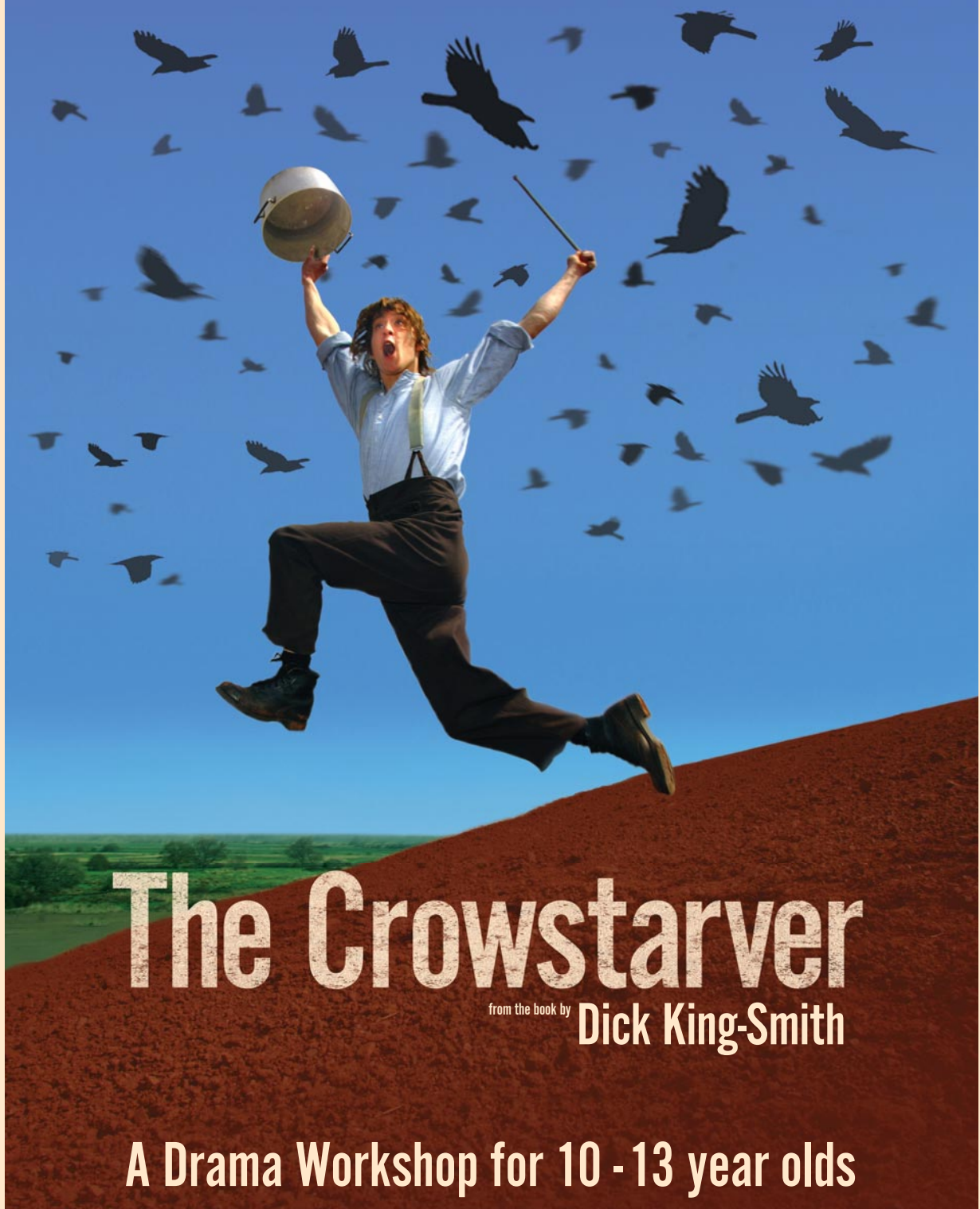


Theatre Alibi with Exeter Northcott Theatre & Oxford Playhouse



The Crowstarver

from the book by **Dick King-Smith**

A Drama Workshop for 10 - 13 year olds

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A Drama Workshop for 10-13 year olds

The workshop below focusses on the moment in the story (on page 56) when Spider is being bullied by a gang of children. It uses similar drama games and exercises to those used in the workshop for younger children – but they've been adapted, or developed, for use with a different age group. As with the workshop for younger children, this workshop has been planned for classes that have already seen Theatre Alibi's production, and/or, read Dick King Smith's book. The suggested space is a school hall, but any large size, cleared classroom will do, as long as children are able to focus and concentrate. Normal class sizes are envisaged. The suggested timings for different sections of the workshop are approximate and tend to be on the tight side. In order to explore things in more depth, it's likely that some games may need to be dropped, or swapped. At the end of the pack is a brief Bibliography for Drama which includes *Dramatic Events* by Richard Hahlo and Peter Reynolds. This is a clear and inspiring book that provided a foundation for many of the ideas in the Drama Workshops included in this pack.

Materials needed

A small drum or wooden claves

A copy of an extract from Dick King-Smith's book *The Crowstarver*

Paper and pencils to write a six-line script (optional)

Length of workshop

One and a half to two hours

1. WARM UP IN A BIG GROUP (15 minutes)

Begin with physical games, moving in the space, working with each other, establishing control in a non-threatening way, developing vocal freedom, and getting people's imaginations working.

For example:

WALKING AND FREEZING IN A GROUP

- i. This game is basically an extension of the simple structure of WALK AND FREEZE. The idea is to give the children different instructions to follow before freezing, for example, 'walk faster, walk in slow motion', or 'run in slow motion'.

- ii. Then gradually ask them to be aware of each other, for example, 'look shiftily at each other and then look away quickly, stare at each other as if you think the other person is very odd indeed, smile at each other as if you are hiding something you aren't going to tell the other person, look at each other in a threatening way, look at them as if you are daring them to do something.' Keep returning to the freeze.
- iii. Then, develop the exercise to link specifically with moments derived from the story of *The Crowstarver*, for example, 'Imagine you are the German pilot running away' or 'Imagine you are a bully looking threateningly at Spider or whatever. Always finish with a freeze.

2. WORK IN THREES (15 minutes)

STOP

- i. A, B and C stand in a triangle facing each other with their arms by their sides.
- ii. The game is simply to touch another person's hand by moving very quickly before he or she says 'stop'. This game is competitive but it requires concentration and fast movement and is, also, essentially fun.

HYPNOSIS

- i. This game begins with A and B standing facing each other, and C standing nearby.
- ii. A holds his, or her, hand in front of B's face about 6 inches away from it. B stares at the hand as if hypnotised by it.
- iii. Then A moves the hand, turning it slowly from side to side, and forwards and backwards. B follows as if being hypnotised by A's hand.
- iv. Gradually, A can start to lead B slowly around the room, or get them to turn and bend. Essentially this is a power game but in a curious way, as in stage fighting, A always has to work with B. It's no good asking B to move into impossibly uncomfortable positions, or too fast, because then the sense of power will be lost. In contrast to STOP, this game asks people to maintain concentration whilst moving slowly.
- v. Meanwhile, C tries to break the spell by saying, or calling out B's name to distract him, or her and break the spell. Encourage C to use different vocal qualities to try and attract B's attention, not just shouting! They could for example, whisper, or plead, or command, or speak very gently in order to try and get B to break away. It's probably useful to have a 'no touching' rule.

CREATING PICTURES IN THREES

- i. A, B and C stand in a triangle facing each other. Without talking, A goes into the middle and takes up a position. (You could encourage people to think about some of the moments from the story *The Crowstarver* whilst they are doing this exercise.)
- ii. B looks at it and then joins A to build a picture.
- iii. Then C looks at the picture and joins in.
- iv. When C has joined in, A comes out of the picture and looks at the shapes created by B and C. Then A joins in again to make a new picture. The game continues with the pictures transforming from one into another.
- v. As the exercise is done in silence and without prior discussion, after a little while, let people have a brief chat about the pictures in each of their minds. Were any of their pictures from the story of *The Crowstarver*?

3. READING AND DISCUSSING AN EXTRACT (15 minutes)

Read out loud and discuss the extract from *The Crowstarver* when Spider is being bullied by a gang of children: Page 56 'A lorry driver I met told me he'd seen this gang of kids'... until 'weak or crippled.'

4. CREATING A SHORT SCENE RELATED TO THE THEME OF BULLYING

(45 minutes)

IMPROVISATION

- i. In groups of six (two groups of three combined) plan an improvisation that will use words and include an incident of bullying. The improvisation could be based on the situation in the extract, or based in a parallel situation from another story that someone has read, experienced or imagined. It'll perhaps take five minutes, or so, for each group to choose their situation but encourage people to get going and start improvising after this length of time.
- ii. Let the improvisation run for five minutes, or so, and go round to each group in turn and watch their progress.

THE SIX-LINE SCRIPT AND BRINGING THE STORY ALIVE

- i. After the improvisation has run for five minutes or so, remind people about how important it is to use movement to express ideas and feelings and ask people to reduce their script to just six lines. They can write them down if they want to, or just commit them to memory.

- ii. When they work on the scene again, encourage them to communicate as much as possible with their bodies, so that they aren't reliant on words.
- iii. Suggest they start the scene with a frozen picture and end with one. In between, fill the scene with movement and energy and speak the text. The scene itself might last a lot longer than the time it takes to simply say the lines. Silence could be used as a way of building the tension.
- iv. Ask each group to share their short scenes with each other. How much can we, as audience, tell about the situation from just the six lines and the body language?
- v. If people have developed their scenes based in a parallel situation to that described in *The Crowstarver* (that someone has read about, experienced or imagined) this story could easily be drawn out from the group and/or the spectators. 'How did this happen? And what happened next? How might it have happened differently? What do you think each person is feeling? What do you think each person is thinking?' And etc.

5. INTRODUCING THEATRICAL DEVICES AND ADDING DIRECT ADDRESS

(If there is time)

- i. Encourage people to introduce theatrical devices into their short scenes, for example, slow motion, repeated words or phrases, or sound effects made with the voice. Perhaps refer to examples from Theatre Alibi's performance, but make it clear that they are not expected to imitate that performance, but rather, use it as an inspiration for their own.
- ii. Add one line of direct address which any of the performers can use, as a story teller, to give the audience some new information, perhaps telling us what one of the characters is feeling. Experiment with different moments when the line using direct address is spoken. For example, try continuing the action whilst the storyteller is speaking, and also freezing the action.
- iii. Share each short scene with each other. 'How much can we, as audience, tell about the situation from just the six lines and the body language? How do we, as audience, feel differently when we are listening to direct address, and when we are listening to dialogue?'

6. CONCLUSION

- i. End with a brief discussion. Explain that Drama is as much about showing with your body as telling in words and the challenge is to use both to bring the story alive!
- ii. In relation to the issue of bullying raised by the choice of extract and the theme of the workshop, remind the class that the story was set more than fifty years ago, and ask them what they would do, if they, or anyone they know, are being bullied now.