



## Meerkat - Teacher Resource Pack



PEUT-ÊTRE THEATRE

### How to use this pack

This pack offers lesson plans linked to English, Science and Dance for KS1 and KS2. You do not need to have visited the zoo in person to use this pack, however the activities also work well as a prior or follow-up activity to a visit.

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### How to access the podcast

You can listen to Audiomoves at the zoo episodes using a mobile phone, tablet, desktop or laptop. Episode are available via:

[our website](#)

[Spotify](#) \*

[iTunes](#) \*

[YouTube](#)

\*These platforms allow you to download episodes so you can listen offline. If you're not sure how to play the episodes, [click here](#)

## **Audiomoves at the Zoo**

These unique podcast recordings are designed to encourage children to move, dance and use their imaginations, whilst learning about animals.

It can be used in the classroom while taking a brain or sensory break, in the hall as part of PE, or as a way to liven up and make playful curricular areas or topics you are covering with your class.

Each recording lasts around 15 minutes and comprises two parts. Part A is a Q&A between a zookeeper and primary school children, and contains key zoological facts and interesting trivia about each animal. Part B is a physical exploration of the animal's movement. Part B is carefully structured to gently introduce a range of movements and accessible alternative options, inviting children to move the way they want, inspired by the animal, turning animal movement into an imaginative dance. Each session ends with a cool down where the children focus on their breathing, notice the sensations in their bodies, and reflect on how the session made them feel.

## **Links to the Curriculum**

Audiomoves at the Zoo links to the national curriculum in the following areas:

### **A. Dance**

Supporting the development of dance as part of the requirement for children to:

- perform dances using simple movement patterns.

Each podcast allows children to explore the dynamics of movement and dance, using animal movement as a start point. It encourages them not only to mimic or copy the animal but rather to use their imagination to personally interpret and recreate the movement. The podcast emphasises on accessibility, inviting children of all abilities to explore alternative ways of moving in a way that feels enjoyable and comfortable to each mover's physical capacity.

### **B. Science**

Supporting the requirement for children to:

- Develop an understanding of the nature, processes and methods of science through different types of science enquiries that help them to answer scientific questions about the world around them.

By setting an 'audible' paradigm, the podcast will help children to work scientifically, following practical scientific methods, such as

- asking simple questions and getting simple and yet scientifically accurate answers
- using their observation skills to gain an understanding of an animals' nature

Particularly relating to animals, the children will learn to identify the animals according to their species characteristics, describe and name simple anatomy and body parts, classify animals on the basis of their food, learn about their provenance, moving patterns and natural habitats

## **C. English**

Whilst learning about the animals, children will expand their vocabulary. They will be encouraged to discuss new word meanings and consolidate the ones they already know. They will become acquainted with uncommon terms, which make part of the scientific/zoological vocabulary. They will be invited to recognise from a list, the words that apply to a certain animal, and those which are irrelevant. Entertaining word games will help them to recognise the spelling of new and already known words. Listening to the podcast will motivate them to link what they hear and read to their own experiences, and then through the resource pack activities they will be challenged to write short sentences, sequence them to form short narratives, read outloud what they have written and then discuss it in class.

### **Learning Outcomes**

These lesson plans will support children develop their:

- Listening
- Dance and movement
- Communication, language and storytelling
- Understanding of animals and biology

## English lesson plan

### Activity 1: The Podcast (zookeeper Q&A)

1. **Introduction:** Introduce the animal and let the children know they are about to listen to an interview with a zookeeper from London Zoo.
2. **Play the podcast Q&A** (time code: 00:00 - 06:22)
3. **Once the Q&A has finished (06:22), press pause.**
4. **Discussion**  
Ask the children what their favourite fact from the interview was.



### Activity 2: Word Search / Terminology

*In class, explain the following useful words that were used by Ronnie*

**Tripod:** comes from the Greek language and literally means "three-legged". The word tripod describes any object supported by three legs, like a camera stand.

**Alarm:** (noun) an anxious awareness of danger.  
(verb) to make someone feel frightened, disturbed, or in danger.

**Burrow:** a hole or tunnel dug by a small animal, especially a rabbit, as a home or a hiding place.

**Squabble:** a noisy quarrel/fight about something trivial.

**System:** a set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an interconnecting network; a complex whole.

**Chamber:** a large room for public events. In older times it used to mean a private room, especially a bedroom. An enclosed space or compartment.

### Meerkat Word Search

R V H H K D H X X H T H  
 R W I S M E Y X D O E G  
 L P R K G S I P L H P L  
 T T A I L E Q T Y J A S  
 I W V F L R N M M I W C  
 I Y O A L T F X O H S S  
 D I G I B A Z J B Q W Y  
 V F B Y V V V Z M U L R

Find the following words in the puzzle.  
 Words are hidden → and ↓ .

DESERT  
 DIG

MOB  
 PAWS

TAIL

### Meerkat Word Search

D L L F K N E Y T R I P O D F G G N  
 E R P A W S M F G P H Y S C R K E V  
 P G Z W K T C L I M B R P E Q N N T  
 F W I E J N C P S Z D G M I X N D X  
 B L B U R R O W S T S C O N P P H V  
 U I S H D R L J W Z G V B E X W T R  
 N B H K I J Y T S J V N J Z Z W S W  
 D H D J G I Q M T A Z T O V K C I T  
 L Y I G W P R J A X B O A Q X G Z Y  
 E K I L R V V A N R Z B E I O M I E  
 R P H R Z V F Q D V U N V R L N L X  
 N Q C Q Z W B A L A N C E C S P T C

Find the following words in the puzzle.  
 Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

BALANCE  
 BUNDLE  
 BURROWS  
 CLIMB

DIG  
 MOB  
 PAWS  
 STAND

TAIL  
 TRIPOD

**Choose the words and/or sentences that describe or are related to the meerkat.**

**Cross off the words that do NOT describe the meerkat and copy the rest in the list below**

Tail	Paws	_____	_____
Burrows	Tripod	_____	_____
Bundle	Fly	_____	_____
Belly	Dig	_____	_____
Swim	Squabble	_____	_____

**How many words/sentences that describe the meerkat did you find?** \_\_\_\_\_

**a. Can you add any words of your own ?**

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**b. Write some sentences to describe the meerkat, using some of the words above**

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### Activity 3: Imagination and Conversation

1. Discuss the characteristics and qualities of the meerkat. Conclude as to what the quintessential attributes of the meerkat are, which characteristic makes them unique (standing as a tripod, digging underground tunnels, crying out alarm calls?).
2. Invite the children to think of the meerkat as a superhero having that characteristic as its super power. Discuss how they could save the planet using their super power? (for example, if shouting alarm calls is their strength, could they use it to warn people about imminent emergencies? Let your imagination run wild!).
3. Ask children to draw this superhero.
4. Find a name for your superhero.
5. Write collectively a short story about how they saved the planet.
6. **Role playing:** invite children to assume the role of a TV journalist and ask them to present their story as a report on the evening news.

## Science lesson plan

### **Activity 1: The Podcast (zookeeper Q&A)**

1. **Introduction:** Introduce the animal and let the children know they are about to listen to an interview with a zookeeper from London Zoo.
2. **Play the podcast Q&A** (time code: 00:00 - 06:22)
3. **Once the Q&A has finished (06:22), press pause.**
4. **Discussion**  
Ask the children what their favourite fact from the interview was.

### **Activity 2: Classifying Animals**

The meerkat is a small mongoose found in southern Africa. Meerkats are weasel-like animals that are members of the mongoose family, which includes small terrestrial carnivorous mammals.

**(KS1)** If meerkats belong to mammals...can you identify which groups the following animals belong?: [ZSL Animal Groups Worksheet](#)

**(KS2)** Animals can be grouped in lots of different ways. Check out [this ZSL Classifying Animals worksheet](#), and see if you can identify which animals belong to which group.

### **Activity 3: Language**

Biologists have discovered that meerkats have developed their own language in order to communicate. The language is made up of different vocalisations / voice calls that act as a vocabulary. Meerkats specialists haven't completely deciphered meerkat language, but they know for sure that meerkats have at least 30 different calls for different purposes. For example, meerkats purr to show contentment, they chatter when they're nervous, and they use sounds to coordinate their hunting efforts. They squeal when danger is present, and



they have different calls for the approach of predators depending whether they are coming from the land or air. [Watch this BBC Earth video](#) to learn how scientists managed to decode meerkat language.

### **So meerkats have their own language. But what is 'language' exactly? How does it work?**

Language is a complex system of words, gestures, and symbols used to convey meaning. It's been the centre of interest of many scientists since the discovery that language functions are related to brain tissue. Certain parts of the brain help process and decode the language, be it spoken or signed. Human beings use language to express themselves and communicate with each other.

Language functions are related to the brain. There are two primary "language centres," both located on the left side of the brain, which help process and decode the language, be it spoken or signed. By decoding we mean that we hear the sound of a 'word' and we immediately attach a meaning to it. Neuroscientists study the human brain and nervous system, and language is one of their topics of research.

### **Activity: Create your own 'language'**

Meerkats have developed their own language. Can you work as a team to develop your own 'language'? It's simple!

1. Ask children to propose a vocalisation (not a known word) or an audible gesture (e.g hand clap) that will mean "jump".  
*Remember jumping does not mean the same thing for all physicalities! Each one can do their own thing.*
2. Ask the class to repeat the sound a few times, to make sure that everyone is on the same page.
3. Find a space, big enough for the whole group to walk/move about and take notice of any obstacles or bumping hazards.
4. The teacher/leader will act as the meerkat on guard and the children as the mob.

5. The mob starts walking/moving freely around the space at a normal pace. Everytime the guard calls out the newly coined 'word' for 'jumping' the mob should jump, each according to their own physicality. And then they resume walking.
6. After repeating a few times you can go ahead and create another 'word', for example 'freeze'.
7. The mob starts walking/moving and now they have to listen out for two different calls.
8. In the same manner, slowly populate your own vocabulary. It's always easier to attach action meanings to sounds, for instance duck down, stand on one leg, sit, eat, raise your hands in the air etc.

Now you have created your own language!

**Variation:** Repeat the same but now ask children to alternate in the role of the meerkat on guard and call the shots.

## [Dance lesson plan](#)

### **Activity 1: Listening and moving to the podcast (KS1 & 2)**

#### **1. Warm Up**

Begin your session by inviting children into the space and proposing a simple name and movement game; in a circle ask the children to name their favourite animal and do a single move mimicking the animal. If you're seated this can be an arm or a head movement – you could also suggest that they can accompany the move with a sound or just do the sound alone. When everyone has shared a movement you could ask children if they can remember someone else's dance move and get everyone to repeat.

#### **2. Introduce the theme**

Introduce the meerkat as the theme of the podcast episode you are about to listen to and have a short discussion - for example: you might talk about whether they like meerkats or not, where they have ever seen one, either live or in a book/on tv. Get them to talk about their experience.

Explain that you are going to join someone called Charlie on a trip to the zoo, during which they will learn about meerkats and then perform a dance inspired by that animal. It should be emphasised at the beginning that children are free to move however they want to. This is about freeing their imaginations; they can be as silly or as serious as they want – as long as they are safe. Ask children to find a space and then look around the room to notice all the obstacles or hard objects they might bump into if not careful, as well as all the other people in the room. Emphasise the need to be safe and look after each other.

Remind the class that they can choose how to move – these can be tiny moves, or big moves. They may choose to do their dance sitting or want to move around the space. The important thing is for them to feel how they want to move in response to what Charlie is saying, the music and the sound effects.

#### **3. Play the podcast and dance**

The podcast episode moves into the dance activity after the zookeeper Q&A. Once Charlie invites you to move, signal to the children.

Joining the children in moving and dancing can help build confidence, particularly if you are not afraid to be silly yourself. Showing how you interpret the invitation to move can help to encourage more hesitant children, but try not to lead the class in following you.

You can also notice how some of the children are moving and encourage others to do the same, or build on and develop other options. You can repeat out loud some of the things Charlie says in the podcast to help guide the children's movements. As Charlie does, keep the language you use open to different choices and possibilities – underling that there is no right or wrong way to respond.

If a certain movement resonates particularly well with class, you can pause the podcast, elaborate a bit on that movement and then move on to the next thing.

#### **4. Discuss their experiences of dancing alongside Charlie**

The Audiomoves at the Zoo podcasts focus on the sensory, somatic experience of movement and dance. However, discussing children's responses after the dance is a great way to prolong the experience; sharing the different ways in which they explored and played in the session and finding the rich vocabulary to express this.

Noticing the relationship between the physical sensations children experienced and feelings and emotions can help children recognise and tune into how their body and mind are one.

##### **Some suggested questions to guide your discussion:**

- What was their favourite movement and why?
- How did that movement make them feel?
- How was the experience of using their body parts in a totally different way than humans do?
- What was it like to imagine having body parts that humans don't have, like a tail or four paws?
- How different would the world around them look and feel if they were a meerkat? *Being able to dig burrows, see a threat far in the distance, or stand as a tripod must change things a great deal!*

- Which of the meerkat's qualities (for example, being an excellent tunnel digger or a lookout to protect loved ones) do they wish they had, and how would they use it in their everyday life?  
*You can ask the children to share how they would move in this case and things they would do. You can further suggest that everyone in the class try out these moves, and then try out different and/or contrasting ways that others would do the same thing. For instance one might choose digging tunnels because they want to become an engineer and another to play in the sand pit?*

***Movement Verb list***

- Walk
- Run
- Dig
- Look around
- Look out
- Climb
- Squabble
- Huddle
- Bundle
- Stand
- Balance