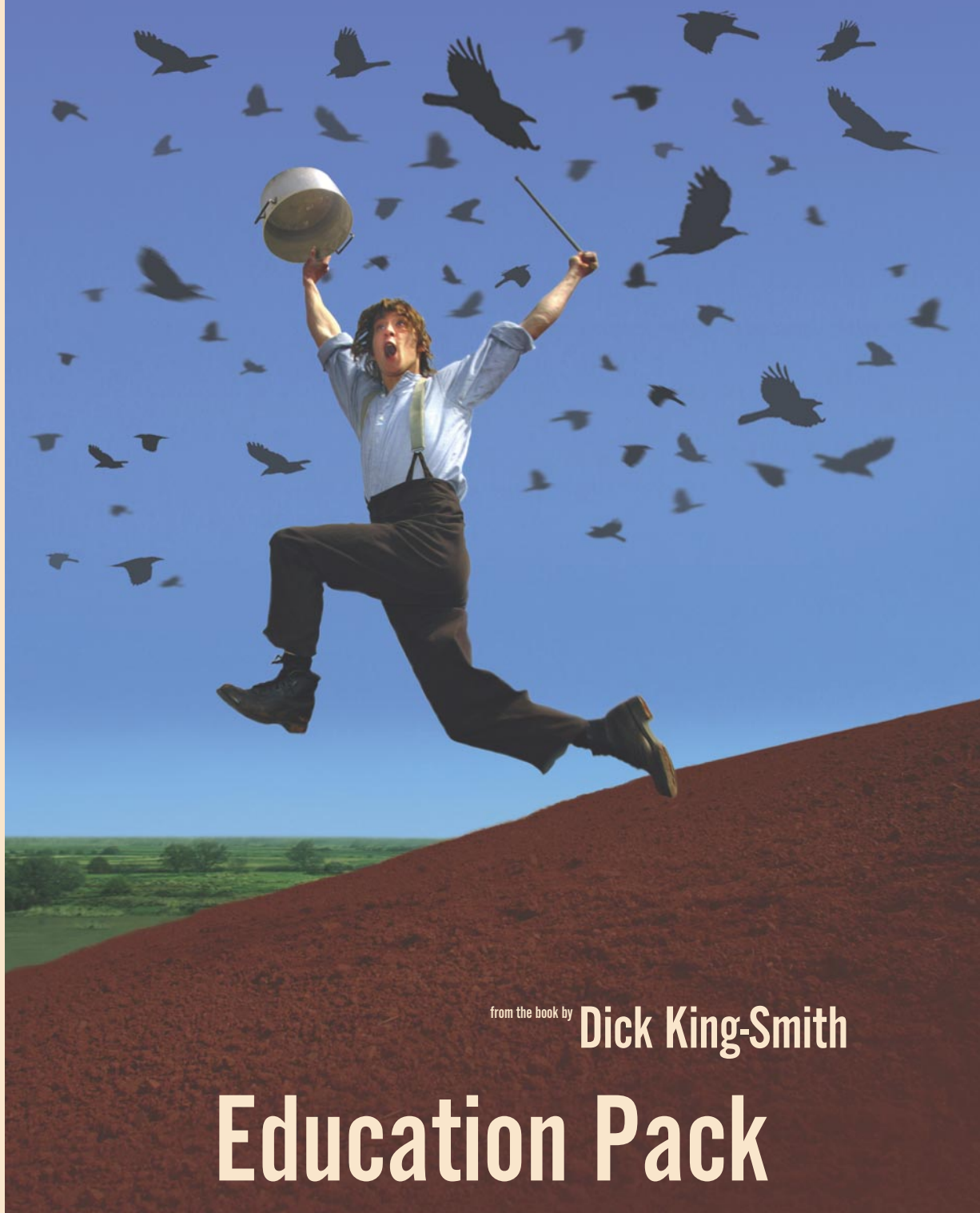


Theatre Alibi with Exeter Northcott Theatre & Oxford Playhouse



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

Education Pack

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Introduction

This education pack has been specially designed to accompany Theatre Alibi's adaptation of **The Crowstarver**. We hope you'll enjoy it.

The pack focuses on **PSHE & SEAL, Drama, English** and **History** and contains a variety of practical ideas for preparatory and follow up work suitable for students at Key Stages 2 and 3.

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Spider Sparrow

The story of *The Crowstarver* is about a boy called John Joseph Sparrow. Nicknamed Spider, he has certain learning difficulties and finds it hard to read, write or count. His vocabulary is limited to a few words but he's also gifted in many ways.



If the children have seen the play, or read the novel, ask them in small groups to make a list of all Spider's gifts. Perhaps aspects of Spider's personality can be included in their lists, as well as his skills.



Ask the children if they can imagine what it feels like to have difficulty reading even simple words. Older children can try reading the poem *Slow Reader* by Allan Ahlberg which may be found online (<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/26833310/SLOW-READER>). The version below is trickier as the children will need to start at the bottom and read from right to left.

.ti - etah
I - ni - ma - I - lla
Si - that - puorg - sre - daer
Wols - eht - ni - ma - I
Yalp - sam - tsirhc - stnaf - ni
Eht - ni - nam - esiw - a
Saw - re - htorb - elt - til
Ym - rev - res - a - si
Ret - sis - ym - meat - llab
Toof - eht - ni si - re
Htorb - ym - puorg - sre - daer
Wols - eht - ni - ma - I



Also, to give older children more idea of what it feels like to have difficulty reading, ask them to try reading the short story below. This time each word has been written in the correct order but it has been printed backwards! They can try this game in pairs, noticing as much as they can about how they feel when they're struggling to do something they find difficult. Then they can share their observations with the rest of the class.

**Ereht saw llits on ngis fo eht srehto. Eht gnignis dah deppots sa yeht de-
hcaorppa eht pmac. Won ereht saw enoon ot eb nees. Neht yeht was no eht
pot fo eno fo eht sexob a taerg etihw god. Ti saw on derbhguoroht. Tub ti
dah kcuts ot sti tsop – ekilnu eht rehto step. Yeht dah deraeppasid neh w eht
elbuort tsrif nageb. Won yeht erew no eht tops. Yeht erew deppart.**

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Ask the children to make up their own short stories like the one above – and then try writing them backwards for a partner to read aloud. They can take it in turns to be 'pupil' and 'teacher'. This time, ask them to notice as much as they can about their partner's body language, voice and emotional reactions. Here are a few questions to help them with their observations:

*Body Language: How is your partner sitting?
Is s/he tense or relaxed?*

Voice: Is her/his voice expressive or monotonous?

*Emotional reactions: How do you think s/he is feeling?
Is s/he feeling embarrassed, defensive or threatened?
Does s/he want to give up or carry on?*

The rights of every child

Spider was born in 1926 in peacetime between the First and Second World Wars. When he's six years old his mother takes him to see the headmaster at the local school. The headmaster says he's sorry but he feels that Spider has problems the school can't deal with. Today ALL children have the right to a formal education. *This right is part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.* It applies to children from all over the world, no matter how much ability they have, or how much money their families have. In reality this doesn't happen all over the world, but it's something to work towards.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child

Rose's Story

Rose was born in 1985 with Down Syndrome. You can often recognise people with Down Syndrome by the way they look. They are described as having learning difficulties or a learning disability. At the time Rose was born things were changing for people with Down Syndrome. In the past parents were usually encouraged to put their children into residential care as soon as they were born. It was thought that they would never be able to lead a "normal" life – go to school or college, walk about on their own, get jobs or get married. But now many people believe that people with learning difficulties can lead as full a life as anybody else, if they are given the right support.



With the help of her parents and others, Rose started learning to read when she was three, even before she could say many words. This is the way that many children with Down Syndrome now learn to speak and read at the same time. Rose went to her local nursery, primary and secondary school with her sister. At school she was made welcome by the teachers and other children. She was the first child with Down Syndrome to go to secondary school in her city. At school Rose particularly enjoyed French, Drama and Geography and she got qualifications in those subjects. At school she also had fun doing her Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award.

It isn't easy for Rose to learn certain things – she has always found Maths and using money very difficult, for example. Sometimes people find it hard to understand what she is saying. But, like everyone, she has special talents. Rose is very interested in people, never forgets their name and understands what they are feeling. She enjoys listening to music, dancing, table football and watching films. She likes keeping in touch with friends by texting on her mobile phone. She also likes outdoor things like camping, canoeing and riding a tandem with her father as well as going to a gym regularly to keep fit.

Now that she is grown-up Rose has moved into her own home with friends and works as a volunteer doing office work for various organisations. Rose says, "I don't like it when people stare at me".



Ask the children, in a big group, to discuss the dangers of labelling and stereotyping other children. Make a big list together.



Then, in small groups, ask the children to discuss what makes each of them unique and also to think about what is most important to them as individuals. They can each make their own list including little things as well as big ones, and add to it later if they think of something else.

Spider's family and their dog Molly

Spider is an only child. His family consists of his mum, Kathie, his dad, Tom, and Spider himself. Spider's dad is a shepherd, his mum works around the house and looks after the family, and Molly is a working dog on the farm where Spider grows up. She's a collie, blue merle in colour and she's also very clever.



All animals are clever in their own ways. In small groups, ask the children to share any stories they know about clever animals. Each of them can write a story about a clever animal, and illustrate it. It could either be a true story or a made up one.

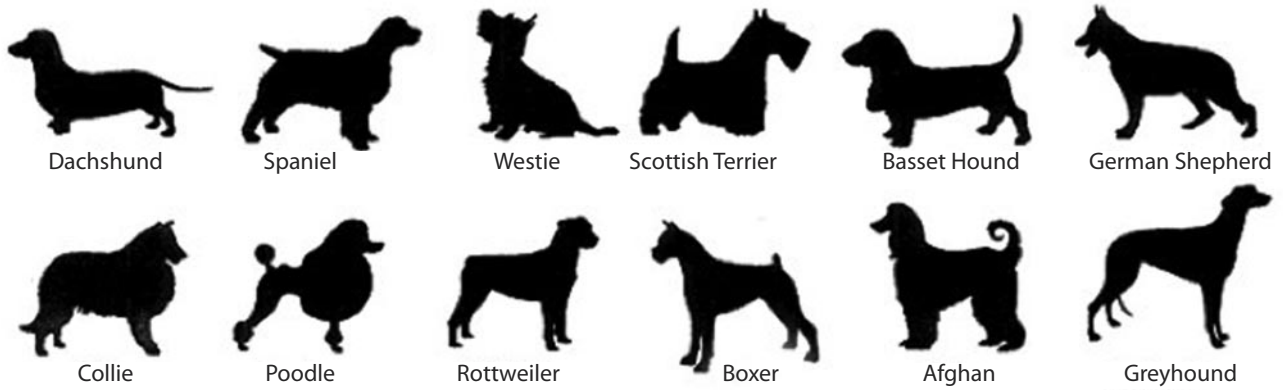
In fact it's Molly who finds Spider in a lambing pen when he's a very young baby. Molly is a dog with a special gift and somehow she just knows Spider's there. He's been left in the lambing pen by his birth mother perhaps because she's too young and poor to look after him by herself – and she wants him to have a loving family, and everything he needs.



Ask the children in small groups to make a list of all the things they think every child needs, no matter where in the world they live, and to share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

Older children may be aware that some children can't live with their birth parents for a variety of reasons and if this happens, they may be taken into care, or perhaps fostered or adopted. In the United Kingdom, today, no child should be without a home of some kind. However, in some countries, even today, it's still possible to find children living on the streets without a home of any kind.

In the book when Molly is very old she gets bad arthritis and, eventually, because she's in pain, she has to be put to sleep. Explaining this to Spider is very difficult, but Molly's replacement is a puppy called Moss who is a Border Collie. Then, when Spider is older, he has his own dog, called Sis. She's part red Irish setter and part hairy Wiltshire cowdog. Spider trains her himself.



Ask the children to choose a breed of dog to make a special study of, including how to train them. Perhaps they can find out more about the breed of their own family dog, if they have one. (It doesn't matter if it is a mixture of breeds like Sis.) Or perhaps they can choose a working dog that lives on a farm like Molly, helping to look after the sheep, or a working dog that lives in the city, helping the police.

Is it always 'good' to be 'normal'?

In the *The Crowstarver*, Spider's parents, Tom and Kathie, worry a great deal about whether, or not, Spider is a 'normal' child, but they dare not ask each other that question.



In a big group ask the children to think about why they think Tom and Kathie don't dare ask each other whether they think Spider is 'normal', or not. Is it because they are frightened of what the answer might be? Could there be other reasons?



Then, in a big group, ask the children to discuss what they think being 'normal' means.



A follow up is to ask children in small groups to discuss whether, or not, they think the following things are 'normal', or 'not normal', and whether they think they are 'good' or 'bad', or 'it depends'. For example, perhaps a lighthouse keeper who enjoys a solitary life might think it's both 'normal' and 'good' to be alone most of the time.

- i Being alone most of the time
- ii Nearly always feeling happy
- iii Feeling frightened about things you don't understand
- iv Always avoiding danger
- v Not daring to tell your family about something
- vi Blaming other people if something doesn't seem quite right
- vii Blaming yourself if something goes wrong
- viii Being able to put yourself in other people's shoes
- ix Always saying the right thing
- x Learning by your mistakes



How many contradictory viewpoints are there in each small group? Ask the children to summarise all the different points of view and choose a few to present clearly to the rest of the class. Each of them could pick one topic to summarise – but the points of view they explain need not be their own.



Ask the whole class to listen carefully to all the different points of view and ask questions if they aren't clear about the reasons behind them. Has anyone said anything that has made them see something from a different point of view?

Exploring issues related to bullying

When Spider is 10 years old he's bullied by a gang of older children. In the book of *The Crowstarver*, a lorry driver sees the gang chasing Spider. They are barking like a pack of hounds, and when they catch up with Spider, they push him over and stand around him laughing, with some of them growling and pretending to tear at him as dogs would at their quarry.



Ask the class in a big group to discuss whether, or not, they think the lorry driver who witnessed Spider being bullied could, or should, have done something to stop what was happening. Perhaps they can think of things that he, as an adult, might have done to help. Invite them to make a list and share their thoughts with the rest of the class.



Again in a big group, ask the class to wonder whether *all* of the children in the gang were bullying Spider. Perhaps some were just standing by and watching? Make a list together of things that some of the *children* could have done to help.



Ask the children in small groups to imagine what Spider felt like when he was being bullied by the gang. Can they find words and phrases to express Spider's feelings? Each group can make a list and then use the drama exercise **INNER SELF** to explore them.

INNER SELF

A member of the class, in role, remains silent whilst one or more people speak the character's inner thoughts and feelings. After the exercise, in a big group, encourage the children to discuss the feelings they experienced as they watched or participated.



In a big group, discuss the things that some of the people in the community were thinking and feeling about Spider. In what ways did they see him as being 'different'? Use the drama exercise **THOUGHT TUNNEL** to express the different thoughts and feelings amongst the community.

THOUGHT TUNNEL

The class are positioned in two lines down the centre of the room to form a 'tunnel'. This tunnel represents the different voices in a community. Then a volunteer walks slowly down the 'tunnel', in role, whilst people from either side speak their 'thoughts' aloud. These thoughts should express a variety of opinions or emotions (not just negative ones). The volunteer is then asked to communicate how hearing the different 'thoughts', spoken by the rest of the community made him, or her feel.



As a large group, make a list of different ways in which someone might be bullied.

Physical bullies, for example, like the gang of children in *The Crowstarver*, kick or hit people; **verbal bullies** use words to hurt or humiliate other people; and **relationship bullies** try to exclude people from a group, by, for example, spreading nasty rumours about them. Together, draw up a list of actions that children and adults can take if they – or someone they know – are being bullied. There are some excellent websites that give further information about bullying and ways of tackling it:

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/resourcesforteachers/classroomresources/infosheets/clinfosheetbullyingwhatcanparentsdo_wdf55555.pdf

<http://www.childline.org.uk/explore/bullying/pages/bullying.aspx>

<http://www.bullying.org/>

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!

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.

Memories of War

In September 1939, when Spider was thirteen years old, the Second World War broke out.

Below is a poem called **THE SECOND WORLD WAR** by Elizabeth Jennings. In it she remembers the same day in September when (like Spider) she, too, was thirteen years old.

The voice said 'We are at War'
And I was afraid, for I did not know what this meant.
My sister and I ran to our friends next door
As if they could help. History was lessons learnt
With ancient dates, but here

Was something utterly new,
The radio, called the wireless then, had said
That the country would have to be brave. There was much to do.
And I remember that night as I lay in bed
I thought of soldiers who

Had stood on our nursery floor
Holding guns, on guard and stiff. But war meant blood
Shed over battlefields, Calvary galloping. War
On that September Sunday made us feel frightened
Of what our world waited for.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR by Elizabeth Jennings is from THE COLLECTED POEMS (Carcenet, 1987, ISBN 10: 0856357219 & ISBN 13: 978-08566357213).
Reproduced by kind permission of David Higham Associates.



Older children may be interested to compare the layout of the poem above with the version printed on the next page and discuss the differences between the two versions. What effect do the changes have? Which version do the children find easier to read out loud? Perhaps the layout of the online version has been altered to make comprehension easier. Do the children agree? Can they explain why they prefer one version to another?



Ask the children to write their own poems about something they have been frightened by, and to choose the way they lay their poems out on the page very carefully.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The voice said 'We are at War'

And I was afraid,
for I did not know what this meant.

My sister and I ran to our friends next door
As if they could help.

History was lessons learnt
With ancient dates, but here
Was something utterly new,
The radio, called the wireless then, had said
That the country would have to be brave.

There was much to do.

And I remember that night as I lay in bed I thought of
soldiers who
Had stood on our nursery floor
Holding guns, on guard and stiff.

But war meant blood
Shed over battle-fields,
Cavalry galloping.

War On that September Sunday made us feel frightened
Of what our world waited for.

Remembrance Sunday

Every year, on Remembrance Sunday – which is the first Sunday in November - we remember all those killed in the two World Wars, and also the wars that have been fought more recently, and are still being fought now.

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/schools-and-learning/learning-pack>

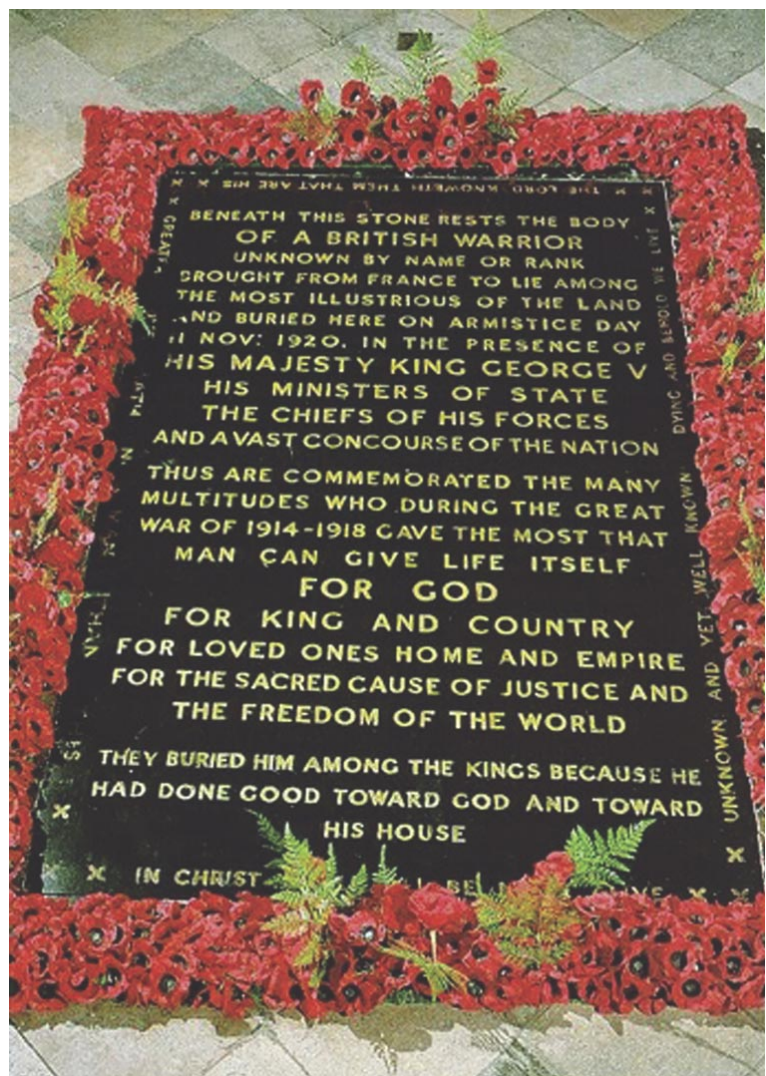


Ask the children to find out more about Remembrance Day. For example, do any of them know who The Unknown Soldier is? Do they know how he was chosen?

The story is summarised below:

The Unknown Soldier represents all those killed in the two World wars, as well as all the more recent wars. When the First World War ended, a British general was blindfolded and led into a hut. There were six coffins in the hut. Each one contained the body of a soldier who had been killed on a different part of the battle-field. The general touched one of the coffins. It was brought to England and buried in Westminster Abbey. Nobody knows the soldier's name.

(HISTORY AROUND YOU by L.E.Snellgrove, (Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1982. ISBN 0 05 002427 2). Extract of text related to the Unknown Warrior is reproduced by kind permission of Pearson Ltd.)



Crows and crow's eye views

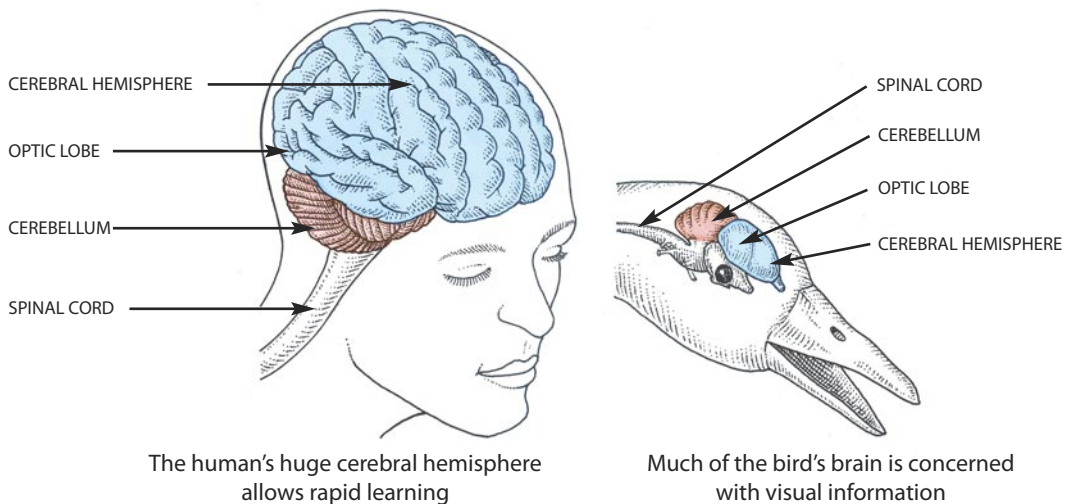
During the war it was Spider's job was to scare away the crows from the fields on Outoverdown farm.



Ask the children, in pairs, to find out everything they can about crows. Did they know, for example, that there are more than 100 species of the crow family? Crows are also believed to be the most intelligent of birds. Ask the children to compare these pictures of a bird's brain and a human brain. Birds have a highly developed sense of sight and sense of hearing but are thought to have hardly any sense of smell, taste or touch.

INTELLIGENCE AND INSTINCT

Bird's brains are small compared to most mammals, and most birds are poor at learning new skills. However, a bird is born with a huge number of 'programmes' built into its brain. These programmes control not only simple activities like preening and feeding, but also feats of instinct such as migration.



BIRDS EYEWITNESS GUIDE (Dorling Kindersley, London, 1998. ISBN 0-86318-2704). The illustrations are reproduced by kind permission of DK Images. Reproduction of the text with the illustrations is by kind permission of Penguin Books Ltd.



Ask the children if they can imagine what it might feel like to be a crow living in the countryside. Can they imagine the world from the sky? What can they see? What can they hear? What do they feel? Ask them to draw, paint, or write a description of a crow's eye view of a particular patch of earth they know well.



Passages from the novel may help the children to draw or paint an aerial view of Outoverdown farm. Here is one:

Outoverdown Farm was a rough square in shape, a thousand acres in extent, and bisected by the drove which ran north to south. At its northern end it was bounded by the River Wyllye that gave the valley its name, and by the road that ran beside it. Nearest to river and road were the watermeadows, and beyond them, a belt of goodish land where the arable crops were sown.



Perhaps the children can add some more details to their art work by including all the important landmarks in the story – for example, the shepherd’s hut, the lambing pen, Tom and Kathie Sparrow’s cottage, the carthorse stables, and so on.

Farms and farming

During the war it was Spider's job was to scare away the crows from the fields on Outoverdown farm.



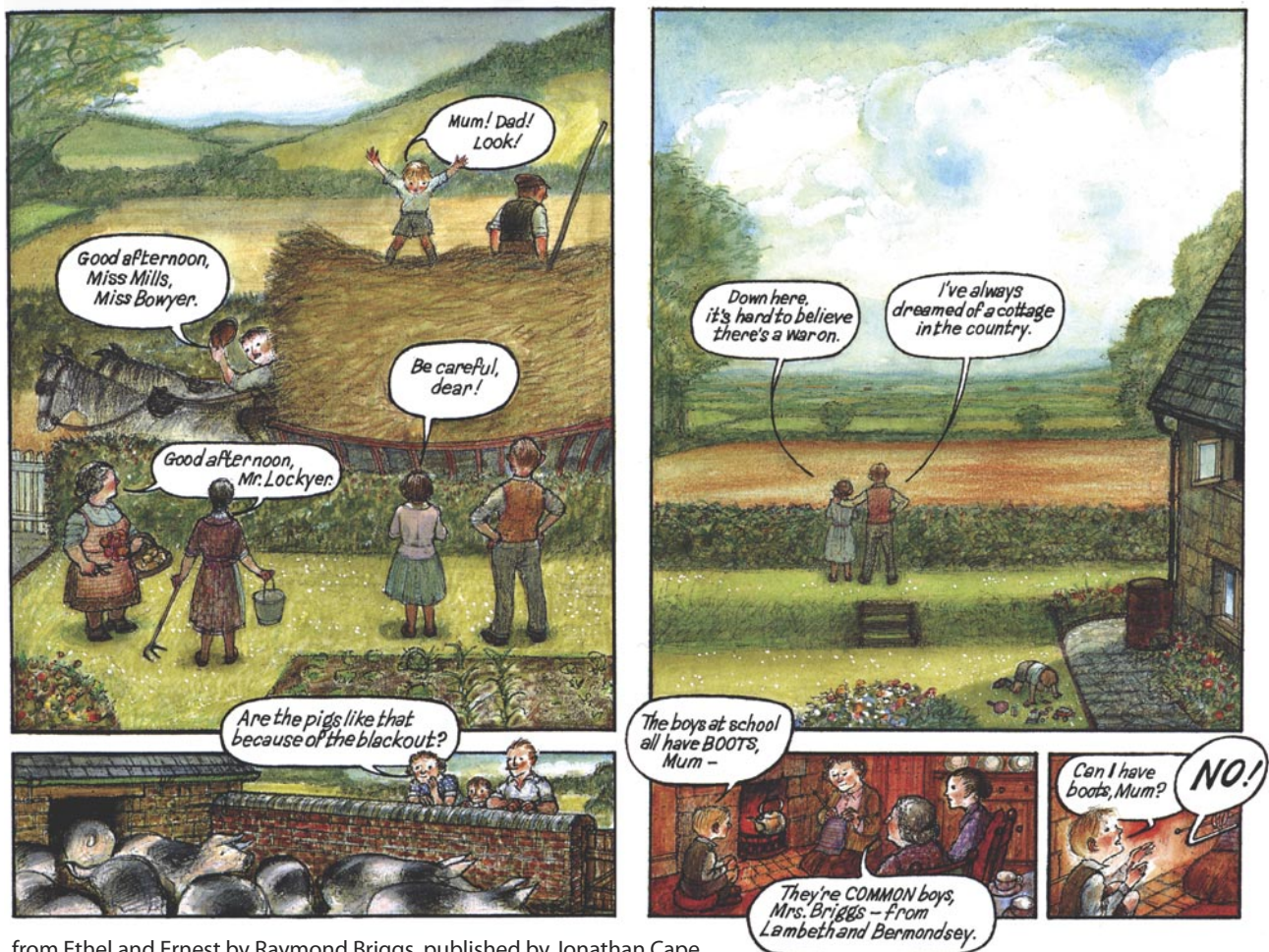
Ask the children to find out all they can about farms and farming during the Second World War. In what ways has farming in England changed since then? The story of *The Crowstarver* will help them and a couple of excellent books about farming are listed below:

20th Century Farming by Graham Rickard (ISBN 1-85078-925-7)

FARM by Ned Halley (ISBN 0 7513 6065 1)



Here is a picture of farmland from an autobiographical comic strip book by Raymond Briggs called *Ethel and Ernest at home during the Second World War*. Ask the children what they notice in the picture.



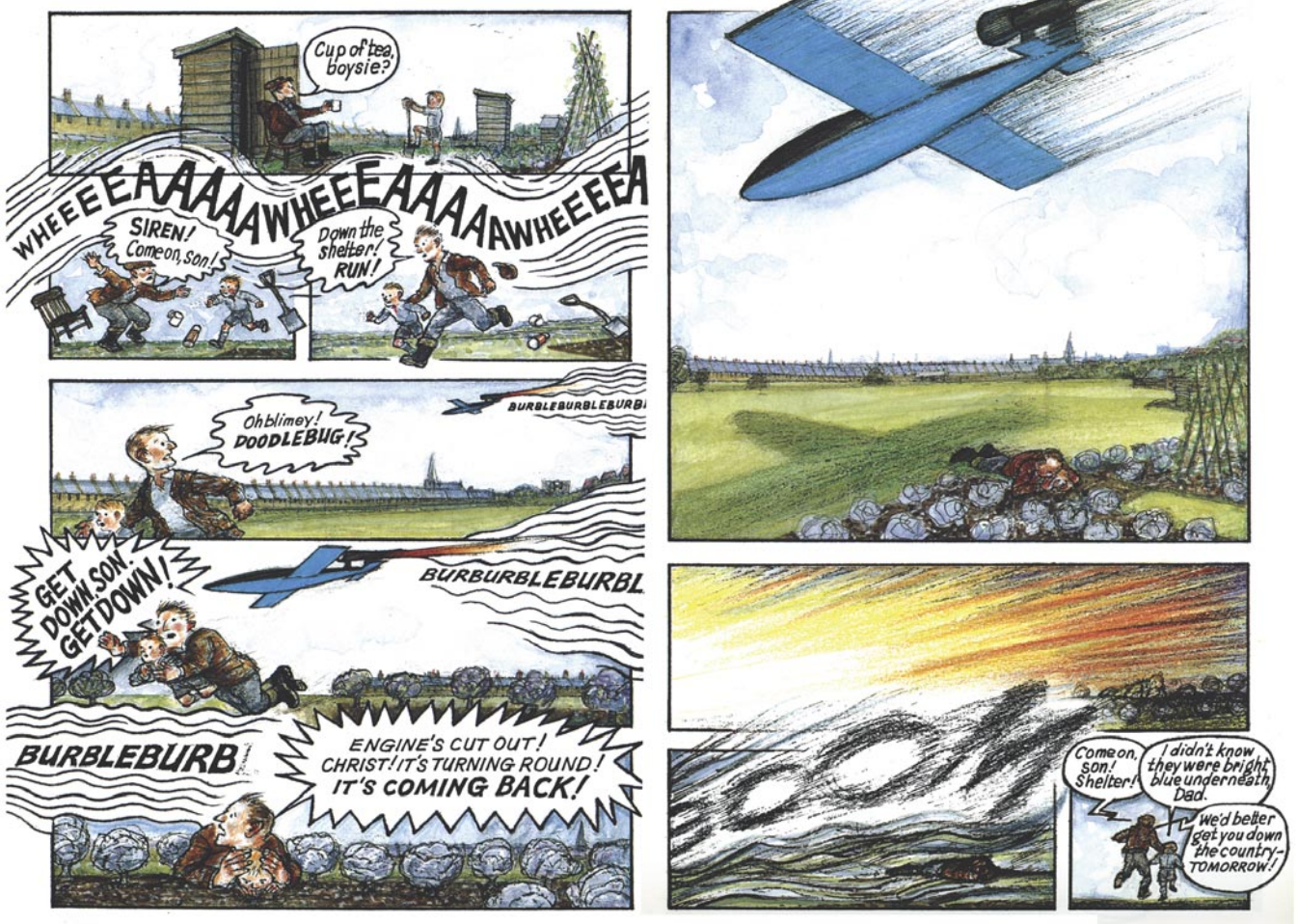
from *Ethel and Ernest* by Raymond Briggs, published by Jonathan Cape. Used by kind permission of The Random House Group Limited

Flying craft in the Second World War

In *The Crowstarver*, a German warplane called a Messerschmitt and a Royal Air Force Spitfire are in combat in the skies over Outoverdown farm - and the German pilot is forced to crash land in a field near where Spider is working.



Invite the children to tell the story of the two planes in *The Crowstarver* using a comic book style. Below is a section from Raymond Briggs' autobiographical comic strip book, which will help them. It illustrates a doodlebug during the Second World War.



from Ethel and Ernest by Raymond Briggs, published by Jonathan Cape. Used by kind permission of The Random House Group Limited



Ask the children if they know what a doodle bug was? Here is a small story told by a man called Peter. In it, Peter remembers the doodlebugs during the Second World War.

"When a doodlebug came, we all had to stand outside in the garden, in case it fell on the house and we were inside and then we all would have been killed when it exploded. I can remember when I was three years old standing there listening to the sound it made, hoping it wouldn't stop because if it did, it meant that it could fall on us. I wanted it to go on and stop somewhere else. All my life, I've always been very good at listening to sounds."



Ask the children to find out the names of other planes or flying craft used during the Second World War, or later wars. Their parents or grandparents may be able to help them and some may have relatives who are serving in the armed services.

The Author of the Book

Dick King-Smith is the author of *The Crowstarver*. He was born in 1922 and grew up in the West Country. Dick was a soldier in World War II, serving with the Grenadier Guards in Italy, and he was a farmer for 20 years before he became a teacher and author. He wrote over a hundred books, which have been translated into twelve languages. His first book was *The Fox Busters*, published in 1978. In later life, Dick lived in Queen Charlton, a small farming village near Bristol, and had many pets including rats, mice, ornamental pheasants, dachshunds, geese, guinea fowl, guinea pigs and English rabbits. Dick also presented a feature on animals on TV-AM's children's programme *Rub a Dub Dub* and appeared regularly on Saturday morning TV. He died peacefully at his home on 4 January 2011 at the age of 88.



Dick's top tip on writing stories is:

"Read as widely as you can. Try not to read rubbish, but soak up all sorts of good stories. Unconsciously you'll take in the way that established authors write their different styles... Your style, when it comes, will be yours and yours alone, for better or for worse, but it will have been affected by your reading."

The process of writing

Dick King-Smith said that he began each book by getting the germ of an idea, sitting down, and knocking something out, hoping that it would evolve into a story. He seldom revised what he'd written, knowing that his editors would leave it alone if it was fine – and tell him if it wasn't. Here are a few notes he made about a typical day:

"Sit down in my very small study in my very old cottage; scribble in longhand in the morning; in the afternoon, type out the morning's work (on an old portable typewriter, with one finger); evening, read day's work to my wife, seeking her approval."

The Adapter of the Play

Daniel Jamieson adapted *The Crowstarver* for Theatre Alibi. Dan has lived and worked in the West Country for more than half his life now since coming to study Drama at Exeter University in 1986. He's worked for Theatre Alibi over the last twenty two years as artistic director, actor, writer and adapter. As well as writing for the theatre, Dan has written five plays for BBC Radio 4.



Dan's top tip on writing stories is:

"When you write a story, don't try to make it what you think other people want to read, make it what you would like to read. Genuine conviction is infectious and if you write a story you really love, chances are, other people might too."

The process of adaptation

The story in the play *The Crowstarver* is essentially the same as the story in the book but it's told in a different way using the language of theatre: actions, words, music, props, costumes, lights and stage design.

In the process of adaptation of *The Crowstarver*, Dan tried to stay faithful to the feel of the original story, not write his own version of Dick King-Smith's book. He began by choosing important moments from the story and then wrote them into a play script. Some moments from the book were left out because otherwise the story would take too long to tell. In the process of adaptation, Dan wrote several drafts of the play script, and during rehearsals, the play script was transformed into theatre images by Theatre Alibi's creative team including himself, the director, actors, musicians, designer, propmaker and stage manager. It's their job to make sure the story comes alive for audiences.

Different kinds of storytelling

The storyteller in the book

In the book of *The Crowstarver*, DICK KING-SMITH, the author, tells the story.



In the book, Dick King-Smith uses *the third person* to tell the story. He also uses *the past tense*. Ask the children in pairs, to take it in turns to make up a story about something that happened to an imaginary friend using *the third person* and *the past tense*.



In the book, Dick King-Smith tells the story from his own point of view. He doesn't pretend to know the thoughts of all the characters he has created. Again, in pairs ask the children to take it in turns to make up a story, this time including the thoughts of the characters in it, but occasionally admitting that they don't know what a particular character is thinking.



Dick King-Smith often includes what people said, or *dialogue*, in his story. Ask the children to make up, or write their own stories including *dialogue* in them, and remembering to use *inverted commas* so that it's easy for a reader to see when people are speaking in the story.

The storytellers in the play

In the play, all the actors take on the role of storytellers. DAN JAMIESON, the adapter of the book, simply calls them St.1, 2, 3, 4 or 5.

In small groups, read the extract below from the play script.



Compare this extract with pages 5-11 in the novel. Ask the children to discuss any differences they notice and make a list.



Then ask them to share their thoughts with the rest of the class and, together, make a big list of all the similarities and differences they can think of.

The Play Script - an extract

(The storytellers approach the stage in the moonlight.

St. 1 The sough of the wind,

St. 2 ...coming over the shoulder of the Wiltshire downs,

St. 3 ...sweeping low across a lambing field...

St. 4 ...'til it meets a stout, stone wall...

St. 5 ... - the lambing pen on Outoverdown Farm.

(Some storytellers make the crying of the lambs and the guttural reply of the ewes, the others carry on the wind.)

St. 1 Inside this, ewes and their new lambs,

St. 5 ...and the shepherd's hut, safe from the west wind's buffeting. **(St. 5 has fetched a box with an opening like a little window in the side, through which a warm light glows. The storytellers show the wind sweep over the "hut" for a moment before St. 5 draws a hurricane lamp out of the box and holds it over the scene. St. 4 pulls a lamb and a teated flagon out of the box. He becomes Tom Sparrow, feeding the lamb.)**

St. 5 Inside the hut, a shepherd, Tom Sparrow, feeding a motherless lamb.

Tom Enough? Sure? Go on then...
(He lays the lamb in the box and settles down to sleep beside it.)

St. 3 **(Beginning to animate Tom's dog, which lies near him,)** Tom's dog, Molly.

Tom Sweet dreams Molly. **(Tom pats Molly's head and she lays her head on her paws, wagging her tail slightly.)**

St. 3 They snatched what sleep they could at lambing time. All quiet now.
Everything in its place.

St. 2 Wait. **(St. 1 has slipped away and approaches now with a shawl round her head, carrying a bundle.)** Along the drove from the valley road a girl comes, striving against the wind, carrying a bundle.

(She comes onstage and creeps up, wary of the “hut” to one side. She goes out of view into a pen upstage then backs out without the bundle. She hesitates a moment then heads off the way she came.)

St. 2 And off again, arms empty.

(St. 2 looks down into the pen and makes the thin wailing that he hears coming from the bundle. Molly hears the noise straightaway and scratches at the door of the hut.)

Tom What’s up Molly? Fox about is there? **(He puts on his coat, takes the lamp and goes out the door. The noise of the wind and the wailing are louder now. Molly runs ahead and barks into the pen, wagging her tail. Tom hangs the lantern and picks up the bundle, a dirty white shawl, from which the crying comes. He takes the lantern and returns to the hut with the bundle. All the storytellers and Molly crowd round Tom as he sits and opens the bundle. It’s a baby. Tom holds him up, turning him this way and that, examining him as he would a new lamb.)** You’re a poor little rat, you are, my lad...

(The baby cries again. Tom holds him close and cuddles him. There’s a note in the shawl, which Tom sees now and reads, then stuffs in his pocket with a shake of his head.)

Looks like your mum’s ditched you.

(He reaches for the lamb’s bottle. The lamb bleats from its box expectantly.)

Wait your turn.

(After a cursory wipe of the teat, he feeds the baby with the bottle.)

Come on, get it down you, there’s a good boy.

(Tom gently, tenderly touches the palm of the baby’s hand and its fingers curl round his finger.)

Ah dear, Molly, I shoulda loved a son.

(A storyteller has slipped away and approaches now as Kathie Sparrow.)

St. 5 Kathie Sparrow comes up the drove now - Tom’s wife, bringing his breakfast. Lambing time is a lonely time for her, with no child for company. **(She stops and looks around before going in to the hut.)**

Kathie Oh Tom. **(She goes in and sees Tom with the baby.)** Tom! **(He hands her the note. She reads it out loud.)** “PLEASE SAVE THIS LAMB”... **(Kath takes the baby from Tom and gently embraces it. Then they walk away down to their cottage.)**

Evaluating Theatre Alibi's performance of *The Crowstarver*



In pairs, or small groups, ask the children to share their most vivid memories of the performance. Were their most vivid memories linked to the acting, or a prop, costume, music, a sound effect, lighting or an aspect of the set design?



Encourage them to share their memories with the rest of the class and together make a list of everyone's most vivid memories.



How did different moments in the play make them feel? Were there exciting moments? Or funny ones? Or sad ones? Or scary ones? Were there moments where they all felt the same thing? Encourage them to discuss the similarities and differences between their responses.



In pairs, or small groups, discuss the characters in the story. How do the children feel about each of them?



Together make two lists, one with *facts about* each of the characters and one with *feelings* about that character.



In a big group, discuss the moments in the performance that might be done in a different way, not necessarily better.



In small groups ask the children to discuss in more depth other ways of telling different parts of the story, perhaps by changing the acting, or a prop, costume, music, a sound effect, lighting or aspect of the set design. Each group could choose one moment to focus on, noting their ideas down, and adding drawings to help explain them.

Invite each group to share their ideas with the rest of the class.



Ask each child to write a review of the performance to send to Theatre Alibi. They could comment on any aspect of the production: the story, the characters, the acting, the props, costume, music, sound effects, lighting or set design - the facts as well as feelings about them. They could also include their own ideas for telling different parts of the story.

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Resources and Acknowledgements

PSHE & SEAL

CHICO THE STREET BOY by Evelyn Puig tells the story of a young Brazilian boy who is homeless and lives in one of Rio's shanty towns (Grosvenor U. S. A., 1984. ISBN-10 0901269794 & ISBN-13 978-0901269799).

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IT'S OUR RIGHT (copyright: SCF/UNICEF – UK, 1990. ISBN 1 871440 04 1).

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