

POLKA

Where theatre begins...



Beauty and the Beast Activity Pack

Dear Teacher/Parent

We do hope you enjoyed the show! Here are a few activities for you to do with your children after you have seen the performance. Most of these exercises are drama based and are good for developing speaking and listening skills.



Polka Theatre's production of Beauty and the Beast is for ages 6 - 12. The majority of the games and exercises in this pack are aimed at KS2, though it would be possible to adapt some of them for Year 2.

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BEHIND THE SCENES

Interview with the writer, Charles Way:

We asked Polka's Young Voices Panel what they would like to ask Beauty and the Beast writer Charles Way about his version of the story and how he became a playwright.

Sophie: Why did you choose the Beauty and the Beast story to write about?

I had for many years been interested in fairy tales and the dramatic possibilities of *Beauty and the Beast* are delicious. It is one of those tales which works both as an action fantasy and as a psychological drama. The symbolism is both clear and deep so there is something in it for every age group and I find this appealing.

Sophie: Have you wanted to be a writer all your life or did you want to do something different when you were younger?

I started writing plays when I was about 14 years old and I have been writing since then and never wanted to do anything else. I don't remember as a child thinking about what I wanted to be - although I'm sure adults used to ask. As soon as I went to school drama and sport occupied my time - and if I could have had an alternative career it would have been as professional cricket player, but in all honesty I was never really good enough.

Clare: How did you get started as a writer?

Professionally I began in 1979 with Leeds Theatre in Education. I joined the company as an actor but it soon became clear that my real drive was writing and I began to write for the company who were very supportive. I think the training I had as an actor helped because I was always aware of the sound of the language and knew when something sounded truthful. It also gave me access to the world of Young Peoples' Theatre, which I have been active in my whole writing life. In the 1970s and 1980s new companies specialising in taking plays into schools and village halls were being created and these companies proved to be a great place to learn the craft of writing plays.

Katie: How do you come up with your ideas for your stories?

This is always a tricky question and I wonder if I know the answer. I know that I read a lot and dream a lot, by which I mean day dream really. I let my mind wander and somehow-ideas grow out of everything that has influenced me. I never try to force ideas. It is as if the idea for an image or a theme makes itself known to me. If that sounds overly romantic it would also be true that these ideas come to the surface when I'm actually writing, which I do for at least four hours a day.

Courtney: How do you get motivated to write?

I have got into a pattern of writing and the pattern is very useful. My main motivation would be to feel that I was reaching into new writing territory, either in style or theme. I like very much to be on commission to write a play for a company and have a deadline - which is a useful motivation too. I also then know that at some point actors will read my play for the first time and this is so exciting that it motivates me greatly.

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Teighe: Do you ever get bored of writing?

Sometimes the process of writing, which begins with a set of vague notions and feelings that eventually after much research and dreaming leads to actually writing something, can be very exhausting as opposed to boring. If I was truly bored with something I was writing I would give it up.

Clare: Who do you base Beauty on? Who do you base Beast on?

Neither are based on particular individuals but I did know that they should be more than archetypes with no individuality or depth. I wanted the Beast to have humour and Beauty to be stronger than often portrayed. Most of my plays are family plays and I'm sure my own family is reflected in some ways in all my work and since I have three sisters –perhaps this one more than most.

Sophie: Why did you include Beauty's sister in your story?

I was interested in the theme of duality that the story throws up; ugliness versus beauty, town versus country, courage versus cowardice etc. I tried to dramatise this throughout, so Beauty's sister is her character opposite which helps make Beauty a clearer character too.

Polka's Young Voices Panel is a diverse group of young people who come together regularly throughout the year, to share their views and opinions on theatre. In particular, the panel gets the opportunity to influence how Polka Theatre runs, and get the chance to express their views on our productions and facilities, as well as tell us what they'd like to see at Polka. Visit www.polkatheatre.com to find out more.

Interview with the designer, Laura McEwen:

What was your inspiration behind the Beauty and the Beast set design?

I began looking at art, design and architecture connected with the late 18th century, the period in which the play is set. This enabled me to think about finding the right shapes and style to use in the design. At the time I started working on the show I was really interested in the work of paper cut artists who create beautiful intricate two dimensional imagery often with quite a narrow colour palette. I felt this really connected with the shadowy 'cut out' images in the play and also gave us a language which could be adapted to give us the various locations.

Where do you start when designing a play?

Immerse myself in art, books, music and try and see a few exhibitions too. I always begin with a huge brainstorm from the script, images that spring to mind, areas to research etc.

How did you work with Roman, the director, when creating the design?

We have many meetings together where we throw ideas back and forth, change our minds and finally reach some decisions. It's great fun and Roman has a brilliantly creative mind so

he always brings loads of ideas of his own.

What themes and feelings in the play did you really want to bring out in the set design?

The dreamy, stormy nature of the play. Belle caught at the centre of a crazy whirlwind of events.

Which setting did you most enjoy creating and why?

The magic of the castle interior for the beast's entrance because there is the opportunity to be incredibly atmospheric.

Which character from Beauty and the Beast do you most identify with and why?

Probably Godwin because I have two daughters who can be pretty demanding at times!

Here are some of Laura's costume designs:

Beast:



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Daniel / Yan:



Godwin:



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Cassandra:



Belle:



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WARM UPS

Make Me A...: Divide the participants into groups of around five or six. Call out, 'Make me a...' and then choose an object or scene that relates to the play. For example, 'Make me a...

...ship in a storm.'
...spider.'
...rose garden.'
...castle.'

The groups then have to the count of ten to use their bodies to make that thing. They should be encouraged to work in silence. When they are ready, they should freeze in position. Give the groups an opportunity to look at each other.

Extensions: It can be fun to bring the object or scene to life on the count of three, encouraging the groups to think about appropriate movement and sound.

For older groups, try qualifying the noun with an adjective, for example, 'a lonely spider', 'an enchanted castle.' etc.

Yes Let's!:

Ask the group to begin moving around the space, making sure to use all areas of the room, not walking in circles and being aware of each other.

Start by calling out 'Let's all...' and add in a movement or action that relates to the play. For example:

'Let's all ride a horse across the moors.'

The group will respond by saying 'Yes let's!' enthusiastically. They then begin to do the suggested action.

Once this has been established with various different commands relating to the story, you can allow the group to call out their own suggestions. You might need to remind everyone that it's very important to keep listening out for new suggestions, even when they're doing an action.

Here are some more examples:

'Let's all steal a rose.'
'Let's all run like wolves.'
'Let's all sail a ship through a storm.'

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'Let's all dance.'

Stealing from the Beast:

In the play, Belle's father tries to steal a rose from Beast's garden. Beast catches him and threatens to kill him. This is a game in which players try to outwit Beast!

Ask the group to sit in a circle. Choose one person to be Beast. They should sit in the centre of the circle wearing a blindfold. Place a rose (or something to represent the rose) underneath Beast's chair. If you can attach a bell or something that will make a noise to the prop, so much the better.

Silently point at someone to indicate that they will be the thief. The chosen person must walk all the way around the outside of the circle, before approaching Beast's chair and attempting to grab the rose. The aim is to steal the rose from Beast without being heard.

Each time the Beast hears a noise, he must point towards the sound. If he points directly at the thief, then their turn ends and somebody else can have a go.

The Wolves are Coming!:

Choose two people to be wolves. They should stand at one end of the room, facing the wall.

Tell the rest of the group that they should skip around the room, as though enjoying a lovely sunny day in the woods.

Instruct the wolves that, once everyone's had a chance to skip for a moment, they should start to make growling or howling sounds.

As soon as the group hears the wolves, everyone should say 'The wolves are coming! The wolves are coming!' and run around in panic. The wolves should then turn around and come further into the space. When this happens, everyone must freeze. The wolves then have 30 seconds to make as many people laugh as they can. There are a couple of important rules to stick to:

Wolves MAY NOT touch anyone!

Frozen people must have their eyes open and may not stand right against the wall.

After 30 seconds, anyone who laughed also becomes a wolf. The whole thing is repeated until there is one outright winner.

Angry Beast:

The aim of this game is to build a sense of tension. Tell your group that, in order for this to happen, they must work hard at being quiet and focussed.

Choose a volunteer to be 'Angry Beast.' Angry Beast stands in the centre of the room. Everyone else should stand touching a wall.

Explain to the group that when you start to say 'tick, tick, tick' (or bang a slow beat on a drum) they must approach Angry Beast and make some form of physical contact. Once everyone is making contact, choose a moment to shout 'Angry Beast! Angry Beast!' When this happens, Angry Beast tries to tag as many people as possible before they can reach the safety of the wall.

Note: Make the group aware that you will only ever shout 'Angry Beast!' when everyone is focussed and quiet. Be prepared to wait!

Everyone who gets tagged, becomes part of Angry Beast. For round two, all the people making up Angry Beast should work out how to make the shape of him with their bodies (like in the 'Make Me A...' game). They should all be in physical contact with each other.

Repeat the process until there's just one survivor left, or until everyone has become part of Angry Beast!

EXERCISES

Sharing Opinions:

This exercise will encourage your group to think about the play and to share opinions about what they saw.

Ask the group to form a circle, everyone sitting on a chair. Explain that there will always be someone in the middle of the circle who doesn't have a chair (you can be the first person). The person in the middle must say something that is true about them. For example:

'Anyone who has a pet cat.'

Everyone to whom the statement applies should get up and move to another chair (not one immediately next to them). The person in the middle should try to get to a chair, thus leaving a new person standing up.

Once the group has got used to the format of the game, add a new rule that all their statements should be opinions about Beauty and the Beast. For example:

'Anyone who thought Cassandra was funny.'

'Anyone who liked the sword fight.'

'Anyone who thought the housekeeper was scary.'

If people are stuck for things to say, you can add the rule that any time the person in the middle says 'anyone who has red shoes', everybody has to change places.

Storm:

Beauty and the Beast opens with a ship caught in a huge storm at sea. All the actors work together to create the images and sounds of this onstage. Challenge your group to see if they can create their own storm sequence.

Ask everyone to sit at one end of the hall, facing your performance area. Tell the group that you are going to create the scene of a ship in a storm and ask them to have a think about the things they might see or hear in this scene.

Invite volunteers to enter the performance space, one at a time. When each child goes up, they should announce who or what they are and choose a position to freeze in. They can be a human character or an inanimate object, it is totally up to them. For example:

'I'm a sailor trying to pull the sails in.' (Freezes)

'I'm a seagull getting blown in the wind.' (Freezes)

'I'm a barrel rolling around.' (Freezes)

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As each new person enters the space, ask them to think about how the picture is forming and how they can add to it. Is there someone they can link on to? Does the picture look interesting? Are people using different levels?

Once everyone is in the space, give them command for the scene to come to life. Let the group act out the ship in the storm.

Extensions: You could introduce some simple props or lengths of fabric to help the group animate their scene. In the play, the actors use long lengths of cloth to represent the sails of the ship. See if your group can re-create this effect.

Once the group has spontaneously brought their tableaux to life, you could also structure it a little more. Give everyone a few minutes to work on their own to create three actions that they can repeat. Now, call out 'action 1', 'action 2', 'action 3' and watch how these work together. You can then 'conduct' the scene a little by calling out commands such as 'keep repeating action 1', 'change to action 2' etc.

To add another layer of interest, invite the group to add a sound effect or word to each action.

Town and Country:

The action of *Beauty and the Beast* takes place in London and Devon. There are opportunities to encourage the group to think about the contrasts between these town and country locations.

Visualisation: Ask everyone in the group to find a comfortable space in the room, where they can sit or lie with their eyes closed without distractions. Once everyone is settled, ask them to imagine Belle and Cassandra's town house.

Ask the group to think about all the senses; what do they hear, smell, what can they feel or taste? What is happening on the street below their window? You might need to give the group a little detail to help them imagine this period of time – horses and carts instead of cars etc!

Now ask them to imagine the house in Devon. What is different? What do they see outside the window now? Encourage the group, again, to think about all the senses.

Note: You could underscore this exercise with music, particularly if you'd like to establish a particular tone or atmosphere for each location.

One Word Circle: Following the visualisation, ask each group member to share a word that relates to one of the locations. Can everyone guess whether they're referring to town or country?

Soundscapes: Choose either town or country and tell the group which location you will be thinking about. Staying in the circle, ask the group to close their eyes again. Tell them that, in a moment, you would like them to make a sound that might be heard in that location; this could be vocal, or made using the body or the floor. When you give the cue, ask everyone to make their sound and to keep repeating it until you tell them to stop.

When you have finished, discuss the impact of the soundscape with the group. Was it effective? Did anyone have a particular picture in their mind when you heard the sounds?

Now repeat the process for the other location. Is there a big contrast between the two soundscapes?

Extension 1, conducted soundscapes: You can do (or repeat) this exercise with eyes open, using a conductor. The conductor will point to people when it's time for them to start making their sound and will agree a signal for 'stop'. Other signals can be built in along the way if appropriate, for example raising and lowering volume, speeding up or slowing down. In this version, it is easier to hear contributions from individuals before building up into a whole group soundscape.

Once signals have been agreed, you can pass the responsibility (and power!) of conducting to members of the group.

Extension 2, small group soundscapes: After the initial whole group soundscape, split into smaller groups of around 5. Each group should build on the initial ideas to rehearse a soundscape that will introduce the audience to one of the locations.

Ask each group to consider the emotion or atmosphere they would like to evoke. Encourage them to play with where they place the audience. How close will they come to the audience? Do they perform behind the audience members' backs? Could the audience be enclosed by performers? There should be time to play with lots of different ways to make sounds, perhaps introducing simple instruments too.

Once the audience is seated each time, ask them to close their eyes and listen carefully to each group's performance. Ask for feedback on what was successful, what images or feelings came to mind etc.

Daniel Knightly's Adventures:

In the play, Daniel Knightly loves to tell tall tales about his adventures. See if your class can come up with some unlikely stories of their own. Here are a few great storytelling exercises.

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Fortunately / Unfortunately:

Ask everyone to find a partner. Explain that they will work together to create a story. One person will start every sentence 'fortunately', the other should start every sentence 'unfortunately'. Give the group a sentence about Daniel that will start their story, for example:

'Daniel climbed aboard the pirate ship.'

The participants should add to the story alternating between 'Fortunately' and 'Unfortunately' sentences. For example:

'Daniel climbed aboard the pirate ship.'

'Fortunately, he spotted a huge treasure chest.'

'Unfortunately, the pirates captured him and tied him up.'

'Fortunately, he managed to wriggle free and push one of the pirates overboard.' Etc.

See if the groups can use this format to embellish a tale about Daniel. This is a great exercise for introducing the idea that good stories should have problems in them that the protagonist has to solve.

And Better / And Worse:

This is similar to the above game, but can be played in pairs or around a circle. It's a great game for introducing the idea of one-upmanship and encouraging bold storytelling.

Start off with a simple story opener, as in the game above.

The next person must add something to the story, starting their sentence with 'And better' or 'And worse', depending which version you have chosen. For example, an 'And better' game might go:

- Daniel climbed aboard the pirate ship.
 - And better, there was a pot of treasure.
 - And better, the treasure was unguarded.
 - And better, Daniel dived into the treasure and discovered a tunnel to a secret cave.
 - And better, the cave was made of ice cream.
- Etc.

It's important that each new sentence builds on the existing story and that it makes the situation better, or worse, depending which version you're playing. The suggestions tend to get wilder and wilder; this is to be encouraged!

Telling / Acting:

Ask everyone to pair up. This time, partners should label themselves A and B. Explain that A will tell one of Daniel's tall tales, whilst B acts it out. It might be helpful to give everyone a title as a starting point. Here are some suggestions:

My daring escape from the crocodile pit.
The day I stole a flying carpet.
How I became the king of China.
My journey into outer space.

Once everyone had had a go, swap the roles of A and B over so that everyone gets a go at telling and acting out the story.

Persuasive Writing:

There are many points in the story where one character needs to persuade another to do something for them. Ask your class to write one of the following persuasive letters:

Daniel writing to Cassandra to ask her to let him see her.
Belle writing to Beast to persuade him to let her visit her sick father.
Cassandra writing to Belle to persuade her to come home from Beast's castle.
Belle's father writing to Beast to persuade him to let Belle go free.
Cassandra writing to Daniel to persuade him to kill Beast.