

Why the Whales Came

INTRODUCTION

This education pack has been specially designed to accompany Theatre Alibi's adaptation of ***Why the Whales Came*** and different sections of it may be used before or after seeing the performance. It focuses on **literacy** and the **English** curriculum and in the interests of encouraging broader reading, it includes related material. Each section contains a variety of practical ideas for preparatory and follow up work in reading, writing, discussion and drama suitable for students at Key Stages 2 and 3. Additionally, sections of the pack are integral to the **PSHE** curriculum.

More information and images can be found at: www.theatrealibi.co.uk

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Whales

- In the story *Why the Whales Came* there is a Narwhal. Did you know that Narwhals use their horns to make breathing holes in the ice so that they, and all the other species, can forage under the Arctic ice-floes? In pairs, find out everything you can about whales. A good way to start is by looking in your school and public libraries for books about whales.
- The book *Whale Nation* by Heathcote Williams is packed with pictures and information about whales. The extracts below mention the Humpback and the Blue whales. There are about eighty different species of whales, dolphins and porpoises. Choose one to make a special study of.

Did you know?

Whales play
For three times as long as they spend searching for food:
Delicate, involved games,
With floating seabirds' feathers, blown high into the air,
And logs of wood
Flipped from the tops of their heads;
Carried in their teeth
For a game of tag, ranging across the entire Pacific.
Play without goals.

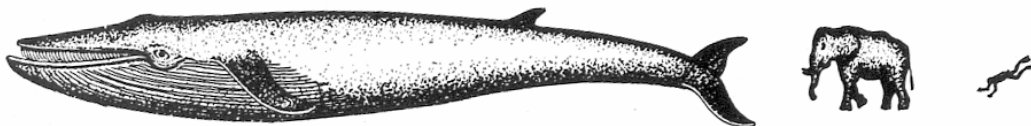
Did you know?

The Humpback catches its food by blowing bubbles.
Five foot wide bubbles, as large as weather balloons:
When they burst, they make a circle of confusing mist.
The plankton : the arctic shrimps, the krill, the sea-butterflies
Are corralled into the middle by a bewildering ring of hissing bubble-bombs
The whale then rises up
Into the centre of a round plate of brimming water,
And eats.

Did you know?

The Blue whale is nearly a hundred feet long.
It weighs a hundred and seventy tons,
As much as two thousand seven hundred people.
Its tongue is ten feet thick, heavier than an elephant.

(Extracts from *Whale Nation* by Heathcote Williams courtesy of Jonathan Cape, London, 1988)



(*Whale Nation* by Heathcote Williams, page28, courtesy of Jonathan Cape, London, 1988)

- In small groups, pool the information you have found and together make a display to share your discoveries with the rest of the class.

Ocean World

You can find out more about whales, and the dangers to them, by looking at the musical *Ocean World* by Peter Rose and Anne Conlon. It tells the story of a humpback whale and begins with her journey, thousands of miles, from the North to the South Pacific Ocean near to where she was born. She travels a route that whales have followed since the beginning of time and when she arrives she gives birth to a whale calf.

The young calf plays and learns and grows strong, nourished by his mother's milk. He is totally dependent on her and always stays close by her side. Sometimes when he is tired, he rests on her back supported by her strength. All around them, they hear the sounds of the adult males filling the sea with their plaintive songs.

When the calf grows big enough, the two of them journey northwards. On the way they meet all the dangers of modern fishing, factory style. They must stay clear of the hundreds of miles of ultra-fine drift nets which are stretched across so much of the ocean; and the massive floating nets which have been lost by boats, but which continue to fish, taking catch after catch of wasted life. The mother whale carefully guides her tired calf past these silent ocean graveyards. They change their route to more remote seas where they hope to find the food they need.

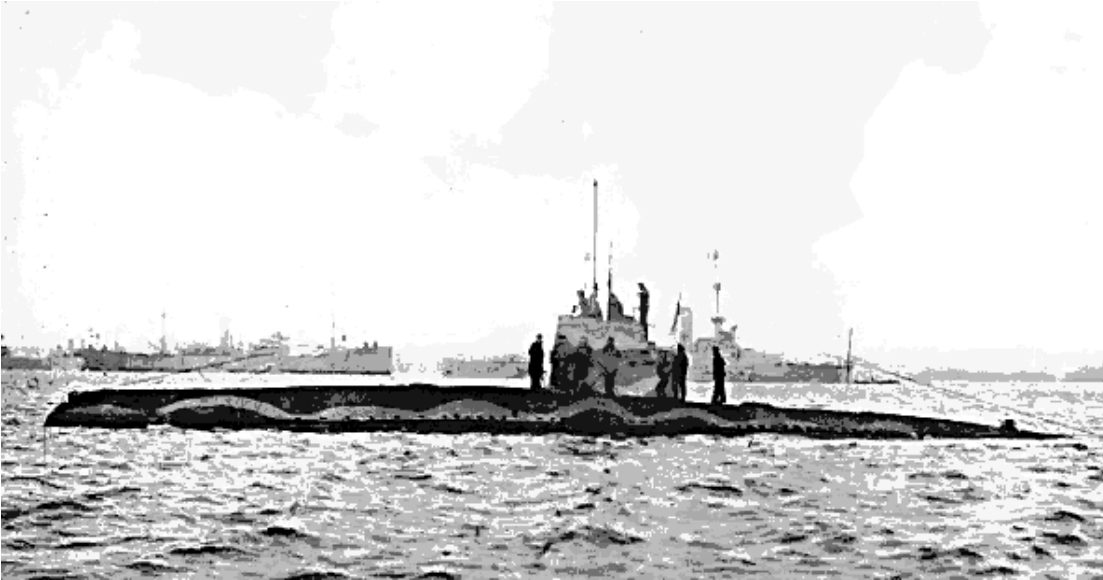
But there is another danger that they encounter on the way.

(This extract from *Man-made Hell* in *Ocean World* by Peter Rose and Anne Conlon pages 102 & 103 is reprinted by permission of the publisher Josef Weinberger Ltd., 12-14 Mortimer Street London W1T 3JJ ☎02074369616
www.josef-weinberger.com)

- See if you can get hold of a recording of whale song from your public library. Make a list of words that come into your mind as you hear their songs.
- Imagine what it might feel like to be a whale. Imagine the world underneath the ocean through their eyes. What can you see? What can you hear? What can you feel? Note down all the ideas that come to your mind.
- Write a poem, or your own lyrics to a song, imagining what it might be like to go on a long ocean journey.

Submarines and the Scilly Isles

- The story *Why the Whales Came* begins in 1914. It is set on the Scilly Isles just before and during World War 1. At that time Britain was at war with Germany and German submarines, or U-boats, were often sighted quite close to the islands. Imagine what it might be like growing up on a small island during war time. The novel by Michael Morpurgo is a wonderful source of information. In small groups discuss your thoughts and feelings. You won't all have the same point of view. Note down your ideas as you talk. Share your thoughts with the rest of the class.



Hulton-Deutsch Collection

Did you know?

The first successful submarine was a leather-encased wooden rowing boat, built in England in the 1620s by a Dutch inventor Cornelius Drebbel. The vessel carried 12 oarsmen and several passengers below the surface of the Thames in a series of trips lasting several hours. Air tubes were used for oxygen while the boat was underwater. These tubes were supported on the surface of the water by floats.

Did you know?

The first submarine to be used in wartime was an egg-shaped craft invented in the 1770s by the American engineer David Bushnell. It was called "Bushnell's Turtle". It carried one crew member and could only remain submerged for half an hour because it lacked an underwater supply of oxygen.

Did you know?

In 1800 the American inventor Robert Fulton built a 6.4-m submarine which was similar in shape to the modern submarine and used compressed air as an underwater supply of oxygen. When submerged it was powered by a hand-operated, four-blade propeller. On the surface the boat was propelled by means of sails attached to a folding mast.

- In pairs, find out everything you can about submarines. A good way to start is by looking in your school and public libraries for books or, if you have a chance you could look up *submarines* in the *Microsoft Encarta 97 Encyclopedia*. Make notes on all the interesting information you discover.
- Have you ever been to the Scilly Isles? Did you know that there are around 140 small islands and rocks but only five of the islands are inhabited? Find out all you can about them. Perhaps you can also get some leaflets from a travel agent to find out what it might be like to visit them now. In small groups, share the information you've discovered and together make a wall chart.

Gracie and Daniel

In the story *Why the Whales Came* there are two friends, Gracie and Daniel, who live with their families on one of the Scilly Isles, the island of Bryher. Between them, they build an entire fleet of model boats and their favourite game is to sail them.

- In pairs, discuss your favourite games. Choose one and write a description of how it is played. Draw a picture or diagram to illustrate your record.
- Ask your parents, grandparents, or any adults you know well, to tell you about the games they used to play when they were your age. Choose one and write a description of how it was played. Draw a picture or diagram to illustrate your record.
- Arrange your work on the wall to show the rest of your class, and together, discuss some of the similarities and differences between the games you and your friends play and the games the adults you know played when they were young.

Sometimes Gracie and Daniel got into trouble. Plenty of people, Daniel's mother (who is in the novel but not in the play) thought that it was Gracie who led Daniel into mischief.

- In pairs, discuss the different parts of the story in which Gracie and Daniel did something they weren't supposed to do. Do you agree with Daniel's mother that it was Gracie who led Daniel into mischief or do you agree with Gracie's mother that they led each other on equally? You may have different points of view.
- Share your ideas in small groups and choose one set of circumstances to discuss in more detail. Think about *what* happened, *when* it happened, *where* it happened, and *who* was involved. Make notes as you talk and in particular, discuss *why* you think Gracie and Daniel acted as they did. Decide whether *in the circumstances* you think they were *right or wrong* to act as they did. Present your views clearly to the rest of the class, making sure that you include any differences of opinion in your group.
- Ask your parents, grandparents or any adults you know well, their points of view about Gracie and Daniel's behaviour *in the circumstances* you have chosen. Make a note of their responses and share these with the rest of your class. Are any new points raised? Do any of these new, or different, points make you change your own point of view?

The Birdman

In the story *Why the Whales Came* there is a character called the Birdman who lives in an isolated cottage with his animals on the island of Bryher. He is surrounded by a flock of seagulls that float above him wherever he goes. At the beginning of the story the Birdman has no friends, other than his animals. All the islanders keep away from him because they think that he is mad. But when Gracie and Daniel, two of the children who live on the island, get to know him, they find that he is not mad at all, just lonely.

- In the novel *Why the Whales Came* by Michael Morpurgo, Gracie is the storyteller. Read the extract below in which Gracie describes the Birdman before she got to know him.

The little I saw of the Birdman was enough to convince me that all the stories we had heard about him must be true. He was more like an owl, a flitting creature of the dark, the dawn and the dusk. He would be seen outside only rarely in the daylight, perhaps out in his rowing boat around the island or sitting high on his cart; and even in the hottest summers he would always wear a black cape over his shoulders and a pointed black sou'wester on his head. From a distance you could hear him talking loudly to himself in a strange unearthly monotone. Maybe it was not to himself that he talked but to the kittiwake that sat always on his shoulder or to the black jack donkey that pulled his cart wherever he went, or maybe it was to the great woolly dog with the greying woollen muzzle that loped along beside him. The Birdman went everywhere barefoot, even in winter, a stooped black figure that lurched as he walked, one step always shorter than the other. And wherever he went he would be surrounded by a flock of seagulls that circled and floated above him, tirelessly vigilant, almost as if they were protecting him. He rarely spoke to anyone, indeed he scarcely looked at anyone.

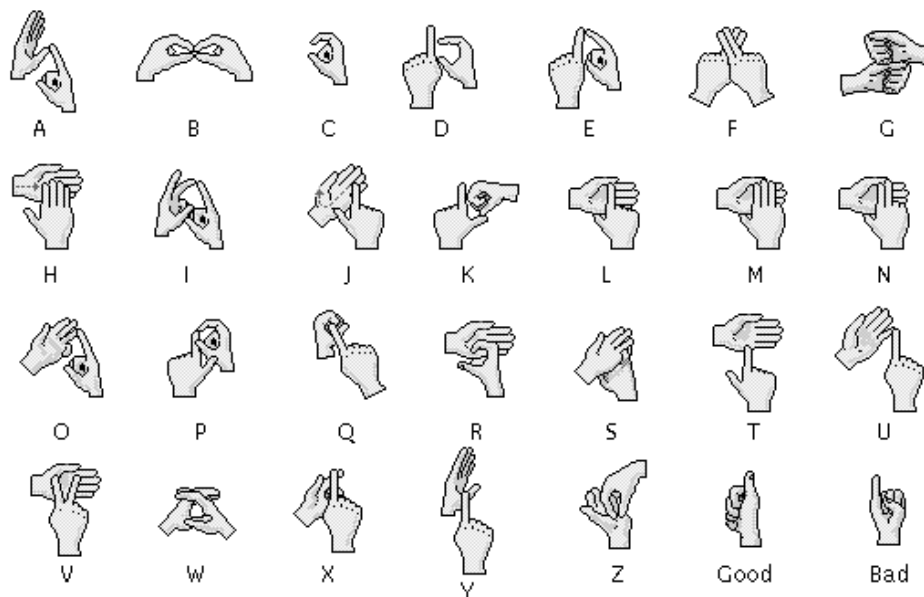
- Compare the passage above with the one below, in which Gracie describes actually meeting the Birdman.

The old man I saw in front of me was not at all as I'd expected him to be. All my life I thought he'd have the predatory look of an ancient crow under the shadow of his sou'wester. I could hardly have been more wrong. Only the tired stoop of his body and the loose, mottled skin of his forearm betrayed his age. His face was the colour of a well-worn polished brown boot. The skin was creased but still brown and supple - not that you could see much of his face for it was almost entirely hidden by a head and beard of wild white hair. But it was his eyes that marked him out from any man I had ever seen for they drew you into them somehow so that you could not look away even if you wanted to.

- In small groups discuss how Gracie and Daniel might describe the Birdman at the very end of the story, once they got to know him really well. What discoveries did they make about him? How might they have described his *personality* rather than his *appearance*? Make a note of all your ideas and impressions. Share your thoughts with the rest of the class and together discuss the difference between first impressions and really getting to know and understand someone. Have you ever been wrong in your judgement about someone?
- Write a description of the Birdman from Gracie OR Daniel's point of view once they got to know the Birdman really well.

Deafness and sign language

- The Birdman spoke in a strange way because he was deaf. Find out all you can about deafness and sign language. For information you could visit www.ndcs.org.uk which is the web site for The National Deaf Children's Society.
- Practise spelling your own name using the chart below.
- In pairs, take it in turns to spell a word to a partner. See if they can 'read' the words.
- Spell a message to a partner.



- Can you imagine what it feels like to be deaf? Make a list of all the sounds you would miss the most and write a poem.

Big Tim

Big Tim is Daniel's brother. He bullies both Gracie and Daniel. Here is Gracie's description of Big Tim from the novel by Michael Morpurgo.

Big Tim stood above us against the sky, his thumbs hitched over his belt. His head was in the sun, but I could see the cruel grin was still on his face. I had never really looked at Big Tim until then, not closely. I suppose that was because I had grown up with him and was too used to him to notice him. Above his high collar his face had the look of a sweating red pudding; but as I got to my feet it was not his face I was looking at, but the massive fist clutching his belt. He grinned at me and pushed me back against the wall. Daniel stepped between us.

- In small groups, discuss *why* you think Big Tim behaves like a bully. Do you think he is influenced by any of the adults in the story? Discuss who you think those adults are and how they might have influenced him.
- Share your thoughts with the rest of the class and together make a list of possible reasons *why* people bully.

Big Tim also bullies the Birdman. At the time the story was written, England was at war with Germany and Big Tim thought that the Birdman was a spy. In the extract below, Gracie remembers a conversation between Big Tim and Daniel. Big Tim has just said that he thinks the Birdman has been signalling to German submarines.

"Don't be silly," said Daniel, "he wouldn't do that. He doesn't even like the war anyway, so there's no point in fighting it. He doesn't want anyone to win it."

"Doesn't he indeed? So he's a Hun-lover just like I said he was, a Hun-lover and a spy." Big Tim's friends closed in around us. He went on, "Father's going to find this all very interesting when I tell him. He'll tan you again Danny boy; that's after I've finished with you."

"You can tell father what you like," said Daniel, "but you can't prove anything. Just leave the Birdman alone. He hasn't done anyone any harm. Leave him alone d'you hear me? The reason you can see lights from his cottage is 'cos he hasn't got any curtains that's all."

- Big Tim calls Daniel a Hun lover. Name calling is one example of bullying. He also threatens Daniel. Do you think threatening behaviour is another example of bullying? In a large group, discuss what bullying is and make a list of as many examples as you can think of.
- Daniel tries to stand up to Big Tim. In the story, do you think he is successful in stopping Big Tim from bullying? In small groups discuss what you can do if you, or someone you know, is being bullied. Share your thoughts with the rest of the class and make a list together.
- Show your list to your parents, grandparents or any adults you know well and see if they have any further ideas. Bring their ideas back to the rest of the class to discuss.

Bullying :

Questions of character to explore through drama and discussion

Below are three questions related to characters in the story followed by suggested ways of exploring answers to them through drama and discussion. The suggested activities are suitable for Key Stage 3 and, in combination with other sections of this pack, aim to relate the events in the story to the students' own imaginations and experience. *The italicised terms indicating drama techniques are loosely defined on the next page.*

1. Why did Big Tim behave in the way he did?

- As a large group brainstorm a *Character Profile** for Big Tim.
- In small groups, imagine a possible life history for Big Tim up to the moment the story begins which could help to explain why Big Tim bullies other people. Choose one or two moments from this imagined life history and use *Freeze Frames** to show your ideas to the rest of the class.
- As a large group discuss all the possible reasons why people bully. Perhaps some of them have nothing to do with the past. Do you think there is ever any excuse for bullying?

2. Can you imagine how the Birdman felt?

- In small groups imagine what it feels like to be isolated or bullied. Make a list of words and phrases to describe those feelings. Use *Inner Self** to express them.
- Make a list of possible actions to take and people to talk to if you, or someone you know, is being bullied.

3. Why was the Birdman so isolated within the community on Bryher?

- Imagine you are a member of the community on Bryher. As a large group, discuss what people on the island were saying about the Birdman. Why do you think they were saying those things? In what ways did they see the Birdman as being 'different'.
- As a large group make a list of reasons why someone might be isolated or bullied.
- In small groups create a *Freeze Frame** for one these ideas. Try to clearly show the *circumstances* in which someone is being bullied. Ask yourselves the questions *Who? What? Where? When? Why?*
- Bring the *Freeze Frame** to life and use *Forum Theatre** to intervene and change the situation. When you intervene, you can draw on your list of possible actions to take and people to talk to if you, or someone you know, is being bullied.

A Drama Glossary

The definitions below are freely adapted from *Drama Activities for Key Stage 3* by Jan Ashcroft and Leonie Pearce, published by Framework Press Educational Publishers Ltd., Lancaster 1996 ISBN 1 85008 136 0.

CHARACTER PROFILE

A group brainstorm using a flip chart in which everything that is known about a character is recorded.

FORUM THEATRE

The class is divided into small groups. One at a time, each group begins by acting out a scene in which a negative outcome is likely. The scene may begin with a *Freeze Frame* which can then be brought to life. At a critical moment the teacher stops the scene using the word “freeze”. The rest of the class are then invited to make suggestions as to how the characters in the scene might change its direction in order to make a more positive outcome likely. Each suggestion is tried until a solution is found. This process may involve other members of the class taking an active role in the improvisation.

FREEZE FRAME

The action in a scene is presented as a frozen picture or snapshot.

IMPROVISATION

The actors take on unscripted roles. These roles may either relate to an imagined set of circumstances or a given story.

INNER SELF

A member of the class, in role, remains silent whilst one or more people speak the character's thoughts and feelings.

ROLE PLAY

The actor takes on the ‘persona’ of another character

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. A volunteer walks slowly down the ‘tunnel’, in role, whilst people from either side speak ‘thoughts’ to them. These thoughts should express a variety of opinions or emotions. The volunteer is then asked to communicate how hearing the different ‘thoughts’, spoken by the rest of the community made him, or her feel.

The Novel and the Author

The storyteller in the novel

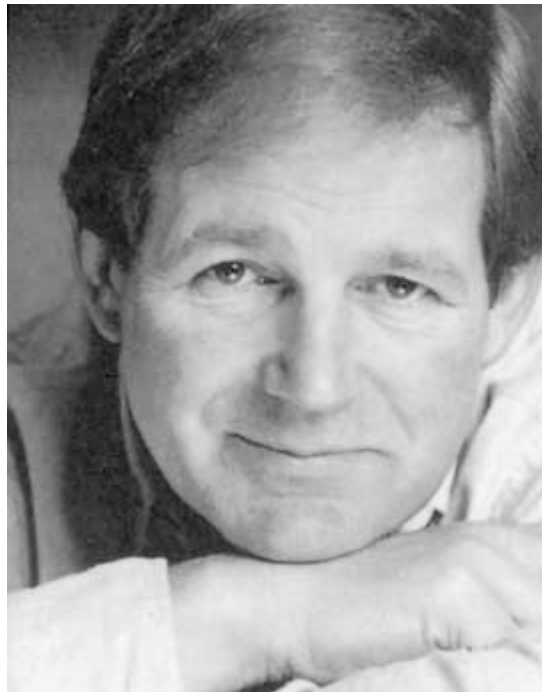
GRACIE JENKINS is the storyteller in the novel *Why the Whales Came*.

- Gracie tells the story from her point of view, using *the first person singular* to tell it. She also tells it using *the past tense*. Tell a story to a partner about something that happened to you yesterday using *the first person singular* and *the past tense*.
- Tell your story as if it happened to you a long time ago. Perhaps parts of it could change in your memory, or you could use your imagination to fill in the bits you've forgotten.
- Gracie often includes what people said, or *dialogue*, in her story. Write your own story including *dialogue* in it. Remember to use *inverted commas* so that it's easy for a reader to see when people are speaking in the story.

The author of the novel

MICHAEL MORPURGO is the author of the novel *Why the Whales Came*. He used to be a teacher until he and his wife set up 'Farms for City Children', an educational charity that now has three farms where children from towns and cities can go and experience the countryside at first hand and learn to work together. Living on one of the farms, and working with children has provided much of the stimulus for his writing. He has written over forty books, including *Why the Whales Came* which has been made into a feature film. Some of his books have won major book awards, including *The Wreck of the Zanzibar* which won the Whitbread Children's Novel Award in 1995. You can find out more about Michael Morpurgo and his books on his website:

www.michaelmorpurgo.org



- On page 6 of the novel, Michael Morpurgo has included a short introduction to the story. Have a look at it and discuss whether or not you think *Why the Whales Came* is a true story, partly true, or completely made up.
- Write a partly true, or completely made up, story that happened to someone else - long ago - but write it as if it was a true story that happened to you. Remember to use *the first person singular*, *past tense*, *dialogue* and *inverted commas*!

The Play and the Adapter

The storytellers in the play

All the actors in the play take on the role of storytellers. Sometimes they tell the story as characters and sometimes that are simply called VOICES in the playscript.

- In small groups, read the extract from the playscript.
- Compare the playscript with pages 79 and 80 of the novel. What differences do you notice?
- Share your thoughts with the rest of the class and list all the similarities and differences you can think of.

The process of adaptation

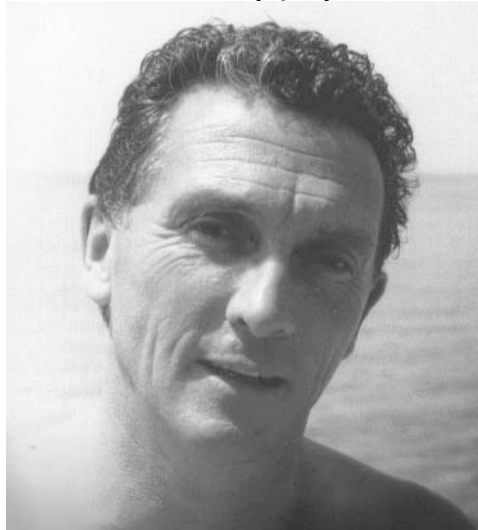
The story in the play *Why the Whales Came* is essentially the same as the story in the novel but it is told in a different way using the language of theatre: actions, words, music, props, costumes, lights and stage design.

In the process of adaptation for *Why the Whales Came*, the adapter tried to stay faithful to the feel of the original story, not write his own version of Michael Morpurgo's novel. He chose important moments from the story and wrote them into a playscript. Some moments from the book were left out because otherwise the story would take too long to tell. In the process of adaptation, the adapter wrote several drafts even changing the script in rehearsal according to what the other members of the creative team brought to it.

In rehearsal, the playscript was transformed into theatre images by all the members of the creative team : the actors, the musician, the designer, the prop maker and the stage manager. In the production of *Why the Whales Came* there were two directors who worked together with all the other members of the creative team to make sure that the story came to life for the audience in the theatre.

The adapter

GREG BANKS is the adapter and the co-director (with NIKKI SVED) of the play *Why the Whales Came*. Greg has worked all over the world as an actor, director and writer. His adaptation of the film *Into the West*, which he also directed, was nominated for a Barclays/TMA Theatre Award. It won the Samuel Beckett Award for best children's show at the Dublin International Festival and recently played on Broadway.



The Playscript - an extract from an early draft

VOICE: Overcast evening

VOICE: The sea

VOICE: The same

VOICE: Soft grey

VOICE : As the sky

GRACIE: We waited

DANIEL : Until the beach was deserted

GRACIE: And slid the boat gently out into the water

DANIEL : Made our way out past Samson

GRACIE: Towards the Scilly Rock, baited the hooks

DANIEL: Let down the lines

GRACIE: And within half an hour

DANIEL: Caught more fish than we'd ever dreamed of

GRACIE: Two dozen Pilchards

VOICE: The boat

VOICE: Lolloped beneath them

VOICE: Lapped

VOICE: By a listless sea

DANIEL: A Bass

GRACIE: Large one

VOICE: A grey wall

VOICE: Of fog

VOICE: Rolled in

DANIEL: And another

VOICE: Scilly Rock

VOICE: Disappeared

VOICE: Samson

VOICE: Vanished

VOICE: We were left alone and lost on a silent sea

VOICE: The breeze had gone

DANIEL: We're becalmed

VOICE: The fog

VOICE: Like a living creature

VOICE: Seemed to listen

VOICE: To their every breath

DANIEL: As long as we keep Scilly rock astern of us we can pull home easily
enough

GRACIE: I can't see it any more

DANIEL : We can hear it though. Hear the surf breaking on the rocks. Listen

VOICE Listen. Hear it? That's not the sea, that's the past, that's the curse of
Samson. Hear it? The curse of Samson.

DANIEL : Are you scared?

GRACIE: A bit

DANIEL: Just keep that sound astern of us, and we'll be able to feel our way home.
There's no swell so we won't go on the rocks.

GRACIE: We began to row

DANIEL : Only a few strokes at a time

GRACIE: Stopping to listen around Scilly rock.

DANIEL: We should be there by now

GRACIE: We pulled until our arms could pull no longer

The Screenplay - an extract

- The novel *Why the Whales Came* has been made into a feature film starring Helen Mirren and Paul Scofield. Below is an extract from the screenplay by Michael Morpurgo. It is taken from a post-production script and contains some extra information such as camera shots (indicated by **bold capitals**). Have a good look at it and see if you can work out what they mean. Overleaf you will find a series of sketches to help you.

When the Whales Came

Screenplay by Michael Morpurgo

INTERIOR. SOUTHILL COTTAGE. CLEMMIE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

M.C.U. CLEMMIE (SIDE VIEW) WIPES PERSPIRATION FROM FOREHEAD

CLEMMIE TO GRACIE: If only I could just get out and do a bit of fishing.

M. C. U. GRACIE LOOKS TOWARDS CLEMMIE.

GRACIE TO CLEMMIE: But I told you -- me and Daniel, we could go.

M.C.U. CLEMMIE.

CLEMMIE TO GRACIE: No Gracie -- I told you, it's too dangerous.

CLEMMIE WIPES HER FOREHEAD. You're not going out there

EXTERIOR. BEACH. EARLY MORNING.

M.L.S. GRACIE L, DANIEL R (BACKS TO CAMERA) - THEY PUSH BOAT OUT TO SEA

DANIEL TO GRACIE: Go on, in you jump.

GRACIE MOVES TO CLIMB IN.

M.L.S. DANIEL L ROWING, GRACIE R

DANIEL (IN **L.S.**) TO GRACIE: You steering proper?

GRACIE (BACK TO CAMERA) TO DANIEL: Yeah. I'm trying to anyway.

(SIDE VIEW) **M.L.S.** GRACIE PULLS IN LINE.

MUSIC: IN

M.S. BASKET OF FISH IN BOTTOM OF BOAT - GRACIE DROPS ANOTHER FISH IN THE BASKET.

ACROSS SEA TO **L.S.** BOAT.

M.S. BASKET OF FISH - PULL BACK TO REVEAL GRACIE L (WAIST DOWN)

GRACIE: LAUGHS

M.L.S. GRACIE R, DANIEL L ROWING

MUSIC: BUILDS

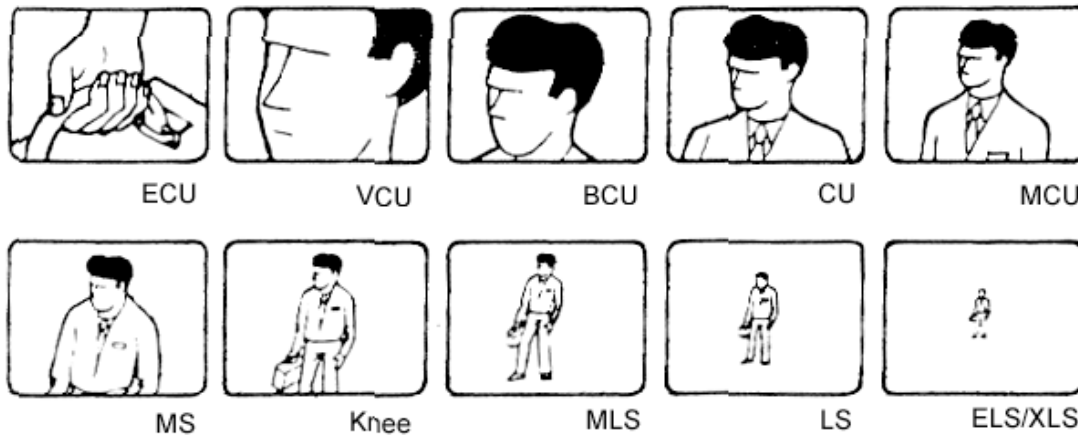
M.L.S. BOAT DANIEL (BACK TO CAMERA) ROWING TOWARDS - GRACIE HOLDS LINE.
(SIDE VIEW) **L.S.** GRACIE L HAULING IN FISH, DANIEL R ROWING

DANIEL (IN L.S.) TO GRACIE: (SIGHS) Tide's too strong.

DANIEL STOPS ROWING. Gonna take us out to sea. Let's make for Samson.

Shots of people

A DIAGRAM OF WHAT YOUR CAMERA CAN DO



ECU Extreme close-up

VCU Very close-up

BCU Big close-up

CU Close-up

MCU Medium close-up

MS Medium shot

Knee Knee shot

MLS Medium long-shot

LS Long shot

ELS Extreme long shot

- In the screenplay, the tide, rather than the fog, takes the children to Samson. Why do you think Michael Morpurgo made this change? What other differences do you notice between the screenplay, the novel and the playscript?
- The title of the story was changed when the film was made. In small groups discuss why you think the title might have been changed and which title you think suits the story better. One person in each group can make a note of all the ideas which come up. Discuss these with the rest of the class.
- Discuss how the interpretation of a story can be altered by changing its title. Think of stories you know and invent other titles for them.
- Choose an exciting moment from a favourite story and write your own short screenplay for it.

Story Theatre

Theatre Alibi calls its style of work *Story Theatre*. If you are interested in finding out more about this style, visit www.theatrealibi.co.uk.

Another story adapted for Theatre Alibi is called *A Fish of the World* by TERRY JONES. ANNA MARIA MURPHY, the adapter, spent a long time working with the actors and the director before she came up with her final version. But first read the original story and try the exercises on the following page. Then see if you can write your own adaptation!

A Fish of the World

A herring once decided to swim right round the world. "I'm tired of the North Sea," he said. "I want to find out what else there is in the world."

So he swam off south into the deep Atlantic. He swam and he swam far, far away from the seas he knew, through the warm waters of the Equator and on down into the South Atlantic. And all the time he saw many strange and wonderful fish that he'd never seen before. Once he was nearly eaten by a shark, and once he was nearly electrocuted by an electric eel, and once he was nearly stung by a sting-ray. But he swam on and on, round the tip of Africa and into the Indian Ocean. And he passed by devilfish and sailfish and sawfish and sword fish and bluefish and blackfish and mudfish and sunfish, and he was amazed by the different sizes and shapes and colours.

On he swam into the Java Sea, and he saw fish that leapt out of the water and fish that lived on the bottom of the sea and fish that could walk on their fins. And on he swam, through the Coral Sea, where the shells of millions and millions of tiny creatures had turned to rock and stood as big as mountains. But still he swam on into the wide Pacific. He swam over the deepest parts of the ocean, where the water is so deep that it is inky black at the bottom, and the fish carry lanterns over their heads, and some have lights on their tails. And through the Pacific he swam, and then he turned north and headed up to the cold Siberian sea, where huge white icebergs sailed past him like mighty ships. And still he swam on and on and into the frozen Arctic Ocean, where the sea is forever covered in ice. And on he went, past Greenland and Iceland, and finally he swam home into his own North Sea.

All his friends and relations gathered round and made a great fuss of him. They had a big feast and offered him the very best food he could find. But the herring just yawned and said "I've swum round the entire world. I have seen everything there is to see, and I have eaten more exotic and wonderful dishes than you could possibly imagine." And he refused to eat anything.

Then his friends and relations begged him to come home and live with them, but he refused. "I've been everywhere there is, and that old rock is too dull and small for me." And he went off and lived on his own.

And when the breeding season came, he refused to join in the spawning, saying "I've swum around the entire world, and now I know how many fish there are in the world, I can't be interested in herrings any more."

Eventually, one of the oldest of the herrings swam up to him, and said "Listen. If you don't spawn with us, some herring eggs will go unfertilised and will not turn into healthy young herring. If you don't live with your family you'll make them sad. And if you don't eat you'll die."

But the herring said "I don't mind. I've been everywhere there is to go, I've seen everything there is to see, and now I know everything there is to know."

The old fish shook his head. "No one has ever seen everything there is to see, nor known everything there is to know."

"Look," said the herring, "I've swum through the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the Java Sea, the Coral Sea, the great Pacific Ocean, the Siberian Sea and the frozen Arctic. Tell me what else is there for me to see and know?"

"I don't know," said the herring, "but there may be something."

Well, just then, a fishing-boat came by, and all the herrings were caught in a net and taken to market that very day. And a man bought the herring, and ate it for his supper.

And he never knew that it had swum right round the entire world, and had seen everything there was to see, and knew everything there was to know.

(A Fish of the World by Terry Jones in "Funny Stories" chosen by Michael Rosen, Kingfisher, London. ISBN 0 86272 320 5)

Storytelling

- Work in pairs, with one person telling the story using words whilst the other person acts out all the characters using gestures. This is a useful exercise just to get to know the story and to make up your own version of it, if you want to. Decide how closely you want to stick with the original story if it's your turn to tell the story using words. Don't worry if you change some of the details, leave some bits out or elaborate other bits. That's half the fun of it. If you forget anything important then the person acting out the story can always remind you - using gestures! Swap over so that you can both have a go at storytelling and acting out.
- In pairs, share the story telling and acting out between you. This time, make up a version of the story together, each taking it in turns to tell different parts of the story. Both of you will need to be on your feet most of the time. You could, perhaps, choose to divide the characters between you.

Improvising dialogue

- Decide which moments in the story could benefit from *dialogue*. You could try making up some of the things the herring boasts about when he returns from his travels. Or you could put the conversation he has with the old herring into your own words.

Writing song lyrics

- Decide which moments in the story could benefit from a song. You could try fitting new words to a tune you know well, or even making up your own tunes. How about a farewell song for the herring who goes travelling? Or a welcoming song for his return? Do you have any other ideas?

Rehearsing

- *Rehearse* the story, including the *dialogue* and *song lyrics*. By now you should have loads of words to choose from.
- Show your story to another pair in your class and discuss how you can improve it. Are you rushing some bits or taking too long over others? Could you manage with fewer words? Have a look at the extract from the playscript for *Why the Whales Came* by Greg Banks to see how much he has cut back on the words. Make sure you are *showing* the story as much as *telling* it. Make a note of all the ideas that come up and try some of them out. You can choose which ideas to include in your playscript later. This is one of the main jobs of a *director* in the theatre.

Writing a playscript

Write your own adaptation of the story based on your improvisations and writing. You can write it in story form OR in the form of a playscript!

Remembering, Reflecting on and Evaluating Theatre Alibi's performance of *Why the Whales Came*

- In pairs, or small groups, share your most vivid memories of the performance. Were your memories linked to the acting, or a prop, costume, music, a sound effect, lighting or an aspect of the set design?
 - Compare your ideas with the rest of the class and together make a list of everyone's ideas.
 - How did different moments in the play make you feel? Were there exciting moments? Or funny ones? Or sad ones? Or scary ones? Were there moments where you all felt the same thing? Discuss the similarities and differences between your responses. You won't necessarily all have the same point of view.
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- In pairs, or small groups, discuss the characters in the story. How did you feel about each of them?
 - Share your ideas with the rest of the class and together make two lists, one with *facts about* each of the characters you have chosen and one with your own *feelings in response to* that character.
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- In pairs or small groups discuss the moments in the performance that you think could be done in a different way - not necessarily better.
 - Discuss 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. Note your ideas down, adding drawings if you want to, to help explain them.
 - Compare your ideas with the rest of the class. Again you won't all have the same point of view.
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- Write a review of the performance to send to Theatre Alibi. You 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 your feelings about them. You could also include your own ideas for telling different parts of the story. We'll post the best reviews on our website notice board! Our email address is info@theatrealibi.co.uk and our postal address is: **Theatre Alibi, Northcott Studio Theatre, Emmanuel Road, Exeter EX4 1EJ.**

Resources

The Book

Why the Whales Came by Michael Morpurgo is published by Mammoth, an imprint of Egmont Children's Books Ltd, 239 Kensington High Street, London W8 6SA (ISBN 0 7497 0537 X) and may generally be found in stock in most good book stores.

The Film

With luck a copy of the film (*When the Whales Came*) starring Helen Mirren and Paul Scofield may be found on video in the audio-visual section of a public library.

Bullying

Children's Books About Bullying edited by Rosemary Stones, Books for Keeps, Dorset. 1998. ISBN 1 871 556 04 5.

Deafness

Information

The National Deaf Children's Society www.ndcs.org.uk

Drama

Drama Activities for Key Stage 3 by Jan Ashcroft and Leonie Pearce, Framework Press Educational Publishers Ltd., Lancaster. 1996. ISBN 1 85008 136 0.

Games

Children's Games in Street and Playground by Iona and Peter Opie. Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1969. 19 827210 3 (8/69)

Michael Morpurgo

Interview

Telling Tales: An interview with Michael Morpurgo by Joanna Carey. Mammoth, London. 1999.

Teachers' Notes

The Wreck of the Zanzibar by Michael Morpurgo. Scholastic Ltd., Leamington Spa. 1998.

Oceans and whales

Vocal score

Ocean World by Peter Rose and Anne Conlon. Josef Weinberger Ltd., London. 1991.

Book and Disc

Oceans Interact available by Mail Order from Tree of Life. Orderline 0870 606 6314.

CD

Chorus of Whales. Maddy Music Group. 1997. Catalogue no RFLCD 206.

Poem and information

Whale Nation by Heathcote Williams. Jonathan Cape, London. 1998. ISBN 0 224 02555 4

Information about Whales and Oceans

Greenpeace Environmental Trust www.greenpeace.org.uk

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, Alexander House, James Street West, Bath BA1 2BT. www.wdcs.org.uk