The Iron Man by Ted Hughes: A look at the book through drama

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KS2

Introduction

Ted Hughes’ The Iron Man is a classic science fiction novel that easily captures young imaginations. Its short length, along with the strength of the writing, makes it an ideal choice for classroom reading. This scheme of work has been written to encourage students to explore the characters and events of the book beyond the realm of the text; the text becomes a springboard for further imaginative work.

The scheme broadly covers all aspects of the drama objectives set out within the KS2 National Curriculum. Improvisation, rehearsed scene preparation and group work both in small teams and in larger groups all contribute to challenging students’ spoken and written language skills. Group discussion and interaction skills are also developed, as well as responding constructively to the work of others.

Learning objectives

By the end of this scheme students will:
- Have used a range of dramatic techniques to explore The Iron Man
- Have experience of creating and sustaining roles
- Have explored characterisation through vocal tone, writing in role, body language and facial expression
- Have experience of working in small groups to produce tableaux and short scenes
- Have developed their spoken language and written skills
- Have experience of presenting their work in front of their peers
- Have experience of constructively responding to the work of others.

Lesson 1: There is an Iron Man!

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson the students will:
- Have developed their group improvisation skills
- Have developed their listening skills, and responded physically to the source material
- Have worked in small groups to create a scene that involves developing and sustaining characters
- Have developed their verbal communication skills
- Have improvised in role
- Have experience of constructively responding to the work of others.

It is important that students are familiar with The Iron Man to at least the following point in Chapter 2 for this lesson: ‘They couldn’t call in the police or the Army, because nobody would believe them about this Iron Monster. They would have to do something for themselves.’

Warm-up: Create the Iron Man (10 mins)

Start off this scheme of work with a creative group challenge!
- Explain to students that they are going to try to build a sculpture of the Iron Man, all together, using their bodies.
- Start with one student, who can begin by forming any part of the Iron Man’s body they choose. Other students then join one by one, until he is fully assembled and everyone is involved.

Listening with improvisation (10 mins)

You are now going to read a section of Chapter 1 aloud, and students will take cues from the text to improvise the giant Iron Man they have made coming apart.

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Read the section that begins ‘CRASH! CRASH! CRASH!’ and ends ‘Silence’.
Using their bodies, how well can students emulate the Iron Man coming to pieces as he tumbles?

**Improvisation exercise: Hogarth tells his parents (10 mins)**

‘So he got home at last and gasping for breath he told his dad. An Iron Man! An Iron Man! A giant!’

His father frowned. His mother grew pale. His little sister began to cry.

His father took down his double-barrelled gun. He believed his son. He went out. He locked the door. He got in his car. He drove to the next farm.’

Divide the class into groups of four. Within each group, ask students to cast themselves as Hogarth, his mother, father and sister.

Ask each group to improvise the scene in which Hogarth tells his family about the Iron Man. The text only briefly outlines each of the characters’ reactions. How can students bring these reactions to life using their acting skills?

**Review a scene (10 mins)**

On this occasion, you will not see all the groups perform. However pick out one group to perform their improvisation in front of the rest of the class.

Invite fellow students to constructively feed back to the group on how well they feel they portrayed the scene and characters. Areas to focus on could include:

- Use of body language
- Use of facial expression
- How well the differences in the characters are portrayed
- How well the actor playing Hogarth conveys the urgency of the situation.

**Vox Pops: What is eating all the metal? (5 mins preparation)**

Vox Pops is a fun improvisation exercise that allows students to explore making varied character choices in terms of attitude, vocal expression and physicality.

To prepare for the game, ask students to be still and close their eyes. Now ask them to imagine themselves as someone who lives in the area where the Iron Man is mysteriously eating metal. Ask them to paint an imaginative picture of themselves as the character, considering:

- Who are they? Are they male or female?
- How old are they?
- What do they do for a living, or in their everyday life?
- Have they any direct experience of the metal being eaten, or have they only heard about it from friends and neighbours?
- Who or what do they think is causing the problem?

Next, explain to students that they are going to be interviewed, as their character, as if for a TV news report. They will need to think, speak and react in character.

**Vox Pops improvisations (15 mins)**

Invite students to enter the playing space in groups of five or six at a time.

Taking on the role of the news reporter, conduct a short interview with each character in the style of a TV news segment, as if you have gathered the assembled characters to hear their opinions on what is happening in their area and why they think it is happening.

Each interview need only last a very short time, but in that time the student should be able to convey the character and his or her attitude to the situation through vocal and physical expression, and choice of words.

**Plenary (5 mins)**

Bring this first lesson to a close by asking students to reflect on their impressions of the book from the early chapters. What is the overall mood? How does the book make them feel? At this stage do they think the book might have a positive ending?
Lesson 2: What to do with a Giant?

Learning objectives
By the end of the lesson the students will:
- Have developed their trust and listening skills through 'Don't Step on the Trap!'
- Have further explored character development and scene creation
- Have experience of performing in front of their peers
- Have considered the use of persuasive language, and accompanying vocal tone.

It is important that students are familiar with The Iron Man to at least the end of Chapter 3 for this lesson.

Warm-up game: Don’t Step on the Trap! (10 mins)
This is a fun game to get students moving and engaged for the lesson ahead.

In Chapter 2, the fox uses his senses to navigate around the trap set by the farmers for the Iron Man. In this game, students will rely on someone else, along with their own sense of hearing, to help them navigate around a room full of traps.

Place lots of chairs around the room. There should be space to move between them, but not too much.

Next, ask students to get into pairs, and to label themselves ‘A’ and ‘B’.
Student A is going to close his or her eyes, and it will be student B’s job to help them get from one side of the room to the other without touching any of the chairs.

Ask each pair to decide on a word. Student B will be able to say this word in order to allow student A to follow the sound and avoid hitting the chairs. Student B may also use the word ‘Stop’, but no other directions. Student A will have to listen very hard in order to make it across the room without hitting a ‘trap’.

If any student hits a chair, that pair is out of the game, and moves to the side to watch.

If time allows, ask students to swap roles so that everyone gets to experience leading and being led.

Listening (10 mins)
Read aloud the section from Chapter 3 that begins ‘One day, a father, a mother, a little boy and a little girl stopped their car on the hill for a picnic’, and ends ‘They drove. They did not look back’.

Scene creation: An interview with the picnic family (15 mins)
This exercise is a nice development from the Vox Pops exercise from Lesson 1.

Divide students into groups of five.

Each group is now going to create a scene in which the picnicking family are interviewed on a television show about what happened to them on the hill. Four students will play the family, and one student the television interviewer.

Really challenge students to consider their use of voice and body language during the scene creation. What attitude does their specific character have towards the situation?

Spotlight the scenes (10 mins)
Spotlight is a great technique to use when you have lots of scenes to look at, but limited lesson time.

Ask all the groups to set up and start their scenes at the same time. You then move, and stand next to one of the groups. This group, and this group alone, should continue to play their scene, while everyone else stops to watch. When you move away, everyone continues, until you stand next to another group, which then becomes the focus. Continue until all the groups have shown a short section of their scene.

Decision Alley (15 mins)
‘But Hogarth had another idea. At first, the farmers would not hear of it, least of all his own father. But at last they agreed.’

This exercise encourages students to consider persuasive language and tone of voice.

Divide the class into two groups.

Explain to students that they will all be people who have heard Hogarth’s idea about making a deal with the Iron Man, and taking him to the scrap metal yard. Allocate one line to be people who have heard the idea and are in favour of it, and one line to be those who think it is the wrong thing to do. Give each group a few
minutes to discuss the kind of arguments they could pose to persuade someone to side with them.

The two groups should now stand opposite one another in a line. Select one student to be the decider. He or she should walk between the two lines, slowly, and as this happens the students on either side each say a line or two to try to persuade the decider to agree with them.

When the decider reaches the end of the ‘decision alley’ ask them to say which group they have decided to ally with, and why. Did any particular arguments stand out? Was anyone’s tone of voice particularly persuasive? Did anything anyone said make them change their mind?

**Plenary (5 mins)**
In the book, Hogarth’s idea is pursued and turns out to be a good one. Can students think what else the farmers might have done to solve the Iron Man problem? What other outcomes might there have been?

### Lesson 3: What to do with an Angry Space Being?

**Learning objectives**
By the end of this lesson the students will:
- Have developed their teamwork skills through quick-fire improvisation game ‘This is My Family’
- Have further considered the use of persuasive language, and accompanying vocal tone
- Have further explored improvisation in role
- Have experience of script writing, working in small groups
- Have experience of creating and sustaining characters.

It is important that students are familiar with The Iron Man to at least the following point in Chapter 5 for this lesson: ‘The space-bat-angel-dragon watched in horror. He knew what this meant for him. He would have to go once more into the sun’s flames.’

**Warm-up game: This is My Family (10 mins)**
Divide students into groups of four or so.

Explain to them that they are going to be a family who are able to see the creature as it makes its way from the star to earth, starting as a little black speck and finally appearing as a huge set of wings.

You will call out each of the following, and after each sentence the groups have ten seconds to arrange themselves into a tableau, before you move on to the next description:
- This is my family when Mum tells them she can see a black speck in the sky through her telescope
- This is my family when they can all see the black speck without the telescope
- This is my family when they can see that it is a creature with wings coming towards the earth
- This is my family when the wings of the creature cover most of the sky
- This is my family when they feel the bump of the creature landing in Australia.

**Improvisation exercise: Persuade the Monster (15 mins)**
This is a fun improvisation exercise in which students are able to further experiment with persuasive language and vocal tone.

Select a confident student with good improvisation skills to play the role of the monster. He or she should stand or sit in the centre of the space.

Other students should then approach one by one, and try to persuade the monster to leave the Earth without harming it.

Encourage students to do this in character; deciding who they are and what their motivation for approaching the monster is before they enter the space. Once each student feels they have exhausted the argument they are trying to pose, they leave the space and it is someone else’s turn.

**Creating a script: Hogarth and the Iron Man (15 mins)**

‘“Please,” he asked, “please can’t you think of some way of getting rid of it? If you can’t, then it’s the end of us all.”’

Divide students into small groups; four or five students per group should work well. Ask them to consider the section at the end of Chapter 4 in which Hogarth
tells the Iron Man about the monster in Australia, and the Iron Man comes up with the plan for his challenge.

Ted Hughes only tells us some of the words that were spoken between the two. Challenge students to use their imaginations to create a script for this scene, as if it were part of a play of the whole book. What lines would they want the two characters to say?

Ask students to commit their ideas to paper. As they are working in small groups, each group may wish to nominate a scribe.

A template for the script accompanies this scheme of work, should you wish to use it. It includes space for stage directions. (See Resource 1.)

**Hearing the scripts (10 mins)**

Ask two students from each group to read out a short section of their script for the rest of the class to hear. You might also ask one student from each group to read the stage directions.

Ask other students to constructively feed back: How well did each script bring the two characters to life? Did any of the stage directions help?

**Group improvisation: Live from the Iron Man’s challenge (15 mins)**

Building on the theme of reportage running through this scheme, this is a group improvisation exercise that requires students to work together.

Invite ten or so students to take the playing space. Elect one student to be a roving reporter, who is live from the scene of the Iron Man’s challenge to the monster. The rest of the group are observers of the challenge; these students should take on the roles that they created for the ‘Persuade the Monster’ exercise earlier.

Invite the reporter to introduce the scene to the ‘viewers at home’, and to then interview the assembled crowd about what they have seen.

Repeat the exercise until all students have participated.

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**Lesson 4: The Iron Man saves the world**

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson the students will:

- Have developed their listening and imaginative response skills through the warm-up exercise, ‘The Monster on the Sun’
- Have experience of working in small groups to create tableaux, and using these tableaux to tell a story
- Have further explored the use of body language and facial expression
- Have created their own characters in order to explore Writing in Role.

You will need to hand out copies of the extract from Chapter 5 to students (see ‘Group Tableau’ exercise). The extract begins ‘And now the space-bat-angel-dragon got his first shock’, and ends ‘“Enough, enough, enough!” he roared’.

It is important that students are familiar with *The Iron Man* to the end of the book for this lesson.

**Imagination exercise: The Monster on the Sun (5 mins)**

This is an exercise to get students using their imaginations and in the mood for drama.

Ask everyone to spread out around the space.

Working individually, ask students to enact being the monster landing on the sun. How does the heat feel? Can they imagine it increasing until it is almost unbearable, as the monster’s skin begins to burn?

To increase the challenge, ask students to add in sounds to their imaginative exploration.

**Group tableau exercise: The Iron Man vs. the Monster (20 mins)**

Divide the class into groups of four or five.

Give each group a copy of the section from Chapter 5 of *The Iron Man*. Students should already be familiar with the chapter, however having the text as a reference will be useful for this exercise.

Working in their groups, students will now find a way to tell this section of the story through a series of tableaux. Encourage them to consider which details from the text are useful in terms of telling the story in this way, and which are less so.

Each group should create a maximum of seven tableaux, and be able to move quickly and easily between them when performing.

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In any devising exercise at KS2, there is a tendency for students to spend too long discussing options, which cuts their rehearsal and overall preparation time short. Combat this by delivering regular timing countdowns as students work, and letting them know where they should be in their process at particular moments. For example, with ten minutes left to go in this exercise they should be up on their feet and creating the tableaux. A reminder of this will be helpful to them in terms of getting where they need to be within the given timeframe.
Showing the tableaux (5 mins)
Give each group an opportunity to show their work, and invite constructive feedback from the audience after each presentation.

How well did the actors use their bodies and faces to portray what was happening in each scene? How well did they tell the story?

Writing in role (20 mins)
‘Meanwhile the Iron Man was the world’s hero. He went back to his scrap-yard. But now everybody in the world sent him a present. Some only sent him a nail. Some sent him an old car. One rich man sent him an ocean liner.’

Give students a few minutes to discuss as a group other gifts that might be sent to the Iron Man. What sort of person would send each thing?

Now, challenge them to write a letter to the Iron Man, in role, which might accompany a gift. The letter should reflect the character of the person sending the gift. Are they rich or poor? How did the Iron Man’s triumph affect them personally? Why did they choose this gift for him?

Allow a few minutes at the end of the exercise for students to say what they have written and why. How difficult is it to convey the character of a person through writing?

A letter template is included in the resources that accompany this scheme of work, which may be of use (see Resource 2). There is also a vocabulary bank that some students may find helpful (see Resource 3).

Plenary (10 mins)
Bring this lesson, and indeed this scheme of work, to a close by reflecting with the class on the book as a whole.

How did the book make students feel? Did the ending surprise them? What do they think they would have done if they were Hogarth? Would they have made the same decisions as him? What might they have done differently?

Extension exercises
A few additional ideas for exploration include:

- Work in groups to devise a rehearsed scene depicting the Iron Man’s next big adventure
- Consider the very last sentence of the book. Do students believe that this level of peace in the world will ever be achievable?
- Using any musical instruments available, can students recreate the ‘music of the spheres’?
RESOURCES

Resource 1: Script Template

Where is your scene set? Who are the two characters?

What are the two characters doing at the start of the scene?

Write stage directions within the brackets, and speech below

Hogarth:  ( )

Iron Man:  ( )

Hogarth:  ( )

Iron Man:  ( )

Hogarth:  ( )

Iron Man:  ( )

Hogarth:  ( )

Iron Man:  ( )

Hogarth:  ( )

Iron Man:  ( )

Hogarth:  ( )

Iron Man:  ( )
How does the scene end?
Resource 3: Vocabulary Bank
Phrases for a letter to say thank you to the Iron Man

My name is ...

I live ...

I heard about your challenge to the space-bat-angel-dragon. I [read about it in the newspaper] [heard about it from friends] [saw clips of it on the internet]

I wanted to thank you especially, because ...

I chose a gift for you. It is ...

I got this gift from ...

I hope that in the future you will ...