

Kindertransport



Teachers' Pack

These exercises are suggestions and starting points for planning pre-visit English lessons

Relating to issues and themes in the play

- Identity
- Relationships
- Possession
- Memory
- Isolation
- Fear

Considering the following

- Character
- Creative writing
- Metaphor
- Personification
- Poetry
- Abstract

Future Self

Preparation time: LOW

Session time: 30 mins initial exercise. 1Hour + including the follow on exercises

This play deals not only with the abandonment of people and places but also of memory. In an attempt to maintain her identity Evelyn has buried a previous identity. A language, a past and a culture.

Our past is important to how we think of ourselves and drives our hopes for the future. Using a P.S.H.E exercise, ask the pupils to consider who they are now. You are going to ask them to write a letter to their future selves. Via class consensus pick an age at which they agree might be important to their future selves . An age that might be considered a turning point or at which important decisions may have to be made? A crossroads? The suggestions may vary considerably depending on the pupils hopes/expectations for their future. This is important and should be remarked upon. You may have to be the referee if no one age prevails. Make sure that it is sufficiently far from the pupil's current age.

The letter should be written as if to a close friend, and should be advising (and possibly imploring) the future self to remember what they currently hold dear. Ask the pupils to consider

- People
- Places
- Values
- Relationships
- Important moments/decisions in life so far

This exercise aims to encourage the pupils to consider who they are and what they believe, separate from their peers. It is important that the pupils are made aware that they will not be required to share what they have written unless they want to do so. Hopefully this will encourage a more free and honest self expression.

Why not?

As a sharing exercise, ask the pupils to consider something they know now that they didn't know a year ago. Encourage them to move away from facts, but towards an emotional understanding about themselves or the wider world. For instance they might now know they are able to cope with loss due to a bereavement. (This is an example, and again pupils should be asked to offer examples that they are prepared to share).

Ask the pupils to consider what they would like to know in the future. Using the age set from letter writing exercise, ask the class to work in small groups (no more than 4) to decide what skills, life lessons and emotional capacity they think it would be important to cope with life, by that age.

In the past I have encouraged schools to create a legacy for both these exercises. We named it the 'echo capsule'. The letters were sealed away in school until the following year, at which point they were re-read these 'echos' from their past and the exercise was repeated. Over three years (years 7, 8 and 9) the exercise allowed pupils an access to their feelings throughout their first three years of secondary education and a greater emotional richness and understanding arose in their written work. It is a good exercise for introducing diary writing.

Beware Little Children

Preparation time: LOW

Session time: 1Hour +

Ask the pupils to think of what the boogieman meant to them as young children. What were they frightened of when the lights went out at night. Was there a monster, an imagined figure that appeared in nightmares or part of their childhood imagination? Ask them to consider what form it took.

- Shape/Form?
- Size?
- Colour?
- Features?

These can be drawn or written out, but allow them to be used as a template for considering their 'grown up' fears. Ask the class to identify what fears they have for the future. What things threaten their hopes and goals or their future lives as they have been imagined. For instance, not getting good exam results, not having many friends/loneliness, conflict and war, economic conditions, health, self confidence. (All these have been suggested when I have undertaken similar exercises). Ask the pupils to pick one of these fears and try to create a child like personification.

Use the template to ask what shape, colour, size and features would this fear take? How would it present itself, what would it do and say? What would lack of confidence look like if it were in human form? For younger pupils a drawing is often a good place to start, but a written description is the overall aim.

Ask the pupils to write a short story that includes this 'character'. The style should be that of a modern children's 'boogieman' story. This exercise encourages young people to consider metaphor, translation and personification. It will help with conversations about the suggested and non literal elements of story telling that are particularly relevant when discussing this play.

Home is Inside Us, Not a Place

Preparation time: LOW

Session time: Initial exercise and follow ons 90 mins +

This play is ultimately about belonging, family ties, separation and identity. The question of ‘who we are’ is in Eva/Evelyn’s story and buried in the story of the three generations of women portrayed in the play. Evelyn tells Faith that “You can’t let people who hate you tell you what you are”. By realising that her mum has denied her the truth of her real heritage, Faith might also come to think ‘you can’t let people who love you tell you what they want you to be’.

Distilling the elements of our life to analyse who we are is a fun exercise that encourages pupils to consider textures and can be a gentle way to the often intimidating concept of writing poetry.

You are going to ask the pupils to sort elements of their life into categories. Firstly, ask them to write a list of all the things that they consider important. The things that represent most accurately their lives currently. The places, the people, the food, the experiences. Next, ask them to create a table as below. Into the left hand column they are to enter the different elements that they have listed. Into the other columns they are to enter any of the senses that are hit as appropriate. See example below:

My Life	Smell	Touch	Taste	Sound	Sight/Colour
my dog	like mud and wet grass	soft and warm		loud and deep	brown
walking by the sea	salt			gentle waves seagulls	yellows (sand) blue/green (sea)
chocolate cake	sweet, rich	sticky, soft	sweet, sugar		brown, white

Each pupil should have a table of elemental senses. This palette of colours, sounds, tastes and textures is an excellent basis for creative writing, poetry or abstract work. When you see your life broken down this way, you can begin to see the evocative elements that go into building our memories.

Why not?

- Try to take the colour column and ask the pupils to make a colour map of their life? Count up how many times each colour is mentioned in that column and fill a piece of paper with blocks of each colour making sure that the one most mentioned gets the biggest block. Ask them to ponder what that predominant colour says about them? Is that colour evocative of a particular emotion?

The artist Pablo Picasso went through a period where he only painted using the colour blue because he felt that the colour dominated his life due to his depression. He had turned the feeling of sadness into a colour. Can the pupils write a true story or account of an incident in their lives only evoking that one colour?

- Why not use the abstract sounds, colours and tastes to produce some creative writing? Use your chart to write a poem. How does your life taste? What are the favourite sounds of your life? The Australian Poet Dorothea Mackellar wrote a beautiful poem describing how the colours of all the things in her life have 'steeped my soul in colour'

COLOUR by Dorothea Mackellar

The lovely things that I have watched unthinking,
Unknowing, day by day,
That their soft dyes have steeped my soul in colour
That will not pass away -

Great saffron sunset clouds, and larkspur mountains,
And fenceless miles of plain,
And hillsides golden-green in that unearthly
Clear shining after rain;

And nights of blue and pearl, and long smooth beaches,
Yellow as sunburnt wheat,
Edged with a line of foam that creams and hisses,
Enticing weary feet.

And emeralds, and sunset-hearted opals,
And Asian marble, veined
With scarlet flame, and cool green jade, and moonstones
Misty and azure-stained;

And almond trees in bloom, and oleanders,
Or a wide purple sea,
Of plain-land gorgeous with a lovely poison,
The evil Darling pea.

If I am tired I call on these to help me
To dream -and dawn-lit skies,
Lemon and pink, or faintest, coolest lilac,
Float on my soothed eyes.

There is no night so black but you shine through it,
There is no morn so drear,
O Colour of the World, but I can find you,
Most tender, pure and clear.

Thanks be to God, Who gave this gift of colour,
Which who shall seek shall find;
Thanks be to God, Who gives me strength to hold it,
Though I were stricken blind.

- If you already have access to the text before the visit, consider the elements of Eva's life that Writer Diane Samuels has introduced. Take excerpts from the initial scenes between Helga and Eva and try to repeat the exercise above, filling in the table for Eva. This exercise can help with analytical work when examining texts.

The class should hopefully hit on such elements as the '2 rings, a chain with a star of David.....all Gold' hidden inside Eva's shoe and the sound it makes when she puts it to her ear. The mention of the 'abyss' and its associated colour and connotations. The sound of Eva's mouth organ and the children referred to as 'Jewels'. Consider what the Writer is trying to evoke.

These exercises are suggestions and starting points for planning pre-visit Drama lessons

Relating to issues and themes in the play

- Identity
- Relationships
- Possession
- Memory
- Isolation
- Fear

Using theatrical techniques including

- Character questioning
- Status
- Representation
- Personification
- Soundscapes
- Hotseating

"You can't let people who hate you tell you what you are"

Preparation time: LOW

Session time: 30 mins to create and perform scenes. 1 Hour + if inc the Chinese Crisis exercise

This important line spoken by Evelyn goes to the heart of what Kindertransport is about. Outside of the play, the resonance is no less powerful. Bullying, victimisation, race and gender stereotyping are prevalent issues.

Often this is a sensitive subject and young people are unlikely to talk about their own experiences of bullying but concentrate more on the injustice of it.

To promote conversation about the issues encapsulated within the quotation, divide the class into groups of no more than 3 people. Read the line to them, or hand them a printed copy and inform them that the short piece they are about to create is to be inspired by the line and whatever it means to them. They can be anyone, anywhere. The only dramatic instruction is that the line must be used as the very last line of their piece.

This exercise asks the participants to analyse what the quotation means to them. The themes will be the same, but the details and situations will vary which is important. By using the line as the very last thing spoken, it forces the participants to say everything they need to say before the 'crescendo' moment. Also, it hopefully stops the scene going on to long, beyond the main issue. From past experience, the great thing about this exercise is that it very rarely allows for any resolution.

Characters are created, a scene is set and the issue is raised. However, opinions are expressed between characters that can be noted by the teacher and then commented on, questioned and/or discussed by the wider group after each performance. This kind of informal hot seating can be empowering to students unwilling to express their own feelings directly.

Why not?

If important issues are raised, dubious or conflicting advice is being offered, or any interesting points raised that could form part of a wider discussion/group involvement, why not use the 'Chinese Crisis' technique. Ask for a group to replay the scene and ask the audience to shout STOP when you want them to identify

- A moment of conflict
- A point at which they feel bad advice has been offered
- A suitable junction at which they feel they could step in and help

These are just suggestions and very much depend on what you see presented in the original scenes. However, this technique invites individuals to share their opinions as part of a wider group consensus. Take some of the suggestions and play them out. Invite someone to take the place of one of the characters and replay the scene but now including his or her suggestion/idea/advice. Ask the group to comment on what they see.

The Sound of Fear

Preparation time: LOW

Session time: 45 mins to list, create and perform scenes. 90 mins if inc the follow on exercise

Theatrically the Ratcatcher is an ever present threat. The feeling of threat and fear is represented musically and personified by the male characters in the play. As a concept, we are used to sound and soundtrack being used to create atmosphere and to pull on us emotionally. Theatrically however, personifying a concept or emotion is difficult to communicate.

Poll the group to create a list of fears or worries. Not tangible objects or creatures (no spiders or guns), but the negative feelings that we can so often carry with us, unseen. The fear of loneliness, of separation, the feeling of worthlessness, death, lack of confidence etc...

In groups of 5/6, allocate one fear per group and ask the pupils to consider a soundscape to represent it. This should be an emotional response to what the word represents to them. Is it loud? Repetitive. Does it build to a crescendo? Is it structured, musical? Limit the use of real words, and if they are used, they must not include the original allocated word.

When performing the soundscapes, ask the groups to consider how they would like them presented. How is it best to communicate this fear to their audience? Where would they like the audience? Do they require the room dark, or eyes to be shut? Will the performing group remain static or move amongst the audience?

Why not?

As an extension to this exercise, try to create a physical representation of the feeling, inspired by the soundscape. Allow the group to decide how best to do this. In past similar exercises I have used the 'artist and clay' technique, where person A is the artist and person B is motionless as a lump of clay. The 'artist' moulds the clay into their image, allowing him/her to realise the ideas in their head. However, in group work this is often less desirable. Allow the group the option to use one person as their 'model' to represent their group idea, or to use everyone in the group to create a bigger tableau effect.

Can these models move? Use the tempo, volume, pitch etc of the original soundscapes to dictate movement. This simple Dario Fo inspired exercise is a fun way for groups to analyse character, physicality and representational styles and will help when discussing the representational nature of fear and the Ratcatcher after seeing the play.

Possession and Memory

Preparation time: HEAVY

Session time: 1 hour to 90 mins. Scope for multiple sessions.

Possessions and memories, just like the human relationships in this play are held tightly and let go. Writer Diane Samuels writes brilliantly of people being lost and rediscovered. Memories that are abandoned and forcibly restored, possessions that are kept close, purposefully hidden from others, and then from themselves.

We see Eva keep a gold watch, rings and star of David hidden in her shoe, close to her. Her Mother wants her to keep them as a reminder of her and of her home, culture and faith. We also see Eva, as Evelyn, eager to get rid of objects from her past without seemingly any sentiment. Boxes of cups, saucers, silverware all offered to her Daughter without any of the same importance invested.

Attachment of memories to objects through character is often described as an 'echo exercise' and quite advanced. The following exercise is often used by playwrights and authors when creating characters, but could work well for thinking about sentimental attachment of memory and encouraging the discussion of a character's past. This is a delicate exercise and probably only for an experienced group.

You will need to have collected a bag of random and non valuable objects. In the past I have used such things as a broken brightly painted clothes peg, a ball of string, a miniature sewing kit from a cracker, a large old iron key, an old badly chipped china cup, a highly polished pebble. All these things were objects I found around my house or on the beach near my house. They are valueless and aren't in themselves too suggestive. The more you can find, the better! You may also want to use a second bag containing small scraps of material, differing in colour, texture and fabric.

Spread the bag of objects on a table or the floor and invite the group to view them. Encourage them to hold them, examine them and eventually decide on one that interests them. Once chosen, they can take it and use it exclusively.

Ask the pupils the following questions. Don't allow them too long to decide, just respond. How old is the object? Who does it belong to? How did they come by it? Why would they keep it? Where do they keep it? On their person? A safe place? Do they always know where it is?

If you have the bag of fabrics then this is where you ask the group to repeat the exercise but this time they are to choose a piece of fabric that is in some way inspired by what they have now decided about the object, its owner, its location etc. Now ask the following questions
How old is the person who owns the object? Where do they live? Who do they live with?
I would encourage the group to write the answers down to help remember their original thinking.

This exercise can become the start of some very strong hot seating work. The basic grounding in knowledge of the character has come from an emotional response to the colour and texture of an object and not the intellectualising of a process. With this in mind, you will find a volunteer for hot seating and ask them to tell you about the day they came by this object, but importantly they must never refer to it. Set up the exercise by telling the person in the hot seat that you want them to describe an incident or day in their life (It is the day they encountered the object but they will never be asked directly about it). Tell the hot seater that they are allowed to place the object wherever they want (holding it if they require) and to think about it throughout the questioning, but never referring to it.

Allow the pupil to tell you about the day. When you think they need help or you want to move forward, try to ask questions that illicit an emotional response. How did you feel? Did that make you happy/sad? Was that important to you? How do you feel now?

The story is almost not important. Reassure the pupils that if they think their story is 'boring', it doesn't matter. The exercise is about emotional responses. They are to think about the object, its significance and not the 'entertainment' value of the story.

To follow up, use these characters to produce some pair work, similar to the ones they will encounter in the play. If the object bore positive memories, imagine that the characters are having to pass down their object, entrusting it to a son or daughter. What do you want them know and feel? How do make them understand the importance?

Refugee

Preparation time: LOW

Session time: 20 mins and repeated to fit

Feeling 'out of place' is something that all the female characters experience. Eva feeling a stranger in another land. Helga feeling like a stranger in her own country! Faith feeling out of place within her own family as she discovers her Mother's past. We have probably all felt similar feelings in the past. You may have students in your class who have had experiences similar to those of Eva, coming to a different country, learning a new language. If appropriate, it's always useful to draw on that experience using Drama. I once ran a session which was actually about empowering two new Polish children who had recently joined a class. The exercise may be useful for understanding isolation and power over others.

In this example, the two year 7 Polish boys spoke very little English. I wanted them to feel proud about their language, celebrate their difference, empower them to speak, whilst given the other pupils an idea of what it is like not to understand people and conversations around you. We chose a volunteer to leave the room, whilst we asked the two boys to come up with a scenario with which they were both familiar. They chose riding and fixing their bikes. We asked the volunteer to re enter the room and to join in with the activity engaging the two boys. The boys had to instruct the volunteer as what to do, but in Polish. The ensuing scene was quite fun and as the mimes got bigger and the voices were raised, the rest of the class became quite hysterical. After, we asked the volunteer how she felt and a serious issue was raised.

It would be easy in a drama context to invent such a scene by getting a group to invent a 'language' - a series of repeated instructions, hand gestures or noises that are familiar and illicit certain other responses. Into this scene you could add a similar 'volunteer' who would have to attempt to fit in and decrypt the language or actions. It would also be a good starting point for discussing status.

Status

Preparation time: LOW

Session time: initial exercise 20 mins but should be repeated as needed. 1 Hour + with exercises

Power over others, both physical and verbal is demonstrated and inferred throughout the play. As a dramatic language, physical status is often a fun way start to approach techniques of body language and physicality in performance.

Take a group of ten pupils and assign them a number, 1 to 10, but do this privately. They alone must know their number. It may be useful to cut out pieces of paper with numbers written on, and hand them out privately.

The whole class are told that 1 is lowest status and 10 is highest. The group of ten must walk around the room in silence and attempt to demonstrate their status. They can use the space and react physically with the other 9 people in the exercise. They must try and make it as obvious as possible to the rest of the people in the class. You will find that the more you run this exercise, the more sophisticated the participants become, as the group at large will have seen what is needed in order to communicate most efficiently. Eye contact or lack of it between the group is identified as a crucial indicator by the class.

The rest of the class must decide what order to place the group, from lowest status to highest. Usually numbers 1 and 10 are obvious, but as they get to 5, 6 and 7 it becomes harder. Once the class have decided and lined the group up, they can reveal their numbers.

Allow the group who were watching, to offer their reasoning to the group performing as a lot of interesting things come up. What the performers were trying to portray is often very different to what was being read, which is good starting point for conversations on body language.

Repeat the exercise with the other part of the group and allowing the previous performers to watch and guess. Encourage the performers to utilise their environment and the other performers around them. They must be silent, but interaction proves vital.

As a follow on, assign numbers between 1 and 10 to the whole of the class. The number must once again be secret. Ask the class to think of a way of acting, both physically and vocally that would represent that kind of status. Thinking of a profession often helps. Remind the class about the lessons learnt from the previous exercise regarding eye contact and body language. Then create a scenario that two of these characters can meet. At a bus stop maybe, or a park bench, or a lift.

Pick one student to enter the scene and sit/wait/stand etc. Allow time for that character to establish. Students often believe that scenes can only start when two people are in a room together. It's always good to challenge this by allowing a minute to pass with just the one actor on stage and then asking the class if they are able to decide what status he or she is.

Introduce the second character. It is always useful to limit speaking in status games in order to make the actors concentrate on physicality and for the audience to work harder. As you introduce the second actor explain that no one is allowed to speak until the whistle/bell/clap. 30 seconds to a minute will suffice. Before you give the signal to allow speaking, freeze the exercise again to ask the class to guess who is higher and lower and try to assign a number value to those statuses. It's up to you to decide how long the improvisation lasts, but I would suggest that each one doesn't go on for longer than 3 mins.

Try this with different combinations. Try changing just one character and put him or her up against different people. Does this affect how they react or affect the number value assigned to them by the audience. The actors will naturally try to adjust their performances depending on the differing values they are given, in order to get closer to their designated number, which is a helpful live critique of their performance.