



## Post-Performance Drama Lesson Plans: The Muddy Choir

### Learning outcomes

These resources are designed to continue to embed ideas and dramatic techniques explored in *The Muddy Choir* into the student's learning and assist them in applying these ideas to their own work.

### Summary

Students will have the opportunity to develop their skills in numerous areas within the Drama curriculum. The plans focus on developing skills in improvisation, character development, the use of song within narrative development, strategies for devising, character status and children's learning, across a variety of areas including literacy. These session plans may be adapted or combined to suit the needs of your pupils. We'd be very pleased to hear your feedback, or any suggestions you have for developing these resources further.

### About Theatre Centre

Theatre Centre is a professional theatre company touring new plays for the benefit of children and young people. A registered charity, Theatre Centre has been commissioning new writing and touring to schools and venues across the UK since 1953. We work closely with artists, young people and teachers to ensure we consistently create high-quality, life-enhancing theatre experiences for young audiences. Find out more about our current touring productions via our website at [www.theatre-centre.co.uk](http://www.theatre-centre.co.uk) or give us a call on 020 7729 3066.

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# 1. Improvisation and building a character

## Aim:

- To encourage spontaneity in thought and action
- To develop confidence in improvisation and develop skills

## Resources:

Script Extracts 1 and 2

Activity	Description
Introduction	<p>The characters of Will, Robbie and Jumbo have been friends for years and share a past. Events and memories from this past have a clear impact on their relationship in the play.</p> <p>This session looks at the use of improvisation to fill in some of the background gaps for the characters and to gain a better understanding of the way in which they relate to each other in the present.</p>
Warm up: Chain Improvisation (Freeze)	<p>*Create a circle and ask for two volunteers to stand in the middle of the circle. Give them an idea of a location and a situation and tell them you are going to clap your hands to indicate them starting.</p> <p>*The pair will begin to improvise. At any time, a student can call out “freeze”. When he/she freezes – the “caller” student can enter the circle, tap the other student lightly on the shoulder and assume the same position as he/she had previously adopted i.e. if she/he was kneeling with one arm reaching up, the next students would do exactly the same.</p> <p>*The new improviser will take the improvisation in a new direction i.e. if the previous improviser had been on one knee, reaching up to propose, the next improviser might have tripped over on the road and be reaching up for help. The “chain” can continue in this way, it might be best to set up a time limit at the beginning.</p>
Back home: Task 1	<p>*Ask the students to get into groups of three and give them the Script Extract 1. Ask them to read through this text extract a couple of times and then to physically “walk through” the scene.</p> <p>*Explain that they are going to undertake an improvisation task, which brings to life a glimpse of the past that the characters share. Explain that they are going to improvise a scene, set in the football match, following a set of instructions. This scene can take place either when they are watching the game of football or having a break:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There has to be a moment of conflict between Will and Robbie</li> <li>2. There has to be a moment of silence</li> <li>3. Jumbo has to bring Robbie and Will back together</li> <li>4. They has to be a moment of joy in which they all share</li> </ol> <p>*Ask the students to read through the instructions and improvise this scene. After the first “draft” of this improvised scene, encourage the students to</p>

	<p>discuss their scene, based on these points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you think was successful?</li> <li>2. What could be developed?</li> <li>3. Was there anything that seemed to lead the improvisation in the “wrong” direction? What was this?</li> <li>4. Are there any additions that you would like to make?</li> </ol> <p>*Then, ask them to do a second “round” of improvisation and then a third, refining and distilling the developing action of the scene between rounds. Ask for volunteers to show these improvised scenes and encourage students to offer constructive feedback.</p>
<p>The Friendship: Will, Robbie and Jumbo</p>	<p>*Ask the students to get into pairs. In these pairs, ask them to choose a pairing within the friendship of the boys - either Will/Robbie, Jumbo/Will or Robbie/Jumbo. Hand out a Script Extract 2 from the resources below and ask them to read through it a few times.</p> <p>*Then, based on this scene and what they remember from the rest of the play, ask them to discuss the following points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you describe this friendship in three adjectives? For example words that could describe Will and Rob’s friendship might be “tense”, “interdependent”, “destructive”, “loving”, “complicated” etc.</li> <li>2. Do you think one of these friends has something the other wants? This doesn’t necessarily refer to a physical possession, it is more likely to be a personality/trait or habit of behaviour. For example, Jumbo might want Will’s bravery or Robbie might secretly admire Jumbo’s openness/loyalty.</li> <li>3. What or who do you think is keeping this friendship together?</li> </ol> <p>*Ask your students to consider the second point i.e. what the two friends in this friendship might want that they feel the other one has? Ask students to focus on one of these characters.</p> <p>*As a pair, they are going to think about how this “dynamic” might have been created in their friendship. Ask the pairs to think about a moment from the past, it could be twelve, ten or five years ago – bearing in mind that the characters are 19 at the time of the play - that either demonstrates an example of this “dynamic” in the friendships or hints at how it first started. Give the students the following instructions: 1) to create a frozen image of this moment 2) allow each student one line of dialogue each 3) using this line of dialogue as a base, ask them to improvise a short scene which brings this moment to life. In this improvisation, the following must happen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It must be clear to the audiences what one character “envies” or wants that the other person has.</li> <li>• The other character must not realise that this envy exists</li> <li>• The situation between the characters must be resolved.</li> </ul> <p>*Once the students have completed the first “round” of this improvisation, they should undergo a similar process of distillation and refinement as they went through in the previous exercise.</p>

Play a scene

\*Ask the students to go back to the script and try putting it on its feet. Ask them to read through the extract twice, before putting it on its feet.

Once all students have developed a strong sense of the scene, ask for volunteer performers to share both their improvised scene and the extract of the script in quick succession.

Lead a discussion focusing on whether improvising the scene gave them any clues into the present dynamic of the relationship and how it might have effected their re-playing of the scene,

The Muddy Choir rehearsal photo 2018



## 2. Role of song in creating a narrative

### Aims:

- To build up student's understanding of the use of song in developing subtext, action and character development
- To develop student's practical use of song in creating their own narratives

**Resources:** Script Extract 3; Music search engine (i.e. Spotify/Youtube) and audio device

Activity	Description
Introduction	Within <i>The Muddy Choir</i> , the role of song is crucial to the style of the piece – bringing movement, life, pace and depth to a necessarily static mode of staging and to the dimensions of the play - bringing an element of the past into the present. It is also a means of giving us information about the less visible, sub-textual life of the characters and the way they relate to each other.
Warm up	<p>*Ask the students to find a place in the room and to sit down/lie down on their own with a piece of paper and pen next to them. To begin with, ask them to close their eyes and explain that you are going to play two very different songs: The Lampton Worm and Parting Glass.</p> <p>*Explain that the first time you play the songs, they just need to listen. Then, ask them to create two columns on their paper, with two headings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How it makes them feel</li> <li>• What it reminds them of or what it makes them think about</li> </ul> <p>*After hearing the song for the second time, ask the students to make notes under these two column titles. Repeat this process for the second song.</p> <p>*Lead a group discussion in which you invite the students to share their feelings evoked by the song – if they feel comfortable doing so. Then, ask them to get into points and discuss the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role do you think music played in the production?</li> <li>• How did it help you understand the characters?</li> </ul>
Music and the script	<p>*Ask the students to get into groups of three. Hand out the Script Extract 3 to the students and ask them to allocate the parts of Robbie, Will and Jumbo within the group. Instruct them to read through the scene twice and then to physically walk through the scene. Tell the students that when they come to the song, they can talk through it.</p> <p>*Play the song again. At the end of the song, the stage directions outline the fact that <i>“it has clearly affected them.”</i> Ask each student to write a short monologue, describing what each character might be thinking once they have finished singing. Once they have completed this exercise, ask for volunteers to show their monologues to the rest of the class.</p> <p>*Ask the students to talk about the dramatic benefits of choosing this song and</p>

	its role in the scene. Ask them to think about how this could be done otherwise.
Music and narrative	<p>*Ask the class to think about a song that they feel has a relevance and meaning to their lives at the moment. In their group of three, they can discuss their song selection with each other, Explain that they are going to use this song as a stimulus for creating a scene in the future. Ask them to choose a member of the group and a song that has a particularly interesting meaning.</p> <p>*Ask the students to imagine a scene ten years in their future. This scene could take place at home, in the work place, or in a place of recreation. The students will need to think about the relationship between the characters and what is happening in the scene. In creating the scene, students must consider the following set of conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has to be three characters involved, including the protagonist i.e. the character whose song has been chosen.</li> <li>• The song has to clearly effect the action of the scene</li> <li>• The scene should last no more than 2/3 mins</li> </ul> <p>In creating this scene, the students should also consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is happening in the scene that means the song needs to be played?</li> <li>• What the subtext for the scene could be and whether the song could help bring this to life?</li> <li>• How each of the characters might feel after the song has finished?</li> <li>• What would happen next?</li> <li>• In what way the current location of the scene could contrast with the memories of the song i.e. in <i>The Muddy Choir</i>, the songs evoked cosy memories of home that clashed with the awful reality of war; can the students think of a similar contrast for their scene?</li> </ul> <p>*Once students have had the opportunity to improvise/draft/devise this scene and distil the points of action, ask for volunteers to show their scenes to the group, using music software where possible to include the song in the scene (if it is to be played, not sung).</p> <p>*In their groups, ask students to come up with three points which describe how the use of song can enhance the action of a scene, build a character or develop a line of narrative. Groups can then feedback to the rest of the class.</p>

### 3. Role of space in building characters and story

**Aim:**

- To enable students to consider how the use of space has a clear impact of story, characterisation and narrative

**Resources:** Script Extract 4 and The Three Little Pigs; Flipchart paper, Masking/LX tape

Activity	Description
Introduction	<p>The action of <i>The Muddy Choir</i> is set within a trench in the First World War. The space within the trenches was severely limited and this significantly contributed to the pressure placed on the characters and the way in which they related to each other. Drawing on an example from the script, students can begin to develop an understanding of the role of space within the creation of narrative and characters.</p>
Warm Up: Space and story	<p>*Ask the students to find a space in the room and to visualise their journey from home to school. Then, ask the students to mark out this journey across the space. Split the group in half and tell the performing group that they can use the full space to re-create their journeys. Then, ask the other half of the group to respond to the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was there a noticeable movement rhythm?</li> <li>• How did the “characters” relate to each other?</li> <li>• Do you feel as though there was a leading emotional quality within the scene? If so, what do you think it was?</li> </ul> <p>*Place down markers around the space that limits the available amount of room significantly. Ask the same group to replay their journeys and then ask the same questions again. Pay close attention to the ways in which making very simple shifts to the use of space can directly impact the action of the characters within it.</p>
The space of the trenches	<p>*Get the students into groups of 4 and distribute flipchart paper to each of these groups. Ask the students to divide it into two parts. In one part, ask them to describe the space and defining features of the trenches, as they remember it from the play.</p> <p>*On the other part, ask them to make notes about what impact that they think that the space had on the telling of the story – see how these points correlate to each other and share with the class.</p>
Scripts and space	<p>*In the same groups, distribute the Script Extract 4. Ask the students to read through the extract twice and then walk through the scene. Tell the students to play the scene across a fairly open space. In the meantime, mark up a space no bigger than 2 metres<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>*Ask for a group of volunteers and first, ask them to perform the scene as they have been doing. Then, ask them to play it in this very confined space. After they have played the scene, discuss the differences between the two, considering the following points:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the shifts in space changes the character relationships</li> <li>• How the general dynamic of the scene shifts</li> </ul>
Different spaces	<p>*Distribute the story of Three Little Pigs in Session 4 resource to the students, staying in their groups of four. First of all, ask them to read through the story, choose characters and “draft” a rough staging of the story.</p> <p>*Then, ask the students to tell the story in three spatial configurations and give each group a roll of masking/LX tape and explain that they can use it to outline the outer perimeters of the space.</p> <p>*Give the groups time to devise different ways and means of telling the story within this space. Ask for volunteers to show their “pieces” and then engage students in a discussion, exploring their different use of spaces and how this impacted upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The character relationships</li> <li>• The story</li> <li>• The dynamic of the storytelling</li> </ul> <p>Re-cap session and bring to a close.</p>

## 4. Transitions and staging

### Aim:

- To enable students to consider the inherent limitations of some scenarios and how to find creative solutions to staging
- To develop students' understanding of how to use transitions to develop pace and rhythm within a performance.

**Resources:** Chairs for each member of the group.

Activity	Description
Introduction	The physical action within The Muddy Choir is necessarily static. As referred to above, the story happens within a very small amount of physical space and the style is predominately naturalistic. There is little room for huge amounts of staging innovation or dynamic physicality. In this session, students will explore the use of transitions to develop the rhythm and meaning of a story.
Discussion	<p>*Ask the students to get into pairs and ask them to talk about the transitions within the production. Ask them to consider the use of movement and song within the transitions: did the transitions work well? Is there anything they think didn't work well? Is there anything they would want to develop?</p> <p>*Lead a discussion focusing on the staging-based limitations of The Muddy Choir (single location, naturalistic etc.) and why the transitions played such an important role within the piece – in terms of both narrative development and style.</p>
Warm up; Point to Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the students to choose a point in the room and to travel to it. Then, ask them to choose another point and to travel to that. Then, to find two more points and to travel to those. They should now have a sequence of four points and transitions between them.</li> <li>• Ask the students to repeat the sequence. Once they feel comfortable with the pattern, ask them to vary the movement of the transitions i.e. to experiment with different physical movements – skipping, crawling, hopping, running – with different speeds and different levels.</li> <li>• Ask them to think about how they feel after they have moved in a certain way and how that impacts upon their next “path” of transiting.</li> <li>• Maybe split the group in half so that one group can watch the half and vice versa</li> </ul>
Action and transitions	<p>*Ask the students to get into groups of five and explain that you are going to lead them in a transition based exercise. Allocate five chairs per group and then give the following instructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set up the 5 chairs in a grouping</li> <li>2. Ask the students to stand about 2 metres away from the chairs in a group</li> <li>3. They must be silent and still until one group member decides to clap their hands</li> <li>4. When this happens, the whole group have to move directly to these 5</li> </ol>

	<p>chairs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. When they arrive at the chairs, they must be silent and still</li> <li>6. Once the students have created this sequence, ask them to repeat it a couple of times.</li> <li>7. Then, tell the group they can vary the pace and style of their transitions – as in the earlier point-to-point exercise. They don't necessarily have to travel via the shortest route between these two locations and can use as much/as little space as they like.</li> <li>8. The student who claps can determine how the group travels to the chairs.</li> <li>9. Tell the students to repeat a number of times.</li> </ol> <p>*Ask a few groups to show back and do feedback, picking up on the journeys between the two points; how the different ways of travelling impacted upon the feelings of the “characters” and how it affected the “action” of what happened when they arrived at their destination.</p>
<p>Development of sequence</p>	<p>*Ask students to select one means of travelling/transiting that they particularly enjoyed or felt was of dramatic interest. Explain that they are going to develop the action of the sequence, focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who the characters are?</li> <li>• What the action of the first scene could be (with a maintained restriction on stillness)?</li> <li>• Why the characters have to move to the other location?</li> <li>• How do they feel when they arrive?</li> <li>• What happens when they arrive at the chairs?</li> </ul> <p>*Give the students time to work through this sequence and then ask for volunteers to present their work.</p> <p>*Then, lead a feedback session which specifically encourages the students to consider how the “gaps” (transitions) between scenes, can be as crucial and dramatically relevant as the scenes themselves. Ask the students to give examples of this – from the production and from their own work</p> <p><i>Think about the fact the travelling isn't necessarily a transition – that it could be part of the scene.</i></p> <p><i>Talk about focusing and framing the action.</i></p>

## 5. Using characters and scenes as a stimulus for devising

Aims:

- To encourage students to explore the ways in which existing productions can stimulate the creation of new work.
- To allow students to work on creating the premise of a new piece of work

Resources: Photograph of three soldiers; Character Breakdowns; Script Extract 5

Activity	Description
Introduction	This session is geared towards helping students to use the action/characters of <i>The Muddy Choir</i> as a springboard to create a new piece of work. It is focused on encouraging students to consider the ways in which they can extract points of interest from the script, reflect on the moments that can be extended and shaped in different ways. In using the script as a stimulus, students could take themes, ideas or characters and shift them into a different time period, setting or perspective.
Warm up	<p>Ask the students to get into groups of 4. Distribute the photo of the three soldiers to each groups and give the following instructions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about what was happening at the time the photo was taken</li> <li>• Consider what the soldiers might have been thinking at the time the photo was taken</li> <li>• Choose one of these thoughts – whether it be a hope, a memory, an idea or a day-dream - and create a still-image/freeze frame of it</li> <li>• Create a very short scene which brings this image to life</li> </ul> <p>Ask for volunteers to present their short scenes and feedback.</p>
Characters as stimuli	<p>*Distribute Session 5 Character Breakdowns for Will, Jumbo and Robbie, with each group receiving a different character. In the same groups of 4, ask students to look at it and to use it, alongside what they remember from the play, to develop their knowledge of the characters.</p> <p>*Then, ask them to work together to recall their character’s relationship with their family and friends on the home front i.e. in England. Who or what did they refer to the most? What or you do you feel that they missed?</p> <p>*Ask the students to, in the role of their selected characters, each write a letter home – thinking about who this letter is being addressed to and how this impacts upon the style and content of the letter.</p> <p>*Explain that when they have all done, the group will select one of these to work with. When the letter has been created, ask the students to imagine the chosen family/friend receiving this letter.</p> <p>*Tell the students to form a family or friend grouping – involving all the students in the group and give them the instructions below. Re-iterate to the students that these instructions are to help the students develop the backbone for the piece and they should feel free to make additions/changes/developments to the action of their scene. The instructions are as follows:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They must all be present at the reading of the letter, whether the letter itself is read by one member of the group or – for some reason – the reading of the letter is shared amongst the reading of the group</li> <li>• One character has to have a negative reaction to something that has been said in the letter</li> <li>• Another character has to comfort/console/counsel this character</li> <li>• Another character has to react positively to something that has been said in the letter</li> <li>• The scene must end in a moment of unison between the characters, whether this be in joy/sadness or anger</li> </ul> <p>*Ask for volunteers to show their scene. Then, in their groups ask students to imagine that this scene belongs to a separate play; a play about the home front. Explain that the scene they have just created can be placed at any point in this play – but that they need to consider what happens before and afterwards i.e. a three point narrative plan.</p> <p>*Tell the students to generate a five-point narrative plan for the rest of the play. In basic terms, they need to draw upon the characters they have created and the beginnings of a story, to draft a very rough idea for the piece. In regard to timing, this could happen across any length of time, from one day to three years; the action could be set within the war or go beyond it.</p> <p>Ask for volunteers to share their drafted narrative structures and feedback.</p>
Script as stimuli	<p>*Explain that within the play, a great deal of the action happens outside the confines of the trenches. To concentrate “on the gaps” in the play i.e. what is unsaid or not shown – can be an interesting way of developing narrative material.</p> <p>*Distribute Script Extract 5 Robbie’s monologue. In pairs, ask them to read through it twice, using two different pairs of readers. Once they have read through the scene, hand out flipchart paper and pens and ask them to reflect on what they can remember about the “progression” of Will’s military career and his relationship with the Sargent Major. Ask the students to choose 3 of these ideas and to create a still image of each of them.</p> <p>*Then, ask them to choose one of these moments to develop into a scene, involving Will and the Sargent Major and see some of these scenes. Ask the students to think about whether – if they had to choose a protagonist for a “spin-off” piece of work, which character it would be and why. Invite them to consider which character has most dramatic potential and what they would like to explore further.</p> <p>Discuss as a group and close.</p>

## 6. Character Status

Aim:

- To enable students to learn more about how the status of characters impact on the ways in which they relate to each other
- To explore status as a means of understanding characters

Resources: Script Extract 6, Cards, Synopsis, Paper

Activity	Description
Introduction	<p>The majority of the play’s narrative “thrust” emerges from the one in which the three main characters relate to each other and the dynamic of the “status” play that exists between them. The action develops when the status patterns shift i.e. when Jumbo decides to raise his status in the group, is when he takes control of his fate. Will and Robbie’s relationship is characterised by the status battles between them.</p> <p>Students will be encouraged to reflect on how an understanding of the way in which characters “wear” or “inhabit” their status can be instrumental in understanding how they relate to themselves and the world around them.</p>
Warm up	<p><b>Activity 1:</b> Separate half the people into A's and B's. The A's, you tell to stand up straight, take up space when they walk, and make and maintain eye contact, or make direct eye contact and then look away.</p> <p>Tell the B's tell to look down, take small steps, and any time they come near someone, to briefly make eye contact, look away, then look straight back. Anyway, everyone walks around the room interacting with the others in their prescribed way. After a few minutes, switch roles. At the end, ask the group how they felt when they were the A's and B's and compare the different experiences of the students. Discuss other “behaviours” of high and low status</p> <p><b>Activity 2:</b> Ask for two volunteers and tell them to each draw a card blindly from your pack of cards. The card will give a status to the actors, Ace/2 being the lowest and Queen/King being the highest. The rest of the group will act as the audience. Ask the group to set a location for the performers – i.e. a shop, a train, a park etc. and to give them a situation.</p> <p>Ask the students to begin to improvise, “playing” the status that their card has given them. Keep the scene fairly short and ask the audience to guess what status they were playing. Also, discuss how the way in which characters played their status impacted upon the narrative of the scene.</p>

<p>Playing low/high status</p>	<p>*Ask the students to get into pairs and distribute some paper/pens. Ask them to divide the piece of paper in half and in one half, write “high status” and in the other “low status”.</p> <p>*First of all, ask them to consider why people play “high” or “low” status to get what they want. Tell them to make notes in the corresponding side of the paper.</p> <p>*Then, ask them to think of a specific situation – based on their notes – where somebody might play high or low status to get what they want. They should create a still image of this situation.</p> <p>*Developing this still image, students should create a short scene, in which one person must play high or low status, they must be clear about what they want and the students can decide whether they end up getting what they want. Ask for volunteers to show a few scenes.</p> <p>*Lead a feedback discussion, exploring how people can play low or high status and how this can work to people’s advantage, in both cases, to help them get what they want.</p>
<p>Status at play</p>	<p>*In groups of 4, ask students to read through Script Extract 6. The status fluctuates throughout the scene – but ask the students to give each characters a score from 1-10 to rate their overriding status level. Once they have established this, ask them to extend this rate – so that if they were playing a high level – to raise it higher and if they gave their character a low status, to lower it further.</p> <p>*Ask for some students to show their scenes and lead a discussion exploring the impact of this status change on the relationship between the characters.</p> <p>*Then, subvert the status levels of the characters, so that the high becomes low and low becomes high. Rehearse and play these scenes. Again, discussion how this impacts on the characters and the action of the scenes.</p>

## 7. Writing a Review

Aims:

- To help students confidence in writing a review and develop essential skills in critical thinking

Activity	Description
Introduction	When thinking about reviewing a piece we automatically think about writing but there are many different ways reviews can be shared. You may wish to think about creating reviews for TV, radio, websites as well as newspapers. This activity will allow you to create an imaginative response to seeing the play, thinking about all aspects of the production.
Preparation	<p>After seeing the performance make some initial notes: what was the play about and what happened in it? How do you feel after seeing the piece? Why? What do you remember most strongly? Why? What did you like and dislike about the production?</p> <p>Remember a review is about sharing your views on a piece supported by examples to illustrate your ideas and thoughts.</p>
Creating the review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start with a strong image that will get your audience's attention and introduces the play. i.e. <i>"Despite the title, there's nothing wooden about Cirque Alfonse's joyous, homespun circus show. Originally created in a Quebec barn, it features three generations of the Carabinier family (including two-year-old Arthur), a local band and some friends who just happen to have worked with some major-league circus outfits"</i> (Lyn Gardner, The Guardian on <i>Timber</i>)</li> <li>Once you have done this, include a SHORT synopsis of the play. What genre is the play? Comedy, tragedy, political, etc. Remember a review is much more than just repeating the plot.</li> <li>Think about how the play made you feel and how it relates to your life</li> <li>Move on to your likes and dislikes of the piece. How did the actors bring the characters to life? Try to reference the design team and reflect on the use of the production elements – sound design, set design and music – and the ways in which they gave the production meaning and flair. Use the names of the designers and actors where relevant.</li> <li>What effect did the play have on you and the audience around you?</li> <li>Do you think the creative team achieved their vision for the production?</li> </ul>

## Script Extracts/ Resources for The Muddy Choir Lesson Plans

### Session 1: Improvisation and building a character

- **Script Extract 1:**

Will: Incoming!

*Explosions ring out. They dive to the floor.*

Will: Stay down! Stay down!

*Explosions continue and then stop. They all look up.*

Will: All clear!

*They get back on their feet.*

Will: I told you the singing were a stupid idea! We've only been in the new observation post five minutes and already you playing the fool.

Robbie: Here, maybe I was just happy to be alive, eh? Never know how long you'll make it out here. Not even safe in your own trench sometimes...

Jumbo: Oh, I loved it! Just what I needed! We've not done that for a while have we? Took us right back to before the war. Right back to Sunderland. Terraced houses, steel ships and watching the lads smash the magpies on a Saturday afternoon. Pie in hand, scarf round neck and mam stood next to us. Ohhh,pie. There's a thought. Will, you fancy pie?

Will: Nah. That's alreet, Jumbo. I'll just be up here checking your singing didn't start a new offensive.

*Will takes up a position looking out over the front.*

- **Script Extract 2**

**Will/Jumbo**

*Jumbo alone. He has clearly been crying. Will enters.*

Will: Where's Robbie?

Jumbo: Don't know.

Will: You're not supposed to be by yourself! God, I'm going to kill that lad when I see him. You alright?

*Jumbo doesn't respond.*

Will: Sergeant Major says the attack is imminent. I know they say that a lot but the Sergeant Major seemed confident of action soon. We should be ready to go at a moment's notice. Keep an ear out for the three whistles. We've got to be ready to sing straightafter. It's good to have you on board, Jumbo.

Jumbo: I can't do it, Will. I can't sing like I used to before. I can't hold the note like I used to. It's different out here and I don't know what's happened to me. Rob knows I cannot do it. Rob can tell. He can hear it. I can't hide it from him any longer. I get scared when I sing.

Will: Of the bombs?

Jumbo: No, it's not that, bombs are bombs I know that. It's different. I get scared inside. You ever feel that? As soon as I start singing, as soon as I hold a note, I feel myself shaking inside, I hear the note wobbling and I want to cry. I know it's wrong, I know I'm soft, but I can't do it without shaking. It's like everything comes up, everything that was down comes up. You promise not to tell, Rob?

*Will nods.*

Jumbo: I'm sorry, I'm weak.

Will: You're not weak, Jumbo. None of us were meant for this. None of us were built for this. We should be back in the docks.

Jumbo: Who do you shoot at?

*Will stops in his tracks. He believes Jumbo has found him out.*

Will: What? What do you mean?

Jumbo: Ya know. When we have to fire over the top at the German lads.

Will: Oh, I...

Jumbo: I shoot over their heads. I aim just past them, just to the side, or sometimes dead in the wrong direction. Is that what you do?

*Will nods.*

Will: Aye.

Jumbo: I thought so. You ever think about them?

Will: The Germans?

Jumbo: Aye.

Will: I think about what they're planning, where they might be, when they might be looking at us. Watching us.

Jumbo: I think about what they're having for supper. I wonder if they're got supper at all. I wonder what they think when they hear us sing. I wonder why they bomb us because of it. I wouldn't bomb us if I heard singing. I would just listen to it. Even if it was Germans.

Will: Well you're different, Jumbo.

Jumbo: I'm sure some of them are the same.

Will: Maybe.

*Beat.*

Jumbo: I don't want ta be shot at anymore, Will.

Will: I don't want you to be shot at either, mate.

Jumbo: You seem really strong oot here. I'm really proud of ya. So is Rob I. know he doesn't show it like but we're really grateful for you looking out for us like this. I don't know what I'd do without the two of you.

### **Robbie/Will**

Robbie: So, how do you think it's going?

Will: Not great. Probably going be here another six months before we advance. The winter will be hard but I guess we'll just digin again.

Robbie: No, Will. I meant the band.

Will: Oh, Great. Yes, I think it's going well.

Robbie: You think the officers will like us?

Will: Of course.

*Robbie fist pumps.*

Robbie: Aye, I knew it. Today was a bit of a mess though wasn't it? I never thought we'd get through it.

Will: You got ta de your rehearsal didn't you?

Robbie: I don't think we can call that a rehearsal, Will. It's hardly much use when two lads are singing and one's just mumbling through.

Will: We got through it though. That's the most important thing.

Robbie: Aye, but Jumbo's hardly on top form is he? And you laid it on a bit thick with him back there. Threatening ta tell the Sergeant Major? That's dark, Will. Never realised you were that into the singing.

Will: Just doing what you couldn't do, lad. We have to keep him under control. I'm worried he might try and run.

Robbie: What? Desert?

Will: You can see it in his eyes, he's on the edge. Can't hold a rifle anymore without it shaking in his hands. We need to have a plan to watch him. If he tries to run we need to catch him. That means one of us needs to be with him at all times.

Robbie: You worried about if he runs?

Will: Of course.

Robbie: 'coz he'll end up in front of a firing squad?

*Will is silent.*

Robbie: That would be bad news wouldn't it, 'coz you might end up looking down your sights at him.

Will: Shut up, Rob! Shut up now! We had an agreement.

Robbie: It's alright, Will. I know. I remember. I remember you said. And I remember you said you'd only do it once. So there's nothing to worry about is there?

Will: Keep your voice down.

Robbie: Mind you, imagine if Jumbo found out in his current state?

That'd push him right over the edge, wouldn't it! You know, if he found out you'd shot a man!

*Will casts a worried look to Jumbo making sure he's asleep.*

Will: You said you wouldn't say anything!  
Robbie: Sorry, Will. It just slipped out.  
Will: We're in a war, it was going to happen at some point.  
Robbie: But someone on our own side?

*Will stops. It's the first time it's been said out loud.*

Will: That boy was going to die anyway, nee matter who was in the firing squad. What does it matter if it was us or another lad what pulled the trigger, eh? You think I don't regret it everyday? You think I don't wish it wasn't me and that it was someone else did it? I'd give anything but the truth is that it's messy out here and sometimes you need ta get your hands dirty, you need to take responsibility in order to take care of your mates. Summit ye wouldn't understand.

### **Jumbo/Robbie**

*Jumbo and Robbie in the trench. Robbie is using a small mirror, a comb and spit to style his hair. Jumbo is trying to sleep. Occasionally Jumbo scratches himself and wriggles from side to side, each time he does it disturbs Robbie. The actors have a small game here. Eventually it annoys Robbie too much.*

Robbie: Will you stop bloody wriggling!  
Jumbo: I can't! It's the bloody lice!  
Robbie: Burn them off then!  
Jumbo: I don't know how!  
Robbie: You've done it a million times!  
Jumbo: I know but they keep coming back!  
Robbie: Then just put up with it and stop rolling around!  
Jumbo: I'm trying!

*They resume their previous positions until Jumbo begins scratching again. Robbie is even more frustrated than before but tries to control himself.*

Jumbo: Where's Will?  
Robbie: Kissing the Sergeant Major's arse probably. Some kind'a extra duty or summit like he always is.  
Jumbo: Rob?  
Robbie: Aye.  
Jumbo: You ever think about home?  
Robbie: Of course. All the time.  
Jumbo: What do you think about?  
Robbie: The things I miss.  
Jumbo: Like?  
Robbie: Like my own space.  
Jumbo: Me too. Although I never really had my own space. Always sharing with my brothers an' sisters. Tiny little house. Still miss it though.  
Robbie: The girls as well. I miss the girls.  
Jumbo: And mum of course. Miss mum.  
Robbie: I miss your mum too.  
Jumbo: Robbie!

*Robbie laughs.*

Robbie: And the clubs of course. Oh God I miss the clubs. The music, the girls, the suits, the dresses, the girls, the lights, the girls, the girls.

*Jumbo heaves himself onto his side and Robbie loses it.*

Robbie: Right! That's it! Enough! Shirt off!  
Jumbo: It's not my shirt it's my trousers...

*Robbie looks at Jumbo.*

Robbie: Really?

*Jumbo shrugs in acknowledgment.*

Robbie: Fine. Trousers off.

*Jumbo takes his trousers off and hands them to Robbie who holds them at a distance.*

Robbie: Candle.

*Jumbo rummages through his belongings for a candle. He holds it out to Robbie.*

Robbie: Take these.

*He hands the trousers back to Jumbo.*

Jumbo Thanks, Rob.  
Robbie: Divn't mention it. I mean seriously, divn't mention it te anyone.

*Jumbo nods enthusiastically. Robbie lights a match and with it the candle. He holds both up to his face and looks*

## Session 2: Role of song in creating a narrative

- **Script Extract 3**

### Parting Glass

Will: How about Jumbo's favourite?  
Robbie: Come on, Will. You know we're not singing that.  
Will: Why not?  
Robbie: Because it's a girl's song!  
Will: It's not!  
Robbie: It is!  
Will: It's not.  
Robbie: Whatever, I'm not singing it.  
Will: Come on, Rob...  
Robbie: No.

*Robbie crosses his arms.*

Will: Come on, Rob. For Jumbo

*Beat.*

Robbie: Fine!

*Robbie reluctantly drags himself to his feet. Making a meal out of it.*

Robbie: He probably won't even sing it anyway. Can you remember the harmonies?  
Oh wait, I can't be bothered. And, 1... 2... 3...

### **PARTING GLASS**

*Of all the money that e'er I spent  
I've spent it in good company  
And all the harm that e'er I've dun  
Alas it was to none but me  
And all I've dun for want of wit  
To memory now I cannot recall  
So fill to me the parting glass  
Good night and joy be with ya all*

*Of all the comrades that e'er I had  
They are sorry for my going away  
And all the sweethearts that e'er I had  
They would wish me one more day to stay  
But since it falls unto my lord  
That I should rise and ya should not  
I'll gently rise and I'll softly call  
Good night and joy be with ya all*

*They finish. It has clearly affected them.*

Robbie: Alright, good choice.

*Will nods. They realize Jumbo isn't talking.*

Will: Jumbo? You alright?  
*Jumbo shakes his head.*

Will: What's wrong, lad?

Jumbo: I can't sing it.

Robbie: What? Why?

Jumbo: I don't want to say.

Robbie: We have to sing it! It's the best song!

Will: Easy, Rob. Give him some space.

Robbie: What is this, Jumbo? You were up for it a minute ago! Come on, lad! Let's bash it out again!

Jumbo: Nah! It reminds us of home!

*They all stop.*

Jumbo: I used to sing it with me mam. It was the last song she sang before I left for training. She sang it as she put me on the train.  
I... I...

Robbie: Jumbo...

Jumbo: I'm going along the line.

*He exits. They watch him leave.*

Robbie: I didn't realize.

Will: You never do. Only got room for one up there haven't you?

*Will taps the side of Robbie's head then goes back to looking over the front.*

*Robbie looks out. Then at where Jumbo left.*

Robbie: Ahhh, he'll forgive us when we're stars.

*Will shakes his head in disbelief ad Robbie combs his hair.*

### Session 3: Role of song in creating a narrative

- **Script Extract 4**

Will: I served on a firing squad. I shot a man, one of our own. A deserter. He refused to fight and tried to run. This was his position. That lad I shot. This was his post. Sergeant Major asked for a detail to tie him up and lay rounds into him.

Jumbo: So he forced you into it?

Robbie: No, Jumbo, he volunteered. Our Will volunteered.

Will: I didn't want ta de it but the Sergeant Major offered us a promotion, a promotion that kept us all safe and warm. That gave us extra rations. That got us this post. His post.

Robbie: Aye, but you said that was the only one. Now the Sergeant Major says you doing it again and again and again. You said once but you've actually dun it loads of times. And you still doing it.

That's what ya left last night. Wasn't it? Wasn't it?

*Pause.*

Will: He offered me a promotion...

Robbie: I knew it! You going need longer sleeves ta fit all the stripes on your arm.

Will: A promotion to serve in the regimental headquarters. Back away from the line.

*Beat.*

Jumbo: You were going to abandon us?

Will: Nah, I was going to go there and then bring you all with us. Get you all properly transferred out away from the line. Forever.

Robbie: And what about the concert, the officers wanting to hear us sing. I suppose that's lies as well is it?

*Beat.*

Will: I can organize you a concert when I get there...

Robbie: Oh, I can't believe this! You promised me, Will. I made you promise me! Was anything you tell us true?

Will: I'll be on the inside lads.

Robbie: When were you going tell us?

Will: After, I needed you ta trust me. If I can get a desk job I can get us all out a here.

Robbie: And the rank means nothing to you?

Will: Of course it means something!

Robbie: I knew it!

Will: It's a tool!

Robbie: Just like us?

Will: No, Robbie! You not listening ta me, See? This is why I couldn't tell you!

Robbie: Why didn't you just say no?

Will: I didn't have that choice. You didn't come to the briefings! You don't know what they're planning! You don't know how dangerous it is to be out here.

Robbie: I think I do!

Will: I'd do anything to get you off the line. That's the truth.

Jumbo: That lad ye shot. He was innocent just like us? He just wanted to gone back to his mam just like us?

Will: He was going about it the wrong way, Jumbo.

Jumbo: Would you have shot me? Would you have shot me if I'd run, Will? If it had been me would you've shot us?

Will: Of course not, lad. I did it to protect you. That was the whole point.

Jumbo: I don't believe you. I can't trust you any more, Will. You shot someone. I don't know you anymore.

Will: Come on lads, I know you hate me but all we need is one more step. Just this one song and that's it. One more step. I can get to the head quarters and get us all out of here

Robbie: And how de we know you're not lying like last time?

Will: You can't

Jumbo: Would you do it again, Will? If you could do it all again. Would you?

Will: If it meant getting you both out of here? Yes, I'd do it again in a flash. Again and again and again.

Robbie: Murderer.

Will: Take that back.

Robbie: No.

*Will picks up his rifle.*

Will: Take that back.

Robbie: Oh, finally! Come on, Lad! How long have you been waiting to do that?

Jumbo: Put it down, Will! We're friends!

Will: He's not my friend!

Robbie: What are you going to do, big man? Shoot us in a trench just like that other poor lad you did in?

Will: I'll do it, Robbie. So help me God I'll do it.

Robbie: See, I told you! You love it out here! You love this! Lance Corporal Big Man With A Gun! Lay it on then!

Will: I will! I'll shoot you, Robbie!

Robbie: I want you to!

Will: I will, I'll do it!

Robbie: I'm saying yes! De it! I want you to! I want you ta shoot me!

Jumbo: Will! Please!

Robbie: De it because I'm sick of this place and I'm sick of you! Murderer!

Will: Rob...

Robbie: Liar!

*Will reloads the rifle.*

## Session 4: Transitions and staging

- **The Three Little Pigs**

Once upon a time, there were three little pigs who lived with their mother in a meadow. One day the mother pig said to the three little pigs, "You need to go out into the world and make your own way." So they waved "goodbye" and out into the world they went.

The pigs decided to build houses near the woods. A big bad wolf lived in the woods. He was not happy when he saw the three little pigs building houses nearby. The first little pig was lazy. He made a house of straw. The big bad wolf huffed and puffed and blew it down.

The second little pig worked a little harder than the first little pig. He made a house of twigs. The big bad wolf huffed and puffed and blew the house down. The third little pig made a house of bricks. The big bad wolf huffed and puffed and huffed and puffed. But the house did not fall down. This made the big bad wolf very, very angry. He went up on the roof and tried to get into the house through the chimney. He climbed into the chimney and slid down into a pot of boiling water. He ran out of the house and never came back!

## Session 5: Character Breakdown

The three young male characters come from Sunderland in North East England and are conscripted to the Durham Light Infantry. They are all aged between 17 – 19 years old.

### Will

A pragmatic young man who is looking to protect himself and his friends from the front line. He is willing to compromise his morality if it will mean the gain of advantages and safety. He plays by the rules and takes any opportunity he can see to improve the chances of survival. He is loyal, grounded and rational. He is under immense pressure in the play to stay measured and collected but there is always a danger that he will break apart and reveal his anger and vulnerability.

### Robbie

A dreamer that wears his heart on his sleeve. Demoralised by the futility of war, he escapes from the discomfort and terror of the trenches with jokes, quips and a love of singing. He dreams of fame and celebrity and a utopian life after the war. His character is vibrant and full of possibility with a light, sparky energy. He is uncompromising, unrealistic and transparent.

### Jumbo

He is the lost soul of the play. He is tortured by the idea of killing another person and simply wants all the fighting to stop. Increasingly on the edge, he is losing his battle for survival and sanity. He is a soft and simple character that has usually followed the crowd: unremarkable despite his size. However, he has the capacity to be stubborn and single minded and will follow his own path to retain his sense of self, whatever the consequences.

## Session 5: Using characters and scenes as a stimulus for devising

### Script Extract 5

Robbie: Oh aye! Wouldn't want to break an agreement would I? Wouldn't want to break a pact. A pledge. Oh no! Wouldn't want ta de that now would we! You see I've just had a lovely meeting with the Sergeant Major. I was walking along the line when I saw you popping out of his dugout so I thought I'd take the opportunity as to enquire about the officers taste in music. You know, to, help us settle the song choice. And oh was he chatty, Will. I had no idea! No wonder you want to spend all your time with him. We got to talking you see. And we got onto his favourite subject, Will: you. Oh, he loves you, Will. Said you were the best most loyal soldier he ever had. Never let him down, he says. Aye, I says. That's our Will. Never lets anyone down, always dependable. Then he says you was just in there and I'd just missed you. I says, Aye, I saw him coming out. I asked where you were going on your extra duties like and the Sergant Major told me, Will. He told me all about the extra duties you've been doing. He says, oh, don't you know - Will's our most trusted lad. Always turns up for extra duty. Time after time. Done more than anyone else. Probably a record-breaker he says. All those times you left late at night or early morning. All those times you weren't able to do rehearsals „coz you were doing extra duties. And everytime you came

## Session 6: Character status

- **Script Extract 6**

Will: Incoming!

*Explosions ring out. They dive to the floor.*

Will: Stay down! Stay down!

*Explosions continue and then stop. They all look up.*

Will: All clear!

*They get back on their feet.*

Will: I told you the singing were a stupid idea! We've only been in the new observation post five minutes and already you playing the fool.

Robbie: Here, maybe I was just happy to be alive, eh? Never know how long you'll make it out here. Not even safe in your own trench sometimes...

Jumbo: Oh, I loved it! Just what I needed! We've not done that for a while have we? Took us right back to before the war. Right back to Sunderland. Terraced houses, steel ships and watching the lads smash the magpies on a Saturday afternoon. Pie in hand, scarf round neck and mam stood next to us. Ohhh,pie. There's a thought. Will, you fancy pie?

Will: Nah. That's alright, Jumbo. I'll just be up here checking your singing didn't start a new offensive.

*Will takes up a position looking out over the front.*

Jumbo: Rob? Pie?

Rob: Seriously, Jumbo, where are you going to get a pie from round here? You seen any lying around anywhere?

Jumbo: I bet Will could get one for us. Will can do anything! Got us off the line and into this cushy observation post. Out of the wet and cold. Nice little digs all to ourselves!

Rob: Easy, Jumbo. It's hardly paradise. Look at the floor would you. There's rat sh...

Jumbo: Got us extra rations!

Rob: Oh, another tin of ham? I could have done without another tin of ham.

Will: No, you couldn't.

Rob: Could.

Will: I'll take it back then shall I?

Rob: No.

Will: I thought so.

*Jumbo points at Will's arm.*

Jumbo: And look, he even got himself a promotion! Not bad for a simple lad from our neck of the woods eh, Rob? You must be proud?

Rob: Oh, I'm overflowing wi' pride, Jumbo. I bet he had ta de summit super special ta earn that.

Jumbo: Aye. Great job, Will.

Will: Thanks, Jumbo. Nice to have some appreciation.

Jumbo: So what do you make of the new post, Rob?

Rob: Looks pretty much like the last ta me. And the one before that. And the one before that. In fact it looks pretty much like everywhere we've been in France.

Will: We're not in France anymore. This is Belgium. Welcome to Passchandaele, boys. Just a stone's throw from Ypres.

Jumbo: Wait. When did we leave France?

Will: We crossed the border last week.

Jumbo: I don't remember seeing it.

Will: We were being bombed, Jumbo. We had more important things to worry about.

Rob: All looks the bloody same with these eyes. Muddy, brown and smelly.

Will: That's one way to look at it.

Rob: Oh right. Tell us another then, Will. I'm all ears.

Will: You could see it as a chance to get off the main line. A chance to have a bit of time and space and room to ourselves. A bit of privacy. Peace and quiet. Where else are you going to get that around here, eh? On top of all that we've also got a more specialised role: observing gunfire and enemy movements. Not a bad job. We've got a view all across the salient from here. Any action and we'll be the most important people on the battlefield.

Robbie: Is that what you're doing up there? Being the most important person on the battlefield?