

7

UNREAL IMPROVISATIONS

It's not uncommon to personify inanimate objects in everyday conversation: The wind is howling. That cake is calling my name. The words leaped off the paper. The fire ran wild. Life is passing me by.

It's also not uncommon for us to speak to nonhuman things as if they were human. Have you ever screamed at your computer for crashing while you were writing an important e-mail? You may have begged your car to start on a cold morning. You've probably told your alarm clock to shut up more than once in your life.

It's fun to think of what things would say if they could talk. Imagine a dress saying, "I wish she'd stop asking her husband if I make her look fat! It is not my intention to make anyone look fat!" But what would its voice sound like? How would it posture itself if it could stand? If it could walk, what kind of a stride might it have?

Improvising objects and animals allows actors a chance to move, gesture, and vocalize in ways that can be completely outside the realm of human nature. Physicalizing the imagined thoughts and emotions of inanimate objects and animals is an excellent way for actors to completely step outside of themselves and avoid stereotypical visible and vocal expressions.

Running the improvisations in this chapter is simple. Just ask the players to take the stage or acting area, read the scene summary aloud, and let the players take it from there. You can give the players a time limit or allow them to end the scene on their own. After the performance is over, you might want to discuss with the players and the observers the characteristics of the objects or animals used to develop specific feelings, actions, and objectives.

Note: A few simple facts about the animals in the “Living Things” section are included to make it easier for the players to develop their characters. If needed, allow the players a few minutes before performing to find more detailed information.

Inanimate Objects

Two Players

1. A smartphone brags about its fancy features to a simple land-line phone.
2. A dime reminds a nickel that the value of a coin has little to do with its size.
3. A permanent marker accuses a pencil of being fickle, since anything written in pencil can be easily erased.
4. An expensive oil painting isn't happy with the simple wooden frame that surrounds it.
5. As dinnertime draws near, a knife and a fork develop a plan of attack.
6. A polka-dotted dress shirt and a striped tie are attracted to each other, even though they realize they don't match.
7. Bruised and battered, a baseball begs a baseball bat not to swing at it.
8. Two peas in a pod swear they'll always be together.
9. A loveseat becomes romantically involved with a large sofa.
10. A 12-foot extension ladder bullies a small stepstool.
11. A roll of dental floss and a toothbrush debate their individual importance in the war on tooth decay.
12. Lamenting the popularity of tablets and electronic reading devices, two books reminisce about the old days.