Irish Inspirations
Stimuli and structures for creating original drama

By

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Preface - delivering the syllabus

In common with all the Warrington Project’s Study Units for GCSE, A S and A-level, this workpack, Irish Inspirations, has been specifically designed to meet the requirements of a specific syllabus.

In this instance, it meets the requirements for the practicals in AQA’s GCE Drama and Theatre Studies Advanced Subsidiary (5530), unit 1 and Advanced Level (6530), unit 4.

From September 2000, candidates will be able to take one or two year courses leading to AS and A level qualifications respectively. However, this work pack may be used with those completing the AEB Theatre Studies syllabus 0653.

ACHIEVING AIMS

The AS course

Using this pack will ‘encourage candidates to develop their interest in and enjoyment of drama and theatre...through their development of theatre skills within their own practice.’

The pack will give opportunities for students to ‘recognise the importance of both discipline and co-operation within practical drama and theatre projects and acquire practical theatre skills...as appropriate to their own dramatic intentions.’

The A-level course

The pack will provide opportunities for candidates to ‘develop further the appropriate production and performance techniques to realise the specific demands of their chosen approach to practical theatre successfully.’

MEETING ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

At AS and A level

The pack encourages a synoptic approach.

Use of this pack will help candidates to ‘demonstrate through their own theatrical practice the results of disciplined and creative co-operation to originate and realise dramatic intentions through a performance for an audience.’

At A level

Use of this pack will help students to ‘make connections between a theoretical understanding of theatrical processes and practices...and their realisation in performance.’

PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Use of the work pack will help candidates to show knowledge and understanding of:

AS

● the staging and production process
● the significance of the audience experience of drama and theatre
● the theories and practice of one prescribed practitioner.
A-level

- understanding of the interconnection of dramatic intent, content and theatrical expression
- understanding and analysis of the interrelationship between performers and audience
- knowledge and understanding of the theories and practice of a further prescribed theatre practitioner.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Use of the work pack will help candidates to develop the skills to:

A S

- develop strategies for practical co-operation and self-discipline throughout a period of preparation for, and performance to an audience.

A-level

- use and develop appropriate dramatic techniques and conventions to extend the range of their achievement in relation to practical presentations.

ADDRESSING KEY SKILLS AND SPIRITUAL, MORAL, ETHICAL, SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND OTHER/issues

The manner in which Drama and Theatre Studies 5530 and 6530 fulfils the requirements for the National Qualification in Key Skills is set out in the syllabus. However, it is important to note that use of this pack

- allows candidates ample opportunity to ‘explore the human condition and evaluate their own existence and values in relation to society;’
- enables the use of ‘negotiation skills;’ and
- ‘encourages recognition and sympathetic awareness of others’ values and beliefs.’
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Introduction

‘Maybe we could do something on …’

TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Group practicals are precarious affairs. Producing original drama by ‘committee’ can be one of the most difficult and unfortunately least rewarding of activities. Each member of the group (perhaps as many as eight strong) is a potential playwright and each will have ideas on what they wish to produce; this tendency towards individualism can assist the creative process but can also work against the success of the group. The pressures of other courses upon the student actors and their teachers can mean that one week’s promising idea wilts by the following week due to a lack of rich stimuli.

Effective drama is often about story-telling. As actors and dramatists you need to explore different ways of telling stories to audiences. You may wish them to become absorbed in your story or you may wish to challenge them. The work-pack seeks to provide stimulus for story-telling; it is not intended to be didactic.

YOUR AS AND A-LEVEL GROUP PRACTICAL

AS level

To meet the requirements of AQA Drama and Theatre Studies AS level you must ‘create and present an original piece of drama for an audience.’ It should last between 15 and 30 minutes and should involve between 4 and 8 people, although not everyone has to perform. The piece should draw upon what you have learnt during your AS course. The practical component is worth 40 per cent of your total AS mark. Equal weight is given to preparation and performance. You must keep a personal portfolio outlining your own contribution to the finished piece.

A-level

If you proceed to the second set of modules, your presentation should last between 20 and 40 minutes. This time you must ‘create and present to an audience a piece of theatre inspired and informed by knowledge and understanding acquired through study of other elements of the Subject Content as a whole.’ In other words, you might illustrate your knowledge of one of the practitioners by creating a piece of theatre clearly influenced by him. You might be able to show how you have been inspired by a particular production you have seen or by a particular style of drama.

For AS and A-level

Each of you must choose a skill from the following list upon which to be assessed:

- Acting
- Costume design and construction
- Mask design and construction
- Set design and construction
- Technical elements: lighting and/or sound

It is possible that all of you may wish to be assessed for acting. If that is the case, the other skills must be shared equally amongst the group.
YOUR TEACHER’S ROLE

The AQA syllabus states that ‘during the devising and creative process candidates may expect support and constructive feedback from the teacher monitoring their progress, who may be consulted throughout for advice, if required, on choice of suitable material for investigation, working methods and possible sources of relevant information or specific expertise.’ However, your teacher will play a part in the assessment process at the end of the practical and so cannot be your director.

WHY USE IRISH WRITING AS STIMULUS?

The Warrington Project seeks to promote understanding between the peoples of Britain and the island of Ireland. A level students down the years may feel that they already know something of Ireland. After all, Irish writers such as O’Casey, Goldsmith, Heaney, Joyce, Shaw, Wilde and Yeats have been mainstays of English exam syllabuses for decades.

The materials presented in this workpack have been chosen not simply because they are a celebration of Irish writing but because they will provide the spark for drama. Their quality is typical of a culture which produced many of the greatest writers in the English language. However, the majority of the pieces chosen are not ‘about’ Ireland, and it is not intended that they should produce a piece of drama set in Ireland or concerning Irish issues. Instead, the literature you will read concerns the basic questions of human existence which dominate our lives whatever our country of birth.

HERE’S ONE WE PREPARED EARLIER

I was lucky enough in developing these materials to have the help of five excellent students from Calday Grange Grammar School’s Theatre Studies Department: Stephen Berry, Mark Drake, Becci Harris, Paul Harrison and Peter Whittem. Having heard about the work of the Warrington Project, they kindly agreed to help in testing these materials with me as their advisor. You will see examples of their work inside the pack.

Much time is wasted when planning a group practical: it is all too easy to leave the rehearsal room with no solid record of the work completed, especially if there have been tensions between members of the group or a general feeling that the session has been unproductive. It is vital that everyone recognises that the frustrations of an unsuccessful session are part of the creative process.

GETTING STARTED

It is up to you what subject you choose for your group practical, the way in which the material is presented and the audience you have in mind. I have written and produced two plays.

The challenge I have found when devising theatre can be stated simply: where do you start? This pack provides you with three structured rehearsal plans, each one working more challenging than the last. I hope they will help your group to develop good habits: equal participation, group unity and record keeping. Stimulus material is provided for each plan (along with warm-up exercises) but what you create with it is up to you.

In the final part of the pack I have provided further examples of poetry, prose and drama which I hope will act as creative stimuli.
NOTE

It is important that whoever is chosen as director for each meeting or rehearsal should read the relevant section of the pack in advance. This will alleviate the need to be constantly leafing through the pack during rehearsal.

BUILDING ON YOUR SUCCESSES AND LEARNING FROM YOUR FAILURES!

The following are some guidelines drawn from experience:

- When you have selected your subject, work towards a clearly defined goal. For example, imagine you have been commissioned by an organisation (it could be anyone from a school to the United Nations) to produce a particular piece of drama.

- Be sure of the age group and nature of the audience you will be performing for.

- Agree upon which practitioner and/or theatrical style you intend to draw from. This work pack contains links to the work of Konstantin Stanislavski (whom you may study at AS level) and Bertolt Brecht (whom you may study at A level).

- Allow everyone’s ideas equal weight and try everything once even when your heart sinks!

- Try not to ditch a promising idea simply because it doesn’t seem to work first time.

- Do your research. Historical or issues based work needs to look and sound authentic.

- Keep a company log book (in addition to your personal portfolio) - there is a suggestion for one at the end of this pack. It is difficult to build from session to session if no-one can remember what was done last time! The log book could be on paper or on video.

- Have several large pieces of scrap paper and pens to hand for brainstorming sessions.
2. The company log book

A. TEMPLATE

Company log book

GROUP PRACTICAL : SESSION EVALUATION

Date: ____________________________ Time: ____________________________

Names of those present:

Main theme:

Best lines:

Best moments:

Practitioner notes:

What could be developed during the next session:

Needs:
B. COMPLETED EXAMPLE

Company log book

GROUP PRACTICAL : SESSION EVALUATION

Date: 3/6/99 Time: 9am - noon

Names of those present:
Stephen Berry, Mark Drake, Becci Harris, Paul Harrison, Tim Kershaw (staff), Peter Whittem

Main theme: ‘The Tales of Cuchulain’
Group worked on the idea of developing some of the stories surrounding the Irish mythological hero for presentation to Year 6 or Year 7 audience. We wanted to capture the excitement (and some of the violence) of the original stories.

As a warm up, each member of the group retold from memory one part of the stories about Cuchulain we had just heard as if they were speaking to a child.

Group moved to a dramatised ‘brainstorm’ about preconceptions of the long past and Irish mythology. These ideas came up:

- blood-letting;
- worship of pagan gods;
- dancing;
- feasting;
- festivals;
- rites such as the fire leaping featured in Dancing at Lughnasa.

These are some of the events in Cuchulain’s life we would like to include in the presentation:

- His childhood in the court of Conchubar.
- His childhood feats throwing and then catching his own javelin.
- His first fights with the boys of the court and his first transformation, hulk-like, into his ‘battle fury’.
- The fight with the guard dog belonging to Culan and his resulting change of name from Setanta to Cuchulain.
- His ‘hero salmon-leap’ onto the bucking bridge during his search for the warrior woman Scathach.
- His training with the warrior woman.
- His courting of Emer and the death of her father Forgall.
- His killing of his son and his fight with the sea.

We felt that further research was necessary to discover more details of his exploits in battle. Peter agreed to research Cuchulain on the Internet.
Next, we attempted to dramatise some of the above. Peter was Cuchulain. We taunted Cuchulain as if we were children (see ‘good lines’ below). We tried to capture the fear of the taunting children as they witness Cuchulain (then Setanta) going into his battle fury. As he became angrier and rose from a crouch, we crouched lower, still circling him. Eventually all ran away except Mark who remained in isolation.

Next, we dramatised the javelin throwing incident, working hard on the necessary noises and creating the flight of the javelin by mime alone. Two characters unsuccessfully try the same feat as Cuchulain before he steps forward and triumphs.

**Best lines:**
(from the taunting of Setanta)

‘Your father talks with women as they wash by the river.’

‘You have no battle cry.’

‘Your father has no blood on his hands.’

‘You cannot sound a horn.’

‘You cannot lift your father’s sword.’

‘When your brother went into battle he was sent yelping home like a puppy.’

**Best moments:**
Use of large piece of light fabric (20 ft?) for blood flow and bucking bridge. We decided to purchase more

**Practitioner notes:**
Investigate possible links to Brecht’s Epic Theatre in style if not in content. Props will be simple and symbolic - long and wide strips of fabric will be used to represent many things from rivers and bridges to blood.

**What could be developed during the next session?**
Music: could we use traditional Irish instruments? What about movement? How can we get as much physical theatre into it? Mark mentioned a Sellotape seat. We all had seen ‘The House of Bernarda Alba’ at the Everyman. We remarked upon how a feeling of heat and tension was created by simple sound effects and lighting. Fiddle music was suggested, whistling wind, Enya, the Chieftans, the Pogues.

**Needs:**
Fabrics; canes/poles/sellotape/mask materials; chicken wire.
3. Warm up exercises

Use one or two of these exercises at the start of each session.

**PHYSICAL AND MENTAL FOCUS**

**Muscle relaxation**

The director tells the actors to lie on their backs on the floor. Eyes closed, feet together, hands at sides. The director instructs the group to tense individual muscles starting with the toes and moving slowly up through the whole body along legs, through the pelvis, torso and neck to the head. Once a muscle is tensed it should remain so. When the whole body is tensed, the process begins in reverse, relaxing each muscle one by one from head to foot.

**Imaginary journey**

Can be used immediately after the above. The director tells the actors to lie on their backs on the floor. Eyes closed. He or she tells the actors to imagine that their bodies are getting lighter, so light in fact that they begin to lose contact with the ground. Describing each scene in detail, the director takes the actors on a ‘flight’ through the rehearsal rooms and around the surrounding area. The actors should be encouraged to visualise every moment of the journey and report afterwards on what they saw!

**VERBAL**

**One minute please**

This is an adaptation of a popular radio panel game. One of the group is given a subject to talk about for a minute. Should they repeat themselves or hesitate before speaking they can be challenged by another actor, who then takes over the subject. Should they repeat themselves or hesitate, the person who challenged them takes over the subject and so on. Points are given at the end of the minute to the actor talking.

**Carry on the story**

Actors sit in a circle. The director then starts off a story by relating the first sentence. Each person in the circle adds a further sentence until the story is completed by the final actor. Small groups may need to repeat.

**PHYSICAL**

**Tug-of-war 1**

In pairs the actors are given an imaginary piece of rope. Holding first in their right hands they are asked to react as each of the partners slowly but steadily pulls on the rope. It often works best if one partner is A and the other B so that the director can call who is pulling at any one time. It is not yet a tug of war. Always remember that the rope is not made of elastic, and so the distance between the partners must remain constant. Having decided who is A and who is B attempt a small tug of war with the director giving instructions as to who is winning at any one time.
Tug-of-war 1
As above but gradually add the other members of the group to produce a full scale tug of war.

The shrinking room
The idea of this exercise is that the actors are locked in a room which is slowly closing in around them, the walls are moving inwards, while the ceiling and floors are slowly coming together. The actors must react as with their bodies as they struggle to hold back the various surfaces. Eventually they are pushed into as small a shape as possible. Try this exercise with individual actors, then pairs then as a group.

The maniac - a simple exercise used by Stanislavski in his teaching book An Actor Prepares
Outside the door of the rehearsal studio lurks a knife wielding maniac. He is about to break in through the door. Those in the room must hold him back. Individual actors should establish how they would react and what part they would play within the group. What steps would they take to defend themselves?

The basket game
Using the props basket you have prepared for these sessions. Actors sit in a circle. The props basket is placed in the middle of the circle. In pairs, actors choose a prop from the basket and use it in an alternative way to its true use. Can develop into mini-sketches or improvisations. Aim for a punch line.

PRACTITIONER LINK - Konstantin Stanislavski
Stanislavski noticed that many poor performances on stage were down to actors feeling tense. The very fact of stepping out onto a stage with an audience present makes otherwise relaxed people become self-conscious and wooden. Stanislavski made sure that his actors left any external worries they had at the door of the rehearsal room. Before starting work, each actor went through a process of loosening their muscles and mental focusing. Stanislavski wrote in An Actor Prepares,

‘You cannot...have any conception of the evil that results from muscular spasms and physical contraction...Therefore at times of great stress it is especially necessary to achieve a complete freedom of muscles. In fact, in the high moments of a part the tendency to relax should become more normal than the tendency to contract.’
Irish inspirations
  Part two : creating drama
Unit 1 : Meeting
PURPOSE
This unit asks you to explore what happens when meetings take place between individuals or between entire cultures.

MINI PROJECT 1
Devise a 5 to 10 minute piece of original drama entitled ‘Culture Clash’ for a sixth form or Year 12 audience.

Preparation time: 2 hrs
Performance: 5-10 mins
Evaluation 15 mins

BEFORE YOU BEGIN
➢ Have a small props basket at the ready containing a few coats, hats, an umbrella, a walking stick, a large sheet.

➢ Select One of the group to be today’s director. The director should make notes on the outcome of each exercise

➢ Focus on the session and try to leave all other concerns at the door of the rehearsal room.

Next...
➢ Use one or two of the warm up exercises set out at the start of this pack.

Use these additional exercises:

➢ The whole group stands in a circle, facing inwards. The director counts: ‘one!’ At random, other members of the group call out subsequent numbers: ‘two!’ ‘three!’ ‘four!’ and so on. See how far your group can count without two people talking at once. If two people speak at once, go back to ‘one’. It’s surprisingly difficult but the more focused the group the further you will get. (7-10 minutes)

➢ Let’s all...yes let’s!

Choose one actor as leader. Leader cries: ‘Let’s all crawl around introducing the News at Ten’ - or any other bizarre suggestion - whereupon everyone else cries ‘yes, let’s!’ and carries out the suggestion with great enthusiasm. Leader abruptly shouts out another instruction such as ‘let’s all walk around greeting each other suspiciously’, the rest of the group shouts ‘Yes, let’s’ and adopts that idea with equal enthusiasm. Allow someone else to take over as leader.

➢ The outsider

Director, send one of your group out of the room. The rest of the group walks about. Choose a ‘chief’ who leads the rest of the group in different ways of walking, hopping, jumping and arm waving as they move about the room. The group must practise so that the chief can signal a change in movement to them without anyone looking at him. Allow the outsider to return. Watching carefully, he tries to decide the identity of the chief. Upon a correct guess the chief becomes the outsider, a new chief is selected and the game carries on.

Kershaw, Irish inspirations, 12
So what?

Director, ask each outsider how they felt when they came back into the room. Can they remember a time when they felt excluded? Did the rest of the group seem to get a kick out of being part of the majority? What did it feel like to be excluded when everyone had been part of the ‘gang’ in ‘Let’s all...’?

Machine of hate/machine of love

Director, begin making a rhythmic movement and sound of hate, preferably towards someone else in the group. One by one the rest of the group join in, relating their movement and sound to a specific person in the group. The group operates as a rhythmic sound and movement machine. Repeat as a ‘Machine of love’, ‘Machine of the world today’.

As the group begins to work as a machine, the rhythm should increase and decrease in speed.

West Side Story

Divide into two groups at either end of the room with a leader at the front. The leader makes a sound and movement, copied by the other members of her group as they advance towards the other group. The leader of the second group responds to the sound and movement of the first and is copied in turn by his group. The second group advances on the first who retreat backwards. The exercise continues with a different leader stepping forward each time and the movements becoming more and more complex.

BEFORE MOVING ON

How did levels of tension increase and decrease during the last two exercises? Was there a feeling of safety or belonging within the groups?

NOW PERFORM THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS

The hostage

In The Hostage by Brendan Behan, a group of Irish nationalists have taken a British soldier prisoner. They are holding him in a house in Dublin. As the play unfolds we discover that the captors are far from being single-minded, dedicated terrorists, whilst their captive is an ordinary young man rather than part of the ‘enemy’. In Act II the soldier chats to Teresa, a country girl who cleans in the house.

SOLDIER. Don’t go.
TERESA. Why?
SOLDIER. I-well, I like company.
TERESA. I shouldn’t be here now; you heard what he said.
SOLDIER. Stay. I’ll hide you if he comes back.
TERESA. Meg’ll be wondering where I am.
SOLDIER. She told me she thought you was in the kitchen. Stay. Go on-stay and tell me a story-the Irish are great at that, aren’t they?
TERESA. Well, not all of them-I’m not. I don’t know any stories.
SOLDIER. Well, any story’ll do. It doesn’t have to be funny. It’s just something to pass the time, ain’t it?
TERESA. Ye es. You’ve a long night ahead of you, and so has he.
SOLDIER. Who?
TERESA. You know, the boy in Belfast.
SOLDIER. He? Oh, don’t start talking about that again, that’ll spoil it.
TERESA. I’ll tell you about when I was a girl in the convent.
SOLDIER. Yeah, that should be a bit of all right. Go on.
TERESA. Oh, it was the same as any other school, except you didn't go home-you played in a big yard which had a stone floor-you'd break your bones if you fell on it. But there was a big meadow outside the wall, and on Feast Days and holidays we were let out there. It was lovely. We were brought swimming a few times, too, but the nuns were awful careful, and if there was a man or a boy came within a mile of us we-well, we...

SOLDIER. Tell us, go on, go on, Teresa-after all we're grown-ups now, aren't we?

TERESA. We were not allowed to take off our clothes at all. You see, Leslie, even when we had our baths on Saturday nights they put shifts on the girls, even the little ones four or five years old.

SOLDIER. Did they?

TERESA. What did you have?

SOLDIER. Oh no, we never had anything like that. I mean, in our place we had all showers and we were sloshing water over each other and blokes shouting and screeching and making a row-it was smashing. Best night of the week, it was.

TERESA. Our best time was the procession we had for the Blessed Virgin on May Day-

SOLDIER. Procession for who?

TERESA. Shame on you, the Blessed Virgin. Anyone would think you were a Protestant.

SOLDIER. I am, girl.

TERESA. Oh, excuse me.

SOLDIER. That's all right. Never think about it myself.

TERESA. And anyway, on May Day we had this big feast.

SOLDIER. Was the scoff good?

TERESA. The... what?

SOLDIER. The grub! You don't understand what I'm talking about half the time, you know.

TERESA. Are you listening to me? Anyway, we had this procession, and I was with the mixed infants.

SOLDIER. What's a mixed infant?

TERESA. A little boy or girl under five years old. They were called mixed infants because until that time the boys and girls we were mixed together.

SOLDIER. I wish I'd been a mixed infant.

Translations

Reading aloud

Read aloud an extract from Irish playwright Brian Friel's Translations, ACT II scene ii. The action takes place in Baile Beag (anglicised spelling and pronunciation 'Ballybeg'). The year is 1833. Maire, a local Gaelic-speaking girl, and Yolland, a British soldier, are together alone after a dance. Yolland and his colleagues are in Ireland to make new maps and to rename all the Irish placenames with English equivalents.

The play is written in English but we must imagine that Maire is speaking in Gaelic and that Yolland can understand little of what she says.

The following night.
This scene may be played in the schoolroom, but it would be preferable to lose-by lighting-as much of the schoolroom as possible, and to play the scene down front in a vaguely 'outside' area.

The music rises to a crescendo. Then in the distance we hear MAIRE and YOLLAND approach-laughing and running.

They run on, hand-in-hand. They have just left the dance.

MAIRE and YOLLAND are now down front, still holding hands and excited by their sudden and impetuous escape from the dance.

MAIRE: O my God, that leap across the ditch nearly killed me.

YOLLAND: I could scarcely keep up with you.

MAIRE: Wait till I get my breath back.

YOLLAND: We must have looked as if we were being chased.

(They now realise they are alone and holding hands-the beginnings of embarrassment. The hands disengage. They begin to drift apart. Pause.)

MAIRE: Manus'll wonder where I've got to.
YOLLAND: I wonder did anyone notice us leave.

(Pause. Slightly further apart.)

MAIRE: The grass must be wet. My feet are soaking.

YOLLAND: Your feet must be wet. The grass is soaking.

(Another pause. Another few paces apart. They are now a long distance from one another.)

YOLLAND: (Indicating himself) George.

MAIRE: Lieutenant George.

YOLLAND: Don’t call me that. I never think of myself as Lieutenant.

MAIRE: What-what?

YOLLAND: Sorry-sorry? (He points to himself again.) George.

(MAIRE nods: Yes-yes. Then points to herself.)

MAIRE: Maire.

YOLLAND: Yes, I know you’re Maire. Of course I know you’re Maire. I mean I’ve been watching you night and day for the past...

(MAIRE nods: Yes-yes-yes.)

MAIRE: Say anything at all. I love the sound of your speech.

YOLLAND: (Eagerly) Sorry-sorry?

(In acute frustration he looks around, hoping for some inspiration that will provide him with communicative means. Now he has a thought: he tries raising his voice and articulating in a staccato style and with equal and absurd emphasis on each word.)

Every-morning-I-see-you-feeding-brown-hens-and-giving-meal-to black-calf-(The futility of it.)-O my God.

(MAIRE smiles. She moves towards him. She will try to communicate in Latin.)

MAIRE: Tu es centurio in-in in exercitu Britannico

YOLLAND: Yes-yes? Go on-go on-say anything at all-I love the sound of your speech.

(MAIRE smiles. He moves towards her. Now for her English words.)

George-water.

YOLLAND: á Water? Water! Oh yes-water-water-very good-water-good-good.

MAIRE: Fire.

YOLLAND: Fire-remarkable-fire, fire, fire-splendid-splendid!

MAIRE: Ah... ah...

YOLLAND: Ys? Go on.

MAIRE: Earth.

YOLLAND: Earth?

MAIRE: Earth. Earth.

(YOLLAND still does not understand.

MAIRE stoops down and picks up a handful of clay. Holding it out)

Earth.

YOLLAND: Earth! Of course-earths! Earth. Earth. Good Lord, Maire, your English is perfect!

(MAIRE nods: Yes-yes.)

MAIRE: (Eagerly) What-what?

YOLLAND: Perfect English. English perfect.

MAIRE: George-

YOLLAND: That’s beautiful-oh that’s really beautiful.

MAIRE: George

YOLLAND: Say it again-say it again.

MAIRE: Shhh. (She holds her hand up for silence-she is trying to remember her one line of English. Now she remembers it and she delivers the line as if English were her language-easily, fluidly, conversationally.) George, in Norfolk we besport ourselves around the maypoll.

YOLLAND: Good God, do you? That’s where my mother comes from-Norfolk. Norwich actually. Not exactly Norwich town but a small village called Little Walsingham close beside it. But in our own village of Winfarthing we have a maypole too and every year on the first of May-(He stops abruptly, only now realising. He stares at her. She in turn misunderstands his excitement.)

MAIRE: (To herself) Mother of God, my Aunt Mary wouldn’t have taught me something dirty, would she?

(Pause. YOLLAND extends his hand to MAIRE. She turns away from him and moves slowly across the stage.)
YOLLAND: Maire.
   (She still moves away.)

YOLLAND: Maire Chatach.
   (She still moves away.)

YOLLAND: Bun na hAbhann? (He says the name softly, almost privately, very tentatively, as if he were searching for
a sound she might respond to. He tries again.) Druin Dubh?
   (MAIRE Stops. She is listening. YOLLAND is encouraged.) Poll na gCaorach. Lis Maol.
   (MAIRE turns towards him.) Lis na nGall.

MAIRE: Lis na nGradh.
   (They are now facing each other and begin moving - almost imperceptibly - towards one another.)

MAIRE: Carraig an Phoill.
YOLLAND: Carraig na Ri. Loch na nEan.
MAIRE: Loch an Iubhair. Machaire Buidhe.
YOLLAND: Machaire Mor. Cnoe na Mona.
MAIRE: Cnoc na nGabhar.
YOLLAND: Mullach.
MAIRE: Port.
YOLLAND: Tor.

MAIRE: Lag. (She holds out her hands to YOLLAND. He takes them. Each now speaks almost to himself/herself.)

YOLLAND: I wish to God you could understand me.

MAIRE: Soft hands; a gentleman’s hands.

YOLLAND: Because if you could understand me I could tell you how I spend my days either thinking of you or gazing
up at your house in the hope that you’ll appear even for a second.

MAIRE: Every evening you walk by yourself along the Tra Bhan and every morning you wash yourself in front of
your tent.

YOLLAND: I would tell you how beautiful you are, curly-headed Maire. I would so like to tell you how beautiful you
are.

MAIRE: Your arms are long and thin and the skin on your shoulders is very white.

YOLLAND: I would tell you ...

MAIRE: Don’t stop-I know what you’re saying.

YOLLAND: I would tell you how I want to be here-to live here-always-with you-always, always.

MAIRE: ‘Always’? What is that word-‘always’?

YOLLAND: Yes-yes; always.

MAIRE: You’re trembling.

YOLLAND: Yes, I’m trembling because of you.

MAIRE: I’m trembling, too. (She holds his face in her hand.)

YOLLAND: I’ve made up my mind ...

MAIRE: Shhhh.

YOLLAND: I’m not going to leave here ...

MAIRE: Shh-listen to me. I want you, too, soldier.

YOLLAND: Don’t stop-I know what you’re saying.

MAIRE: I want to live with you-anywhere-anywhere at all-always-always.

YOLLAND: ‘Always’? What is that word-‘always’?

MAIRE: Take me away with you, George.

(Pause.
Suddenly they kiss.
SARAH enters. She sees them. She stands shocked, staring at them. Her mouth works. Then almost to herself.)

SARAH: Manus ... Manus!

(SARAH runs off.
Music to crescendo.)

Performing

Perform this extract with two actors playing Yolland and Maire with movement only whilst another two read the lines. What kind of non-verbal repertoire do the first two have at their disposal?
REFLECTIONS

We are easily put off other people if they do things differently to us. Their qualities are ignored because of one thing about them.

➤ Brainstorm a list of pet hates we have which can put us off people.

➤ When do irritations become more serious prejudices?

➤ What examples of culture clashes can you find in England today? Think about:
  - religion
  - race
  - older vs younger generations.

➤ What does one culture feel it has to defend against another? What happens when sympathies develop between individuals from the different cultures that are not shared by their families and friends?

FURTHER READING

Eavan Boland: ‘An Irish Childhood in England 1951’

The bickering of vowels on the buses, the clicking thumbs and the big hips of the navy-skirted ticket collectors with their crooked seams brought it home to me: Exile. Ration-book pudding, Bowls of dripping and the fixed smile of the school pianist playing ‘Iolanthe’, ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ and ‘John Peel’.

I didn’t know what to hold, to keep. At night, filled with some malaise of love for what I’d never known I had, I fell asleep and let the moment pass. The passing moment has become a night of clipped shadows, freshly painted houses, the garden eddying in dark and heat, my children half-awake, half-asleep.

Airless, humid dark. Leaf-noise. The stirrings of a garden before rain.

A hint of storm behind the risen moon. We are what we have chosen. Did I choose to - in a strange city, in mother country, on nights in a North-facing bedroom, waiting for the sleep that never did restore me as I’d hoped to what I’d lost - let the world I knew become the space between the words that I had by heart and all the other speech that always was becoming the language of the country that I came to in nineteen-fifty-one: barely-gelled, a freckled six-year-old, overdressed and sick on the plane when all of England to an Irish child was nothing more than what you’d lost and how: was the teacher in the London convent who when I produced ‘I amn’t’ in the classroom turned and said - ‘you’re not in Ireland now’.

➤ Why does England seem like an alien place to the poet?

➤ Although she speaks English when she arrives, the poet finds the pronunciation of those around her very odd - the people on the bus speak with a ‘bickering of vowels’. Can you invent a nonsense language and use it in a scene to unintentionally exclude an outsider?
PRACTITIONER LINKS

The group’s director for the session should introduce these ideas for discussion and use.

Konstantin Stanislavski

**Investigate The Super-objective**
Make sure that everyone in the group understands the main thrust or idea behind your drama. Try to sum it up in one sentence This might sound obvious but unless you agree upon the play’s super-objective individual cast members will pull in different directions. (See An Actor Prepares - Konstantin Stanislavski)

**Investigate Inner Truth**
Try to imagine a life for your character beyond the confines of your play. What did they do yesterday, last week, in their early childhood? How does their background influence them now? Their behaviour and experiences in the past should explain their behaviour now. Creating an inner truth (or inner life) helps to turn your character into a realistic human being.

**Investigate the Magic If**
Stanislavski referred to the word ‘if’ in this way because he found its use so powerful. As you rehearse and perform your piece, think about your character and constantly ask yourself what you would do in their situation.

Bertolt Brecht

The machine of hate and West Side story are both exercises based on the work of practitioner Augusto Boal who was himself influenced by Brecht. Brecht wanted his audiences to take a more active role as observers rather than passive spectators. In these two exercises, how does Boal turn actors into observers as well?

To find out more about Boal read The Essential Guide to Making Theatre by Fredman and Reade, Hodder & Stoughton, 1996 or Devising Theatre by Alison Oddey, Routledge, 1997

**NOW EVALUATE THE UNIT USING THE SHEET PROVIDED.**
Company log book
GROUP PRACTICAL : SESSION EVALUATION

Date: 

Time: 

Names of those present: 

Main theme: 

Best lines: 

Best moments: 

Practitioner notes: 

What could be developed during the next session: 

Needs: 

Kershaw, Irish inspirations, 19
Unit 2 : Kith and kin
‘When our relatives are at home, we have to think of all their good points, or it would be impossible to endure them.’

From Heartbreak House by George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

**PURPOSE**

This unit asks you to explore the complex dynamics of family relationships - the tensions, the security and the subtexts.

**MINI PROJECT 2**

Devise a 10 to 15 minutes of original drama on the theme of family life, childhood or youth.

**Timing:**

- **Preparation:** 3hrs
- **Performance:** 10-15 mins
- **Evaluation:** 15 mins

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

- Have a small props basket at the ready containing a few coats, hats, an umbrella, a walking stick, a large sheet.
- Select One of the group to be today’s director. The director should make notes on the outcome of each exercise and write-up the group evaluation.
- You will need some large sheets of paper, a marker pen and some means of pinning the paper to a vertical surface so that it can be written upon.

**PREPARE**

- Focus on the session and try to leave all other concerns at the door of the rehearsal room.
- Turn to the first pages of the pack and carry out one or two of the physical warm up exercises suggested there. (10 mins)

‘Hidden thoughts’

- Director, ask the group to comment on situations where they might say one thing but mean another. When does this happen? What true thoughts and feelings are not being expressed? For instance, what is really going through the minds of the potential employer and the applicant during that vital job interview?

- Working in fours, two of the group role play a situation where neither character is saying what he really means. Another two actors represent the true thoughts of those people.

Unfortunately, family situations can lend themselves to this sort of behaviour.

- Brainstorm arguments from early childhood over meal or bed times as well as more recent conflicts over relationships; family outings; homework; your social life; or part-time jobs.

For example:
Mother: What time will we see you back tonight then? (She treats this house like a hotel)

Daughter: Dunno. One-ish maybe. (I ’m glad she cares but I ’m not going to show it)

Mother: Ryan ’ll be there will he? (Please let her say ’no‘)

Daughter: Depends whether he’s back from Ibiza. I told you. (She’s obsessed with Ryan. Why can’t she just let me choose my own friends)

Repeat the above task but with non-verbal looks and gestures only.

Subtexts

In theatre, the thoughts printed in brackets are sometimes known as subtexts.

Act the dialogue above with the subtexts given and then change the subtexts to alter the mood of the piece

Perform the following extract from Act I of Irish dramatist Samuel Beckett’s play ‘Waiting For Godot’. (Beckett offers virtually no details of setting or of his characters’ histories.)

ESTRAGON: Let’s go.

VLADIMIR:: We can’t.

ESTRAGON: Why not?

VLADIMIR: We’re waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON: (despairingly). Ah! (Pause.) You’re sure it was here?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others?

ESTRAGON: What is it?

VLADIMIR: I don’t know. A willow.

ESTRAGON: Where are the leaves?

VLADIMIR: It must be dead.

ESTRAGON: No more weeping.

VLADIMIR: Or perhaps it’s not the season.

ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a bush.

VLADIMIR: A shrub.
ESTRAGON: A bush

VLADIMIR: A - What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?

ESTRAGON: He should be here.

VLADIMIR: He didn't say for sure he'd come.

ESTRAGON: And if he doesn't come?

VLADIMIR: We'll come back tomorrow.

ESTRAGON: And then the day after tomorrow.

VLADIMIR: Possibly.

ESTRAGON: And so on.

VLADIMIR: The point is -

ESTRAGON: Until he comes.

VLADIMIR: You're merciless.

ESTRAGON: We came here yesterday.

VLADIMIR: Ah no, there you're mistaken.

ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday?

VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday?

ESTRAGON: Yes.

VLADIMIR: Why ... (Angrily). Nothing is certain when you're about.

ESTRAGON: In my opinion we were here.

VLADIMIR: (looking round). You recognize the place?

ESTRAGON: I didn't say that.

VLADIMIR: Well?

ESTRAGON: That makes no difference.

VLADIMIR: All the same ... that tree ... (turning towards the auditorium) ... that bog.

ESTRAGON: You're sure it was this evening?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (Pause.) I think

ESTRAGON: You think.

VLADIMIR: I must have made a note of it. He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.
ESTRAGON: (very insidious). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (Pause.) Or Monday? (Pause.) Or Friday?

VLADIMIR: (looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape). It’s not possible!

ESTRAGON: Or Thursday?

VLADIMIR: What’ll we do?

ESTRAGON: If he came yesterday and we weren’t here you may be sure he won’t come again today.

VLADIMIR: But you say we were here yesterday.

ESTRAGON: I may be mistaken. (Pause.) Let’s stop talking for a minute, do you mind?

VLADIMIR: (feebly). All right.

- It is difficult to decide exactly what kind of situation Vladimir and Estragon find themselves in but their frustrations seem only too authentic. Why?

After performing the extract, write in subtexts for some of the lines. Then, change those subtexts and play the scene again.

CHILDHOOD FEARS

‘Prayer Before Birth

➢ Read ‘Prayer Before Birth’ by Irish author and poet Louis Macneice.

I am not yet born; O hear me.
Let not the bloodsucking bat or the rat or the stoat or the club-footed ghoul come near me.

I am not yet born, console me.
I fear that the human race may with tall walls wall me,
with strong drugs dope me, with wise lies lure me,
on black racks rack me, in blood-baths roll me.

I am not yet born; provide me
With water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk
to me, sky to sing to me, birds and a white light
in the back of my mind to guide me.

I am not yet born; forgive me
For the sins that in me the world shall commit, my words
when they speak me, my thoughts when they think me
my treason engendered by traitors beyond me,
my life when they murder by means of my hands, my death when they live me.

I am not yet born; rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must take when
old men lecture me, bureaucrats hector me, mountains
frown at me, lovers laugh at me, the white
waves call me to folly and the desert calls
me to doom and the beggar refuses
my gift and my children curse me.

Kershaw, Irish inspirations, 24
I am not yet born; O hear me,
Let not the man who is beast or who thinks he is God
come near me.

I am not yet born; O fill me
With strength against those who would freeze my
humanity, would dragoon me into a lethal automaton,
would make me a cog in a machine, a thing with
one face, a thing, and against all those
who would dissipate my entirety, would
blow me like thistledown hither and
thither or hither and thither
like water held in the
hands would spill me.

Let them not make me a stone and let them not spill me.
Otherwise kill me.

Exploring fears

—are these some of the fears we have in childhood?
They might be part of our imagination but how do we deal with them?
What other fears do we have as children?

-Produce a dramatic interpretation of each verse but avoid naturalism where you can.

SAFETY IN THE FAMILY

A Sofa in the Forties

Read: ‘A Sofa in the Forties’ by Seamus Heaney from his recent collection entitled Spirit Level.

All of us on the sofa in a line, kneeling
Behind each other, eldest down to youngest,
Elbows going like pistons, for this was a train

And between the jamb-wall and the bedroom door
Our speed and distance were inestimable.
First we shunted, then we whistled, then

Somebody collected the invisible
For tickets and very gravely punched it
As carriage after carriage under us

M oved faster, chooka-chook, the sofa legs
Went giddy and the unreachable ones
Far out on the kitchen floor began to wave.
*

Ghost-train? Death-gondola? The carved, curved ends,
Black leatherette and ornate gauntness of it
Made it seem the sofa had achieved

Flotation. Its castors on tip-toe,
Its braid and fluent backboard gave it airs
Of superannuated pageantry;
When visitors endured it, straight-backed,

When it stood off in its own remoteness,
When the insufficient toys appeared on it

On Christmas mornings, it held out as itself,
Potentially heavenbound, earthbound for sure,
Among things that might add up or let you down.

We entered history and ignorance
Under the wireless shelf. Yippee-i-ay,
Sang ‘The Riders of the Range’. HERE IS THE NEWS,

Said the absolute speaker. Between him and us
A great gulf was fixed where pronunciation
Reigned tyrannically. The aerial wire.

Swept from a treetop down in through a hole
Bored in the windowframe. When it moved in wind,
The sway of language and its furtherings

Swept and swayed in us like nets in water
Or the abstract, lonely curve of distant trains
As we entered history and ignorance.
*

We occupied our seats with all our might,
Fit for the uncomfortableness.
Constancy was its own reward already.

Out in front, on the big upholstered arm,
Somebody craned to the side, driver or Fireman, wiping his dry brow with the air
Of one who had run the gauntlet. We were
The last thing on his mind, it seemed; we sensed
A tunnel coming up where we’d pour through
Like unlit carriages through fields at night,
Our only job to sit, eyes straight ahead,
And be transported and make engine noise.

- How do ordinary household objects take on a life of their own when we are children?

Follower

Read: ‘Follower’ by Seamus Heaney

My father worked with a horse plough,
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung
Between the shafts and the furrow.
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.

An expert. He would set the wing
And fit the bright-pointed sock.
The sod rolled over without breaking.
At the headrig, with a single pluck

Of reins, the sweating team turned round
And back into the land. His eye
Narrowed and angled at the ground,
Mapping the furrow exactly.

I stumbled in his hobnailed wake,
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;
Sometimes he rode me on his back
Dipping and rising to his plod.

I wanted to grow up and plough,
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.
All I ever did was follow
In his broad shadow around the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
Yapping always. But today
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me, and will not go away.

- In what ways do we want to imitate our parents when we are children?

Exploring the family

➤ What does family mean to us? Brainstorm concepts connected with family. Single words only e.g. ‘solidarity’, ‘safety’. Director as scribe. Represent each of these concepts with a gesture and a sound (but not a word!)

➤ Create the scene from ‘Follower’ with movement and sound but no words.

➤ Create the train from ‘A Sofa in the Forties’ complete with full sound effects, a driver and a guard. Dramatise Heaney’s poem.

DEVELOPMENT WORK

Repeat the idea of the ‘sofa train’. This time, form the train but at a given signal (such as the sounding of the whistle!) stop. Each member of the group leads an improvisation using as a starting point a moment from their own lives. Of course, the improvisations will develop in very different ways to the actual incidents. Compare! (Have a given signal for each improvisation to finish. Make them short and sweet.)

PREPARE YOUR DRAMA

Now prepare your 10 to 15 minutes of original drama on the themes of family and childhood. You might choose to produce 2 or 3 short pieces. Link them by character or theme. Any one of these could provide the basis for extended group practical work. Try to target your work for one specific audience.
If you want to produce drama for young children (for instance between five and seven years of age) think carefully about the issues schools and parents would want them to confront - a first visit to hospital, for instance or ‘stranger danger’. Or you may just want to tell them a really good tale. You may also want to present them with more than one possible outcome. Perhaps you could find a way of letting them choose the end of the play.

If creating drama for a younger audience, the following mix ‘n’ match structure may help you. Choose one box from each of the 6 columns and then develop to create a brand new story each time!

Drama for younger audiences - story structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character 1</th>
<th>Setting/location</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Character 2</th>
<th>A chance happening</th>
<th>Ending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A talking animal</td>
<td>Underground</td>
<td>A message</td>
<td>An older person</td>
<td>A lost object</td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A n astronaut</td>
<td>In a busy town</td>
<td>A mysterious box</td>
<td>Twins</td>
<td>A meeting on a journey</td>
<td>Reunited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone of noble birth</td>
<td>On another world</td>
<td>A marvellous machine</td>
<td>Someone good at sport</td>
<td>A prize</td>
<td>Rewarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A detective</td>
<td>In school</td>
<td>A car</td>
<td>A visitor from a foreign land</td>
<td>A change of plan</td>
<td>A better life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A servant</td>
<td>A huge old house</td>
<td>A large sum of money</td>
<td>A villain</td>
<td>Moving house</td>
<td>Escape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A school child</td>
<td>In the country</td>
<td>A boat</td>
<td>A magician</td>
<td>An accident</td>
<td>Back to square one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some with an unusual job</td>
<td>On an island</td>
<td>A camera</td>
<td>Someone who can be invisible</td>
<td>Mistaken identity</td>
<td>Serves you right!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRACTITIONER LINKS - Konstantin Stanislavski and Bertolt Brecht

Stanislavski wrote: At the moment of performance the text is supplied by the playwright, and the subtext by the actor...If this were not the case, people would not go to the theatre but sit at home and read the play (Building a Character).

By writing this, Stanislavski brought the actor into the creative process. He also encouraged the actors to see their characters as real people rather than one or two dimensional constructs. Brecht opposed what he saw as the lies inherent in naturalism: after all, when an audience visits the theatre they are not witnessing real life, so why fool them into believing that they are?

- Where do you stand on this debate? Any piece of drama which, as suggested above, presents an issue to an audience - whether they be adults or children - is likely to be Brechtian in influence, especially if it offers alternative outcomes.
FURTHER READING

Still on the subject of family life, read and then consider dramatising ‘The Starving Children from Africa’ by Tricia Rainsford, another Irish writer.

Turnips.
Baby vomit.
I wished my mother was there.
‘God forgive the whole lot of you,’ Nana said.

We looked at each other. I swung my legs and my heels hit against the rung that stretched between the legs of the chair. At Christmas Chrissie had tied a string around the cat’s neck once and then tied the free end onto the rung of a chair. ‘Like huskies,’ she’d said when our mother shouted at her, ‘If dogs can pull people and big heavy sleighs then the cat can pull a stupid chair.’

‘Jesus, Mary and Joseph,’ our mother said, pushing her fingers inside the string around the cat’s neck.

‘You’ll be glad when it snows,’ Chrissie said.

Our mother looked at the cat who was making a noise like a crinkled plastic bag.

‘Don’t kill her,’ I said, ‘Please Mammy, don’t kill Chrissie. She won’t do it again. Give her one more chance, she’ll be good, won’t you Chrissie.’

Our mother looked at me. She had a golden fleck in one of her eyes. Once, when she was in a good mood she told me it was gold-dust sprinkled into her eyes by the fairies. The cat coughed a rough, chokey kind of cough. Mammy rubbed her face with her free hand.

‘A knife to free the cat, Sheila,’ she said quietly - ‘I want a knife to free the cat - NOW!’ she roared.

I ran to the drawer and got the brown handled knife.

Mammy cut the cat free. The baby cried upstairs and Mammy cursed as she sawed at the string. It snapped and the cat ran out of the room without looking back at Chrissie.

‘Stay away from the animals, Chrissie,’ Mammy said, standing up.

‘She will,’ I said.

Chrissie looked at the floor and she was keeping her mouth shut tight like it was full of water that she wanted to spit.

‘I’m coming, I’m coming,’ Mammy called to the baby as she left the room. Chrissie made a face at Mammy’s back and stuck out the tip of her tongue between her lips. Chrissie always had red lips. Like she had just eaten an ice-pop.

I hated when Mammy was cross, even when she was cross with Chrissie because sometimes it would be like a big flood and she would get cross with me as well even though I hadn’t done anything.

I hated that. But even so it wasn’t as bad as Nana. Mammy was only mad at me sometimes. Mostly she was nice to me. Nana was different. Nana was always mad. And it was like ice-water. It felt like it might freeze your insides until you died. Faced with the shiny turnips I wanted my Mammy. I closed my eyes and tried wishing.

‘Let Daddy come in now and tell us that Mammy is coming home from hospital today and we have to go home. Now. Before we finish our dinner.’

I opened my eyes. Everything looked just the same. I stared at the door. No sign of Daddy. Then I remembered. I closed my eyes again. Please, God,’ I said in my head, ‘Please let it happen now and I won’t forget to thank you. I won’t be like those ungrateful lepers, I swear. I’ll thank you. I’ll remember, I promise. I’ll even try to be good if you let it happen.’ I squeezed my eyes tightly together to make my wish fly faster. I could smell the turnip on my plate and it made me feel sick. Chrissie kicked me under the table and I opened my eyes. She made a face as she pointed to the mound of yellow turnip on her plate. Nana made rattling noises with the range. I looked at the door. It was closed and quiet.

‘Ashamed of yourselves, that’s what you should be,’ Nana said, stuffing turf and broken sticks into the round hole on the top of the range.

Kershaw, Irish inspirations, 28
‘The starving children in Africa,’ my cousin Máiread mouthed putting on her Nana face. We all giggled. I filled my mouth with mashed potato. Máiread smiled and cut her bacon with her knife.

Máiread was good at cutting because she was eight. I stuck my fork in a piece of bacon and nibbled around the edges. It wasn’t too bad. There was a bit of a smell of turnip but not too much.

I looked down at the turnip. It looked bigger. Nana had stopped rattling.

‘Stop pushing your food around your plates. Eat it up and get on with your business. We haven’t all day. I wonder what the starving children in Africa would say if they were handed a dinner like that?’

I looked up from my plate and there they were. The starving children from Africa. Big bellies. Big eyes. They crowded around the kitchen table looking at our bacon and turnip and mashed potatoes. And it was Nana’s fault. Every time we were eating she talked about them - the starving children - and every time she talked about them in they came.

I felt bad for them that they were starving - I hated being hungry myself - but I still wished they didn’t have to come every day and watch us eat. It was horrible being watched by starving children and when they were there I found it hard to swallow even things that I liked. I wanted them to go away but I didn’t like to say anything in case they heard me and it hurt their feelings.

Sometimes I thought that even if they would only come once in a while that would do. But I didn’t know how to tell them and anyway I thought they were probably afraid of Nana and so they wouldn’t want to make her mad by not coming when she called them. It looked like they were obedient children who came straight away when Nana called and I could see why Nana would like them - they did what they were told and would never turn up their noses at good food.

The real problem was the watching. Standing around the table slowly blinking their big eyes at me and my sister, Chrissie, and my cousins - Máiread, Phyllis and Brendan - tried to eat our dinner.

I didn’t say it but I thought maybe they weren’t as well behaved as Nana thought because they did a lot of staring and I was always being told it was rude to stare. But I didn’t know how to stop them staring without getting them into trouble with Nana so I kept my eyes on my plate. That way I wouldn’t have to look into their starving faces.

I wished there was a way I could give them my dinner but I knew there wasn’t. I knew they weren’t real so they couldn’t really eat bacon and turnip. Sometimes I thought they were ghosts. Ghosts of children who had died from starvation who had nothing much to do now that they were dead so they hung around my cousins’ house waiting for Nana to call them in to watch us eat. I thought that would be lousy if it was true. A very boring way to spend forever.

The back door opened and my aunt walked past carrying a huge plastic basket overflowing with laundry. It smelled lovely. Better than turnip, anyway. Nana tutted. I looked up at her to see if my aunt had done something wrong but Nana was still looking at us. I looked back at my plate and forked some mashed potato into my mouth. I could hear my aunt unwinding the rope that held up the clothes horse and the squeaking noise as the pulleys let it fall low. I wondered if it was called a horse because of the squeaking noise. If it was they were wrong, they should have called it a clothes mouse. Horses didn’t squeak. They made a hot, blowy noise through their noses.

Nana moved closer to the table. I watched her from underneath my eyebrows without lifting my head. She shuffled closer and closer, thumping her walking stick in front of her. The sound of the rubber end of the stick landing on the floor made me all jump. Brendan started to eat his dinner faster. I could hear him chewing. Nana stopped about a foot from the end of the table. Some of the African children had to move to make room for her.

‘Did even one of you,’ Nana said in a quiet voice that made the hairs on my arms stand up, ‘Even one...just one of you think to ask your mother if she had a bite to eat before you sat down?’

I was confused for a minute because my mother was in hospital and I thought that the nurses gave you your dinner in hospital. Then I realised Nana meant my Aunt Emer. Had even one of us asked Aunt Emer if she had had her dinner? I looked at my sister and cousins, they were all eating. I doubted that they had asked and I knew I hadn’t asked. I could see Nana’s point. I could see that we were being selfish. Nana was right. Aunt Emer had loads of children and people said that that made you tired and we never even asked her if she had had her dinner. I felt a bit ashamed.

Then I had an idea and I suddenly felt much better. Aunt Emer was alive and could eat bacon and turnip - not like the starving children from Africa. So, if we did this thing maybe the starving children would be able to go away and haunt the table of some other children who were too selfish to be bothered asking or caring or anything. I filled my mouth with turnip and though it made me want to vomit it also made me feel good to be doing something to make up for being such a selfish six year old. I chewed it and tried not to think about what it was until I had forced it to slide down my throat. Once I stopped wanting to be sick I was glad. Proud of myself. It seemed like a good time to keep going.

‘Aunt Emer,’ I said, looking past Nana at my aunt who was winding the clothes horse back up to the ceiling. She looked at me. ‘What?’ she said and I could see that she was tired and that made me feel more determined to do what I had to do. I took a breath and I could taste turnip on the air that went through my mouth. ‘Have you had your dinner?’ I said.
Auntie Emer tutted and yanked the rope hard into place. Nana didn’t speak but I could hear her breathing as it got louder and louder.

“Well! Did you ever hear the like of it, Emer! Well, what more could you expect from the likes of...you bold, bold, strap, you,” Nana said in a hissing voice like a cat. I kept my eyes on my dinner. The pile of turnip was definitely getting bigger even though I had already eaten some of it. It wasn’t fair.

“I isn’t that just typical, Emer? What more could you expect from the likes of her? God between us and all harm - what kind of a brazen strap would say something like that.”

I finished my last piece of potato and began to move some turnip onto my fork but I couldn’t see it very well because my eyes were stinging and there were tears filling up inside my nose.

“I don’t know,” Auntie Emer said going out the doorway into the hallway. The door clicked as it closed behind her.

I stuck my fork into the turnip and went to lift it when all of a sudden something moved inside my head. It made a loud noise like the door but I didn’t think anybody else heard it. I listened but it was gone and so were the tears in my nose and the pain in my eyes. Instead a new thought was there and it was so clear that I couldn’t believe I had never seen it before. Like when you learn to read and you try to imagine what it was like when all the same letters made no sense.

The new thought was like a friend who had come to let me out of a dark room. I let my fork fall onto my plate beside the mound of turnip and I sat back in my chair and started swinging my legs again.

“Finish your dinner, young lady,” Nana said.

I looked up at her but she looked too frightening so I looked at my knees. They were brown from the sun. I shook my head.

“I hate turnip,” I said in a shaky voice.

“What?” Nana shouted.

“I hate turnip,” I said again and this time my voice was steady - like a gunslingers’ hand. The new thought grew inside my head like Jack’s beanstalk and it made me feel good.

Nana made a noise like the choking cat and inside my head I had a quick picture of Nana tied to the rung of the chair like the cat. Chrissie would be glad to tie Nana to the chair if she got a chance.

“Finish your dinners and scrape off your plates,” Nana said, turning away from the table, ‘Y our father will be in for his dinner in a minute. You can’t be sitting around all day. Hurry up.’

Nana thumped up the kitchen with her stick as we all stood up from the table. I walked to the scrap bucket and scraped my turnip into the mushy mess inside. It slid off the plate in a lump and splashed out of sight. I felt really good but a bit sorry for the hens - though I thought they probably liked turnip better than I did. As I turned around from the scrap bucket I could see the African children leaving and they looked like they were smiling. One of them turned and waved at me. He had a smooth brown face with shiny white teeth and he smiled happily at me. I thought he looked nice and wished he could stay and play but I understood he was busy. I waved back at him and he waved again and then turned his back and walked away. I thought that probably meant they wouldn’t be coming back to us any more. I hoped they would be happy wherever they had to go next.

PRACTITIONER LINK - Konstantin Stanislavski

► The character of Nana seems ripe for dramatic development. Give yourself the challenge of playing someone much older than you. Should be easy? Maybe, but read what Stanislavski had to say about the need for intense observation when playing someone old. In fact this kind of attention to detail is necessary to avoid stereotyping when playing any character:

‘Why can a young man instantly jump up, turn around, run, sit down, stand up without any preliminary preparation whereas an old man is deprived of such
possibilities?...Thanks to the sedimentation of salts and to the hardening of muscles and other reasons which undermine the human constitution as time passes, the joints of an old man are not well-oiled. They rasp and squeak like rusty iron. This lessens the breadth of his gestures, it reduces the angles of flexibility of his torso, his head. He is obliged to break up his larger motions into a series of smaller ones and each has to be prepared before he makes it. ’ (Building a Character)

NOW EVALUATE THE SESSION USING THE SHEET PROVIDED.
GROUP PRACTICAL : SESSION EVALUATION

Date: 

Time:

Names of those present:

Main theme:

Best lines:

Best moments:

Practitioner notes:

What could be developed during the next session:

Needs:
Unit 3: Hope from conflict
a theatre project for Warchild

Sixty million people have been killed in wars during the 20th Century. As you read this, over 30 wars and conflicts rage around the world. Some fill our TV screens with appalling images of distress, emphasising war’s brutalising effect on man. Many of these wars go unreported, often due to political expediency or lack of interest. They reveal a familiar pattern: Over 80% of war casualties are now civilians - mainly women and children.

Children are amongst the first casualties of any armed conflict, always the most vulnerable and innocent of victims. In the last decade alone, 1.5 million children have died in wars. Four million have been disabled and a further 10 million traumatised. The severe psychological wounds that war inflicts on children can scar them for life, crippling the very generations that must one day re-build their devastated countries. For the future peace of the world we must do everything in our power to help these war children.

War Child stands on the twin beliefs: that we’re not free to ignore an innocent victim’s plea for help and that children are the seed-corn of society, its future hope. War Child interprets the term ‘war zone’ to include areas of current armed conflict, areas where children are still suffering from the devastation of war leaves in its aftermath, and areas where children’s lives are in jeopardy due to poverty, violence and disease.

War Child’s Aims

- To alleviate the suffering of children by bringing material aid into war zones.
- To support those children who have been evacuated into refugee camps.
- To initiate rehabilitation programmes once children return safely to their homes. This includes identifying needs for capital reconstruction projects.
- To be instrumental in healing the psychological damage caused to children by their experiences of war.

To achieve our objectives War Child operates on three levels:

- As an implementing agency, identifying, developing and staffing aid projects and programmes.
- As a grant-making trust, providing funding and logistical support for other non-governmental organisations.
- As a pressure group, forging links with the media and entertainment industries in order to promote awareness of the problems facing children in war zones and mobilise public support on their behalf.
PURPOSE
This unit is designed to take you a step further in the use of stimulus material and to help you find strategies for researching a group project.

TASK
Warchild is a charity which seeks to improve the conditions of children in areas of the world torn by armed conflict.

Your theatre group has been commissioned by the charity to produce a 15 to 30 minute consciousness-raising dramatic presentation for secondary schools. The piece should concentrate on the plight of children suffering under the ravages of war.

The charity has said that it wants audiences to be able to identify with the characters and with a clearly defined story. They do not want a piece that only presents children affected by war as pitiful victims, neither do they want a piece which preaches to the audience.

➤ Read Warchild’s aims as set out on their Internet site and reproduced on the previous page.

A keen volunteer attached to your group has already provided you with examples of poetry and prose.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN
➤ Select one of the group to be today’s director. The director should make notes on the outcome of each exercise

➤ Director, before the session, instruct your group to have looked at and read the accompanying images and stimulus material.

➤ Have a small props basket at the ready containing a few coats, hats, an umbrella, a walking stick, a large sheet

➤ You will need some large sheets of paper, a marker pen and some means of pinning the paper to a vertical surface so that it can be written upon.

PREPARE
➤ Focus on the session and try to leave all other concerns at the door of the rehearsal room.

➤ Turn to the first pages of the pack and carry out one or two of the physical warm up exercises suggested there. (10 mins)

➤ Ideally, what might a human being expect from his or her first few years on the planet? Read the following extract from ‘An Unborn Child’ by Irish poet Derek Mahon.
I have already come to the verge of Departure. A month or so and I shall be vacating this familiar room. Its fabric fits me like a glove While leaving latitude for a free hand. I begin to put on the manners of the world, Sensing the splitting light above My head, where in the silence I lie curled.

Certain mysteries are relayed to me Through the dark network of my mother's body While she sits sewing the white shrouds Of my apotheosis. I know the twisted Kitten that lies there sunning itself Under the bare bulb, the clouds of goldfish mooning around upon the shelf. In me these data are already vested;

And sometimes too, in the small hours of the morning When the dead filament has ceased to ring, After the goldfish are dissolved into darkness And the kitten has gathered itself up into a ball Between the groceries and the sewing, I slip the trappings of my harness To range these hollows in discreet rehearsal And, battering at the concavity of my caul,

Produce in my mouth the words 'I want to live!'- This is my first protest, and shall be my last. As I am innocent, everything I do Or say is couched in the affirmative. I want to see, hear, touch and taste These things with which I am to be encumbered. Perhaps I needn't worry. Give Or take a day or two, my days are numbered.

DISCUSSION

Clearly children are likely to become the innocent victims of war by being wounded or killed themselves but in what less obvious ways might children be affected by war?


■ How would the ‘white waves’ call the child to ‘folly’? How could he be turned into an automaton by the world? How might the world make the child into a stone?

➤ What responsibilities do adults have towards children in trying to make and maintain peace? Do they always carry out their duties selflessly?

‘The Alchemists’

➤ Read ‘The Alchemists’ by Irish poet Margaret O’Beirne

They are frequently spotted The peace-makers, you know, At press conferences, airports, Photo-opportunities.

They are sharp dressers with a Good line in verbal automatics: Peace before Christmas, peace After Christmas, peace After Christmas, peace between meals.

There’s a lot of it on tap, peace. Conditions are ideal for peace. Never better - as I have said before And I repeat it here again.

The promise of peace is politicians’ gold- It paves the way to peace of mind: Dublin, Brussels, the tables of plenty. And we thrill to its glint in our mind’s eye.

They have gone a long way on Promissory notes, the illusionists With the plausible air. To coin gold out of breath is a new Irish alchemy - guarantees Our future At least.

Golden guarantees are at others’ expense: Enniskillen, Greysteel, the Shankill, Loughinislan- There the vaults have another stench.

Southern ‘peace’ is a red hand in Ulster.

■ What might be suggested by ‘verbal automatics’?
Her attitudes towards the ‘peacemakers’ sounds cynical. How and why?

How might this poem illustrate the concept of subtexts mentioned in an earlier unit?

Why do you think Margaret O’Beirne has chosen the title ‘The Alchemists’?

In the Middle Ages, alchemists attempted to change base metals into gold using the philosopher’s stone a hypothetical substance thought to hold the power of eternal life. Alchemy could also embrace astrology, occultism and magic.

Improvise a scene where an alchemist and his assistants attempt to bring peace to a war-torn country. What would the ingredients be? What would be their cost? What would be the alchemist’s motives?

What conflicts can you think of in the world today?

Children bound for safety

Read the following extract ‘children bound for safety recall final farewell to their families’ from an article by Dominic Kennedy in The Times newspaper.

In 1939, 15 year old Ursula Brann was on a train packed with Jewish children heading for Britain. ‘It was more like an adventure, something exciting,’ she said. ‘I didn’t realise it was going to be the end of everything.’ Her suitcase, stuffed with clothes, had just enough room for a prayer book, dedicated to her by her father, Ferdinand. ‘My parents had numbers to go to America in 1942. I clung on to this: only three years and we will all meet up again.’ The reunion never happened. Ursula, now Mrs. Gilbert, was born in Berlin in 1923 and experienced prejudice from an early age. ‘At school in Germany the children were separated. We weren’t allowed to play with others, we weren’t allowed to go on outings, no theatre visits, nothing like that.’

On Kristallnacht her father’s shop selling Russian delicacies was destroyed. ‘Everything was raided, burnt and smashed.’ An aunt found the young refugee her first job in England, as a milliner. ‘War broke out on a Sunday,’ she said. ‘On Monday morning the managers of this workshop got everybody together and said, ‘We have a German in our midst and we have to tell this German person to leave the company.’ That German was me. I have never forgotten that.’

Improvise the scene at the milliners. Try reversing the situation by making it a young British person who is being excluded. What might happen next?

STORY-TELLING TECHNIQUE

Warchild have said that they want a strong narrative running through the piece you develop. Here is an example of a story-telling technique. Theatre Companies who want to create new work often have to adopt this technique when no writers are available.

Start with the brief in mind. Perhaps the first actor could read from an existing news article or story on the subject. Early in the story and at an appropriate turn in the tale the first actor stops and the second takes over. You probably will not create a perfect piece first time but remember, you can always pick the best bits and choose to develop those later. Each actor should try to stop their part of the story at a cliff-hanger.

This example is from The Sixth Form development group helping to prepare these materials.
Sixth-form example

The group decided to create a story (with a child as the central character) set in an oppressive regime where what people say is used against them by those who were once their friends and neighbours:

Actor A: She ran down the alley. She flung herself at the barbed wire at the end. Scraping herself up she turned to face the footsteps following her. Lights filled the alley.

The bulbs lit up the gleaming wire as she clambered through it. A coin from her pocket rolled into the alley.

Actor B: She stood up and ran, hoping they would not be following her. She constantly looked over her shoulder. After 5 minutes of running she looked over her shoulder and saw a man.

‘Stefan! You were our next door neighbour,’ she said. ‘How could you do this to us?’

‘It’s the law,’ he replied.

‘But I played with your daughter. Your wife gave us milk and cookies. We were your neighbours, your friends. How can you chase me and shoot me?’

Actor C: ‘They told us and they were right - the only way to flush out traitors is with a gun. Now are you going to come with me or are we going to do it here?’

Actor D: Stefan reached for his gun just as she turned to make her exit. However she was too slow. Bullets soon ripped through her back, exiting through her chest. As she fell slowly, she uttered the word: ‘Why?’

Try using the above story-telling technique to create the basis for your starting point on the War child project.

➤ Think, what is it that you wish to convey about the plight of children in areas affected by conflict?

➤ What might make their experience of the situation different to that of the adults around them?

➤ Many children are exploited as gun-runners or soldiers during conflicts. At what age do they start to learn the loyalties and hatreds of their parents?

FURTHER RESEARCH

Various diary accounts exist written by children trapped by conflict. Anne Frank is perhaps the most famous exponent but from more recent times you may remember Zlata’s Diary written during the 1993 war in Bosnia. On Monday 15 March 1993 she writes:

‘There are no trees to blossom and no birds, because the war has destroyed them as well. There is no sound of birds twittering in springtime. There aren’t even any pigeons - the symbol of Sarajevo. No noisy children, no games. Even the children no longer seem like children. They’ve had their childhood taken away from them, and without that they can’t be children.’

Zlata’s Diary by Zlata Filipović, published by Penguin

➤ Could you use the diary or letter format as part of your drama? What opportunities might this present?

AND AFTER THE CONFLICT IS OVER?
Most of the stimulus material in this pack is by contemporary Irish writers. Northern Ireland was divided politically from the rest of Ireland in 1921. For many years in Northern Ireland there has been conflict, somewhat euphemistically referred to as ‘The Troubles’. In 1992 Albert Reynolds’ and Dick Spring’s coalition government in the Republic of Ireland (Eire or sometimes ‘The South’) worked with the UK government to produce ‘The Downing Street declaration’. This produced a ceasefire by the IRA in August 1994 and by the Protestant or ‘loyalist’ paramilitaries in October. The ceasefire held until 1996 but hopes for peace were rekindled with the ‘Good Friday agreement’ of 1998.

Children of the troubles

During the nineteen-nineties the people of Northern Ireland have had a taste of what peace might bring. In 1995 an American writer, Laurel Holliday, compiled a set of first-hand accounts of childhoods in the ‘Troubles’ by those who had lived through them, both nationalist and loyalist, Catholic and Protestant. In Children of the Troubles published in 1997 by Pocket Books, John McConnell and James Bailie recall events from their youth in the attached photocopies. At the end of this unit you will find a set of images from the Warchild website.

John McConnell, Belfast

Then I asked thirty-five-year-old John McConnell what stands out in his life, he said, ‘the Troubles. I’ve always been nervous ... never calm . . . and with the cease-fires I’m just the same.’ When I interviewed him during the cease-fires, there had been no shootings for over a year, but John told me that he still jumped whenever he heard fireworks. “I’ve got it in my head,” he said, “Oh, that’s shooting! That’s shooting!”

John was brought up in a conflict area near the Castlereagh Road in East Belfast, where he says he knew that every weekend there was going to be trouble. ‘Whenever you saw a gang standing on the corner, you knew they were just waiting for the Army and the police to come up so they could start trouble.’ Sometimes the violence was so bad that his mother kept him and his four brothers in the house.

As his story shows, John was always open to friendships on the other side of the divide and, as it turned out, his early romantic relationships were with Catholic girls. That made him a target for both sides, but somehow he was able to carry on peacefully.

Several years ago John was targeted by the IRA partly because of a mistaken identity and partly because he cooks for the Army. Of this terrifying time he says: ‘The police asked me if I wanted to move house or if I wanted to change my job. I said no. But I was putting things up against the doors. I thought someone was going to bust the doors down. The police asked if I wanted to arm myself. But I just wouldn’t have a gun in the house.’

This was just a few months before the cease-fires, which, when they were announced by both sides, helped a little to put John’s mind at ease. He concludes his story, in fact, with the statement that there is peace now in Northern Ireland, which was a bit optimistic perhaps, even considering that it was written during the cease-fires.

Today John is living happily with his partner and their children, Gary, age three, and Lindsey, age two. He says, ‘So long as my kids are okay, I’m okay. I love my family. I live for my kids.’

But one thing is missing for John. He misses Eamon, the childhood friend who is the subject of his story. He wrote this story in hopes that Eamon (whose last name is Marks) will read it and get in touch with him through the publisher of this book.

Eamon

This is my story of meeting Eamon in the times of the Northern Ireland Troubles.

I moved into an estate (housing project) on the outskirts of Belfast when I was about fifteen years old. I just hung about my house for the first few days. Then one day I was playing football by myself when two boys came up to me and asked me if I would like to play football with them. I said ‘yes,’ so we went over to a field where boys were picking teams.
One of the boys who asked me if I wanted to play football with them was called Eamon. I realised he must be a Catholic as the boys were laughing and saying that Eamon’s team was Celtic. This was the first time I had met a Catholic and he was just like the rest of us. And a good footballer too!

When we stopped playing Eamon said he would walk round with me as he lived not far from me - about five doors away.

The conversation was mostly about football until I asked him if he supported the Celtics [a Catholic team with a Catholic following from Northern Ireland]. ‘Yes,’ he said and then he told me that he was a Catholic. There was a silence for a while between us and then he said he would see me later.

So later that night he called for me and we did what we did most nights after that which was play more football and go to the school youth club.

I got to know Eamon better and he told me he’d lived on the estate for four years now and that he and his mother were the only Catholics in the estate. But he never talked about that much. He told me he was not interested in the Troubles. He only had time for his mother as his father had passed away.

Eamon was not what I thought Catholics were like - cross-eyed and dirty - although I had never met any of them up to now. Eamon was a tall, skinny lad - always well-dressed and with black straight combed hair. He was quiet and helpful.

One day he took me by surprise by saying he was going out to collect bonfire wood for the 11th July [eve of Orange Day, a Protestant holiday] and he wanted to know if I was going to help him. And I always thought that the Catholics went down to Dublin for the 11th-12th July to get away! He did his bit for the bonfire. We must have collected four doors and a lot of old tyres. Here was a Catholic lad out collecting wood for the Protestant bonfire. Nowadays we would be lucky to see a Catholic near a bonfire, let alone helping collect for one!

I saw Eamon a lot more now, but not in the daytime as he went to a Catholic school. One day I asked him would he have liked to have gone to our school and he said he would have loved to go to our school but he had to go to his own school because of his Catholic ‘ways.’

That night I called for him. It was raining heavy and his mother, Pauline, came out and asked me did I want to come in as Eamon was upstairs. This was the first time I was in Eamon’s house. I sat down and I noticed a cross and a picture of the Virgin Mary up on the wall.

Eamon’s mother asked me did I like living in the estate. I said yes. After that it was quiet because I did not know what to say to her. Then she offered me some lemonade and then Eamon came in and asked his mother could I go up to his room. She said yes, so we went up. Eamon’s room was like mine-pop posters and football posters---only he had Celtic posters up! He told me about the time when there were only about five Catholic families living on the estate and one night he heard a lot of shouting and screaming. He looked out the back window of his house and saw a Catholic family moving out and a crowd around his own house. He said he panicked and ran downstairs and told his mother. She locked all the doors and drew the curtains. Then there was a knock at the door.

Eamon said his mother was screaming and they heard a lot of screaming outside. He looked out the window and saw a group of women. They shouted to him to open the door and he said he opened it because he knew a lot of the women at his door. They came in and they asked where his mother was. She was in the kitchen and they got her to calm down as she was in hysteric.

I asked Eamon how did he feel and he said he felt scared and shaking. He felt like running out of the house and not stopping. But he also said he worried about his mother.

He told me that one of the women from the estate had told him that men from other areas had come into the estate to get all of the Catholic families out. The women said they would help keep Eamon and his mother safe from the men. The women stood outside their door and front window and shouted to these men to go away. He said it lasted about twenty minutes. But it was like all night to him.

Then the men went away but they shouted that they would be back. But this never happened.

His mother would not move house but she was still afraid to go out of the house for about six months and she had to get help from the doctor. Eamon took her home to his mother over the estate. Eamon told her she didn’t want to move either. The women of the estate helped him and his mother a lot and this is why they stayed in the estate.

That night really told me what kind of person Eamon was caring and helpful, and he loved his mother.

I got to know his mother well and so did my own mother. The 11th night came and we were celebrating. Eamon was with us and we were singing ‘The Sash’ [a Protestant anthem] and he joined in. He even sang the ‘Billy Boys,’ another well-known Protestant song!

It was not long after this that there were a lot of tit-for-tat shootings going on - Protestants shooting Catholics and Catholics shootings Protestants. The trouble was getting worse. Eamon still never said much about the Troubles that were going on. That was his nature.

After one night at the school youth club we walked home and said the usual things - ‘see you later,’ ‘see you tomorrow.’ But I never did. That night someone shot two shots through Eamon’s window. I heard the bangs and went downstairs. My father told me to stay in the house, so I looked out of my brother’s window and saw a crowd at Eamon’s house. Then I saw an ambulance come and take someone away.
My mother came up and told me that Eamon was shot. But he was okay as he was shot in the lower leg. I felt numb. And I felt hatred for the ones who did this. Why Eamon, I just kept asking myself.

Next morning I saw a lorry moving all of the furniture out of Eamon's house. I ran downstairs and I asked one of the men where was Eamon and he just said he was in hospital and he was okay.

Later I found out it was one of his uncles moving house for him and his mother. I never heard of where he moved to, but there was a rumour going around that he moved to England and is living there now. I still think about him and wonder how he would feel now that there is peace in Northern Ireland.

James Bailie - Belfast

One of five children, James Bailie was born at home, near Belfast's Shankill Road, in 1953. As he describes in his essay written at age fifteen - an assignment to tell what he did over the summer vacation of 1969 - he grew up in a Protestant neighborhood close to the interface between the two communities in Belfast and was, therefore, an eyewitness to considerable violence. The map on page 40, with which James illustrated his school essay, is an example of how children try to make sense of the Troubles - in this case, visually.

Forty-two now, James is married with two children. He works as a quality inspector for Short Brothers Aerospace Manufacturers in Belfast and lives in a quiet area near the Holywood Road, where he and his wife Yvonne, a cleaner at Queen's University, moved in 1983 to get their children out of the worst of the Troubles.

The Riots in Belfast
(Written at age fifteen)

I am a Protestant living in the Shankill Road area of Belfast. My father is an Orangeman [member of a Protestant organization] and hates the Catholics. My mother and the rest of us have no quarrel with them although we never associate with them. The trouble is that people like my father and his Catholic counterparts cannot live in peace together as the riots have shown.

I was at the scene of the outbreak of the riots [August 3, 1969] and I feel I am qualified to give an account of what happened. I suppose it all started at Unity Walk when the Catholic inhabitants stoned our procession of juveniles [young participants in the annual Protestant Orange parades] while we were marching past. Obviously it was only a few troublemakers who started it but, nevertheless, the whole community had to suffer the consequences. The efforts of the police were enough to keep these troublemakers apart but tension mounted and the parade in Derry [August 12] was enough to start the fighting off again on an even deadlier scale.

My friends and I were touring our area [August 14] and saw groups of men facing a few hundred Catholics in lower Cupar Street. Suddenly the mob started running up the street, but shouts from our boys were enough to bring reinforcements from neighbouring streets.

For about twenty minutes these two forces battled but neither seemed to be gaining any headway. From nearby David Street, petrol bombs were hurled into the midst of the Protestants but these were met with equal strength by the victims.
Police trucks arrived in time to prevent serious trouble breaking out. They sped down Cupar Street right into our boys. Fortunately they jumped out of the way in time but a third truck came while our lads were running behind the previous ones in glory. This time they were not so lucky because two of them were struck down by the vehicle. Later I found out it was a neighbour of mine and a particular friend of mine who was one of the victims.

The police kept the hotheads away from each other for the night. I did not see any more fighting because I was only permitted to stand at the corner of Cupar Street.

No one was able to sleep that night since we were all put on alert. Rumours were spreading that Catholics from faraway estates [housing projects] were coming. The only place for them to get by was Kashmir Road, but to our relief it was heavily guarded by vigilantes from neighbouring streets.

Right up to about two o’clock bursts of gunfire ripped the peace of the night, but nothing more than this was visible or audible that night.

Next day [August 15], preparations for protecting ourselves were made. A nearby factory in Cupar Street was forced open and containers were rolled out and put at street corners facing the Catholic area behind Cupar Street. I helped in these preparations.

A meeting was in progress in Canmore Street where Johnny McQuade M.P. [Member of Parliament] was attending. He was talking about peace and how to protect yourselves without starting anything with the ‘enemy.’

No sooner had the bottom of the Kashmir Road been barricaded than about twenty Catholics in a large lorry, obviously hijacked, arrived at Bombay Street and blocked off the end of the Kashmir Hill. All was set now for a pitched battle and it was not long before the first stones rained down on us.

In our street, petrol bombs were frantically being prepared while, at the scene of the battle, paving stones were being pulled up and shattered to provide ready ammunition. This time no police came and both forces were left to fight it out.

It was not long before the guns came out on their side. Incidentally, it was only four o’clock in the evening. These guns frightened our boys and kept them from advancing up the hill.

The main thing which worried us was that Mockil’s [engineering works on Springfield Road] workers had not come home yet. Their usual way home was through the Catholic area but they could not possibly go that way now.

Suddenly a man ran down Cupar Street and a few remarked he had enough, but a few minutes later he returned with a shotgun. Until now I had not seen a gun in these riots. He positioned himself behind the Kashmir Road and from reliable sources I heard that he had shot five Catholics. One of them I was told was killed.

More Protestants took his lead and got their guns. Mainly they were shotguns or pistols but two had rifles. Altogether there were no more than six guns.

At the Catholic school which our boys unsuccessfully tried to burn I actually saw one of us shot in the face. Luckily it was a shotgun and he appeared to be alright, though streams of blood covered his face. I gave him my handkerchief and a while later he was taken to hospital in an ambulance. That was enough for me. I realized that since I was only a few feet away from him it could as easily be me that was hit by the spreading buckshot.

I ran up to our house via Eastland Street to avoid being the target of this sniper from the school, eager to tell about my close experience. At about four o’clock the Army made a brief appearance at the scene of the trouble, but before half on four [4:30 p.m.] elapsed they were gone.

By now our crowd had taken over the Catholic barricade, burnt as it was, and proceeded to burn every house in Bombay Street - as the Catholic houses in lower Conway Street had suffered the previous night.

It was dark by now and the fighting had been going on for about eight hours when the troops took over, firing tear gas grenades to disperse the crowd.

That was the end of the fighting. The next day the Army put up their barricades and for two days we were virtually locked in.

Now everything has quietened down, but at night organised parties of Protestants patrol our streets to ensure there are no Catholic reprisals for the deeds which our kind carried out. Radio Free Belfast [Nationalist Catholic radio channel] threatens us saying that Wilton, Conmore, Sugarfield, and Bellevue Streets will suffer the same fate as Conway and Bombay Streets. All I can say to this is that they will need a very strong force to carry out their threats judging by the number of men we have guarding us.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Using the Internet

In 1997, the BBC started an Internet news archive. Visit www.bbc.uk.com and click on ‘news’ then ‘archive’. A sample page is printed below.
Children's rights 'violated by war' - Children have often been the unwitting victims of battle but a new report suggests they are playing an increasingly active role in wars around the world.

In this section

Crime bans sex
Kennedy to be buried at sea
Shuttle launch delayed again
KLA weapons deadline passes
New oil pits
IRA raids:
 overlook

Children in war-torn countries, especially in Africa, have been propelled into the front line. Children as young as ten are often pressed into joining rebel groups or irregular army units.

Precocious machines
They often volunteer out of a precocious sense of machismo or because it is the only way to get food or money.

Sometimes their motive is simply revenge but often they are pushed into taking up arms against their will.

Over the last decade, two million children have died as a result of armed-conflict and six million have been injured, blinded or brain damaged.

In Rwanda more than 2,000 minors and adolescents are in custody accused of taking part in atrocities.

In Afganistan 8,000 children under the age of five have been killed in mines, mainly due to anti-personnel landmines.

http://news2.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/newsid_49000/49117.stm

BBC News | World | Children’s rights ‘violated by war’ - 11 Feb 2000

World

World

The United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef) has published a report which highlights children in conflict. A child rights emergency, to highlight the plight of hundreds of thousands of children in the war torn areas of the world.

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Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In 1948 the United Nations accepted without dissent an international charter entitled ‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. You might like to think about how war and conflict are in breach of these ideals or may seek to defend them. Here are a few of the 30 articles. You can investigate the rest of the document by visiting www3.itu.int/udhr

Article 1
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 3
Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 5
No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 13
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.

Article 14
(1) Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

Article 15
(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 18 (extract)
Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Images from Warchild website
Text and pictures Copyright 1996 Thom Hoffmann

Running back home
Grenades were still falling in east Mostar, August '95
On this square 3 Italian journalists were killed.

Houses destroyed.

Citizens of East Mostar spent months in basements, hiding. Many didn’t survive the bombing from outside the town.

The girl left looks like Anne Frank.

Three, four hours spent on this square. He didn’t utter one sound.

Houses bit by bit being repaired.

Who can repair him?

NOW EVALUATE THE SESSION USING THE SHEET PROVIDED.
Date: 

Names of those present:

Main theme:

Best lines:

Best moments:

Practitioner notes:

What could be developed during the next session:

Needs:
Irish inspirations
   Part three : seeking inspiration
Unit 4: Irish inspirations
PURPOSE

If you are going to produce a piece of theatre with a narrative (ie a story) running through it, where do you find a tale to tell? You need something around which a theatrical plot can be woven. Following a more Brechtian model, you may want your audience to question your narrative or the characters with whom you present them, all the while considering alternatives outcomes. Whatever your intentions you need a germ of a story and characters who your audience can love or hate.

In keeping with the Irish theme of this workpack, here are some stories which seem to cry out for dramatisation. Perhaps you will dispense with their actual content but keep their structures. Perhaps you will find corresponding examples from locations and cultures closer to your own experience.

THE ‘BLACK’ IRISH

Defeat of the Spanish Armada

In 1588 Philip II of Spain sent a fleet, or Armada, of 130 ships against England. The ships contained hundreds of men, many of whom were drawn from Spain’s upper classes. With them they carried enough treasure to allow for the establishment of Spanish rule in England. In the English channel they met with an English fleet of 197 smaller ships commanded by Francis Drake and Howard of Effingham.

After a fierce running battle, the Armada sought refuge off Calais but were put to flight by fireships sent by the English. What remained of the Armada made its escape around the North of Scotland and the West of Ireland but suffered many losses on the way. Only about half of the fleet returned to Spain.

Of those whose ships foundered in storms, many survivors were washed up on the shores of Ireland. There they met with a hostile reception. Some were robbed and put to death by local peasants or by their English rulers. However, stories prevail to this day of Spanish sailors who survived and made their home amongst the local Irish population, marrying local women. In many places along Ireland’s West Coast local people attribute their dark hair and skin to their partly Spanish ancestry.

Areas of explore

Having read this story, what areas might you explore with your group?

- The attitude of local communities towards strangers in their midst.
  How would your attitude towards the Spaniards be changed if you were governed by people whom you did not accept? Might you try to curry favour with the authorities by handing over the survivors of the shipwrecks?

- A witness describes one of the Spanish survivors:
  ‘He was dressed in black raised velvet with broad gold lace and died in the grey Irish waters wearing a doublet and breeches of white satin, with russet silk stockings. There came striding out of the waves sixteen persons alive with their chains of gold.’

  from The Great O’Neill, a biography of Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, 1550-1616 by Sean O’Faolain

Kershaw, Irish inspirations, 48
If you were a member of the Spanish nobility, how would your social class colour your view of the local people? If you were one of the inhabitants what would you think of the new arrival?

How could you represent the experience of an outsider arriving in a foreign country? (Refer if you want to the extract from Brian Friel’s Translations from earlier in the pack.) What common ground might you find with the local inhabitants?

What has been the experience of people who have settled in your area in more recent times? They may have come from another country or from a different part of Britain.

THE TALES OF CUCHULAIN

A summary

Each country has its own mythology. The tales of the mythical Irish hero Cuchulain (pronounced ‘kuh-hullin’) are bloodthirsty and exciting but not very well known outside Ireland. They were collected together at the beginning of the twentieth century by the Irish writer Lady Augusta Gregory. Lady Gregory’s friend the poet W. B. Yeats became interested in the stories as a way of re-establishing Ireland’s cultural credibility. He felt that to be taken seriously, a country needed a mythology (like Arthurian legend in England) of which it could be proud.

The legend tells that Cuchulain is the son of Dechtire (the sister of King Conchubar, pronounced ‘Conor’) and the god Lugh (pronounced ‘Loo’). At first, he is named Setanta. His heroic deeds begin soon after his infancy. Keen for companions of his own he travels to the court of Conchubar where he sees many young boys playing. Without asking he starts to play with them but is set upon and nearly killed by the boys who turn out to be the king’s sons. Setanta does not know that he must seek permission before playing with the boys. On hearing the identity of the new arrival, Conchubar commands his sons to allow Setanta to join in their play. Setanta joins the court.

Setanta’s name is changed after he is attacked by and kills the giant hound of the blacksmith Culain by driving a hurling ball down its throat. In recompense Setanta promises to find and train another hound of the same type and until then to be the guard of Culain’s home and possessions. He will be named Cuchulain - ‘hound of Culain’.

Still a boy, Cuchulain sets out to ‘bloody his arms’ in battle killing many of his king’s enemies. As a warrior he is without parallel. When fighting he enters a ‘battle fury’ making his hair appear to be on fire. One of his eyes closes and shrinks back into his head; the other glares and stands out on a stalk. His snarl splits his face from jaw to ear. He is also likely to be unable to stop killing and on returning home may carry on the slaughter amongst his friends. King Conchubar realises this and as the boy Cuchulain returns from his first battle, the king sends out a hundred and fifty ‘red-naked’ women to shame him and cool his battle fury.

After meeting his future wife, Emer, Cuchulain sets out to visit the Scottish warrior woman Scathach to learn her skills. To get there he must cross the strange ‘bridge of the cliff’. When trodden upon for the first time, the bridge narrows to a hair’s breadth; the second time it shortens to an inch; the third it becomes slippery as an eel; and the fourth it rises up as high as the mast of a ship. Cuchulain crosses it at the fourth attempt by making use for the first time of his ‘hero’s salmon leap’.

Cuchulain helps Scathach to defeat another warrior woman, Aoife. On his return home he encounters an old woman who demands that he allow her to pass by on the cliff path by suspending himself from
the cliff edge by his hands. He does so but as she passes she stamps on his hands to make him fall. He leaps up and kills her. Later he finds out that she had been the mother of the last three warriors he had killed in the battle against Aoife.

‘Cuchulain’s Fight With the Sea’

Chuchulain’s adventures are many and often involve tragedy. One of the most poignant of these is recounted in W. B. Yeats’ poem ‘Cuchulain’s Fight With the Sea’.

A man came slowly from the setting sun, To Emer, raddling raiment in her dun, And said, ‘I am that swineherd whom you bid Go watch the road between the wood and tide, But now I have no need to watch it more.’

Then Emer cast the web upon the floor, And raising arms all raddled with the dye, Parted her lips with a loud sudden cry. That swineherd stared upon her face and said, ‘No man alive, no man among the dead, Has won the gold his cars of battle bring.’

‘But if your master comes home triumphing Why must you blench and shake from foot to crown?’ Thereon he shook the more and cast him down Upon the web-heaped floor, and cried his word: ‘With him is one sweet-throated like a bird.’

‘You dare me to my face,’ and thereupon She smote with raddled fist, and where her son Herded the cattle came with stumbling feet, And cried with angry voice, ‘It is not meet To idle life away, a common herd.’

‘I have long waited, mother, for that word: But wherefore now?’ ‘There is a man to die; You have the heaviest arm under the sky.’

‘Whether under its daylight or its stars My father stands amid his battle-cars.’

‘But you have grown to be the taller man.’

‘Yet somewhere under starlight or the sun My father stands. ‘Aged, worn out with wars On foot, on horseback or in battle-cars.’

‘I only ask what way my journey lies, For He who made you bitter made you wise.’

‘The Red Branch camp in a great company Between wood’s rim and the horses of the sea. Go there, and light a camp-fire at wood’s rim; But tell your name and lineage to him Whose blade compels, and wait till they have found Some feasting man that the same oath has bound.’

A mong those feasting men Cuchulain dwelt, And his young sweetheart close beside him knelt, Stared on the mournful wonder of his eyes, Even as Spring upon the ancient skies, And pondered on the glory of his days; And all around the harp-string told his praise, And Conchubar, the Red Branch king of kings, With his own fingers touched the brazen strings.

At last Cuchulain spake, ‘Some man has made His evening fire amid the leafy shade. I have often heard him singing to and fro, I have often heard the sweet sound of his bow. Seek out what man he is.’

One went and came. ‘He bade me let all know he gives his name At the sword-point, and waits till we have found Some feasting man that the same oath has bound.’

Cuchulain cried, ‘I am the only man Of all this host so bound from childhood on.’

After short fighting in the leafy shade, He spake to the young man, ‘Is there no maid Who loves you, no white arms to wrap you round, Or do you long for the dim sleepy ground That you have come and dared me to my face?’

‘The dooms of men are in God’s hidden place’.

‘Your head a while seemed like a woman’s head That I loved once.’

Again the fighting sped, But now the war-rage in Cuchulain woke, And through that new blade’s guard the old blade broke, And pierced him.

‘Speak before your breath is done.’
‘Cuchulain I, mighty Cuchulain’s son.’

‘I put you from your pain. I can no more.’

While day its burden on to evening bore,
With head bowed on his knees Cuchulain stayed;
Then Conchubar sent that sweet-throated maid,
And she, to win him, his grey hair caressed;
In vain her arms, in vain her soft white breast.
Then Conchubar, the subtlest of all men,
Ranking his Druids round him ten by ten,
Spake thus: ‘Cuchulain will dwell there and brood
For three days more in dreadful quietude,

And then arise, and raving slay us all.
Chaunt in his car delusions magical,
That he may fight the horses of the sea.’
The Druids took them to their mystery,
And haunted for three days.
Cuchulain stirred,
Stared on the horses, of the sea, and heard
The cars of battle and his own name cried;
And fought with the invulnerable tide.

Glossary
Emer: Cuchulain’s wife
raddling: dyeing
dun: fort
The Red Branch: Conchubar and his army

FURTHER RESEARCH
There are many books of Celtic legend in which you will find examples of the tales of Cuchulain including Lady Gregory’s Cuchulain of Muirthemnell published by Colin Smythe Ltd. Chronicles of the Celts by I. Zaczek and published by Collins and Brown explores the tales of Cuchulain amongst many other Irish and Scottish stories. On the Internet, try www.irelandnow.com.

Whether you research Irish mythology or delve into the legends of another country, the stories you find will often deal with and confront basic human values and truths. The language required for a sense of authenticity will need careful thought: it might be necessary to avoid modern slang and to consider the kind of ‘weighty’ speech appropriate for gods, kings and heroes.

PRACTITIONER LINK
Bertolt Brecht

If you are studying the theories and practice of the German dramatist and director Bertolt Brecht, you will be familiar with the term ‘epic theatre’. Unlike naturalistic drama, epic theatre does not require the dramatist to speak to the audience only through the words of the characters as if those characters were real people. Instead, characters would talk in the third person; there might be a storyteller; the plot would be told in advance; and the audience invited to consider alternative outcomes.

Myths like the tales of Cuchulain lend themselves to epic theatre. If we are not already familiar with the exact story then we can at least predict the outcomes because myths from many cultures follow similar structures. Furthermore, they are by their very nature not naturalistic; we are always somewhat distanced from the events before us.

Alienation effect
This state of affairs makes myths perfect for generating what Brecht termed ‘Verfremdungseffekt’ or ‘alienation effect’. Brecht’s aim was to make his audience think and be critical. It is not that a Brechtian audience is not supposed to feel emotions but sentimentality should be avoided at all costs. They should not simply accept what is put in front of them as the truth.
REFLECTIONS ON MYTHS AND LEGENDS

➢ In what ways are myths and legends non-naturalistic?

➢ Research the tales of Cuchulain and compare his adventures with those of Orpheus. Can you see similarities in the structures of the stories?

➢ Explore alienation effect by allowing your actors to step out of role and talk to the audience; by having them put on different pieces of costume on stage; by including a storyteller or narrator.

➢ How can myths and legends help to transmit a nation’s culture or give a sense of national identity?

➢ If national myths do not take your interest, what about local folk tales?

➢ Who might your audience be for a piece of drama on myths? Children react very well to myths and legends in their original form. For adults there have been several recent modernised adaptations of Greek myths including the story of Orpheus and Eurydice and the tragic tale of Jason’s spurned lover, Medea.

NOW EVALUATE THE SESSION USING THE SHEET PROVIDED.
Company log book

GROUP PRACTICAL : SESSION EVALUATION

Date: Time:

Names of those present:

Main theme:

Best lines:

Best moments:

Practitioner notes:

What could be developed during the next session:

Needs:
Unit 5: From major to minor
PURPOSE
The purpose of this unit is to explore the role of minor characters in novels and plays.

Think of a novel or play you know well. Are there minor characters within the story whose own tale is just waiting to be told?

In the world of novels, Jean Rhys takes Rochester’s first wife from Charlotte Bronte’s novel Jane Eyre as the central character for her own novel, ‘The Wide Sargasso Sea’. Tom Stoppard did the same with his play ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead’. In this razor-witted absurdist comedy, Stoppard investigates the lives of the two men whose only role in Shakespeare’s play Hamlet is to spy upon its eponymous hero on a voyage to England. Throughout Stoppard’s play we see glimpses of Hamlet, but we only ever view the action from the sidelines with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

In Shakespeare’s ‘The Tempest’, Alonso and his court are shipwrecked and washed up on a mysterious island. Stephano is his drunken butler who at the prompting of the part man, part monster Caliban makes a half-hearted attempt to usurp control of the island from the powerful magician Prospero. Caliban, who has lived on the island all his life, thinks that Stephano is a god and, in Act II scene II makes the following promises he will later regret:

I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries;
I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.
A plague upon the tyrant that I serve!
I'll bear him no more sticks, but follow thee,
Thou wondrous man.

STEPHANO REMEMBERS
The Irish poet James Simmons uses the minor character of the drunken butler in his poem ‘Stephano Remembers’:

We broke out of our dream into a clearing
and there were all our masters still sneering.
My head bowed, I made jokes and turned away,
living over and over that strange day.

The ship struck before morning. Half past four,
on a huge hogshead of claret I swept ashore
like an evangelist aboard his god:
his will was mine, I laughed and kissed the rod,
and would have walked that foreign countryside
blind drunk, contentedly till my god died;
but finding Trinculo made it a holiday:
Two Neapolitans had got away,
and that shipload of scheming toffs we hated
was drowned. Never to be humiliated
again, ‘I will no more to sea,’ I sang.
Down white empty beaches my voice rang,
and that dear monster, half fish and half man,
went on his knees to me. Oh, Caliban,
you thought I’d take your twisted master’s life;
but a drunk butler’s slower with a knife
than your fine courtiers, your dukes, your kings.
We were distracted by too many things...
the wine, the jokes, the music, fancy gowns.
We were no good as murderers, we were clowns.

► What does Stephano like about being on the island?

► What are his feelings about Caliban?
Konstantin Stanislavski

In tandem with the ‘magic if’ (described in Unit 5) Stanislavski asks his actors to remember the play’s given circumstances. He listed these as follows:

- the story of the play
- its facts, events, epoch, time and place of action
- conditions of life of your character
- the actor and director’s interpretation
- the production, the sets, the costumes, the properties
- lighting and sound effects.

If you were to choose a character like Stephano and build a piece of original theatre around him, the first three given circumstances above would be particularly important during the devising process. In fact, the poet James Simmons has gone a considerable way to creating an inner truth for Stephano using the given circumstances of the play: he imagines what Stephano’s attitude might have been towards his own masters the ‘scheming toffs we hated’ and his despondent recognition of his own failure to amount to anything.

Bertolt Brecht

Brecht and Shakespeare, although separated by centuries, have a surprising amount in common. Shakespeare’s use of asides, characters who speak in verse and the original convention of boys taking the roles of women all have the effect of laying bare the mechanics of theatre to a certain extent. They distance the spectator because we are occasionally reminded that what we are watching is not real. Having said that, Shakespeare presents us with some of the most psychologically complex characters to be found anywhere in literature, perfect for the kind of analysis Stanislavski’s system invites. We may encounter ghosts, spirits and fairies in Shakespeare’s plays, but often the human situations in which his characters find themselves are strikingly real. It is quite common for directors to use elements of Brecht and Stanislavski in any one production.

Before you start thinking of your own literary minor characters whom you would like to promote to centre stage, read Irish poet Michael Longley’s poem ‘Fleance’. The young son of Banquo, Fleance escapes when his father is killed by Macbeth’s hired murderers but then disappears from the action of the play. Observe how in Longley’s poem, Fleance (like Stoppard’s Rosencrantz and Guildenstern), is aware of his status as a character in a play.

**FLEANCE**

I entered with a torch before me
And cast my shadow on the backcloth
Momentarily: a handful of words,
One bullet with my initials on it-
And that got stuck in a property tree.

I would have caught it between my teeth
Or, a true professional, stood still
While the two poetic murderers
Pinned my silhouette to history
In a shower of accurate daggers.

But as any illusionist might

Unfasten the big sack of darkness,
The ropes and handcuffs, and emerge
Smoking a nonchalant cigarette,
I escaped - only to lose myself.

It took me a lifetime to explore
The dusty warren beneath the stage
With its trapdoor opening on to
All that had happened above my head
Like noises-off or distant weather.
In the empty auditorium I bowed
To one preoccupied caretaker
And, without removing my make-up,
Hurried back to the digs where Banquo
Sat up late with a hole in his head.

Try to think of some characters who are introduced by writers but then seem to disappear or who are never actually seen but still influence the drama. Or perhaps you can think of minor characters like Stephano who might have a story to tell. The following examples might be helpful:

- Sycorax - a witch and mother of Caliban in Shakespeare’s The Tempest
- Caliban - an important figure in The Tempest but at the end does he stay on the island or leave for a possible life of exploitation in Milan or Naples?
- the murdered duchess from Browning’s poem ‘My Last Duchess’
- Grace Poole the servant and part nurse, part jailer of Rochester’s first wife in Jane Eyre
- Lydia in Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice.

NOW EVALUATE THE SESSION USING THE SHEET PROVIDED.
GROUP PRACTICAL : SESSION EVALUATION

Date: 
Time: 

Names of those present: 

Main theme: 

Best lines: 

Best moments: 

Practitioner notes: 

What could be developed during the next session: 

Needs: 

Kershaw, Irish inspirations, 58
Unit 6: Making links
**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the unit is to explore ways of seeking inspiration for drama, especially from the past.

Try writing the story for an historical figure about whom little is known, or whose importance has only recently come to light, or one who died in mysterious circumstances. Find a figure who interests you and you will be surprised at how many connecting links you can make many of which may act as the inspiration you need for drama.

For instance, I was already familiar with the story of Tollund Man, but while researching this workpack I found Seamus Heaney’s poem about him and also other stories of ‘bog bodies’.

**TOLLUND MAN - OUTLINE**

In 1950 one of the most famous archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century was made in an area of peat bog in Tollund Mose in Jutland. Lying on its right side, legs drawn up and naked except for a leather cap and belt was the well preserved body of a man. Radiocarbon tests showed that the body was about 2000 years old. At the time of his death, he appeared to have been about thirty or forty years of age, about 1.6 metres tall, with stubble still on his chin and a rough porridge still in his stomach. His face was striking to look at: his lips were closed; his eyes shut; he wore an apparently tranquil expression. Yet around his neck, making deep furrows in the skin was a noose. He had been hanged.

**TOLLUND MAN ACCORDING TO SEAMUS HEANEY**

I
Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country near by
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.
Bridegroom to the goddess,

She tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen,
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint’s kept body,

Trove of the turfcutters’
Honeycombed workings.
Now his stained face
Reposes at Aarhus.

II
I could risk blasphemy,
Consecrate the cauldron bog

Our holy ground and pray
Him to make germinate

The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers,
Stockinged corpses
Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth
Flecking the sleepers
Of four young brothers, trailed
For miles along the lines.

III
Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbril
Should come to me, driving,
Saying the names

Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard,
Watching the pointing hands
Of country people,
Not knowing their tongue.

Out here in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home.
Imagine why Tollund Man had been killed. Was he

- a victim of robbery?
- a criminal?
- a sacrifice in a religious ritual?

Dramatise the events leading up to his death. How does an artistic interpretation of the story (like drama or like Heaney's poem) differ from a more academic account? Research the people to whom Tollund Man belonged. (Read People of the Wetlands by Bryony and John Coles, Thames and Hudson 1989 or find inspiration from other archeological finds in Meet the Ancestors by Julian Richards, BBC Worldwide, 1999)

**Bog Bodies**

Researching Tollund man, I came across another intriguing story about 'bog bodies'

In 1983, police in Macclesfield, Cheshire were investigating reports that a man named Peter Reyn-Bardt had murdered his wife, Malika, some 23 years earlier. Reyn-Bardt had boasted for some time that he had killed her, dismembered her and buried her body in the back yard but when interviewed he always denied the accusations. However, on May 13, men working on a peat extraction site at Lindow Moss near Reyn-Bardt’s home discovered a well preserved human skull which was identified as coming from a 30 to 50 year old European female. When confronted with the discovery, Reyn-Bardt admitted to the murder. Police continued their investigation of the site and decided to involve archaeologists from Oxford University. Just before Reyn-Bardt went to trial, Oxford came forward with a date for the skull - they had found it to be 1660 to 1820 years old.

**Rewards of Research**

Research is one of the most rewarding aspects of creating original drama. It can provide you with the spark of enthusiasm you need to produce exciting work. Nowadays you have the Internet at your disposal as well as more traditional resources such as books and microfiche.

Why not have a go and see just what you can turn up?

**Now Evaluate the Session Using the Sheet Provided.**
Company log book
GROUP PRACTICAL : SESSION EVALUATION

Date: 
Time: 

Names of those present:

Main theme:

Best lines:

Best moments:

Practitioner notes:

What could be developed during the next session:

Needs:
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