

Bush
Theatre
Ramona
Tells
Jim

by Sophie Wu

RAMONA TELLS JIM

Cross-Curricular: Drama and Theatre Studies, Art & Design, Music, English Language, English Literature, Politics and PSHE

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Introduction

Ramona Tells Jim is a darkly comic play about confession and the gravity of young love, from Bush Theatre Emerging Writers' Group graduate and actor Sophie Wu.

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance your understanding of *Ramona Tells Jim* and to provide you with the materials to assist students in both the practical study of this text and in gaining a deeper understanding of this exciting new play.

This includes production photographs, discussion points and exercises that have been devised to unpack the play's themes and stylistic devices.

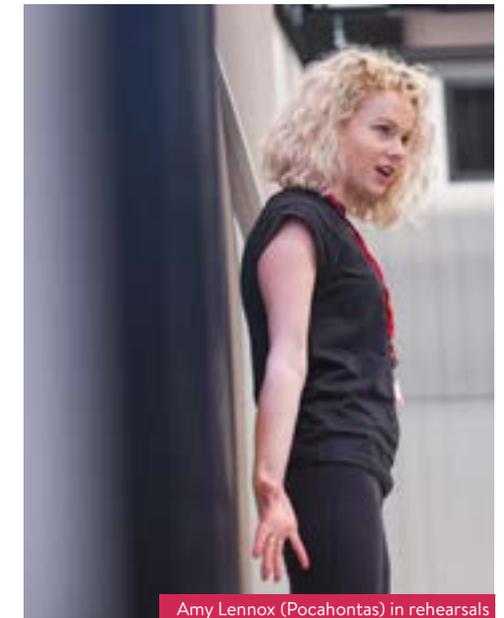
In line with the national curriculum, *Ramona Tells Jim* is a suitable live theatre production for analysis. It will also provide an invaluable resource for students who are focusing on contemporary new writing.

The play will provoke students to ask pertinent questions, think critically, and develop perspective and judgement.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to get in touch with Holly Smith on 0208 743 3584 or at hollysmith@bushtheatre.co.uk.



Joe Bannister (Jim) in rehearsals



Amy Lennox (Pocahontas) in rehearsals

RAMONA TELLS JIM

Scotland. One wet, midge-riddled field trip. Ramona is 15 and she's totally cool. Honestly. She's completely cool.

In 1998, Ramona, of Englandshire, has a penchant for Enya and hates bananas. On her geography field trip she meets Jim, a local laddie wearing an anti-pill fleece. He's obsessed with hermit crabs, rock erosion and making homemade Irn-Bru cocktails.

Deep in the Scottish Highlands, Ramona falls for Jimmy's awkward charm but gets caught in a scandal that will haunt her for years to come.

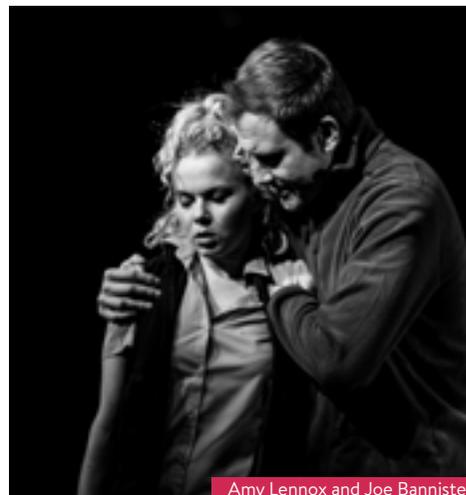
Fast forward fifteen years and Jim, of the crappiest village in Scotland, has got a girlfriend and something like a functional life. But Ramona still can't shake the consequences of that fateful trip. Determined to clear her conscience, she heads back to the Highlands to find that neither her nor Jim's lives have turned out how they had planned.

CAST (in order of appearance)

Ramona	Ruby Bentall
Jim	Joe Bannister
Pocahontas	Amy Lennox

CREATIVES & CREW

Playwright	Sophie Wu
Director	Mel Hillyard
Designer	Lucy Sierra
Lighting Designer	Rajiv Pattani
Sound Designer	Dominic Kennedy
Movement Director	Carolina Valdés
Wardrobe Consultant	Natalie Pryce
Casting Consultant	Matthew Dewsbury
Company Stage Manager	Sophie Sierra
Assistant Stage Manager	Luis Henson



Amy Lennox and Joe Bannister

“Um, who the fuck is Ramona?”

Pocahontas, Ramona Tells Jim



Joe Bannister (Jim) and Ruby Bentall (Ramona)



Amy Lennox (Pocahontas) in *Ramona Tells Jim*

classroom exercise #1

Reflecting on the production

Curriculum links: Drama, Art & Design, Music

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper and pens

Use this exercise to get your students responding to work that they have seen onstage. This tool enables students to respond to any piece or dance, theatre or live performance that they have seen.

Organise the class into groups of 4 or 5 and give each group a large sheet of paper and some pens.

Write the name of the production on the whiteboard, then assign each group an area of the production to explore including:

- The set and staging
- Directing
- Costume
- Music and Sound
- Acting
- Themes of the play

Each group should write their chosen area of the production as a heading on their flip chart paper. Each group then has five minutes to brainstorm thoughts and comments around their assigned area of the production, noting them in a spider diagram on their flip chart paper.

After five minutes each group must pass their paper onto the next group and repeat this process until every group has commented on all areas of the production listed by the class.

These sheets can then be photocopied and handed out. You could also put the sheets up in the classroom for inspiration when discussing the production.



classroom exercise #2

Dear me...

Curriculum Links: Drama, English Language, English Literature

Time: 30 mins

Resources: Pens, lined paper, envelopes

In *Ramona Tells Jim*, the narrative of the play is split between 1998 and 2013. We meet Ramona and Jim as teenagers, and again as they re-connect years later as adults. When they see each other again, nothing has turned out the way they thought it would, including themselves.

TEENAGERS

Jim: See the headland over there?

Ramona: Yes.

Jim: One day that won't exist. It'll just crumble into the sea bit by bit and all the plant life and birds and insects that live on it will perish.

Ramona: I suppose they could all find another cliff to live on.

Jim: There isn't another cliff. Isn't that sad?

Ramona: Sort of the same as humans really except we wrinkle and wrinkle and wrinkle until we shrivel up and die.

ADULTS

Ramona: Okay. It's nice to see you.

Jim: Yes. And you. Nice to see you too.

Ramona: Yes. Good to see you. You look so -

Jim: What?

Ramona: Different.

THE EXERCISE

Use this exercise to get your students thinking about themselves, both what they've achieved or learnt so far in their lives, and their aspirations for the future. This exercise will also develop creative writing skills.

Ask students to write two short monologues in the form of letters to themselves. One looking back to when they were 5 years old, and one looking forward to when they will be 50 years old.

Letter 1:

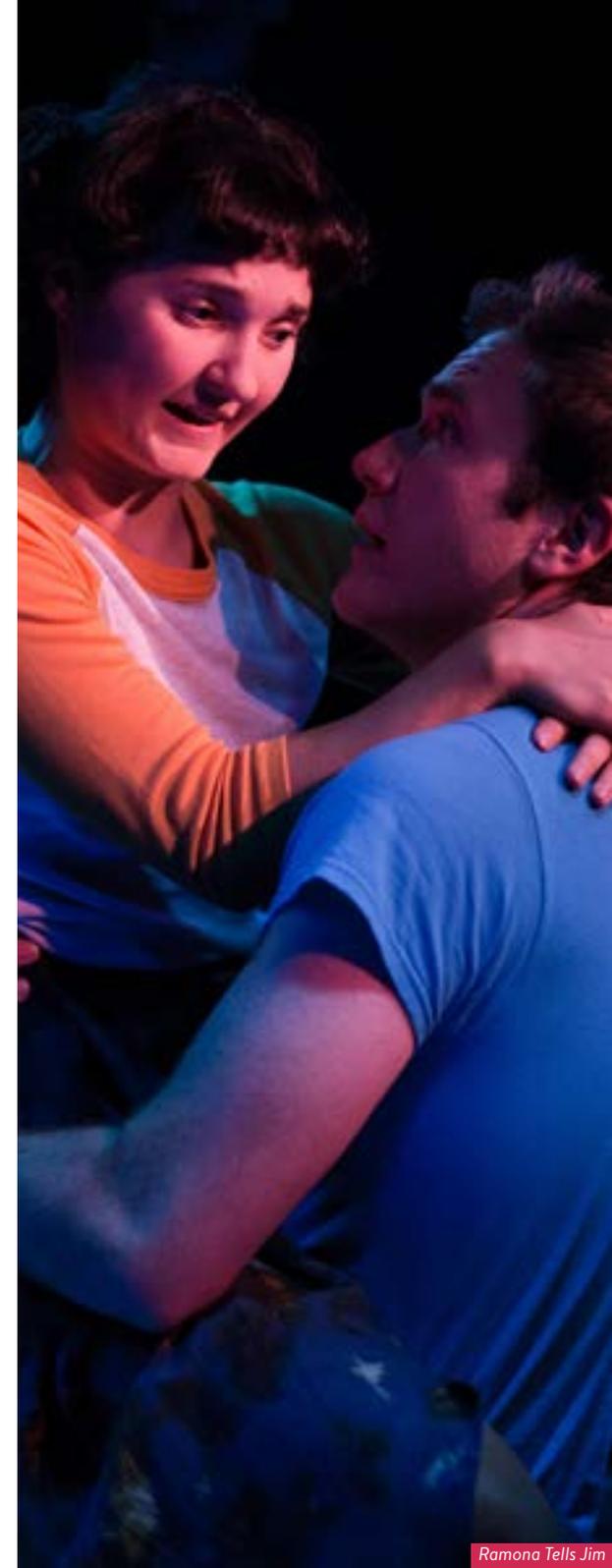
- What would you want your 5 year old self to know about the future?
- Would you give them any advice?
- Would you want them to do anything differently?

Letter 2:

- What do you want to have achieved by the time you are 50?
- What aspects of yourself now do you hope to keep or develop in the future?
- What aspects of yourself do you hope to be different by age 50?

When the students have completed these letters they can rehearse and perform them to each other as monologues.

Are there common themes among the letters in the group in terms of what advice they would give, or where they see their lives in the future? In what ways is the letter format a useful one when writing a monologue?



Forum Theatre: Making Decisions

Curriculum Links: Drama and Theatre Studies

Time: 30mins - 1hr

Resources: Printed copies of the script extracts

The most significant action in the play is Ramona's accusation of sexual assault from Darren, which results in Jim attacking him and eventually ending up in Juvenile Detention. When Ramona turns up unannounced in Jim's life, he thinks their relationship is restarting, but Ramona reveals her accusation against Darren was false.

As a class, discuss the relationship between Ramona and Jim, from when they first meet to the state of their relationship at the end of the play.

Prompting Questions

- **Why do you think Ramona lied about Darren assaulting her?**
- **What impact did the lie have on both character's lives?**
- **Could Jim have reacted differently? How?**
- **Why do you think Ramona eventually told the truth?**
- **How does Jim react to learning the truth?**
- **Why do you think the playwright made the decision to make the accusation false?**

Then put the group into pairs, or let them choose a partner. Assign each pair a scene from the following;

1. Ramona lies to Jim about Darren assaulting her
2. Jim confronts Darren about the assault (this is not shown in the play)
3. Ramona tells Jim the truth
4. Jim reacts to Ramona breaking up with him

Ask the pairs to rehearse and re-enact as it originally happened. Now use Forum Theatre techniques to change the decisions/actions in the scene.



Forum Theatre

As a scene is acted out, a member of the audience can at any time assume the role of director and clap their hands once to stop the action. They then suggest the actor/character takes a different action to the one they have just taken, or were just about to take. They clap again and the action resumes again, this time with the new action being taken. Multiple actions can be changed, and the same action can be changed more than once.

After each pair, discuss how the changes made effected the outcome of the scene? How would it affect the outcome of the play? How would it change the relationship between Ramona and Jim?

Script Extracts

1. Ramona Lies to Jim

Jim: Yeah. Did he touch you?

Ramona: Sort of. Yeah.

Jim: Touched you how?

Ramona: Just you know, stuck his big nineteen year old pervy hand on me.

Jim: Where?

Ramona: Um- Well

Jim: Where Ramona?

Ramona: Well... You know?

Jim: No I don't know. Where?

Ramona: You know in my - my -

Jim: (Indicating crotch area) In your...

Ramona: Yeah. Yup.

Jim: Fuck.

Pause. Jim is seething and still.

Ramona: Are you alright?

Jim: You're 15!

Ramona: I look older. I look about 22.

Jim: You really don't.

Ramona: Whatever. It's nothing.

Jim: It's not nothing.

Ramona: I mean I'm obviously a bit traumatised.

Jim: Of course you are. Fuck.

Ramona: Nah It's not a big deal. (Beat) I don't think I am that traumatised actually.

Beat.

Jim: I'm going to find him.

Ramona: What are you going to do?
 Jim: Ramona?
 Ramona: What?
 Jim: Did he really do that to you? Did he really touch you?
 Ramona hesitates for the tiniest fraction of a second.
 Ramona: Yes.

2. Jim Attacks Darren

This scene is not shown and only described in the play, but we know that after Ramona's confession, Jim immediately confronts Darren in the pool hall and attacks him physically.

3. Ramona Tells Jim The Truth

Ramona: I'm sorry.
 Beat. Jim stares at Ramona.
 Ramona: I lied.
 A slight pause.
 Jim: What about?
 Ramona: I lied.
 Jim: Yes?
 Ramona: I lied that I was groped. I lied that, that boy groped me.
 Jim: I...I don't understand.
 Ramona: I lied to you, about that boy. Darren - groping me at the caravan site. After we first met. And then I just went back to school and my life and everything went back to normal and you...Well you went to prison for ten months.
 Jim: Youth detention. And it was for two years
 Ramona: Fuck. (Beat) I thought... And I... I sent you what like seven post cards?
 Jim: Five.
 Ramona: And then I just sort of... Forgot.
 Jim: You forgot?
 Ramona: Well, I didn't forget. Obviously I didn't forget. But I wanted to and, for a bit, I almost did. In fact. But then recently, I think about it every day now. That I did that. To you.
 Pause. Jim is silent and staring straight ahead.
 Jim: He didn't touch you.
 Ramona: No.
 Jim: Then why did you say he did? (Beat) I don't understand Ramona. Why?
 Ramona: Honestly? I have no idea. It all just kind of... Spiralled.
 Jim: What did he do then? What did he actually do to you?
 Ramona: Nothing.
 Jim: Nothing? He did nothing to you?
 Ramona: No.
 Jim: So I... He did nothing.

Ramona: Yes.
 Jim: Why are you telling me this? Now?
 Ramona: Because... Well. I thought you'd probably want to know.
 Jim: Okay.
 Ramona: I want to make it better.
 Jim: Better for who?
 Ramona: For you.

4. Jim Reacts To Ramona Breaking Up With Him

Ramona: I can't come to Frankfurt with you Jim. Obviously I can't. I mean I don't even know you.
 Jim: What?
 Ramona: I don't know you. You're just a stranger. And I'm a stranger to you. And me, back then is basically a stranger to me too and we just have to accept the fact that one stranger told a lie to another stranger and that we as people, in truth, don't give a shit about each other. I'm not sure we even like each other really. In fact you're really creeping me out and genuinely why would I want to come to a fucking fish conference or whatever it is? In Frankfurt? I mean isn't Frankfurt quite shit?
 Pause. Jim smiles sardonically and nods.
 Jim: Isn't Frankfurt quite shit? Ha! Isn't Frankfurt quite shit? Haha. No. Frankfurt is not fucking shit Ramona.
 Jim starts walking towards Ramona, slowly. As he does, she backs away. He throws a chair out his way.
 Ramona: Jim, please just calm down.
 Jim: Why are you trying to make me angry then?
 Ramona: I'm not.
 Jim: Is that what you want?
 Ramona: No.
 Jim: Would you like me to shout at you? Would that make you feel better? Would you like me to shout at you and tell you how terrible you are and tell you that you've completely fucked up my life but ultimately I'm so glad you came all the way here and told me the truth because that's definitely made it all better? Would that make you feel good?
 Ramona has no more room to back away. She's up against the wall. She starts to cry.
 Ramona: Jim, I'm sorry, I honestly am.
 He grabs her by the throat up against the wall.
 Jim: You have no idea what you do to people do you? You have no idea the effect you have on the environment around you. You just slither into people's lives, vomit all over their spider plants and fuck off.
 Ramona is trying to get his hands off her throat. She's gasping.
 Ramona: (Whimper) Please... Please Jim.
 Jim: It's not my fault! You've done this! You - you've fucked it all up.
 Ramona starts to wheeze, clawing at his hands.

interview with the designer

Meet Lucy Sierra

What does the Designer of a play do?

A designer is in charge of the visual storytelling of the piece through set, costume and prop design. We work closely with the director to discover and decide the world of the play, where and when it should be set, and what the space needs to tell the story.

What was your process when designing for *Ramona Tells Jim*? Were there any challenges?

The director and I distilled the play down to its essence and felt it was important to go for a non-literal, poetic representation of the world of the play. The challenge was that the pace of the piece can't be interrupted by scene changes, so we had to find a simple fluid visual language in what is a very intimate performance space.

How do you approach designing a set which has to depict more than one location?

When I know there is more than one location I strip the play back and work out exactly what it needs to tell the story. I then step back and look at the play as a whole, rather than specific locations. Audiences have powerful and strong imaginations,

and so not everything needs to be shown on stage in order to understand where we are.

Why do you enjoy being a Designer?

Theatre interrogates the world we are in and holds a mirror up to it. Each play that I work on is different and asks different questions. I love exploring why it is we as humans behave in certain ways. Starting with a play and a blank space and then slowly discovering and building the world in which it will exist is really exciting and rewarding.





Joe Bannister (Jim) in *Ramona Tells Jim*

Shoebox Set Design

Curriculum links: Drama & Performing Arts, Art & Design

Time: 30-45 minutes

Resources: Shoeboxes, assorted coloured card, coloured pens, assorted fabric and construction materials, access to a printer and the internet.

Use this exercise to get students thinking about the importance and impact of set design on the atmosphere of the play. Set design is primarily about discovering what will best clarify and support the story being told.

Give each student a shoebox, or put them into pairs and share one between two. Tip the shoebox on to its side so the lid is directly in front of you. The inside of the box is your stage and it's your job to design the set for *Ramona Tells Jim*.

Discussion

Discuss with the group the locations in the play.

- Beach
- Jim's caravan
- Jim's flat

The challenge for the students is to design a set which can depict all three locations.

Encourage students to use a range of materials, as well as considering how they could incorporate technology into their design.

Discuss with the group the difference between Abstract and Realistic stylistic forms.

Pitch

Ask the students to present their designs to the class in the form of a 'pitch', aiming to win the design contract for the show.



Meet Stewart Pringle

Stewart is the Associate Dramaturg at the Bush Theatre. He is responsible for our Emerging Writers' Group (EWG).

What is the EWG and what does it do?

The EWG (or Emerging Writers Group) is the Bush Theatre's flagship writing talent development programme. It brings together a cohort of six writers each year, who work in collaboration with our creative team as well as one another to develop a new work for the stage, which we then showcase as an extract at the end of each year. Alongside masterclasses with leading new writing figures, the participants will also be mentored by myself, artistic director Madani Younis and associate director Omar Elerian.

In the past, a number of our EWG graduates have had their works commissioned into full length plays for productions at the Bush, and the idea is that participation is just the first step on a journey for each writer with the Bush Theatre.

How long does it take and what are the stages of development that a play goes through from its first submission to its final production?

Things work a little differently with the EWG. Each writer comes to us with an idea which we'll then assist them in developing in a group setting over the coming 6 months. They'll work on sections of their piece each month, bringing in excerpts which they'd like to share and discuss with the group.

At the end of that six months, they are then joined by their personal mentors who will guide them in selecting an extract for presentation and in working it up into its best possible form. We'll then produce these extracts for an invited industry audience, as well as the whole Bush Theatre team.

If we do decide to commission a play, then we would work with the writer over a year to 18 months to produce a production-ready draft.

Why did you commission Sophie Wu's play, *Ramona Tells Jim*, and how did it change over the course of development?

I think the whole team just fell in love with the world Sophie created, and her three brilliant characters. It's a huge cliché but they really did leap off the page, and Sophie had such a clear idea of that story's journey.

The play's gone through at least five or six drafts since then, but the emotional core of the story has never changed, and neither has the truth of her characters. It's the sign of a great piece of writing when six drafts down the line, it's as sparky and thrilling as it was the first time you met it.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to pursue a career as a playwright?

Save everything. Delete nothing. Save the notes you scribble on your phone on the night bus. Save the poems you wrote when you were 17. Never be scared to put something down for a while if it isn't working for you, because nothing is ever a waste of time, and that doodle you start because your masterpiece isn't clicking into shape might end up being the one that fights its way onto the stage.



Meet Sophie Wu

Sophie Wu is a well-known actress and writer for screen and stage. Her debut play, *Sophie Wu Is Minging, She Looks Like She's Dead*, premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and transferred to the Soho Theatre to rave reviews.

What was your inspiration for writing *Ramona Tells Jim*?

The play was inspired by growing up in Scotland and going on school trips to the highlands when I was teenager. I was a bit of an outsider at school and enjoying picking that little scab! I really wanted to get underneath the skin of what it feels like to be a teenager and that first intense, buzz that you feel when you meet someone that you have a genuine connection with. I also love the elemental wildness of the Scottish landscape and have always had a desire to write about it.

Would you describe the characters in *Ramona Tells Jim* as 'misfits'? Why?

Yes. They are both disconnected from their social groups in different ways and gravitate towards each other as they are vulnerable, lonely and thirsty for a connection with someone that understands them.

What were the challenges of showing the same characters at drastically different stages in their lives?

Finding the way they use language differently. They are hopeful and positive and playful when they are young. When they are older they are more guarded and less flowery with their language and perhaps more jaded.

Why did you choose to make Ramona's assault accusation, false?

Because I wanted to explore the idea of one tiny impulsive decision made in the heat of a moment and how it can irreversibly impact the rest of your life without you knowing it at the time.

What advice would you give to someone who wants to pursue a career as a playwright?

Write every day! And don't think about if it's good or bad or right or wrong. Just get it all down and then go back and refine it later. I like to think of it as a brain vomit!



Sophie Wu at the Lyric Hammersmith. Photo: Helen Murray

“One of the most experienced prospectors of raw talent in Europe.”

– The Independent

“When it comes to plays that capture the detail of ordinary lives and the still, sad and often wonderfully comic music of humanity, the Bush is in a class of its own.”

– Daily Telegraph

“In terms of number of seats to impact on the ecology of British theatre, there is no more influential theatre in the country than the Bush.”

– Mark Shenton, Theatre Critic

“I was no longer an outsider coming from a demographic that often believes itself to be marginalised, a source of ridicule knocking on a big middle class door: I was a writer being allowed a voice, being allowed to collaborate. I was seriously at home, and honestly, it was the best thing ever.”

– Georgia Fitch, Writer

“Right from the start something about the Bush got under the reviewers’ skin, and I don’t know who doesn’t look forward to going there.”

– Michael Coveney, Theatre Critic

“The Bush reeks of fertility -- its commitment to new work, its new play know-how, its engaged and vibrant audience -- all of these make it one of the most exciting places I’ve been in my creative life. There is no other way to put it: I adore the Bush.”

– Ayad Akhtar, Writer, *Disgraced*

“It’s hard to define what would be lost to British culture if the Bush had never been. A certain crystallization of talent... A panoply of plays which, viewed as a whole, form a body of work that is not only a cultural panorama, but an alternative history of Britain.”

– Terry Johnson, Dramatist and Director

“The Bush understands new writing and new writers, their passion and their peculiarities. I started working there in the 1980s and I’m still involved now – because what’s never changed is the commitment to the people who write the plays and that’s why writers love the Bush.”

– Catherine Johnston, Writer

“I have been privileged to see some of the most thrilling and significant drama imaginable. It is simply the best theatre in the world.”

– Mike Bradwell, Artistic Director
1996-2007