

A MONSTER CALLS AT THE OLD VIC



TEACHING RESOURCES

JULY—AUGUST 2018

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All information is correct at the time of going to press, but may be subject to change

Teaching resources

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Further details of this production
oldvictheatre.com

CAST

HAMMED ANIMASHAUN

Anton/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *Barber Shop Chronicles*, *Amadeus*, *The Threepenny Opera* (National Theatre); *7 New Plays* (National Theatre Studio); *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Lyric Hammersmith/Latitude Festival); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Bugsy Malone*, *Secret Theatre* (Lyric Hammersmith); *Measure for Measure* (Young Vic); *Hate/La Haine* (Barbican); *Heroes*, *Married to the Game* (Theatre 503); *The Boy Who Fell Into a Book* (Soho); *Mogadishu* (Royal Exchange Manchester/UK tour). Television includes: *Breeders*, *Furious Andrew*, *Black Mirror*, *Pls Like!*, *Flowers*, *Wizard Sleeve*, *Deadbeats*, *The Mimic*. Film includes: *The Festival*, *The Ellington Kid*, *Twenty8k*, *Borrowed Time*, *Tooting Broadway*.

NANDI BHEBHE

Miss Godfrey/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *The Tin Drum* (Liverpool Everyman/UK tour); *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare's Globe); *946* (The Asylum/Shakespeare's Globe); *A Season in the Congo* (Young Vic); *Fela!* (National Theatre/Broadway); *5,6,7,8* (Royal Court); *Episodes of Blackness* (Vocab Dance Company); *946* (St Ann's Warehouse).

SELINA CADELL

Grandma/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *The Cherry Orchard* (The Old Vic/New York); *The Dresser*, *Noises Off* (West End); *Humble Boy* (Orange Tree); *People*, *The Habit of Art*, *Stanley* (National Theatre); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Albery Theatre); *Twelfth Night*, *Uncle Vanya* (Donmar). Television includes: *Love Nina*, *The Lady Vanishes*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Toast*, *Spooks*, *Lewis*, *Midsomer Murders*, *Bremner*, *Bird and Fortune*, *The Catherine Tate Show*, *Casanova*, *Foyle's War*, *Sword of Honour*, *Great Expectations*, *People Like Us*, *Doc Martin*. Film includes: *The Lady in the Van*, *Nativity*, *Hereafter*, *Snowcake*, *Festival*, *Match Point*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *The Madness of King George*.

MATT COSTAIN

Mr Marl/Ensemble

Theatre as a performer includes: *La Strada*, *Hetty Feather* (West End/UK tour); *Treasure Island* (West End); *Wendy and Peter*, *The Histories Cycle* (RSC); *War Horse*, *The Birds* (National Theatre); *Macbeth*, *Pericles*, *Man Falling Down* (Shakespeare's Globe); *The Tempest* (Regent's Park); *Romeo and Juliet* (Rose Theatre); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Dr. Faustus*, *The Master and Margarita* (Chichester Festival); Theatre as a Director and Aerial/Movement Director includes *Treasure Island* (West End); *La Strada*, (West End/UK tour); *Wendy and Peter*, *The Histories Cycle*, *Dido Queen of Carthage* (RSC); *The Birds* (National Theatre); *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Brazil*, *Cuckoo's Nest*, *Blade Runner*, *Bugsy Malone*, *Alien* (Secret Cinema).

GEORGIA FROST

Sully/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *Little Mermaid* (the egg, Theatre Royal Bath); Television includes: *Casualty*, *Magic of Musicals* (BBC). Georgia recently graduated from Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, where she won the Alan Bates Award 2017.

STUART GOODWIN

Monster/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *La Strada* (West End/UK Tour); *Cyrano* (The Company); *Sleeping Beauty* (Bristol Old Vic); *Tristan & Yseult* (USA tour); *The Wild Bride* (UK/USA tour); *Midnight's Pumpkin* (BAC); *A Conversation*, *Two Clouds Over Eden*, *Peer Gynt* (Royal Exchange Manchester); *Hinge of the World* (Yvonne Arnaud Theatre); *The Gentleman* (Jermyn Street); *A Russian in the Woods*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (RSC); *The Country Wife* (Sheffield Crucible); *The Three Musketeers* (Young Vic). Television includes: *Doctors*, *Strictly Confidential*, *The Bill*, *Prime Suspect*, *State of Play*, *State of Mind*, *The Cops*. Film includes: *Cashback*, *Rita*, *Sue and Bob Too*.

FELIX HAYES

Dad/Ensemble

Theatre: *Vice Versa*, *The Tempest*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *City Madam*, *Cardenio*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (RSC); *Peter Pan*, *Jane Eyre* (Bristol Old Vic/National Theatre); *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, *A Christmas Carol* (Tobacco Factory Theatres). Television includes: *Three Girls*, *A Gert Lush Christmas Special*, *Drunk Histories*, *Friday Night Dinner*, *Roisin Conaty*.

JONATHAN HOLBY

Swing

Theatre includes: *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Peter Pan* (Regent's Park); *Lord of the Flies* (Regent's Park/UK tour), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (ContextureTheatre); *Mirrorball* (Arcola); *The Renaissance Body* (RSC); *Brian Looks Like Alan Rickman* (BCT/York Theatre Royal); *Project Mayhem* (Secret Theatre Project, Hong Kong). Television includes: *Queens*. Film includes: *The Terrible Tale of Henrietta Tate*, *The Intent*, *Blood and Glory*, *Beatgirl*.

JOHN LEADER

Harry/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *Vivaldi's The Four Seasons: A Reimagining* (Shakespeare's Globe); *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Peter Pan*, *War Horse* (National Theatre); *Chigger Foot Boys* (Tara Arts); *Running Wild* (Regent's Park); *Romeo and Juliet* (Orange Tree); *Beasty Baby* (Theatre Rites/Polka); *Alice's Adventures Underground* (Les Enfants Terribles); *Clown* (Pohang Bada International Festival, South Korea). John trained at East 15 Acting School.

MARIANNE OLDHAM

Mum/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (The Old Vic); *An Inspector Calls* (West End); *The Argument* (Hampstead); *Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Chichester); *The Real Thing*, *The Changeling* (ETT); *Hamlet* (The Factory); *Design for Living* (Salisbury Playhouse); *The Girl in the Yellow Dress* (Market Theatre Johannesburg/Live Theatre Newcastle); *Troilus and Cressida* (Cheek by Jowl); *How Many Miles to Basra* (West Yorkshire Playhouse). Television includes: *A Very English Scandal*, *The Living and the Dead*, *Life in Squares*, *The Musketeers*, *Foyle's War*, *The Crimson Field*, *Doctors*, *The Impressionists*, *WPC56*. Film includes: *Finding your Feet*, *Absolutely Anything*, *Silent Girl*, *Titus*, *500 Miles North*.

MATTHEW TENNYSON

Conor

Theatre includes: *Flare Path* (West End); *Making Noise Quietly* — Evening Standard Theatre Award for Outstanding Newcomer (Donmar); *Salome*, (RSC); *Cleansed* (National Theatre); *The Seagull* (Regent's Park); *A Breakfast Of Eels* — Off West End Award for Best Male Performance (The Print Room); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Beautiful Thing* — Manchester Theatre Award for Best Newcomer (Royal Exchange Manchester). Television includes: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Grantchester*, *Humans*, *Babylon*, *Father Brown*, *The Hollow Crown*. Film includes: *Making Noise Quietly*.

WITNEY WHITE

Lily/Ensemble

Theatre includes: *Loserville* (West Yorkshire Playhouse/West End); *Wonder.Land* (National Theatre); *Dusty* (Charing Cross Theatre); *Room* (Stratford East/Dundee Rep/Abbey Theatre). Television includes: *Doctors*, *Clean Break*.

TESSA WOOD

Understudy Grandma

Theatre includes: *The Rocky Horror Show* (West End/German tour); *The Provoked Wife*, *Five Kinds of Silence* (Stepping Out Theatre); *Our Town* (Almeida); *The Barrier* (Park Theatre); *Orpheus & Euridyce*, *Memories of Loss* (Riverside Studios). Television includes: *First Kill*, *Last Kill*, *Accidental Heroes* and *Triangle*. Film includes: *The Last House on Cemetery Lane*, *Skin*, *Swoosh!*, *Somebody to Love Me*, *Skin* — Terror Awards International for Best Supporting Actress.

MUSICIANS

BENJI BOWER

Composer/Musician

Theatre includes: *La Strada*, *Hetty Feather* (West End/Kenny Wax); *Peter Pan*, *Jane Eyre* (Bristol Old Vic/National Theatre); *The Lion, The Witch & the Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, *Treasure Island*, *Papa Please Get The Moon For Me*, *Aesop's Fables* (Bristol Old Vic); *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (UK/World tour); *Outpost*, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, *Cinderella*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, *Ugly Duckling* (Tobacco Factory Theatres); *Orpheus and The Furies*, *Table of Delights* (Damfino Theatre); Television includes: *Panorama*, *Horizon*, *Alaska*, *Countryfile*, *Autumwatch*.

WILL BOWER

Musician

Theatre includes: *Jane Eyre*, *Peter Pan* (National Theatre/Bristol Old Vic); *The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, *Table of Delights* (Bristol Old Vic); *Cinderella: A Fairytale*, *One Hundred and One Dalmations* (Tobacco Factory Theatres); *Outpost* (Green Ginger). Television includes: *Frozen Planet*, *Cult of a Suicide Bomber*; *Faster Harder Stronger*. Will also is co-founder of UNFORSCENE and Bower Brothers with worldwide releases on Tru Thoughts Records and Kudos Records. Credits include: *Pacific Heights*, *New World Disorder*, *Fingers and Thumbs* and *Return of the Wob*.

CREATIVE TEAM

SIOBHAN DOWD

Conception

Siobhan Dowd was born in 1960 to Irish parents. Brought up in London, she started her career working in New York City for International PEN, where she led the Rushdie Defence Committee and was named one of the 'top 100 Irish-Americans'. On her return to the UK, Siobhan co-founded English PEN's readers and writers program and went on to serve as Deputy Commissioner for Children's Rights in Oxfordshire. Siobhan only started to write herself when she was invited to contribute a story to an anthology for children about racism. She went on to write four award-winning novels, celebrating the publication of *A Swift Pure Cry* and *The London Eye Mystery* but *Bog Child* and *Solace of the Road* were published posthumously. Waterstones had only just named her one of the top '25 Authors of the Future'. She died in April 2007 aged just 47. In her final days Siobhan set up a Trust to use the proceeds of her work to fund reading projects for children.

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PATRICK NESS

Author

Patrick Ness is the bestselling and multi award-winning author of ten books for adults, young adults and children. *A Monster Calls* was inspired by an idea by the late Siobhan Dowd and is published in forty-three languages. Patrick also wrote the feature film adaptation. He has won the Carnegie Medal twice, the Costa Children's Book Award, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Red House Book Award, and *A Monster Calls* is the only novel to have ever won both the Carnegie Medal and the Kate Greenaway Medal for illustration. He created and wrote the eight-part BBC *Doctor Who* spin-off *Class*.

SALLY COOKSON

Director

Theatre includes: *La Strada*, *Hetty Feather* (West End/Kenny Wax); *Jane Eyre*, *Peter Pan* (Bristol Old Vic/National Theatre); *Sleeping Beauty*, *Treasure Island*, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, *Papa Please Get the Moon for Me*, *Clown*, *Strange Case*, *Pericles*, *Pains of Youth*, *The Visit* (Bristol Old Vic); *The Lion*, *The Witch and the Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Strictly Balti*, *The Ugly Duckling*, *Boing!*, *How Cold My Toes*, *Shadowplay*, *Cloudland*, *Lenny and Bob the Man on the Moon* (Travelling Light); *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (UK tour); *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, *Cinderella: A Fairytale* (Tobacco Factory Theatres); *Romeo and Juliet* (Rose Theatre, Kingston); *Stick Man and Tiddler* (Scamp Theatre).

ADAM PECK

Writer in the Room

Theatre includes: *The Jungle*, *Medusa*, *Minotaur*, *Only*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Hey Diddle Diddle*, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (Bristol Old Vic); *Bonnie & Clyde*, *140 Million Miles*, *Cinderella: A Fairytale*, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (Tobacco Factory Theatres); *Septimus Bean & His Amazing Machine*, *Minotaur* (Unicorn); *My First Ballet* series (English National Ballet); *The Lion*, *The Witch and the Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Fagin's Twist* (Avant Garde Dance/The Place); *Father Christmas* (Lyric Hammersmith); *Varmints* (Sadler's Well/East London Dance).

MICHAEL VALE

Set Designer

Theatre includes: *Bent* (National Theatre); *Jane Eyre*, *Peter Pan* (National Theatre/Bristol Old Vic); *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Canterbury Tales* (RSC); *Rigoletto*, *Faeries* (Royal Opera House); *Alcina and Tosca* (ENO); *La Boheme*, *Carmen* (Glyndebourne); *Tosca*, *Turn Of The Screw*, *Jepthe*, *Tolomeo*, *Ariodante*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *Jenufa* (English Touring Opera); *Oedipussy* (Spymonkey); *My Perfect Mind*, *Napoleon Disrobed*, *Heads Will Roll*, *Never Try This At Home* (Told By An Idiot); *Cymbeline*, *Rapunzel*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Midnight's Pumpkin*, *Dead Dog In A Suitcase* (Kneehigh); *Idomeneo* (De Vlaames Opera, Antwerp); *Fidelio* (New Zealand International Festival of the Arts); *The Merchant of Venice* (Galaxy Theatre, Tokyo).

KATIE SYKES

Costume Designer

Theatre as Set and Costume Designer includes: *Hetty Feather* (West End); *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Romeo and Juliet* (Rose Theatre Kingston); *Cinderella: A Fairytale*, *101 Dalmatians* (Tobacco Factory); *Antigone*, *World Cup 1966* (Bristol Old Vic); *La Strada* (Belgrade Coventry); *Up Down Man* (Salisbury Playhouse); *The Wind in the Willows* (Mercury Colchester); *Boing!* (Sadler's Wells/Unicorn); *Into The West* (New Victory, New York); *Cloudland*, *How Cold My Toes*, *Mother Savage* (UK tour). Theatre as costume designer includes: *Jane Eyre*, *Peter Pan* (National Theatre); *Treasure Island*, *Sleeping Beauty* (Bristol Old Vic).

AIDEEN MALONE

Lighting

Theatre includes: *La Strada*, *Hetty Feather*, *Coyote on A Fence* (West End); *Jane Eyre* (National Theatre/Bristol Old Vic); *Peter Pan* (National Theatre); *Napoleon Disrobed* (Arcola), *Raisin in the Sun* (UK tour); *Brighton Rock* (York Theatre Royal); *Delirium* (Barbican); *Dogs Barking* (Bush); *Bone Room* (Young Vic); *The Suppliants* (Gate); *Frankenstein* (Salisbury Playhouse); *Lighten Up* (Unicorn); *Greed* (Battersea Arts Centre); *Turn of the Screw* (Hackney Empire); *Dialogues de Carmelites* (Royal College Of Music); *On Thee We Fed* (ENO Works); *Imbalance*, *Kaash*, *Quimeras* (Sadler's Wells); *Tete*, *Raft*, *Unkindest Cut* (UK tour).

MIKE BEER

Sound

Theatre includes: *La Strada* (West End/UK tour); *Tomb Raider Live*, *Annabelle 2* (Premier Entertainment — site specific); *Eye of the Storm* (UK tour); *A Story of Tom Jones — The Musical* (UK tour); *City of the Unexpected*, *Candy Lion*, *Illiad*, *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning*, *Storm Cycle* (National Theatre Wales); *Jane Eyre* (National Theatre/Bristol Old Vic); *Peter Pan*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Treasure Island* (Bristol Old Vic); *Sweeney Todd* (Welsh National Opera); *100: The Day our World Changed* (Wild Works).

DICK STRAKER

Projection

Theatre includes: *Richard II* (The Old Vic); *Don Juan in Soho* (West End); *The Ring Cycle* (Royal Opera House); *Greek* (Scottish Opera); *Cymbeline*, *Love's Sacrifice* (RSC); *Andrea Chenier* (Opera North); *Carmen* (Grange Festival); *Before I Leave* (National Theatre of Wales); *The Woman in White* (Broadway); *Notorious* (Goteborg Operan).

JESSICA RONANE CDG

Casting

Theatre includes: *Mood Music*, *Fanny & Alexander*, *The Divide*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Girl from the North Country*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, *King Lear*, *The Caretaker*, *The Master Builder*, Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Future Conditional* (The Old Vic); *Running Wild* (Regent's Park). Theatre (children's casting): *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Sound of Music* (Regent's Park); *School of Rock*, *The Audience*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Made in Dagenham*, *Billy Elliot the Musical* (West End); *Matilda the Musical* (RSC/West End); *Bugsy Malone* (Lyric Hammersmith); *Caroline or Change* (National Theatre). Film includes: *The Kid Who Would Be King*.

DAN CANHAM

Movement

Theatre as a movement director includes: *Peter Pan* (National Theatre); *Jane Eyre* (Bristol Old Vic/National Theatre); *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Romeo and Juliet* (Rose Theatre, Kingston); *One Hundred & One Dalmatians* (Tobacco Factory Theatres); *Shooting with Light*, *Voyager* (Idle Motion); *Once Upon a Time* (Aga Blonksa); Theatre as a director: *SESSION*, *Of Riders and Running Horses*, *30 Cecil Street*, *Ours Was the Fen Country* (Still House — International tour). Theatre as a performer: *A Matter of Life and Death* (National Theatre); *To Be Straight with You* (DV8); *The Bacchae*, *Tristan and Yseult*, *Brief Encounter* (Kneehigh); *Rite of Spring* (Fabulous Beast/ENO); *Faust* (Punchdrunk).

LAURA CUBITT

Puppetry

Theatre includes as Puppetry Director: *Common* (National Theatre); *Dinosaur World* (UK tour); *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (National Theatre/West End — Puppetry Consultant); *Don Quixote* (RSC — Puppetry Co-Director); *Running Wild* (Chichester — Associate Puppetry Director); *Goodnight Mister Tom* (West End — Associate Puppetry Director). As Movement Director: *War Horse* (National Theatre/Berlin — Associate Movement Director); *Oppenheimer* (RSC/West End — Movement re-staged); 2012 London Olympics Opening Ceremony (Assistant Movement Director). As a performer: Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (The Old Vic); *Peter Pan*, *Elephantman*, *Women Beware Women*, *War Horse* (National Theatre); *Oppenheimer*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (RSC); *Running Wild* (Regent's Park/UK tour).

MATT COSTAIN

Aerial

See the Company pages for full biog.

RACHEL BOWN-WILLIAMS AND RUTH COOPER-BROWN OF RC-ANNIE LTD

Fights

Theatre includes: *Woyzeck* (The Old Vic); *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Salome*, *Snow in Midsummer*, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, *Girl Fights* (RSC); *The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *The Secret Theatre*, *Boudica*, *Lions and Tigers*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *The White Devil*, *Comus and Imogen* (Shakespeare's Globe); *The Little Matchgirl* (Bristol Old Vic/Shakespeare's Globe); *Common*, *Ugly Lies the Bone*, *Peter Pan*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *The James Plays*, *Cleansed* (National Theatre).

CHARLIE HUGHES-D'AETH

Voice Coach

Theatre includes: *The Divide*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Girl From the North Country*, *Woyzeck*, *'Art'*, *Groundhog Day*, *The Caretaker*, *The Master Builder*, *Future Conditional* (The Old Vic); *Matilda the Musical* (West End/Broadway/Australia); *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (West End); *The Gods Weep* (RSC/Hampstead); *The Tempest*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (RSC); *Adrian Mole the Musical* (Leicester Curve); *Jerusalem* (Northcott, Exeter).

MIRANDA CROMWELL

Associate Director

Theatre as Director: *Half Breed* (Soho/Indian tour); *The Rest of Your Life* (Bush); *Magic Elves* (Bristol Old Vic); *Pigeon English* (Bristol Old Vic/Edinburgh Fringe); *Death and Treason* (Bristol Old Vic/tour); *Children of Killers* (NT Connections/National Theatre). Theatre as Assistant Director: *Far Away*, *Swallows and Amazons* (Bristol Old Vic); *An Enemy of the People and Strife* (Chichester); *hang* (Royal Court). Theatre as Associate Director: *Coram Boy* (Bristol Old Vic); *Angels in America* (National Theatre/Broadway). (Chichester); *hang* (Royal Court). Theatre as Associate Director: *Coram Boy* (Bristol Old Vic); *Angels in America* (National Theatre/Broadway).



The A Monster Calls company

CHARACTERS

CONOR O'MALLEY

A thirteen year old boy who lives with his mother.

MUM

Conor's mother, who is divorced. She has been diagnosed with cancer and is receiving chemotherapy and other hospital treatment.

GRANDMA

Conor's maternal grandmother.

MONSTER/YEW TREE

The yew tree, which is centuries old and visible through Conor's window. The Monster emerges from the tree.

HARRY, ANTON & SALLY

Three students who bully Conor at school.

LILY

Conor's school friend who steps in when Harry and his friends threaten Conor.

DAD

Conor's dad, who has moved to America and remarried. He has another child with his new wife.

MISS GODFREY

A teacher at Conor's school.



The A Monster Calls company

SYNOPSIS

Thirteen year old Conor wakes from a nightmare. It is 12.07am. It is the same nightmare that he has had before and he finds it difficult to accept the images that he keeps seeing. In the morning Conor notices that his mum hasn't got out of bed yet and so gets himself ready for school and completes other chores. Mum arrives in the kitchen and apologises for not being able to do more: her latest round of chemotherapy has made her extremely weak and unwell. She explains that Grandma will arrive the following day to help, despite Conor's insistence that they are coping fine without her.

At school, Conor encounters Harry, Anton and Sully who bully him. Harry and Anton are particularly cruel when they mention his mum and her hair loss. Miss Godfrey arrives just in time to see Conor's friend Lily push Anton to the floor. However, when Miss Godfrey asks Conor if Lily's version of events is true, Conor denies it. He acts as if he doesn't care when Lily confronts him after school.

Conor wakes from another nightmare, again at 12.07am. This time the Monster speaks to him from outside the window and emerges from the yew tree. Conor insists that he is not afraid of him and the Monster tells him:

'I do not often come walking, boy. Only for matters of life and death. I expect to be listened to'

The Monster pledges to tell Conor three stories, after which Conor will tell his own story: his truth, which the Monster is convinced Conor is most afraid of.

Grandma arrives and begins to talk about an independent school near her house that she thinks would be suitable for Conor, who continues to deny any need to even consider it. It is clear to Grandma that Mum hasn't been completely honest about the seriousness of her illness, or that Conor is refusing to face the reality of possibly losing his mum.

The Monster arrives and tells his first story. It involves a King, who loses all but one of his family through war. His grandson is his only living relative until the King marries a strange woman in order to heal his grief. A year before the Prince can legally take the throne, the King dies and so the crown goes to the Queen. Rumours spread that she has played magic tricks in order to gain power. The Prince falls in love with a humble farmer's daughter and they run away. Sleeping under a large yew tree, the Prince wakes to find the daughter dead. The Queen is blamed for the death of the daughter. The Prince asks for help from the villagers and the Green Man. The Prince manages to overpower the Queen who is condemned to burn at the stake. At the last minute the yew tree plucks the woman from the fire and takes her to a village by the sea where she cannot be found.

Conor is shocked to hear that the Monster has saved the woman, who has been accused of killing the daughter. However, the Monster reminds him,

**‘I never said she killed the farmer’s daughter.
I only said that the Prince said it was so’**

The Monster reminds Conor that people sometimes need to lie, including to themselves. In some stories, and in life, there are characters who aren’t totally bad or totally good. Most people are somewhere in between.

At school Lily tells Conor that she forgives him for not telling Miss Godfrey the truth about what happened in the playground, making allowances for what he’s going through. Conor feels increasingly isolated and that everyone now treats him differently following his mum’s diagnosis. Harry and the boys approach to taunt Conor but he refuses to react even when Harry raises his fist.

It becomes clear that Mum’s treatment is not working as it should and so Conor must go and stay with Grandma whilst his mum is back in hospital. His Dad flies in from America, where he lives with his new wife and child. As Conor hugs his mother she notices the yew tree outside.

Grandma’s house is very neat and tidy with valuable antique furniture and Conor does not feel at home there. When Conor forces the hands of an antique clock to 12.07, the Monster appears once more.

Story Two involves an Apothecary (the old name for a chemist or someone who uses herbs and plants to heal illness) during the Industrial Revolution. The Apothecary becomes increasingly bitter that the new sprawling towns and cities are making it difficult to find the plants that he needs. He asks the Parson if he can cut down the yew tree that grows in his garden. The Parson refuses and preaches against the apothecary’s approach to healing. Suddenly, the Parson’s two daughters become very ill and the bark of the yew tree could potentially save them. The Parson appeals to the Apothecary who refuses and the daughters die. The Monster tears down the parsonage and Conor helps, but he is actually destroying Grandma’s precious living room. When Grandma arrives home from the hospital she is speechless with emotion.

Dad tells Conor that he will not be punished, as there is no point: he is dealing with more than enough. Conor goes to see Mum in hospital. She has taken a turn for the worst. She is given a new drug, made from the bark of yew trees, that she hopes will make a difference but Dad tells Conor that this is the time when he needs to be particularly brave. Dad then returns to America because his daughter is ill, and Conor is left once again feeling lonely and isolated.

At school, Harry shakes Conor’s hand and tells him that he no longer sees him proceeding to ignore him completely. No longer able to cope with feeling invisible, Conor beats up Harry, with the help of the Monster, and Harry ends up in hospital. Miss Godfrey tells Conor that in his circumstances, the usual punishment of expulsion would be pointless, he is being punished enough already. Lily writes Conor a note, which says, ‘I see you’.

Conor is collected from school by Grandma, who explains that Mum’s treatment is no longer working. Later that night the Monster tells Conor

‘I did not come to heal her. I came to heal you’

Conor’s nightmare returns — he dreams that he is trying to prevent his mum falling off a cliff but she keeps slipping away from him. Conor admits that he just wants it all to be over but feels guilty for feeling that way. The Monster explains that the human mind is complicated and contradictory, and that Conor’s wish is simply to end the suffering and pain.

Collected by Grandma, Conor arrives at the hospital to see his mum and say goodbye, shortly before 12.07am.

THEMES

FAMILY

Conor lives with his mum and is very loyal to her. He does not agree that sometimes they need help from Grandma, particularly as he does many of the chores himself, even though he is only thirteen.

Grandma arrives to help both Mum and Conor, despite Conor's resistance and although they are very different to each other, they both realise that they are going to have to rely on each other after Conor's mum loses her battle with cancer.

Conor's dad now lives in America and has a new wife and baby. Conor finds it difficult to understand why he cannot go and live with his dad in America rather than live with Grandma. He finds it difficult to understand why Dad's American family seems to take priority over him and his mum, and feels isolated and lonely.

GRIEF

Conor experiences a range of emotions as a result of what is happening. He finds it difficult to admit that he is frightened and the Monster and his stories enable him to process the grief that he is feeling. This includes the emotions of anger, loneliness, fear, resentment, denial, guilt and sadness which are all common and normal responses to losing a loved one.

The grief felt by Grandma is not explored as much in the story, but it is clear that she is also trying to negotiate the difficult emotions surrounding her daughter's death. Whilst Conor might deny what is really happening, Grandma tries to be more practical, having Conor to stay at her house, visiting Mum in hospital and starting to make arrangements for a new school for Conor when the time comes.

Dad is also experiencing a sense of grief, but his return to America at a crucial time suggests that he is finding it too difficult and needs to remove himself from the situation.

HIDDEN EMOTIONS

Many of Conor's emotions are only shown through his nightmare which he has repeatedly after his mother is diagnosed with cancer. Only towards the end of his mother's life can he admit that in some ways, he just wants it all to be over so that he is no longer so frightened of what the future has in store.

The Monster's stories are carefully chosen by him to teach Conor that emotions are difficult, and life can be cruel and complicated. The stories also demonstrate that we all have good and bad inside ourselves and by sharing our nightmares with other people, we can understand and deal with them. Many of the characters in the Monster's stories are adults and so Conor learns that life can be complicated regardless of age.

TRUTH

Conor's mum has tried to protect Conor from the reality of what is happening. The day before she tells him about the diagnosis, she allows him a day off school to create happy, fun memories. But later she is perhaps not so truthful about what is going to happen, and both Dad and Grandma become concerned that Conor does not completely understand that at some point, he will need to go and live with Grandma.

PEOPLE ARE COMPLICATED

In the stories that the Monster tells, he often includes characters who are not completely 'good' or totally 'bad'. The Prince does not tell the whole truth about what happened to the farmer's daughter, and the Apothecary and the Parson cannot or do not save the Parson's daughters. Most people are somewhere in between good and bad.

BEREAVEMENT

Conor's mum is terminally ill and he will have to say goodbye to her. He is only 13 and the adults around him are aware that he is finding the process very difficult — perhaps even more difficult than he himself realises. It is even harder for Conor because he is an only child and his mum is a single parent.

Conor also finds it increasingly frustrating that he feels invisible and isolated. Since other people have found out about his mum's diagnosis, they have begun to treat him differently, including being extremely unkind. Conor experiences some very difficult emotions about the way in which people now view him because of what is happening to his mum.

FRIENDSHIP

When Harry and his friends bully Conor, they are particularly cruel about his mum and her hair loss (which has been caused by the chemotherapy treatment she has undergone). Lily steps in and pushes Anton to the ground. Although Conor denies the story that Lily tells Miss Godfrey, Lily later forgives him because she realises that he is having a very difficult time. She has found it difficult to understand why Conor didn't tell the teacher the truth about the bullying but after speaking to her own mum, she realises that he is experiencing some very difficult emotions.



Matthew Tennyson; John Leader

REHEARSAL DIARY

BY MIRANDA CROMWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

WEEKS ONE AND TWO

We started the first day with a full meet and greet of all of the many people making the show happen. **Mathew Warchus** kicked off the proceedings, welcoming everyone and introducing The Old Vic and Bristol Old Vic collaboration.

Sally spoke of the importance of this partnership and said that, 'In 1946 the Theatre Royal was threatened with closure, so the present company of the Bristol Old Vic was created as an offshoot to The Old Vic in London.'

Patrick Ness, the writer of the novel explained that he had inherited the original idea of the book from **Siobhan Dowd** who was planning to write this story before she passed away.

Michael Vale talked through his ideas for the design. **Katie Sykes** also talked about ideas for the costumes. The design is very bold and exciting with lots of space to encourage the audience's imagination.

Sally spoke on how integral the ensemble will be in telling this story. Much of the sound, music and physical action will be devised by the company. There will also be multiple character changes and ensemble storytelling throughout.

Sally asked the company and creative team to talk about our first responses to reading the book. There were many people who described a visceral reaction to the story. We realised that many people have personal experience of the events described in the book.

In the first few days we were exploring the language of the storytelling. We used music, movement, projection, dialogue and sound design to tell this story. The ensemble are the storytellers and the actors will multirole throughout. They will help to create the Monster and interpret Conor's memories, thoughts and nightmares, as well as playing all the other characters in the play.



Patrick Ness, Sally Cookson

We are using a story structure that Sally and Adam have been working on. They developed this through Research and Development rehearsals with actors last year. It is a distilled version of those discoveries, with text taken from the book and ideas for ensemble movement and music within it.

Sally is clear to reiterate that this is not a script and at the start of the second week we start to play around with the scenes and improvising around the text. Sally asks the characters to speak their thoughts aloud before they say the text. This helps to flesh out the characters intentions and what the subtext is.

We create music and sound with **Benji Bower** starting with an exploration of the nightmare in an abstracted way using fragments of text and sound. We even play with learning text spoken backwards.

Dan Canham works with the ensemble to build dynamic movement alongside the sound world of the nightmare. This continues to develop over the next two weeks discovering ways to move quickly between locations, characters and intentions.

We work through sections of the play, exploring what it's like for Conor at home with his mother, his school, his friendship with Lily and the relationship with his Dad and Grandma.

Towards the end of the second week we start tackling the big technical questions, to work out what we need from the set, lights and sound. We interrogate relationships between the characters. Sally sets up improvisations that fill in memories. We use research and discussion to flesh out the timeline of the Mother's illness.

By the end of the second week we are through the first third of the play, creating a rough sketch and stitching the scenes together. It is really exciting to see the world of the play taking shape.



The *A Monster Calls* company

WEEKS THREE AND FOUR

The last two weeks have flown by; we have been working hard on the end of the first act of the play and beginning to tackle the second act.

We had to break up the second tale the Monster tells Conor into many layers, as we are using lots of different modes of storytelling to communicate this tale.

We began with a basic rhythm for the choreography. Dan wanted to establish an industrial feel for the second tale. The ensemble created choreography in pairs to a set rhythm and then we added the text. Whilst Benji embellishes the music adding more instruments and detail we worked on short sections of this tale needing to lay each element in separately as there are many challenges. The ensemble are using lots of the space and manipulating the chairs and props. The storytelling needs to be crystal clear and the music needs to be worked into the text. There are many dramaturgical questions like, 'what do we want the audience to feel/know at each moment?'

Sally acknowledges that we have spent a lot of time on this scene and it still feels as though we have lots of challenges to resolve. She describes it as a perfect example of the devising process, the key is to keep going and not to get too disheartened. She adds, 'we have to interrogate it all the way through.'

After a few days on this section and a restructuring of the dialogue and tone of the music, we crack it! It's very satisfying to see all the elements working together to support the story.

We spend a lot of time this week working on the scenes between Conor and Mum, Conor and Grandma and Conor and Dad. We start to build the picture of what these relationships are like for Conor and what the subtext is under the scenes. Then we add the ensemble into the scenes adding focus to the key moments within the scene.

Sally often starts this work by saying things like, 'Let's fill in some memories.' Improvisations are set up to help the actors build up experiences that inform the scenes. We then read and discuss the text, often making small changes to the script directly influenced by those improvisations. Sometimes Adam goes away and works on a new draft of the scene when big changes to the dialogue need to happen. We often refer to the novel, we find moments that we can use to further enhance bits of the storytelling adding more detail.

When a scene is not feeling quite right Sally asks the actors to keep the dialogue loose enabling them to find the right phrases and particular words whilst keeping the structure of the scene intact.

This way of working is very freeing and you can see the actors building the characters and the relationships between each other. It keeps everyone investigating the story and searching for the best way to communicate the story. Sally reminds everyone 'we have to make the story clear.'

Once we get to the end of the first act we have our first run-through. It's really exciting and revealing, showing us the places where the production is starting to sing and where it needs reworking. The following day, after much discussion between Sally and Adam, we work through their notes. It's hard work but at the end of the day the storytelling feels much clearer and we head into the sunshine.

WEEKS FIVE AND SIX

We have just finished our final two weeks in the rehearsal room in London and the mood within the company is very exciting. I am currently sat on a train heading to Bristol, as is the rest of the company, the set, props and paperwork.

We welcomed a couple of new members to our company, **Tessa Wood** joined us as an understudy for Grandma and **Tomi Hargreaves** will be operating the sound. We launched straight into Act Two and having now established a shared language for devising we were making really good progress. Everyone throws in ideas and discusses the plot points as Sally listens tests and selects the ideas that work best.

However, we hit a stumbling block as we get to a particularly tricky scene: In *no tale*, the monster visits Conor again, without a story for him this time. We tried and tested several ideas; we discussed what was important to see in this scene, how it affects Conor and propels the next bit of action. This is where all of Sally's devising experience really shows. She stays patient and brave as we wrestle the ideas down and find in each of them something useful. The end result is a real collaboration with elements of lots of ideas used to maximum effect. The process takes time, patience and a critical eye; the end result is really satisfying.

These last two weeks we really got into the guts of the play, as the emotional and psychological elements of the story get really detailed and require deconstruction. The rehearsal room was quite literally heating up; we were experiencing a bit of a heat wave and with many days drifting into evening work everyone was struggling to keep the focus.

This is where it is essential that the deputy stage manager **Adam Cox** and myself are keeping track of the changes. Scenes are being created and changed very quickly and it may be days before we repeat what we did. All the blocking, acting notes, journey of props and technical requirements need to be carefully documented ahead of us moving into the theatre.

As we near the end of the rehearsal period we are tantalisingly close to finishing but now that the play has been devised it needs rehearsing. We can now see that the structure works and the devised material is on the right track but it must be refined to bring the performance quality up. So we really spend time on Act One getting it to a place where it feels confident and dynamic. This leaves us heading to Bristol with work still to do on Act Two.

The final two days are spent running through what we have and sharing it with the wider company: **Tom Morris**, Artistic Director of the Bristol Old Vic, **Mathew Warchus**, Artistic director of The Old Vic, **Kate Varah** Executive Director of The Old Vic, **Patrick Ness** the writer of the book *A Monster Calls* and the wider creative team. It is an exposing and exhilarating feeling. The company are nervous and tensions are high, before we start the run through Sally suggests that we sing together. We stand in a circle and sing rounds of a song we've been using in a vocal warm up. I can feel the tension dissipating as wordlessly the company are reconnecting and sharing eye contact, smiling and raising their voices. This togetherness is a great way to start the story.

By the end of the run on Saturday there is not a dry eye in the house; this story is one that affects so many of us, myself included. Working through the material has been painful at times but also incredibly healing. Being able to have the space within the working environment to be open and honest has been a rare gift. We all leave feeling very proud to have got this far and ready to face the next hurdle.

In Bristol we need to add the final elements; sound design, lights and projection. We also need to finish the play, we still aren't sure exactly how it should end. But we have trust in the process and we can't wait to put the final piece of the puzzle together with you, our audience. We look forward to seeing you there.

AN INTERVIEW

WITH MIRANDA CROMWELL, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

How have you created a balance between planning before the rehearsal period began, and the devising process in the rehearsal room?

It's important to note that the 'script' that was created before the rehearsal process started is not a script in traditional form. The novel has been consolidated into a structure by Adam Peck (the Writer in the Room) and is the starting point for devising in the rehearsal room.

There was a period of Research and Development (R&D) early in 2017 in which a group of actors worked with Sally (Cookson), Adam and Dan (Movement Director) in which they went about solving some of the bigger questions that needed solving, such as how to represent the Monster. The production uses a very minimal set so we also needed to make sure that our choices provoke the audience's imagination.

What advice do you have for GCSE and A Level students who have to devise from a stimulus?

It's important for you to decide *how* you want to tell the story, and what language is best, whether it's physical theatre, music, storytelling etc. In *A Monster Calls*, it was important to work out how to communicate the exposition around the dialogue and so the design and music are integral parts of that, as well as how and when we use the ensemble to move the story forward.

You also have to plan backwards when you're planning the schedule for your devising work: you have to get to the end point so be realistic about how long that will take. Usually one day of rehearsal will give you about one minute of performance, and with music and movement it can take longer but those two elements can help tremendously in communicating the narrative to the audience.

What have been the biggest challenges so far with this particular story?

There are several that come to mind. One is the use of ensemble, and how they are used. We also have to create several different locations without furniture on stage because of the minimal set design. The creation of the Monster is a challenge, particularly as he appears many times, although he's not as scary as Conor's nightmares. Hopefully you'll enjoy how we've created the yew tree, too.

What do you want the audience to take away from seeing this show?

One of the important messages is that, regardless of age, life can be very complicated. Ultimately we all have good and bad in ourselves but it's perhaps not helpful to judge experiences as good or bad: instead we need to understand that sharing our own nightmares and monsters is important.

AN INTERVIEW

WITH DAN CANHAM, MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

We caught up with Dan during the rehearsal process to discuss how movement has been integral to this production of *A Monster Calls*.

What's the role of a Movement Director?

This is a title which can be very difficult to define. On some shows it can be helping actors move and use their bodies as part of their characterisation. On other productions it can be like this one in that I've identified the visual images and metaphors that lend themselves to telling this particular story. Working with Sally, it's a democratic process in which we share our expertise. Sally very much invests in the visual storytelling and the action being the primary focus and that then informs my work.

Part of my role is knowing when to contribute to discussion, when it's important just to listen, and when to chip in with ideas that can solve problems or answer questions. 'Movement Director' is a porous term and it can mean so many things.

With that in mind, what has been your approach on this production?

A key element of this show is the ensemble, using them to embellish the story and emphasise particular moments. They are absolutely integral to the telling of this story and so our work has been extremely detailed. It forms a sort of punctuation for the audience. The set pieces of movement have a very close relationship to Benji's score so there are very rhythmic moments which provide that punctuation.

Can you tell us a little about the R&D process?

This happened last year, and its aim was to get a handle on the world of the story that we are telling. We needed to discover a method of storytelling that wouldn't rely on set — we're relying on the use of the actors' bodies for much of this production. During the R&D process Sally mixed discussion with practical exploration, asking questions about what the story is saying to its audience, and finding ways in to that very quickly.

The benefit of having a Research & Development period is to identify three or four of the bigger challenges and then be able to go into the rehearsals prepared with ideas or solutions. Devising is a messy process, but you get there in the end. It's important to remember that.

Is there a particular exercise you recommend for the beginning of the rehearsal process?

There's a great exercise which is very simple. The company walks around the space, paying close attention to patterns that are created and their relationship with others. Walking at the same rhythm, the person leading the exercise then counts '1,2,3,4' and the whole company except one person should stop. There's no pre-planning, no one knows who it will be and so it very much relies on everyone homing in on the dynamic of the room. I liken it to getting your Bluetooth switched on and responding to the non-verbal cues in the room.

A Monster Calls is an ambitious and demanding text to mount on stage. What has been the biggest challenge?

I'd say it was the second tale that the Monster tells. The tales are obtuse; they have no clear lines that you'd usually analyse. They don't follow the usual clear idea of who the protagonist is, or the focus of the tale, and so we had to get it in the space and work on it. During that process, large chunks of text will appear or disappear, lots of things will get thrown in. But the process of creating the movement has to be quite flexible — you often can't begin to put the finer detail into it until everything else is in place.

For those wishing to create their own movement for a piece of theatre, what pointers can you give?

You absolutely must focus on doing rather than talking. Spatial relationships between characters are a great starting point. Exercises that experiment with how you balance the space can help you identify what those relationships can be within the space.

Siti Dance Company utilise the Six Viewpoints, as adapted and explained by Anne Bogart — looking at the use of gesture, and also being aware of the architecture in the room are just two ways to begin the work of creating movement.¹ This idea of viewpoints came out of postmodern dance and movement and was seen as a way of quickly building a movement piece and is another great starting point.

¹ The Viewpoints Book, A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition

stilluntitledproject.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/anne-bogart-and-tina-landau-the-viewpoints-book.pdf

AN INTERVIEW

WITH MATT COSTAIN, CAST

Matt Costain is a cast member and is in charge of the aerial work in the show. We caught up with him to explore his role in creating Conor's world, and the Monster:

Sally has explored the theatrical language and the way in which the ensemble are going to be used and through the R&D we identified aerial elements as being particularly helpful. Sometimes what we do is very literal, whereas other times it's more thematic.

A good example is the Monster: he draws his power from the earth, and so we have to find a way to show that.

How have you gone about creating the movement for *A Monster Calls*?

In creating movement for a production it's a case of creating a palette of ideas and a language of movement. What are the key feelings in the piece? What's the rhythm of the story, the beats? This production also relies a lot on the ensemble so it's been a case of developing a movement style and language for them, having identified *why* they are there and what quality of movement they should have. You'll see certain elements of movement that you might not expect. No plot spoilers.

Some of what we have done has been a basic, step-by-step approach. For example, climbing a rope, which has to be done safely as well as being an effective way of communicating to the audience. But once we've ensured the climbing can be done safely, we can then start adding a particular movement quality to it, without trying to be too complex. It's the same with lifts — first being able to do it safely and then adding dynamics to it. It needs to add to the story, rather than being movement for movement's sake.

What's involved in the rehearsal process on a production like *A Monster Calls* and what's been the biggest challenge?

Sally's rehearsal process is very democratic and rehearsals are very open and creative. It can actually be quite liberating when things get cut: we could almost have a set of 'deleted scenes' which show work that's been created and then cut. During the creative process, you sometimes have to find the 'bad' (perhaps cliché, unclear, too long etc) vision of how something could be done before you find the best solution. All ideas are tried and used, and one idea follows another — you find the bits that work and that one idea begets another.

Because we've also had a writer and musician in the room all the time, we've been able to explore and problem solve as a team.

The Monster is the most challenging aspect — we have to believe that he is mighty, and I think we've achieved that. However, we had a vital realisation in rehearsal that the Monster is morally ambiguous. The storytelling therefore has to be extremely precise so that the audience perceives the Monster as we intend them to.

AN INTERVIEW

WITH BENJI BOWER, COMPOSER

Benji Bower, composer, explains how he has created the soundtrack for *A Monster Calls*.

My starting point for this show was the feeling I got from the Patrick Ness' book. When reading it for the first time it affected me deeply and still does whenever I read it. A lot of people nowadays have been affected by cancer and illness in families and so it was easy to tap into Conor's heartache.

For me, whenever writing music it has to come from deep within. It has to mean something to me first and then hopefully that will come through to others. I think a lot in images: the book is very filmic and so it provided many of those images for me. The illustrations were so wonderfully dark, too.

Sally was very clear from the start that we should not sentimentalise the mother's illness. With music it is so easy to spoon feed people specific emotions so it was good to know what we needed to avoid to fit with Sally's vision and intention.

To develop the sounds that will be important for the creation of mood and atmosphere, I actually went to record a yew tree in deepest West Wales. In fact it is one of the only bleeding yews in Europe (it bleeds red sap). I have taken some of the sounds and processed/morphed/effectuated/distorted the sound to make a palate of sound to compose with. Therefore many of the sounds you will hear come from the yew but it won't sound like the sound of a tree as you might expect it to.

We also set up the idea of the nightmare being very dark and fractured, unrecognisable and backwards. This has led to a sound design that I have been creating with lots of glitches and jumps to accent the nightmare feeling.

Much of my palette of sounds comes from the tree. On this show we are using a lot of synths, subs and electronic instruments. Something one could try when creating sound for a production is to record some natural sounds and try and find the music within them. If you have access to a computer or FX processor, try and change the sound to something unrecognisable.

The advice I'd give to students who are creating their own sound ideas for an adaptation or original devised piece of theatre is that being in contact with your director is really important; as is having an understanding of the feeling that comes from the book or whatever you are using as a stimulus. I think if you can really connect with the content this will help the music and sound process.

Working out the boundaries of your sound world before you start is also important. For example, what's the style and genre? Does it need to be associated with a particular place? For example, is it latin music etc.? This might help create your instrumentation. Depending on whether it is, a recorded soundtrack or live performance, how many musicians do you have to work with?

All of these factors will limit or enhance your compositions and sounds.

In rehearsal, I sometimes simply observe what is being staged, and other times I will workshop and experiment with ideas with the performers. I then go away and write/design the sound — collaborating with directors, designers and actors utilises all of these approaches. We normally do a Research and Development week before we start a project, but when devising a show, collaboration is key to the process.

I normally get the word from Sally what our next show is and that then excites me into writing music which then I play in the rehearsal room and we see where our musical world will sit. Sometimes I will improvise and then I go back and write, or I write on the spot. It can be very scary at times but sometimes the best things come from improvising and playing around.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

These activities can be adapted for Key Stage 2 and 3 students, as well as being extended to aid further exploration for Key Stage 4 and 5.

WARM UPS

WORKING AS A TEAM

- Moving around the room at a brisk walk (perhaps to the rhythm of some upbeat music), swing your arms and have a slight bounce in your step. Listen carefully to your teacher or workshop leader who will have the following instructions to choose from:
 - Stop
 - Go
 - Tall (make yourself as tall as you possibly can, on the spot)
 - Small (make yourself as small as you can, which may involve lying down on the floor in a tiny ball)
 - Clap (clap once and then carry on walking)
 - Jump (jump once and then carry on walking)
 - Hide (standing still, imagining that you are trying to avoid being seen by someone you don't want to see you)

Once you have had a few trial runs, aim to be totally synchronised with the rest of the group on each command. Anyone out of time might be 'out'.

- To make the game more difficult, your leader might reverse the instructions to their opposite or equivalent. Meaning that:
 - Stop means go, go means stop
 - Tall means small, and small means tall
 - A clap is a jump and a jump is a clap
 - Hide means that you have to make yourself as large as possible in the space so that there's no way you can't be noticed.

Again, after some practice, anyone doing the wrong move or being out of time has to leave the game.

You might even like to create some new instructions for your leader to use. Your aim is always to be working in complete cooperation with the rest of the group, working as an ensemble.

CREATING A WHOLE GROUP DYNAMIC

Stand in a space in the room. Try and balance the space between you and everyone around you — where are the gaps? Begin to walk around the room at a steady pace and aim to match the timing of everyone else. Remember to change direction and be aware of the different patterns your route is making across the space.

Now start to make eye contact with the people around you-smile, too! By making eye contact, you're tuning into the atmosphere and dynamic in the room. When your teacher or workshop leader counts down from four to one, you have a decision to make. Either stop, OR be the only one who continues walking. It may take a few tries to make it happen but the aim is to have an ensemble who are so in tune with each other that they can make this happen.

If you are an older group, you could also experiment with walking at a brisk pace and then, as an ensemble, beginning to slow down, stop, and sit on the floor. Without speaking, you can then try and get up and gradually increase the pace of walking again. All of this is possible without one person leading the ensemble. Instead, it simply relies on complete concentration and an ability to pay attention to the people and the space around you.

USING OUR BODIES TO MAKE OBJECTS

Find a space in the room and stand in it. When your teacher or group leader tells you to, start moving around the space. After a while, they will shout a number. You need to get into a group of that number, and with your bodies create the objects you're given. You only have 10 seconds to do each one and the leader of the game will count down from 10 to 1, at which point you have to freeze in position.

- Groups of 2: A knife and fork
- Groups of 3: Chair and table
- Groups of 4: A car
- Groups of 5: A washing machine
- Groups of 6: The Eiffel Tower
- Groups of 7: A toaster, with pop up toast
- Groups of 8: Big Ben (tower and clock, with sound effect of the bells)
- Groups of 9: Santa's Sleigh
- Whole group: A pirate's ship

SOUNDSCAPE

A soundscape is the use of sounds which are combined to create mood and atmosphere. Although music is sometimes used, there is often no melody, instead there are a series of sounds which combine.

- For example, a churchyard at night might include the sounds of:
 - Owls hooting
 - Wind through the trees, including a yew tree
 - Clocks chiming the hour
 - Rain
 - Animals searching for food
- If you want to create a spooky churchyard, then you could include:
 - A creaking gate
 - Ravens calling to each other
 - Crunching gravel

Composer, Benji Bower, has used the recording of the sound of a real tree and then used synthesizers and computer software to manipulate it for *A Monster Calls*. However, how can you use your body, the floor, your voice (but not words) and the texture of your clothes to create a soundscape?

You could also try this with the text below, using found objects. This can be items you find in the classroom or studio, or objects you've brought in from home, ranging from a pine cone, to a saucepan lid, sticks, jars etc.

Look at the idea that Writer in the Room Adam Peck had for the opening nightmare in the play. How can you create it with your own ideas and found objects?

Thud. Conor falls on hands and feet on forest floor. ★

Atmosphere of place: whistling wind, cliff edge, ★

CONOR

'Mum'. 'You have to get out of here.' ★

Heavy feeling (1). ★

Dragging. ★

CONOR

'Mum, you have to run.' ★

Dragging. Atmosphere. ★

MUM

'I'm fine, darling. There's nothing to worry about.' ★

Increased tension. Heavy noise. Dragging? ★

CONOR

'Mum, run! Please run!' ★

Rumbling, booming — sound of the dark monster down below; a thing ★ bigger than the world climbing the cliff-face, ★

MUM

'But darling, there's—' 'No!' ★

Heavy feeling. ★

CONOR

'Mum.' ★

Invisible weight. Roar, burning cloud of darkness, pressing down. ★

MUM

'Conor?' ★

Hovering fists. ★

Violent pounce, grabbing, pulling. Thud. ★

Conor is released. Running, panting, throwing himself, reaching, ★
pulling. ★

Catching, holding on. ★

TELLING STORY TWO

In groups of five or six, you are going to tell the story that the Monster tells Conor as his Second Story. For each bullet point, create one tableau (or allocate different tableaux to different groups to reduce the number each group has to create). If you aren't one of the characters in the scene, perhaps you can find a way to become furniture or scenery to give the audience more information. Make sure you choose something you can do for a few seconds without wobbling.

- A King is sad because his Kingdom has been ravaged by war
- The King looks at his baby grandson who is now his only relative
- The King marries a mysterious woman to try and heal his grief
- The King dies and the Queen takes the crown because the Prince is not yet old enough to become King
- The Prince falls in love with a farmer's daughter and they run away together to escape from the Queen who wants to marry the Prince herself
- Waking up under a yew tree where they rested for the night, the Prince finds the farmer's daughter dead.
- The Prince tells villagers that the Queen has killed his beloved and must be punished.
- The villagers storm the castle and take the Queen to be burned at the stake
- At the last minute the yew tree rescues the Queen and takes her far away from harm
- The Prince admits that it was him who killed the farmer's daughter to make it look like the Queen had done it. By making the villagers angry, he knew that he would have their help to overthrow her, which he would not have been able to do by himself.

Once you have created these tableaux, focus on the text below from Story Two.

If they found him, they would see the knife and the blood, and they would call him murderer. They would put him to death for his crime. And the queen would be able to rule unchallenged. There was nowhere for the prince to run. His horse had been chased away while he slept. The yew tree was his only shelter. And also the only place he could turn for help. Now, the world was younger then. The barrier between things was thinner, easier to pass through. The prince knew this. And he lifted his head to the great yew tree and he spoke.

He said enough to bring me walking. I know injustice when I see it. The prince ran towards the approaching villagers.

PRINCE

(To VILLAGERS)

'The queen has murdered my bride! The queen must be stopped!'

One of the challenges in the rehearsal room has been making this story convincing through the use of ensemble and physical storytelling. As well as playing the different characters, the ensemble must create a sense of location, and perhaps create a soundscape too, in order to create mood and atmosphere for the audience.

Decide how the ensemble will tell the story. Will one person say all of the text? Perhaps people will take turns to deliver certain lines, or speak as a chorus? Are there words that you think everybody should say together?

Experiment with combining this text with some of your tableau as appropriate. Once you are happy with this, move on to another part of Story Two and create your own text, using the bullet points to help you.

CREATING A FEAR-MONSTER

Many people are scared of things. Sometimes, being able to imagine the thing that we fear as some kind of creature can help us reduce our fear. Giving our fear a name or drawing a funny picture of it can also help.

In groups of four, discuss what things people tend to be frightened of. This doesn't need to be your own fear, but common fears involve getting lost in crowds, losing something precious, the dark, flying, or failing tests. Choose one of those things.

Once your group has decided which fear to physicalise, experiment with ways of showing that fear visually. Shape, levels, angles, contact between different people, eye contact with the audience, making claws etc are all ways that you can show your fear-monster to the people watching.

Now that you have created a shape for the fear-monster, consider how it moves. If your fear is the dark, do you think the movement might be quite slow because darkness makes it difficult to see? If birds or small animals are the fear, perhaps hand gestures towards the audience's faces might be an effective motion? Walk from one side of the room to the other, maintaining the shape of your fear-monster as you do so.

To make your fear-monster even more convincing, you now need to create a sound that your monster makes. Does it use real words, or gibberish? Is it loud or quiet? Perhaps non-verbal sounds like sniffing, growling or barking might be more effective?

Finally: you now need to imagine creating a product or anti-dote to your monster. For example, a spray that you can use in the dark that allows you to see in the dark if you don't have a light or a torch. In your group, create a TV advert for that product. Alternatively, how about creating an advert or interview which explains to people how to deal with their fear?

Share your fear-monsters and adverts with the rest of your class or group.

ASKING QUESTIONS AND IMPROVISING SCENES

Books can often go into a lot of descriptive detail about events that we don't necessarily need to show on stage. However, it can be helpful to discuss or improvise scenes that aren't in the final version of the play in order to inform our performance.

For primary pupils:

- The first time Conor has to sleep in a bedroom at Grandma's house whilst Mum is in hospital. Remember, it is very neat and tidy with a lot of precious furniture that Conor is not allowed to touch, and there is no wi-fi
- Conor helping his mum pack a bag for hospital. What items might she take with her to remind her of home, and be more comfortable during her stay?
- Conor trying to imagine telling someone (Lily?) about the Monster he has seen and then deciding to keep it a secret.
- The conversation between Dad and Grandma when Conor has destroyed the furniture in the living room
- Life before Mum's illness — a day in the life.

For older students:

- Dad telling Conor that he's moving to America
- Mum taking Conor for a special day out the day before she tells him of his diagnosis
- The conversation between Lily and Miss Godfrey after Lily hits Anton
- Lily's parents talking to her about what has happened to Conor and his mum
- Dad and Grandma arguing about telling Conor more information than his mum has about her condition and prognosis.

QUESTIONS FOR OLDER STUDENTS TO DISCUSS

- How long did Mum know her diagnosis before she shared it with Conor/Grandma/Dad?
- How long has Dad lived in America? What caused the divorce? Has Mum met Dad's new wife?
- Before Mum's diagnosis, what was her relationship with Grandma like?
- What job did Mum have before her illness? What was their daily or weekly routine?
- If Mum was to write a letter to Conor, what would she say?

SPEAKING THOUGHTS BEFORE THE TEXT

Look at the dialogue below, which is a conversation between Conor and his dad.

21. Americans Don't Get Much Holiday

DAD

'Doesn't look like your grandma's home yet.'

CONOR

'She sometimes goes back to the hospital after I go to bed. The nurses let her sleep in a chair.'

DAD

'She may not like me, but that doesn't mean she's a bad lady.'

CONOR

'How long are you here for?'

DAD

'Just a few days, I'm afraid.'

CONOR

'That's all?'

DAD

'Americans don't get much holiday.'

CONOR

'You're not American.'

DAD

'But I live there now. You're the one who made fun of my accent all night.'

CONOR

'Why did you come then? Why bother coming at all?'

DAD

'I came -because your mum asked me to. I'll come back, though. You know, when I need to. (Beat) And you'll visit us at Christmas! That'll be good fun.'

CONOR

'In your cramped house where there's no room for me. And then I'll come back here for school.'

'Why did you come?'

One exercise from the rehearsal room is to speak the character's thoughts before the words from the dialogue in order to explore what the character is feeling and therefore how the line should be said. For example:

CONOR

Thought:

I'm angry that I don't seem important to you anymore. I don't understand why I can't come and live with you.

Line:

'Why did you come then? Why bother coming at all?'

Discuss and experiment with how you think the characters' emotions affect the way they speak to each other. Once you have settled on some ideas, try and create a vocal and physical way of portraying those emotions without saying them out loud first.

VOICE WORK: THE MONSTER

Watch the trailer for the film [youtube.com/watch?v=WMgm20Di9Wg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMgm20Di9Wg)

Listen to how Liam Neeson uses his voice as the Monster. Compare this with the way in which the Monster's voice was created in The Old Vic production. How was sound used?

Consider how an actor uses pitch, pace, projection and tone before starting to think about how we can alter voices electronically through echo, reverberation and amplification.

What would it be like if you whispered rather than making the Monster's voice loud? Would that make him more or less frightening for an audience to begin with?

Statements for Key Stage 4 & 5 students to discuss and debate:

- Theatre for young people should avoid sensitive subjects like death and bereavement
- Contemporary theatre allows young people to explore the world in which they are growing up
- All children should go to the theatre in order to understand the world around them
- Non-naturalistic staging is more interesting and engaging than naturalistic theatre
- Adaptations of novels allow readers to experience the world of the book more successfully than the books themselves

GLOSSARY

AMPLIFICATION

The use of equipment such as microphones and PA systems to amplify sound.

ENSEMBLE

A group of performers who work together to tell a story.

GESTURE

A universally understood action such as shaking hands, nodding or shaking your head.

PHYSICALITY

Use of the body to tell a story or create a story.

SYNCHRONISED

When two or more people do something in exactly the same way and at exactly at the same time.

PITCH

How high or low a sound is (particularly voice).

PROJECTION

The use of support in one's chest, abdomen and diaphragm to ensure that the voice is heard clearly.

REVERBERATION

An extended sound which appears to make things shake.

SOUNDSCAPE

A combination of sounds, created by performers or instruments to create mood and atmosphere.

TABLEAU

Also known as a freeze frame or still image, where performers create one image, or several (tableaux).

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

A period of days or weeks in which a director, designer and a number of actors experiment and explore different ways of telling a story. During this period, writers, academics, historians and other experts may also contribute to discussions to ensure accuracy in subject matter.

MULTI-ROLLING

When an actor plays more than one character in the same production.



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PORTRAYING GRIEF AND LOSS

CHALLENGING SUBJECT MATTER FOR YOUNGER AUDIENCES

‘Stories are important. Stories can be more important than anything. If they carry the truth’

Patrick Ness, *A Monster Calls*

Traditional theatre once insisted that theatre for children should be gentle, fun and without challenge. An annual trip to a pantomime, for example, allows children to join in a fairy-tale world in which the worst mishap is a custard pie in the face or a slapstick encounter with a ladder. However, contemporary theatre has become more understanding of the needs of children and young audiences, and aware of the importance of exploring difficult and challenging subject matter.

In *A Monster Calls*, the reader often responds viscerally to Conor’s loss and his refusal to fully confront the truth that he will soon lose his mother. Patrick Ness, in the original novel, says, ‘Stories are wild creatures. When you let them loose who knows what havoc they might wreak?’ and some people may suggest that this is exactly the reason why challenging subject matter such as bereavement should not be staged for young audiences.

Children’s books, however, frequently present difficult subject matter. From Roald Dahl to JK Rowling, we are constantly confronted with orphans, neglectful parents and even murderers but the written word can sometimes seem less threatening than live theatre in which the reality of such issues can hit hard. However, *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child* now runs in The West End and on Broadway and it too provides powerful reminders of our own mortality and the importance of family, loyalty and acceptance of emotions and conflict.

In 2005, Melly Still directed *Coram Boy* at the National Theatre. Helen Edmundson’s adaptation of Jamila Gavin’s novel deliberately retained the dark elements of child slavery, illegitimate pregnancy and even infanticide. Some critics claimed that the production, which also played on Broadway and has since been performed at the Bristol Old Vic, was too graphic for the younger end of the target audience but Melly Still responded at the time, ‘Theatre is a place where you can deal with big scary things and show that, without the pain and the death, our experience of joy and life is not so vivid. I’m steeped in that from a fairy-tale tradition and I believe it very strongly.’² *Coram Boy* is not a story without hope. The death of Meshak at the hands of Otis, the fraudulent ‘Coram Man’, leads to other children being reunited with parents, or finally finding someone who will love them as their own. Likewise, in *A Monster Calls*, Patrick Ness reminds us that Conor’s mum has actually helped him develop skills that will, in time, help him to cope.

Laura Wade’s *Alice* also explores the grief of a young teenager in a modern version of *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice chooses to escape the platitudinous guests following the funeral of her brother Joe who has been killed by a drunk driver. Consumed by her own grief, Alice’s mother has no time for Alice and both characters turn up in Wonderland as the Queen of Hearts and the Knave respectively. Lyndsey Turner’s 2010 production at Sheffield’s Crucible Theatre included a tea party that mocked and subverted the funeral wake, a televised croquet tournament highlights her lack of privacy and the Caterpillar’s Border Control asked Alice about her ‘emotional baggage’. Like Conor, Alice feels isolated and patronised as all thoughts have turned to the dead sibling instead of her.

In her 2013 article *Why Children’s Theatre Matters*³ Lyn Gardner wrote, ‘Theatre, particularly theatre for children, fires the imagination, it gives our children the skills and the creativity necessary to face the world, to understand it and perhaps to change it too’. *Alice*, *Coram Boy* and *A Monster Calls* also encourage young audiences to engage their imagination through the non-naturalistic style of both performance and design.

² Patrick Ness in *A Monster Calls*

³ The Guardian: Down the rabbit hole

theguardian.com/stage/2006/nov/22/theatre1

Coram Boy's forest, for example, was created by the wailing song of grieving mothers stood scattered on stage representing trees. Much of the stage was left bare to allow for the larger ensemble scenes, and used aerial work to create a spectacular climactic underwater scene towards the end of the play. *A Monster Calls* utilises similar methods to create a yew tree, a monster and more besides.

In *A Monster Calls*, the minimal set and aerial work encourages the audience to 'fill in' many of the gaps and process the content simultaneously. Sally Cookson says, 'That's what I like doing when I'm in an audience. I don't like to be fed every idea and be told what I'm meant to be feeling in every single moment. I am always trying to offer up different interpretations. Each person who sees it will take something different from it.' Like *A Monster Calls*, *Coram Boy* used soundscape and an original soundtrack (by Adrian Sutton) as an integral part of the storytelling palette, combined with the music of Handel who also features as a character in the play. The use of ensemble and multi-roling relies on the audience's ability to suspend their disbelief and one could argue that in developing theatrical literacy we are also enabling our audiences to also develop emotional literacy through the themes and ideas to which we expose them.

The domestic setting of *A Monster Calls* makes it closer to our own 21st century reality than the 18th century *Coram Boy* and the idiosyncratic Wonderland for *Alice*. However, Michael Vale's set design demands just as much investment for the audience. There is very little furniture on set, and so the ensemble must bring characters and settings to life through movement and storytelling techniques.

Live theatre enables audiences to explore and engage with challenging issues because it gives them the imagination and creativity to do so in a safe place. Just as we find in grief and sadness, theatre also allows all of us to experience joy and happiness and the ability to navigate a way through the complexity and contradiction of life.



The *A Monster Calls* company

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