The Task:

Below is a short story. Practice reading the story, exploring the characters, voices and emotions represented. You may wish to record yourself reading the story aloud, as an aid to reviewing your performance. This is not a memory exercise, so there's no need to learn the words off by heart. Instead, you should work on your storytelling technique.

The Text:

The Lonely Girl

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who lived in a small, quiet village hidden away in a forgotten valley. The village was quiet for one reason - no other children lived there.

Long ago, many families - especially those with children to feed - had left the village because there was no work, and they were tired of being poor. The little girl's family had stayed only because they were so poor that they did not even have a cart to carry them away with their few belongings.

The little girl was always lonely. Every day she played alone, and that made her sad.

One day, as she was out wandering by herself, she came upon a wishing well in a hidden clearing. She thought 'This must be a magical wishing well.' and decided to make a wish. This she did, saying out loud "I wish for a friend, with which to laugh and to play."

Unbeknown to her, a Goblin had made his home in a ditch at the edge of the clearing. He heard the girl's heartfelt request, and thought to himself that it would be quite funny to play a trick on the lonely little girl.

He quickly wound a wreath of leaves and placed it on his head, and then tucked handfuls of tall grasses down the back of his jacket, to pretend that they were wings. He then leapt out at the startled girl and said "Behold! For I am the Fairy of the Well, and I will grant your wish."

The girl was overjoyed, and beamed with happiness as the Goblin told her "You must travel home through the Southern Wood. At the crossroads in the middle of the wood, you will find yourself a true friend."

"Thank you so much," the little girl cried, "now I shall never be lonely again!" And, as quickly as she could, she headed back home, taking the road through the Southern Wood.

The Goblin, meanwhile, had raced ahead of her. On his way he caught a piglet, and tied a halter to it. When he arrived at the crossroads, he tied the piglet to a tree, and then hid in bushes at the edge of the road so that he could see what happened.
The little girl skipped happily through the wood, thinking of how much fun she was going to have with her new friend, but when she reached the crossroads the only creature she saw was a piglet, tied to a tree. "Well, I suppose the Fairy knows best." said the girl. "Maybe a piglet for a friend is all that I deserve." She then untied the piglet and headed home.

The Goblin laughed so hard that his belly hurt. It had been so funny to see the little girl's disappointed face. He headed back to his muddy ditch, laughing all the way.

The Goblin woke the next morning to the sound of the little girl crying at the well. He peeked through the undergrowth at her, sniggering quietly to himself. He was so proud of what he had done, that he decided he would play another trick on the girl. He dressed up as before, and leapt out at the sad, tearful little girl.

"Behold!" he shouted, gruffly. "I am the Fairy of the Well. Why are you crying, little girl? Did I not grant your wish and lead you to a new friend?"

"Yes, you did," answered the girl, "and I don't mean to be ungrateful. It's just that I was hoping for a friend who would play with me, and share with me, but all the little piglet would do was hunt around for food for himself to eat. He didn't want to play with me unless I had food to give him. Then, while I slept, he ate all of the food in the house, and when there was no more food left he ran away. Now, once again, I'm all alone."

The Goblin was overjoyed. He would play another trick on the girl, and make her cry even more. "I will find you another friend." he said. "This time, make your way home across the old stone bridge. There you will find a new friend."

The little girl thanked the Goblin (though, of course, she thought of him as a rather dishevelled, rough-looking Fairy), and turned and headed for home.

Again the Goblin raced ahead of her. This time he crept up on a small, brightly-coloured bird, and tied it to a piece of string. He took the bird along to the old stone bridge, and tied it to the railings on the side of the bridge wall. He then hid behind a nearby tree, so that he could see the little girl’s disappointment once more.

When the little girl came along, she was was not disappointed, but happy. "What a beautiful bird!" she said out loud. "Much better than a greedy little piglet. I think we're going to be great friends."

She then freed the bird from the string, saying "Now let's go home together, my new friend." But, once the bird was free, it soared into the sky, and soon disappeared from view.

The Goblin laughed so hard he almost gave himself away, and headed back to his muddy little ditch, laughing all the way.
The girl was once more heartbroken. Now she would never have a friend. She began to cry, but soon found instead that she was actually annoyed. Why had the Fairy not given her a suitable friend, one who would enjoy playing games with her, and share toys and treats? Right then, she made up her mind to head back to the well.

When she got there she found the Goblin rolling on the floor, laughing. The grasses has fallen from his jacket, and the wreath of leaves lay broken on the ground. She saw him then for what he was, and was both sad and furious at the same time.

"You tricked me! You evil, horrid Goblin!"

This made the Goblin laugh even more than before, and he had to hold his aching sides.

The sad, lonely girl dropped down by the side of the well and burst into tears. "Now I'll never have a friend." she sobbed. Then, as her tears soaked into the ground around the well, the air began to flicker and glisten and shine. The girl looked up in wonder, while the Goblin began to feel quite ill.

Suddenly a thousand little lights burst forth from the well, laughing merrily like the tinkling of a thousand tiny bells.

"Faeries!" gasped the lonely girl, excitedly.

"Faeries!" exclaimed the Goblin, suddenly afraid.

The Goblin tried to run, but the Fairies surrounded him, and spun sparkling golden thread around him so that he could not move. Despite her tears, the girl began to laugh at the sight of the Goblin, bound by thread and rolling around furiously in the mud.

It was then that the Queen of the Fairies, with wings of coloured light that shone like the sun, flew to the girl and said "Little girl, your wish for a friend has been heard and granted. Every tear you have shed here today will become a year of happiness from this day on." Then, with a wave of her delicate little hand, she turned the mud-covered Goblin into a little monkey, and the thread into a finely-crafted cage.

"Take him home with you, " the Queen told the girl, "and your friends will soon come." And it was true.

The girl carried the monkey home in its cage, and the people of the village were amazed, for they had never before seen a monkey. Soon, word spread to other nearby villages and towns, and people came to see the ugly little monkey jumping around in its beautiful golden cage.

With so many visitors, the village grew prosperous once more, and families began to move back to their homes. They came back with their children, and soon the village rang loud once more with the voices and laughter of boys and girls, and the lonely little girl was never lonely again.