



Moth



SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE 

Teachers Notes
HOUSE: ED 2010

SUITABILITY

Years 10 – 12

DATES

20 – 23 July

Introduction



A. Introduction

These teacher's notes have been designed to assist you with classroom preparation and extension work in relation to the Arena Theatre Company production of *Moth*. We hope that this resource will assist you to further enjoy your performing arts experience back in the classroom. The activities are designed for students from Years 10-12. Drama educators Meg Upton and Mathew Clausen have contributed activities to these notes. In these notes there are a range of learning activities that provide an opportunity for students to explore the broad themes and style of the performance.

Syllabi written by NSW Board of Studies have been used as a guide for the planning of these activities. You should consider rephrasing the questions and activities to suit the particular terminology, curriculum foci and outcomes used in your school.

Some websites are suggested in this kit. It is recommended that before setting activities based on these, that teachers first visit the sites and assess the suitability of the content for your particular school setting.

B. Classroom Context and Curriculum Links

Arena Theatre Company has created another fine example of cutting edge contemporary Australian youth theatre with their production of *Moth*. Told from the perspective of two characters, this performance addresses the experiences and concerns of young people. The combination of writer Chris Kohn's cleverly crafted script and director Declan Greene's arresting staging create potent and relevant messages about bullying, identity, mental health and relationships. This performance provides many opportunities for discussion, reflection and extension class activities. The themes, content and style of this performance provide links to the following subject areas:

Curriculum Links-

Drama: *Making, Performing, Appreciating*

English: *The study of drama, responding to and composing texts*

PDHPE: *Self and Relationships, Individual and Community Health*

C. Performance Event Description and Synopsis

A martyred saint. A talking moth. A mission to redeem our sins.

Sebastian is a terminally unpopular fifteen-year-old suburban kid, with an overactive imagination and an obsession with anime and death. His only friend Claryssa is an emo Wiccan art-freak barely one rung higher than Sebastian on the social ladder. What starts as just another night drinking down at the cricket nets soon gives way to an ecstatic vision that leaves Sebastian unconscious and Claryssa missing without explanation. The next morning, he wakes up with a mysterious moth in a jar by his bed, a burning passion to save the souls of all humankind and a desperate need to reach Claryssa. Sebastian spirals into a breathless ride of schizophrenic delusion and religious passion, living life at a feverish pitch that can only lead to tragedy.

Mental illness. Religious zeal. Love. This is a highly charged, rapid-fire, funny and moving new production. *Moth* is writer Declan Greene's first commission for Arena, bringing together his unique, incisive voice with director Chris Kohn and designer Jonathon Oxlade to create a thrilling new work for audiences aged 15 years and over.

Pre Performance

Activity One - Arena Theatre Company



Curriculum Links English/Drama

In this activity your students will research Arena Theatre Company. The information provided in this activity will help your students understand the process behind the making of the play and the contribution of the creative team. Ask your students to visit the Arena Theatre Company website and to complete the related tasks.

Arena Theatre (This links to the old website that was functioning when these notes were written - a new website is under construction)

http://www.arenatheatre.com.au/index_1.php

- Where is Arena Theatre Company located?
- Look at the design of the website; the use of colour, images, font etc. What image is the company trying to convey?
- Go to the link for past and present productions at the Arena Theatre Company website. Read through the descriptions and look at the images and video clips.
- What adjectives would you use to describe the style of the performances?
- From the performance list, which one would you most like to see? Why?
- Are there common themes or issues in the performances?
- Can you see a link between the image of the company and the visual style of the performances?
- Write four expectations you have about the performance *Moth*.

Pre Performance

Activity Two - Making Moth



Curriculum Links Drama/English

In this activity, your students will look at the process of developing *Moth* for public performance and the contributions of the production team to this process. Ask your students to read the following information and then report back to the class using the discussion questions provided.

2.1 Development of the Play and Directorial Concept

Moth is a completely new show, developed over the course of a year before finally making it to the stage. Many individuals are involved in this lengthy process and have their own vision for the play - the writer, the director, the dramaturge, etc.

The Director's View

Director, Chris Kohn says ... *"The development process involved three separate weeks with different actors each time. We deliberately did this to get a range of perspectives and approaches. We also worked with a class of Year 12s at Buckley Park Secondary College. We showed them some scenes, talked about the characters and the world of the play and invited them to give feedback. We were keen to get responses to such things as the authenticity of the language and the characters, their interest in what happens, and the ending. We also had a work experience student and her friend to respond to the work, and they are very close to the ages of the characters."*

The Dramaturge's View


Dramaturge, Maryanne Lynch says ... *"Moth had already gone through at least one, perhaps two draft scripts, and a week's workshop with actors, before I came on board. Even so the next three drafts have been a process of helping the writer and director make more discoveries about the piece --what shape it should have; what's missing or too present in the characters; whether the language of the text and of characters within it feels right; and even what the piece is all about. It's amazing how a work constantly reveals itself to you across drafts, rehearsals and production."*

"Wait, what's a Dramaturge?"

Mayanne Lynch says ... *"As a dramaturge I may begin with a conversation with a director, a writer, a team of collaborators; I may receive a first-draft script or initial idea; I may be invited into a project when it has already been some time in the making. The key element in any and all processes is to assist, enhance and extend the artistic idea into its fullest realisation. So at times I suggest a form that hasn't been discovered; or point out what I find confusing in the storyline and what this is or isn't revealing of the deeper intentions of the work. Or perhaps it's about nutting out the themes, or the characters, or the style."*

Discussion Topics

- How did the writer and director use collaboration and rehearsal to complete the script for *Moth*?
- What do you think about the idea of a play like *Moth*?
- Why a play and not a novel or a film?
- How can improvisation and rehearsal of written script be helpful in improving the final script?
- Why do you think it is important for a company like Arena to have feedback from a young audience?



Activity Two - Making Moth Continued

2.2 Vision of the Characters and Play

The Writer's View

Declan Greene says ... *"Sebastian is an impossibly skinny and gawky fifteen-year-old with big bug-eyes and a small pursed mouth. He wears a second-hand school blazer that is several sizes too big, with shorts and a shirt, no tie. His head is shaved and he has a rash of pimples across his forehead. His skin is always slightly greasy. He drowns himself in Lynx deodorant because he gets B.O. and has an organically intense smell. His laugh is beyond annoying. He is obsessed with video games and post apocalyptic anime - Ghost in the Shell, Neon Genesis Evangelion, Akira, Trinity Blood, etc."*

"Claryssa is the same age as Sebastian. She is quite large, and wears a massively oversized school jumper that she tries to use to camouflage her weight, with sleeves that hang way down over her hands. Her hair is dyed black with an inch of brown regrowth, and is always frizzy and untamed. She has beautiful unblemished skin, and huge blue eyes lined in black. Out of school uniform she would wear Goth/emo clothes - tight black jeans or vinyl pants, My Chemical Romance t-shirt, dog-collar, black lipstick, etc. She hates everyone in her year-level - thinks they're all immature fuckheads, apart from Sebastian, and has no problem at all with the fact that everyone hates her."

Discussion

- How do you feel about these characters from their written descriptions?
- Why do you think the writer has chosen these two characters as the focus of the drama?
- What might some of the challenges that actors might face if playing these roles?

2.3 Directorial Concept and Production Design

More from the Director

Chris Kohn says ... *"Moth is a very text-based and actor-driven show, so not a show where in rehearsal I might say 'this is going to be it'. The design facilitates the performance and the acting, There are three panels of felt that act as a triptych, inspired by traditional religious triptychs in churches. The three panels create three spaces which means that there are more spatial dynamics and possibilities. I like to think of Moth as being a short sharp intense piece for a teenage audience. It plays with memory and the past and I hope that a young audience will like that."*

Research and Discussion

- Research what a triptych is and what its purpose was.
- Go to Google and do an image search for examples of the triptych.
- When you see the production focus on how the idea of the triptych works for the production. Consider how the panels create different spaces and how the panels work symbolically.

2.4 The following web link is to a rehearsal blog of *Moth*. Ask your students to visit the blog and read some of the more recent postings. Have a class discussion and compare the comments made by the production team provided above and the comments made in the blog postings.

Moth Blog Spot

<http://arenamoth.blogspot.com>

Pre Performance

Activity Three - Generation Z



Curriculum Links English/Drama

3.1 In this activity your students will discuss and explore through drama activities perceptions, opinions and perspectives about Generation Z.

Ask your students to work with a partner and visit the following web links. They may wish to search for other sites relevant to this activity. Ask them to feedback information about how the media has defined Generation Z.

Generation Z

<http://www.generationz.com.au/>

The HeraldSun

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/gen-z-here-they-come/story-e6frf7l6-1111115637247>

3.2 Ask your students to work with a partner. Each pair will need to find somewhere in the room to work. Using the information from the web links and developed during class discussion, each pair is to prepare a short movement and voice presentation that represents perceptions of Generation Z. The pairs are to use physical shape and movement to show members of this generation in various situations. Each situation is shown as a moment and is introduced by a statement for example, Generation Z is,,, Generation Z likes.... Generation Z wants ... etc. Allow the pairs time to prepare and then view their work.

3.3 Divide your students into groups of four. Ask each group to develop the previous activity by comparing their parents' generation with Generation Z. The structure of the performance is the same as for 3.2 with the addition of character work in situations introduced by statements. Allow the groups time to prepare and then present the work to the class.

3.4 Ask the groups of four to work together again. Each group is to devise a scene between a teenager and their parents about any of the following issues: what to wear, going out, what time to be home, homework, drinking. Ask the groups to reflect on their understanding of the similarities and differences between their generation and their parents' generation as they devise their performances. Allow the groups time to prepare and then ask them to show their performance work to the class. Ask the class to provide encouraging feedback on effective situations, strong character work and engaging performance skills.

3.5 As an extension to the previous activity, ask volunteer groups to replay their scenes. Explain to the class that you will ask the actors to freeze the action at points during the performance. When the scene freezes you will choose one character and ask them questions about the action/issues occurring at that moment in the scene. When the play continues the actors may need to improvise based on what they have rehearsed to incorporate new insights or understandings about characters based on the responses to the questions.

Pre Performance

Activity Four - Teenage Tribes

Curriculum Links Drama/English

4.1 This activity looks at social groups and how these groupings impact on social dynamics amongst young people. Begin this activity by discussing with the class the types of groupings of people that exist in society. Ask the class to give reasons why people in society might want to belong to a group. List some of the names given to groups that young people in Australian high schools might belong to or feel connected to. Debate as a class the benefits and limitations of groups and the practice of labeling others as belonging to a group.

4.2 Seat your class facing a performance area. Ask for volunteers to move to the performing area and adopt a frozen pose as a character belonging to a particular 'teenage tribe'. Keep asking for volunteers until the tableau appears to be complete. Encourage your students to adopt strong poses by emphasising use of facial expression, gesture etc. Help students achieve belief by asking them to imagine the character in a specific moment or situation to give their character pose intention. Each tableau should try to capture as many aspects of the group they are representing as possible.

4.3 The aim of this activity is for each group to extend their representation beyond the stereotype that may have been shown in the tableaux. This activity will require substantial preparation time.

Divide the class into groups of four. Each group is to choose two 'teenage tribes' and create more complex representations of the people who might belong to them. In the situation, characters from two different groups are forced into a situation where they have to work together. The aim of the drama is to show how common aims/interests can unite a group and how individual needs can work against this. When making this drama, each group member will need to create a more specific character with a personal history. Ask the group members to spend time developing individual characters. The characters in the drama will be more interesting if some share similar values/music/interests/identity and others do not.

Provide feedback on the ability of the group to achieve the aim of the drama and on effective choices for character, staging and the elements of drama.



Post Performance

Activity Five - Performance Reflection

Curriculum Links English/Drama

5.1 Ask your students to read the following reviews of *Moth*. Encourage your students to reflect on each review by answering the following questions:

Moth Review

<http://sometimesmelbourne.blogspot.com/2010/05/review-moth.html>

1. What was the general impression of the performance given in the review?
 2. What did the review identify as the highlights of the performance?
 3. What criticisms did the reviewers convey?
 4. How do the opinions of the reviewers match with your impressions of the performance?
- 5.2 The following questions can be used as a guideline for a discussion or written review of the performance.
1. What are your initial responses to the performance? Often using a rating out of say ten or twenty helps you to find where your initial reaction sits. By answering the rest of the questions you will be able to identify specifically the strengths and weaknesses of the performance.
 2. Briefly summarise the narrative journey or plot of the performance.
 3. What were the key issues and themes?
 4. How effectively were the themes and issues addressed? Describe one example from the performance where you felt a theme or issues was communicated powerfully.
 5. Describe the overall look of the production. How did this directorial/design contribute to your enjoyment of the performance?
 6. Describe any specific features of the set design that you thought were especially effective.
 7. What sounds/music or multi-media was used in the performance? How effective were these choices? Describe and explain one example of an effective choice from the performance.
 8. Analyse the acting in the performance. How clearly was character/role established? How strong was the use of focus, commitment and belief? Comment on the performers and their effective use of the expressive skills of voice and/or movement.
 9. In the play Claryssa says: *"I guess that's the thing about remembering. Over time, you're just remembering remembering. The colours fade... And all the details get lost... Then you're remembering remembering remembering..."* What was memory and what was reality in this show?
 10. At the end of the play what has happened to Sebastian?

Post Performance

Activity Six - Developing Character

Curriculum Links English/Drama

6.1 Despite some resistance and frustrations, Sebastian and Claryssa are friends. Their relationship is the driving factor in the play. Think about some of the following aspects of their relationship and discuss their possible meaning:

- Sebastian holding his breath
- Their insults to each other
- What they have in common
- What makes them different
- How they respond to bullying
- When Claryssa hits Sebastian

6.2 The following quotes from the actors and director provide an insight into how the characters were interpreted. Ask your students to read through this material and to respond to the questions that follow:

Sebastian as played by actor Dylan Young

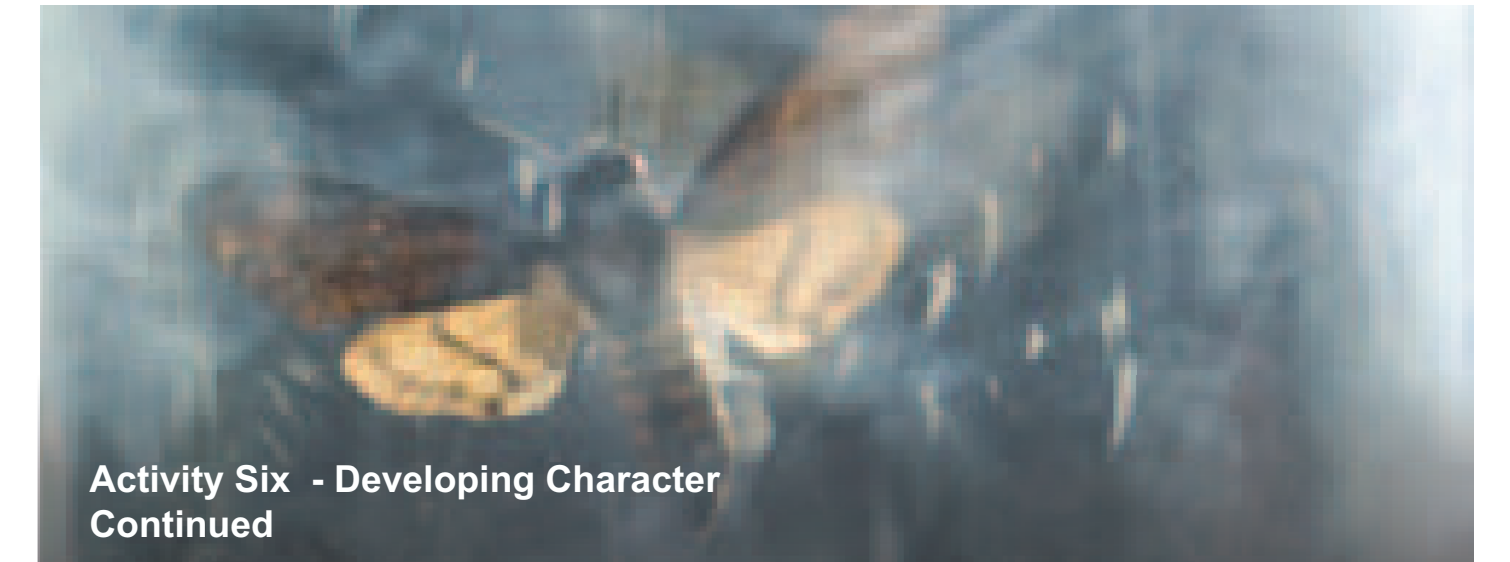
'I love Sebastian, his mind and his humour, and I like his immaturity. His mind works in a quite mysterious and complex way. I also love his unpredictability. He's not particularly nice but I think that deep down he cares, particularly about his mum. For Sebastian this is a moment in time when he's quite ill, has become anxious and self involved and paranoid, and I think that's quite a realistic feature in such moments ie when you're ill. It's looking at a specific moment. He likes Claryssa, but he doesn't know any other way to treat a friend. He's never had a chance. There are some echoes that they have had a good relationship but now he's a wreck, pushing everyone away, and pretty manipulative. I think he's reaching out but masks it with humour and sarcasm his present state he hasn't got much of a hold on empathy though except perhaps for his mum.'

Claryssa as played by actor Sarah Ogden

'I think that Claryssa is brave, bold, pretty moody, and isolated. She is outside the normal cliques. She has no sense of humour! Claryssa is hiding from the world under her doona. She let herself be vulnerable and has been slapped in the face so she becomes afraid; and wants to stay in bed until the shit is over. I think she feels a bit superior to Sebastian and he pisses her off but they are both on the outside, so they are sort of together by default. She wouldn't identify herself with being an emo. Others do but she doesn't. She's looking for something, and she really likes her art. Towards the end she shuts down because Sebastian's not around and she really needs someone to talk to.'

Comments about the characters' relationships by the actors:

"They're both quite imaginative, and they enjoy bitching about others. This gives them a false sense of security. They play the game, the game of ragging on each other. They would never tell anyone else that they are friends but it is a friendship or their version of friendship."



Activity Six - Developing Character Continued

Discuss

- What do the actors think about Sebastian and Claryssa's friendship or relationship?
- Look at the comments by writer, Declan Greene (Activity 2), and compare the playwright's descriptions, with the actors' descriptions.
- How do the descriptions of the characters given by the actors and playwright compare to your impressions of the characters seen in the performance of Moth?

6.3 Divide the class into pairs. Ask each pair to discuss the nature of friendship, its value and its qualities. What happens when friends fall out? How would you describe the 'friendship' that exists between Sebastian and Claryssa? Share the pair discussions as a class.

6.4 Ask your students to write a letter/email/face book posting as Claryssa to Sebastian or as Sebastian to Claryssa. Provide the following guidelines:

- The purpose of the communication is to tell the other person why they are or were your best friend based on a recent incident.
- Use your experiences of seeing the production to make the communication truthful - how you believe either character would address their friend in a real way.

6.5 After they have completed this task, ask the class to form small groups. Each group member is to share their communication from Claryssa or Sebastian. Ask the groups to choose two to develop into performance work. Two group members will play the characters while the other group members will use transformational acting to represent locations, the method of communication (letter, email, face book, sms) and events from the incident shown in tableaux.

Provide the following guidelines for rehearsal and preparation:

- In the performance you will need to convey truthful character work as Claryssa or Sebastian.
- You may need to make changes or add to the selected communications and create some stage action
- You will need to consider where the audience is.
- You will need to consider expressive skills such as voice, gesture, movement, facial expression, timing, tension, pause, stillness, intention.
- Perform to your class.
- Discuss the ways in which each group revealed aspects of Sebastian and Claryssa's personality and friendship.

Allow each group time to prepare and rehearse. The groups will need assistance with developing ideas for how they can shift focus from one character to another. They may also require advice in how to use physical skills to create objects and locations.

View student work and provide feedback that highlights how each group used theatrical techniques to express aspects of Sebastian and Claryssa's friendship.

Post Performance

Activity Seven - Images from the Play

Curriculum Links English/Drama

7.1. Some of the themes and ideas presented in the play are:

- Friendship and fitting in - sub group such as mean girls, jocks, tragics, nerds, losers
- Emo culture - music, look, attitude
- Post Apocalyptic events - the end of the world
- Light versus Dark (bright light, god light, sun light, cave darkness, darkness of night, sleep)
- Reality versus memory
- Adults interfering in teenagers lives

Either as an individual, group or class task, identify moments from the play that addressed these themes or ideas through dialogue, stage action or stage images.

7.2 Using the extracts from the script below, ask for volunteers to perform these moments in front of the class. After each performance, hold a class discussion using the questions provided with each extract [note: the script extracts are from the initial rehearsal script and some changes may have occurred before the final production].

1 . *Bullying*

CLARYSSA: (as S's Mum) "You're not being bullied are you?"

SEBASTIAN: "No way."

CLARYSSA: (as S's Mum) "Oh, thank god. Because I really don't think I could handle that right now."

Discuss

- From your understanding of the play, is Sebastian telling the truth?
- What do you think about his mum's response?
- What kind of impact can bullying have on individuals?
- How is bullying dealt with in your school?

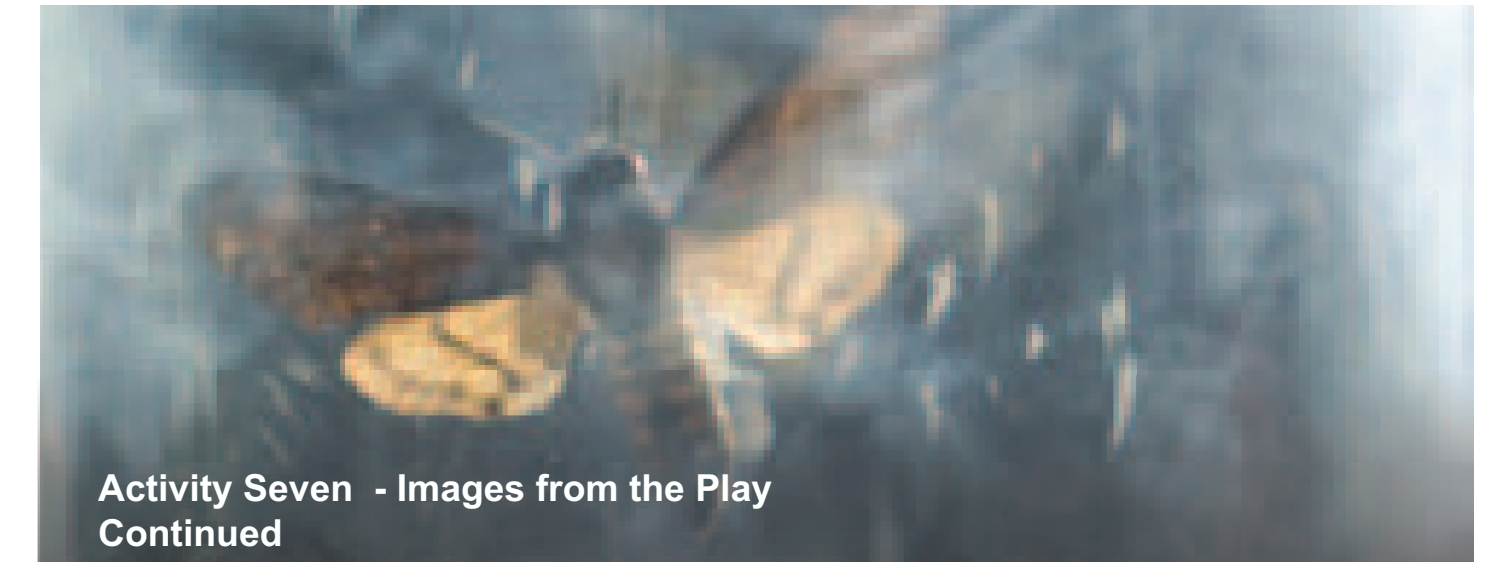
2 . *Being Emo*

SEBASTIAN: "Can you please not be so Emo. It's actually really boring."

CLARYSSA: "Shut up. I just mean... Like Siobhan and Simone and Alicia in art-class... The way they've got like, junkie boyfriends... And they cut themselves... And they all got molested as children... I just wish I was more like that."

Discuss

- From your research and knowledge about emo culture what does Claryssa mean by this?
- Why would being an Emo be boring?



Activity Seven - Images from the Play Continued

3 . *Schizophrenia*

SEBASTIAN: "Hey. So, hey. I bet you can't guess what happened to me last night."

"Do you give up?"

"Claryssa – do you give up?"

CLARYSSA: "I don't care."

SEBASTIAN: "Okay, you give up. So. Last night... An angel came to me.

Saint Sebastian. He said the world's gonna end. And he said I have to help people find God. And then...He turned into a moth. This moth. Here."

Discuss

- Is this really what happened to Sebastian?
- How might you respond if someone told you this story?

4 . *Facebook*

CLARYSSA: "I type your name into Facebook and go to your page. It's so lame, seriously."

SEBASTIAN: "Whatever."

CLARYSSA: "You don't even have a profile pic. Just some *anime* thing from Neon Genesis. You haven't uploaded any photos. Noone's tagged you in any. You've only got twenty-two friends and all the wall-posts are from me."

Discuss

- Discuss Facebook and its positive and negative qualities
- In this conversation what is Sebastian's status on Facebook? Does this matter?

5 . *Being a Teenager*

CLARYSSA: "Yes. It's hard being a teenager."

SEBASTIAN: "No. For some people, it's awesome being a teenager. Just not any of the ones I know."

Discuss

- The actors - Sarah and Dylan - are playing teenagers, how much do you believe their portrayal?
- Why do you think Claryssa says it's hard being a teenager?
- Why might it be awesome being a teenager?

Post Performance

Activity Seven - Images from the Play Continued

Curriculum Links

7.3 This is an ensemble task that uses some of the techniques of non-naturalistic theatre. Ask your students to follow these guidelines:

1 In groups of between 3 and 5 you are to choose three of the script extracts that you will link together to create a short performance.

2 For each script extract, the group members can choose to play characters or to create frozen tableau/objects/images to accompany the dialogue. Group members may also share the roles of Sebastian and Claryssa if they wish to.

3 In your performance you will need to include one moment that shows a representation of the moth as a symbol. The meaning of this symbol should be connected to some aspect of Sebastian and/or Claryssa's world.

4 Use some or all of the following dramatic elements and theatrical conventions, to help represent the moth as both a creature and as a symbol of an idea:

- Sound
- Abstract movement
- Use of space
- Heightened language
- Rhythm
- Transformation of object or character

Allow the groups substantial time to prepare and rehearse. Offer feedback and guidance on how they might transition smoothly from one moment to another. View each group's performance work and provide feedback on effective choices in staging with particular reference to the use of tableaux to highlight issues and ideas in the extracts and the effective choices made to create a representation of the moth.

Post Performance

Activity Eight - Elements of Production

Curriculum Links English/Drama

8.1 The elements of production include direction, set, costume, lighting and sound. This activity provides an opportunity for your students to consider the directorial concept or vision for the play.

Ask your students to complete the following tasks that reflect on each of the elements of production for *Moth*. Once they have completed these tasks, ask them to identify the directorial concept by explaining how the various design elements worked together in performance to highlight the themes and issues of the play.

8.2 Set Design

Set Designer, Jonathan Oxlade says...*"School, home, the oval the cricket nets are all part of the Moth landscape, by using a simple device of three separate drops we create a bit of space between characters and also some time between moments. The drops are not representations of spaces but 'feelings' of spaces. The Tower Theatre space is an intimate sized theatre. The feeling world of Moth is quite dusty and slightly claustrophobic, hopefully the intimacy of the space will add to this feeling."*

Discuss:

- What might it mean to be claustrophobic? How does the set of *Moth* reflect this idea?
- What aspects of the set suggest the idea of 'school' and the everyday life of a student?
- How does the set design bend these ideas or possibly contort them for the purposes of telling the story of Sebastian and Claryssa?

8.3 Sound and Music

Now that you have seen the performance and had some time to discuss or respond to it, create a soundtrack for *Moth*.

- Choose 6-8 songs that you think would be just right to be played throughout the show.
- Play sound bites or some of the songs and talk about why you've chosen them.

8.4 Lighting

Lighting Designer, Rachel Burke, says...*"Light is a transitory, ephemeral thing and is perfectly suited as a metaphorical medium to illuminate the world of this play. Light feels like the third character in Moth, it is as defined and as present as the characters of Sebastian and Claryssa."*

Discuss

- Choose an important moment in the play where the lighting made a big impression on you.
- Why do you remember this moment? What action was taking place?

8.5 Projection

Lighting Designer, Rachel Burke says ... *"The projection elements were work-shopped with lighting and sound from the first meeting to ensure that the images would be embedded in the world of the play. The colouring of the images and the quality of the projector source were all important considerations from the outset."*

Discuss

- What projected images can you remember from the play?

References

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