcanic eruption (and might be fun if it involved both.)
- Explain that the others in the group must listen carefully to the words the narrator makes up and quickly move to bring the story to life, physically creating what is needed along the way. Eg:
  - If the Narrator says "Tom's alarm clock went off and he fell out of bed," the rest of the group must create the alarm clock and the bed for 'Tom' to fall out of.
  - If the Narrator says "Emma walked through the forest until she found the magic fountain," the others must create these trees and yes, the fountain. And how are they going to make sure it's magic?
- Encourage your ensembles to not only think of physical things they can 'be' with their bodies such as chairs, beds or other people but think about the atmosphere they are creating: Can they use sound effects to help the story? Do the trees sway? Is the magic good or bad or dangerous?
- Challenge them to be as inventive as possible. If the Narrators say something really impossible, how can they rise to it and make it happen?



- Challenge your Narrators to create a 3-part story for their journey:
  - A beginning: What do they want and where are they going? Is this an invitation? A quest?
  - A middle: How the journey goes. Is it a disaster story? Do they get lost? Save a life?
  - An ending: Do they end up back where they started or are they changed forever in some way?
  - Give your ensembles 10 minutes to finish their journey, then invite your groups to share their journeys with each other and discuss the challenge of this activity. Did any Narrators try to make it hard for the rest of the group by choosing impossible things? How did they overcome this?

## b. ENSEMBLE PICTURES!

**[You will need: Appendix G: ENSEMBLE PICTURES]**

- Organise your students into groups of 5 or 6 and hand each group a copy of Appendix G.
- Explain that they now have 10 minutes to read out each of the 10 Ensemble Pictures and work together to bring them to life. Add that this means they have only ONE minute to make each image so they must do some quick decision making.
- Add that some of the pictures are more complicated than others but encourage them to use movement and sound effects, it doesn't have to be a frozen 'still' image.
- When your students have completed their Ensemble Pictures, explain that you are going to read them all out, one by one, and when they hear the Picture, each ensemble must remake what they had as quickly as possible.
- Discuss the results: is it easier or harder to work as an ensemble at this speed?

## c. ENSEMBLE STAGE DIRECTIONS!

**[You will need: Appendix G: STAGE DIRECTIONS]**

### NOTES FROM THE REHEARSAL ROOM:

*"Into sight now comes the CATBUS..."*

*"I love an impossible stage direction!" – Tom Morton-Smith (Adaptor, My Neighbour Totoro).*

Two of the main characters in *My Neighbour Totoro* of course are the giant spirit, Totoro and the Catbus. These two puppets were specifically made for our production by Jim Henson's Creature Shop and were designed built to bring the important characteristics of these characters from the film:

- Their loveable friendliness
- Their soft maleable lightness
- An 'other worldyness'
- Their sheer size

- Repeat the exercise by inviting another volunteer Narrator read out Stage Direction 2. Encourage your groups to think about what they discussed as they go into this new challenge.

## THE USE OF PUPPETRY

*"I puppeteer the little white Totoro and for a long time, I was just using a cushion or rolled up foam. To me, it's about absolutely believing this cushion is that creature and about wanting to tell that story for the audience. If I believe that this thing that I'm putting 100% of my focus, putting my attention on how they might breathe or jump or land on the floor, they will."*

**Haruka Kuroda**, cast member and puppeteer, *My Neighbour Totoro*, Original 2022 Company.

There are many different types of puppets: stick and hand puppets, marionettes and shadow puppets being just a few examples. Our production of *My Neighbour Totoro* is packed with puppets and unusually, many different types. We use stick puppets to represent animals such as chickens and the goat and the smaller tototos, as well as larger inflatable puppets made by Jim Henson's Creature Shop.



### ACTIVITY 12: SOOT SPRITES!

*"The ensemble (cast) are the people who are going to tell the story of Totoro and this is embedded in rehearsals through movement and the relationship between the performers. They can move scenery, play characters or both at the same time. But they are always present, shaping the environment, telling the story together."*

**Mervyn Millar**, Puppetry Associate, *My Neighbour Totoro*.

This physical activity in 2 parts is designed to introduce students to working as an 'ensemble' and creating story together, just as we did in the rehearsal room and onstage in every production.

#### a. Shoal.

This activity encourages students to experience group movement and to use their senses and peripheral vision, staying aware of what is happening around them and their own place within a group. **[You may like to play some music partway through the below activity to encourage and inspire movement.]**

- Ask your students to stand together in the space in a big clump but not so close they can't move freely.
- Explain that they are going to try to move together, like a shoal of fish or Soot Sprites in the attic by following a leader around the room.
- Invite a volunteer to stand at the front of the group as the leader. Make sure they are facing outwards in the same direction as the group. Encourage them to start with small and slow movements to lead the 'shoal', maybe swaying or by small hand and arm movements until the whole group takes their first step and continue from there.
- As they start moving around the room, encourage the leader to experiment with changes of tempo, getting faster or slower and introducing moments of stillness to let the shoal 'breathe together'.
- After a few minutes, invite another leader to take over and continue moving the shoal. After a minute or so, tell the shoal that if the group's direction changes, whoever is at the front of the shoal now becomes the leader.
- At this point, pause the shoal and introduce a new idea. They are going to repeat the activity but this time, they will try and move together, without a leader. Explain that at no point must it look like one person is leading and all their movements must be the same – just like a shoal of fish.
- Encourage them to keep their movements slow and simple at first and see what happens. You might like to introduce music at this stage to encourage this flow of movement.
- After 5 minutes of this, discuss the activity: What was it like to lead the shoal? How easy or hard was it to follow a definite leader? What were the challenges and how did they overcome them? Did this get easier or harder once the leader was removed and they could all move together? How did being part of the 'shoal' feel?

## b. Mei and the Soot Sprites.

This activity builds on the previous one, encouraging the students to create story as an ensemble.

- Discuss the nature of the Soot Sprites in the story: They are spirits who love to live in an empty house. They are as light as feathers and can move fast or slow. They like the dark and don't like being seen. They often move together but can get separated from the group. When new people make an empty house their home, the Soot Sprites eventually move on to find another empty house.
- Now discuss the character of Mei: she is 4 years old, the younger sister in the story and this is her first time in the attic of her strange new house. She says she is not afraid of anything but she has never encountered Soot Sprites before and doesn't know what they are and if they mean her harm.
- Ask for a volunteer to play Mei and explain to the students that they will be acting as a 'shoal' of Soot Sprites following Mei as she explores the attic and disturbs them.
- Depending on the number of students, either keep one big group or divide them into two and allow one half to watch the action and then swap over.
- Before Mei enters the attic, give the Soot Sprites a few minutes to establish themselves somewhere in the space, remind them that this is a space they know well and are happy in. Encourage them not to try and establish a leader but to keep moving as a group as much as possible.
- Let the game begin by Mei entering the attic. When does she see the Soot Sprites? What is her reaction when they move? What are their reactions to this intruder? Are they curious about each other?
- After 7 minutes, change over your Mei's and let someone else explore the attic. Encourage your Soot Sprites to experiment with tempo, moving fast and slow and see how Mei reacts. Can they still move as a group? What if some Soot Sprites get separated from the others? What if they get trapped by Mei on their own? Does she squish them into powdered soot by accident like in the story?

### Extension and discussion:

- Try the above exercise with Mei and Satsuki visiting the attic together. How different is it for Mei to have her sister as company? Does it give her more confidence? How do the sisters deal with the Soot Sprite encounter and their feelings together?
- As you repeat the scene with different Mei's and Satsuki's, challenge your group to improvise and create a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. What happens when the sisters enter the attic, what effect does that have and what is the resolution?
- After the activity, allow the Soot Sprites to share their feelings about being discovered. What were their feelings towards these intruders? Did any of them get separated from the group and what was this like? What did the 'shoal' feel like? A family or community? A big group of individuals? Safe? Scary?
- Invite them to share their feelings as an ensemble: how easy was it to improvise a story together? Did the ending come naturally or was it hard to come together and work as a group?
- If you have time, allow the Soot Sprites and the Sisters to plan a simple story in 5-steps. Eg.
  1. The Soot Sprites get settled in the attic
  2. The sisters enter and the Soot Sprites react.
  3. Mei runs away and Satsuki calls her back.
  4. The sisters try to round up the Soot Sprites.
  5. The Soot Sprites leave the house.
- Encourage your students to use these steps as a guide but not to plan too much beyond that, to try to keep their senses open and react to each other as things happen.
- When their story is completed, discuss the results as a group: What do they think the benefits are of working as an ensemble? Is there a different sense of achievement in creating a story this way?



## ACTIVITY 13a: BEING TOTORO

*"The first scene where we see Totoro, he's basically asleep and doesn't do very much. It has this mysterious stillness, so for a stage show, it's like, hmm... how is that going to work?"*

**Basil Twist**, Puppetry Designer and Director, *My Neighbour Totoro*.

During rehearsals for *My Neighbour Totoro*, the puppeteers had to practise working together as one imaginary creature. In the following physical activity (in 2 parts), students can build on the ensemble work they did to imagine the character of Totoro and bring him to life in the room.

- Discuss the character of Totoro and everything they know about him? Eg: He is large, round and soft. Mei goes to sleep on his belly. He is a spirit of the forest. He has a large mouth with lots of teeth. He snores and roars and chuckles. How might he move?
- Divide your students into groups of 4 and ask them to stand in a diamond shape, so they are all facing forward and one person is in front. (If your group doesn't divide by 4, a trio will work with a triangle shape just as well).
- Ask the students to breathe together, with the student in front breathing loudly enough so the others can hear them and follow.
- When they are ready, ask the leader to start to make movements (Eg. lifting up one arm, gently swaying, or crouching down, or shifting from leg to leg). Ask them to keep the movements slow so they can make them together. (If they lose connection or become self-conscious, remind them to breathe together.)
- After a few minutes, invite the whole group to rotate so that someone else leads. Explain that the leader's aim is to develop a movement and rhythm without 'catching out' the rest of the group with quick movements.
- Encourage the groups to experiment with developing their Totoro. Eg: Changing leaders whenever they like, by turning on the spot. / Adding sound, such as roaring, chuckling and snoring but not words.
- Invite the 'Totoros' to move around the space in their groups, trying to keep the diamond shape! The diamond or triangle can get bigger or smaller if need be. What happens if one Totoro meets another?
- Come together as a group and reflect on this activity. Did their Totoro develop their own character? Was it easy to 'tune in'? Were they able to feel like one character? Did they feel that the character was more powerful than one just one of them could have made?



## ACTIVITY 13b: MEETING TOTORO

If you have time, you can extend Activity 8a above to develop the behaviour of your Totoros and explore how other characters interact with them.

- Invite each Totoro, in turn, to discover and investigate a chair or a bag in the room while the other students become the audience. Remind the groups that there is no rush – we want to see the thoughts of their Totoro through their movement.
- Let your audience give encouraging feedback as they watch: Can they see the moment when Totoro first sees the object? Can they see its curiosity overcome its caution?
- As a group, discuss what it would be like for the character in the story to meet Totoro, such as: Mei and Satsuki, their mother, Kanta, Nanny and the villagers. Has anyone seen Totoro before? Ask them to consider: His size. His warmth. How our body language changes near large creatures? Think about how difficult it can be to touch something you don't understand. Will Totoro allow you to touch him? How does he react? Can he invite you to tickle him or sleep near him? Make sure the actor knows how Totoro might indicate this.
- Ask one group to recreate their Totoro in the middle of the room and invite students to approach it one by one, in character. They might like to be a character from the play: (A young boy like Kanta, nervous, preoccupied and sensitive. Or someone like Yasuko, the girls' mother, loving, vulnerable, unwell.) Or they can play one of their own villager characters.
- As each character meets Totoro, invite the group to notice how Totoro reacts, how the different body language and rhythm of each 'visitor' makes him respond.
- If you have extra time, try having a 'shoal' of Soot Sprites meet Totoro!



## NOTES FROM THE PRODUCTION:

### Puppetry and the Japanese tradition:

*"Puppetry," says our Puppetry Designer and Director Basil Twist, "is about something mysteriously coming to life."*

This is deeply connected to Japan's tradition. Mei and Satsuki's dad talks of a time when trees and people were once friends. It is only the children who can see Totoro and have that special connection to nature.



### ACTIVITY 14a: MAKE A ROD PUPPET

From the above activity, your students will see that the performance of Totoro does not depend on the puppet (but it helps). The character is created by the performance of the puppeteers and the rest of the ensemble reacting to it. There are many different types of puppet but a rod puppet is a good place to start as it can be operated by one or more people and is simple to make.

The following 2-part creative activity is designed to help your students take their first steps in making a stick or rod puppet of their own, either together or in their own time at home to bring in and share. It concentrates on creating an animal or human character. If any student would like to make a Totoro, they might like to look at using papier-mache. **[You will need: art materials such as wooden spoons, lolly-ice sticks, cardboard, felt or scraps of material, cotton wool, string, wool, glue, modelling clay, split pins or butterfly clips].**

- As a group, research puppet-making online, looking up simple ways of making rod puppets and making sure you have the materials.
- Organise your students into pairs to make their puppet. Ask them to decide which puppet they are going to make: an animal puppet, or one of the other characters such as Mei or Kanta.
- Ask them to think about the structure of their animal or human – what features will they have? Eg: Arms and legs, a tail? The shape of their head. How much movement they need, how many joints?
- Encourage them to think about the moving parts of their puppet. Do they need the arms and legs to move independently? If so, they could use a wooden spoon for a body and attach cardboard arms with butterfly clips at the shoulders and wrists.
- Once they have a body or skeleton for their puppet, ask them to think about the shape of the body. Can they pad the stomach out with cotton wool for example? How will they create the head? By using modelling clay or papier-mache.
- If their puppet wears clothes, ask them to cut these out of the scraps of material and add hair out of wool or string. Remind them at this stage, their puppets do not have to be amazingly real or finished, the animals in *My Neighbour Totoro* are made out of skeletal frames, it's the puppeteers who bring them to life!
- Invite them to add a face to their puppet. Encourage them to experiment a bit with this to get the right face. Which features are going to be the most important. If they like, they could have different faces or mouths on pieces of paper that they can change, depending on how their puppet feels!
- When their puppets are almost done, ask them to attach the rods to the moving parts so they can operate their puppet. At this stage ask them if it's possible for one person to operate the puppet or do they need to work as a pair, Eg: with one person on the arms, the other on the head?



## ACTIVITY 14b: MEET THE PUPPET

This second part concentrates on bringing the puppets to life by allowing the students to learn to work with them and respond to outside influence. **[You will need: computer with internet access ready to play these clips: [Straw Puppet](#) and [Rod Puppet](#)].**

- As a group, watch the above links of Improbable improvising with two puppets: a straw puppet and a rod puppet.
- Discuss how these puppets have been made and are being operated. The straw puppet is a particularly simple design and has no face at all! At what moments does it really come to life? Notice how two people are operating the puppets but only one person is speaking for them. See how the rod puppet's head is moved so it can look at what it needs to see. Notice how it given time to think like a real person!
- Now give your pairs a few minutes to discuss the character of their puppet, coming to some decisions together. Does their puppet speak? Is it shy or bold? How will it move? Which parts will they each operate and who will do the speaking or make the noises?
- Encourage them to give their puppet a name and a short biography. Where are they from? What do they like to do? How are they feeling right now? Encourage them to use this time to practice operating their puppet together.
- Invite a volunteer pair to introduce their puppet to the rest of the group. Encourage the audience to ask the puppet questions, allowing the puppeteers to respond by moving their puppet, speaking back and/or making sounds.
- When all the pairs have shared their puppets, discuss the results: Did any of the puppets surprise the puppeteers with their responses? Did they suddenly feel alive at any point? As if they had a life of their own?

### Extension:

- If you have time, ask your students to pair up their puppets and interact together, encourage them to bring their puppets to life by giving them a 'story' – a sequence of thoughts and actions. Don't forget about the thoughts, this will affect the movement of their puppets!

## JAPANESE ORIGINS

### NOTES FROM THE PRODUCTION:

#### Puppetry and the Japanese tradition:

*"Puppetry," says our Puppetry Designer and Director Basil Twist, "is about something mysteriously coming to life."*

This is deeply connected to Japan's tradition. Mei and Satsuki's dad talks of a time when trees and people were once friends. It is only the children who can see Totoro and have that special connection to nature.



## ACTIVITY 15b: FLIP BOOK FUN

This is a creative activity to inspire students to make a basic animation, a moving image from still pictures that they will draw.

**[You will need: flip books for each student: 24 pieces of blank paper cut to 3 x 5 inch pieces and stapled together on the left hand side, pencils, rubbers, pens. Older students may like to make their own flip book.]**

- Hand out a small stack of 24 pieces of paper, cut to the same rectangular size, to each student and a pencil and rubber. Explain that in animation, one second of film is made up of about 24 separate drawings or 'frames' so they are going to make a one second film.

- Give them a few minutes to think about what type of film they'd like to make, keeping it simple as it won't be very long. Eg: a stick figure throwing a ball, a car driving over a bridge, a cat running up a tree. Explain that they will have 20 minutes to finish their 24 pictures.
- Ask them to use their pencil to draw their first image on the bottom sheet of paper in the stack. Explain that image will be the first 'frame' of their flip book animation, so to draw whatever they want to be the beginning of the story. Add that they should draw the image toward the bottom right corner of the sheet of paper so it's easy to see when they're flipping through the book later on.
- Encourage them to draw in pencil so they can rub out any mistakes they make and to go over the pencil with ink once they're finished with each drawing. This will help them to see the drawing through the next page so they can copy it more accurately and plan the slight change they want to make in the next drawing.
- Now ask them to draw the same image on the next sheet of paper but to make it slightly different, a progression of the story. Remind them to draw on the same bit of the page as they drew the first image (bottom right hand corner).
- Explain that this new image will be the second 'frame' in their animation, so it should be a very small change from the first. Eg: the stick figure starts to bend down to the ball, the car moves further towards the bridge, the cat gets closer to the tree.
- Remind them to always draw the next image on the page that's on top of the previous image they drew. These slightly varied images will create the animation when you flip through your book.
- When all the drawings are done, invite them to flip through their flip book to watch their animation come to life. Encourage them to swap flip books to watch each other's films.

### Activity Extension:

- This activity is a more advanced version of the above flip book. **[You will need: stacks of 24 UNSTAPLED pages and other art materials such as pastels or water colours.]**
- Give your students five minutes to prepare their flip book story, to plan what movement is going to be involved and create a real beginning, middle and end to their one minute film.
- Hand out the stacks of unstapled pages and explain that this time, they will have twenty minutes to create their flip book. Explain that the pages are not stapled so they can use pastels or water colours to create a background for the action if they wish.
- Remind them to number their pages in one corner incase they go out of sequence and allow the paint or ink to dry before stapling them together.
- Encourage them to think about what else is in the picture. Are there birds flying overhead? A flower opening? Wind blowing? How will they add this to each picture they draw?
- When all the drawings are done, invite them to staple them all together in the right order and flip through their flip books to watch their animation come to life. Encourage them to swap flip books to watch each other's films.

### Discussion:

- As a group, discuss the different forms of cartoons and animations they know of. Do they own any comics or graphic novels themselves? Is there anything anyone is a big fan of? Do they have a collection? Can they talk about their collection and why they like it?
- Can they think of any famous comic books or graphics novels or manga that has been turned into an animation or another art form or vice versa? Eg:
  - The Marvel and DC universe.
  - *The Lion King* was based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.
  - Most of Shakespeare's plays have been turned into graphic novels!
- Both manga and anime are incredibly popular with audiences in Japan and around the world and *My Neighbour Totoro* has an enormous fan following. Why do they think this is? What is it about cartoons and animation that creates such loyal fans? What is it specifically that makes Japanese manga and anime so popular?



## ACTIVITY 16a: MAKE A MANGA!

- This creative activity uses the idea of 'storyboards,' a popular way of bringing stories to life, most seen in comic books and graphic novels, but often used when planning a film to help a director or designer 'see' a story and plan camera angles.  
**[You will need: pens, large sheets of paper.]**
- Discuss the meaning of a 'storyboard' with your students. What does a manga, comic book or graphic novel look like? How might this layout be a useful part of planning your story?
- Organise your students into pairs and distribute paper and pens. Ask the pairs to draw FIVE large squares on the paper.
- Invite one of each pair to draw something they really want in the first box: world peace, the perfect exam results, a crown... Add that this drawing can be as simple or detailed as they like. Not every writer or director is great at drawing, it just has to make sense to them.
- Now invite their partner to suggest THREE ways in which they could achieve/get what they want. Explain that the first two ideas must fail and the last will succeed. Encourage these ideas to be as realistic or surprising as they wish.
- Ask your pairs to draw how the first two plans fail in boxes 2 and 3 and to draw the third successful attempt in box 4. If the plans are complicated, they can add dialogue or thought bubbles to explain them.
- Now ask each pair to draw the results of their 'quest' in box 5. Give them a few extra minutes to write down any emotions they feel might accompany this result. Ask them to consider the following: Have they got or achieved the thing they wanted? Has it been lost / broken / long forgotten in the quest?
- Invite your pairs to talk through their 'storyboard' with another pair and then discuss the results as a whole group: which boxes stood out as exciting moments of the story? Which of the stories has a happy / sad / unexpected ending? Were there any comical moments and why were they funny?

### EXTENSION:

- Give your students extra time to create and expand their own storyboards individually, adding extra squares to fill in the gaps. Encourage them to create extra characters and even add lines of dialogue to the squares like a cartoon or graphic novel.
- Challenge them, if they wish, to add their own puppet characters in the story. How would they change their rod puppets to make them into Manga characters? Would their animals suddenly be able to speak or share their thoughts? How can they add to the story?
- If they have time, they can colour them or add images from magazines or newspapers, (or even create them on their tablets if they are able.)



## ACTIVITY 16b: MANGA ACTION

This activity builds on the 'storyboards' and aims to bring many of our previous activities together. It allows students to work as an ensemble to bring the Manga designs and stories to life and involves the puppets they have made. (You will need: students' Manga storyboards and puppets!)

- Organise your students into groups of 5 or 6 and ask them to choose ONE of their Manga storyboards to bring to life in a live action ensemble Anime.
- Explain that they will have 20 minutes to plan and rehearse this using every member of the group and their puppets. Encourage them to draw on the work they have already done:
- Group tableaux and still images
- Using imaginary 'spirit' characters
- The ensemble creating background and sound effects
- Improvising with puppets



- Encourage them to work on bringing each frame of the storyboard to life in turn. Then to work out how to move from one to the other in the most simple and effective or dramatic way, making sure every member of the group is being used and knows what they're doing.
- Invite each group to share their Manga Action and discuss the results.

#### **EXTENSION:**

- If you have the time, choose ONE of the storyboards for the WHOLE group to act out in the same way.
- When deciding on a storyboard, ask your students to consider how a bigger group might help each section of the story. Which story could benefit from more puppets? More scenery? More characters?
- Give them 20 minutes to plan and rehearse each frame in turn just like before, with everyone included and knowing their role in each part of the story. Encourage them to remember everything they learned from their past activities working as an ensemble.
- Give the group 5 more minutes to work out how to move from one frame to another as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Invite the group to perform their Manga Action. If you can, record the performance and watch it back with the group so they can see how far they have come and enjoy the results.

# RESOURCES

## Appendix A: My Neighbour Totoro in 10 Scenes

1. Professor Tatsuo and his daughters, Satsuki and Mei move house to be nearer their sick mother in hospital. They start exploring the spooky old house immediately and find hundreds of sooty, black, tennis-ball sized creatures with big eyes. When they meet their neighbour, Granny, they tell her all about them.

**GRANNY** *It seems you have soot-sprites living here. They won't cause you any trouble. If they like you, they'll simply move on without a word.*

**MEI** *I don't want them to go anywhere.*

**SATSUKI** *What if there was a big one ... the size of a beach-ball... hiding in the dark... waiting for the moment to pounce... RAWRR!!*

**MEI** *I'm not afraid of anything.*

2. Satsuki meets Kanta, the boy next door. He doesn't know how to speak to girls and can only pull faces. Satsuki thinks he's very strange.

**SATSUKI** *My name is Satsuki.*

**KANTA** *(doesn't answer)*

**SATSUKI** *Your name is Kanta, isn't it?*

**KANTA** *(runs away) YOUR HOUSE IS HAUNTED!*

**SATSUKI** *Why did that boy ... why was he like that?*

**TATSUO** *(laughs) I was a little boy like him once.*

**SATSUKI** *Yuck.*

3. Satsuki spots a big tree from the window, an ancient Camphor tree behind the house. Mei thinks the house is going to fall down, it is so full of creaks and groans. As they all laugh, the Soot Sprites leave the house and fly away.

**TATSUO** *We should all laugh. It's impossible to be scared when you're laughing. (he laughs) Laugh at the owl ... laugh at the moon ... laugh at the big spooky trees!*

**ALL** *(laugh)*

**TATSUO** *There we go. Anyone still scared?*

**SATSUKI** *No.*

4. Tatsuo takes the girls to visit their sick mother in the tuberculosis hospital. They miss her terribly and want her to come home so they can care for her.

**MEI** *When are you coming home?*

**YASUKO** *I think they want to take care of me here for a little longer.*

**SATSUKI** *Mei is worried you might not come home if you know that the house is haunted.*

**YASUKO** *That all depends on the ghosts, doesn't it?*

5. While Satsuki is in school, two little spirits, Shōtotoro and Chūtotoro appear in the garden. Mei chases them and they lead her to a hole in the giant camphor tree. Mei falls down the hole and lands on a giant spirit.

**ŌTOTORO** *Doh-doh-ohhh.*

**MEI** *Totoro. We're friends now, Totoro.*

Mei falls asleep on Totoro but in the morning, Satsuki finds her asleep on the ground, alone. Mei can't find the hole in the tree to show her family.

**MEI** *He was big and round and I fell asleep on his belly. I'm not lying.*

**TATSUKI** *It sounds like you've met one of the spirits of the forest, which makes you a very lucky girl. Spirit of the forest... thank you for watching over Mei... thank you for making us feel so welcome in our new home ... please continue to watch over us all.*

6. One night in the rain, the sisters wait for their father's bus but he doesn't arrive. Mei falls asleep on Satsuki's back and the giant spirit, Ōtotoro appears. He is getting wet in the rain so Satsuki lends him an umbrella. Delighted, he gives her a parcel of seeds in return.

**SATSUKI** *It makes a good noise, doesn't it ... the rain? 'Pitter-patter pitter-patter ...'*

**ŌTOTORO** *(chuckles)*

**MEI** *(wakes) Totoro!*

**SATSUKI** *I can see him, Mei ... I can see him!*

The magical Catbus arrives and Ōtotoro climbs on board. The girls stroke the Catbus and scratch it behind the ears.

**CATBUS** *(happy) Meow!*

**MEI** *Goodbye Totoro!*

**SATSUKI** *Safe journey home!*

7. The sisters plant the seeds in the garden and wait for them to grow. One night they spot the Totoros marching out of the trees. They perform a ritual around the seeds, bowing to the soil. The girls run out and join them. The seeds sprout into a giant magical tree.

**SATSUKI** *Mei!*

**MEI** *Yatta! Yatta! (We did it)*

Next morning the girls wake up to find the seeds have sprouted into little plants.

**SATSUKI** *I thought ... I thought I'd dreamt ...*

**MEI** *No – it was real!*

8. Ōtotoro appears and summons the Catbus. The Catbus takes Satsuki to the lost Mei and then takes the sisters to the hospital where they hear their mum is going to be alright.

**MEI** *She's laughing. She must be okay*

**SATSUKI** *She's going to alright. We should get home ... Granny will be worried.*

**CATBUS** *Miaow!*

The three spirits, Shōtotoro, Chūtotoro and Ōtotoro watch the girls arrive home. They parade up and down and make music in celebration.

## Appendix B: Moving House!

### Scene 2 – *The Old House (edited)*

The Kusakabes arrive at their new home – a large wooden building, painted white but with a red roof – it has definitely seen better days. A large veranda with an awning. Behind the house is a large camphor tree. Tatsuo and the Removal Man start unloading the truck.

There's a water-pump and a well and a stone lantern. The girls have never had so much outside space – they run, they jump, they turn cartwheels and laugh deep from their bellies. Satsuki swings around a wooden support holding up the veranda's awning – the wood is rotten and the support moves dangerously. Mei and Satsuki both laugh. Mei gives the support a good shake – the whole thing nearly comes tumbling down.

### Scene 3b – *Haunted (edited)*

Satsuki and Mei reach the attic. It is dusty and cob-webbed, with a few bits of broken furniture here and there. Something moves behind them in the dark. Whatever they are, they are everywhere. Small, black, sooty, tennis-ball sized creatures with big eyes – Soot-sprites.

Every surface is covered in Soot-sprites. They swirl around the room. Satsuki runs to the window and flings open the shutters. The sudden daylight surprises and disperses the creatures. They disappear into the cracks of the wooden walls and floorboards and are gone.

### Scene 6 – *Evening Wind (edited)*

Night is falling and the quiet of the countryside envelops the Kusakabe house. There are lights from inside the house, but the grounds are getting dark. One of the screen doors slides open. Satsuki exits the house. The darkness of the countryside is a little frightening. She has come outside to collect wood from the wood-store.

Satsuki steps off the veranda but is stopped by the hoot of an owl. She steadies herself, puffs out her chest and steps foot into the dark. She makes it to the woodpile and starts gathering up some logs. Arms laden, she begins the journey back to the house. The tops of the trees shake – just the wind or something more magical?

## Appendix C: Scene 12 – Mei Wakes Up

**SATSUKI** *There you are. You need to stay near the house. What were you thinking?*

**MEI** *Where has he gone?*

**SATSUKI** *Who?*

**MEI** *He was big and furry ... with whiskers and pointy little ears ... a large mouth and claws ... teeth ... he roared and shouted but I wasn't scared.*

**SATSUKI** *You were dreaming.*

**MEI** *I didn't dream it... I didn't make him up!*

**TATSUO** *Who's this now?*

**SATSUKI** *Mei saw a bear.*

**TATSUO** *A bear?!*

**MEI** *I know what a bear looks like.*

**TATSUO** *There are no bears around here.*

**MEI** *He lives under this tree ... I climbed through a hole ... I'll show you ...*

MEI can't find the entrance.

**MEI** *He was big and round and I fell asleep on his belly. And I know what a bear looks like. I'm not lying.*

**TATSUO** *No one thinks you're lying.*

**MEI** *Satsuki does.*

**SATSUKI** *I don't ... but maybe you just ... maybe you were just pretending and ...*

**MEI** *I think the little ones ate my lunch.*

**TATSUO** *It sounds like you've met one of the spirits of the forest, which makes you a very lucky girl. A long time ago ... when the land was covered in trees ... man lived alongside the animals, and the spirits of the land and the sea lived with us ... they protected us and the forest gave us all we needed ... but as man grew, he chopped down the trees to build houses ... to build cities ... we made animals our pets ... our food ... our labour ... and the spirits of the forest started to hide from us ... frightened but also disappointed. Now they don't show themselves at all ... and certainly not to grown-ups like me. But once in a while they meet someone ... someone like you Mei ... and they like you ... and so they let you see them ... so you know that they are there ... protecting you.*



## Appendix D: ANIME SISTERS (edited)

1. **SATSUKI** *Come on!*  
**MEI** *Wait for me!*
2. **SATSUKI** *What if there was a big one ... hiding in the dark ... waiting to pounce ... RAWRR!!*  
**MEI** *I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of anything*
3. **MEI** *I wasn't scared in the first place.*  
**SATSUKI** *Liar.*

---

4. **MEI** *Brush my hair!*  
**SATSUKI** *Wait your turn.*
5. **MEI** *He was big and furry ... with whiskers and pointy little ears ... a large mouth and claws.*  
**SATSUKI** *You were dreaming.*
6. **SATSUKI** *Mei? What's wrong?*  
**MEI** *(shy, no response)*

---

7. **MEI** *(holding up her drawing) My picture got wet. I wanted to give it to Mummy.*  
**SATSUKI** *When we get home I'll help you to draw another one. You can even use my crayons.*
8. **MEI** *Totoro ...?*  
**SATSUKI** *I can see him, Mei ... I can see him!*
9. **SATSUKI** *(roars) Doh-doh-ohhh!*  
**MEI** *(roars back) Doh-doh-ohhh!*

---

10. **SATSUKI** *She could die, Mei. She could die. (walks away)*  
**MEI** *I hate her. She's so mean. (cries)*
11. **MEI** *I'm sorry I ran away, Satsuki. I'm cold.*  
**SATSUKI** *I shouldn't have shouted ... I'm just so glad you're okay*
12. **SATSUKI** *She's going to be alright.*  
**MEI** *I know.*

## Appendix E: Kanta Character Study

Kanta is Satsuki's next-door neighbour and classmate. He lives with Granny and his parents, Hiroshi and Tsukiko. He helps with household errands and enjoys playing with airplane models. He is young and has a shy personality. He cares about Satsuki, but doesn't know how to talk to her and has to ask his dad's advice on what to say to girls. At first, Kanta just pulls faces at Satsuki and runs away but when he hears her mother is sick, he lends her an umbrella. He tries to comfort Mei when she and Satsuki have a row and, when Mei goes missing, he helps search for her and even comforts Satsuki.

## Appendix F: Kanta's Secret Voice – Scene 5 (edited)

SATSUKI	Hello again.	
KANTA (doesn't answer)		
SATSUKI	My name is Satsuki.	
KANTA (doesn't answer)		
SATSUKI	Your name is Kanta, isn't it?	
KANTA	I ... I ...	
SATSUKI	It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance.	
	We are going to be neighbours.	
	Where is your house? Is it down the road?	
	The sky is so big here and the air is so clean	
	Are there bears in the woods?	
	Do you go to school in the village?	
	Which class are you in? Is the teacher nice?	
	Have you ever been to Tokyo?	
	We came in the truck but there's a bus	
	and there are trains. Do you like gorillas?	
	They have two at the zoo in Tokyo	
	I've seen them. (beats her chest like a gorilla)	
	Can we walk to school together?	
	(sees the basket) Is that for us?	
KANTA	My mum ... she said ... my mum said ...	
SATSUKI	Yes?	
	... to give this to Granny.	
KANTA	(thrusts the basket forward)	
SATSUKI	What is it?	
KANTA	(under his breath) Take it ... take it ...	
SATSUKI	Excuse me?	
KANTA	Take it!	
SATSUKI	(takes the basket)	
KANTA	(runs away)	

## Appendix G: Ensemble Pictures

1. The Kusakabe family arrive in a small truck. It is moving-day and the truck is overflowing with furniture and suitcases – it looks as though it could topple over at any point.
2. Mei and Satsuki visit their mother in hospital.
3. The villagers work in the rice fields.
4. Sleeping in the tree hollow is a large creature. As it breathes, its ribcage rises and falls. The creature's breath is heavy and slow – a deep, rumbling sound.
5. Kanta is feeding the chickens.
6. Mei is helping Granny with the laundry. Mei is stamping on the wet laundry in a tub. Granny is scrubbing.
7. Mei and Satsuki wait at the bus stop in the rain.
8. The seedlings grow and expand, pushing into the air. The plants grow higher and higher – creepers spiralling upwards, leaves unfurling, branches reaching into the sky.
9. Satsuki and the villagers search for the missing Mei.
10. The sisters hug the Catbus. It purrs happily.

## Appendix H: STAGE DIRECTIONS

Stage directions from *My Neighbour Totoro*:

1. Night is falling and the quiet of the countryside envelops the Kusakabe house. There are lights from inside the house, but the grounds are getting dark. One of the screen doors slides open. Satsuki exits the house. The darkness of the countryside is a little frightening. She has come outside to collect wood from the wood-store. Satsuki steps off the veranda but is stopped by the hoot of an owl. She steadies herself, puffs out her chest and steps foot into the dark. She makes it to the woodpile and starts gathering up some logs. Arms laden, she begins the journey back to the house. The tops of the trees shake – just the wind or something more magical? The owl hoots and swoops down from the trees, startling Satsuki and causing her to trip and drop all of the wood she was carrying. Upset, she picks herself up, dusts herself down and starts picking up the wood.
2. Mei chases the two totoro through the thick tangle of the forest. Mei's clothes get caught on branches, her hat gets knocked off and left behind. Chūtotoro and Shōtotoro are faster than their little legs would suggest. They run further into the dark and ancient forest. Mei manages to keep them in sight. She clammers over tree roots and rocks. She clammers up an incline and into a clearing. She has lost sight of the two totoro. At the centre of the clearing stands the old camphor tree – massive and ancient. Tied around the trunk of the tree is a large rope. A small shrine to one side of the tree. Mei looks up at the huge, magical tree. From the tangled roots of the tree watch the two totoro. Mei catches sight of them and they disappear into a burrow at the base of the tree. Mei puffs up her chest and clammers over the roots to the opening of the burrow. She sticks her head in. She calls out. "Hello!"