Introduction

The changes in exam specifications, requiring students to perform extracts from texts, mean that they are given a very wide choice of texts for performance. This scheme offers a range of teaching ideas exploring the characters within the script and using on- and off-text activities that will give students a greater understanding of the characters, enabling them to produce more knowledgeable, engaging and convincing interpretations of their own. It will also generate other ideas for further exploration of the text.

The text

*Dead Dog in a Suitcase* (and other love songs) is based on *The Beggar’s Opera*, a satirical ballad opera written by John Gay in 1728. In 1928 *The Threepenny Opera*, Bertolt Brecht’s own adaptation of the play, set in Victorian England, opened.

The music

Music is very important in this story. Carl Grose says of Charles Hazelwood’s score, ‘He conceived of an all-encompassing, multi-layered, gorgeously powerful live score that combined trip hop and folk, Renaissance polyphony and psychedelia, ska, grime and dubstep – echoing John Gay’s original by plundering the sounds of our times.’ The CD can be purchased from Kneehigh’s website.

Pre-reading research projects

Before reading the text, ask students to research and create a short presentation as an introduction. Ideas might include:

- John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*
- Punch and Judy
- Kneehigh
- Characters in *Dead Dog in a Suitcase* (there are some excellent photos on the Kneehigh website).

Session 1: Opening scene

Learning objectives

- To work as an ensemble to recreate the opening scene
- To explore the characters’ feelings during the opening scene.

Warm-up

This game requires concentration and patience from students. If you have a large group, you may want to split them in half and either have two groups playing at the same time, or stay in a big circle and alternate between groups, which adds a bit of competition to the game.

Students have to count from one to however many people are in the group. The rules are:

- They must not simply count around the circle in order
- They cannot discuss who is going to have which number or go next
- No one is permitted to say more than one number
- If a number is repeated they must start again
- If more than one person speaks at a time they must start again.

They may or may not get to the top number. If they do, they can simply play again and if they do not then it can be a challenge for the next lesson. With a small group you might double the number or add a counting backwards element to the game.
Main activity: Main characters’ opening sequence
In groups of 9. If you have a small class then omit characters as required. Ask students to create the opening sequence on p. 17, but rather than having the characters exit they should remain on stage. The Punch and Judy show element of this sequence should be imagined.

Things to consider:
**Macbeth:** Mac emerges from the shadows. He is full of confidence and thinks nothing of the darkness. How will you show this confidence in the way he walks, his pace, his facial expressions, posture and use of the space?

**The Goodmans:** The Mayor and his wife. How will you show the status held by the Mayor and consequently by his wife? How will you show this through your facial expressions, posture, gesture and movement? Will you enter from the same side or cross the stage from opposite sides and meet in the middle? How do the Goodmans feel about each other? How can you communicate this to the audience through the use of facial expressions and proxemics? Lady Goodman pins a rosette to her husband and they kiss. Do they touch each other when they meet? How? Do they remain touching? Why or why not? What sort of kiss might this be? Consider the difference between an air kiss and a passionate kiss; what would each communicate to the audience?

**Lucy Lockit:** The text says Lucy ‘darts down from the rooftops’. What does this suggest about how Lucy feels? She is clearly pregnant; how will this affect her movement? How will Lucy use facial expressions and gestures to show her feelings? How does she feel about her father, who is pursuing her, and how does she show this? When she hides from her father, how is she feeling? Scared? Annoyed? Amused? How will you show this?

**Colin Lockit:** Colin is the Chief of Police. How will you show his status as he enters? Consider his movements and facial expressions. He is searching for Lucy; how is he feeling – angry, annoyed, upset, worried? How will you show this?

**The Peachums:** Les Peachum is a successful businessman, but is unscrupulous, as we know from his employment of Macbeth. Who do you think is in charge in the relationship? How would you demonstrate this to the audience? The Peachums dance when they enter, what type of dance is it? Consider the differences between a waltz and the robot, between twerking and the tango.

**Polly Peachum:** The stage directions state that Polly sees her parents coming and makes a break for it, suggesting that she is already on stage. Is she with Macbeth? Is she watching him? Is she on the opposite side of the stage, oblivious to his presence, or eager to approach him? How will you show Polly's feelings before her parents enter, and how will you show the changes when they arrive?

**Filch:** The word ‘filch’ means to steal; what does this suggest about his character? How will you show this with your use of movement, gesture, posture? How does Filch use the stage space? How do the other characters react to Filch?

After giving students some time to rehearse their entrances, ask them to create mini-scenes within the sequence, e.g. the Peachums discussing one of their business ventures; the Goodmans discussing the election; Lucy and Polly might address the audience; Filch could move from the Peachums to the Goodmans eliciting different reactions. Students should rehearse the scene, shifting the focus from one character/pair to the next. When the focus is not on students, they should still be animated, rather than frozen. Groups should consider whether the characters can see each other, or if they are in their own separate space.

Performance and feedback
After each performance, ask the audience for positive comments on the work they have seen. Encourage them to think in Drama terms about what they like or what has worked, e.g. ‘Tom’s facial expression as Filch was strong, his narrowed eyes and furrowed brow complemented his low-pitched, tone of voice’, rather than ‘It was good’. Equally, with points of constructive criticism, try to encourage students to offer practical suggestions of how to improve work.
Session 2: Goodman’s death

Learning objectives
- To explore how to shift the audience’s focus using on- and off-text work
- To create a monologue of Goodman’s death.

Warm-up: Focus line-up
This warm-up explores the concept of holding and shifting the audience’s focus. Ask six students to line up on stage and number them. Person 1 looks towards the audience, the rest of the line-up look towards Person 1. Discuss how Person 1 now naturally holds the audience’s focus. If Person 1 looks at Person 2, they have passed the focus on. Person 2 now looks at the audience and everyone else looks at Person 2. Encourage the group to practise passing the focus before adding an emotional content, e.g. Person 1 sees something a bit scary behind the audience and reacts to it, the others don’t see it; Person 1 passes the focus to Person 2, who increases the tension by being more frightened. As this continues down the line the tension and reactions should get bigger. Students are allowed to use non-verbal sounds to vocalise their fear, but not words. Experiment with different emotions and characters and lines from the text.

Main activity: The assassination as a monologue
Read from p. 19 when Goodman enters, up to p. 20 when Macheath shoots him. Ask students to work in pairs to share ideas for a solo performance where Macheath and Toby are imagined.

Things to consider:
Think about how the tone of the scene changes from Goodman’s determined tone when speaking into his Dictaphone, to exasperation when he has to pick up after Toby. When Goodman sees Macheath and says ‘You!’ what tone does he use? Is he surprised, angry, scared? Does he know who Mac is and immediately know what will happen? Has he had dealings with him before? How? Why?
- How will you physically express Goodman’s feelings when he pleads with Macheath? What facial expressions does he use when Macheath shoots the dog?
- How does Goodman die?

Rehearse and perform.

Session 3: The Lockits

Learning objectives
- To devise scenes to explore the Lockits’ backstory
- To improvise scenes exploring the relationship between Macheath and Lucy
- To devise the moment that Macheath or Lucy reveal to Lockit that Macheath is the father of Lucy’s baby, through both verbal and non-verbal work.

Warm-up: Upstaging
This warm-up follows on well from the focus line up in the previous sessions. Split the group in half; one half make up the audience. Number the other half 1 to 3 and ask them to stand on one side of the room. The 1s have the line ‘I am powerful’; the 2s have ‘I am attractive’ and the 3s have ‘I have a secret’.
- Now ask students to enter and exit one by one, saying their line in any way they choose. They are free to do whatever they like before they speak in order to keep the audience’s attention, but once they have spoken they must exit.
- Next, ask the group to line up at the back of the room. Each person may only say their line once. They can choose any movement and can go in any order, exploring the different ways to steal the focus from each other.
- Finally, repeat the exercise, allowing students to say their line as often as they like.
- The audience should discuss whose story they would like to see more of and why. Ask the audience to swap in and repeat the activity.

Main activity 1: Exploring the Lockits
Discussion: How does Colin Lockit feel about his daughter’s pregnancy? How does he feel, considering his status as Chief of Police, that Lucy is saying she does not know who the father is? How might this reflect on him?
- Read pp. 26 and 27. In pairs, rehearse the scene between Lockit and Lucy from Lockit: ‘Oi! He’s not the father is he?” to ‘Lockit: Knit your booties.’ Ask students to perform some examples of their work.
In the same pairs, ask students to create four short scenes that give the Lockits' backstory. Students can play different characters in these scenes. Ideas might include:

- Lockit and his wife arguing and going their separate ways
- Lockit's wife breaking the news to him that she is terminally ill
- Lockit murdering his wife
- Lockit's wife with a friend or lover
- Lockit telling Lucy that her mother has gone – Where? Why?
- Lucy with her friends talking about the loss/disappearance/indifference of her mum
- Lockit and Lucy enjoying (or not enjoying) a holiday/day trip/evening out.

Rehearse, perform and feedback.

**Discussion:** How would you describe the relationship between Lucy and her father?

**Main activity 2: Exploring Lucy and Macheath**

Read the scene between them from p. 49 to p. 53.

**Discussion:** At the start of the scene do we assume that Macheath and Lucy have been romantically involved? Is there anything that suggests this prior to Lucy telling Mac that he's the father of the baby? What sort of partner do you think Macheath is likely to be?

Discuss the idea of a scale of a relationship; number 1 being totally dysfunctional and on the verge of breakup and number 10 being blissfully happy. What would be the features of a relationship on each number on the scale?

In pairs. Allocate one number to each pair and ask students to improvise a short scene that shows what they think Mac and Lucy's relationship might be like at that number on the scale. They might consider what we learn from the text about the sort of activities they may have taken part in, and how they interact with each other.

Show some of the improvisations and discuss, before giving students time to rehearse their work. Aim for each pair's work to be different.

As an ensemble, ask students to perform each example of Lucy and Mac's relationship, perhaps moving down the scale from good to bad.

**Main activity 3: Baby Father**

**Discussion:** How will Colin Lockit react to the news that Macheath is the father of Lucy's baby? List the sorts of things you think he would say. What physical reaction would he have? Consider his movements, gesture, posture and facial expressions as well as his use of proxemics. How would this change if Macheath was the one to reveal the news? What would happen to your interpretation of the scene if you could not use words?

In pairs devise a scene where Lucy reveals to her father that Macheath is the father of the baby. The scene should be short (less than one minute). Ask students to consider carefully the ideas that they offered in the discussion.

Repeat this activity, but after Lucy has said the words 'Macheath is the father' the scene should be non-verbal.

Repeat the same activities, both verbal and non-verbal but with Macheath revealing the news to Lockit.

Perform and feedback a selection of work with a focus on how a non-verbal scene makes a difference to students' use of movement, physicality, facial expressions, gesture, proxemics and so on.

**Session 4: Macheath’s Gang**

**Learning objectives**

- To work as an ensemble to create Macheath’s gang
- To devise a contrasting scene to show the alter egos of Macheath’s gang.

**Warm-up: Who am I?**

This is an old favourite that students always enjoy. Each person needs a pen and a sticky note. Ask each student to write the name of someone famous on their sticky note. It can be an historical figure, a character from a play, book, film, TV, an actor, presenter, etc. It should be someone that everyone is likely to be familiar with rather than a character who said one line in the The Cherry Orchard. You could choose the people yourself before the class or use characters from the text to make it more focussed.

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**Extension ideas**

Repeat the same exploration of the relationship between Polly and Mac.

Create an ensemble piece where Mac moves between the two women in the manner of One Man, Two Guvnors.

Explore using choral voice to underscore the scenes using Lucy’s song on pp. 42, 52 and 53 and Polly’s song on p. 72.
Each person takes one of the names and without looking sticks the note to their forehead. Around the circle each person asks a question that has a yes or no answer, e.g. Am I a man? Am I a character in a book? Am I alive? If the answer to the question is yes, they can ask another question, if it is no then play moves to the next person. Continue for a set time or until everyone has guessed their character.

**Main activity 1: Macheath’s Gang**

In groups of 7 – a narrator and 6 other characters – ask students to create the line-up of criminals. The narrator can use the table below and information from the text (p. 43) to describe each character in turn. In the text, it is Lockit describing the gang, but an alternative might be to have Macheath as the narrator introducing them. Allow students some freedom to add to and embellish the script with more details of their heinous crimes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>One Shot Jimmy</strong></th>
<th>Macheath’s right hand man, deadly aim, never missed a shot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dylan Noir</strong></td>
<td>greaseball, good with explosives and a cutthroat razor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frankie Bardo</strong></td>
<td>the brains of the operation, handles logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joey</strong></td>
<td>a monkey, trained to kill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gordon Sinister</strong></td>
<td>the clean-up guy, specialises in body disposal, never a shred of evidence unless he wants you to find it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barry the Cod</strong></td>
<td>a loose cannon, A1 nut job, rumoured to have eaten his own parents before he was born</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Things to consider:**

- How does your character feel about the life they lead? Are they remorseful about the things they have done or do they enjoy it and what it brings them? How will you show this?
- How does your character interact with the other members of the gang? Do they like or loathe them? Are they friends or is this purely a business arrangement? How will you communicate this? Consider proxemics in particular.
- How does your character’s facial expression communicate their feelings? How does it change depending on which member of the gang is being introduced? Why?
- How does your character stand? Consider all parts of their body from head to toes. How does your character move? Heavy and lumbering? Light and agile?

**Rehearse, perform and feedback.**

**Main activity 2: Macheath’s Gang’s alter egos**

**Discuss:** What might Macheath’s gang do when they are not in a fearsome criminal cartel? Does Frankie Bardo work in a library? Is Barry the Cod a swimming teacher? Does Dylan Noir volunteer at Help the Aged?

In the same groups, recreate the line up from the previous activity and use it as a framing device to start a short (less than 1 minute) scene in which we see another side to each member of the gang. The rest of the group can play any other characters necessary, but not everyone needs to be in each scene.

**Rehearse, perform and feedback.**

**Framing devices**

Framing devices or repeated scenes can be a great way of starting and ending scenes. Groups return to the same scene or image to start and finish a scene. In this case, the framing device is the line-up of Macheath’s gang.
Session 5: Pilchards and Widow Goodman

Learning objectives

- To create a repeated movement sequence to represent the workforce in the pilchard cannery
- To explore and perform Widow Goodman's speech from a vocal perspective.

Warm-up: Interrogation

Ask two students to sit as if they are in a police interview room. A is a police officer and B a suspected criminal. In this instance it works to take on the role of a member of Macheath's gang. A questions B about what happened and tries to discover why the crime took place. Students must remember that this is a storytelling exercise so it is important that B is co-operative and 'sings like a bird'. Once a scene has been described, e.g. the gang planning a robbery, B ringing a member of the gang to arrange the details, volunteers from the rest of the group help to recreate the moment. Once this has been done, the interrogation continues.

Main activity 1: Pilchard canning

In groups of 6 or more, ask students to create a repeated movement sequence that represents the workforce canning the pilchards. Some examples might include:
- Operating machinery
- Working at a conveyor belt
- Sealing the cans
- Adding the labels
- Checking the cans
- Packing boxes.

After rehearsing the movement sequence ask students to use the workforce's song on p. 44 to add words to their movements. They could sing, chant, rap, use choral voice to add the words but they should aim to be more imaginative than simply speaking the words.

Rehearse, perform and feedback.

Main activity 2: Widow Goodman’s monologue

In pairs, ask students to closely read Widow Goodman's address to the workforce on p. 44. Ask students to divide the text in half, and each of them work on a close reading of their own half, annotating the text with a focus on vocal skills including pitch, pace, tone, volume, emphasis, pause, accent and intonation. Students should then share their ideas with their partner, edit their work as necessary before using their ideas to prepare a vocal performance of their half of the text.

Rehearse, perform and feedback with a focus on the different ways students chose to deliver the speech. What was effective and why? What choices were common? What choices were made that were more unconventional? Were they effective? Why? Why not?