

National
Theatre
Learning

The National Theatre production of

THE
CURIOUS
INCIDENT
OF THE **DOG** IN THE
NIGHT-TIME

BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING NOVEL BY

MARK HADDON

ADAPTED BY

SIMON STEPHENS



Background pack

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Background pack

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Introduction

Welcome to the National Theatre's background pack for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

With reflections from members of the creative team, illustrations and workshop activities, this background pack gives an insight into the journey that brought Mark Haddon's book to the stages at the National Theatre in 2012, before its onward journey to the Apollo Theatre in London's West End.

Methuen Drama have provided a series of activities for use by teachers and schools, as published in their Critical Scripts edition for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The activities follow at the end. If you plan to print this document for further use, we would recommend that you print only the pages that you want to use.

National Theatre Learning

Through imaginative and innovative in-school, on-site and online activities, NT Learning opens up the National's repertoire, artistry, skills, and the building itself, enabling participants of all ages to discover new skills and experience the excitement of theatre-making.

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Jane Ball
Programme Manager, NT Learning
January 2014

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Students across the UK can also view a series of [BBC Learning Zone films](#), exploring the production.

See curiousonstage.com/learning or email learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk

The National Theatre production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

based on the novel by **Mark Haddon**;
adapted by **Simon Stephens**

The play opened at the National's Cottesloe Theatre on 2 August 2012 and transferred to London's Apollo Theatre on 1 March 2013; and the Gielgud Theatre from 24 June 2014.

Christopher John Francis Boone
Mike Noble / Jack Loxton*

Siobhan
Rakie Ayola

Ed
Trevor Fox

Judy
Amanda Drew

Mrs Alexander/Posh Woman/Voice Six
Gay Soper

Mrs Shears/Mrs Gascoyne/Voice One/
Woman on Train/Information/Shopkeeper
Golda Rosheuvel

Roger Shears/Duty Sergeant/Voice Two/Mr Wise/
Man Behind Counter/Drunk One
Daniel Casey

Policeman/Mr Thompson/Voice Three/Drunk Two/
Man with Socks/London Policeman/
London Transport Policeman
Paul Stocker

No. 40/Voice Five/Lady in the Street/Woman on
Heath/Punk Girl
Jo Dockery

Reverend Peters/ Uncle Terry/Voice Four/
Station Policeman/Station Guard
Patrick Driver

Toby
Audrey or Marilyn

Other parts are played by the ensemble
* at some performances the part of Christopher is played
by Jack Loxton

Understudies

Jack Loxton* (Christopher),
Katie Elizabeth Payne (Punk/Ensemble),
Mark Rawlings (Ed/Rev Peters/Ensemble),
Golda Rosheuvel (Siobhan),
Matt Tait (Physical Swing and US Mr Thompson/Roger
Shears/Ensemble),
Cathy Walker (Judy/Mrs Alexander/Mrs Shears/
Ensemble)

Christopher Boone (Mike Noble)
PHOTO BY BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

Director **Marianne Elliott**

Designer **Bunny Christie**

Lighting Designer **Paule Constable**

Video Designer **Finn Ross**

Movement Directors **Scott Graham** and **Steven Hoggett**,
for Frantic Assembly

Music **Adrian Sutton**

Sound Designer **Ian Dickinson**

Associate Director **Katy Rudd**

Resident Director **Ashley Scott-Layton**

Fight Director **Kate Waters**

Company Voice Work **Yvonne Morley**

Dialect Coach **Jeannette Nelson**

Casting **Charlotte Bevan**

Original Casting **Alastair Coomer** CDG

General Management **National Theatre Productions**
Chris Harper / Stephen Rebbeck / Lauren Hills /
Thea Foster

Rehearsal Photographer **Ellie Kurtz / Manuel Harlan**

Production Photographer **Brinkhoff/Mögenburg**

Maths Consultant **Marcus Du Sautoy**

Autism Consultants **Cian Binchy / Robyn Stewart**

Original production sponsored by
Neptune Investment Management.

No animals were harmed in the making of this production.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time
is presented with kind permission of Warner Bros.



Synopsis

Part 1

Christopher has just found his neighbour Mrs Shears' dog Wellington, lying dead with a garden fork sticking out of his side. As the main action continues, Christopher's teacher Siobhan, begins to narrate Christopher's story, reading from his notebook.

Cutting back to the scene with the dead dog, a Policeman arrives and asks Christopher for an explanation. In his book Christopher explains that he doesn't lie. He says that he didn't kill the dog, nor is he the owner of the fork. Christopher starts to groan, and when the Policeman tries to help Christopher up, he hits him. The policeman arrests him and takes him to the police station. In his book, Christopher reveals he finds people confusing.

At the police station the Duty Sergeant asks for Christopher's possessions so that he may remove them. Christopher says he needs his watch to tell the time, and when the sergeant tries to take it off of him, Christopher screams. The sergeant asks about his family and we find out that Christopher has a father, but his mother has died. His father Ed arrives at the police station and he and Christopher touch fingertips in greeting – even though Christopher can hardly bare to be touched at all. Ed explains to the Sergeant that Christopher didn't mean to hurt the policeman. 'I just wanted him to stop touching me'. The Sergeant cautions Christopher and lets him go.

Christopher reassures his dad that he didn't kill Wellington. Christopher thinks they need to find out who did kill him so they can be punished. Ed says 'it's a bloody dog' and he should leave it.

In Christopher's book he explains that his mum died two years ago. He came home from school one day and she wasn't there. We see the moment when Ed tells Christopher his mum has died of a heart attack. Christopher wants to know what kind.

Christopher tells Siobhan that he is going to make finding Wellington's killer a project although his father told him not to do this. Siobhan suggests maybe he shouldn't do it. On Saturday there's nothing to do, so Christopher decides to do some detection work after all.

He visits Mrs Shears to confirm that he didn't kill Wellington, but wants to find out who did. She tells him if he doesn't go away she'll call the police. Next he calls on Mr Thompson and then the people at No.44. who warn him to be careful about asking questions. He visits another neighbour, Mrs Alexander, who hasn't heard anything about Wellington, but realises they haven't talked before and it's nice that he's come to talk to her. She asks him if he has a dog. He doesn't, but does have a rat called Toby. She invites him in for a cup of tea and some Battenburg cake. Christopher says he's wary of strangers and doesn't want to go into her house, and also that he doesn't like yellow things, ruling out the Battenburg, so she offers to bring something else out to him. After she goes inside Christopher worries that Mrs Alexander will call the police so he goes away.

Christopher continues to try and deduce the murderer, pointing out that most victims know their killer, and that is likely to be the case with Wellington's killer. He remembers that Mr Shears doesn't like Mrs Shears, so he is Christopher's prime suspect.

Ed talks to Mrs Gascoyne at Christopher's school. He wants Christopher to take his Maths A Level early: 'It's the one thing he's good at', but Mrs Gascoyne says they haven't got the resources. Ed offers to pay for the extra staff and won't take no for an answer.

Ed tells Christopher off for 'poking round' Mrs Shears' garden. When Christopher tells him he suspects Mr Shears of the murder, Ed says he won't have that name said in the house. 'That man is evil', Ed makes him promise to give up his detective work. Christopher tells Siobhan that his father wants him to stop writing his book. She tries to reassure him that some good books are short. Christopher disagrees because he doesn't yet 'have a proper ending'.

Christopher (Mike Noble) and Ed (Trevor Fox)
PHOTO BY BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG



Synopsis (continued)

Christopher goes back to see Mrs Alexander, who asks why he ran away last time. He explains he was scared she'd gone to call the police, but she hadn't. Mrs Alexander tells him not to worry about her telling anyone they've spoken; she just wants a chat. He asks her about Mr Shears, but she says it's best not to talk about it as his father would obviously 'find it quite upsetting'. Christopher asks if Mr Shears killed his mother. Mrs Alexander reassures him not and realises she's said too much. She feels she must explain to Christopher what she had meant; that his mother had an affair with Mr Shears. Christopher realises this is why Mr Shears left. When Siobhan reads about this in Christopher's book she asks if it made him upset to learn about the affair. As his mother is dead and Mr Shears isn't around he thinks it would be feeling sad about something that doesn't exist 'and that would be stupid'.

Siobhan asks Christopher about his mother. He remembers being by the swimming pool and her encouraging him into the water.

Ed has discovered Christopher's book and read about his conversation with Mrs Alexander and what he's been up to. He doesn't like that he's 'been raking up the past and sharing it with every Tom, Dick and Harry'. Ed shakes Christopher, who punches him. Ed then hits him back before going off in search of

a drink. When he has calmed down, Ed apologises to Christopher and says he only worries about him getting into trouble.

When Christopher next gets home from school, he looks all over the house for his book. Eventually he finds a box with his book and a number of envelopes with his name and address on. From the handwriting he realises they could be from his mother which is 'interesting and confusing'. On reading a letter he realises it is from his mother, who explains about her new life with Mr Shears, how he can have his own room at their new flat and that she thinks that's he's not written back to her because he must still be angry at her.

The next day, while Ed is out, Christopher reads the other letters from his mother; there are 43. He reads about how his mother had grown to feel lonely in her marriage, and had started spending time with Mr Shears. She fell in love with him and felt that Christopher and Ed didn't need her any more. When she decided to go and live with Mr Shears, Ed told her she couldn't say goodbye to Christopher.

Ed finds Christopher with the letters and tries to explain that he wanted to protect him and to reassure Christopher than he can trust him. He explains that when his mother left with Mr Shears, Mrs Shears was very nice to him and they became good friends, although things became difficult and they argued. One day he left after an argument with Mrs Shears to find Wellington waiting to attack him, so he killed the dog. Christopher rolls himself into a ball, reciting numbers to try and calm down. He tells his father he has to leave because it would be dangerous to stay. Siobhan suggests he could live with her, but he dismisses the idea because she's his teacher. He also discounts living with Uncle Terry in Sunderland or Mrs Alexander. He has his mother's address now.



Christopher (Mike Noble) and Siobhan (Rakie Ayola)
PHOTO BY BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

Synopsis (continued)

Part 2

Christopher has decided to take his pet rat Toby and go and live with his mum in London. He takes out a card from his dad's wallet and memorises the PIN. He goes to Swindon and asks a passerby how to get to the station. His questions confuse her and she leaves. Christopher explains to the audience a formula for reaching places if you've got lost.

On reaching the station. A Station Policeman approaches Christopher and helps him get some cash so that he can buy a ticket. Boarding the train, Christopher is intercepted by the policeman, who tells him his father is at the police station looking for him. Christopher refuses to get off and as the pair tussle and struggle, the train starts to pull away – with them both on it. The policeman has to call his colleagues to delay Christopher's father until they return.

Christopher reflects on how passengers on trains look out of the window, but don't really notice anything: he, on the other hand, notices everything, down to the finest detail, which he lists. Christopher wets himself and the policeman sends him to the toilet. On his way back, Christopher hides in the luggage rack, counting through prime numbers to calm down. After a while, he realises the train has stopped and he has reached London. He tries to avoid the policemen.

This station is even more confusing and exhausting than Swindon. As he asks a woman at the Information desk for directions to his mum's house, Ed 'appears' and begs Christopher to come home, but Christopher accuses him of not being trustworthy,

because he killed Wellington. So instead, while Christopher waits on the platform, Ed's voice talks him through how to get safely onto an Underground train: 'Count the trains. Figure it out. Get the rhythm right. Train coming. Train stopped. Doors open. Train going. Silence.' Suddenly, Christopher realises he has lost Toby, his rat. He climbs down onto the line to get him back – to the horror of the other passengers who eventually help him back onto the platform with seconds to spare.

Eventually Christopher manages to get onto a train. He arrives at Willesden Junction and asks a Shopkeeper how to get to '451c Chapter Road, London NW2 5NG.' He is offered an A to Z, but instead of paying for it, he leafs through the pages, memorising the route.

Christopher's mother Judy arrives home with Roger (Mr Shears) to find Christopher outside, curled in a ball. She comforts her son and takes him inside – in spite of Roger's reluctance. When she asks why Christopher has never replied to her letters, he answers, 'Father said you were dead.'

Later, Ed arrives from Swindon and an argument with Judy follows. She is furious that he told Christopher she was dead, but he is equally furious that her only input into raising their son was to send some letters. Ed is allowed to see his son and tries desperately to apologise, but before long, a London Policeman arrives to escort Ed from the house.

The next morning, as Christopher eats breakfast, Judy and Roger argue over how long he can stay: she is happy for it to be indefinite, but Roger is not. Christopher announces that he needs to go back



Christopher Boone (Mike Noble), Policeman (Patrick Driver) and Ensemble
PHOTO BY BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

Synopsis (continued)

to Swindon to sit his Maths A' Level. He insists that Judy accompanies him.

Judy loses her job, having taken two days off. She is buckling under the pressure from Ed and from Roger, and suggests to Christopher that they try and postpone his exam. He doesn't like the idea. Later, while walking on Hampstead Heath, Judy confesses that she's postponed his exam, but it sends him into a panic.

At home, Roger has brought some books from the library for Christopher. He refuses them. Judy is enforcing a star-chart system to persuade Christopher to eat. Christopher turns up the radio and tunes it between stations, listening to the white noise. Later, Roger is drunk and grabs at Christopher. Judy pulls him away and promises her son it will never happen again. She begs Christopher to be quiet while she packs some things. They are going to take the car and drive back to Swindon.

Back home, Christopher is nervous he'll have to see Ed, and starts to bang on a drum, nervously. Judy tells him his father will stay somewhere else until they get a new place to live. They bump into Mrs Shears in the street, who sneers at Judy for returning. Judy tries to encourage her son to ignore her.

They go to school. Siobhan says that Christopher's A Level papers are still in school and they are arranging for the Reverend Peters to invigilate the exam, just as Christopher had expected. Judy says that her son hasn't been eating properly. Christopher tells Siobhan that he's very tired but wants to do the exam.

When he attempts the paper, though, Christopher goes into a wild panic. He can't even read the words. Siobhan 'appears' encouraging him to get his breath back and count through cardinal numbers to calm down. Soon he is able to answer a question – and Siobhan suggests that he could explain it to the audience after the play has finished.

Back at home, Ed approaches his son gently to ask how the exam went. He is very proud of him. Judy has found the puzzle she'd posted to Christopher a while ago and he solves it.

Siobhan asks Christopher about his new home. He tells her they have to share a toilet with other people. And his rat has died. He asks if he can live with her instead. When she refuses, he explains that he has to go (reluctantly) to his dad's after school to wait for his mum to finish work.

Ed begs Christopher for five minutes of his time. They need to talk: Ed can't cope any more with being shunned by his son. He asks if they can start a project to spend more time together and promises everything will be OK. He presents his son with a dog. It will stay at Ed's house but Christopher can visit at any time. Christopher names him Sandy.

At school, Siobhan presents Christopher with his exam result: a grade A. Although he doesn't behave like it, he claims he is happy with the achievement. He tells her that he's spending much more time with his Dad, who has also arranged for him to take a further Maths A' Level next year. Christopher is making plans to go to University. He knows he can do it: 'I can because I went to London on my own. I solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington. I found my mother. I was brave... And I wrote a book... Does that mean I can do anything?'

Play ends

A short while after the curtain call, Christopher reappears, remembering Siobhan's promise that he could explain how he solved one of his Maths A' Level questions. He shares his solution: 'Quod Erat Demonstrandum [that which was to be demonstrated] – a phrase that signals the completion of the proof in a mathematical or philosophical argument]. And that is how I got my A Grade!'

Characters



CHRISTOPHER

Christopher is 15 years old and has a unique perspective on the world. He notices things in minute detail, finds people confusing when they use metaphors and physical gestures, doesn't like to be touched by anyone, and finds animals (especially his pet rat, Toby) and objects more

straightforward and comforting. Christopher is very good at maths and is fascinated by the workings of the universe. He lives in Swindon with his Dad, Ed. His favourite teacher is Siobhan. He doesn't like strangers, or the colours yellow and brown and his favourite colour is red. And metal coloured. When he discovers his neighbour's dog, Wellington, dead in the front garden, he decides to do some detective work to find out who killed him and to write it down in a book. Christopher's behaviour and personality traits indicate that he has an autistic spectrum disorder. The authors of book and play have taken some licence, however, and psychologists working with the Company have said that he has too many different traits for his condition to be exactly Asperger's Syndrome.

SIOBHAN

Siobhan is Christopher's teacher at school. She has a train set which Christopher likes to play with and she helps him to write his book about his detective work. Siobhan also helps Christopher to think about how to keep calm in difficult situations, sometimes appears in his memory to remind him of the advice she's given him. Siobhan is the person Christopher confides in when he finds out about the letters his father has hidden from him.



ED

Christopher's father, Ed, is a plumber. He is a single dad, living with Christopher in Swindon. He loves his son and champions his abilities at school by persuading the Headteacher to allow him to sit his maths A' Level. Sometimes, however, Ed's behaviour reveals how wearied he

is by Christopher's condition. He can get frustrated, even to the point of lashing out. Ed is cross with Christopher when he starts investigating Wellington's 'murder', making him promise to stop.

MRS ALEXANDER

Mrs Alexander is an older woman living in Christopher and Ed's street. She's not a friend of the family, Christopher calls her a stranger but she seems to know all the neighbourhood gossip. She supports Christopher's initial detective work, helping him fill in the gaps about why someone would have wanted to kill Mrs Shear's dog Wellington.



JUDY

We first encounter Christopher's mother Judy when he recalls in his book the moment his dad told him that she had died. Christopher remembers his mum on the beach in Cornwall, swimming, diving, persuading him to paddle in the waves and fantasising about a life with a Mediterranean lover in the South of France. Judy found it difficult to cope with Christopher's

condition and felt isolated in the home and in her marriage.

MRS SHEARS

Another neighbour of Christopher's, Mrs Shears is the owner of Wellington, the dead dog whose discovery starts the play. She's divorced from her husband, Mr Shears. Mrs Shears is angry with Christopher when she sees him with the dead dog. As the play develops, we discover that Mrs Shears had at one time been close to Christopher's father, Ed, and had argued with him just before Wellington's death.



Christopher (Mike Noble), Siobhan (Rakie Ayola),
Ed (Trevor Fox), Mrs Alexander (Gay Soper),
Judy (Amanda Drew)
PHOTOS BY BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

Mrs Shears (Golda Rosheuvel)
REHEARSAL PHOTOS BY ELLIE KURTZ

Characters



ROGER SHEARS

Mrs Shears' ex-husband, now lives in London. When Christopher starts investigating Wellington's death, Roger Shears becomes 'Prime Suspect'; the logic is he knows Roger Shears didn't like Mrs Shears and most murders are committed by people known to them.



POLICEMAN

There are several policemen in the play in Swindon and London. Christopher trusts policemen inherently, but his trust is tested when they bump up against the things that he finds difficult: being touched (he hits a policeman for that and is arrested), having his watch taken off (in the cells, the Duty Sergeant tries to take it, but gives up in the face of

Christopher's protests), and trying to take him home when he doesn't want to.

MRS GASCOYNE

The Headteacher at Christopher's school, Mrs Gascoyne is very cautious about her students' education, wanting to make sure they are equally treated, even (short-sightedly) if it stands in the way of individual achievement. Reluctantly, and with some persuading from his father, Mrs Gascoyne allows Christopher to sit his maths A' Level in the school.



REVEREND PETERS

The Reverend tries to explain death and afterlife to Christopher to reassure him about his mother's death. He fails when Christopher stumps him with a question about the precise location of first heaven, and then God.



Workshop diary: planes, trains and automobiles

Before rehearsals began, there was an intense research and workshop period. These extracts from associate director Katy Rudd's diary give a flavour of the discoveries the Company made.

Research: School Visits

Before rehearsals began, we researched what it's like to be a young person living with behavioural difficulties. This was important, because although Christopher is never described as having Asperger's Syndrome he clearly displays issues with making sense of the world, processing information and relating to other people. To help us understand his world, a few schools kindly opened their doors to us, allowing the cast and creative team to meet pupils, staff and families living with, and affected by, autism.

Luke (Treadaway, who played Christopher in the original cast), Marianne Elliott (director) and I worked with four schools (Riverside School, Southlands School, Spa School and Treehouse School), visiting them a number of times. The first was Southlands School in Lymington. Southlands is a residential school for boys aged 7-16 with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome and other associated difficulties on the autistic spectrum. Marianne and I boarded a 6am train and arrived at 9am, in time for assembly.

At Southlands you soon realise you are in a very special place. The staff are united by their laughter, warmth and dedication to their pupils. Walking into the hall, a Year 11 pupil played the piano from memory. It was a note-perfect, unwaveringly poised performance. To me, the boys in assembly looked and acted like any other teenage boys.

The theme of their assembly was the 'Global Population'. The teacher leading it said she was going to 'shrink the world down' so that it would have a population of 100. At this, a Year 7 pupil shouted, 'I don't want to be the size of a pea!' He was quickly reassured that he was only being asked to *imagine* the size of the world if it had 100 people in it. How frightening the world could seem if you believed someone had the power to shrink you down to the size of a pea.

Afterwards, we met with the Head Teacher, Naomi. Marianne and I had no personal experience of autism and we had pages of questions, so we asked Naomi to take us back to basics: What is autism? What is the spectrum? What is Asperger's? How do you diagnose it? What does autism look like? What does it sound like? What causes it? Can you cure it? Is it

hereditary? How can you manage it? What impact does it have on families? How does it make you feel to have AD? What prospects are there for young people with AD? What support is there? What is *stimming*? What is *twirling*?* The answers were complex. These are the questions that every family confronted with autism must face.

To deepen our understanding we focused on various characteristics of autism. One which is important and prevalent in the novel and the play is high anxiety.

Naomi asked us to imagine a bath tub full to the brim with water. That, she said, is often the level of anxiety that her pupils start with at 9am, when they come to school. Such high anxiety means it only takes something very small to make that water – or less metaphorically, their emotions – spill over the edge and cause great distress to the pupil and their peers.

Naomi gave another example of the level of anxiety felt by young people with autism. She asked us to imagine lying in bed and fearing that there is someone outside the door trying to get in, then make this feeling last the entire night. She questioned how rested we would feel in the morning after a night spent in fear and how this would affect our anxiety levels. She said many of her students feel like this on a daily basis.

* *Stimming* is short for 'self-stimulatory', or 'stereotypic' behaviour. In a person with autism, *stimming* usually refers to specific behaviours such as flapping, rocking, spinning, or repetition of words and phrases.

Twirling (of fingers, hair, objects) is a form of this repetitive movement.

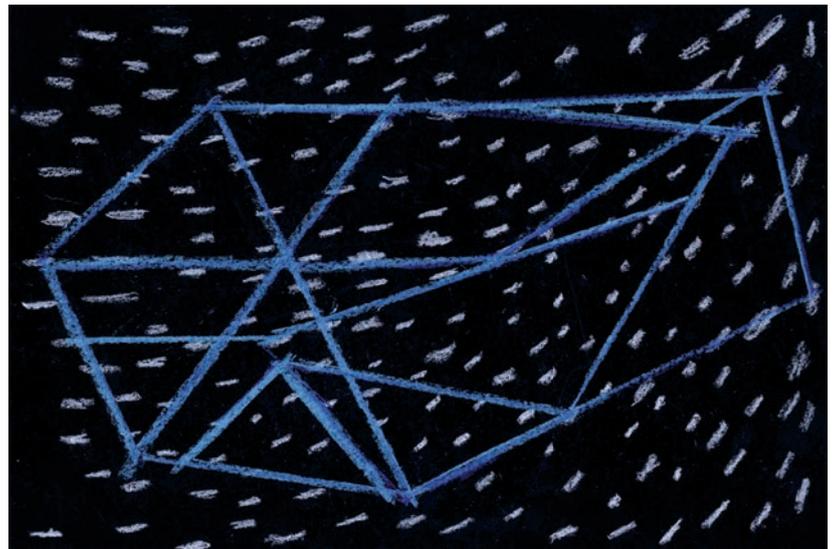
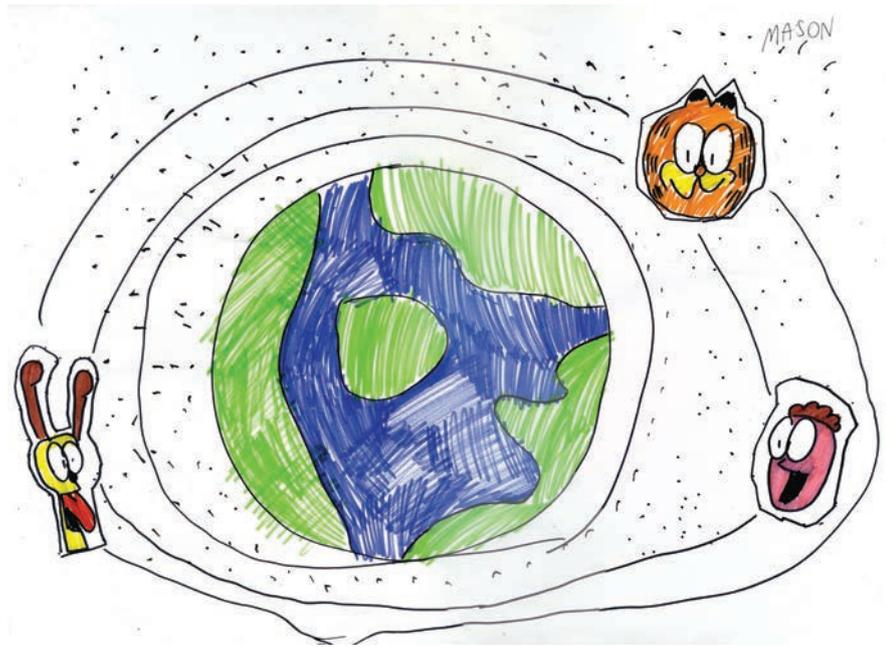


Luke Treadaway (Christopher in the original cast) plays on an interactive projector at Riverside School, which is used by pupils to lower anxiety and as a reward for good behaviour.

PHOTO BY KATY RUDD

The Universe...

Students at Riverside School, Southlands School and Spa School were asked to draw their idea of the universe. This is some of their work.



Diagnosing Christopher Boone

In neither the novel nor the play, Christopher Boone is never actually defined as having autism or Asperger's Syndrome.

In an early publication of his novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Mark Haddon allowed the word autism to be printed on the cover, a decision he later regretted because he is uncomfortable with the novel being used as a reference or guide book for people with autism or Asperger's.

He explained that *Curious Incident* is not a book about Asperger's. 'It's a novel whose central character describes himself as "a mathematician with some behavioural difficulties". If anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way. It's as much a novel about us as it is about Christopher.'

Autism is a spectrum disorder that affects people in multifarious ways. During the research for the play we spoke to various specialists and one said that Christopher displays too many traits to be authentically autistic.

Mark says, 'I know very little about the subject. I did no research for *Curious Incident* other than photographing the interiors of Swindon and

Paddington stations, reading Oliver Sacks' essay about Temple Grandin and a handful of newspaper and magazine articles about, or by, people with Asperger's and autism.' He continues, 'I deliberately didn't add to this list. Imagination always trumps research. I thought that if I could make Christopher real to me then he'd be real to readers. I gave him some rules to live by and some character traits and opinions, all of which I borrowed from people I know, none of whom would be labelled as having a disability. Judging by the reaction, it seems to have worked.'

In many ways Christopher is 'high-functioning', his ability to excel in mathematics is savant. His communication skills and grasp of the English language are impressive (indeed his book is a best seller!), yet his behavioural difficulties are indicative of a very low functioning and highly challenging teenager.

Diagnosing Christopher is a pointless exercise. He is an individual, like any other character. It is not possible for an actor to play the whole spectrum of autism or Asperger's. Our job is to present a character who has integrity and depth and who is unique and has individual quirks, flaws and dreams. This is Christopher John Francis Boone.

Katy Rudd
March 2013

Rehearsal diary

Week One, Day 2

Workshop: Creating homes from home

After a Frantic Assembly-style warm-up in the rehearsal room, the company paired off, joined hands and took it in turns to lead their partners around the space. [See the 'Jumping' exercise on page 25 for an example.]

Exercise 1

Individually, the company were asked to physically map out a room in their house. They included objects such as windows, fireplaces, doors etc. Each person had to come up with a 20-second physical sequence.

The sequences were taught to each other in groups of three and joined together to make one long sequence. Groups performed these sequences and were given objectives to make their actions more fluid or specific.

Luke [Treadaway, Christopher in the original cast] performed his sequence solo, with text, and without looking at his hands. This gave Christopher a striking physicality, it looked like he was on auto-pilot.

Exercise 2

The company split into two groups. One member of each group was asked to clearly describe a room in their house. The company then built it using boxes, card, pens, chalk, string – and pretty much everything else they could possibly find in the rehearsal space!

The actors were allowed to direct the construction

of their rooms. The company were asked to think of a way of creating the same room in 20 seconds and also in 10 seconds.

We talked about losing literal ideas/props and going back to the first exercise when the actors depicted these objects through movement. We discussed what objects Christopher would find most interesting.

In one actor's bathroom the objects were the blind (made of rolled brown paper), the bath (made of four plastic boxes), the bookshelf behind the toilet (physicalised by another actor), the fireplace and the map of the world (which spun around Christopher).

In another's bathroom these were: the bathroom mirror, the shower, the stones and the sloped eaves (which Christopher banged his head on).

Whilst this was being devised, Luke improvised two physical sequences for both rooms. Luke and the company then put these together.

Luke then moved from one room to the next. This introduced a hallway or 'no-mans-land' which Christopher had to negotiate. He tried not to step on any of the floor cracks.

Luke introduced a model plane which he played with throughout. It flew around the map, ending up with him in the bath (a plastic box).

The company lifted Luke in the bath, and started to fly him around the space: all the time Christopher was flying his plane and as the company put him back down, he landed the plane.



Luke Treadaway (who played Christopher in the original cast) in rehearsal
PHOTO BY ELLIE KURTZ

Rehearsal diary (continued)

We then took all the objects away and used only movement. This felt like Christopher was in complete control. We had created Christopher's world.

Reflecting on the exercises

Discussing the exercise, Marianne said she felt like objects became characters, as if Christopher had given them thoughts and feelings.

One actor said she felt as though she was playing a character in the space, reacting to objects in a different way.

Howard (Ward) and Nick (Sidi) [from the original *Cottesloe and West End* cast] both felt as though they were playing their teacher roles, supporting and challenging Christopher on stage, seeing him through each sequence. It was observed that when Christopher is challenged, the atmosphere is more interesting.

The introduction of the model plane into the exercise led us to discuss how Christopher would play.

We also discussed loneliness both as a positive and a negative: Christopher finds sanctuary in solace, but it can also be a frightening and distressing place.

Week One, Day 5 Workshop: A Beautiful Mind

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is perceived by some to be a sweet story; this week in rehearsals has illustrated that it is also dark, messy, sticky, violent and poetic.

The company discussed what we've learnt so far:

- This story is an unapologetic celebration of the human being. It is Christopher's story: he has a unique mind, a unique logic, this has to affect how we interpret it.
- Flash-backs are Christopher's memories – and these are not clean, rose-tinted memories.
- All characters are fallible.
- There is no commenting on the action, it all happens in the moment. Characters tell the truth, even if it's awful. We need to remain present and truthful to Christopher.
- We are under CHRISTOPHER'S RULES.
- The company was struck by the success of physical work and the language we have created.

Within it, we were able to fly Christopher through space, float and swim. The company found the physical work emancipating, which allowed them to stop *thinking* and feel closer to the characters.

- It feels right that rooms should be abstract and focus on detail, allowing us to see Christopher's world through his eyes.
- Christopher directing the action really works: he is in total control.
- Roger is emotionally removed from Christopher; the lack of tolerance he shows towards him highlights Christopher's selfishness to the audience.
- We have to be clear about who is talking and where we are. Time shifts also need to be really clear.

Questions

Whilst the company was reaching a set of decisions, there were also a number of questions to address.

Ensemble

What is the role of the ensemble? Are they sat around the space? Are they Christopher's brain microbes? What does it mean when they are in the school



Luke Treadaway
PHOTO BY MANUEL HARLAN

Rehearsal diary (continued)

aesthetic? Are they teachers?
What is happening on the peripheries? Are the company always there? Are they sat/or stood?

What are the company wearing? What elements of costume are important to Christopher? What would he see or focus on?

The School Performance

Is Christopher imagining the school performance?
How does the book/narration get passed?

Siobhan

Who is Siobhan reading the book to? Audience?
School Children? To Christopher?
Is this the first time Siobhan has read the book?

The Story

One actor observed that it should never feel like *The Truman Show*, like the company is in control and therefore making Christopher redundant. It is Christopher's story.

Roger and Judy

We only ever see Roger and Judy's relationship as dysfunctional. Is it therefore too easy for Judy to leave Roger? Would Judy have left if Christopher hadn't showed up? Does Christopher rescue Judy?

Trains

If Christopher is facing an issue that is too big to deal with, we should see him busying himself with a task, like playing with the train set. We held a meeting with key members of the creative team, to discuss how the train activity could work.

Train set: How do you get rid of it? *Do* you get rid of it? What is the progression of the train?

We see Christopher play with the train, hear the train spoken about in letters; he decides to go to London, we see him then actually taking and experiencing the reality of the train journey.

Exercise 1: Train sets

In pairs the company constructed train sets. They were tricky to build. Creatives decided ensemble looked like children. Trains only seemed successful when Christopher played with them.

Exercise 2: Train Coming, Train Stop, Train Going, Silence

The company were divided into two groups and set parameters. Group A was only allowed to move two steps while group B was allowed to use the whole space.

Train coming – step into a huddle and look right

Train stop – look centre, inhale

Train going – look left and move out of huddle

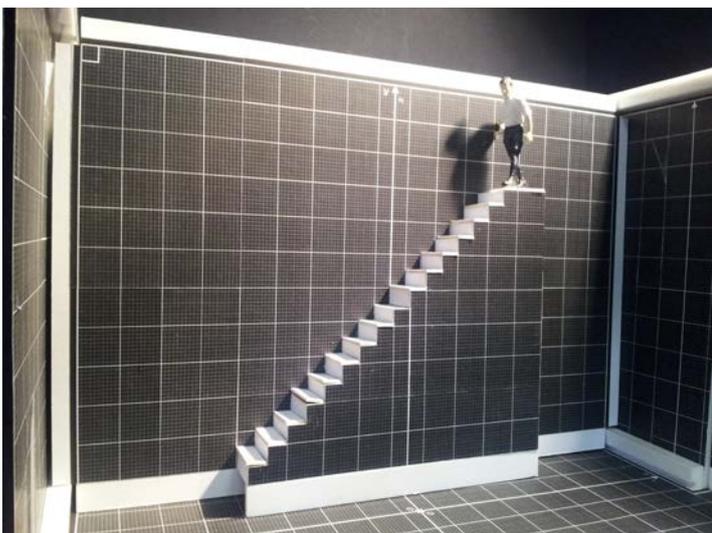
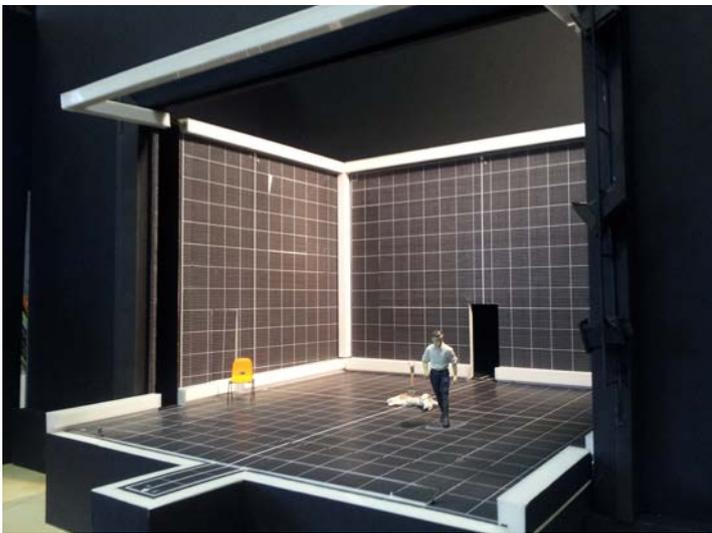
Silence – close eyes

Developing the set

For a set to be realised on stage, it has to go through a vigorous design and scoping process.

After early designs are delivered, the production team will produce a white card model which envisions how the set could look in the theatre space. Once the final design is approved, a model box will be produced, a scaled-down version of the final set, which will be used as a reference by everyone working on the production – from set construction teams to production managers.

These photographs show the model box for Bunny Christie's stage design for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, alongside photographs of the final set in the Apollo Theatre. Lighting is designed by Paule Constable.



Model box photographs courtesy of MARTIN BARRON
(NT Production Management)
PRODUCTION PHOTOS BY BRINKHOFF/MÖGENBURG

Interview: Marianne Elliott, director

Director Marianne Elliott was interviewed about her production in a Platform event at the National Theatre, shortly after the original production had opened.

***The Curious Incident...* is such a loved and well-known book. Had you read it before this project came your way?**

Yes I read it when it first came out, and loved it.

Did you think 'I can see this on stage' or did it come as a bolt from the blue?

I never, ever thought you could see this on stage! The first I knew about it was when Simon Stephens, the adapter, rang me maybe about two or three years ago, and said, 'I've got this script, Marianne, will you have a read?' I thought, 'great! A new Simon Stephens' script coming my way – yeah, I will read it.' When it came in the post I thought 'oh God, it's an adaptation of the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, that's not going to work, is it?' I suppose I was slightly trepidatious reading it.



The script wasn't a commission. Simon had met Mark Haddon when they were writers-in-residence here for a time, and were in the NT Studio together. They had hit it off and Mark suggested to Simon that he try adapting the book. And Simon – who gets a lot of commissions already – decided that he wouldn't take a commission for it, and he wouldn't take it to a theatre to get them interested: he decided that he would just be in a room on his own and see if he could adapt it. Then he sent it to me. And I read it and adored it, immediately. It was a while since I had read the book, so I half remembered it, which was a good thing. Then I gave it to Nick Hytner [director of the National Theatre] and said 'it's an adaptation of a book – and that's a bad idea; and it's a really well-loved book – and that's a bad idea; but it's Simon Stephens' and I'd really love to do this'. Nick read it and he immediately agreed we could do it.

In the theatre world there's a mysterious word, *workshop*. How much does the play change in the period when you're workshopping it?

We spent a week workshopping. It's a terrifying word, I don't know what it means really: it can be anything. We went into the Studio about a year ago with most of the actors that eventually joined the cast [of the original production] at the



Above: Marianne Elliott in rehearsal
Right: Simon Stephens on the first rehearsal day
PHOTOS BY ELLIE KURTZ

Interview: Marianne Elliott, director

National] and Steven Hoggett and Scott Graham, the choreographers. We spent that week not worrying whether the show was going to be done; it was unpressured. Every day was different; every day we'd look at different parts of the story and think 'how could we show...' And we also spent a lot of time working out how you might stage a show like this where two people are talking for five lines, and then we're immediately into another scene in a completely different location, a completely different timeline, and one actor might now be a completely different character. We can't change the set, we can't go off and get changed into different costumes: it has to be ready and available immediately. We worked on how we might show Christopher's house; I remember using lots of found objects and rolls of brown paper to be the blind in his bathroom, and sitting Luke in a little plastic bucket and carrying him around... We all thought it would work – but it didn't happen in the end!

The play's success is so dependent on who is playing Christopher. How did you come across Luke Treadaway (who plays Christopher)?

I had worked with Luke a few times before. When we staged the original production of *War Horse* in the Olivier at the National, he was the first Albert – he'd just left drama school then – and before that he was in my production of *Saint Joan* at the National Theatre. He played all the servants in every scene. Then we did a short film, *Alice* (based on *Alice in Wonderland*), in which he played the Rabbit.



Luke Treadaway and Marianne Elliott in rehearsal
PHOTO BY ELLIE KURTZ

He's too old to play Christopher, really. Luke is in his late twenties, and the boy should be 15. But Luke is very inventive and had great fun in the workshop. As it progressed, we started realising that describing and

explaining things was going to be very physical, and it became more apparent that Luke would be right in the role, because he is really good at that.

You've shared out the narrator's voice between roles – and there are lots of characters –

The teacher is mainly the narrator. The device is that the teacher in the play, like in the novel, decides it will be a good idea if Christopher were to write down his experiences of finding this dead dog. He decides to write a book and she reads from it – and he does as well. The characters that he meets and writes about come alive and are acted by the Ensemble. They are on stage all the time. The play, I feel, is written a bit like a poem.

The action has to be incredibly agile: you have to imagine you are in a street one minute and then in school the next. Christopher says that he doesn't like plays, and he doesn't like acting, which is a lie! I was very keen – and Simon was too – that the show shouldn't seem realistic: it's an illusion, if anything. I didn't want an old-fashioned set that is clearly located in a school: it had to be what Bunny Christie calls a *magic box*. You have to believe you are in a school, and sometimes swim in Christopher's imagination. So if Christopher decides that he wants to be an astronaut and he is going to be weightless, then you as an audience have to believe that he is an astronaut and is weightless. Even if you can see how the illusion is created, there's no lie to it. That's another reason why I felt the production should be staged 'in the round'. I have worked a lot 'in the round' and felt that it was a truly immersive way of putting a show on. The audience are breathing the same air as the actors, and they can touch the actors. It always feels to me like the most natural way to do drama. If something happened in the street – two people arguing, for instance, and other people thought it was interesting enough to watch, they would gather around that event. The centrifugal force of the round really means that you feel part of the experience. What's very challenging and nerve-wracking for the actors, is that they are sitting on the edge of the stage all the time. If they need a prop, they pick it up from the side. There is no illusion about where the prop comes from.

There's never a time for a breather backstage!

No, but to me that's a luxury as an audience member, because you can see an actor go from this incredibly traumatised, wrangled, messed-up state into the next scene which is three years later, and they are absolutely fine. You can see the switch in the actor. In the rehearsal room, as a director, you see that all the time. You see how actors can do that so brilliantly, and truthfully.

Interview: Marianne Elliott, director

On the jacket of Mark Haddon's book, it says that Christopher has Asperger's. In Mark Haddon's article for the programme he says that he wishes that wasn't written on it because he wants it to be vaguer and less diagnostic than that. Did you get someone in to advise you about Luke's performance? Or did you just go with your instincts?

We did get a lot of advice – not about the performing of it – that would make me very nervous, 'cause I would feel like I didn't have the control. We got a lot of advice about autism and Asperger's syndrome, and we went to various schools and spoke to consultants. Two adults with Asperger's talked to us individually and as a group. I thought about bringing somebody into the rehearsal process but after a while I realised Christopher is probably not completely accurate because he has too many traits on the spectrum. He is his own individual character, and Luke was creating him, and I felt that was a very delicate, embryonic growth.

There was no one else commenting on the performance, except for Mark Haddon. He came to the first day of rehearsals, cried – in a good way – and then said he didn't want to come again! Then he saw the first preview performance.

Did Mark Haddon say what he felt about it? It must be a strange thing to see your novel become a piece of theatre.

He has been through quite an interesting process with this book, as you can imagine, because I think it is probably the nation's favourite book. A lot of people love it and I think that has been wonderful for him, though I would have thought it is possibly quite difficult to move on. He has given so many interviews about it with journalists that he doesn't know what else to say; it has sort of died for him, in a way. He did say that when he came to the first day of rehearsals, it had come alive for him again, because it was out of his domain I suppose and other people were speaking his words.

You only had six weeks to rehearse, which seems such a tiny amount of time to create something from scratch. How does it work?

Six weeks is a luxury: most theatres don't have that. Everybody works differently. I go into rehearsals very prepared; I know what I want to get out of the day. Me and Bunny [Christie, the designer] designed it over a long period of time. Then we worked on model boxes for a long time, and then we devised a story board where we took a photograph of the model using little model figures for every scene. We had

worked out a lot in the workshop. Rehearsals had very structured days.

Who directs the director? Who do you go to?

Usually it is the designer, I would say. Usually I am in the rehearsal room, trying to galvanise the troops and the designer is in the workshop (the workshops at the National Theatre, where they build and make things), trying to galvanise his/her troops. We'll come together at the end of the week to talk about how things are going.

The other thing is that my husband is really good, so I can come home from work every evening and scream and shout, and then look very composed the next day! Unfortunately I couldn't do that on this show, because he's in it, so I had to lie a lot at home, too!

To be truthful, I thoroughly enjoyed this process. I have not really enjoyed the process so much in the past two years, because the show is everything to me, it means so much. I am sure anybody who tries to be creative feels the same way. But I have loved this: I love the script; I really like the book. Working with choreographers is really illuminating and makes you feel like you're working with a cohort in the room because they're developing stuff and trying things out as much as you are.

We went into rehearsals very prepared, but there are also lots of ideas in the show that the actors came up with during rehearsals.



Marianne Elliott, Associate Director [for original West End cast] Nadia Fall and Movement Director Scott Graham in rehearsal
PHOTO BY ELLIE KURTZ

Temple Grandin – animal behaviour

This production uses live animals on stage – to explain the importance of Christopher’s relationship to animals.

Here, Simon Baron-Cohen, whose article on ‘Christopher and Asperger’s Syndrome’ appears in the programme for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, applauds Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson’s unusual approach to autism, *Animals in Translation*, in an article first published in the Guardian.

This magisterial book on animal behaviour is unique and, for me, is gripping reading. It is written by Temple Grandin, perhaps the best-known woman with autism on the planet, and co-authored by Catherine Johnson, a mother of two children with autism.

Grandin is famous because she lectures tirelessly on what it is like to have autism. She is unusual because she is a woman with autism (most people with autism are male). She was one of the first people with considerable professional qualifications (she is an associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University) to go public about her diagnosis of autism. She also has an international reputation in the meat-packing industry, for her ground-breaking designs of humane cattle-handling equipment, techniques, and setting standards of good practice in handling animals.

In this fascinating book, Grandin attempts two ambitious projects. First, to explain animal behaviour. Linked to this, she aims to show how problems in animal behaviour can be easily remedied if you understand the causes of the behaviour. To this end, she has analysed animal behaviour down to its smallest details, so that she can predict what an animal will do. She has vast experience in being called in to trouble-shoot difficult behaviour in domestic and agricultural animals, from cattle to dogs to horses, and has synthesised the knowledge of animal breeders, animal trainers and zoologists into a wealth of practical advice on how to manage difficult animals.

Her second big focus is a new theory of autism. She argues that the autistic mind is closer to the animal

mind than it is to the typical human mind when it comes to perception of detail. This last thesis will be most controversial, but it opens up a whole new way of understanding autism.

Some readers may wonder why a person with autism, who readily recognises she has difficulties understanding the social lives of people, can have such an intuitive and accurate understanding of other animals. Surely a person with autism would be more likely to choose an inanimate domain, such as mathematics, or music, or computers? Aren’t animals and their social lives just as confusing as other humans to a person with autism?

We know there are autistic “savants” who can identify a prime number with lightning speed, or can perform calculations such as multiplying two six-digit numbers together faster than a hand-calculator, or can listen to a piece of music just once and then reproduce it, or can tell you on what day of the week any date will fall. In all of these instances, the individual has systemised an inanimate system. They have analysed how the calendar works, as a system. Or they have analysed how music works, as a system. Or how numbers work, as a system.

When we systemise, we try to identify the rules that govern the system so that we can predict the system. And to identify the system’s laws you have to analyse the system down to its smallest details, to spot regularities of the kind “If A, then B” or “If I do X, then Y occurs”. Put formally, systemising involves piecing together “input-operation-output”. According to the theory I advanced in *The Essential Difference* (Penguin/Basic Books), people with autism are hyper-systemisers.

Grandin has successfully systemised animal behaviour. She notes that the behaviourist psychologist BF Skinner tried to do this in the 1950s (and describes an interesting meeting between herself and the great man). In my opinion Grandin has done a better job than Skinner did. This is because Skinner did not spend all his waking life trying to imagine how animals see, how they feel and how they think. Indeed, he famously argued that one should not speculate about an animal’s emotions, thoughts, perceptions and drives, and instead recommended an exclusive focus on the environmental factors that either reward the animal’s behaviour (leading to it being repeated) or punish it (leading to it not being repeated).

Temple Grandin – animal behaviour

Grandin, in contrast, starts from inside the animal's mind: what kinds of stimuli might make an animal frightened? What kinds of stimuli might make an animal angry? What do we know about the neuroscience of animal drives that might help us predict its behaviour? Grandin's incredibly patient, thorough, fine-grained analysis of animal behaviour results in her understanding it to the point of being able to predict it, fix it, control it and explain it. Her book almost stands as a manual for animal behaviour.

Here are some examples of laws that Grandin has uncovered: if an animal has to walk through a tunnel (to be vaccinated, for example) there are factors that will determine if it goes forward or refuses to enter. If there is a yellow object near the entrance, the animal won't enter. If that same object is painted grey, it will. If there is a moving object (a coat hung on a fence, flapping in the wind), the animal won't enter. If that same object is held still, it will enter. If the light contrast is too severe, going from light to dark, the animal won't enter. If indirect lighting is used, the animal will enter. If a moving light overhead is reflecting on the floor, the animal won't walk over that part of the floor. If there are unexpected noises (for example from the plumbing) near the entrance, the animal won't enter. If the noise is eliminated, the animal will enter.

She has also systemised the causes of aggression in domestic animals such as horses or dogs, down to a set of laws: for example, if a stallion is kept locked up and deprived of the opportunity to learn to socialise, it will not learn courtship rituals and will turn into an aggressive rapist. If a dog is not taught that it is the "beta" male in a household (with its owner being the "alpha" male), then it will behave like a dictator in a hierarchy and bite those whom it sees as its "inferiors". If a cat is reared indoors, it will treat a red dot from a laser pen as a mouse and chase it incessantly as you move the dot up the walls, over the floor and on to furniture.

Finally, she has systemised animal breeding. If you cross a fast-growing rooster with a fast-growing hen, you get fast-growing chickens. But she identifies that such single-characteristic genetic breeding programmes always come with a down-side. The fast-growing offspring also have weak hearts, for example. If you cross fast-growing chickens with those selected for their strength, you get long-living, fast-growing chickens – but they are monstrously aggressive.

The laws of animal behaviour that Grandin has uncovered are not just from her acute observation, but also from her knowledge of neuroscience. The yellow object panics the cows as they approach a tunnel because most mammals have dichromatic vision: they see just blue and green. This means that a yellow object is very clear to them – it has the highest contrast. Humans have trichromatic vision – we see blue, green and red – while birds see four basic colours (blue, green, red and ultraviolet).

She readily recognises that human behaviour is much harder to systemise than is animal behaviour, not least because animal emotions are few in number. She estimates there are four primal emotions in animals (rage, prey-chase, fear and curiosity) and four primary social emotions in animals (sexual attraction, separation distress, attachment and playfulness). In contrast, our recent count of discrete human emotions listed 412 (see www.jkp.com/mindreading). The non-autistic person effortlessly makes sense of other people's behaviour despite this complexity not by trying to systemise people, but by using a different approach (empathising).

What of Grandin's theory of autism: that people with autism are closer to animals than they are to humans? Such a theory could be taken as offensive (suggesting people with autism are somehow sub-human). In fact, Grandin's claim is that animals have superior perception of detail, and so do people with autism, and she backs up these claims with evidence. So, far from offending people with autism, she is if anything suggesting that non-autistic people have less sharp perception. We are, if you like, sub-autistic.

She links the two themes of her book by arguing that a person with autism will have a greater affinity for animals than will a person without autism, because the same sorts of unexpected flickering lights or sudden small movements or sounds that might startle an animal might also startle a person with autism. She goes further to argue that understanding animal perception might help us understand autistic perception.

If you are intrigued by animal behaviour, then this book will be a pleasurable read, as the intricacies of different species are laid bare. I was delighted to learn that elephants use infrasonic and possibly even seismic communication to send messages to their family members across distances as great as 25 miles. And I was distressed to read that male

Temple Grandin – animal behaviour

chimpanzees wage territorial wars in just the same way as humans do, resulting in many deaths. Or that the stereotypically friendly dolphin has been observed to engage in gang-rape of an isolated female.

Grandin is the modern day Doctor Dolittle who does not have any mystical telepathy with animals – she is simply an extremely experienced, sharp observer and careful scientist who has isolated the principles that govern animal behaviour. We owe her a huge debt for having used her autistic obsession (into animals) and her autistic perception (for accurate details) to teach us so much.

Simon Baron-Cohen is director of the Autism Research Centre at Cambridge University

Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behaviour
by Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson
publisher: Bloomsbury, £16.99

Prime numbers are what is left when you have taken all the patterns away. I think prime numbers are like life. They are very logical but you could never work out the rules, even if you spent all your time thinking about them.

Encouraging Curiosity

National Theatre Learning has been working with schools around the UK to create new pieces of theatre that respond to the themes and characters in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The schools involved are all mainstream schools that offer integrated support for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

Theatre practitioner, Melissa Woodbridge, writes about the first of these projects that took place in autumn 2012.

After many years of teaching drama and working with students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), the fact that *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* was to be staged felt very satisfying. It was a privilege therefore to be invited to participate in, and help create, an accompanying learning project and to introduce this great production to the very people to whom it might mean most.

One of the first projects I worked on in a school ran for three years, working with a group of students diagnosed with ASD, offering once weekly Shakespeare sessions. Staff at the school had warned in advance that the young people involved might well refuse to participate in 'drama', and my colleagues and I were given some discouraging opinions of their abilities, and whilst we were optimistic, there was some nervousness on our part since none of us had worked with young people on the spectrum before. So we learnt on our feet, with the help of some wonderful specialists and our brilliant students. We ensured that there was no pressure to participate although there was a commitment to attend. We kept the staff team consistent and had a high practitioner to student ratio. This afforded us the opportunity to adapt every exercise we did to the individual concerns of each student or in some cases simply to sit with a disengaged student week after week, until trust had developed. We played simple but structured games that we repeated each week to provide familiarity and to build confidence. As the complexity of the stories and plays we worked on increased and the students became more involved the inventiveness and creativity they displayed constantly surprised us. They showed us the world and the work of Shakespeare

anew, challenged us and made us laugh along the way. It was one of the richest teaching experiences we have ever had.

Many of the team read Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* during the early days of that project and found that we recognized in it some of the behaviours and feelings of the students we were getting to know. Early in our project we began demonstrating and acting for the students in each session and discovered that whilst our students loved to watch us perform they were initially very challenged seeing us suddenly 'being someone else'. It can be difficult for ASD students to understand something as fiction when it is presented as reality in a dramatic setting. As Christopher says in *The Curious Incident...*, 'I don't like proper novels, because they are lies about things which didn't happen.' Our students were often confounded by an actor's seemingly sudden change of mood and would express concern, surprise or anxiety. We therefore repeated our short performances at every session and took clear and repeated steps to assume a character so that participants could see us moving deliberately from one world into another. They then copied us, and these steps, and gradually learnt to use their own imaginative thinking, a skill we wanted to encourage them to develop.

In planning a learning project based on the NT production of *The Curious Incident...*, I wanted to explore whether those participating would experience the same difficulty separating fact from fiction. The first project was with ASD students from Longfield Academy in Kent and it began when the group saw the production at a 'relaxed' performance – designed with ASD audiences in mind. At the Q&A session with Company members that followed the performance, one particular query stood out from among a barrage of excited questions: 'Does the guy playing the main part have Asperger's himself?' The young student asking the question was sure he did. The actors were all amazed. The very nature of live theatre, along with talented actors presenting such an entertaining story, that resonated with their own lives, had revealed again the difficulty that those with ASD can have with reality and fiction.

Having seen the production, there was great enthusiasm among the Longfield students for the subsequent project. Andy Brunskill, an NT Staff Director, led the rehearsals, exploring the students' lives and encouraging them to express themselves

Encouraging Curiosity (continued)...

in their own way. We helped by creating exercises where the students felt comfortable speaking in front of each other and helped them find the joy in performing. Much of my work focuses on development through games, gently introducing new skills. Having established Andy's aims prior to the session, we would demonstrate exercises first and then encourage the students to create material for their final showing. We moved from experiences in the literal world to those in a more fanciful or more 'curious' one. We had great fun with a game based on finding unusual ways to get through an imaginary locked door. Using mime our students tunneled underneath it, used magic potions to enter via the keyhole, and dynamite to explode it.

In turn, having looked at a more fantastical world, the group were better prepared to think about their feelings. In one exercise we asked the question 'What are you afraid of?' and then worked on scenes where students helped others act out their fears and, in an imaginary context, helped them to confront them.

The final performance that completed the project attempted to find a balance between the worlds of the literal, the imaginary and the emotional. The performance was staged at the John Lyon's Education Studio at the National Theatre Studio, for an audience of parents, friends and NT staff. It was a wonderful afternoon. The school had arranged transport for a coach-load of enthusiastic parents, to celebrate what their children had achieved. Their teacher described it as the proudest day of her working life. It is hard for those of us used to the stage to comprehend the leap taken by those who never thought they would find themselves on one, but some of these students don't usually speak in class, let alone on a stage in front of an audience. On that day, the students were exultant.

Like all the projects we are involved in we learnt a great deal from working with Longfield Academy and we are excited that we will continue to work with schools in response to *The Curious Incident...* as it begins a new life in the West End. The possibilities, as Christopher says, can be endless: 'I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything'.

Melissa Woodbridge is a practitioner for NT Learning and a founder member of Touchstone Shakespeare Theatre Company.

touchstoneshakespearetheatre.org.uk

Exercises

Drama Exercises For Schools (KS4) And Youth Theatre

These exercises might be useful for school and youth theatre groups who are studying or performing *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, or who are investigating the devising process more generally. Some exercises come directly from the rehearsal room, while others have been written to give you a sense of how the Company have approached the play, condensing what might have taken a few hours or days into a few minutes.

The key areas of investigation are:

- Building ensemble: alerting members of the group to what's going on around them, establishing a shared rhythm and tempo that can then be played with and feeling safe to take risks with performance
- Creating a world on stage that serves the intentions of the writer and which helps the audience to understand how Christopher sees and interprets the world around him
- Analysing our own and others' work and seeking to refine and improve its clarity.

1. Clicks

This exercise is really useful for developing focus and for establishing a shared tempo.

- Arrange the group into a large circle. Send a finger click around the circle from person to person. Each person clicks their fingers twice: one click to receive, one to pass on.
- Establish a tempo and ask the group to stick to it, not speeding up or slowing down. Once you have achieved this, invite the group to think about why a shared rhythm might be useful to the Company.
- Scatter the group and ask them to remember to/from whom they sent/received the click in the circle. Play with sending the click around the room, using the established pattern.
- Extension: when anyone receives the click, they must use it to tell a story – they are the only person who can move and can keep hold of it for as long as they need to, before sending it on. Ensure that the transitions between one person moving/stopping are really exact and happen simultaneously with the clicks. Ask the group to consider what skills they are practising that might be helpful if they are creating a new piece of theatre.

2. Jumping

This exercise was used by the Company in rehearsal. It comes via Frantic Assembly, movement directors on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. It's very physical and fun.

- Ask the group to stand in evenly spaced rows and columns, forming a grid.
- Play some music with a clear, regular beat. Row-by row, starting with the front, each row jumps eight times in time to the music and on your count. On their 8th jump, everyone in the row should simultaneously turn 180 degrees to face the row behind. Each successive row follows this pattern in turn, starting their jumps on the first count of the next 8. You may want to re-start this a couple of times, giving the group a chance to reflect on how to improve the uniformity of their jumping.
- When the back turns on the 8th jump, they immediately start the process again, this time jumping for six and turning 180 degrees on the 6th jump.
- The process continues with the whole group turning row-by-row on 4th, 2nd and finally 1st jumps.
- To make the routine more complex, repeat the whole process, this time asking the group to add in gestures or other moves on the 2nd and 4th jumps, each time their row is jumping.
- Ask the group to reflect on the skills they are using to make it work.

3. Journeys Home

The Company worked to create a representation of Christopher's journey home from school. It's a motif that recurs throughout the play and which gives the audience a sense of how Christopher interprets the world and how he is feeling at a given moment in time.

- Ask everyone in the group to imagine their own journey home from school and, working individually, to enact a condensed version of it. They should make sure to have a definite start and end point to their journeys.
- Once everyone has done this, ask participants to get into groups of four or five and to decide on one person's journey that they are going to enact together.
- Explain that for Christopher's journey in the play, inanimate objects become more significant than people. Christopher's condition means that people are quite confusing to him, whereas inanimate objects are constant and dependable. When creating the journey, there should be no talking and the groups should focus on trying to create the objects that they encounter along the way.

Exercises (continued)

- Watch as many of these as you can these and ask the audience to reflect on what worked well.

In rehearsal, the Company didn't just devise the journey home from scratch, they already had Simon Stephens' script to help structure their performance.

- Hand out the speech from the play that narrates Christopher's journey home and ask someone to read it out loud.
- In the same small groups as before, students must create Christopher's journey home, again focusing on the objects mentioned in the speech and making sure that the whole speech is spoken as part of the performance. If there's anything useful from the first round of improvisations, ask the groups to incorporate that.
- Watch the different versions. Ask the audience what worked well and then give the group some direction to incorporate into their performance before they show it again. Pick up on ways to strengthen anything that the audience has identified as successful and otherwise focus on:

i. How they can have a clear sense of 'journey' – always moving forward, going from one end of the stage to the other, etc.

ii. Incorporating all the objects that are mentioned – have they ignored any? Why? Can we stretch ourselves to attempt the things we don't quite know how to do?

iii. Speed and logic of actors' transitions from being one object to another – is it interesting to see the same actor playing the front door, then fridge door, then bedroom door? Do the objects come to Christopher or the other way round? What happens if you ask the group to switch without having time to plan it?

iv. The possibility of lending the objects personality – think about how you can show the way that Christopher experiences drinking the milkshake, not just miming the object itself.

Members of the Company in rehearsal
PHOTO BY ELLIE KURTZ



Resources: Ambitious About Autism



Ambitious about Autism is the national charity for children and young people with autism. The charity provides services, raises awareness and understanding, and campaigns to make the ordinary possible for children and young people with autism. We were delighted to welcome members of the cast and production team to meet Cian, one of our Youth Patrons, at Ambitious About Autism and see the specialist work we do at Tree House School. To find out more please visit ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk

Talk about Autism is the free online community and discussion forum we provide for everyone interested in autism, including parents, carers, family members, people on the spectrum, and professionals. Visit talkaboutautism.org.uk

In a video by the National Theatre, original cast and crew talk about how they created the world of the book for the stage. Visit [youtube.com/watch?v=k2bV75ITXJw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2bV75ITXJw)



Luke Treadaway and Niamh Cusack from the original cast, with Cian Binchey at Tree-House School
PHOTO: KATY RUDD

Additional resources

FROM THE NATIONAL'S BOOKSHOP:

Copies of the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* are available from £7.99 from the National's Bookshop, along with special merchandise and stationery.

W shop.nationaltheatre.org.uk

T +44 (0)20 7452 3456

E bookshop@nationaltheatre.org.uk

Teaching Activities

Methuen Drama has published a schools' edition of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* as part of their Critical Scripts series, edited by Paul Bunyan and Ruth Moore.

Individual copies of this edition can be purchased from the NT Bookshop and all major book retailers.
ISBN 978-1-4081-85216

More information:
bloomsbury.com/criticalscripts

Extracts from the Key Stage 3 and GCSE teaching activities appear on the following pages, with kind permission of Methuen Drama.

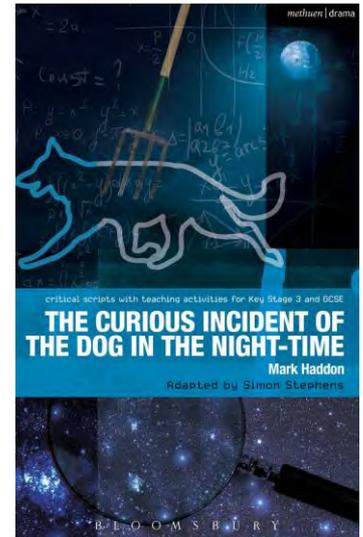
Teaching and Learning Activities

The activities that follow are taken from the schools' edition of the play published in **Methuen Drama's Critical Scripts** series, edited by Paul Bunyan and Ruth Moore: www.bloomsbury.com/criticalscripts.

Aimed at Secondary pupils, the activities are the first three from a longer scheme of work that accompanies the play script, with additional resources available online from the series page.

The additional resources required for activities 1 and 2 follow as an Appendix to the activities. Activity 3 requires use of the Critical Scripts edition of the play.

Individual copies of this edition can be purchased from the NT Bookshop and all major book retailers. ISBN 978-1-4081-85216



Developing literary analysis

The materials provide vibrant and challenging approaches to teaching that enable learners to develop critical thinking, independent learning and transferable skills.

The structured active learning approaches, outlined in the scheme of work, increase teachers' confidence in taking on ambitious and innovative approaches to developing reading, writing, speaking and listening, and enable pupils to:

- analyse writers' complex techniques and skills
- understand texts in a cultural and historical context
- understand writers' intentions and choices of language, structures and ideas
- analyse the different contributions made by novelists, playwrights, directors, narrators
- analyse images, drama and literary techniques.

Such work has a direct effect on pupils' ability to write about literary and dramatic techniques and use evidence from the text to back up their ideas. The 'learning' section of the scheme of work is devised in such a way that pupils build their learning and are provided with the appropriate contexts and techniques to produce sophisticated responses and develop high-level skills. This is achieved through drama approaches that enable learners to visualise, physicalise and articulate complex ideas and concepts in response to texts, and that extend their reading and writing skills.

The scheme of work is addressed directly to the pupils so that they can understand and analyse the learning process and consider the progress they are making in each of the skills identified. While individual activities are identified within the scheme, they are often inter-linked and inter-dependant and are best approached within the complete scheme of work.

Discounts on class sets

For information on discounts when purchasing class sets of 30 copies or more of the Critical Scripts edition of the play, contact Phil Prestianni at Bloomsbury:

phil.prestianni@bloomsbury.com

1. Introducing and exploring ideas

To analyse text and introduce key ideas within the play.

Learning

- ◆ The whole class (divided in half) sits in two large circles, surrounding two inner circles of words (written/printed individually on to pieces of card). The words, if rearranged, make two quotations from the script.

- ◆ Around the room will be quotations from the play ('I promise', 'Do you know that it is wrong to lie', 'If you don't tell the truth now, then later on it hurts even more') and mathematical equations, questions and prime numbers (' 864×251 ', '157, 163, 167, 173, 17', 'Show that a triangle with sides that can be written in the form $n^2 + 1$, $n^2 - 1$ and $2n$ (where n is greater than 1) is right-angled'.)

Teaching & Resources

- ▣ The word-cards need to be prepared before the lesson and set out (in a random order) within two separate circles.

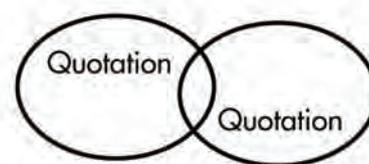
The quotations need to be prepared before the lesson (see website).

- ◆ Read out all the words around the circle, thinking carefully about the order the words might go in, so that they make sense as one quotation. Through discussion and negotiation, reposition the words around the circle so that they can be read out in the 'correct' order. Everyone listens to both quotations being read.
- ◆ As a class, sit in a large semi-circle facing the projected quotations and discuss what they mean and why they might be important to the text.
- ◆ Look at the projected image of a Venn diagram with the quotations printed within each circle. Discuss which words or ideas suggested by either quotation could be placed in the central overlap? Why?

'The word metaphor means carrying something from one place to another and it is when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn't.'

'I don't like acting because it is pretending that something is real when it is not really real at all so it is like a kind of lie.'

- ▣ Project the quotations
- ▣ Project a Venn Diagram



Further activities, reflection, analysis or discussion

- ◆ Discuss what the quotations and numbers around the room suggest about the play you are about to explore.
- ◆ Speaking and Listening – Discuss the strategies used to negotiate the ‘correct’ order and the clues you used to formulate a response.
- ◆ How might a Venn diagram be used to explore characters, themes or ideas in the play?
- ◆ How and why might the playwright focus on the use of metaphors, pretence and lies to convey ideas to the audience?

2. Introducing a context and a character

To develop a context and reflect on the techniques used to introduce the characters and key ideas.

Learning

- ◆ Sit in a large semi-circle facing the projected image. Watch the short film clip. What have you noticed about the shots in this clip? What sort of landscape is it?
- ◆ In groups of four, you are going to develop a Commentary to accompany these shots, describing what can be seen out of the train window. Try to include

Teaching & Resources

- ▣ YouTube clip
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9GzipgQCJA>

The texts (taken from pages 57–58 of the script) need to be prepared before the lesson, as do stills from the film clip.

metaphors in your Commentary. Each group will be allocated a slightly different section and be given a still from the film as a guide. You will also be given some pieces of 'text' that would be found inside the train, that you are going to introduce in to your Commentary.

- ◆ Using your still as a stimulus, develop a Commentary (spoken in first person in the present tense) that describes what you can see. At different stages in your Commentary, other members of the group will interrupt by reading out loud one of the texts found within the carriage.
- ◆ Move in to a space with your group next to a picture. You will be given some time to rehearse your Commentary in your groups before the process begins.
- ◆ Stand with your group in a large circle. When the music fades, the first group will step forward as the teacher freezes the film, and provide the Commentary until the music begins again. The next group will then move forward. This

Model how this could be done by commentating on a short piece of the film clip and reading out a poster that could be displayed in the carriage.

Copies of the stills from the film clip should be placed round the room.

Use the 'frame forward' command at this stage to control the shots displayed.

♪ Music.

▣ Extract from the film clip.

will continue until all groups have provided Commentaries of the scene from the train and verbalised the texts found within the train carriage.

- ◆ When all the groups have provided Commentaries, the teacher will read the following extract,

Extract 1 (page 65)

From **Christopher:** 1. There are nineteen cows in the field.

to 7. The cows are mostly facing uphill.

Further activities, reflection, analysis or discussion

- ◆ Discuss how the use of commentary or verbalising texts might be used within the play. Why?
- ◆ Discuss what Christopher's description tells us about him? What are the playwright's aims here?
- ◆ What differences are created by the description that includes metaphors and the description that Christopher uses? How might the playwright develop this in the play?
- ◆ Discuss the front cover of the play and what it suggests about the content and themes of the play.

3. Investigating the opening scenes and structure

To investigate and analyse the text and reflect on the techniques used to introduce the characters and key ideas.

Learning

- ◆ You will be working in a small group of between 2 and 5 students. Each group is given an extract from pages 3–16 of the play. (See extracts below.)

Extract 1 (Pages 3–4)

From The start of the play
to *Christopher looks at the Policeman.*

Extract 2 (Pages 4–6)

From I do not tell lies.
to And it can also mean ‘I think what you just said was very stupid’.

Extract 3 (Pages 6–8)

From Could you take your laces out of your shoes please, Christopher?
to Right. Lovely. Do you know your father’s phone number, Christopher?

Teaching & Resources

By exploring these extracts, the pupils begin to select and analyse the relevant information. They also begin to take a real interest in the material and want to know more. By Action Reading the extracts, they have to consider some of the initial issues that directors and actors need to address.

By working on the different extracts in this way, and sharing them with the class through Rolling Theatre, they are essentially teaching each other different aspects of

Extract 4 (Pages 8–10)

From Christopher turns to Ed. Ed looks at him.

to Do you understand what I'm saying? Yes.

Extract 5 (Pages 10–12)

From The second main reason is that people often talk using metaphors.

to Yes, Christopher, you could say that. You could very well say that.

Extract 6 (Pages 12–14)

From Siobhan reads more from the book.

to If I make her a get-well card will you take it in for her tomorrow?

Extract 7 (Pages 14–15)

From How are you today, Christopher?

to I don't know.

Extract 8 (Pages 15–16)

From Christopher, if your father's told you not to do something maybe you shouldn't do it.

to If you don't go now I will call the police again.

the script. It is, therefore, not necessary to read large amounts of the script as a whole class. This more active approach leads to engagement and deeper levels of understanding and analysis.

- ◆ In your group, produce a short Digital Video Clip of the extract. To do this, you begin with a Still Image, followed by an Action Reading of the script and then freeze at the end in a final Still Image. You need to investigate the script and search for clues about the characters, story and setting in order to produce an accurate Action Reading of the extract.

- ◆ As a class, you produce your Digital Video Clips as Rolling Theatre. Music is used to guide you. All the groups freeze in their initial Still Image and then the first group unfreezes, adds the action and then freezes again. When they freeze, the next group knows that they can begin. This continues with all the groups producing their Digital Video Clip, until all groups have shown their pieces. When you are not presenting your Digital Video Clip, you can become a Spect-actor. This means that while your body remains frozen in the Still Image, your head can turn to follow the action so that you can see and hear the

For each of the Still Images, stop the pupils (by counting them down using the prime numbers from 11, 7, 5, 3 and 2) while they are ‘rehearsing’ and ask them to show the Still Images. Once they have all frozen, ask them to sharpen the pictures to show the tension.

Position the groups round the room according to the order of the *extracts*.

♪ Play music at the start, end and in between each extract.

Remind them of the nature of Spect-acting and the importance of freezing in their final Still Images at the end of the Rolling Theatre.

work of the other groups. You should remain in your place, in order for all the groups to freeze in their final Still Image at the end.

- ◆ Reflecting on the scenes that you have just presented and observed, think about the structure of the play and the devices the playwright has used. How do you ensure smooth transitions between and within the different extracts when the action moves from one scene to another or where Siobhan's reading provides a character's voice? What techniques could you add to ensure the audience understand what is happening. Discuss this within your group and with the groups either side of your extract.
- ◆ As a class, re-run the Rolling Theatre adding the techniques and/or devices that you have discussed.

To model this process, you might provide examples of different ways of developing a transition or scene such as: Siobhan having a book that she is reading from, the other groups turning to face the action as it happens; Siobhan being removed from each group and placed in the centre of the circle.

♪ Play music at the start, end and in between each extract.

Further activities, reflection, analysis or discussion

- ◆ How did the Rolling Theatre activity help you to analyse and understand the significance of the scenes and explore the methods used to introduce the audience to the different characters and issues?
- ◆ How did the changes made to the Rolling Theatre help your understanding of the scenes? What techniques do you think the playwright, director and actors would have used?
- ◆ What role does Siobhan have throughout these scenes and how do you think this relates to the decisions the playwright made when adapting the novel in to a play?
- ◆ Discuss what is understood by ‘Truth’ and how this is explored in the opening scenes. What attitude does the audience have towards the characters at this stage of the play and what ideas do they expect to be explored throughout the play? Why?
- ◆ Preparing for written analytical responses. Analyse how the language devices and techniques are used to explore:
 - ◆ Characters
 - ◆ Relationships
 - ◆ Tension
 - ◆ A sense of voice

Appendix

Activity 1: Quotations

I promise

Do you know that
it is wrong to lie

If you don't tell the
truth now, then later
on it hurts even more

864 x 251

157, 163,

167, 173, 17

Show that a triangle with sides that can be written in the form $n^2 + 1$, $n^2 - 1$ and $2n$ (where n is greater than 1) is right-angled.

Playwright

From the Critical Scripts edition of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Methuen Drama, 2013), edited by Paul Bunyan and Ruth Moore

Audience

From the Critical Scripts edition of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Methuen Drama, 2013), edited by Paul Bunyan and Ruth Moore

Writer

From the Critical Scripts edition of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Methuen Drama, 2013), edited by Paul Bunyan and Ruth Moore

Reader

From the Critical Scripts edition of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Methuen Drama, 2013), edited by Paul Bunyan and Ruth Moore

Appendix

Activity 1: Word cards

The word

metaphor

means

carrying

something

from one

place to

another

and it is

when you

describe

something

by using a

word for

something

that it

isn't.

**I don't like
acting**

From the Critical Scripts edition of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Methuen Drama, 2013), edited by Paul Bunyan and Ruth Moore

because it

is

pretending

that

something

is real

when it is

not really

real at all

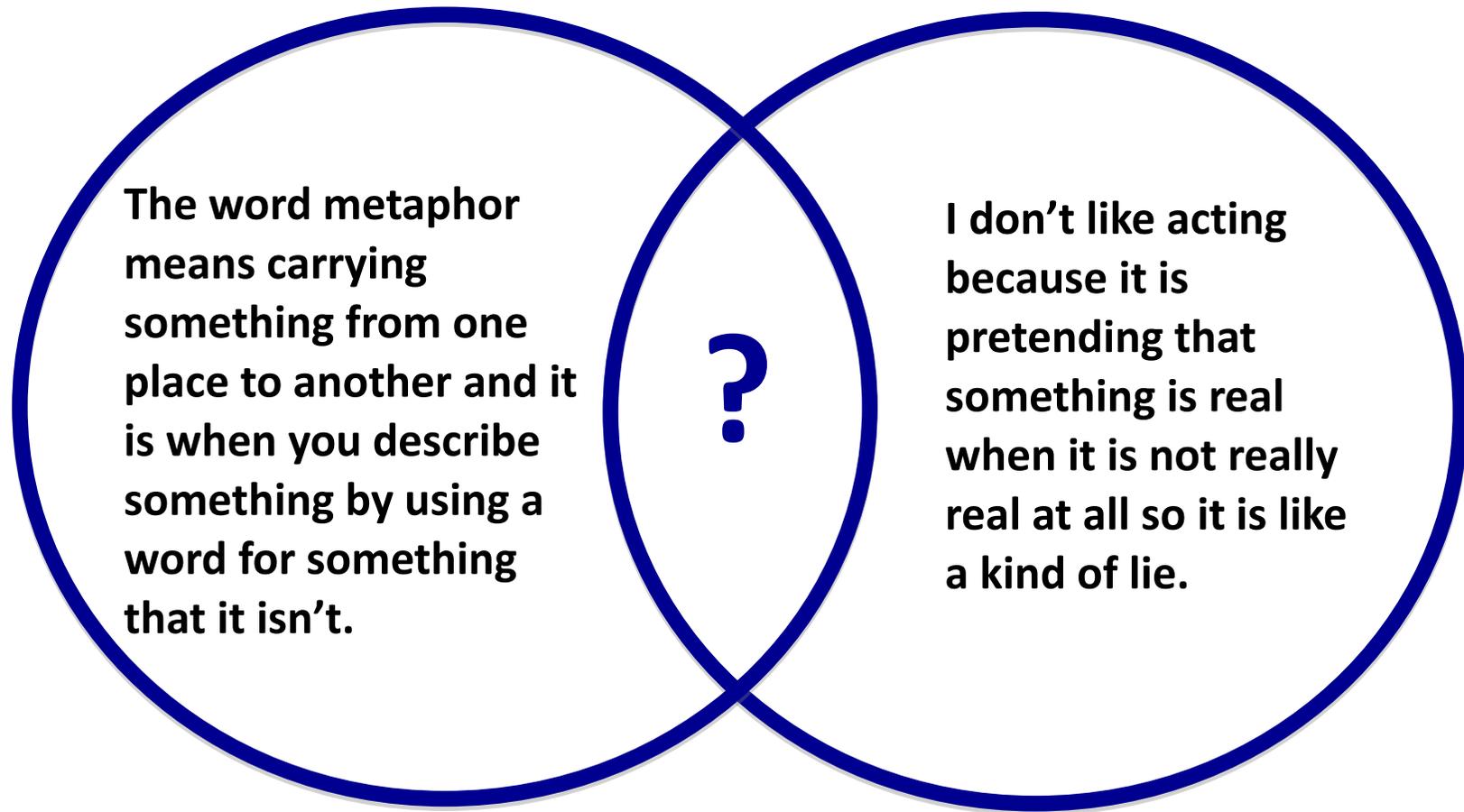
so it is like

a kind of

lie.

The word metaphor means carrying something from one place to another and it is when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn't.

I don't like acting because it is pretending that something is real when it is not really real at all so it is like a kind of lie.



Appendix

Activity 2: Found texts from the train

Customers seeking access to the car park please use assistance phone opposite, right of the ticket office.

Warning CCTV in operation.

Great Western.

Cold beers and lagers.

CAUTION WET FLOOR.

Your 50p will keep a premature
baby alive for 1.8 seconds.

Transforming travel.

Refreshingly Different.

It's Delicious, it's creamy and it's
only £1.30.

Hot Choc Deluxe.

0870 777 7676.

The Lemon Tree.

No Smoking.

Fine teas.

Automatic Fire Door Keep Clear.

Air Conditioned.

Reserved Parking.

Open As Usual This Way.

No Smoking.

No alcohol.

Dogs must be carried.

RVP.

Dogs must be carried.

LFB.

A Perfect Blend.

Royal Mail.

Mon–Fri 7 am – 7 pm.

Dogs must be carried at all times.

Special Lunch Offers.

Parking Subject to the Railway
Bylaws Section 219 of the
Transport Act 2000.

Please stand on the right.

Superb Coffee.

Step-free Access.

Take Extra Care with Children.

Superb Coffee.

Cash Dispensers.

Superb Coffee.

Dogs must be carried at all times.

Appendix

Activity 2: Train Journey Pictures























