

## **The Trading Post**

### **Aim:**

*This piece can be used to introduce the importance of trade in the sense of sharing resources and the need for co-operation between the parties. It works well for family and adult audiences and is based around an old folk-tale.*

### **Performers:**

1 narrator

4 actors

### **Props etc.**

2 sets of steps / stools

4 canvas back-packs

1 large cooking pot

A few carrots

2 onions

2 potatoes

4 tin mugs

*N.B. The characters carry all their vegetables on stage with them in their bags. They produce half of them in the first part and half in the second. The person with the pot empties it and puts it back in his bag between the first and second parts.*

### **Notes:**

*The whole piece should have a storytelling quality in both its telling and acting out. The travellers should be stylised and animated but not caricatures, and the narrator should be warm and expressive in tone, but an adult audience should not feel patronised.*

*You can run the two parts immediately after each other, or you could have an explanation or some interaction in between. We ran the 2 pieces straight through, but put in the opening bars of a simple piece of folk music firstly to introduce part one and then to re-introduce part two, whilst emphasising the connection between the two.*

## The Trading Post

### Part One

*During this first speech, the four characters walk onto stage, where there are two sets of steps (or a couple of stools will do). The travellers gather in the centre, two sitting on the steps and two standing/leaning next to them, acting out what the narrator is saying, until "shared their experiences". At this point they freeze until traveller 1 begins to speak. Each of them carries a battered back-pack from which they produce the items they describe.*

**Narrator)** Once a time ago, in a land not so far away and at a time not too distant, four travellers met upon their way.

They were all weary after a long day's journeying, with little to offer one another, but, as travellers do, they sat down together to pass some time and tell their tales. As they told of their journeys - they laughed, argued, encouraged and shared their experiences. As the night began to fall, and thoughts returned to packing up and moving on, and wondering about the possibility of a meal and a place to lay their heads, they began to speak. Of what they each had in their provisions.

**1)** Well, I was passing a field of potatoes yesterday, and the farmer called out to me to stop for a while to help. I stayed for the day, pulling up the roots from the hard ground, and in return he gave me a meal, and an armful of potatoes. I have eaten well today, and have just a few potato left, for supper.

**2)** Well, I've certainly not been as fortunate as you. I would love to earn some food, but the land that I've travelled through is hostile to strangers, and I have been reduced to scavenging bits of food, wherever I can. I live on what I find, and today has been a lean day. All I could find was a field of carrots, and I only had time to grab a couple before the farmer's hand saw me and raised the alarm. Still, these will keep me going for now and I hope for better things tomorrow.

**3)** I can understand the frustrations of that farmer who you stole from - I believe in working for what you need. I have a field many miles from here, but the ground is rough and unyielding and I have only ever managed to grow onions in it. Even then, the weather has been harsh and the harvest low this year, forcing me to take my meagre crops and try to trade them along the way. I have only these 5 onions left, and when they have gone I will need to beg for work, or go hungry.

**4)** Well, I don't see the need to go hungry - you simply need to know how to trade. I make and carry pots and pans to sell, and can always find money to eat, but now I have left it too late for the day's markets, so tonight I will be hungry, but tomorrow will be fine.

*[All of the four travellers freeze.]*

**Narrator)** So, four people, with different journeys behind and before them, with little to offer and less for themselves, but as they began to pack away and say their goodbyes, one of them saw their feeble offerings through fresh eyes.

*[All unfreeze.]*

**2)** Well, my friends,

**N)** he began

**2)** it has been good to share our stories, and to pass some time along the way with you, but I wonder whether we could also share our scraps of food?

**N)** Some questioned him

**3)** But how do we each take a bite of an onion? How will it help us?

**N)** But the others realised what he was saying

**4)** Carrots for goodness

**2)** Potatoes for heartiness

**1)** Onions for flavour

**3)** And the pan to cook it in.

**N)** They all agreed that this was a good idea, collected water from a nearby spring. and filled

**4)** the pot *[holding it out]*

**2)** with carrots *[put in]*

**1)** potato *[put in]*

**3)** onions *[put in]*

*[All produce cups from their hags, to dip into the pot.]*

**N)** and together they cooked a hearty broth, that they all agreed was

**1)** warming

**2)** filling

**3)** tasty

**4)** delicious

**N)** and they travelled on their ways that night, never expecting to cross ~ .again, but with their stomachs full of the finest food they had eaten for many a month, and their hearts full of the new friendships they had made.

*[During this last speech the travellers pack their things away, wave their goodbyes/shake hands and depart happily.]*

## **Part Two**

*[During this speech the four travellers arrive on stage again. It is important that they ad out the first part of the scene in exactly the same way in tone and action as previously.]*

**Narrator)** Once a time ago, in the very same place and a very similar time, four travellers met along their ways.

Again they had little to offer one another, but again they passed some time together. There was the same laughter, the same arguments, the same encouragements and the same tales shared, *[freeze here as before until traveller 1 begins to speak]* and very soon there were the same thoughts of moving on, and the same pondering over the provisions that each had brought.

- 1) The last few potatoes earned
- 2) A couple of stolen carrots
- 3) A handful of hard grown onions
- 4) A tradesman's pot

**Narrator)** So, four people, with different journeys behind and before them, with little to offer and less for themselves, but as they began to pack away and say their goodbyes, one of them saw their feeble offerings through fresh eyes.

2) Well, my friends,

**N)** he began

2) it has been good to share our stories, and to pass some time along the way with you, but I wonder whether we could also share our scraps of food ?

**N)** Some questioned him

3) But how do we each take a bite of an onion? How will it help us?

**N)** But the others realised what he was saying

4) Carrots for goodness

**2)** Potatoes for heartiness

**1)** Onions for flavour

**3)** And the pan to cook it in.

**N)** And it seemed like a good idea

**4)** Although .... I do find myself wondering, if our shares are really equal

**N)** one began to say

**2)** equal enough

**N)** was the reply, and yet others also began to question

**1)** Indeed, I have the most precious ingredient to make this broth thick and enriching. What will I gain from the other meagre offerings? I could keep my potatoes for a meal tomorrow.

**3)** And eat the very same that you have eaten for the past days, instead of enjoying seasoning and taste.

**2)** well, you would say exactly that, having only onions to eat, you profit the most from our sharing

**3)** Profit the most? From sharing with thieves and casual hands. These onions are far more precious than your offerings will ever be, because they are my sweat and labour. I begin to ask myself if I can bear to give them where they will not be appreciated - lost in the midst of a soup that is far more about bulk than taste.

**4)** My dear friends

**N)** broke in the first doubter

**4)** this discussion, I fear, is rather pointless

**N)** and caught the attention of the others

**4)** for the decision really rather rests with me.

**N)** This made the travellers forget their grievances with one another, as they turned on him as one

**1)** You have no rights over us

**2)** You are just the same

**3)** with the same to lose and gain

1) what gives you the right to decide for us?

N) But the fourth traveller stayed calm in the knowledge that he was right

4) Why this does, dear friends, I think you will find

N) he quietly said, producing his pot,

4) this does.

N) and the others looked on in silence.

4) You see, each of your offerings we can do without, but without a pot you cannot make broth.

1) So what does this mean?

N) the others questioned

2) do we not eat together

3) or do we?

4) Well .. I think we should

N) and the others nodded their agreement

4) but as the one with the most important offering, I think that I should be allowed to eat twice as much.

N) The others were silent once again, but then they began to voice their disbelief

2) You expect to eat more than I who have been forced to risk being caught, I am so desperate to eat?

4) Well, then you will enjoy the broth twice as much

1) Well, I am not so desperate to make such a dishonest tradesman's deal. I have eaten well from what I have earned. I would rather eat the same than sit at a table with any of you.

3) And I would rather go hungry than allow any of you to enjoy the seasoning of my labour.

4) You are mistaken to let pride and vanity go before well-being

3) No, you are mistaken that I would sink so low to share with any of you who are so wily

2) superior

**1)** selfish

**4)** fools.

**N)** and they travelled on their ways that night, never expecting to cross paths again, with stomachs empty, and hearts full of hatred for those whom they had met.

*[During this final speech the travellers pack their things away angrily and depart.]*