

# *Hospital Food* by Eugene O'Hare: Devising and exploring a text to produce original performance outcomes

# A level

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## Introduction

This scheme explores Eugene O'Hare's NT Connections play *Hospital Food* as a stimulus. It is relevant for many new A level Drama & Theatre Studies exam specifications, where both explorations of texts and devising form a great deal of the assessments. Through the activities students will learn how to explore the text stimuli, leading them to produce their own original work as well as performing the writer's intent. There are also ideas on how to apply practitioner's ideas which again makes this scheme relevant for many exam specification units.

### Learning objectives

By the end of this scheme all students will:

- ▶ Have developed their understanding of what devised theatre is
- ▶ Have developed their ability to work cooperatively in groups
- ▶ Have developed their ability to create original material from a play text stimulus
- ▶ Have developed their understanding of how to deconstruct ideas, themes and narratives that make up the stimulus
- ▶ How to carry out in-depth research to inform and develop ideas and creativity
- ▶ How to apply the work of practitioners to the deconstructing of the stimuli and the devising processes thereafter
- ▶ Have explored the actor-audience relationship
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – characterisation, aural and physical
- ▶ How to explore social, cultural, political and historical influences within stimuli and incorporate within their own work.

By the end of this scheme some students will:

- ▶ Have developed their ability to direct others
- ▶ Have developed their performance support skills.

## Lesson 1: Developing confidence and skills in devising from a given stimulus

### Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to begin to work from a stimulus to produce short imaginative performance outcomes
- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – aural and physical.

### Starter (5 mins)

In order to begin freeing the students to create work, some initial devising exercises mixed with improvisation exercises may be useful.

### Main activity

Divide the class into groups and give each group a recent article on the NHS, or on a new health scare or new food/drink we should all be avoiding/having more of.

Each group must read the article, summarise it and share it with the rest of the class.

Then, each group must present a 2-3-minute performance piece based around the article.

Rehearse and show the work.

Rhianna Elsdon has been a qualified teacher of Drama since graduating from Cambridge in 2002. She has worked in three state schools and extensively for Edexcel/Pearson. Having previously been a Head of Drama and Faculty, she is now a member of SLT and an SLE responsible for training and development in her school and across the Dorset County. She is also a published writer of educational books and play scripts and is currently undertaking a PhD with the University of Birmingham exploring verbatim theatre.



### Resources

- ▶ Internet access
- ▶ The play text *Hospital Food* by Eugene O'Hare.

As a differentiation exercise, the group could be divided so that each member has to summarise in a different or more challenging way, i.e. one person produces a series of bullet points, while someone else writes a paragraph of prose, and another person must only write a sentence.

**Plenary**

What do you think is potentially exciting, and also difficult, about devising your own original material?

What skills do you already think will be necessary?

**Extension Homework – to be done for each lesson throughout the scheme**

At any point, students could be told to record formally their evaluations of process and outcomes, as per the headings in whichever A level exam specification you are following. For example, some headings students could respond to in their portfolio/coursework notes could be:

- ▶ Analyse and evaluate your contribution to the devising process
- ▶ Reflect on social, historical and cultural contexts in the work
- ▶ Outline your initial response to the stimulus and how it was developed throughout the devising process
- ▶ What additional research did you undertake to develop ideas and how did this in turn develop the performance outcomes?
- ▶ Evaluate how your chosen role(s) emerged and developed from initial ideas through to the final performance
- ▶ Evaluate the creative choices you made and whether or not they were successful in performance.

## Lesson 2: Developing devised performance outcomes with social, cultural, historical and political themes and intentions

**Learning objectives**

By the end of the lesson students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – aural and physical
- ▶ How to develop different methods for incorporating social, cultural, political and historical influences within their work
- ▶ How to use research to inform practical.

**Starter**

Return to the articles from the first lesson, ask students to identify elements of social, cultural, historical and political within the articles, separating it at sentence-by-sentence level if possible.

**Main activity**

Using the internet, or research that has either been done for the students or which they do themselves (or could have done previously), create a 3-minute piece under the heading *The History of the NHS*. They must be able to cite sources for its construction, though there can be original material as well.

The piece can be in any style.

Rehearse, show and evaluate the outcomes

**Plenary**

Discuss and evaluate each person's contribution to the devising processes so far, reinforcing again that many of the exam units to which this scheme is linked are about contribution to process and ability to discuss and reflect within coursework much more than performance outcomes.

*This May Hurt a Bit*, the play on the NHS by Stella Feehily, has an online resource pack by NT which includes a timeline for the history of the NHS, which may be useful.

Having the marking criteria for the respective exam board to hand at this point will be useful and then the same could be displayed as students work in the future as a reminder.

## Lesson 3: *Hospital Food* as a stimulus for devising material – scene 1, developing skills in interpreting and performing play text stimuli

### Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – aural and physical
- ▶ How to develop different methods for interpreting the text stimuli.

Some students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to develop their performance support skills in relation to sound, music and lighting.

N.B. This is a powerful text which looks at teenagers with cancer. Before starting out on the unit, as cancer affects so many people and families, it is important to ensure that the work won't have an upsetting impact upon any of the students.

### Starter

Create a naturalistic script that could be lifted straight out of the sixth form common room. No real names, or real 'gossip', but make the script on one side of A4 sound very natural with overlapping dialogue and tangents.

Write and read these out as if they were 'radio scripts' and discuss the results.

Then read the opening of Scene 1 of *Hospital Food*.

Stage the very opening with its precise stage directions, use of sound and music.

**Discussion:** What do you think the writer is trying to indicate with the opening action? How/what does sound, music and potentially lighting contribute here in terms of the effect on the audience?

### Extension

As a task for design students, they could be set to come up with their own opening use of music, sound and lighting. This could be an immediate task, or perhaps a homework task to come back to in a later lesson.

Assign a character to each person. They have to create a role-on-the-wall for their character so far, based on the author's notes at the start and the conversations in scene 1.

Key quotes for their character and the meaning need to be on the sheet as well as the annotated gingerbread outline.

### Main activity

Create a short script for these characters based before the scene has taken place – a carefree time when they are just chatting in *The Retreat* casually, like the starter activity's dialogue. This time, however, try to get the rhythms and the style to match the characters based on what you know so far; e.g. get the sarcasm in if that's your character, or if your character is 'naïve' then find a way to show that in what they say.

Write, rehearse and read aloud the outcomes.

### Plenary/homework

Again, this could go into a performance log/coursework with the script and roles-on-the-wall included as evidence, perhaps annotated or reflected upon.

### Additional homework for next lesson

Research different types of cancers, any technical or medical words from this scene, and treatments for cancers that the writer has mentioned, and in general. Some members of the group then research alternative, homeopathy treatments for cancer.

Related activities could involve looking at dialogue by Pinter or Churchill to see styles that might help generate ideas.

## Lesson 4: Developing skills in interpreting and performing play text stimuli using non-naturalistic styles/forms

### Learning objectives

By the end of these lessons students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – characterisation, aural and physical
- ▶ How to develop different methods for interpreting the play text stimuli
- ▶ How to interpret the writer's craft
- ▶ How to deconstruct narrative, characterisation, themes and the language within a given play extract
- ▶ How to produce original work inspired by stimuli
- ▶ How to develop non-naturalistic outcomes from the naturalistic stimuli and research.

### Starter

If the students do not know the text, start by getting them to improvise what they think might happen next, if the end of scene 1 wasn't the end, and it continued, with Gus and Josh being the only ones absent.

What would the characters say/do?

Alternatively, get students to act out the very final part of scene 1 and freeze, then get each character left on stage to vocalise a short monologue/extended thought-track on how they are feeling and the questions they have, based on the revelations by Gus.

### Main activity

Students bring forward the research they have found on treatments for cancer. In pairs, show a movement associated with a treatment, and a potential side-effect. This should be stylised, with sound effect, brief use of words (if any – such as the name of the drug used, or the operation being performed) and movements that are crisp and can be repeated easily.

Having done this, pairs are put into groups of six to create an essence/drama machine. In this, one pair starts with their practiced sequence which they do twice, then the next pair joins in with their own sequence; the first pair keep going with their own repetitions. By the end, all pairs are repeating their individual sequences at the same time, having built the essence/drama machine stage by stage. They then find an interesting and stylised way to bring all of the repetitions to a united close.

### Extension

Inspired by Layna's speech in scene 1 where she talks about the number of chemo cycles Gus has been on and how homeopathy won't work, the essence/drama machines can then develop to show alternative treatments for cancer that have been researched. The drama/essence machines run as before, but this time, instead of ending in a united way, there is a stylised choral blend of some form, with minimal language, into the alternative treatment essence/drama machine.

### Alternative sequence

Give students a section from Louise Page's *Tissue*, which is about breast cancer.

Her style is less naturalistic for the sequences where she explains going to the doctor and having examinations and treatment (scenes 14 or 19 for example). Take a page and give it to a group, asking them to perform it, interpreting it as there are no stage directions.

Then ask other groups, or the same group, to complete a similar scene but using research they gathered on cancers and treatments.

### Homework

Again, this could be added into journals/coursework to discuss the developed material and its style alongside the stimuli. Reflection on social, cultural, political and historical aspects found in the research could also be included.

To show the sense of repetition and feeling less 'human' and 'manipulated', which Page indicates is what happens to the 'patient', perhaps suggest to students to perform her work or their own new scenes adding in human puppetry for the role of the patient.

## Lessons 5 and 6: Exploring scene 2, incorporating practitioner influence – Frantic Assembly

### Learning objectives

By the end of these lessons students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – characterisation, aural and physical
- ▶ How to develop different methods for interpreting the play text stimuli
- ▶ How to interpret the writer's craft
- ▶ How to deconstruct narrative, characterisation, themes and the language within a given play extract
- ▶ How to produce original work inspired by stimuli
- ▶ How to incorporate the work of Frantic Assembly with the stimuli.

### Starter

Use any number of starters from Frantic Assembly's own suggested warm-ups from their own website, their devising theatre workbook or videos on YouTube.

Read scene 2 as a class.

### Extension

Rehearse the sections between Gus and Josh that aren't the extended monologues. Aim for naturalistic and faithful presentation of the action.

### Practitioner main task

The monologue by Josh, in which he talks about being alive and dreaming of walking on clouds where he is no longer tied to his drip, offer huge potential for realisation in the style of Frantic Assembly. For inspiration, Frantic Assembly's *Things I Know to Be True* or *Lovesong* could be shown with clips from the rehearsal room outlining the movements, connections and lifts which students could aim to incorporate within their work.

The work needs to be carefully rehearsed across two lessons, with the person playing Josh learning their lines.

### Extension

If there is a student who again is particularly interested in technical support roles then they could take responsibility for adding light or sound to the work. It could be that Josh's monologue is recorded and that this too is in some way 'manipulated' for effect through Garageband (for example) and that the person playing Josh doesn't therefore actually speak.

The work should be recorded and then watched back, with students evaluating their contribution and the final effect. Students should reflect on the use of Frantic Assembly's style with this piece of writing and how it adds/detracts/changes the work and the potential effect on the audience. Once again, all of this could go into coursework or a portfolio.

The section 'Rosie's Monologue' from *Things I Know to Be True* is especially useful as an example. Push duets by Frantic Assembly could also work well. From other influences, human puppetry again could be used to show the helplessness that Josh feels at times, and the sense of freedom from pain and treatments that he is seeking.

## Lesson 7: Exploring the stimuli further and devising original material – scene 3

### Learning objectives

By the end of these lessons students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – aural, physical and characterisation
- ▶ How to develop an original performance outcomes inspired by the stimuli
- ▶ How to explore the actor-audience relationship.

Read scene 3 and discuss what happens and what the character developments are.

### Starter

Devise, through rehearsed improvisations, the short scene we hear about but don't see – Sol giving Josh the key to the goods lift.

Compare the different interpretations.

### Main activity

Divide the class into small groups who are each given a page of scene 3 to stage. Each group is asked to try the given page in different ways in terms of the audience-actor space arrangement; for example, one group might perform it in the round, one group performs it traverse style, another could create an almost 'promenade' style where the audience can sit anywhere in the room.

The action is practised, and the effect of the different stage set ups is analysed, preferably with an audience in to help with discussions. The effect for the actors is also analysed within a plenary.

Reflecting on the roles-on-the-wall done previously could be useful here.

If the class is not big enough, then the group performs the same section in the different space set-ups.

## Lesson 8: Exploring the stimuli further and devising original material – scenes 4 and 5

### Learning objectives

By the end of these lessons students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – aural, physical and characterisation
- ▶ How to develop an original performance outcome inspired by the stimuli.

### Starter

The final two scenes are read, the last one consisting only of stage directions. The material is discussed with the focus on what the final intentions of the writer are determined to be and whether the play has been successful for the students, with responses justified.

### Practical starter

Each person pretends they are a character in the play and writes a postcard to Josh – except for Reece who has already written one and we have learnt in the narrative what it said.

These postcards are shared and the different ideas discussed in terms of their effect upon the character of Josh and the audience.

### Main activity

The end scene is acted, with the music as outlined by the writer, but the action must also include each character reading their postcard. Whether the action freezes, or whether this is overlapped or one at a time, or any other choice, is up to the students.

### Extension

Come up with a completely different way of staging the final scene, but with the same plot. Non-naturalistic ways could be experimented with; again, human puppetry with the cast dressing Josh and helping him leave, or a very didactic way with Josh narrating his every final moment in the play.

### Plenary

The impact of these explorations is discussed and the reasoning by the writer to have no words and just Gus and Josh alone is ratified.

As with any lesson's work, and plenaries/discussions, these could go into coursework or a portfolio.

## Lesson 9: Developing skills in devising verbatim material

### Learning objectives

By the end of these lessons students will have learnt:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – aural, physical and characterisation
- ▶ How to develop an original performance outcome in the verbatim theatre form
- ▶ How to research original characters and material for themselves for use in performance
- ▶ How to develop their ability to include the work of other practitioners in their devised work.

### Starter

Students need to be introduced to verbatim theatre and some of its hybrids so that they understand about the importance of personal testimonies and research and that in some cases (such as Alecky Blythe and Anna Deveare-Smith for example) headphones are worn by the actors when performing.

As a practical activity to get students thinking about playing real people, pair them up and ask A to be the one talking and B to observe. A talks about a favourite holiday and B listens and watches closely. After a couple of minutes, A is asked to stop talking and B recounts what they remember, including mannerisms and vocal pauses, etc.

They then swap partners and those who spoke before listen, and the exercise is repeated.

Students reflect on what it is like to play real people and how this does or does not in their opinion differ from imitation. They can also reflect on how they didn't remember everything the person said and 'self-edited', and what this means for performing what the person actually said.

### Main activity

Students research online for real testimonies by cancer sufferers and their loved ones who have seen people undergoing treatments. If at all possible, the aim is to see if they can find a video.

Students must edit what they have seen/read/heard. This brings them into contact with debates in verbatim about editing and how difficult it is and how potentially controversial.

They then learn their edited verbatim text by heart and perform when it is learnt, aiming to show full characterisation with gestures, patterns to the speech etc.

### Plenary

Discuss whether the play *Hospital Food* would be stronger with real people's testimonies within it and perhaps the wider implications of work 'based on real events and real people'.

This is a popular warm-up by Out of Joint Theatre company and Max Stafford-Clark within verbatim workshops.

## Lesson 10 onwards: Developing an extended final devised performance piece

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### Learning objectives

By the end of these lessons students will have learnt and be able to demonstrate:

- ▶ How to work collaboratively with others in discussion and practical work
- ▶ How to develop performance skills – characterisation, aural and physical
- ▶ How to develop an original performance outcome
- ▶ How to incorporate the work of other practitioners within their own original devised pieces.

Some students will have learnt and be able to demonstrate:

- ▶ How to use music, sound and lighting effectively within a devised piece
- ▶ How to write original material for a performance outcome.

### Developing a final extended piece

Many activities in this scheme lead to short performance outcomes that could be developed to be longer. They could also be inserted into the original play to be extra scenes, or different ways of presenting existing scenes.

If choosing to take this into an extended piece, the appropriate specification would need to be consulted to ensure the use of the stimuli, practitioner influence and final outcome requirements were all adhered to. The criteria for your relevant exam board would need to be clarified for the students so that they were aware of what they will be assessed on in terms of the process and the performance.

### Coursework/portfolio

Most exam specifications that have coursework reflecting on process in putting work together for performance require an evaluation of the final outcomes and a reflection upon intentions. If this isn't done formally in writing, certainly verbal discussion along these lines should take place at the scheme's conclusion and a reflection of all the skills developed should be analysed by the students.