

**Pilot Theatre and Octagon Theatre, Bolton's
Production of**



by Jonathan Harvey

UK Tour 2005

EDUCATION RESOURCE PACK

By Helen Cadbury for Pilot Theatre

Introduction

This Education Pack contains resources to enrich your students' experience of seeing Pilot Theatre and Octagon Theatre Bolton's production of *Beautiful Thing*. It contains interviews and ideas for workshop exercises which are specific to the production, but which may also be adapted for other texts. Some exercises are more appropriate before seeing the show and some would be very useful as follow-up activities, please feel free to use it in whatever way is most helpful for your own practice.

Where possible, each exercise is labelled to show where it fits into the curriculum for Drama/ Performing Arts GCSE, AS, A level and BTEC. English, Music, PSHE/ Citizenship and Cross-curricular themes are also indicated. Pages use a different typeface for teaching notes (Times New Roman) or **student resources (Arial)**. These materials are also suitable for young people in youth theatre or other youth arts settings. I have tended to use the word 'student' to cover 'young person,' 'participant', 'player' and I hope that workshop leaders outside formal education settings do not find this off-putting.

As the tour progresses, additional pages may be added.

We hope you find this pack useful.

The play is about the transition from adolescence to adulthood; boys to men, girls to women, it's about that journey, about growing up and crossing a bridge.

Marcus Romer - Director

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IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

JONATHAN HARVEY AUTHOR OF BEAUTIFUL THING

THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER 1996

An acclaimed play and now a film, *Beautiful Thing* is about gay teenage love on a London council estate. It has been accused of being a fantasy, but here its writer Jonathan Harvey argues that it is only too true.

People think of *Beautiful Thing* as my first play, when in fact it's my seventh. But though they're technically wrong, they are right in a way - it was the first play in which I tackled gay issues, and therefore the first really adult, honest one. The others were written for youth groups and festivals, so you had to write with kid gloves.

Because the two boys who live on a council estate fall in love and kiss and dance in front of their neighbours, I've been accused of writing a fantasy, but that's wrong, too. I believe in every second of the story. I believe that these things can happen and do happen. I'm not saying this is a place with no homophobia. The most important characters in the story are embracing and loving, and accepted by Jamie's mum, who ends up dancing with them, but we know that when Ste's dad finds out there will be big trouble. That's one of the most interesting things about making a play into a screenplay - you can open it out and show these things. In the theatre they were just dancing on the balcony. In the closing scene of the film, when they are dancing together, you see the disapproving looks of the neighbours.

Although I'm from Liverpool myself, I decided to set it in an estate in Thamesmead in south London, where I taught for three years before becoming a full-time writer. I felt I knew how the kids spoke, but I wasn't so close to them that I'd end up censoring myself. If Jamie's mum had been Liverpoolian I might have had a problem with the fact that she swears and is a bit saucy. I hate the stereotypes of us as thieves and robbers with a great sense of humour.

We filmed for five weeks on location in the same place that was used for *A Clockwork Orange*. In the sixties, all these high-rise blocks looked futuristic; now they just look like slabs of concrete with bits of water and greenery in between; not quite as drab as some estates. When we were first there, a few lads shouted out at us, but we used a lot of extras from the estate and in the end they were dancing, too. You see, it does happen.

The filming threw up some other interesting issues. The two boys are supposed to be 15 and 16, which is below the age of consent for gay sex. In the theatre we used older actors. For the film we auditioned 17-year-olds. It's a lot more real, because you're getting a real 17-year-old face responding to this experience.

Obviously the lawyers had to look pretty carefully at it, because these boys do have a snog on screen. In the end we agreed to take the specific age references out. That wasn't because of legal problems, but because Gay Times wouldn't let us show their magazine if it was mentioned that they were under age. So we changed "I'm 15" to "I'm old enough." Basically, I had the choice of inventing a gay magazine or taking the age out, and I felt that it would be truer to take the age out. Everyone can see that these are 17-year-olds.

In general, though, I think the film is very loyal to the play. You go on the same journey, but I find it more touching because you're not in a big theatre, miles away from this bed and this flat. When Jamie massages Ste's back, you can see his hands. You don't have to tell the audience what he is doing. Because I'm a dialogue obsessed theatre writer I found that quite difficult.

Does the fact that Jamie's mum dances along with them make it a fantasy? I don't think it does. For a start, she joins them more in active defiance than acceptance. I don't think she's totally come to terms with his sexuality. Then again, when you go out on the gay scene in Liverpool, you see people with their mums, and their mums are usually young and attractive and like a good laugh. Yes there's an element of wish fulfilment in there, but I think of it as honest. The ending is nice but they do have to go through the pain to get there. Most people, in one way or another, have to come out to their parents when they become sexually active - I think both gay and straight audiences can relate to that. I came out to my parents when they asked me. I was 18, and the thing that upset my mum was that I hadn't told her before.

They came to see the play when it was first on at the Bush Theatre in London, but it wasn't until they saw my name on the opening credits in the cinema that they really appreciated it, and understood why I'd given up my nice teaching job with a pension for a typewriter. My mother wrote me a letter saying that watching *Beautiful Thing* had given her the same thrill as watching Shelagh Delaney's film about teenage pregnancy, *A Taste of Honey*, in the early sixties.

If people want to think of it as a fantasy, that's all right by me. I think it's about time we started to put a smile on our faces and celebrate the good things in life. When you have a life like this, you seize any beautiful thing that comes your way and you don't let go. Tomorrow you might get a brick through your window.

(© 1996 Guardian newspapers.)

Teachers Resource: Key Themes

Curriculum areas: PSHE and Citizenship, Drama GCSE (exploring issues in drama.)

Beautiful Thing and Jonathan Harvey's article raise important issues about sexuality and homophobia, which some of your students may find challenging. This page suggests some resources to support teachers, in facilitating discussions around homophobic bullying. You may wish to explore these resources before tackling the Drama and Citizenship exercises (Arrange Yourself, p7, Forum p.9 and Playback, p.10.) which further explore themes from the play.

'Schools should make sure that homophobic attitudes do not go unchallenged' Ofsted

Talking About Homosexuality in the Secondary School

This publication has some excellent teaching resources including printable worksheets to guide discussions, as well as detailed information on the law.

<http://www.avert.org/pdfs/homosexualityinschool.pdf>

Safe For All a joint report by the Policy Research Unit at the Institute for Education and the charity Stonewall.

http://www.stonewall.org.uk/docs/mfbn_Safe_For_All_PDF_Format.pdf

<http://www.stonewall.org.uk> has a number of useful resources including statistics on incidents of homophobic bullying in schools and personal accounts from pupils, parents and teachers. Follow the Education link.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/bullying> has accessible pages for pupils, parents and teachers on bullying.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying/teachersindex.shtml#a> is a useful pack full of advice for combating bullying

If the above link does not connect, try this:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk> then search for bullying

(If clicking on these links does not work immediately, try Control, Click.)

Ten Steps to Educate the Whole School

1. Acknowledge and identify the problem of bullying. Homophobic bullying may be hidden from view.
2. Develop policies that recognise the existence of homophobic bullying. Challenge derogatory use of the word 'gay' and remove graffiti promptly.
3. Promote a positive social environment. The ethos of the school will influence what can be done.
4. Address staff training needs. Don't assume only lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers can address such issues.
5. Provide information and support for pupils through noticeboards, school diaries and websites.
6. Integrate sexual orientation into curriculum planning.
7. Use outside expertise.
8. Encourage role models.
9. Don't make assumptions. Not all pupils and teachers in your school are heterosexual.
10. Celebrate achievements. Make successes, such as challenging the curriculum or reducing bullying, known through assemblies, newsletters, noticeboards or websites.

From Education For All: Stonewall: January 2005

Drama and Citizenship: *Beautiful Thing* as A Stimulus

Drama allows us to step into other people's shoes and imagine what it might be like to be them. We are able to 'empathise' with their situation. The programme of study for Citizenship says:

"Pupils should be taught to use their imagination to consider other people's experience...."

Danny Braverman (*Playing A Part: Drama and Citizenship 2002*) describes the experience of drama work with Leap – a youth arts organisation - in Winchester prison:

The narratives (of the play) were true stories about racism, homophobia and eating disorders...In the front row of the audience, in amongst a sea of perplexed, white, male faces sat two skinheads complete with swastika and union jack tattoos... We were playing a scene where a young male protagonist was rowing with his Dad about his decision to wear make-up, when we came across an unexpected response. We were used to lively audiences of young people engaging with and commenting on the action, but never had we had such a wave of sympathy for the boy with make-up. During the interaction that followed the show, several young men took the place of the protagonist and argued in role with his authoritarian father, putting the case eloquently for the right to wear make-up. The image of a skinhead with a swastika tattoo on his face proclaiming his right to wear make up "because it's the person inside that matters," will never leave me. Somehow the structure of this theatre experience had helped this young man to step into the shoes of an overtly 'effeminate' character – perhaps for the first time.

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Part 1: Opinion Exercise: Arrange yourself

Before starting this work it would be useful to agree some shared ground rules with the young people about respecting the opinions, experiences and performances of the other members of the group.

Objective: to foster teamwork, to encourage listening skills, to encourage students to work instinctively, to enable students to share personal experience and opinions.

Can be used before seeing *Beautiful Thing*.

Divide the group into teams of 8 to 12 people and ask them to line up in their team with the head of each line facing you. The first team to sit down, having accurately completed the task, gets a point. You may wish to appoint a score keeper, it gets quite hard to keep score as the game speeds up. Explain that you will give a series of instructions and when the team has completed an instruction they must sit down to show that they have finished. Keep the game quite fast as you want to encourage instinctive responses.

Arrange yourselves according to...

...height with the tallest at the back

...shoe size with the smallest at the back

...how many brothers and sisters you've got (including step- and half siblings) with the most at the front.
...your house number, with the highest at the back and with a house 'name' counting as 0.

Remind of current score to keep it competitive, then move on to the next set of questions which act as an instant survey of the group's relationship to the media.

Arrange yourselves according to...

...the number of hours a week you spend in front of a screen.
...the number of television channels you receive in your home.
...the number of websites you visited in the past month.
...the number of radio stations you listen to regularly.
...the number of times you've read a newspaper in the past week/month.

The game can then shift gear into another exercise called **Where Do You Stand?** You can then move the questions on, to get a barometer of opinion, by giving a statement and then asking the group to arrange themselves in order, from strongly agree at the back to strongly disagree at the front (along the lines of a market research survey: strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree, strongly disagree). These questions will vary depending on the focus of your group. Here are some suggestions:

...there is bullying in your school/college
...there are racist comments aired in your school/college
...there are homophobic comments in your school/college
...children need two parents to bring them up
...a child can be raised well by one parent
...two people of the same sex could be good parents

There need to be opportunities for some discussion about where people find themselves on the line, some students may strongly disagree with something because they have no personal experience of it. You may wish to give people an opportunity to alter position when they have heard another person's point of view, (beware of peer pressure contributing to sheep-like movement.)

After seeing the show, try playing Arrange Yourself again to explore students' response to the events of the play.

Part 2: Forum Theatre Exercise

Resources: Script extract: “I had a phone call tonight.” See page 11

Objective: To explore the text and relate it to personal experience; to explore ways of tackling homophobia and other kinds of bullying.

Should be used after seeing the play.

1. Ask students to read aloud, either in a whole group, small groups or pairs, the scene extract: “I had a phone call tonight.”
2. In small groups of 4 or 5 improvise a scene which shows the event which is being discussed. Think about what other characters might have been present and how they react (e.g. did Jamie have any friends with him, did anyone witness it, who reported it to the teacher, how many people assaulted him or verbally abused him?) Keep the scenes short but clear.
Health warning: remind students to act the hitting. You may wish to introduce Slow Motion or Stage Combat conventions here.
3. Show the scenes and select an appropriate one to forum.
4. Ask the group to repeat the scene as accurately as possible.
5. Ask if any of the audience would like to take the place of Jamie, the protagonist in this scene, to see if they can change any of the outcomes of the scene by doing or saying something differently. That person will need to call ‘freeze’ at the moment they wish to step in as the protagonist. (If the scene is quite short they can take over the whole scene.)
6. The other characters cannot be replaced and must stay in role, they can only change their characters’ actions or words if they genuinely feel the new Jamie has changed their response.
7. Try the scene with other people stepping in to Jamie’s shoes. Keep discussing with the group the different outcomes and to what extent Jamie is able to influence, if at all, the outcome of this event, while remaining true to himself.

Part 3: Playback Theatre

Objective: to explore personal experience as a source for drama, to begin to move from the personal to the political through a dramatic structure.

1. If your group have a good level of trust you can extend this exercise further into students' own personal experience. Ask everyone to think of an event in their lives when they have been picked on, put down unfairly or barred from participating in something. They can then share these stories in a small group and decide in the group which story they are going to act out.
2. Create a short scene to show what happened, the subject of the story should act as director, putting the other players into her/his shoes. Recreate the geography, the casting, and the telling. Run it through with the director 'narrating,' then run it through with the other players taking on the language of the subject and the other characters.
3. Each group needs to share their scene with the rest of the class, with the director in each group invited to comment first. Then invite comments on what the issue is. (Reminder about sensitivity to people's personal issues.) If appropriate, the scenes can then be run as pieces of Forum Theatre (see p.9, no.5, 6 and 7.).
4. Introduce the idea of who could have helped: immediately (e.g. witnesses) or in the wider sense (the school community, the code of conduct/behaviour, good communication between staff and students, supportive family and friends)
5. This exercise can lead to a discussion about different tiers of influence, where students start to move from the personal to the political. It can be a very accessible way of tackling the parts of the Citizenship Curriculum about local and national government. This is a potential model but might change depending what issues your group have come up with:

The problem	The objective	The method	To lobby
Homophobic bullying	To stop the bullying	Improve people's attitudes by making it clear that homophobia is unacceptable.	Teachers and governors, to ensure it's in the code of behaviour and taught about in PSHE.
Violent crime against young people	To feel safe on the streets	To have a youth club, so young people in the neighbourhood would have a place to hang out.	Local councillors who make decisions about how money is spent in the community.

Script Extract

Act 2 Scene 4

Sandra I had a phone call tonight.

Jamie Oh, you're lucky.

Sandra From your tutor.

Jamie Miss Ellis?

Sandra She's worried about ya.

Jamie God, coz I bunk off games does it mean I'm gay?

Sandra No. Coz someone hit you.

Jamie Everyone gets hit.

Sandra And called you queer. And it ain't the first time. She's worried about what it's doing to ya.

Jamie I'm all right.

Student Web links for further information:

<http://www.stonewall.org.uk>

<http://www.thesite.org.uk>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/bullying>

Script Writing Exercise: Location Dialogue

The estate on which the play is set, the shared public walkway, the privacy of Jamie's bedroom, the thin walls dividing the different households: these locations all affect the interaction of the characters in the play and drive the story forward.

1. Individually, write down a fictional name. Decide what this person looks like, give them an age, an occupation and a **secret**.
2. Join up with a partner and describe your character to each other.
3. In pairs agree on a **private location** where your two characters could meet, a place where they cannot be overheard.
4. Write a minimal stage direction which describes the place and who is on stage.
5. Begin to write the dialogue by contributing one line each for your character, follow the rules that you would use in improvisation, avoid blocking ideas and accept the direction in which the conversation is evolving between the characters. You don't have to include all the information about your character (from point 1) but bear it in mind. Keep the lines short, if necessary set yourself a word limit of between 1 and 6 words per line.
6. When everyone has reached about a page of dialogue, each pair should read these aloud to the group, in character.
7. Then each pair needs to re-write the scene with a **public location**, e.g. park, noisy train platform, quiet library, swimming pool, pub or cafe. It may be useful to share some ideas first about how this might change the way the characters communicate.
8. Share the new scenes out loud, how did the tone change, could the characters use the same words or did they have to keep some information to themselves?

Extension Activity (DRAMA): the duologues can be developed through improvisation to form the basis of a devised play. The following suggestions could be given to the writers/devisers: when do you want the audience to learn your character's secret? What clues can you give, so the audience feels 'hooked' into the narrative by trying to guess the secret? Keep your play limited to one or two locations and up to four characters. When you have finished the writing process, go through your script and edit out any unnecessary words, less is often more!

Extension Activity (FILM/MEDIA) Develop the scenes into a short film script which could be shot in students' own neighbourhood. Compare how location is used differently in the play and in the film of *Beautiful Thing* (see bibliography.)

Interview With Marcus Romer – Artistic Director of Pilot Director of *Beautiful Thing*

by Jo Darby

- **Why did you choose to do a production of *Beautiful Thing*?**
- **What attracted you to the play?**
- **Do you think it has contemporary relevance?**

It is perfect for our target audience of young people, it sits right in the middle of the age range that we target all our productions at, so in that sense it was perfect. It is also a very well written play. It covers a range of emotions and issues. I have always wanted to do a production of it. I had seen the movie, but was aware that the play actually works much better. I wanted to tell a story for now with a young contemporary cast.

I do feel it has enormous contemporary relevance. [Homophobia is a serious issue, which we want to address as artists, particularly to look at it from a young people's perspective.](#)

- **What particular aspects of the play are important for you to portray?**

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CHARACTERS!

I also wanted to portray the sense of truthfulness. I want it to have a resonance for the audience. I also wanted to portray the truth of the text and stay honest to the playwright's intentions. At the same time I wanted to find our own way of telling the story.

I also wanted to portray an accuracy of location and environment.

- **How do you bring these to the forefront in the production? What practical techniques do you use?**

We did a lot of character work in week one of rehearsals, some singly and some in pairs. The actors were also encouraged to do some research, to find some contemporary pictures and stories from the Internet. This fed in to their practical use of the set. We looked specifically at the Thames Mead area. We also did a lot of 'playing', which allowed the characters to develop through exploration and research. We did some improvisation between the characters, which developed their sense of back history. For example we did the scene where Tony and Sandra first met in Tesco's to help them establish that part of their relationship. Other ideas that we investigated through improvisation were ideas about Jamie's father and holidays Sandra and Jamie might have been on. This was really important to help the actors create this sense of a shared history. We also did some hot seating of the characters in order to gain some truth for the characters that was appropriate for the actors. After the improvisations we would then all discuss each character's ideas about what

had come out of it, again, to ensure that there was a sense of a shared history and a real connection between the characters.

- **Having read the play and seen some of the rehearsals it strikes me that charting the communication between the characters is an interesting way in. Is this something you have been consciously aware of? If so how have you put this into practice?**

We did a lot of status work in week one of rehearsals. We also looked at the characters needs at different moments in the play, what does each character need from each other? The status of the characters and their needs shift throughout the play. The whole play is about the transition from adolescence to adulthood; boys to men, girls to women, it's about that journey, about growing up and crossing a bridge.

In terms of communication it's also interesting to look at the information that is passed between the characters. For example in the scene where Leah says that she has covered for Jamie and Ste by not telling Trevor about them sharing a bed, she has that key information and plays with the idea of communicating it or not. So it's worth looking at who has what information at what time. Information can be used to damage, and that's where the taunting and name-calling comes in. The passing of information always has a consequence, there's always fallout.

That idea of interconnection in the play is also very interesting. There is a geographical and environmental interconnection between the characters, which is their physical interconnection because of their proximity, but there is also an emotional interconnection that perhaps develops because of their physical closeness. It is only Tony who falls outside this web of connection, because he is not actually from there, his roots are different.

Postscript

As the ideas have developed in preparation for the tour of *Beautiful Thing*, we have had permission from Jonathan Harvey to re-locate the play to Manchester (imagine the location of the TV show, *Shameless* by Paul Abbott.) All the actors will therefore have Northern accents.

Acting Exercises

1. Back story

Curriculum Links: GCSE Drama, AS level, A level Drama and Theatre Studies, BTEC Performing Arts (acting)

Objective: to develop character by exploring the process undertaken by the Director and cast of Beautiful Thing. To explore techniques for performing texts, devising from text and acting techniques (links to study of Stanislavski's theory of Given Circumstances.)

Assign the following lines/extracts (next two pages) to groups of students and ask them to imagine the scene which is being described, which happens off stage and out of stage time.

1. Leah's story – does she get interviewed by a TV company, what happens?
2. Tony and Sandra – imagine their first meeting, how could use the supermarket location to theatrical effect?
3. Ste and Jamie – what did Ste and Jamie feel about going to the Gloucester? How did Sandra's work colleague react on seeing them?

Each group should then devise a scene about the event, making clear both character and location.

Script Extracts for Back stories

1. Leah's story

Sandra: Face facts Leah, no bugger wants you.

Leah: That bloke from the telly wants me.

Sandra: Shut up.

Leah: He does so there! He's doin' a documentary called 'Victims of the System.'

Sandra: He's already made it, Leah. Your mother told me. He said he couldn't have you on it (Jamie joins in) coz you were such a cow.

Leah: He was a pervert anyway.

2. Tony and Sandra

Jamie: Where did you meet my mum?

Tony: Planet Earth.

Jamie: Where?

Tony: Oh, you know, out and about, here and there. What's a place? It's somewhere where, you know, shit happens.

Jamie: Yeah, but where?

Tony: Tesco's.

3. Ste and Jamie

Sandra: Where've you been please?

Jamie: Nowhere.

Sandra: Oh, yeah? It's half-one in the morning actually. (pause.) Where did you go?

Jamie: Out.

Sandra: Jamie! You went to the Gloucester, didn't ya? Look at me.

Jamie: Only went for a drink.

Sandra: That's where gay people go...

Jamie: You been spying on me?

Sandra: No, someone at work seen you go in...

Jamie: Don't mean I'm gay.

Sandra: Going in with another boy, so who was that?

Jamie: Ste.

.

Acting Exercises:

2. Hotseating

Curriculum Links: GCSE Drama, AS level, A level Drama and Theatre Studies, BTEC Performing Arts (acting)

Objective: to develop character by exploring the process undertaken by the Director and cast of Beautiful Thing, to explore techniques for performing texts, devising from text and acting techniques (links to study of Stanislavski's theory of Given Circumstances.)

Either:

If this exercise follows from the **Back story** exercise, students can be hotseated as the character in their Back story scene.

Or:

Use Script Extract 3: *Bunkin' Off* (p.19) and focus on hotseating Jamie and Ste.

In groups, make a mind map with the character's name in the middle, of all the facts we know about the character who is going to be hotseated. Then add branches which show all the feelings this character may be going through at this point in the play

Ask each group to select an actor to play the character. They are then invited to sit on the chair and the group can ask them questions, the interviewers should be helpful not hostile in their questioning, like a trusted best friend. The hotseated character must answer questions truthfully and remain in role during the interview, they can use the mind map as a prompt.

Extension activity

1. Re-work and perform the scenes from the Back story exercise, ask the group to evaluate how the hotseating has changed the scene or any individual performances.
2. Writing exercise: create a monologue or diary entry for your group's chosen character at this point in the play.

Script Extract: Bunkin' Off.

Jamie Bunkin off?

Ste No, I'm at school, what's it look like?

Jamie Not like you to miss a race.

Ste First time for everything.

Jamie You're in the relay team.... Been worried about ya.

Ste Don't be.

Jamie Well, I was

Ste Well, don't be!

Jamie Have they...?

Ste No.

Jamie What?

Ste Nothing's happened. Yeah? I'm all right. I'm pucker.
Everything...everything's pucker

Jamie You ain't running coz you're black and blue. That's why innit? I
know. I've seen. That's why you ain't in the relay team.

Acting Exercises:

3. Status in Beautiful Thing

“The status of the characters and their needs shift throughout the play. The whole play is about the transition from adolescence to adulthood; boys to men, girls to women, it’s about that journey, about growing up and crossing a bridge.”

Marcus Romer Director

Curriculum Links: GCSE Drama, AS level, A level Drama and Theatre Studies, BTEC Performing Arts (acting)

Objective: To deepen understanding of how the narrative of Beautiful Thing develops through shifts in status, to explore character development.

“Status is a confusing term unless it’s understood as something someone does. You may be low in social status, but play quite high, and vice versa...Audiences enjoy a contrast between the status played and the social status.”

Johnstone, 1981

- a. **Status Warm Ups – useful for exercise 2 and 3**
- b. **Cards**

3. Shuffle a pack of playing cards and give one card to each member of the group. Ask the group to line up in order of the value of their card from king down to ace, they must not say what is on the card, but rather, act out the social status of that card’s value. When they have negotiated their position in the line, ask them to reveal their card. Evaluate with the group how well they were able to express, physically or verbally, the aspects of their character’s status.
4. Re-shuffle the cards. Ask the group to remain the same social status, but they must now take on the ‘playing’ status of their new card value. Ask them to renegotiate their position in the line, observing closely what improvised conversations take place.
5. Pairs could develop the conversations from this encounter into small scenes.

b. See-saw

1. Create an imaginary scenario for two players: e.g. shop assistant and customer in a shoe shop, the customer is returning a pair of shoes for a refund.
2. Three volunteers, A, B and C. C stands where the other two can clearly see him and hold his arms out on either side. When he raises or lowers his left arm, A must raise or lower her status accordingly and when he raise or lowers his right arm B must raise or lower her status. Initially the arms should raise and lower in opposition during the improvised scene, but it can be interesting to see what happens if both players are high status or both are low status.
3. Repeat with different players, locations and scenarios.

2. Textual Analysis Exercise

AS/ A level Drama and Theatre Studies

1. Follow the through line of one character and annotate your copy of the text to show where there are small and large shifts in their status.
2. At each point where there is a shift, write down what you think this character needs at this point (e.g. I need space to be myself...)
3. Draw a timeline for your character's needs (straight line) and use another colour to show how their status rises and falls at the same time (curving up and down line.) Compare these with the timelines of the other characters and you will begin to map the emotional journey of the play.

3. Information as power: Devising Exercise

GCSE Drama, BTEC First (acting) stimulus for devised work.

...in the scene where Leah says that she has covered for Jamie and Ste by not telling Trevor about them sharing a bed, she has that key information and plays with the idea of communicating it or not. So it's worth looking at who has what information at what time. Information can be used to damage, and that's where the taunting and name-calling comes in. The passing of information always has a consequence, there's always fallout.

Marcus Romer Director

Using the above quote as a devising stimulus, create a scene where a character's status is raised by their possession of an important piece of information. You could develop Leah's story by showing what happened when she talked to Trevor or invent a new story (e.g. a child witnessing a crime, the butler who sees the Princess with her lover...)

Design Notes

Laura McEwen: Designer

I always start with colours. I do what's called a colour scape, going through the play and finding colours that belong. Later I add the 3D dimensional aspect of the set, which you can see in these images of the model box.



The play 'Beautiful' Thing' is location specific, we know it is set on a housing estate, originally London but now re-located to Manchester, and the audience need to see the exterior of three flats and the interior of one. Working out a way to easily switch between the interior and exterior is probably the greatest challenge of this piece. It was important to me that these weren't two completely separate worlds, that one could evolve out of the other. I discovered that by rotating the walls on the set it was an easy way for the audience to step into the flat and see the more intimate image of Jamie's bedroom.



Photography was really useful near the beginning of my process. I visited many different estates in city suburbs and looked at the quirky characteristics of flat fronts – what gave them their individual identity. It was important for me

to think about the things I could include in my design, which would be specific to the different characters in the play – how would Sandra’s flat differ to the appearance of Ste’s? My photographs became really valuable reference material and also helped me form the colour scape for the piece.

Beautiful Thing is a touring production so it was also vital to consider how my set could work in different theatre spaces. The heart of the design will always look the same for all of the spaces, but there are additional walls which can extend the set for the larger theatre spaces.

Design Workshop Ideas

Curriculum links: Technical students on GCSE, AS, BTEC course, Design Technology.

The task

Using Laura's description of the design process as a guide, create your own set design for *Beautiful Thing* set in a location near you.

1. Go through the text and list any essential features which will need to be included in the set.
2. Take photographs of a location in your town or city, which you feel could be like the flats in the play.
3. Produce a notebook, which shows what the key colours and shapes are going to be used in the set: use your photographs and add drawn, or painted, images or collage from magazine pictures. Add notes to your images, quotes from the text or ideas about themes to justify your choices.
4. Make a scale diagram on graph paper, showing where scenery and furniture (the set) will be positioned. (you may want to contact your local theatre to get their dimensions, or the theatre where you saw the production of *Beautiful Thing*)
5. Make a model box based on your drawing. A simple method is to take a photocopy of your scale diagram and stick it to a piece stiff card. It is easier to paint the smaller parts of your model before you cut them out.
6. Cut around the shapes, leaving quite a large tab at the bottom of each one to stand it up. Take a large piece of card, cut to scale, to be your stage area. You can paint this black, or if you imagine your set to have a painted floor cloth, colour it accordingly.
7. If you are going to move the pieces around, as many directors and designers do during the production process, don't glue them down yet. When you are satisfied with the positions, you can glue the tabs down onto the 'stage.'

Music in Beautiful Thing

Curriculum links: GCSE Drama, GCSE Music, BTEC Music Technology

In Pilot's production of *Beautiful Thing*, the sound track follows the original script, by including the songs by Mama Cass, which are part of Leah's personal soundtrack.

There is a soundtrack of exterior sound effects underscoring the scenes. We also use different remixes of *Beautiful* by Christina Aguilera, including a Paul Rauhofer mix which is a club anthem, bringing the production up to date.

Exercise: Music devised from Drama

Use *Beautiful Thing* as a text to devise your own musical soundtrack. Pilot's style is to re-mix and re-work tracks which are important to a character and which help the audience's emotional connection with a character or a particular moment in the play. We know that Mama Cass is in Leah's head as well as on her stereo but what about the other characters?

1. Choose a particular track by an artist or band that would be really important to one of the other characters. For example, Sandra will have different musical tastes to Tony, which may emphasise the age difference between them. Tony tries to connect with Jamie but fails, what music would he be into and how would it differ from Jamie's taste?
2. Choose a scene from *Beautiful Thing* and re-mix your character's favourite track to become their theme tune or personal soundtrack.
3. Decide whether the music should underscore (play while the actors are speaking) or introduce the scene.
4. Ask a group of acting students to read/ perform the scene with your track to see how it helps the audience get into the mood of the scene.

Exercise: Drama devised from Music:

On the following page are the lyrics of the original version of *Beautiful* by Christina Aguilera which could be used as a devising stimulus.

Beautiful: Christina Aguilera

(spoken)

Don't look at me

Every day is so wonderful
And suddenly, it's hard to breathe
Now and then, I get insecure
From all the fame, I'm so ashamed

I am beautiful no matter what they say
Words can't bring me down
I am beautiful in every single way
Yes, words can't bring me down
So don't you bring me down today

To all your friends, you're delirious
So consumed in all your doom
Trying hard to fill the emptiness
The piece is gone and the puzzle undone
That's the way it is

You are beautiful no matter what they say
Words won't bring you down
You are beautiful in every single way
Yes, words won't bring you down
Don't you bring me down today...

No matter what we do
(no matter what we do)
No matter what they say
(no matter what they say)
When the sun is shining through
Then the clouds won't stay

And everywhere we go
(everywhere we go)
The sun won't always shine
(sun won't always shine)
But tomorrow will find a way
All the other times

We are beautiful no matter what they say
Yes, words won't bring us down
We are beautiful no matter what they say
Yes, words can't bring us down
Don't you bring me down today

Don't you bring me down today
Don't you bring me down today

Mama Cass: Research exercise

“I didn’t realise how much I miss her until I saw Beautiful Thing.”
Mama Cass Fan

“Mama Cass helps me concentrate”
Leah in Beautiful Thing

Mama Cass may seem an unusual role model for a teenage girl growing up in Britain today, but who was she and what did she look like?

Use the Internet and your knowledge of the play to complete this quiz

1. What was Mama Cass’s real name?
2. When was she born?
3. What was the name of the band she was part of for several hits, including *California Dreaming*?
4. Name two other songs recorded with that band.
5. Name two solo songs.
6. When did she die?
7. There are two different theories as to what she died from, which one does Leah believe is the truth?
8. Why do you think Mama Cass is Leah’s favourite singer?

(If you get stuck, try www.casselliot.com)

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