

Teaching Ideas

Section A: Practical Suggestions for Exploring the Play

Using the booklet

If you need to teach this whole play, the following pages outline possible practical approaches you could use when trying to teach this text in its entirety to your GCSE students. It offers a fun, hands-on alternative to simply sitting and reading the script aloud from start to finish.

The following teaching ideas guide you sequentially through the entire text. They offer a range of practical suggestions that go far beyond simply acting out the script. The activities are designed to not only teach the play's plot, but the workshop activities will also provide students with a foundation to understanding features such as style, characterisation, performance techniques etc.

The following teaching ideas could be followed sequentially, or could be used as individual stand-alone tasks. All of the following teaching ideas are available as printable downloads on the CD-ROM.



Practical Suggestions for Exploring Act One

Teaching Idea One	<p>ACT ONE - opening of play to Mrs. Johnstone going to work</p> <p>After reading the opening scenes of this play students should be asked to create a series of three still images that capture this entire first section. These snapshots should capture the details given about Mrs. Johnstone and her family, they should convey the lifestyle she has, her attitudes to other people and her relationship with the audience. Within one of the three snapshots the students should be allowed to include one sound, this may be one of Mrs. Johnstone's words, for example, 'dancing' or a sound, perhaps children playing, or they may invent their own sound that they feel best captures the opening moments. Discuss with students why the playwright has chosen to start the play with this scene and the first impressions it helps to convey of Mrs. Johnstone.</p>
Teaching Idea Two	<p>ACT ONE - Mrs Johnstone going to work to the birth of the babies</p> <p>Read these scenes with the students and explain that this is our first introduction to the character Mrs. Lyons. Students could be asked to perform the section using two opposing styles-the first performance should portray Mrs. Lyons as a gentle, serious yet caring woman. Students should not only consider how they perform the dialogue but also how they perform actions, such as Mrs. Lyons opening the package. The second performance should portray Mrs Lyons as the gentle woman at the start but gradually showing a duplicitous nature as she talks about the babies. If students want to be creative, they could even perform the section using a mask, experimenting with using different natures in one performance. Ask students to consider which style worked best and portrayed the correct first impressions of Mrs Lyons. Discuss with students the writer's introduction of superstition and how this is developed later. Discuss the use of the comic interlude when the gynaecologist appears and the use of the heart beat sound effect.</p>
Teaching Idea Three	<p>ACT ONE - birth of the babies to Mrs. Johnstone losing her job</p> <p>After reading these scenes, in pairs, they could be asked to work upon the following improvisation exercise:</p> <p><i>Mrs. Johnstone decides to call in the police and tell them that she gave her baby away and that she has now changed her mind and wants the baby back. Improvise the conversation she has with the investigating officer.</i></p> <p>Students will need to use all the details from these scenes and consider how it has affected Mrs. Johnstone.</p>
Teaching Idea Four	<p>ACT ONE - Mrs. Johnstone losing her job to Mrs Lyons hitting Edward</p> <p>Students could then read the next section. In small groups, students could be asked to complete two improvisation exercises, involving the following characters: Mrs. Johnstone, Mickey, Mrs. Lyons and Edward. Students should be asked to imagine that after seven year old Mickey asks why he can't play at the park end, Mrs. Johnstone tells him the truth about his twin. Similarly, when the seven year old Edward is slapped by his mother, Mrs. Lyons then tells him the truth. The students should pay close attention to the text, in order to answer truthfully and 'in character.' They will need to consider character aspects such as, how will the two mothers explain the situation and how will the two boys react. Will the boys be upset, worried, even excited?</p>
Teaching Idea Five	<p>ACT ONE - Mrs. Lyons hitting Edward to Sammy taking the other children away from Mickey and Linda</p> <p>As a class exercise, ask the group to imagine they are school teachers writing a report on Mickey, Linda and Sammy. Each class member could be given a pen and asked to write phrases on a large sheet of paper that they feel would have been included in the reports of each character, for example, 'serious, hardworking member of the class', 'time waster, disruptive influence', 'bright and breezy but perhaps too noisy for own good'. Perhaps 'a popular, sociable girl.' Students could be asked to look back at previous scenes to gain information about this role, they should pay close attention to the text in order to use accurate character details.</p>

Practical Suggestions for Exploring Act One

<p>Teaching Idea Six</p>	<p>ACT ONE - Mickey and Linda on their own to Mrs. Lyons sweeping the shoes off the table</p> <p>Select two students to read the section out loud to the rest of the class. Whilst reading this section students could complete a thought-tracking exercise. Whilst it is being read out the teacher could shout out 'freeze' at various points and the speakers should then be asked to explain their private thoughts or reactions at those specific moments in the text. Try to encourage students to consider the characters' attitudes towards each other - love, irritation, naivety, anger, sorrow, sympathy, fear, happiness etc.</p>
<p>Teaching Idea Seven</p>	<p>ACT ONE - The Narrator 'There's Shoes upon the table'</p> <p>After reading the scenes involving the Narrator, students could be asked to list all of the Narrator's methods of getting his message to the audience, such as the use of verse, gestures, movement, voice levels and tones, lighting, sound effects, music, costume, song etc.</p> <p>After compiling their lists, students could be asked in small groups to create an improvisation of the Narrator intervening when Linda and Mickey are in scenes on their own, explore their affection for each other and the possible problems that will arise when Edward comes onto the scene.</p> <p>After completing this exercise, discuss with students the fact that the Narrator is accomplished at giving information to the audience and punctuating the play with realism. Discuss why an author might want to use the device of a Narrator.</p>
<p>Teaching Idea Eight</p>	<p>ACT ONE - Mrs. Lyons sweeping shoes from table to the children being apprehended by the policeman</p> <p>Students should read this section and then focus upon the growing friendship between the children. Students could be asked to list their similarities and differences, such as quietness, noisiness, shyness, confidence, naivety, etc. After discussing this friendship students could be asked to create an improvisation of the three children at the age of (say) ten, playing hide and seek. Within their performance they need to try to convey the differences between the three characters and the fact that Mickey and Linda are much more knowledgeable about life on the streets than Edward. Perhaps students could also be encouraged to experiment with accents during this exercise and consider what messages accents can portray about characters.</p>
<p>Teaching Idea Nine</p>	<p>ACT ONE - the children being apprehended by policeman to end of Act One</p> <p>Students could be asked to discuss why the policeman reports their misdemeanours in different ways to Mrs. Johnstone and Mrs. Lyons. What factors influence how the policeman behaves towards the two women and what factors influence how the women react to the policeman's behaviour? Is this a comment on society - that wealth and privilege shape other people's attitudes? Students could even be asked to create two still images: one of the policeman talking to Mrs Johnstone and one of the policeman talking to Mrs Lyons. Students could be asked to consider how they would physically portray the differences.</p>

Practical Suggestions for Exploring Act Two

<p>Teaching Idea Ten</p>	<p>ACT TWO - opening of Act Two to getting onto the bus</p> <p>Students should read these sections. They should then be asked to select one character from the sections, either Mrs Johnstone, Linda, Mickey, Edward, Sammy or Mrs. Lyons. The students should be asked to walk round the room as that character. Explain that their walk must try to portray their status in society. As they walk around the room, the teacher could keep shouting out statements that might affect how they walk or move, such as 'it's raining,' or 'here comes a policeman.' This exercise will encourage students to consider the characters in terms of performance potential and the powerful effect movements can have upon conveying messages about characters. Analyse the different walks: was Mrs. Johnstone's different from Mrs. Lyons', because they are from completely different backgrounds? Likewise, did Mickey and Edward's walks differ because of their contrasting backgrounds and status in society? Did Linda's walk reveal anything about her confidence and did Sammy's betray his criminal tendencies?</p>
<p>Teaching Idea Eleven</p>	<p>ACT TWO - On the bus to Mickey and Linda on the hill</p> <p>Students could be asked to condense Sammy's lines on the bus into ten words and create a performance out of these words. Students should concentrate upon the tone of his voice when delivering their words and what tone can suggest about a character.</p> <p>Students should read the scene between Mickey and Linda alone on the hill and then be asked to condense the characters into ten words per character. They should then create performances out of these words.</p> <p>This will help students to identify important meanings within the scenes and analyse the dialogue for messages it can convey.</p>
<p>Teaching Idea Twelve</p>	<p>ACT TWO - the Narrator's scenes</p> <p>After reading the scenes, students could be asked to complete a written exercise. They should imagine that the Narrator keeps a journal and should create a journal entry. They should try to emulate the Narrator's style of speech and use techniques such as his use of verse, short sentences, repetition, his dark demeanour, etc. This will encourage the students to consider this role in terms of linguistics and dialogue.</p>
<p>Teaching Idea Thirteen</p>	<p>ACT TWO - the final scenes.</p> <p>Students should read the final scenes of the play. In groups, students could be asked to present these final scenes in the style of frozen tableaux. These tableaux should morph into each other, and each tableau should be accompanied by a placard or caption. This exercise will hopefully encourage students to realise that this play contains various examples of stylised methods of production.</p>