

Bugs Came First

1. Opening

Web of life theme and dance

Badger(s) enter and sing:

We and our ancestors have wandered here
Day after day, year after year
We follow the old traditions
But we are feeling threatened
We hear sounds we do not understand
We see strangers on our land
Some of us are dying, we don't know why
There's poison on the earth
And fire in the sky...
We ask the buzzard and the owl in flight
What do they see by day or night?
We don't feel safe on our ancient ways
Something's going wrong these days
Something's going wrong these days

Frogs enter – keep a polite distance from Badger

Badger

Don't be nervous, frogs – what's the matter?

Frogs sing:

Badger, we need to talk to you
There's something wrong, we feel it too.
Our ponds and our rivers are drying out
What's it all about?
Those metal monsters squash us on the roads -
It's not safe for frogs or toads
We want to stay alive and thrive, and keep
Jumping merrily
We need safe spaces so that we
Can be happy and free!

Frogs dance and leap

Hedgehog appears – cries out when it notices Badger

Frogs keep out of Hedgehog's way – but Hedgehog doesn't notice them, because of concentrating on Badger

Badger

Relax – I don't need any dinner..yet..

Hedgehog sings

I can't find the food I want
To see the winter through
What's a poor hedgehog to do?
If all the slugs and snails are dead
I won't get fed
What's a poor hedgehog to do?
It isn't safe to be outside
When humans use pesticide
What's a poor hedgehog to do?

They all think a bit while instruments improvise

Badger

Let's go and find Wise Old Owl, who'll know what to do..

All agree and they set off, walking along the river. They meet river animals – eg. Dipper, Otter - who may join them.

Sound of river and musical improvisation

When they arrive at Owl's tree, s/he is still a bit sleepy...

Owl

Hoo-hoo, what's all this to do, what's up with you, hoo-hoo? It's a bit early isn't it-ooo

Frogs, nervously

Owl, we need your advice..

Owl

Hoo-hoo, I'm glad you knew
I was the right creature to come to
Hoo-hoo, what to do, what to do....

They all have a little sleep and think – musical improvisation

Owl wakes

I think we have reached the time foretold in my great-great-great-great-granny's prophecy, the time when we have to rise up against the Terrible Thing. We need to call a General Assembly of all the animals together– I'll send messengers out far and wide, all over the Earth – and those who can't get here themselves can send their stories.. Now, what time, and when...?

Badger

Not in the day when we're sleepy

Owl

Or in the night when we have to ...go out...About this time, dusk.... and nobody will be too hungry

or sleepy.. Call the other owls, the eagles, the geese, the cormorants,all those who can fly fast and return - it's a world crisis – we have to get organised....

*Improvise messaging music, calls of birds, wind and sea sounds, many voices.
Weave in web of life theme*

2.The General Assembly

Lots of background chit-chat and hubbub – this can be recorded or live. UK animals will probably arrive first.

Owl

Welcome, welcome, to you all, from near and far, what a wonderful turn-out. So many of you, with stories to tell of what is happening. Where necessary, I can translate. Now, a few things before we start...

We've called you, hoo, because we are living, hoo, in a time of crisis..animals are suffering everywhere - We want to work out what to dooo.

Please flap your wings, or wave your legs or feelers to show when you agree, otherwise it'll be chaos and we won't hear a thing. If you disagree with anything, or want to make a comment, then hold a leg – or something - out ...like..this...(she demonstrates)

And of course, for the duration of this General Assembly..no-one will think about eating anyone. Normal predation rules do not apply in this space. Thankyooou.

I myself have seen many changes, not for the better. It's much harder to find a decent place to live these days, and food...isn't always that available (*looks meaningfully at insects, and frogs*)...BUT - we all need each other from the smallest to the largest. If anyone of us disappears, and I mean *disappear* - for ever, then it affects all the rest of us.

First – can we hear from Dormouse? Wake up Dormouse - we've got a planetary crisis to sort out -

Dormouse

Crisis – what crisis?

Dormouse sings

I love to climb in the trees at night, looking for things to eat,
I'm fond of fruit and flowers and hazel nuts
In Spring I build my nest from honeysuckle bark
But when it gets too cold, I'm dozy, dozy, dozy, dozy

Owl

Oh come on Dormouse, don't fall asleep now – tell us what's going wrong – woods aren't what they used to be are they?

Dormouse

Wrong? oh...(yawning)
It's getting harder
To move from tree to tree in the forest canopy
And it's getting harder to sleep the winter through
Safely underground
And I'm dozy, dozy, dozy, dozy, dozy... (*falls fast asleep*)

Owl

Oh well, that's dormice for you.. we won't get anything else out of him now – this weather's too cold for him.

Swallows fly in, twittery musical improvisation

Owl

Hello swallows, you must be tired after your long journey – and I know it's getting harder for you as well to find enough food to keep going.

Butterflies, followed by bees, fly in and go to flowers. Instrumental improvisation for butterflies is followed by humming for the bees – everyone can join in with this

Owl

Welcome, welcome – sorry to hear bees that you've been getting ill.

Other animals can take part in the assembly without having a singing or spoken part. Here's a list of some other UK animals that might come – there are plenty more to choose from of course! If possible, try and record some local bird songs and play them occasionally during the assembly, so there is a constant low hum/chatter, but not enough to overpower the speech or songs. Owl can introduce different animals.

Mole

Otter

Hare

Adder

Grass Snake

Slow worm

Bats (Lesser Horseshoe, Pipistrelle, and others)

Beetles (Stag, Oil and Shield beetles, ladybirds, and many more)

Dragon Fly

Damsel Fly

Water Vole

Buzzard

Song birds such as skylark and song thrush

Wading birds such as geese and godwits

Sea birds such as puffin and oystercatcher

Owl

We have messages of solidarity from all over the world, from:

Africa, where those humans are at it again, making wars....it's specially hard for the Great Apes in the Congo, and the Hyaenas are really suffering from prejudice and discrimination. The Elephants

are finding it difficult to hear each other over a distance, there's so much other racket now that is nothing to do with us animals...they're on their way here now, but they got delayed trying to find a clear path..

The Giant Panda sent an update from China – although they're hanging in there, the forests are still being destroyed by Metal Monsters, so they face an uncertain future.

We have news from India – first, a live interview with the esteemed Tiger (*small animals look a bit nervous*)

(loud and impressive percussion introduction for Tiger, who then speaks over the music)

Tiger

My empire used to stretch from the shores of the Caspian Sea
Across Siberia and Asia
I walked proudly in Indonesia and Malaysia
But now my power has dwindled, and so few of us walk free
We long to return to our ancient territory
To walk again, proud and free, proud and free...

*Music leads straight into **Vultures** – they call over the instruments*

Vultures

We are the Asian Vultures
We are scavengers, essential to life, essential to life
But we are being poisoned, we are being poisoned - we are misunderstood
Help us, help us, help us!

Owl

We also have had reports from the Americas, Europe, the Arctic and Antarctic, Australia, New Zealand, and South East Asia - and all the islands in between – and all the sea between the islands. Metal Monsters are everywhere, and the Thing is spreading

Here's a message from our friend the Palma Stick Grasshopper:

'Humans are turning my beautiful Canary Islands home into golf courses and cutting down the plants I need to eat..and if I go, then lots of others will go too...'

We have messages of support from: (*Owl reads from a list of non-UK animals – for example the following - they can be depicted through dance, projections or sounds. Feel free to add to or cut down the list – these animals are all threatened in some way*)

The American Crocodile
The Burying Beetle
Purple Skimmer Dragonfly
Possums and Wombats
Kiwis
The Monarch Butterfly

Ocelot
Poison Frogs and Glass Frogs
Bison from Bielowieza
Sloth, 2/3 toed
Sumatran Rhino
Emperor Penguin
Polar bear
Lion
Wild Chicken/turkey
Gecko
Gentle Lemur
Comodo Dragon
Golden Lion Tamarin
Cheetah
Salamander

*(the **Giant Tortoise** enters, a group of children can move together to represent one tortoise)*

Giant Tortoise sings

I'm a giant tortoise, I come from Galapagos
(proudly) When I was a hatchling, I met Charles Darwin!
I'm big and heavy, so I move rather slowly,
But I can last a year without food or water

I'm a giant tortoise, I come from Galapagos,
My kind is precious, there' s not many of us
I feed off grass, and leaves and cacti
I hate those cats and dogs and rats that steal my eggs *(hiss)*

I'm a giant tortoise, I come from Galapagos
We were nearly hunted to extinction
But luckily Ecuador gives us protection
So we can stay on our lovely island

Grey Wolf and Brown Bear enter

Wolf speaks or sings over musical improvisation

I come from the forest, aaay (howls)
Deep in the Carpathian Mountains, where I love to roam *(howl)*
But humans hate us, hunt us and kill us
They're destroying our forests, *(howl)*
We just want to live in peace,
We just want to live in peace.

Bear sings

I was born to wander through the forest

Search for berries in the autumn sun
Sit by the river in the summer
Doze in the winter safe in my den
Me and wolf hide in the mountains
We can share the forest if we're left alone
But we are afraid, the forest is changing
What is this Thing that threatens us all?
This Terrible Thing that threatens us all?

(Wood Ants process in with a leaf)

Wood Ants sing

We are just humble arthropods, we're not that big or grand
And yet it's good to know that other creatures understand
Our ancestors have walked on Earth for millions of years
But now some things are changing, and life is not so clear

The forests where we love to roam grow smaller every day
And a strange new monster threatens everything that's in its way
It's eating up all the trees, and drying out the ground
It silences the birds with its whining screaming sound

We want to keep together, so our colonies can thrive
We help other insects and trees to stay alive
We work together and we share resources equally
We all protect each other in our community,
We want to stay together in our community.

All

And you must! And you will! Out with the Metal Monsters! Down with the Thing! *(all wave feelers, legs, flap wings etc)*

All sing Metal Monsters

Metal monsters everywhere
In land and sea, on the air
They make such a noise, and they smell bad too
So life is impossible for me and you

Metal monsters everywhere
They drown our voices in the air
And deep down in the sea
Make communication difficult for you and me

Metal monsters everywhere
And they just don't care
They flatten and destroy, they crash and roar
We don't want them any more!

Elephants enter - start with trumpet/trombone calls and bass drums /other percussion calling and responding before they arrive on stage. Then they sing:

Elephants

We have followed our ancient ways
Roaming the earth since the last Ice Age.
But where oh where are the vast open spaces
And what has happened to the ancient places
That hold the memory of our ancestors?

We can call over many miles
We try to talk to humans
And some understand, and they are friends
But others will not hear what we have to say
And the earth is changing.

We can be so gentle, we smell each single flower
We pick sweet fruit from the trees
But if we are wronged, our anger is mighty
We crush anything in our way

And we will roam the vast open spaces
Proud and free on our territory
We long to return to our ancient places
To remember our ancestors

Spiders enter and sing

We may be small but we're mighty
We can float up high in the sky
You can find us on Mt Everest
Or down on the forest floor

The silk that we spin is strong
We can use it to climb up high
Birds line their nests with it, we make soft beds with it
You should give it a try

We want to offer our skills
To be of use to you
Call on us, and we'll wrap up
Anything that bothers you
Call on us, and we'll wrap up
Any trouble that bothers you!

Owl

Thankyou for your kind offer -we'll certainly keep it in mind

(Feeler/leg waving)

Albatross and Swift fly in

Albatross

I fly from pole to pole..I see strange things in the oceans, that make birds choke if they eat them.
And there's black poison in the sea that suffocates us and clogs our feathers..

Swift

I too fly thousands of miles over sea and land....I see forests vanishing, strange new landscapes
appearing where no creature can live. Sometimes when we come back here, the houses
where we used to nest are blocked, and it's hard to find somewhere else..and the Thing, the Thing is
spreading...

Frogs

It's to do with those humans, whenever there's too many of them, the Thing is there too ..they used
to know how to keep it under control – but they can't any more, they're all too tired because they
stay indoors all the time.

All - whispering first, then getting louder- the Thing..the Thing...the Terrible Thing!

All sing It's the Thing

It's the Thing, it's the Thing
The terrible, tyrannical Thing
It spreads all over everywhere, has no feelings, doesn't care
It's the Thing, it's the Thing,
The terrible tyrannical Thing
It smashes rocks and tears down trees
Clogs up the rivers and the seas
It's the Thing, it's the Thing
The terrible, tyrannical Thing
It's changing the weather and the seasons too
So we're all confused, don't know what to do about the
Thing, the Thing, the terrible, tyrannical Thing

Dormouse wakes up, yawning

So – what are we going to do....?

Owl

My great-great-great-great granny had a prophecy..she said that one day the Thing would try and
take over the earth, but that it could be defeated. We have to find some human children, under the
age of twelve. According to the prophecy, we animals can't defeat the Thing on our own, but if we
help these human children, we can overcome it together... one of us must guide them to the Old
Woman of the Woods, who'll tell them what to do

Hedgehog

Where are these children?

Owl

Well, I've heard of some in *(name your region of choice, eg.)* Slop, pop, ...Shropshire, perhaps it's called...they are good to animals, we've seen them by the river, talking to dragonflies. Swallow, can you go? It's on your way as you fly back to Africa and they know you because they see you every year - get their attention, and lead them to the Old Woman of the Woods. Then they'll know what to do.

Meanwhile we'll gather all the animals of the world - the time has come!

All sing Anthem of the Creatures of the Planet

We're the creatures of the planet – we've had enough
We need to take some action, start to get tough!
There isn't any time to lose, we've got to do it now
Come together and work out how

Creatures unite, from Australia to Africa
Europe, Asia, the Arctic and America
All that's flying in the air, or swimming in the sea
We need to show solidarity

We are starting to get seriously annoyed
Don't want our precious earth to be destroyed
The Thing will take over, there isn't any doubt
If we don't come together and sort it out

Termites, earthworms, fungi and bacteria
Mammals, reptiles, and creatures flying through the air
All that's living in the sea, and all that's on the land
Come together and lend a hand (or a foot or a fin or a wing or a bit of something)

(Choruses of names of animals – you may want to add to these, or shorten them)

Slow worms, glow worms, sticklebacks and crested newts
Lions, panthers, rhinoceros and elephants
Blue whales, white sharks, spotted trout and hermit crabs
Grey lag geese, pelicans and albatross

Eagles, buzzards, nightingales and parakeet
Sparrows, robins, woodpeckers and cormorant
Crickets, locust, dragonflies and ladybirds
Lizards, pythons, poison frogs, alligators

Beaver, otter, antelope and spotted deer
Grey wolf, cheetah, Arctic fox, and grizzly bear
Moles that tunnel underground, wriggling centipedes
Woolly bats and chimpanzees

Corals, tubeworms, octopus and jellyfish
Spiders, beetles, hoverflies and ladybirds

Moths that fly around at night, buzzing bumble bees
Three toed sloths hanging from the trees

From the ocean depths to the mountain top
All come together and make them stop, stop, stop,
Stop, stop, stop
Stop, stop, stop, STOP!

3. The children's journey begins

Travelling theme - Swallow reaches children

*Instruments improvise for swallow singing and getting children to follow. They end up at the house of the **Old Woman of the Woods**, in wellies talking to adders. **Swallow** leaves.*

Ah, you've made it at last - you've come to talk about the Thing, haven't you?

Children

Have we? What Thing?

Old Woman

Ah, maybe you didn't quite follow what Swallow was saying. You have a very important task. The Terrible Thing is taking over the earth, and - with a bit of help – you're going to stop it - but first you have to go to the Pacific.

Old Woman sings *Far Away in the Pacific Ocean*

Far away in the Pacific ocean
There's a place with hardly any motion
It's called the North Pacific Gyre
If you're a sailor, you don't want to get stuck there!

And in that corner of the ocean
There's a monster floating
Above and below the surface of the sea
It has no other place to be

You must go to the Pacific Ocean
And find that monster floating
Ask it how it came to be
And how to set the planet free
Be brave, we depend on you
To work out what to do

But there's one way I can help you
Take this golden fruit
If you're in mortal danger
Threatened by the Terrible Thing
Then hold it high – and sing (*hands fruit to children*)

Keep going that way, until you get to the sea
Then you'll get a lift with a sea creature..I wish I could come with you, but I have to stay here..good
luck! And remember – the Thing can't stand laughter or music..

4. Into the Ocean

Music leads out of the end of the song into the travelling and sea sequence improvisation.

*Start with sound of waves (recorded or on percussion). Play blades of grass for gull squawks,
followed by seal sounds. Then the children begin their descent to deep sea.. lots of sounds (recorded
or improvised) and projected images – could be drawings.*

*The children hear and see many different creatures, giant clams(with attached algae), tube worms,
(at chemical vents) squid, coral, crabs, sponge, many fish, jellyfish, seals, porpoise, dolphins,
whales, sharks..kelp forests, diatoms and plankton*

*Fish, and dolphins click, dolphins also squawk and whistle. The coral colonies chatter, as different
creatures swim in and out..and the algae also make sounds.*

*Then the deepest sound of all, and the loudest, starts – the whales – they sing or chant, probably
down a tube:*

Whales

We swim six thousand miles
From the cold waters where we feed
To the warm tropical seas where we can bring up our young.
And so it has been for millions of years
In our home, the ocean
We love to play, dancing with the waves, diving deep below
In our home, the ocean
But now there is strange noise that makes it hard to hear each other
Across the thousands of miles between us.
What is this noise, this Terrible Thing, that destroys our peace
Deep in the ocean
Children, help us,
Children, help us,
Help us, help us!

*Their calls for help merge with sounds of sobbing from somewhere else - the children finally arrive
and see the **Plasticosaurus** - it weeps and sings..*

Lament of the Plasticosaurus

Ah ah ah,what a misery
All alone here in the sea.

I don't want to exist, I'd rather disappear
It isn't any fun floating here

The Terrible Thing feeds me so
I can only grow and grow
Ah ah ah...what a misery
I keep on growing and poison the sea

Children

Can we help? That's awful!

Plasticosaurus

To save the ocean you must go back to the land
And then you'll understand
You must make me disappear -
Stop them feeding me – is that clear?
Go to the headquarters of the Terrible Thing
You'll be all right - just laugh and sing

Children

Where is it? What will we do when we get there?

Plasticosaurus (sings)

When you get there, all will be clear,
Children, have no fear

(spoken) Here's the address (on the bottom of a plastic container it holds out as part of a limb)

Children read out:

Trash Unlimited
No.1, the Basement
Misery Street, Grey Town

Albatross appears

There's no time to lose!
I'll take you there - when we reach land, Peregrine will take over, who knows the way to Grey Town

*Improvised flying music. Albatross has to be careful to avoid being snagged on fishing lines.
Albatross turns into Peregrine (for example, by changing wings)*

5. Confronting the Thing

As they get nearer, they hear the sounds of the Terrible Thing in the distance. It gets very dark.

Peregrine

I have to leave you here, it's not safe for me to fly down Misery Street – Good luck!
Don't forget – the Terrible Thing has no power over you when you sing or laugh..

They walk down Misery Street . Number 1 is surrounded by a security fence. Mechanical sounding

voices repeatedly tell them to keep out. A projection represents the Thing

(spoken voices)

Keep out
No unauthorised admission

*The children respond by singing **Come Outside***

Children

Come outside, come outside, come outside, come outside

Guards/Thing *(mechanical spoken voices over percussion)*

We'll stay in here with our machines
They fulfil our dreams
Do what they're told to do
And make us money too

Keep out of the way
Children should obey
This is no place to play

Children

Do you watch the days grow short or long
Listen to bird song
Wait for the sun to rise
Or talk to dragon flies?
Come outside..etc

Guards

You should get out of here
Havn't we made that clear?
We've got important things to do
We won't be disturbed by you

Children should obey
Keep out of the way
This is no place to play

Children

You just produce a load of junk
That's really daft
You think you're so important
You make us laugh

Come outside etc

(the children laugh)

Guards

Don't you dare laugh at us!

The guards rush at the children, but as they do so, the spiders start to spin webs round them, and a Slime Mould starts to squeeze through the security fence. The children get out the golden fruit...choose another life form to help – maybe fungus?

The children hold high the golden fruit...

Beautiful improvisation, refer to Web of Life theme

The children sing and dance and The Thing collapses and deflates

All sing *(and dance)*

Web of Life

We are all part of the web of life
We all need each other, we survive together
Don't tear the thread of the web of life
We survive together, we all need each other

Trees and plants spring up
Rejoicing

Finale *(all)*

We are free, we are free of the terrible Thing
We are free, we are free of the Terrible Thing
But the Terrible Thing must not return
And humans must start to learn
They didn't come first, and they won't leave last
They're in too much hurry, they make a mess fast

We'll keep away the Terrible Thing
If we don't forget to laugh and sing
Respect all life on earth
Care for all life on earth

We are free, we are free of the Terrible Thing
We are free, we are free of the Terrible Thing
Care for all life, care for life
Respect the earth, respect the earth