



Blackeyed Theatre
In association with South Hill Park
presents

TEACHERS

By
John Godber



Education Pack

Contents

About this Resource	2
Blackeyed Theatre	3
Directing Teechers	4
John Godber	5
Synopsis	6
Characters	7-8
Godber-esque	9
Verfremdungseffekt	10
Language	11
Physicality	12
Education Today	13-14
Reviews	15-16
Company Up Close	17-18
Watching The Show	19
Post Production	20
Crew Biographies	21-22



About this resource

This resource is designed to fully support our touring production of John Godber's *Teachers*, and provide you with additional creative and cross-curricular activities to enhance your visit to the production. It is designed for Key Stages 3 and 4, but activities can be adapted for other ages.

The resource comprises 3 sections:

1 Pre-production

This is the largest section and contains notes and activities to help your group get to grips with the play before their visit, to think about the story and themes and to consider contemporary dramatic interpretations.

2 Watching the show

This section contains questions and activities that students can engage with during their visit to see the production, to help maximise their understanding and enjoyment.

3 Post production

This section contains guidance for an evaluation session following the production, based on your students' critical appreciation.

We have intended to make the layout of the resource as accessible as possible, in order for sections of the pack to be used on their own, or in a different order. The pre-production pages contain these elements:

Notes which provide useful contextual and theoretical information about the focus of the section. This is designed to be supplemented with your own research and background knowledge.

'student activity' which contains practical tasks that you can set for your group to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes about each topic along the way.

'Stretch' containing higher level thinking questions to stretch and challenge your students.

Blackeyed Theatre



Blackeyed Theatre Company was established in 2004 to create exciting opportunities for artists and audiences alike, and to offer challenging, high quality theatre to the mid-scale touring circuit. The company specialises in reviving modern classics and staging established titles in innovative ways, using small ensembles of actor/musicians to create theatre that is audacious, fresh and far bigger than the sum of its parts. Since 2004 Blackeyed Theatre has embarked on national tours of *Not About Heroes* (Stephen MacDonal), *Dracula* (Bram Stoker, adapted by John Ginman), *Teechers* (John Godber), *Mother Courage And Her Children* (Bertolt Brecht), *The Trial* (Steven Berkoff), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Bertolt Brecht), *Alfie* (Bill Naughton), *The Cherry Orchard* (Anton Chekhov), *Oh What a Lovely War* (Joan Littlewood), the world premiere of *Oedipus* (Steven Berkoff) and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (Bertolt Brecht).

In 2009, Blackeyed Theatre became an associate company of South Hill Park Arts Centre. In 2008, the company produced its first Christmas show, *A Christmas Carol*, a year later *Peter Pan* and in 2010 *Beauty and the Beast*. In 2011, the company launched PULSE, a new writing initiative designed to create new, sustainable theatre, through which *The Beekeeper* was produced and performed in London in May 2012, picking up three Off West End Theatre Award nominations, including Best New Play.

Blackeyed Theatre is largely self-sufficient and receives no funding for its national tours, creating innovative, challenging theatre can that's also commercially viable. It achieves this by producing work that audiences want to see but in ways that challenge their expectations, by bringing together artists with a genuine passion for the work they produce, and through an appreciation that works of art with a mass appeal do not have to be presented in a dumbed-down way. By offering a theatrical experience that's both artistically excellent and affordable, audiences and theatres are far more sustainable in the long term. And responding to demand ensures that more people see innovative theatre.

Blackeyed Theatre has a growing national reputation for creating dynamic theatre using live music and great performances to tell stories with honesty and passion.

Directing *Teachers*

Teachers is a play I'd wanted to direct for years. And following the success of the 2013 production, I decided I wanted to direct it again! Quite apart from the fact that everyone else in my family are teachers and I believe in the play's message, *Teachers* is what theatre is all about and a brilliant opportunity for actors, artistic team, director and audience alike. Minimal set, minimal costume, simple lighting and just three actors, *Teachers* strips theatre right back, takes away the frills and calls on our creativity and imagination to create the unique world of a modern comprehensive, as seen through the eyes of three Year 11s.

Teachers is a comedy first and foremost, presenting an array of colourful and finely observed characters striving to survive in a struggling Comprehensive. But like all great Godber plays, underlying the comedy is an ascorbic social commentary, an attack on an education system that often marginalises the arts and ignores students' potential. And today its relevance is clear. Never mind the financial cutbacks and divisive league tables, the new Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, recently told teenagers they should steer away from the arts and humanities and opt for science or maths subjects if they want to access the widest range of jobs. That's after her predecessor, Michael Gove, backtracked in his plans to introduce an E-Bac qualification which didn't include any of the arts in its core subjects.

These examples are indicative of what – in my opinion – is a fundamental lack of understanding about the role the arts play in a young person's education. It's not about reciting Shakespeare, bashing a tambourine or glazing a pot. It's about thinking creatively and critically, using imagination, expressing something that's impossible to say or write. It's about enabling young people to channel their emotions constructively and fulfil untapped potential. It's about developing skills that are transferable to all career paths.

As John Godber shows us through Salty, Gail and Hobby, young people can very quickly be categorised in terms of ability, intelligence and potential, and once categorised, our education system doesn't make it easy for students to escape a label, stigma or reputation. In their new teacher (Mr Nixon), Salty, Gail and Hobby find someone who believes in their potential and encourages them to express themselves through drama. But it's not long before the rigours of the state school system take their toll on Mr Nixon, threatening to push him away.

Making a play like *Teachers* work depends on a number of factors. Having brilliant actors who work well together is the most important, and in Jake, Lucy and Brad I know I have a fabulous, supportive cast. For each of them, creating a Salty, Gail and Hobby who audiences can relate to and believe in is vital. The characters we then create within 'the play within a play' have to be distinct and bold. For me, that's about continuously looking at it through the eyes of these fifteen year-olds performing for their mates and teachers. As Godber points out, it's in exercising their imaginations that Salty, Gail and Hobby find their love of drama. In creating our interpretations of Oggy, Basford, Parry and Prime (to name just a few), we've tried to be as imaginative and creative as possible.

Casting Hobby as a male character was a decision I made having seen Brad performing a number of times. As a performer, his style and skills are ideally suited to the play I want to create, and I saw no reason why Hobby had to be a girl. When I emailed John Godber to check he'd be happy with me doing this, he responded almost immediately saying that when he wrote the play the character of Hobby was actually based on a boy he had taught! I can't wait to see how the dynamics of the play are influenced by having a male Hobby, and I'll be interested to hear what audiences have to say.

With *Teachers*, I hope to give audiences a brilliant piece of entertainment, lots of laughs as well as one or two genuinely touching moments. Although written in 1984, our version is very much set in 2015, when social media rules and all seek celebrity. Young or old, I think audiences will recognise some if not all the characters in the play from their own school days. I have three brilliant young actors, a great script and two weeks to create our unique interpretation of the play.

Adrian McDougall

John Godber

John was born the son of a miner in Upton, West Yorkshire. He trained as a teacher in drama at Breton Hall College. Whilst he was Head of Drama at Minsthorpe High School, the school he attended as a student, he won every major award at the National Student Drama Festival between 1981 and 1983.

John has an MA from Leeds University, an Hon DLitt from Hull University, an Hon DLitt from Lincoln University and a DUni from the Open University. He is a Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Liverpool Hope University and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

John's plays are performed across the world and he has the distinction of being one of the most performed writers in the English language. He has won numerous awards for his plays including a Laurence Olivier Award and seven Los Angeles Critics' Circle Awards. His plays include BOUNCERS, UP 'N' UNDER, APRIL IN PARIS, TEECHERS, BLOOD SWEAT AND TEARS, HAPPY JACK, SEPTEMBER IN THE RAIN, SALT OF THE EARTH, PASSION KILLERS, HAPPY FAMILIES, GYM & TONIC, LUCKY SODS, UNLEASHED, THICK AS A BRICK, MEN OF THE WORLD, PERFECT PITCH, MUDDY COWS and FUNNY TURNS. John also co-wrote the highly successful SHAKERS with Jane Thornton.

John is also co-writer of the BAFTA-award-winning ODDSQUAD and wrote both THUNDER ROAD and MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE (BBC). His first feature film, UP 'N' UNDER, adapted from his own play was released in 1998. John has also written extensively for radio, including two series of SPREAD A LITTLE HAPPINESS, which he co-wrote with Jane Thornton for Watershed Productions, GOING EAST, also co-written with Jane Thornton and FIRST BORN, both for the BBC.

John has recently established The John Godber Company working with Theatre Royal, Wakefield, which will present his plays. To date the company has toured his play THE DEBT COLLECTORS, WEEKEND BREAKS and LOSING THE PLOT, all of which he has also directed. He has also directed a production of his adaptation of Stan Barstow's A KIND OF LOVING for The John Godber Company.

Further information can be found at www.johngodber.co.uk

“Plays are a way of understanding the world”

John Godber

Stretch

How does a play help us to understand the world?

What do the titles of John Godber's plays tell you about his interests as a writer?

Why are John Godber's plays so popular?

What makes a good play?

What areas of society would make good source material for a play of your own?

synopsis

Teachers is a play within a play. Three year 11 students put on a performance for their teachers. School leavers, Salty, Hobby and Gail Saunders perform an account of their time in High School (given the name 'Whitewall' for their performance). They were particularly inspired by their time with Mr. Jeff Nixon, the new drama teacher who ignited their passion for the stage with his idealism and belief that all children should be treated equally.

At the end of the play 'Mr Nixon' leaves Whitewall High School to teach at St George's, another school with a much better reputation.

Activity

In pairs, make a list of 8 memorable events that have happened within your school over the last year.

Give each event a short title, and make a list of which people were involved, and where each event took place.

Characters

Ian “Salty” Salt

A school-leaver, bright and fresh-faced, rather dirty in appearance
(also plays Teecher B, Jeff Nixon, Pete Saxon, Oggy Moxon,
Derek Basford, Mr Hatton and Deanie)

Lilian “Hobby” Hobson

(also plays Mrs Cordelia Parry, Ms Jones, Mr Basford,
Ron, Simon “Piggy” Patterson, Oggy Moxon and Mrs Clifton)

Gail Saunders

Loud mouthed, bossy and full of enthusiasm
(also plays Teacher A, Ms Maureen Whitham, Oggy Moxon, Mr Basford, Miss Jackie
Prime, Barry Wobschall, Dennis, Doug and Mrs Coates)



Characters within Gail, Hobby and Salty's play

- Mr Nixon - The drama teacher, socialist and idealistic
- Mrs Parry - The Headteacher
- Ms Maureen Whitham - A fussy teacher, desperate to leave
- Doug - The caretaker, a miserable man who hates kids and drama
- Ms Jones - A women who wants to leave but no-one will employ her
- Mr Dean "Deanie" - A teacher who thinks all the kids love him
- Bobby "Oggy" Moxon - The school bully in a modern age
- Peter "Pete" Saxon - A large, frightening youth with tattoos, appears foolish
- Mr Fisher - Head of PE
- Barry Wobschall - A small boy who never brings his PE kit
- Simon "Piggy" Patterson - A boy who is always telling on others
- Ron - A boy who never does PE
- Mr Hatton - Helps with the youth club dance
- Dennis - Oggy's side-kick
- Jeff "Niko" Nixon - New drama teacher, young and casual
- Mrs Cordelia Parry - The Head Teacher
- Mr Derek Basford - The Deputy Head
- Miss Jackie Prime (later Short) - PE Teacher
- Mrs Coates - Head Teacher at Saint George's
- Mrs Clifton - Head of Governors at Saint George's

Godber-esque

John Godber has developed a distinctive style of writing that appeals to a wide range of audiences. He creates worlds and characters that ordinary people can relate to. Godber writes with a fast paced and energetic style to keep audiences on their toes and intrigued about what's coming next.

Although his work varies throughout his extensive career, there are a number of recognised techniques and devices that Godber uses, and his experimentation with theatrical convention has become a trademark.

- Actors play multiple roles
- Direct address to the audience
- Social commentary veiled in humour
- Quick paced scenes
- Episodic structure
- Frequent changes of direction
- Use of different styles of text
- Colloquial language

John Godber enjoys playing with theatrical convention, in his introduction to *John Godber Plays: 1* (Methuen, 2001, UK), he says:

"I had become increasingly bored by the conventions of modern drama. Most of the plays I had read were set in realistic locations, and therefore fairly limiting in terms of how they could represent themselves to an audience. In some respects these plays amounted to nothing more than 'big telly' – true they had good stories and incisive characterisation, but in terms of their theatrical scope, the four walls of the box set seemed to limit their vision. Of course, I was not the first to recognise this: Berkoff, Edward Gordon Craig, Brecht, Artaud and sundry others had all identified this limitation, and had done work to counter the spread of this particular theatrical virus."

Verfremdungseffekt

In the previous quote John Godber talks about the limitations of the theatrical form Naturalism. He explains that the 'Fourth Wall' creates a barrier between the audience and the performers, which can stifle the theatrical scope of the production. Godber's way of thinking is more in line with Bertold Brecht, who developed Epic Theatre. Both practitioners are interested in a political theatre, a theatre which speaks 'for the people' and 'about the people'.

Many of Godber's devices have their roots in Epic Theatre, and particularly the methodology surrounding the V-effect or Verfrumsdung effect. The V-effect was developed by Brecht as a way of distancing the audience from the action on stage. Brecht wanted the audience to remember at all times that they were watching a play, and that the characters were actors performing. He wanted his political messages and social statements to provoke the audience, to make them think and question, and he used a number of techniques to try to create the best possible circumstances for this to happen.

Here we can see Godber using direct address to engage the audience at the start of the play:

Salty: A lot of the stuff in the play was told to us by Mr Harrison...

Gail: And even though you might not believe it, everything what happens in the play is based on the truth.

Hobby: But the names and the faces have been changed.

Gail: We're going to take you to Whitehall High School. It's a comprehensive school somewhere in England... And they're expecting a new teacher to arrive.

Hobby: There's fifteen hundred kids at Whitehall and it's a Special Priority Area which means that it's got its fair share of problems...

Salty: All we want you to do is use your imagination because there's only three of us, and we all have to play different characters...

Hobby: And narrators...

activity

3rd Person

Read the beginning of Act One and identify the lines where the characters talk in 3rd person. Explore different ways to present this to an audience.

Running Commentary

In pairs, take it in turns to provide a running commentary whilst your partner carries out a series of simple day to day tasks. i.e taking off your shoes, or looking for a pen. Narrate the action in 3rd person.

Stretch

What do you think Brecht and Godber are trying to achieve by using the V-effect?

Brecht was creating theatre between the 1920's and the 1950's, how does one theatre practitioner influence the work of another?

How important is it that socialism is explored through art?

Language

John Godber's use of language in *Teachers* is carefully chosen to create honest portrayals of recognisable characters. They are stereotypically working class characters (mostly from the north of England) who are easy to recognise and relate to.

Godber uses these stereotypes to draw out humour from his characters, exaggerating language and personality to create funny dialogue and situations.

Here is an extract from the beginning of Act 1, where the audience are introduced to the 3 main characters Salty, Gail and Hobby.

Salty: No more school for us so you can knackers!

Gail: Salty, you nutter?

Salty: What?

Gail: Swearing.

Hobby: Shurrup.

Salty: So what?

Hobby: You daft gett.

Salty: It's true.

Gail: Just get on with it.

Salty: Nobody can do us.

Hobby: We've not left yet.

Salty: Knackers.

Gail: Oh God he's craacked.

Hobby: Shurrup.

Salty: I've always wanted to be on this stage. I've always wanted to come up here and say 'knackers'. I bet you all have...

activity

Humour

In small groups read through the first scene of the play and discuss where humour is being used? What makes these lines funny? and how do you think these lines should be performed?

Colloquial language

Identify any slang, colloquial language or swearing.

Why have these characters used these words? What does this language tell us about these characters? What impact does it have on the action within the scene?

Appropriate language

Create a list of words that you use with your friends but wouldn't use at school.

Why are these words appropriate in some situations and not others?

"I think a joke only works if it's painfully true. If you didn't laugh you'd cry"

John Godber

Stretch

Think about how language is formed when we are small children, and can you think of any non-verbal forms of language?

Do you think that a director of a play should adapt the language to fit in with regional dialect?

Examine different dialects and their colloquial terms, are there any similarities?

Explore Shakespearean insults and consider how language has changed since the 16th Century.

Physicality

Teachers is a fast paced and dynamic script that demands a great deal from the actors who must move seamlessly from one character to the next, maintaining the focus and energy.

In the introduction to *John Godber Plays: 2* (Methuen, 2001, UK) Godber talks about the stylistic notion of the play being a return to the basics.

"I based the setting of the play around the props and facilities I had at my disposal as a drama teacher; a few chairs and desks and a whole load of imagination."

Performing *Teachers* with minimal set, props and costumes requires an expressive body, in order to define the different characters and to keep the flow of action moving.

"I often say if you let the plates fall you are left watching three actors and three chairs, but if you keep the plates spinning the audience never see three chairs and three actors, they see a comprehensive school at work. It is a shared experience and a piece of theatrical magic."

An expressive body can articulate a wide range of different characters, moods and contexts. The power of the audience's imagination to fill in the gaps is key to the success of *Teachers*.

*"If theatre's going to exist,
it has to be unashamably
theatrical, and not rely on
a fancy set"*

John Godber

activity

Rhythm round

Standing in a circle pass a clap around the outside of the circle whilst maintaining a regular rhythm. Work as a group to keep the same tempo.

Once this has been established, try passing the clap across the centre of the circle, whilst maintaining the regular rhythm.

Now try speeding up the clap.

Heartbeats

Standing on your own tap out the rhythm of a different heartbeat in response to these emotional states:

- relaxed
- anxious
- tired
- curious
- desperate

Perform improvised sequences and explore how the different rhythms effect the rest of the body.

Gestures 1-10

Perform the question "would you like a cup of tea?" without any words and without using your mouth.

Perform this gesture as tiny as you can

Perform this gesture as big as you can

Perform the gesture in a range of scales from 1(tiny) to 10 (largest)

Explore other gestures.

Stretch

Research acting techniques associated with Expressionism.

Read about Jacques Lecoq's 'States of Tension' and run a practical workshop for your class.

Discuss what Godber means by 'theatrical magic' in the quote above.

Research and discuss the concept of 'Semiology' and the readership of signs in theatre.

Education Today

Although *Teachers* was written in the 1980s it retains its political and social relevance. Many of the issues raised within the play are still current in contemporary schooling.

Context

During the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, the UK education system underwent a great deal of change. When Thatcher took leadership in 1979, schools were predominantly governed by local authorities who drew up catchment areas and distributed funds to the schools. Schools exam results were not published in the public domain, and there was no nationalised curriculum. During her leadership the powers for local authorities to make decisions about their local secondary schools was reduced, and direct control was assumed by Whitehall and central government (notice the name of the school in *Teachers*!). The National Curriculum was introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as a nationwide curriculum for primary and secondary state schools following the Education Reform Act 1988. At the time Thatcher was keen to limit the scope of the National Curriculum to English, Maths and Science, but over time it evolved into what we have now.

New schools called City Technology Colleges (CTCs) were established with aid from private sponsorship, and parents were given more choice about which school they sent their children to. This coupled with the publication of league tables and the fact that funding was linked to student intake, meant that management structures within schools increasingly became more market driven. Thatcher would also have liked to have seen more schools charging for their courses, and becoming private schools.

Many teachers opposed the changes, and campaigned against the low pay, working conditions, and lack of morale within the industry. Over the past few years there have also been a significant number of changes to the education system resulting in similar problems.

In *Teachers* Mr Nixon argues with Mr Badford (The Deputy Head) about the fairness of private education. Mr Nixon believes that all children should have access to the best possible education, and that this should not be reserved for those who can afford it.

Nixon: But that's not the point. Surely all schools should be the same, have the same facilities, have the same cash, cash made readily available. Shouldn't we want the best for all kids, not just those whose parents can pay to send them to a good school whether it be fees or bus fare?

Nixon: And kids have a right to a good education regardless of whether their parents have the ability or willingness to choose for them ...

Headlines

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan tells teenagers: Want to keep your options open? Then do science

Independent 10.11.14

Education secretary Nicky Morgan: 'Arts subjects limit career choices'

The Stage 11.11.14

Nicky Morgan: pupils 'held back' by overemphasis on arts

The Telegraph 10.11.14

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan was in the headlines recently for her comments about studying arts subjects.

Talking at a conference to promote STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths) she reflected on the proportionally higher uptake of arts subjects over recent years, and indicated that she thought they limit career choices for young people.

These comments come after a number of years of significant unrest within schools, colleges and universities following the highly unpopular policies and approach by the previous Education Minister Michael Gove.

activity

2014 saw the removal of drama from the primary National Curriculum.

Working in small groups, mind map the implications that this might have on:

- Primary students
- Secondary school drama departments
- The performing arts industry

Stretch

- Do you think schools should be able to make profits for private stakeholders?
- Why is drama and dance important for personal development?
- Should drama and dance only be taught to students at fee paying schools?

Reviews

The British Theatre Guide

4th June 2013 by Robin Strapp

With Michael Gove introducing sweeping educational changes to the English examination system and many students being denied the opportunity to study arts subjects as he compels schools to concentrate on core subjects, together with the savage cuts to the arts forcing theatres and Arts Centres to close, John Godber's brilliant classroom comedy *Teachers* is as apposite today as it was when it was written in 1984.

In fact little has changed. Then it was the concern that drama teaching and the creative arts as a whole were under threat in our schools, with drama once again being squeezed from the timetable.

The Blackeyed Theatre has brought a fresh new vibrancy to the script updating the music with such up-to-the-minute hits with a hilarious rendition of "Gangnam Style" and a gleeful rendition of "Don't Stop Believing" and songs from Beiber and One Direction.

This high-energy production is played with total commitment from this young cast of three under the very capable hands of director Adrian McDougall with inventive choreography by Scott Jenkins.

Jacob Addley, Nicole Black and Donna Preston are talented actors who play over 20 different characters with just three chairs and three desks as a set. They challenge the audience to work hard to use their imaginations to create the various scenes, and it works well.

This fast-moving, funny play takes a hard-hitting look at life in Whitewall High School, a comprehensive in a special priority area. Enter a new drama teacher, Jeff Nixon, fresh out of college and brimming with enthusiasm, beautifully portrayed by Jacob Addley.

The headmistress, Mrs Parry, is about to tackle her fifth production of *The Mikado* and hoping to get this one right.

Anyone who has taught in a school or indeed been a pupil will recognise the authority of Mr Basford, the tyrannical deputy head who rules his classes with a rod of iron and is a very nasty piece of work. We also meet Doug, the self important, 'jobsworth' caretaker.

Then there are the kids, which of course include the school bully, Oggy Moxon, who is dreaded by staff and pupils alike.

Donna Preston is particularly impressive with some superb facial expressions and Nicole Black moves effortlessly from character to character. Her sexy Miss Prime, the PE teacher, is a joy to watch.

You could almost feel echoes of recognition of previous school experiences rippling around the audience as the play unfolded with vivid vignettes of life at the chalk face. This is a top of the class production, ten out of ten.

The Good Review

22th April 2013 by Peter Coe

South Hill Park is a gem of an arts centre.

Every time I visit, I'm struck by what a buzz there is about this beautiful old building. Eye-catching art exhibitions, intriguing evening classes and workshops, comedy in the cellar, live music in the bar. Then there's the cinema, the recital room, the digital media centre, the dance studio. A proper creative hub.

Not forgetting, of course, there are two theatre spaces: the main Wilde Theatre and the smaller studio.

One of my highlights from last year's programme at the Wilde was Blackeyed Theatre's production of *The Trial*. Staged simply, but with tremendous style, it was a really compelling piece of theatre.

Similar simplicity has been applied to Blackeyed's *Teechers*, an updated version of John Godber's 1980s play-within-a-play, set in a secondary school.

The stage set consists of just three desks and three chairs, and the cast comprises just three young actors, Jacob Addley, Nicole Black and Donna Preston, all dressed in school uniform.

Over the course of the show, the trio bring 20 different characters, both pupils and staff, vividly to life.

All three are terrific character actors, giving convincing portrayals over a wide-range of roles.

Preston switches effortlessly from sullen teenager Hobby, to frightfully posh headmistress Cordelia Parry, to the unfortunate, twitchy, Simon "Piggy" Patterson.

Addley's roles include the idealistic drama teacher Jeff Nixon, the closest thing the story has to a hero, and he has great fun portraying more colourful characters such as the Neanderthal Pete Saxon, and the Alpha-pupil Oggy Moxon.

Black's range stretches from the seductive, self-adoring Miss Jackie Prime to the miserable caretaker Doug.

All three actors project the kind of presence that says they're completely comfortable on stage, with bags of energy, ingenuity and impressive physicality.

Entertaining song-and-dance set pieces punctuate the evening, including a memorable Gangnam style routine and a hilarious take on Glee's *Don't Stop Believing*.

On the night I attended, most of the audience seemed to be school pupils of around the same age as those depicted on stage. From what I saw, they absolutely loved it, particularly the bit just after the interval when they, and some of their teachers, were urged by the cast to get up and dance.

Amidst all the fun, and frenetic energy, this play carries serious messages about education and art, and how they can give hope and direction to otherwise listless lives.

It seems particularly timely in the current climate. And South Hill Park is an apt setting, given that the venue has suffered the loss of hundreds of thousands of pounds of Arts Council funding. Despite this, it continues to provide a home for high quality work, right across the creative spectrum. Long may it continue to do so.

Company Up Close

Jacob Addley (who plays Salty)

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in the town of Bracknell. I started primary school at St Margaret Clitherow in Bracknell where I spent my life at that age wanting to be a football player, fireman or a superhero. I went on to Sandhurst school until I was 14 and then Garth Hill College in Bracknell where I took Performing Arts and Dance as subjects along with History, which has always been a little secret passion of mine. Garth really was what pushed me into loving theatre and auditioning for the BRIT School of Performing Arts and Technology where I attended and until 2009, studying musical theatre.

When and what was your first experience of drama?

My first theatrical experience was at the South Hill Park Arts Centre in Bracknell in an outdoor community Shakespeare production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the age of 10. This production gave me my first taste for performing to an audience, the excitement of stage combat and the many exciting and wacky people that have remained close friends of mine ever since. From that first Shakespeare production, I performed every year in South Hill Park's Community summer shows, Easter shows and their professional pantomimes until I was about 17. Alongside all this, South Hill Park has provided me with many other opportunities and projects as well as introducing me to a huge number of contacts. SHP really was my safety net that allowed me to try things out, fail or succeed. I would not be doing what I do today without it.

What do you hope audiences will get from seeing *Teachers*?

I hope that audiences, especially young audiences, will have a fantastic evening out at the theatre. It's a brilliant script with lots of fantastic comic moments. I hope all audiences will relate to the characters in this show, from the strictest teacher to the biggest bully. This is going to be a truly fantastic show so please come along and have as much fun as I have had being a part of it all.

How do you go about preparing for a multi-role show like *Teachers*?

I would prepare for multi-rolling in the same way I would prepare for any role. You focus on each individual character, as well as their physical movements and vocal styles. The great thing about this show is that all the characters involved in this production are people you can easily relate to. The biggest challenge is working on the transitions between characters and making it very clear for an audience.

Ultimately, our job is to tell a story and make it as clear and as entertaining as possible to an audience.



Company Up Close

Lucy Benson-Brown (who plays Gail)

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in Surrey, just outside of Guildford and went to Guildford High School and then City of London Freeman's Ashted for 6th Form. I studied my GCSEs abroad in Singapore.

When and what was your first experience of drama?

It was my GCSE drama class. I'd never done any drama before and I had an absolutely brilliant drama teacher. The first thing we studied was Equus and I thought it was the most incredible thing I had ever read. Every class was such an amazing discovery and the improvisations and workshops that my drama teacher led just blew my mind at 15! From that point on, I auditioned for every play at school possible and went to every drama trip.

What do you hope audiences will get from seeing Teachers?

Teachers is such an iconic play and I hope that audiences - even if they have seen it before - will rediscover it again. The story is so universal that I think everyone will relate to the Miss Primes & Salty's of this world! We've all been there.

How do you go about preparing for a multi-role show like Teachers?

I haven't played a multi-role perhaps since I was at drama school so for me, I'm going to watch lots of stand-up comedy to try and steal some tricks, study accents and work hard on physicality. It's really about trying to distinguish between each character and make them as detailed and as big as possible so that's going to be lots of fun.

Brad Clapson (who plays Hobby)

Where did you grow up and go to school?

I grew up in Bracknell and went to Garth Hill College.

When and what was your first experience of drama?

My Next door neighbour asked me if I wanted to play the "spoilt horrible brat" role in "Queen Elizabeth slept here". I was in year 5. Why she asked me I have no idea!

What do you hope audiences will get from seeing Teachers?

I want them to come out of the theatre feeling nostalgic about their school days, swapping stories about their old teachers or the teachers they have currently. And laughing about those memories.

How do you go about preparing for a multi-role show like Teachers?

I've researched British actors and actresses that are well known to everyday people and worked them into the piece. For instance Mrs Parry is loosely based on the characters "Hyacinth Bucket" from "Keeping Up Appearances" and "Mrs O" from "Acorn Antiques", both iconic characters in their day but also something that I believe Mrs Parry would have watched. On the other hand I have of course bought my own experiences out! My Deputy Head of my school was the scariest teacher I have ever encountered so have some of his mannerisms as Basford.

Watching the Show

We hope that you are looking forward to your visit to see Blackeyed Theatre's production of Teechers.

In order to maximise your students understanding of the show we have created a number of questions about the different 'lenses' through which your students can watch the show. These lenses allow the students to focus in on the performance elements, and analyse them in the moment.

Some students may find it helpful to make notes during the show, others may prefer to concentrate fully on the production and make notes afterwards. You can also choose whether to allocate groups to look specifically through different 'lenses' during the show, or ask all students to cover all areas.

Lenses

Performances

How do the actors share the roles?
How do the audience identify the characters?
How would you describe the acting style/s?
Is there a particular performer that stands out and why?
Identify the vocal techniques used throughout the show.
How do the actors physicalise the characters?
Are some characters more stylised than others, and why?
How is the 'ensemble' used within the piece?
How have the cast created the 'visual' images within the piece?
Hobby is traditionally played by a female performer.
What effect does a male casting have on the production?

Story

Concentrate on the narrative and what story is being told.
Make a note of what happens in each scene
Is the story clear?
What happens during the transitions?
How are the themes drawn out by the company?
What are the most obvious themes?
What decisions has the director made in the telling of the story?

Music and Song

Where is music used within the show?
What effect does this have on your understanding of the story?
How would you describe the style of music?

Visual Design

Set

Sketch the main scenic elements
How are the different places created?
Why does the set look the way it does?
What are the visual qualities of the set?

Lighting

How does the lighting affect the impact of the scenes?
How would you describe the quality of the lighting?
How is lighting used to help alienate the audience?

Costume

How have costumes been used to help indicate different characters?
Is there an overall design theme?
Where and when do the characters change costumes?

Post production

NOTES

As soon as possible after you have seen the production (the same evening or the next day is ideal) encourage your students to sit down and make some detailed notes about the show.

Sketch the scenic elements and the layout for different scenes.

Sketch or write about moments of action that stood out for you.

Consider techniques that you really enjoyed.

Identify moments that challenged you, that you didn't understand or made you think.

Run through the production elements 'lenses' and write as many facts about these areas as you can, consider facts as well as subjective opinions.

EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Evaluation

Give each student, or group of students, one of the following formats, and set them the task of writing a short critical review of the production in an appropriate style to that of their format.

- diary extract
- television news article
- tabloid news article
- letter to the company
- health & safety report
- love letter
- speech
- youtube video
- Twitter status update

Collate their evaluations into one complete document.

Snowball

1. Pair up your students and ask them to discuss their favourite moments from the production
2. Then ask them to pick one of those moments
3. Ask them to come up with a question that they would like to ask the director about that specific moment?
4. Merge pairs with another pair to form groups of four
5. Ask each pair to share their questions, and decide on one of those questions to take forward
6. Merge groups of four together to form groups of 8 and repeat the negotiation exercise
7. Continue to merge groups until one large group is formed and the whole group has decided on one question that they would like to ask the director about the production
8. Set a homework activity where each student has to write a detailed answer to the question

Blog

Write a review of Blackeyed Theatre's production of Teachers.

Upload the file to your school's website, create your own blogsite and send your reviews to the Director.

Cast Biographies



Jacob Addley

Jake graduated in 2009 from The Brit School Of Performing Arts. He was a founder member of the Royal Berkshire Academy of Performing Arts and has performed with National Youth Musical Theatre. His credits include Salty in Teechers (Black-eyed Theatre UK Tour) Will Scarlet in Robin Hood at The Queen's Theatre Barnstaple, Peter Pan in Peter Pan (Wilde Theatre, Bracknell), Do Dah the cat in Dick Whittington (The Towngate, Basildon), Philip in Orphans (Jam Pot Productions) and Eddie in One Fine Day (South Hill Park), for which The Stage nominated him as Best Solo Performer at the 2011 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Jake's film credits include Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, WASP, 66 and Stormbreaker. He has also had lead role in numerous short films and commercials. Jake toured with Blackeyed Theatre in Mother Courage And her Children in 2012 and is looking forward to appearing again as Salty in John Godber's Teechers.



Lucy Benson-Brown

Lucy trained at Manchester School of Theatre. Her theatre credits include Mogadishu (Manchester Royal Exchange Bruntwood Competition), Yesterday (Clwyd Theatr Cymru), Platform (Old Vic Tunnels & Frantic Assembly) and The Happiest Day Of Your Life (Old Vic New Voices in New York).

Lucy is also a writer and graduate of the Young Writers Programme at The Royal Court. Her solo-show Cutting Off Kate Bush received a sell-out run at The Edinburgh Festival 2014 and subsequently transferred to Paines Plough's Roundabout Space as part of their Brave New Work Season with Hackney Downs Studios.



Brad Clapson

Brad graduated from the Brit School of Performing Arts in 2008 where he studied Musical Theatre. Theatre credits include Narrator in La Ronde: A New Musical (Rosemary Branch), Lead Male in Storming the Barricade and Keep Smiling Through (both 5 star shows from the Edinburgh Fringe Festival), Thénardier in Les Misérables (Dysart Productions), Magic Mirror in Snow White, Ugly Sister in Cinderella and Simple Simon in Dick Whittington (all Wilde Theatre, Bracknell), and various roles in The Widgets. As a choreographer, his credits include Just So, Pandoras Box and Eurobeat (all Wilde Theatre, Bracknell).

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Creatives' Biographies

Adrian McDougall - Director / Producer

Adrian is the founder of Blackeyed Theatre and a professional actor, director and producer.

As a director, credits include House & Garden and Brassed Off (South Hill Park), The Long Lost Legend of Robin Hood, Alfie, two national tours of Oh What A Lovely War and The Beekeeper, which was nominated for three OFFIE awards (Blackeyed Theatre). As a producer, touring productions include Effie's Burning. The Caretaker, Misery, Art, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Oedipus, Oh What A Lovely War, The Cherry Orchard, Peter Pan, Alfie, Beauty and the Beast, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Trial and Mother Courage And Her Children (Blackeyed Theatre), The Madness of George III (Blackeyed Theatre with Original Theatre Company and Icarus Theatre Collective).

Scott Jenkins – Choreographer

Scott trained at the Urdang Academy of Dance and Musical Theatre where he attained top marks. Since graduating, his theatre work includes The Pirates of Penzance (London), Workshops for Spamalot (London), Mack 'n' Mabel (Kenton Theatre), Oklahoma (Newbury Corn Exchange) as well as Cabarets as a dancer and singer in and around Reading.

Scott Currently works as a Director/Choreographer & Artistic Director for a number of companies, and credits include Disco Inferno (Choreographer), All Shook up (Director and Choreographer), West Side Story (Choreographer), Beauty and the Beast (Director and Choreographer). He works extensively with Berzerk Productions, where he has been coaching children in acting and dancing for over 10 years. He is currently Managing Director of MJ Entertainment, offering Tribute band acts across England, including Jersey Jukebox (Jersey Guys). He has been nominated for the pride of Reading awards for his continuous dedication and support to the young people of Reading.

Victoria Spearing - Designer

Since graduating from Bretton Hall in 2001, Victoria has worked as a freelance theatre designer and maker. Theatre work includes The Queen and I, Bugsy Malone, BFG, Whistle Down the Wind, When We Were Married, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Norfolk's Rose, The Caretaker, Around the World in 80 days, Alice in Wonderland, The Wizard of Oz, Blue Remembered Hills, Summer Holiday, House and Garden, The Adventures of Mr. Toad, Henry V, Oliver! Fantastic Mr. Fox, Brassed Off, Noughts and Crosses, The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe and Billy Elliot (all for South Hill Park Arts Centre), Mort the Musical and Loserville the Musical for Youth Music Theatre UK. Touring work includes The Beekeeper (for which she was OFFIE nominated), The Trial, The Caretaker, Art, Misery, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Oedipus, Oh What a Lovely War, The Cherry Orchard, Alfie, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Trial, Mother Courage And her Children, Teechers, Dracula and Not About Heroes (all for Blackeyed Theatre), See How They Run, Twelfth Night, Dancing at Lughnasa, Shakespeare's R&J, The Importance of Being Oscar, Mallard, Journey's End and Birdsong for Original Theatre, The Madness of George III for Wilde Enterprises and The Go! Go! Go! Show for Shows4kids. She has also designed South Hill Park's hugely successful pantomimes, Dick Whittington, Sleeping Beauty, Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast and Peter Pan. In addition she has designed and made props for use in educational productions in most of the major London museums.

Charlotte McClelland - Lighting Designer

Charlotte trained on an Arts Council bursary at Central School of Speech and Drama. Recent lighting designs include Angels On High for Guildford International Music Festival (vertical dance on Guildford Cathedral), Carmen and The Marriage of Figaro for Longborough Festival Opera, Art, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Oedipus, Oh What A Lovely War, The Trial, Dracula and Not About Heroes for Blackeyed Theatre, Plasticine and Butterfly Kiss for Birmingham School of Speech and Drama, Ever the Bull for Demonstrate, Cinderella for South Hill Park Arts Centre and The Baghdad Monologue and Chicos del 21 for Frances M Lynch/ Electric Voice Theatre.

Jenny Little - Costume Designer

Jenny graduated BA (Hons) in Costume for the Screen and Stage from the Arts Institute at Bournemouth. During her degree, she was costume maker on Virus for Bournemouth Direct Theatre School and assisted in Wardrobe on Les Miserables at the Queen's Theatre, London.

After her studies, she started as a Wardrobe Assistant on Snow White for Evolution Productions at the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury. Since then she has worked with Evolution as Wardrobe Mistress on their last 3 pantomimes at The Central Theatre, Chatham. She has also worked as a Costumier on The Lands, Dancing on the Waves, Fiesta Latina Nights, Jazz ala Carte and Studio 54 for American company Jean Ann Ryan Productions, who create theatre productions for Silversea Cruises. For Blackeyed Theatre she has designed costumes for Mother Courage And her Children, Teechers, Dracula and Not About Heroes. Other work has included hand painting and dying costumes for West End productions of Lion King, Oliver and Wicked.

Danielle Corbishley – Education Advisor

Danielle trained at Dartington College of Arts and with Jasmin Vardimon Company. She is a performer, director, lecturer and magician who has been creating physical and visual theatres since she was tiny. As Head of Drama at Reading College she developed an innovative programme of ambitious work for young people, and regularly provides workshops and training for youth groups around Berkshire. She loves magic and regularly performs as cabaret illusionist 'The Great Dandini', for which she also won the prestigious Paul Pearman Trophy for magic 2011-2012. As Artistic Director for Beautiful Creatures Theatre she has created a broad portfolio of performances, including 'The Will of The Wisp' 'KIN' 'QuickFix' 'The Tipping Point' 'The Fortress' and 'The AirQuarium'. Beautiful Creatures are also working with Caversham Festival to programme a new area for outdoor arts, and create large-scale outdoor participatory projects. For more information please visit <http://beautifulcreatures.org.uk>