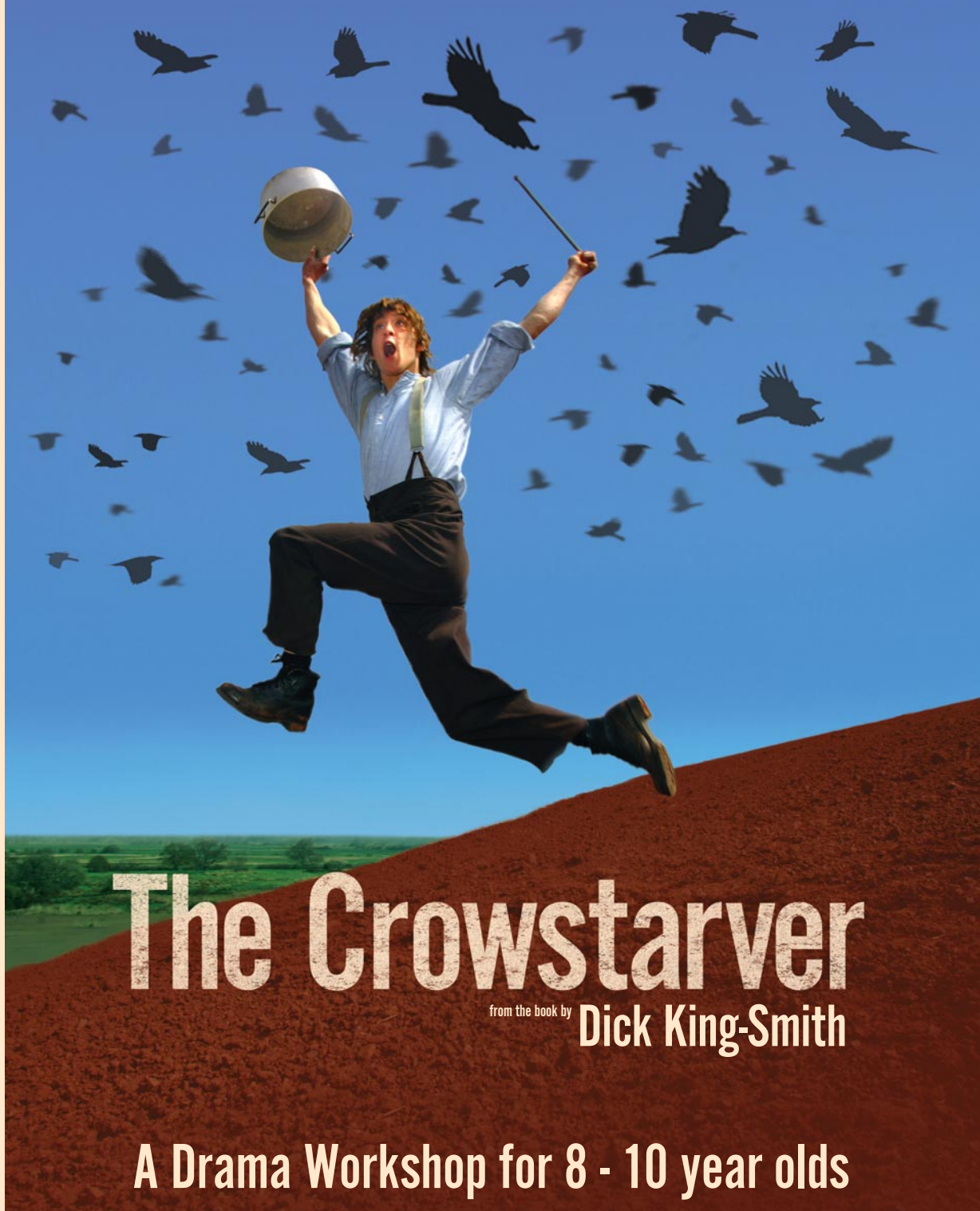


Theatre Alibi with Exeter Northcott Theatre & Oxford Playhouse



The Crowstarver

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

A Drama Workshop for 8 - 10 year olds

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A Drama Workshop for 8-10 year olds

The drama workshop below focusses on the moment in the story of *The Crowstarver* when Spider visits the village school with his mum, Kathie. It uses the drama exercise *Frozen Pictures* (sometimes referred to as images, tableaux, freeze frames, or snapshots) and 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*

A flipchart (optional)

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 (30 minutes)

Begin with physical games, moving in the space, working with each other, establishing control in a non-threatening way, developing vocal freedom.

For example:

WALKING AND FREEZING IN A GROUP

- i. Ask the children to walk about in the space noticing things about it that they haven't noticed before.
- ii. Ask them to walk energetically, but without running, and to touch the four walls in any order. Encourage them to look straight in front of them, moving in straight lines and diagonals but also avoiding bumping into each other! Perhaps they can imagine they are birds or aeroplanes moving through the air at some speed with the air parting in front of them.

- iii. On a signal from you, ask them to freeze for a moment and then to continue touching the four walls in any order.

BALANCE THE SPACE IN A GROUP

- i. Ask the children to walk anywhere in the space, no longer touching the four walls, but keeping their walk full of energy.
- ii. Ask them to spread out evenly around the room.
- iii. Freeze every now and then, so that they can check if they are an even distance from the people around them. They will need to look all around them in order to do this.

TRAFFIC LIGHTS IN A GROUP: STOP, LOOK, GO

- i. Ask the children to keep walking but if you give one beat on the drum, they freeze.
- ii. On two beats, they turn their heads.
- iii. On three beats, they move off in the direction they are looking. This game will encourage sharp, clear changes of focus.

SEND THE CLAP

- i. Stand in a circle and send a look around the circle by passing eye contact from one person to the next.
- ii. Add in turning the whole body as eye contact is passed on.
- iii. Add in a clap.
- iv. Pass on the look, turn and clap more and more quickly.
- v. Then let it change direction. Instead of passing on the clap to the next person, people can pass it back the way it came. This game encourages very fast changes of focus.

If you feel there's time, you could conclude the group warm up section with playing a name game, for example

NAME GAME

- i. In a circle, ask the children to take it in turns to take the first letter of their name and to find an action that starts with that letter. Then, they say and do the action plus the name, for example, 'Jump for Josie'.
- ii. Everyone repeats 'Jump for Josie' and then the next person has a turn, and so on round the circle.

2. WORK IN PAIRS (30 minutes)

CONCENTRATION IN PAIRS: ONE, TWO, THREE

- i. Ask the children to stand in pairs facing each other.
- ii. Then take it in turns to count out loud up to three: A says 1, B says 2, A says 3, B says 1, A says 2, C says 3, and so on.
- iii. Then, clap instead of saying 3. So, it goes 1, 2, clap, still alternating between A and B.
- iv. Then, stamp instead of saying 1. So it goes stamp, 2, clap.
- v. Finally, click fingers instead of saying 2. So it goes stamp, click, clap, alternating between A and B.

This exercise is a lot easier in its final stage when just the body is working. Explain that from now on many of the games will be using just the body, without words, and concentrating on how expressive it can be.

SCULPTING IN PAIRS

- i. A takes 10 seconds to sculpt B into a model of a bird, or animal. There is no talking during this exercise. Then A and B swap roles.
- ii. Repeat the exercise but this time the sculptor has a minute to complete the sculpture. Encourage the children to work in more detail and to see the way in which small adjustments can make a difference to the finished sculpture. Ask them, as they are sculpting, 'What is the animal or bird doing? What are they looking at? What kind of mood are they in?' Again, encourage the children to work in silence during the exercise itself.
- iii. Leave all the sculptures in the space and let the sculptors move around to have a look at some of them. Make a few encouraging comments about what is being communicated through some of the more controlled and expressive sculptures. Then ask people to swap roles.

RELATIONSHIPS IN PAIRS

- i. Briefly ask the children which relationships they can remember best from *The Crowstarver*. Perhaps make a list together on a big flip chart.
- ii. Ask each pair to decide on a relationship and to make a frozen picture, or snapshot, of that relationship. The relationship could represent two people in the story, for example Spider and the headmaster (page 49 in the book); OR it could represent a person and an animal, for example, Spider and a wild horse (page 146 in the book).

- iii. Let people share their impressions of what is being communicated through the body, before the picture is explained to them with words. 'What do we see when we look at the picture? What qualities come across about the relationship? Caring? Bullying? Friendship? Can we tell who the people or animals are and what they are doing? Where is the focus? In the frozen picture, are they looking out at the audience or at something imaginary? Does the frozen picture communicate what is intended?'
- iv. Suggest to the children that every piece of theatre is made up of a series of pictures and the audience understands what is happening by looking as much as by listening. In a way, these physical pictures, or 'images' in theatre, are like a kind of sign language for the audience.

3. WORK IN GROUPS OF 5 OR 6 (30 minutes)

CREATING A GROUP PICTURE

- i. Without talking, the first person goes into the space and takes up a position. The second person looks and then joins the first to build up a group picture. (You could encourage the children to think about some of the moments from *The Crowstarver* whilst they are doing this exercise.)
- ii. One by one, each person looks at the picture and then joins in, until about six have joined. Ask the spectators 'Is the picture clear? Where is the focus? Is it interesting to look at? What title would you give the picture?'
- iii. Repeat the exercise from the beginning, letting everyone in the class have at least one turn. Encourage as many people as possible, to describe what they see.

CREATING A GROUP PICTURE FROM A MOMENT IN THE STORY

- i. Read out loud the extract from the story of *The Crowstarver* describing Spider's visit to the village school. It begins on page 47 'Mister was as good as his word...' and continues until page 48 '...Spider simply clammed up.'
- ii. Split the class up into groups of 6 or less.
- iii. Ask each group to create a group picture based around a moment in the extract. Whilst they are working together, encourage the children to concentrate not just on what is happening in the picture, but also on the relationships, focus and feelings of the people involved.
- iv. Have a look at each picture and discuss it. 'Can you tell what the relationships in the picture are? Where is the focus? What is happening? What are the different qualities

and feelings expressed in the picture? What do you think the people in the picture might be thinking? What do you think they might be saying?’

- v. A variation of this exercise is to let each group make up or choose their own moment from the story of *The Crowstarver*. When you are looking at each picture, the story behind it could easily be drawn out from the group and/or the spectators, by asking questions. ‘What do you think is happening? And what do you think might happen next?’ And etc.

4. FURTHER WORK IN GROUPS OF 5 OR 6

(If there is an extra 30 minutes, or if there is time)

BRINGING THE MOMENT ALIVE

- i. Ask each group to make up and remember, or write down, a five, or six, line script for their picture. Each person in the group should have one ‘line’ to say that is theirs. If there are animals in the picture then sounds could be chosen.
- ii. As a group, encourage the children to try out different ways of speaking the words, or sounds, for example, fast and excited, or slow and cautious, or quiet and frightened. Also they can try to find a reason for each different way of speaking, or making sounds, and decide together on a pattern that feels right. Don’t forget to use pauses and silences! Perhaps they can add laughter or cheers! Start from the frozen picture and bring it alive for a few seconds before freezing again. In between the frozen moments, fill the picture with movement and energy and speak the ‘lines’.
- iii. Share each short scene with the others in the class. Finish with self-evaluation: ask the children if they managed to retain the detail in their pictures when they added the words and the movement.

5. CONCLUSION

End with a brief discussion. Explain that Drama is as much about showing with your body as telling in words and that the challenge is to use both to bring the story alive!