

# Bush Theatre

## F\*ck the Polar Bears Education Pack





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## Introduction

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance your understanding of *F\*ck the Polar Bears* by Tanya Ronder 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 political and historical context, rehearsal photographs, discussion points and exercises that have been devised to unpack the play's themes and stylistic devices.

In line with the national curriculum, *F\*ck the Polar Bears* would be a suitable live theatre production for analysis. It will also provide an invaluable resource for students who are focusing on new writing, ensemble work and theatre productions based on political and social justice issues.

*F\*ck the Polar Bears* tackles the challenges of researching, presenting and understanding social, environmental and political issues in an accessible and creative way. The play will provoke students to ask pertinent questions, think critically, and develop perspective and judgement. If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to get in touch with Amanda Castro on **020 8743 3584** or at **[amandacastro@bushtheatre.co.uk](mailto:amandacastro@bushtheatre.co.uk)**



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## Synopsis

The play follows one weekend in the life of a family. The dad, Gordon, is on the verge of a massive promotion. He works as a Communications Director for a big energy company and the title of CEO is almost within his grasp. The family are planning to sell up and move to their dream house in their dream location – but things aren't going well at home.

Gordon is waiting for that phone call, baiting his ex-addict brother, Clarence, and pretending that his smoking habit doesn't exist. Gordon's wife Serena isn't happy – despite channelling her unhappiness into her fitness regime, Serena can't shake the dissatisfaction brought about by her idle housewife status.

Blundhilde, their au pair, is too efficient; her brand of passive aggressive environmentalism makes Serena feel guilty.

Worst of all, Gordon and Serena's pampered daughter Rachel has lost her beloved polar bear stuffed toy.

They are a family teetering on the edge and the addition of an unexpected hamster into the household proves too much for them. Gordon's fragile mental state deteriorates, causing him to believe their household appliances are turning against him and seeing visions of polar bears.

When Blundhilde uncovers evidence that Gordon is complicit in a scheme to extract shale gas through fracking he becomes the victim of an angry protestor attacking their house with eggs. Trapped in their home, the family are forced to face the cost of Gordon's promotion or risk facing the eggs.

## 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 the 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.

## Context: The Big Six

Gordon is a high ranking employee of a large energy company known as one of 'The Big Six'. 'The Big Six' are the UK's six biggest energy suppliers. These companies dominate the energy market and collectively have an over 90% share of the market, supplying gas and electricity to over 50 million homes and businesses in Britain. These large companies have attracted criticism from environmental groups for failing to invest in renewable energy and from consumer groups for profiteering (making profits through unethical means), the high salaries of its senior staff and the low amount of tax they pay.



British Gas is the biggest UK energy supplier, serving 11 million homes and employing over 28,000 staff based across the UK. Their CEO is Mark Hodges who took over in June 2015 – he earns an annual salary of £625,000 with the potential to earn bonuses that could take his salary up to £3.75 million. British Gas recently announced that it had doubled profits in the first half of this year, causing controversy as its parent firm Centrica had also announced thousands of job losses. Many criticised the company for making such a large amount of profit when many people were struggling to pay their energy bills.



EDF Energy supplies electricity and gas to approximately 6 million customers and produces one fifth of the nation's electricity. Their CEO is Vincent de Rivaz, who is paid £1.2 million a year. Many criticisms of the company revolve around its involvement in nuclear power. In 2013 EDF sued six activists who had broken into and shut down one of EDF's power stations in protest for up to £5 million in damages. After a strong public backlash, they dropped their lawsuit. EDF was also found guilty of hiring a security firm to spy on Greenpeace as it campaigned against new nuclear reactors in France.



E.ON supplies electricity and gas to over 5 million customers and employs 12,000 people in the UK. Their CEO is Tony Cocker. In 2014 E.ON was fined a record £12 million for mis-selling its products to customers and giving incorrect or misleading information.



Npower has over 5 million customers and produces around 10% of the electricity used in the UK. Its CEO is Paul Massara. Npower has been consistently criticised for its poor customer service; a poll by Which? voted them the country's worst energy supplier for four years running. A campaign was launched again Npower following revelations that their parent company RWE Npower had paid no UK corporation tax for 2009-2011 despite overall profits of £766 million for that period.



Scottish Power supplies energy to around 5.6 million customers throughout Great Britain. Their CEO is Neil Clitheroe. Scottish Power is owned by Iberdrola, a Spanish multinational company which was described by Greenpeace as the 'Company Enemy of Renewables', accusing the company of leading a smear campaign against renewable energy.



SSE (formerly Scottish and Southern Energy plc) has approximately 9 million customers. Its CEO is Alistair Phillips-Davies who earned £2.7 million last year. In April 2013, SSE was fined £10.5m for "prolonged and extensive" mis-selling – the largest penalty ever imposed on an energy provider at that time. The energy watchdog Ofgem said the company provided "misleading and unsubstantiated statements" to potential customers about prices and savings that could be made by switching to SSE.



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## Interview: Tanya Ronder, Playwright

### **What was the initial inspiration behind *F\*ck the Polar Bears*?**

It was feeling angry about the massive bonuses and amounts of money the bosses of our water and energy companies took home. Which made me wonder if they felt guilty, or responsible for their actions, and what they were like in their own homes, with their wives and children.

### **The characters in *F\*ck the Polar Bears* are very complex - at times they do or say things that are selfish, rude or unlikeable but at the same time they are all relatable in different ways. How do you write such complex characters?**

Part of the premise is that none of us is able to be truly happy right now in the time we live in, because of what's happening to the world. At some level I think we must all hate ourselves for how little we are doing, or feel able to do, to save the planet from the consequences of global warming. I think when we feel bad about ourselves, we behave badly. So I wanted to get to a layer of nastiness in the characters, I suppose in the way that the whole play sits on a layer of human dirt, trash and waste.

### **Do you think theatre has a duty to respond to national and global issues such as climate change?**

I guess so, though I don't think every theatre practitioner needs to take responsibility for it. I think theatre programmers would be remiss not to offer perspectives on global problems in the work they stage, but theatre is a broad church and we look to it to find all sorts of different things, not just provocation or education, so I don't think every play needs to address big issues. It's not always what I want to go and see in my time off! I really didn't want *F\*ck the Polar Bears* to become an issue play, but more a domestic drama where the larger issues underpin it. I have tried to avoid putting too many facts and statistics in, because I think it's difficult for drama to handle and pass on that kind of knowledge.

### ***F\*ck the Polar Bears* has many comedic moments in it. Is comedy difficult to write?**

I don't know if it'll be funny until an audience is in, so it's a difficult question to answer right now! It has been tricky balancing the comedy with the stark tragic and serious elements to the play. I feel I've been walking a tightrope, or several tightropes - a lattice of them - to try and achieve that balance.

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**What is the writer's role during the rehearsal process?**

It varies, according to how available the writer is, and how much the director invites the collaboration. Also it varies from writer to writer as to how complete and locked-off the script is, or if there's still room for growth and change once the actors are assembled and rehearsal process begins. I always fall in to the second category, whatever I'm writing; the play is not complete until the company is assembled and those final pieces can fall in to place. The Bush is a new writing venue so utterly support the writer's full involvement and collaboration from beginning to end, and Caroline Byrne, the director, has also totally welcomed my input, so during casting and rehearsals I have been as present as availability has allowed.

There are always questions which come up, which the writer can help with, and at the same time I've been changing the odd line here and there, fine-tuning the play, inspired by the rehearsal process. I'll leave them to it for the final couple of weeks, give them breathing space to make it their own, and will then come back for the last stages – rehearsal room runs, dress rehearsals, previews etc.

**How did you become a writer?**

I trained as an actor and worked as one for many years. But the job didn't make me happy. It was when I realized that I could write adaptations without speaking other languages that I understood I wanted to be an adaptor of plays rather than act in them. My first job was an adaptation of Peribanez at the Young Vic. They took a punt on me, for which I'll always be grateful. I adapted for more than a decade, then slowly, a bit shyly, started writing original plays.

## Classroom exercise: Writing from another point of view

### Curriculum Links: Drama, PSHCE, English

**Time: 1 hour - can be  
extended into more than one  
lesson**

**Resources: Pens and  
paper**

A challenge for any writer is how to present characters who hold values and opinions that are completely different from yours, whilst still presenting them as well-rounded, realistic characters rather than caricatures.

The characters in *F\*ck the Polar Bears* all have their flaws and weaknesses which may make some of them unlikeable to an audience at times – Gordon, for example, holds a job and in the course of that job does things that many people in the outside world would think is unethical or selfish, whilst others would think there is nothing wrong in what he does. However, Gordon and the other characters in the play are all presented in a way that makes them complex, interesting and relatable, despite (or perhaps because of) their flaws.

Ask the students to create a fictional character whose morals and opinions are completely different to their own. Their challenge is to create a well-rounded and believable character and write a monologue from that person's point of view.

They can use these questions as a starting point to build up their characters:

- Name
- Age
- Describe where you live
- What is your job?
- Tell us about your family.
- What do you enjoy doing?
- What upsets you?
- What are you most afraid of?
- What do you want most in the world right now?

It may also help the students to hot seat their characters in front of each other as they are working on their characters.

Give the students plenty of time to develop these monologues (this may go over into two lessons) and ask them to perform their monologues for each other

Afterwards, lead a discussion with the students – what was the process of writing these monologues like? Was it easier or harder than what they expected and what were the challenges? How did the audience respond to each of the monologues?



**“The whole play sits on a layer of human dirt, trash and waste”**

**Tanya Ronder**

## Context: The environmental movement

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**Environmentalism is a social movement that seeks to influence the political process by lobbying, activism, and education in order to protect natural resources and ecosystems.**

Around the world, there are many environmentalist groups that fight against the protection of the Earth, such as Greenpeace, the WWF and Friends of the Earth. These organisations will often focus on issues such as climate change, overfishing, challenging nuclear power, protecting the forests and oil drilling among many other issues.

### Famous environmental protests and protestors:

**Swampy:** In the 90s, environmental protestor Daniel Hopper (nicknamed 'Swampy') became notorious in the press and the wider public for a number of high profile protests. He led hundreds of villagers in Berkshire who chained themselves to trees to try and prevent a bypass being built. Along with a group of other protestors he dug tunnels beneath a planned bypass in Devon and helped build a network of tunnels to try to stop the expansion of Manchester Airport.

**Plane Stupid:** More recently, the activist group Plane Stupid made headlines when they staged a protest on a runway at Heathrow Airport. They gained access to by cutting a hole in a fence and chained themselves to railings on the runway to protest against the airport's expansion. Thirteen members of the group were subsequently arrested and are awaiting trial on charges of aggregated trespass.

**Oil spills:** Numerous groups have protested against oil company BP in the wake of oil spills and the devastating impact they have had on the environment, including the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill which killed 11 people and put 400 species of animal at risk. After the event Greenpeace activists in London scaled BP's company headquarters and unfurled mock BP logo banners imprinted with oil stains reading "British polluters".

**Earth Hour:** this is a global movement that encourages individuals, households and businesses to switch off their non-essential lights for one hour on the last Saturday in March each year, as a symbol of their commitment to the environment. Hundreds of millions of people across the world take part in this annual event.

## What is fracking?

Of particular concern to environmental groups at the moment is fracking. Fracking is the process of drilling down into the earth before a high-pressure water mixture is directed at the rock to release the gas inside. Water, sand and chemicals are injected into the rock at high pressure which allows the gas to flow out to the head of the well. The process can create new pathways to release gas or can be used to extend existing channels.

Fracking has become a controversial issue: here are the arguments that people use for and against it.

### PROS

#### Access More Gas and Oil

Scientists estimate that these resources will begin to run out during our lifetimes, so until we find a true replacement fuel, fracking is likely here to stay.

#### Improved Air Quality

By using natural gas instead of coal, the resulting improvement to air quality is easy to quantify.

#### Decrease Dependency on Foreign Oil

As population continues to increase, with no end to the nation's potentially crippling oil addiction in sight, it pays to uncover more domestic sources for oil.

#### Lower Taxes

While continuing to raid every possible inch of the country for new oil sources will certainly impeded attempts to wean the nation of its oil dependency, the positive effects fracking has on taxes are not easily ignored.

#### Increase Return on Investment

Conventional techniques of drilling do not produce the same results as fracking. Drilling at less conventional sites necessitates the use of fracking, to maximize return on investment.

### CONS

#### Lack of Exploring New Energy Sources

The belief that renewable energy should be taking priority over discovering new sources of gas and oil is pervasive.

#### Water Drought

Considering the fact that over half the nation is currently experiencing water droughts, the concept of using massive amounts of water to probe underground for oil and gas that may not even be available has given pause to many environmental observers.

#### Increased Pollution

Water supplies in fracking zones have been known to show an increased presence of toxic chemicals.

In addition, these toxins are also released into the air, which leads to an increase in air pollution.

#### Spread of Toxins

There is essentially no way for local communities to prepare themselves for specific chemicals, as fracking companies are not required by law to provide a list of which chemicals they will be using for the job.

#### Noise Pollution

Since fracking is conducted at all hours of the day and night, this causes consternation for those who are affected by the additional light and noise.



## Article: Lancashire fracking debate: 'they are changing the laws to suit themselves'

Ben Quinn, *The Guardian*, 16 August 2015

**Anti-fracking alliance on Fylde coast digs in to resist new fast-track policy on drilling applications – but not everyone thinks it would be bad for the area**

Resting a hand on the shoulder of his nine-year-old daughter, Samantha, John Tootill shakes his head as he gazes over the lush green fields near Lancashire's Fylde coast that have become the new focus in Britain's battle over fracking. "It's for her and her brother that we're fighting them, really," says Tootill, 61, who fears that plans to drill on a number of local sites, in what would be the UK's biggest round of fracking so far, will destroy his farm and garden nursery business, as well as poison the wider area forever. Such are his concerns that he recently withdrew Samantha and her eight-year-old brother from their local school.

While he and other local campaigners were popping open champagne corks just over a month ago when Lancashire county council rejected a planning application by shale gas explorer Cuadrilla, they are now coming to terms with the prospect of an even greater struggle as the government last week unveiled a new fast-track policy that would strip local authorities of the right to decide fracking applications unless they approve them swiftly. To Tootill, the government intervention is nothing less than a subversion of democracy: "They are actually changing the laws to suit themselves, to suit the industry and the lobbyists.

"Basically, the democracy that we believe we have is being disregarded just so that they can have their way because they are obsessively pushing for it, almost to the point of a tantrum when they know they are not getting their way."

Located five miles from Blackpool – its tower can sometimes be glimpsed over the horizon – the site closest to Tootill's farm is at Preston New Road, near the village of Little Plumpton. Cuadrilla had hoped to drill four wells there and undertake exploratory fracking for shale gas until county councillors rejected the application on grounds of visual impact and unacceptable noise. Counting on the support of an alliance ranging from environmental activists to celebrity supporters such as Vivienne Westwood, locals are now gearing up to resist Cuadrilla's appeal. They were taken by surprise last week, however, with the issuance of the new planning guidance by a government frustrated at the slow rate of progress of exploratory work intended to pave the way for a US-style "shale gas revolution".

In future, councils will be strongly encouraged to meet the existing deadline of 16 weeks to approve or reject fracking applications and will be labelled as "underperforming" if they fail to act quickly

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## Discussion topics:

**Do you think fracking is right or wrong?**

enough. Greg Clark, the secretary of state for communities, will now systematically be able to call in applications and decide himself. Welcoming the changes, Cuadrilla described the current planning process as “unwieldy”, saying: “There is no good reason why an application for a shale gas exploration site should take three to four times longer to determine than an application for a major housing development, a supermarket or a large-scale quarry.”

**Do you care strongly about environmental issues?**

Under its plans for fracking at Preston New Road, and another Lancashire site – Roseacre – drilling would extend half a mile under the surrounding land to tap into the underground shale beds. Every 30 metres or so along the horizontal wells, water, sand and a lubricant called polyacrylamide will be blasted in at high pressure to fracture the shale and release the gas it contains. For the first 60 to 90 days after fracking, the gas flow will be burned off in flares that will light up the night sky while its composition is checked. After that, the wells will be plugged into the National Grid.

**Do you think environmental activists go too far in their protests or not far enough?**

Judging by the sheer number of anti-fracking signs bearing the red rose of Lancashire on lawns and homes in areas like the Fylde, the issue remains highly contentious politically, even if the constituency remained in Tory hands after May’s election. In addition to fears about ground pollution, local opponents of fracking cite concerns about its impact on tourism and house prices, which the government’s own estimates suggest could drop by as much as 7%.

**Could society be doing more to prevent climate change?**

Still, supporting views exist. At the Eagle and Child Inn a short drive from Little Plumpton, landlord Michael Baines says some heated evening discussions have taken place among his clientele. He believes that fracking would be good for the area, saying: “In the short and medium term there would be jobs, and in the long term it would help to tackle energy-dependence issues around, for example, the oil that Russia pipes to Europe. The anti-fracking side is substantially more vocal, but you always shout loudest if you don’t like something, and I think there are some people from outside who are involved and have quite extreme views. They don’t endear themselves to me.” Extreme or not, reaching out for help appears to be a priority for local anti-fracking campaigners. Jim Marsh, 69, a retiree in the Plumpton area, tells of receiving support in the last couple of days from Bianca Jagger, among others. He is excited about the prospect of a Jeremy Corbyn-led Labour party, though less so about an Andy Burnham one.

“I wrote to Burnham after he seemed to give us a bit of hope with something he said about fracking, but then his office just sent us this,” he says, showing an email from the MP’s office saying: “It would be more appropriate for you to continue to seek support through your own constituency MP at this stage.”

Patience with the political system appears to be wearing thin. Marsh says: “David Cameron said not so long ago that he believed in localism and it should be up to councils to do it in the democratic way ... but when they have done it in the democratic way, this is what they are coming back with.”

While ready to continue fighting in the courts, Tootill is insistent that they won’t just stop there. He says: “We will oppose it by whatever means, because what we’re talking about is the health and safety of our children and their future. It’s exactly the same as if we are fighting an occupying oppressor.

“We’re up against a goliath now, but they’ll find they’re facing many Davids.”

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/aug/16/lancashire-fracking-debate-they-are-changing-the-laws-to-suit-themselves>

## Classroom exercise: Discussion and debate

### Curriculum Links: Drama & Performing Arts, Politics, Geography

**Time: 20-30 minutes**

**Resources: Open space**

At either end of the room place signs stating “AGREE” and “DISAGREE”. One by one, you will read the statements below out loud to the group. Everyone in the group must then place themselves at a point between these two signs to signify how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement (e.g. the closer they stand to the “agree” sign, the more strongly they agree with the statement).

Selected people at each point in the spectrum of opinion will then be asked to explain their reaction to the statement. The aim will be to encourage debate and discussion over the text and the issues presented within it. After each discussion is there anyone who feels compelled to change their mind?

It is worth reminding the group at the beginning of the exercise to remember the importance of respecting other people’s views, of not interrupting others and of refraining from offensive or personal remarks.

#### Statements:

1. Gordon should pull out of the CEO job because of the negative impact he would have on the environment, even though it means he will lose out on the salary increase and his dream home.
2. SERENA: *Some monster could come in and become CEO instead of you and make it all even worse, then what would we do?*  
Gordon should accept the CEO job and attempt to affect change from the inside.
3. I can relate to one or more characters in the play.
4. SERENA: *You’re not going to save the world by recycling, Blundhilde.*  
BLUNDHILDE: *So don’t bother? What am I meant to do?*  
It’s not worth trying to do our bit for the environment because an individual person cannot make enough of an impact on their own.
5. Each of the characters in the play is selfish, even when they claim to be thinking of others.
6. Money can alienate you from other people.



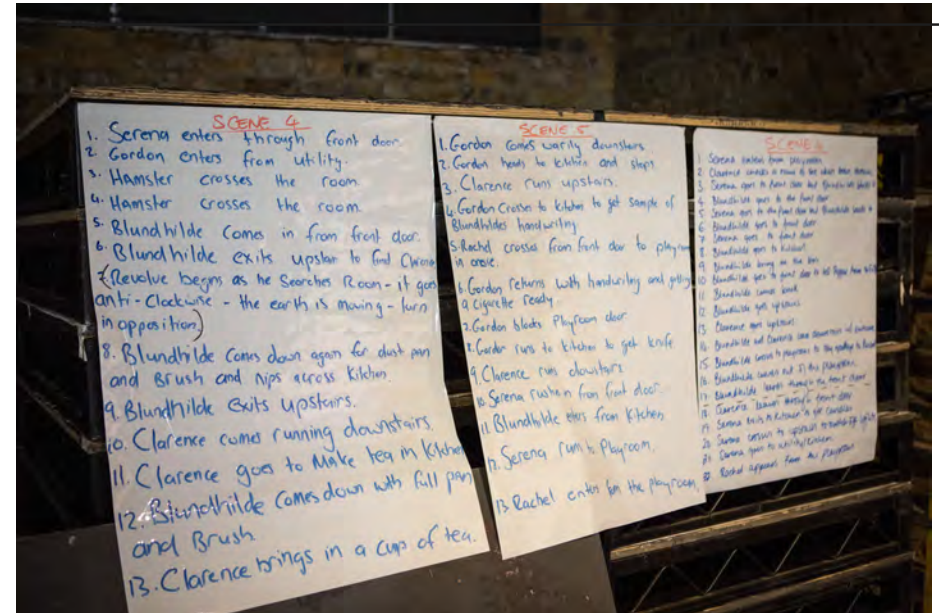
# A Day in the Life of an Assistant Director

Hello! My name is Mark Stuart Flynn and I am the assistant director on *F\*ck the Polar Bears*. Being an assistant director is a fantastic way to learn how to direct. I am currently doing a Master's in theatre directing and assisting on this show has allowed me to see how the skills I am learning are used in the rehearsal room.

If you get a chance, arrange a meeting with the director in advance of rehearsals. It'll give you a chance to find out exactly what their ideas for the production are and what specifically they require from you in the rehearsal room. The director may have a specific role in mind or some research tasks to undertake before rehearsals commence. You will feel much more comfortable entering the room on Day One if you have prepared well. On the occasions when I have failed to do this, I have felt nervous, flustered and constantly playing catch up. So do your prep and give yourself the best possible platform to work from!

Before we started rehearsals for the show I read the play (at least 5 times... maybe more) and Caroline asked me to put together a research pack for the actors to have in the rehearsal room. I met with the writer Tanya and she gave me some great resources that she used to help her write the play. I compiled all these together with my own research and put together the research pack. A research pack includes any topic, news articles, diagrams, pictures, books, music, maps, whatever you can think of that is mentioned in the play that the actors can read through and gain a better understanding of the issues that the play deals with. In *F\*ck the Polar Bears* we deal with environmental issues, mental health, fitness and many other topics. I put in to the research pack anything that related to these topics that would be useful. But also trying not to include every single piece of information available as it would take the actor's weeks to read through it all.

Once rehearsals have started my job varies day to day. Caroline will tell me what things she wants me to focus on each day that will help her in rehearsals. These jobs include being on the book during rehearsals (which means reading the script while the actors rehearse and if they forget a line I am able to call it out to them). I note down any changes that Caroline needs. When actors are not needed in the rehearsal room I go over lines with them. I helped put together the audio and video footage that Caroline needed for the show, this involved me working with our child actors getting them to record different sections of text from the play, and working with one of our leads, Susan, recording sections of her text that will be used in the soundscape of the show. I really enjoyed this and it allowed me to work with the actor's one-on-one. A large and important part of my work as assistant director has also been that of observation; observing the director's process as well as how the actors communicate with each other and how they develop their performances throughout a rehearsal period.



Assisting Caroline has been very beneficial towards my development as a director. Being able to observe her directing process and how the actors work has helped me so much in my development as an emerging director. Having Tanya the writer in the room for the first two weeks of rehearsals was brilliant for me. Watching how a play takes shape with the writer watching the rehearsals and making changes each day was really exciting. The cast have been so helpful and all the production team have been super to work with. I hope this helps any aspiring directors out there if they read this!

# Classroom exercise: Power plays

## Curriculum links: Drama & Performing Arts, English Literature and Language,

**Time: 30 minutes**

**Resources: Open space, printed copies of extracts 1 & 2 (overleaf), a pack of playing cards**

Drama is at its core about the exchange of power and this is abundantly clear in *F\*ck the Polar Bears*. Each of the characters in this play is locked in a complicated power dynamic with the other characters that constantly shifts and changes. This set of exercises will help students understand these dynamics more and how they help us understand character.

### Exercise One - master/servant game

In this simple improvisation, put the students in groups of three and label one of them the master and the other two as servants. They must then improvise a scene using this dynamic.

Ask the students to explore the different ways that someone can be high or low status – how does someone low/high status use the space around them? What body language or language do they use? What are their movements and gestures like? What are subtle ways in which someone can show they are high or low status?

Give each person in the group of three the chance to become the master. Ask selected groups to show their improvised scene to the rest of the class and lead a discussion on what works and doesn't work. An extension of this exercise would be to switch round the focus – this time, the master is low status whilst the servant is high status. Ask the students to explore in their improvisations how this unusual dynamic can work and how it affects a scene.

### Exercise Two - playing cards game

Get together a stack playing cards of different numbers (as many cards as you want students on stage taking part in the exercise at once). Hand each student a playing card face down so the student can't see it and have each student hold it to their forehead with their fingers. Explain to the student that the number or figure on everyone's card represents their status level (i.e. someone with number 3 is low status, while someone with a 10 is high status). The students must not say to each other directly what it says on each person's card.

The students will, one by one enter an improvised party scene. In this scene, they have to treat the other performers accordingly depending on the status shown on their card. Each performer has to learn more about their character based on how the other performers treat them. After running this scene for a few minutes, ask them to hide their cards and line up according to where they think they are in the pecking order.

Then ask the students to look at their cards – did they guess correctly? How did people treat them during the scene and what were the different ways that performers either used or displayed their power or lack of power?

You can also a slightly different version of this game, where each person is giving a card and is able to see the number on their card. They can then run the scene in full knowledge of what their status is and relate to other people accordingly.

### Exercise Three – text analysis

Thinking back on the exercises you've just done and thinking of the different ways in which a character can show their high or low status, ask the class to read through the following two extracts from *F\*ck the Polar Bears*. Who has the power/higher status in each moment in these scenes, how do they get that higher status and do they ever lose it? How does this tell us more about the characters and their relationships with one another?



## Example One

**Clarence** Afternoon.

**Gordon** Where's Serena?

**Clarence** Getting Rache. She took Blundhilde to work the Sat Nav. Can I get you something?

**Gordon** Don't treat me like an invalid.

*Beat.*

**Clarence** Can you take any time off this week, for the house and stuff?

**Gordon** Your tone is fucking unbearable.

*Beat.*

A hamster was loose in my house and for a moment I mistook it for something, what's so invalid about that. I am dandy.

**Clarence** Of course you are.

**Gordon** And no I can't take time off, on Monday I'm in Germany signing my new contract.

**Clarence** Well done on your promotion, mate, I've not said.

**Gordon** I earn my money, me.

**Clarence** Doesn't come free for any of us, sadly.

**Gordon** I keep the lights on, you paint walls.

**Clarence** Don't let's argue. I just want to be sure the company's not taking too much from you.

**Gordon** If you're feeling sorry for me, Clarence, then you've got the wrong end of the fucking stick, I mean, who are you, Big daddy Clarence?

*Half beat.*

Who pays for mum, Clarence?

**Clarence** Who visits mum, Gord?

**Gordon** Who has time to visit her? High achievers work and work and then we work some more.

## Example Two

**Serena** D'you know what, you have undermined me since you damn well stepped in to this house, telling me every day how I'm running things the wrong way.

**Blundhilde** I never meant to undermine you...

**Serena** Then you slip in that that you've been in to our bedroom and found a letter and when I remark that that's a bit odd, you insult me. Well you know what, you can open that door right up again and ask your girlfriend -

**Clarence** Ex girlfriend.

**Serena** See if Pepper Anne will bail you out because I don't want you sleeping -

**Gordon** Serena -

**Serena** ONE MORE NIGHT UNDER OUR ROOF.

*Beat.*

My husband has some kind of episode, terrorizes our seven-year-old, my ex-drug-addict brother-in-law is my new best friend because there's no one else to help, we have an open house tomorrow with twenty two viewings booked and you top it by setting your militant ex girlfriend up to egg our home, then tell me I'm fucking ridiculous.

**Clarence** Serena...

**Gordon** We can't just throw Blundhilde out, Serena.

**Serena** Side with her, why don't you, gentleman? Who smuggled an illegal pet in here, causing some fracture in your mind to gape open like that, who's going to clean her girlfriend's eggs off the windows, and who is in the best position to judge right now whether she should stay or go, me, or you, coming on all coherent.

**Blundhilde** Fine.

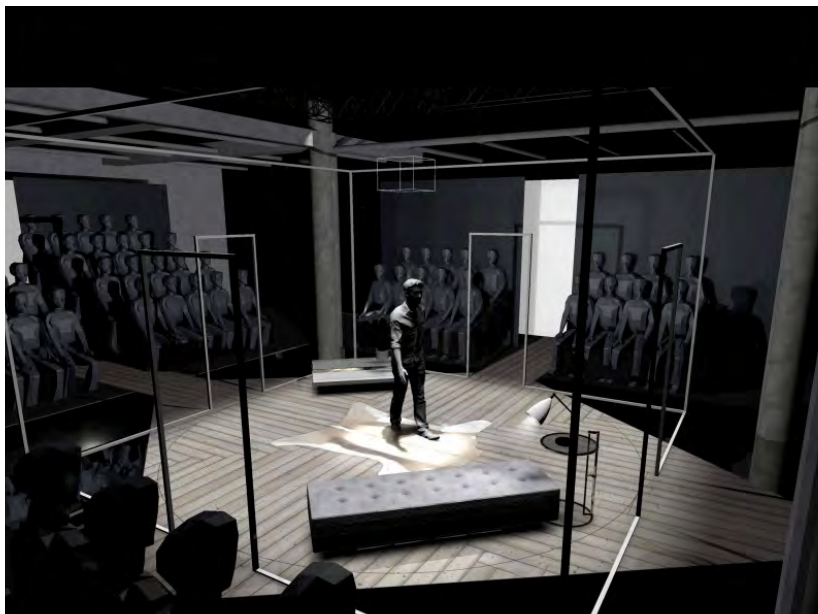
**Gordon** Blundhilde...

**Blundhilde** That's fine, I'll go, but first you have to tell them what you've done.

*She addresses Gordon.*

**Clarence** Easy, Blundhilde.

**Blundhilde** What you're doing to Rachel and me and everyone young in the world.



*F\*ck the Polar Bears* set drawings by Chiara Stephenson

## Interview: Chiara Stephenson, Designer

### What is the overall concept behind the design for *F\*ck the Polar Bears* and what were your influences when working on this?

The overall concept behind the design for *F\*ck the Polar Bears* was to create a fragile level playing field on which the characters and the play can voice their varying opinions on the issue of climate change and global warming. With a rotating set, the idea was to shift the audience perspective from scene to scene. So our view into the world of our characters is always changing. Each character has a different view point, as does the audience from scene to scene. The set acts much like a rubix cube!

With the design being in the round and with a fragile skeletal frame work set between actor and audience which fades in and out of the spectators consciousness... The design sets out to highlight our ever changing awareness of the bigger picture which then gets distracted by the more immediate needs in front of us.

We are at times meant to feel very connected and immersed in the action of the room and then at other times view it all from a more detached, exterior perspective which allows us hopefully to consider the bigger picture and the broader problems beyond household dynamics.

### How did you work with the director Caroline Byrne to develop the set and costume design?

Caroline and I worked very closely together throughout the design process. First establishing the key issues of the play and base concepts it raised and then working through all sorts of ideas and options until the right combination of elements settled into something we felt comfortable would serve the play well.

We didn't want to patronise our audience with obvious environmental references or be distracting with visuals. We hope that the design we have come up with supports the play's message and also demands its audience to take responsibility and have a better awareness.

**How can set design be used to explore the character's relationships with each other and their state of mind and how have you explored this with *F\*ck the Polar Bears*?**

The stage is set in a hallway of a home. The cross roads of a house where people collide and converse but never settle or resolve issues. The slightly presentational clinical nature of our hallway is intentionally uninviting but forces our characters to deal with each other and not retreat into the comforts of home.

The skeletal light frame work also acts as a canvas for Gordon's mind and conscience, enhancing his mental unravelling and psychological journey. We use the frame to enhance Gordon's perception of his environment, both immediately around him and also with his fears of what lies ahead.

**What is the most satisfying part of being a theatre designer and what advice would you give to any budding theatre designers out there?**

The most satisfying part of being a theatre designer is being able to enhance and enrich the way an audience absorbs and experiences a play.

Personally, as someone who struggles to absorb information solely from text, if there's a way that visually through design I can help and not hinder the act of storytelling, and bring the words, and space between the words on the page to life, then that's exciting.

It's a lot of hard work, and not glamorous by any means but very satisfying and rewarding to bring wild and wonderful visions to life. I would advise any budding theatre designers to go for it. Take risks, stay up all night to get it done and stick with it. Don't waver. Put in enough hours and you will succeed at it. Also, don't just go and see lots of theatre. See lots of art, go to gigs, sponge on all forms of culture and entertainment, not just theatre. This will make your palette way richer when it comes to designing yourself.



## Classroom exercise: design and psychology

### Curriculum Links:

**Drama, design, art**

**Time: 30 mins**

**Resources: Pens and  
paper**

For *F\*ck the Polar Bears*, set designer Chiara Stevenson thought carefully about how the design of the play could emphasise the shifting dynamics between characters and reference Gordon's mental state at different moments of the play.

She also uses design to explore how the audience might view the play, and how their relationship to the play might shift. Each element of the set design corresponds to a set of ideas and questions present in the play that Chiara wanted to emphasise and explore through design.

In small groups, ask students to create their own alternative set design for the play and to present their designs to the rest of the group.

Ask them to think carefully about their approach – do they want to design a naturalistic set or something more abstract? What opportunities and challenges might arise from taking either approach? How would they like the audience to be seated when watching the play? What themes in the play would they like to bring out when designing the set?

## References and links

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### Links for more information on the production

<https://www.bushtheatre.co.uk/bushgreen/fck-the-polar-bears-meet-the-playwright/>  
<https://www.bushtheatre.co.uk/bushgreen/tanya-ronder-i-didnt-want-any-starving-polar-bears/>

### Links for more information on 'The Big Six'

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Six\\_Energy\\_Suppliers\\_\(UK\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Six_Energy_Suppliers_(UK))  
<http://business-reporter.co.uk/2015/07/30/energy-price-controversy-as-british-gas-profits-double/>  
<http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/ethicalreports/energyindustrysectorreport/companyprofiles.aspx>  
<http://www.energycompanynumbers.co.uk/who-are-the-big-six-energy-suppliers/>  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/energy/11475989/Big-Six-energy-companies-profits-increased-tenfold-since-2007.html>

### Links for more information on Environmentalism

<http://www.earthhour.org/>  
<http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/>  
<http://news.sky.com/story/1506680/protests-expected-ahead-of-fracking-vote>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jul/01/fracking-could-hurt-house-prices-health-and-environment-official-report-says>  
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<http://www.dangersoffracking.com/>  
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<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/aug/19/plane-stupid-activists-plead-not-guilty-heathrow-expansion-protest>  
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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/earthnews/10282538/Swampy-retires-from-protests-to-get-a-job-picking-acorns.html>  
<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/aug/19/plane-stupid-activists-plead-not-guilty-heathrow-expansion-protest>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepwater\\_Horizon\\_oil\\_spill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepwater_Horizon_oil_spill)

**Production photography (front page) by Eric Richmond**  
**Rehearsal photography (pages 2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19)**

