

The Worm Collector

Hello - John Mee from West Yorkshire Playhouse here!

By the time you receive this document most of you will have attended the preview of The Worm Collector and joined in the workshop following the performance.

For those of you who couldn't be there - I led this workshop with Nathan McMullen in role as Mark Wallace, the central character in The Worm Collector.

The plan is that, when The Worm Collector visits your school, you will lead the workshop with Nathan in role as Mark Wallace and the notes and check list that follow are intended to help you with your preparation.

The workshop is intended to last about 45 minutes. What follows is a plan that you could use as it is, but I have included some alternative ideas at the end for those of you who would like to experiment a bit. You may find that there is too much to fit into the 45 minutes but I'll leave it up to you to decide how long to spend on each section and whether to cut some sections out. The plan is based around suggestions for drama activities designed to open up an investigation of the central incident of Mark's death. Some are straightforward and some are more challenging.

I suggest using a number of different drama conventions in the workshops. You will find some extra notes about those conventions at the end of this document on page 8.

You could stick to the basic plan or try some of my alternatives - or indeed your own. Please choose the activities that best suit you and your class, given their drama background and your confidence in handling the work. You won't have time to use them all. If you invent some more please email your ideas to me at john-mee@ntlworld.com and I'll pass them on to the teachers who have yet to have a visit from the company.

I'm happy to have a chat about these notes if that would help.

My number is **07775 782603**. Good luck.

John

The Worm Collector

A PLAN FOR A WORKSHOP FOLLOWING THE PERFORMANCE

First of all

The children might need a break and a chance to stretch their legs. The company will need ten minutes to clear scenery and properties from the performance area.

Before Nathan returns to the space in role as Mark

When the performance area is cleared please create a three-sides-on space using benches or chairs for your class to be sitting on at the beginning of the workshop. When Nathan returns in role as Mark he will sit on the fourth side of the space. He will bring in his Grandad's fishing stool to sit on.

1. BUILDING A SETTING - a visualization exercise as a starter for you and your class that will lead into meeting Mark

Ask the class to think of a canal side as a place where they could meet Mark – a place where he might feel most comfortable. A quiet place a little way up the canal from where Mark's Grandad does his fishing.

Gather details about canals from them and create a collective setting in which you identify together an image in your minds – the towpath, the colours and names of the narrow boats, passers by, perhaps a soundscape, somewhere for Mark to sit as he watches the world go by. Decide time of day, season of year together, so you can get a feel of the place.

Let there be a bridge to one side where we can walk across to the other side of the canal and meet Mark later.

2. TALKING WITH A GHOST – which re-introduces Mark to the children and puts them in direct contact with him.

Prepare some of the class, perhaps a dozen, to be in role as passers-by – dog walking, two people strolling past, a jogger, decide a few more for

yourselves, and rehearse them before inviting Mark into the playing space. As he comes into the space narrate some of the details you have collected from the class to describe time, weather, season, surroundings as if looking through Mark's eyes to focus the moment and organize "passers by" to enter from right and left of Mark. Let them cross over the bridge so they can be on the same side of the canal as where Mark will sit.

Begin by saying: "We all know that Mark has met his end. We saw that in the performance of The Worm Collector. But here we can create a chance to talk with him as if he is still alive."

Then go on to make up what you will say next depending on what the children have invented and how Mark responds to the passers by.

This will be something like: "It's a cold blustery day as Mark sits under a tree on the towpath. Two dog walkers go by slowly. Mark looks up and watches them go past. The jogger who is out whatever the weather comes from the other direction. Mark doesn't even seem to notice her" and so on.

When all have walked past ask the rest of the class to comment on how Mark is looking and model hot-seating Mark by starting with questions like:

Is this the kind of place you like to be sitting Mark?

Tell us about fishing with your grandad.

What was it that made you pick up the knife?

If you had your chance again what would you do?

Then open up the hot seating to the whole class. If they need it give them a few moments to talk with each other to decide what they're going to ask Mark before calling them back to work as one group.

If they need help in focusing their questions you could give them categories to work on:

Family / School / Gary / Making the video / Friends

Finish this section with the following question to the class, not to Mark:

If there was one thing you could have told Mark about Staying Safe what would it be?

Let Mark and the class listen to some responses before moving on to:

3. ECHOES OF A LIFE - re-creating the moment when Mark stood up to Gary

Mark will interrupt the responses to Staying safe by saying ...***“Granddad said: Best way to fight is to go towards what’s got you on its hook.”***

Mark will tell you and your class that he doesn’t really know what happened. All he knows is that he and Gary stood facing each other ... he’ll speak lines from the play ...

“And I figured, someone has to go to Gary. And that someone was going to be me One minute we were facing each other. And I could see that actually he was pretty frightened. When he saw what was in my hand. But trying to hide it. I couldn’t believe that. Gary Nicholl. Frightened of something. I can’t really remember what happened next. Whether he pushed me or I pushed him or whether the grass was a bit uneven and it was hard not to end up falling into each other.

We ended up hugging. Like were really good friends

Nathan as Mark will create his half of the image of that moment while you look on with the children.

4. POINTS OF VIEW – an exploration of what witnesses might have seen.

Bring back some of the children who were in role earlier on as passers by and place them in different vantage points. Ask them to explain what they can see from their point of view. Here are some examples of how you might run this moment:

The jogger looks over her shoulder and sees something in a split second before she runs on.

The dog walker doesn’t like to stare but has a quick look.

Grandad’s friend, Joe McAllister, looks up from his fishing.

You could make up some other people’s points of view depending on the roles you created in Building A Setting.

Ask Mark if this is how it happened. Is what the passers-by said true? All he will be able to say is: ***“I can’t really remember what happened next. Whether he pushed me or I pushed him or whether the grass was a bit uneven and it was hard not to end up falling into each other.*”**

***We ended up hugging. Like were really good friends*”**

5. INSIDE MARK’S MIND

A way of capturing and challenging ideas is to use a conglomerate to represent Mark’s feelings. Mark will stand centre while some of the class represent his thoughts and feelings standing close to him as if they are all one person. It’s a bit like when we talk to ourselves inside our heads.

Ask no more than six at a time to choose one of the Staying Safe ideas or give them Staying Safe ideas on slips of paper as suggested below. Ask them to speak as if they are thought tracking inside Mark’s head. Their job is to speak as if they are suggesting other ways of facing up to the feelings that Mark had when he thought about Gary. Mark will describe some times when it was just impossible to do what the children will suggest. These will include things like:

If the children say “I could have told my mum.”

Mark might reply, “But she’d only have worried and the doctor said that she has to remain calm or it would affect the baby. Then everyone’d be really mad with me if something happened and they would have blamed me.

Here’s some other things the children might say. You’ll find them at appendix 1 at the end of this document ready to cut out to give to individual children if you think this is necessary. Perhaps the best thing is to get them to invent their own. Mark will reply to each suggestion.

Staying Safe ideas:

I could have got Hal to have a word with him

I could have pretended like Gary never said anything

I could have said cruel stuff back
I could have phoned Childline
I could have told Mr Carmichael
I could have told Sprogger
I could have told Marla
I could have fought him but not using a knife
I could have walked away
I could have asked Gary to leave me alone
I could have asked Granddad for his advice
I could have stayed away from school
I could have got my friends to help me
I could have asked my dad what to do

6. MARK ASKS FOR HELP – a pair drama

Take a moment with the class to examine what Mark might have said if he had found the courage to talk with Marla. In pairs ask one child to take on the role of Mark and one child to take on the role of Marla.

Ask the child playing Marla to begin with the words: "What's the matter Mark? You've been looking a bit down in the dumps." Ask the child in role as Mark to explain how things are difficult with Gary at school. Mark's opening line could be: "Why do some kids have it easy? I have to face Gary Nicholl every day."

You might want to ask some pairs to feedback some part of their conversation before you ask the class if they know what a Ripple Effect is as you build towards the end of the workshop.

7. THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Make sure the idea of a stone dropped into water is clear to them. Ask them to accept that the stone dropping into the water in this play is the

moment when Mark meets his death and lots of people's lives are changed. Could there have been a chance to stop the stone dropping and the ripple to stop rippling?

Have ready all the names of the characters from the play or those mentioned in the play (except for Mark's). You'll find them at appendix 2 at the end of this document ready to cut out to give to individual children. They are:

Gary

John, the doctor

Mum

Dad

Hal, Mark's older brother

Sprogger, Hal's friend

Marla, Hal's girlfriend

Granddad

Joe McAllister, Granddad's friend who fishes by the canal

Mr Carmichael, Mark's teacher

Rosey, the baby born after Mark's death, now a bit older. She is at least 6 years old.

And I've invented:

Another teacher at Mark's school

One of the cleaners at Mark's school

Mark's next door neighbour

The owner of the paper shop where Mark has a paper round

Please invent some more of your own perhaps including some from Section 1. Building A Setting.

As you distribute the names keep one back (the name of Rosey) ready for later. Ask the children not to look at who they are playing until everyone has got one. Leave a small number of children, a maximum of four, without roles and ask them just to watch for the moment.

Ask the children to look at the name they have been given and decide where to stand in The Ripple Effect to show just what Mark's death means to the character they are representing. As they enter one at a time ask them to say which character they are representing and to place the name on the floor in front of them.

Will they stand close to or further away from Mark? How will they stand? What direction will they be looking in? Will they stand closer or further away from each other? What can they use The Ripple Effect to mean?

Let the Ripple Effect build slowly, one character at a time until everyone is in. You could begin by modeling the idea yourself.

Ask the children still watching to join you in an interpretation of where people stand in The Ripple Effect.

I have included some more ideas for using the Ripple Effect on page 10.

8. WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

There should be one girl left watching this. You will need to have chosen her carefully for the final role, that of Rosey. Give her the piece of paper with the name on it and ask her to read it without showing it to the rest of the class. Check that she remembers who Rosey is.

Ask the class to believe that time has moved on to a point, a flash forward, where Rosey is old enough to understand what happened to her brother Mark and move them out of the playing area leaving only Nathan as Mark in the space.

Invite the girl playing Rosey to talk with her brother Mark. Offer her some suggestions and ask the class for suggestions if she needs them.

What would she like to say to him?

What are her hopes for the future?

Let this run for a little while. Mark will respond in a variety of ways that will be designed to support the girl playing Rosey.

Invite other children into the space to take on the role of Rosey.

9. FINALE

With the class create a "what could have been" picture of the family as a final freeze frame before asking Nathan to come out of role and have a chat with the class.

DRAMA CONVENTIONS SUGGESTED IN THESE NOTES (with thanks to Geoff Readman and Richard Perkin):

Visualisation – a way of creating a setting in the children’s minds’ eyes. The teacher uses questions to determine how the school hall is changed in terms of time / place / people/ events in order that a fictional action can take place. In The Worm Collector workshop we create the canal side.

Collective setting – the detail of a visualization is created by a group and their readiness to accept the collective picture is agreed through negotiation led by the teacher. In The Worm Collector workshop we reach a moment where we can agree where the canal bridge is marked in the school hall.

Soundscape – sounds are made by the children using voice, whisperings, clapping, singing without words to enhance an atmosphere and lead the group into building belief in the fiction of the drama. In The Worm Collector workshop we might make the sounds of an autumnal wind blowing across the canal.

In role – speaking, responding and behaving from the perspective of somebody other than yourself. In The Worm Collector workshop the children might be in role as a member of Mark’s family, someone he knows or one of his friends.

Hot seating – a character is interviewed or questioned by the group to develop understanding of the character’s action, needs and motivations. In The Worm Collector workshop we hot seat Mark Wallace.

An image of the moment – a representation of a moment of truth, an action central to the story line which can be reviewed, replayed and deconstructed to explore meaning. In The Worm Collector workshop we see the moment of Mark’s accident.

Conglomerate –several children collect together to represent one character to speak the character’s thoughts, to show the character’s feelings, to externalize the character’s reactions to a shift in the plot. In The Worm Collector workshop we make an image of Mark as he talks to himself.

Thought tracking – establishes how a character is feeling at a particular moment – it can provide a contrast between what the character says aloud and what they think inside. In The Worm Collector workshop we thought track Mark as he looks at different options for facing Gary.

Pair drama – two children in role play through the thoughts and actions in an agreed setting responding to the teacher’s briefing. In The Worm Collector workshop we use pair drama in the Mark and Marla sequence.

Forum theatre - a powerful way of examining alternative actions. Forum theatre works by showing an audience a line of action which, on the second or third showing can be changed. In this work a dilemma or problem is explored and observers can stop the action to suggest alternative ways forward. Your groups prepare their version and make sure that it shows the moment when a problem is there to be solved.

Freeze frame – In The Worm Collector workshop we use a freeze frame to ask what could have been.

MORE IDEAS

If you’d like to follow up with further drama work or if you’d like to change the planning above here are some other ideas:

MARKING MOMENTS FROM THE PERFORMANCE

This is a very quick focus activity that should last only a few minutes.

One way in to switching from the spectator role into the participant role is to ask the children to see moments from the performance in their minds’ eyes, to remember what was happening and then to remember how Mark was sitting, standing, gesturing at that moment – to remember the body language.

Get them to feedback verbally and then see if you can interpret their report back by making Mark’s shape yourself. Can you get it right? Can they help you? Can one of them come into the space and make a freeze frame of a moment in the performance? Can we guess the moment?

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Here are some ideas you could use next if you have enough time in the workshop, or if you work the Ripple Effect again on another day:

Where would the children still watching place the characters and why?

Walk around touching children in The Ripple Effect on the shoulders to give them an opportunity to say something to Mark, perhaps to express their feelings, their regrets, to ask him a question. Wait for Mark to reply. He might just remain silent.

Offer an opportunity for the children who have been observing to join in as Mark, creating a conglomerate which will show through body language how he responds to what the characters will say.

So that if Mum says "Why, Mark? Why?" The Marks might hold their head in their hands or crouch down or shrug their shoulders. You might need to model this.

Discuss and if necessary explain the body language convention to the children representing Mark and then let the piece run for a moment with characters speaking and the Marks reacting visually.

This next exercise demands close concentration and readiness on the part of the children. Ask the child playing Mum to approach Mark and show what she would do if she could. Repeat this with other characters.

Again you might need to model this by asking them to believe you are Mr Carmichael, Mark's teacher, and by doing something like putting your hand comfortingly on Mark's shoulder.

What might the child playing Gary do here?

ECHOES OF MARK'S LIFE

Ask the children to stand in two equal lines facing each other, like a corridor. A corridor that one child in role as Mark will walk down listening, first of all, to a thought which comes from inside his own head telling him to face up to Gary (these 'private view' thoughts will come from the children on one side of the corridor) alternating with a 'public view' thought which comes from the outside world and suggests some opposite reactions (these 'public view' thoughts will come from the children on the other side of the corridor).

WHICH ANSWER FITS?

Jodie Marshall, the writer of 'The Worm Collector', has written some examples – first lines are the ones you might have used in the workshop and second lines are what Jodie thought Mark might say back to himself. Cut them up, distribute them and sort them to fit together.

I could have got Hal to have a word with him

But then Gary would have told everyone I had to get my big brother to fight my battles for me.

I could have pretended like Gary never said anything

I tried but when he said stuff about my family that isn't true, and other people heard it, then if I hadn't denied it they'd have believed him.

I could have said cruel stuff back

I did. About his dad being in prison, but I wish I hadn't. Not cos it made him angrier (which it did) but cos I felt sorry for him.

I could have phoned Childline

How could they have helped? They weren't gonna phone Gary's house and ask him to stop, were they?

I could have told Mr Carmichael

If he knew me and Gary were fighting he'd definitely take the camera away cos he might think it'd get damaged.

I could have told Sprogger

Whenever someone disses him he always sticks up for himself. He hardly ever wins but no-one thinks he's a wimp.

I could have told Marla

I'd rather she'd have thought of me as more of a grown up now.

I could have fought him but not using a knife

If I'd gone to school with my face all battered in everyone would have known what happened.

FORUM THEATRE

Divide the class into groups and ask them to create alternative ways of dealing with Mark's problems. What about:

Finding a way of discussing it with Mum without worrying her.

Persuading Sprogger that the problem is real.

Talking with Marla without getting embarrassed.

Facing the moment of picking up the knife or letting it lie there.

Getting friends to stand with you.

Going back to school after staying away.

Meeting Gary in the corridor when no one else is around.

Forum theatre is a powerful way of examining alternative actions. Forum theatre works by showing an audience a line of action which, on the second or third showing can be changed. In this work a dilemma or problem is explored and observers can stop the action to suggest alternative ways forward. Your groups prepare their version and make sure that it shows the moment when a problem is there to be solved.

Appendix 1

Staying Safe ideas:

I could have told my mum

I could have got Hal to have a word with him

I could have pretended like Gary never said anything

I could have said cruel stuff back

I could have phoned Childline

I could have told Mr Carmichael

I could have told Sprogger

I could have told Marla

I could have fought him but not using a knife

I could have walked away

I could have asked Gary to leave me alone

I could have asked Grandad for his advice

I could have stayed away from school

I could have got my friends to help me

I could have asked my dad what to do

Appendix 2

Names for The Ripple Effect

Gary

John, the doctor

Mum

Dad

Hal, Mark's older brother

Srogger, Hal's friend

Marla, Hal's girlfriend

Grandad

Joe McAllister, Grandad's friend who fishes by the canal

Mr Carmichael, Mark's teacher

Rosey, the baby born after Mark's death, now a bit older. She is at least 6 years old.

Another teacher at Mark's school

One of the cleaners at Mark's school

Mark's next door neighbour

The owner of the paper shop where Mark has a paper round

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