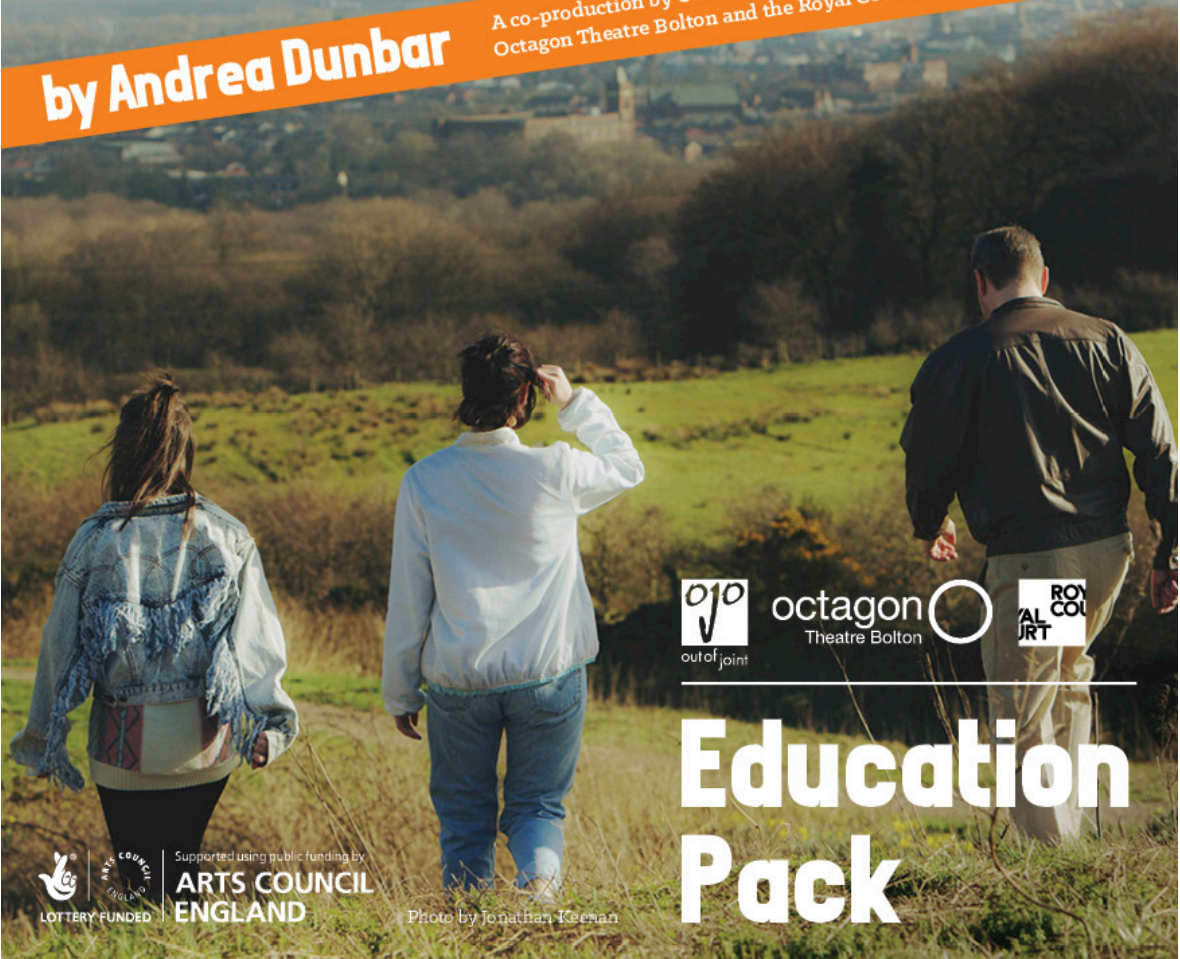


RITA, SUE + BOB TOO

by Andrea Dunbar

A co-production by Out of Joint,
Octagon Theatre Bolton and the Royal Court Theatre



octagon
Theatre Bolton



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Photo by Jonathan Keenan

Education Pack

Index

Introduction

Aim	3
Summary of the play	3
Timeline and context of the play	5

Production Credits

8

Research

Andrea Dunbar	9
Margaret Thatcher and the effects of conservative government on the working class in the North of England	10
Max Stafford-Clark on Andrea Dunbar	12

Rehearsals

Workshop exercises	17
Actioning in practice	26

Written by Gina Abolins

Rehearsal shots by Jon Bradfield

Production shots by Richard Davenport

Rita Sue and Bob Too film still: BFI, rereleased 2017

Black and white portrait of Andrea Dunbar by Don McPhee

Introduction

Aim

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance our audiences' enjoyment and understanding of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* by Andrea Dunbar. These resources give an insight into the rehearsal processes of the show and are aimed at anyone with an interest in theatre wishing to gain a deeper understanding of what it took to create this new production.

We hope that you find the materials interesting and enjoyable.

If you are keen to know more about the Education department at Out of Joint or you would like to book a schools' workshop, please contact Gina Abolins, Education and Artist Development on 020 7609 0207 or at gina@outofjoint.co.uk



Summary of the play

Teenagers Rita and Sue have just spent the night babysitting Bob and Michelle's two children. The play opens with Bob driving the young girls home. He offers to give them a ride around for half an hour before dropping them off, and suggests they go to the Moors. The girls agree. Bob talks to the girls about condoms and sex, says that things are not going well with him and his wife, and coaxes the young girls into having sex with him.

After this, the girls continue to have sex with him on a regular basis. Whilst ironing his jeans, Michelle, Bob's wife, finds condoms in Bob's pocket. She accuses Bob of cheating "again" and suspects that it is Sue or Rita. They argue and Bob claims that the reason he is cheating is because Michelle will not have sex with him.

While doing their YTS (Youth Training Scheme) the girls are met by Michelle. Michelle questions the girls about their lifts home with Bob. She then reveals that she suspects Bob of cheating, because she has been sterilized and therefore the condoms she found in his pocket were definitely not intended for her. It is revealed that Bob had an affair with a previous babysitter, but Michelle won't leave because she still loves him.

Sue and Rita both skip work to go and meet Bob. He tells them that he is having to sell his car as he cannot afford to keep it due to unemployment. He blames his lack of job on Margaret Thatcher, stating that she only cares "for the rich people" and doesn't care for working- class people like him.

Both Sue and Rita's parents find out about what has been happening with Bob. The girls argue and Rita admits that she told a friend about the affair, who has gossiped about it to others. Sue's parents, Michelle, Bob, Rita and Sue have a confrontation outside Rita's house. Ultimately, Sue's parents and Michelle blame Rita for what had happened. The argument ends with Michelle leaving Bob.

Some weeks later, Sue meets Rita for work. Rita reveals that she is moving in with Bob and that she is pregnant with his baby. Rita and Sue part ways promising each other that they will stay friends, however months later Sue and Rita have not been in contact. Rita has had her baby and is now married to Bob. The story ends with Sue's Mum and Michelle, previously enemies, commiserating about men and parenting over a drink in the local pub.



Timeline and context of the play, collated by John Hollingworth

This timeline, although containing some inferences, is on the whole based on evidence within the text. It was used as a useful aid in rehearsals to give the company a better idea on the months in which the story took place, and the context of the time in which it happened.

1982:

- 26th January- Unemployment over 3 million for first time.
- 6th February- Queens Pearl Jubilee
- 3rd March- Barbican Centre opened by the Queen.
- 2nd April- Falklands invaded by Argentina
- 25th May- *Madness*, House of fun at number 1 for two weeks.
- 14th June- Falklands ends
- 21st June- Prince William was born

Scene 1- Takes place on Friday 25th /Saturday 26th June.

Scene 2- Dad says Sue is '*near finished at that school*'. Buttershaw Comp broke up July 23rd. If we take Dad's words to indicate a month before break-up then this scene would take place Saturday 26th / Sunday 27th June.

Scene 3- Takes place on a weekday; Bob has to be home by four, the normal end of his working day. If Bob's friends flew to Spain weekend to weekend the first day he could use the house would be Monday or Tuesday. Bob says scene one happened '*a month since*' Rita says she starts Albion '*next week*' If we say she finishes school on the 23rd and starts at the mill on the 26th then this could be Monday 19th / Tuesday 20th July: Rita skiving off her last week of school.

- Rita and Sue start at Albion Mills on Monday 26th July.

Scene 4- *Coronation Street* and *The Bionic Man* are on telly. Probably a Friday night or Saturday. Not clear how long after scene 3 this is. If we said a fortnight into Rita and Sue's YTS- the girls still needing money because of the low pay- this could be Friday 6th / Saturday 7th August.

- Dexy's *Come on Eileen* at Number 1 for the whole of August, knocked off by *Survivor's Eye of the Tiger*.

Scene 5- Weekday, Michelle says she found Durex in Bob's pocket '*the other night*', so it's likely to be the week after, Monday 9th / Tuesday 10th August.

Scene 6- Weekday, Rita says her mum will keep her in '*for the rest of the week*' if her skiving off the mill is discovered, so we could take this to be a Monday or Tuesday. Rita marvels their affair has '*gone on for as long as it has*.' Bob has hardly any work, even more plausible during late August if paying customers are holidayed. We could make this the last week of that month, Monday 30th / Tuesday 31st.

Scene 7- The girls babysit and are asked to sit the night after too, likely making it a Thursday night. Rita says '*a week's a long time to go without a jump*.' They didn't have one in scene six, so if we say a successful meet up Friday 2nd / Friday 3rd September, then this would be a week later: Friday 10th September. Rita would fall pregnant around this time.

- 14% of the UK workforce was unemployed.
- Rita tells Janet about what's been going on between Bob, Sue and her. Janet's big mouth ends up with Rita and Sue's parents finding out, along with everyone else.

Scene 8- In a previous draft of scene 9, Rita says her mum has kept her in for '*two weeks or so*' after the argument in this scene. Backdating that would make this Saturday 16th / Sunday 17th October. As no characters are at work, we can guess this is a weekend. Bob, in an old draft is watching *Match of the Day*, which fits with this.

- Michelle and her two children, Simon and Jenny, move out 16th / 17th October 1982

Scene 9- Rita is eight weeks pregnant and fell pregnant around September 10th, making this the morning of Monday 1st November, if we take it the girls are starting their working week. It's two weeks' shy of the end of their 16 week YTS placement that finishes November 12th.

- Michelle moved back into her house with her children in November.
- 12th December- Greenham Common Camp
- Bob and Michelle's children, Simon and Jenny, spend Christmas at Bob and Rita's rental flat.

1983:

- 3rd February- unemployment hits a record high of 3,224,715
- Bob and Michelle's divorce comes through (exactly a year after the girls come into her life) in March 1983.
- April/May Michelle takes Bob to court to get maintenance payment.
- April/Rita and Bob would likely have their council flat by now.
- Bob and Rita get married on May 4th.
- 9th June- General election returns Thatcher with a landslide victory.
- Rita gives birth to her daughter, Susan, on 21st June at 39 weeks. (Due date: 14/07/83)

- *Every Breath You Take* by The Police is at number 1, 14th June- 25th June.
- 16th June- The National Museum of photography, Film and TV opened in Bradford.

Scene 10- Sue says the last time she saw Rita was 7 months ago, this would be sometime around June 1983. Sue is 16.



Production Credits

An Out of Joint, Octagon Theatre Bolton and the Royal Court Theatre co-production

RITA, SUE AND BOB TOO by **ANDREA DUNBAR**

newly edited by **John Hollingworth** and **Max Stafford-Clark**

Bob **James Atherton**

Rita **Taj Atwal**

Mum **Sally Bankes**

Sue **Gemma Dobson**

Michelle **Samantha Robinson**

Dad **David Walker**

Directors **Max Stafford-Clark** and **Kate Wasserberg**

Set & Costume Designer **Tim Shortall**

Lighting Designer **Jason Taylor**

Sound Designer **Emma Laxton**

Casting Director **Amy Ball**

Fight Director **Alison de Burgh**

Movement Director **Dan Watson**

Dramaturg **Titas Halder**

Production Managers **Sam Fraser** (Octagon), **Andy Reader** (Tour), **Marty Moore** (Royal Court)

Technical Stage Manager **Kate Jones**

Deputy Stage Manager **Tamsin Withers**

Assistant Stage Manager **Beth McKnight**

Costume Supervisor **Brigid Guy**

Associate Designer **Tim McQuillen-Wright**

Relighter **Adam Eastwood**

Casting Assistant **Arthur Carrington**

Deputy Movement Director **Katherine Hollinson**

Rita, Sue and Bob Too was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 14 October, 1982. Following a workshop at the National Theatre Studio in December 2015 the play was newly edited by John Hollingworth and Max Stafford-Clark. This production was first performed on 6 September 2017 at Octagon Theatre Bolton.

Andrea Dunbar

Born on the Buttershaw estate in Bradford in 1961, Andrea Dunbar was one of eight children. She attended Buttershaw Comprehensive School, where in 1977 at the age of fifteen, she began to write her first play *The Arbor*. *The Arbor* is a semi-autobiographical piece about a teenage girl who falls pregnant to her Pakistani boyfriend. She was encouraged by her teacher to develop the piece as a part of her CSE drama course, and in 1980 *The Arbor* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London under the direction of artistic director, Max Stafford-Clark. Dunbar was the youngest playwright to ever have her work on stage at the venue. She was the winner of the Royal Court Young Writers Festival in 1980.



After the success of *The Arbor*, Dunbar was commissioned to write another play for the Royal Court, and in 1982 she wrote her most famous play *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*. In 1987 she turned her play into a film, under the direction of Alan Clarke. It is thought that the film and the differing views around it could be what sparked Dunbar's early death. On one hand, the film became a cult classic thanks to its frank portrayal of working class life, however; on the other hand, the film angered many of the residents of the Buttershaw estate. This led Dunbar to regular and heavy drinking, one of the perceived causes of her fatal brain haemorrhage.

Her final play *Shirley* was produced at the Royal Court in 1986, a play about the relationship between the titular character and her mother.

In 2000 Max Stafford-Clark re-visited the Buttershaw estate along with playwright Robin Soans, where he created a piece of verbatim theatre that arose from discussions with residents on the estate. These discussions exposed opinions on the life and work of Dunbar and how it had affected the lives of the people that live there. From this, Soans created the play *A State Affair* that was featured as a double bill alongside *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*.



Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Government



On May 4th 1979, Margaret Thatcher became the UK's first female Prime Minister as the leader of the Conservative party. She came to power following 'The winter of discontent' – the result of union strikes, which came under the labour government of James Callaghan who relied on the support of the unions whilst in power. Callaghan was taken out of office through a vote of no confidence. Thatcher saw the unions as 'the enemy within'.

Timeline of Margaret Thatcher's rise to power

13 October 1925

Margaret Hilda Roberts born in Grantham, Lincolnshire.

1940

Attends the University of Oxford to read chemistry and law. Becomes president of the Oxford University Conservative Association, her first political job.

1950

Fights and loses her first parliamentary election to be MP for Dartford.

1951

Marries Denis Thatcher.

1959

Elected Conservative MP for Finchley.

October 1961

Harold Macmillan appoints her junior Minister of Pensions and National Insurance.

1970

After the Conservative victory in the 1970 general election, Edward Heath appoints her secretary of state for Education and Science, but she loses the position in the 1974 general election defeat.

February 1975

Wins leadership challenge against Edward Heath.

4 May 1979

Thatcher is elected Britain's first female Prime Minister. She retains the position for eleven and a half years, making her the longest serving prime minister of the 20th century.

2 April 1982

Argentina invades the Falkland Islands. Within days Thatcher sends a huge military task force to the southern Atlantic.

14 June 1982

British forces recapture Port Stanley. Argentina surrenders in what is seen as a resounding victory for Margaret Thatcher, confirming her "Iron Lady" nickname.

9 June 1983

Margaret Thatcher wins her second general election with a majority of 144 seats in the wake of the Falklands war that greatly increased her popularity. Unemployment was at 3 million.

6 March 1984

A national miners' strike begins under NUM leader Arthur Scargill, in response to the closure of uncompetitive mines. Riots and the miners' strikes dominate the news as Britain edges towards chaos. The strike collapses after a year, prompting the government to press ahead with its legislation restricting trade union rights.

12 October 1984

Thatcher is the target of an IRA bomb that explodes during the Conservative party conference at the Grand Hotel in Brighton. She escapes uninjured. Five people were killed, including Conservative MP Sir Anthony Berry.

11 June 1987

Thatcher wins a third general election with a majority of 101 seats.

1 April 1990

The hugely unpopular community charge, or "poll tax", is introduced. Protests against the tax turn into riots.

November 1990

A tearful Thatcher leaves Downing Street after losing the support of the party over differences on European Economic Community policy and the poll tax debacle.

Relevance to *Rita, Sue and Bob too*

- **YTS (Youth Training Scheme):** This is often referred to by Rita and Sue, and was brought into operation in 1983 by Thatcher as a result of the 1981 race riots, which brought into focus the number of unskilled unemployed. Brought in for school leavers, it guaranteed a year of work and experience upon finishing school, although many saw it as unpaid labour. In 1982 she stated in the House of Commons that she was 'profoundly concerned by unemployment'
- **"She makes the rich richer"** Privatisation and lower taxes. Poverty increased under Thatcher, she was very much an individualist. In July 1981 Unemployment was at a 44 year high. The closure of the mine meant that families destined for a life of work

in the mines became destined for a life of poverty. In Yorkshire in January 1980 steels workers went on strike- thatcher then announced in February that state benefit of those on strike would be halved. The strike was called off on April 1st 1980

- **“I doubt she’ll get back in, there’s too many people hate her”** In the North of England many people celebrated Thatcher’s death due to the impact she had on the mining communities; the bitterness still remains and emotions still run high. But she was lauded by Barack Obama as ‘the patriot prime minister’ who had ‘taken a country that was on its knees and made it stand tall again’

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/10/newsid_2541000/2541071.stm



On Andrea Dunbar by Max Stafford-Clark (extract from *Taking Stock*)

*Andrea Dunbar wrote her first play at fifteen, having never been inside a theatre. **Max Stafford-Clark** was Artistic Director at London’s Royal Court Theatre when he took delivery of those first, hand-written scenes.*

Any theatre takes pride in presenting new work by Harold Pinter or Caryl Churchill, as the Royal Court did during my time there. But the theatre’s focus on people who haven’t previously considered themselves professional playwrights was arguably its most important function. The annual Young Writers’ Festival was a national competition open to any aspiring writer up to the age of eighteen. And in 1980 there was one outstanding play: The

Arbor. Written boldly in green biro on pages ripped from a school exercise book, it told the story of a Bradford schoolgirl who became pregnant on the night she lost her virginity. A family argument was depicted with brutal authenticity, and the final scene was heartbreakingly affecting and bleak. The principal character, just called 'Girl', had lost her baby and by accident meets the boy who had made her pregnant. The innocence of the mutual recriminations revealed how young the protagonists really were. I tried to get in touch with the writer, Andrea Dunbar, but she was in a battered wives' home in Keighley and communication was difficult. In the event, I was to know Andrea for the next thirteen years.

The Arbor was a misleading title. A pack of abandoned and feral dogs roamed the centre of Brafferton Arbor, the crescent on which Andrea lived. Pastoral it was not. Some houses were boarded up, and some gardens were a tangled mess of grass and weeds, often featuring rusty bits of car engine mounted on breezeblocks; like the occasional battered caravan that also blossomed in some gardens, they were dreams of escape – hopeless male fantasies doomed to remain for ever in a state of stagnation. There were a lot of single mothers, but Andrea's own father had stayed with his family, and his violence and drinking had been the dramatic centre of Andrea's childhood. Families scratched by on benefits, on the occasional odd job, on petty crime and on dole fraud. The poverty was shocking.

I first met Andrea in her social worker's house in Haworth. Haworth is everything the Buttershaw Estate is not. Cobbled and fragrant, it is straight out of a Hovis advertisement. Andrea received the news that we were to produce her play at the Royal Court with no particular enthusiasm. 'No,' she'd never been to London before. 'No,' she'd never been in a theatre. 'Alright,' she'd be prepared to come down, but we had to get the money to the post office for the fare, don't send it to her home. I learnt that it was a culture where you didn't give yourself away. Admitting to pain or showing enthusiasm were equally undesirable.

She enjoyed rehearsal and was amazed to find how much she laughed at the scenes she had written. 'It weren't so funny when it were happening,' she commented wryly about a neighbourhood row that escalated into a riot. Andrea and a friend came to stay at my home in Camden Town while the play was being rehearsed. I found it strange to cope with a writer who was more enthusiastic about going to Buckingham Palace or Madame Tussaud's than about coming to rehearsal. But her comments were apt and incisive: 'He weren't sitting down, he were standing up when he said that,' she would say. Or, 'She didn't laugh then, but she did laugh when she said that.' The autobiographical nature of the play and Andrea's gift of total recall meant she could add lines or develop an argument as we were rehearsing. I badgered her for more detail, and invariably she provided it. The play did well. By the end of the Young Writers' Festival, the word about the quality of the evening had spread and performances were packed out.

After The Arbor Andrea went back to Bradford and began to write a second play. She had no desire to move away from Buttershaw and had little curiosity about life elsewhere. She phoned a couple of times and asked, 'What can you do on stage?' She wasn't seeking advice about Brecht but was asking how sexually candid it was possible to be in the theatre.



Rita, Sue and Bob Too was Andrea's second play, and it became notorious for the first scene in which two schoolgirl babysitters take it in turns to have sex with Bob, their employer, in the back of his car. There's an increase in confidence, and, although there's never much political analysis in Andrea's work, there's an awareness of life getting grimmer. Bob reveals the good times will have to end because he's going to have to sell the car, and he gives the two girls a political seminar: 'There's no hope for kids today, and it's all Maggie Thatcher's fault. She'll bring total destruction. Just you wait and see . . . It'll take years to get the country back on its feet again.' (Sc. 6) But the hardness of the life is mitigated by the sheer priapic vigour of the two girls, who certainly do not see themselves as victims. 'I hope he brings us here again,' says Rita anxiously at the end of their first sex session. 'Oh he will. Make no mistake about it,' says Sue with confidence. It's the one certainty in a fickle world.

'Sex is plainly central', wrote Rob Ritchie, 'but it is the unlooked for consequences, the unwanted pregnancies, the family rows, the broken friendships that provide the real dramatic interest.' Each of Andrea's plays ends with a quieter moment of pre-feminist reflection. In Rita, Sue and Bob Too, Michelle, who has been deserted by Bob, and Sue's Mother, who is a tough but bedraggled figure, meet in a pub. They've last met during a steaming neighbourhood row: antagonists then, they arrive at a slow understanding. 'Anyway, all men are no good. They want shooting for all the trouble they cause,' advises Mother. 'All fellas do the dirty on you sometime or other. Only let them come on your conditions and stick to them. Don't let them mess you around.' (Act 2, Sc. 10)

Andrea died of a brain haemorrhage at the age of twenty-nine. She had written three plays and had had three children. All her plays are written from a young woman's perspective, but as her technique sharpened she began to move away from the simple autobiographical stance of *The Arbor*. In *Shirley*, her final play, there are several scenes written from the point of view of the older woman character, who in previous plays was simply called 'Mother'. Andrea's plays as a girl showed an extraordinary talent; the tragedy is that she never lived to write the plays of her maturity.



The success of Andrea's work and of the film of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* didn't make life easier. She didn't like the film much. It had an upbeat ending with the ménage between the two girls and Bob continuing in frolicsome mode. 'That would never have happened,' said Andrea. You didn't go back with somebody who had rejected you. The film infringed Andrea's particular moral code. She knew that life was rarely that easy; and sometimes it was impossible. Telephone calls to Andrea were constantly upstaged by the domestic crises that made existence on the Arbor so dramatic. On one occasion one of the kids had set fire to the curtains, and on another, one had stuck their fingers in an electric socket. For the interviews that followed the film Andrea would only consent to be filmed from one side. She had scars down one cheek that she said she had got through a fight in a pub. I learnt later that she had fallen through a glass door when she was drunk and had needed sixty stitches and plastic surgery.

On my first visit to the Arbor I had met Andrea's family. I had been to the pub, been up to the moors and seen her old school. I was about to drive off in my MGB when I felt a firm tug on the seam of my trousers. It was Andrea's younger sister, Catherine, aged thirteen. 'Tek me wi' yer,' she said. 'Tek me wi' yer.' I explained it was impossible. And I went. Eight years later I met Catherine again. It was after Andrea's death, at a benefit the Royal Court had organised to raise money for her children. Politely I explained that although she had

probably forgotten we had in fact met on a previous occasion. 'Oh no,' she said staring at me unforgivingly, 'I remember you.' She now has six children of her own.

But they remember their writers in Bradford. Outside the Central Library is a fine statue of Priestley. His face is turned towards what is left of the elegant Victorian square, and the brass coat tails of his raincoat fly behind him. Inside the Library, the small Andrea Dunbar Room provides a quiet space for writers who can't get any peace at home. Upstairs in 'Local History' there's a scrapbook that has carefully been put together about Andrea's life. There is stuff on the plays and on the film and on local people disapproving of the grim and disreputable picture that her work gives, but the final clipping is about dole fraud:

Award-winning playwright Andrea Dunbar told today how she was considering giving up writing after being prosecuted for claiming social security without revealing her royalties. Dunbar, who won acclaim for her plays about down-to-earth Bradford life, was fined £75 with £50 costs after admitting receiving £5,400 she was not entitled to. Dunbar, 27, said she had faced a series of blows throughout her life – most recently this summer when she needed sixty stitches in her face and plastic surgery after she fell through a glass door. Dunbar of Brafferton Arbor, Buttershaw, said she regretted ever starting to write for all the trouble it had brought her. People thought she was rich, but she wasn't. She still lived with her parents and her three children. Dunbar was ordered to pay back the £5,400 at £3 a week. The court heard that, like her characters, she was living in poverty.

Bradford Telegraph and Argus, 15 December 1988

It would have taken Andrea over thirty-four years to have paid it off. She would have taken satisfaction from the fact that the state only got a couple of years' worth out of her.



***Rita, Sue and Bob too* workshop exercises**

We have supplied a number of different exercises to use in a workshop, as well as a rough amount of time they should take a group, dependant on numbers. We have done this so you can pick and choose based on your group's knowledge of the play. If the group have read and/or seen the play, then we recommend you focus on the 'Maps' exercise and the character timelines with improvisations. If they are less knowledgeable on the play, we suggest you give an overview on the play and discuss and lead the 'Themes' exercise, as well as the maps exercise. All of these exercises were used in the rehearsal process of *Rita, Sue and Bob too*, and will give a good insight into the first week's rehearsal of an Out of Joint show.

Maps exercise (around 45 mins)

Hand out your list of facts about locations – found below

Within the play, there are **indisputable facts** about locations in the play, for example, Bob and Michelle have a television in their living room, **reasonable assumptions** – for example, Sue has her own bedroom, and then **things that you invent yourselves** – for example – there is a dining room in Bob and Michelle's house. Split into 3 groups and allocate each group with either Bob and Michelle's house, Sue's house or the estate and surrounding areas. Using the indisputable facts sheet, reasonable assumptions they can make and their imaginations, each group must make a map on a sheet of paper showing the layout of the entire house or estate. Firstly, mark down all of the facts in one colour, then add in assumptions in another colour, then add in any extra detail and decoration in another colour. Once the group has done this, they must then make a 3D version of the house/estate in the rehearsal room/drama studio, and be able to walk the rest of the group around a full-size imaginary version of the house, including furniture, windows, etc.. Be as specific as possible, noting where doors, windows are, colours of walls and carpets, what you can see out of the windows, etc... Workshop leaders and teachers – try and encourage the groups to be as specific as possible, and question them where necessary. Make sure they know the difference between FACTS and ASSUMPTIONS they have made – this is crucial.

Timeline exercise (around 45 mins)

Hand out your list of facts about the characters of Bob, Rita, Sue and Dad, historical facts from 1936-1982, and prompt sheet to help the group come up with ideas for the timeline.

Split into either three or four groups dependant on numbers, and allocate each with either Bob, Sue, Rita or Dad. Explain that they are to create a timeline from birth to present day for their character, including significant points in their life, as well as any historical dates they feel appropriate. Again, use different coloured pens for **facts**, **assumptions** and **creation**. From this timeline, they must then find three key turning points in their character's life,

which they feel made them who they are. Groups are then to feed back on their findings, talking through the timeline as a whole.

Improvisations (around 30 mins)

Each group is to choose one 'turning point' from their timeline. Explain that one person in the group is to play their character of Bob, Rita, Sue or Dad, and they alone must tell the others exactly what happened during that turning point (to be made up on the spot). The person who is 're-telling' what happened to them must choose who plays which person in the story, and then each group must then take it in turns to get up and improvise the scene. The person playing the character must only tell those improvising the re-enactment of the turning point what happened, everyone else must simply watch and then feedback with the group after each improvisation on how the turning point effected the character physically and vocally, how this might affect them long-term and in the context of the play.

Themes exercise (around 45 mins, dependant on size of group and number of moments suggested)

It is recommended the group have read and/or seen the play beforehand, but if not, please discuss and summarise the play with the group. Then as a group discuss the themes of the play. Encourage them to say whatever first comes into their heads, that there are no wrong answers – the more ideas on the page, the better. Then once you have exhausted ideas, go through the themes found, questioning whether they affect every one of the characters of the play (this is why it's easier with a group who know the play. If not, this will require your guidance.) Once you have whittled the themes down, as a group decide on the one theme you like best. The theme we found best encapsulated our production of the play was "A desperate need to fill the void", but yours can be anything you feel most appropriate to the group. Then give the group a few minutes to think about a specific moment in their life that they feel fits into this theme. PLEASE NOTE: It is crucial that individuals don't use an event in their life that is undigested and something that will cause them unwelcome emotion. This may affect what theme you choose – we suggest you be sensitive to your group when selecting a theme. Tell the group that they are not obligated to choose something, but if they wish to, they will then be asked to re-enact the moment in an improvisation, so must be happy to do so if they wish to share with the group. Once you have selected a number of memories, individuals must state how many people were involved in their memory (they are to play themselves) then choose members of the group to be in the improvisation. Much like the timeline improvisations, in groups, the individual must only tell the group they are improvising with what happened and who they all are in the improvisation, and what part they played in it. Improvisations are they re-enacted for the rest of the group, with only minimal detail of where it is set being given – no back story whatsoever. Where possible, only describe what you can see – i.e a large room with tables, chairs, people sat eating meals at the tables and a kitchen where food is being prepared, rather than saying 'we are in a restaurant'. Ask the group to pay attention in each improvisation to where the turning

point was in the scene – the point where everything changed for the person, and how this affected them physically and vocally. This exercise is a brilliant way of discovering a performer's natural ticks and body language they wouldn't even be aware they do. By acknowledging these as normal reactions and not 'put-on', performers are able to integrate them into their performance.

Needed for the workshop:

- Printouts of: Facts about locations in the play, facts about characters, historical events and prompt sheet.
- Flip-chart paper (At least 6 sheets)
- Marker pens (at least 9 – different colours)



Facts about locations in the play

Bob's house

- Bob lives with Michelle and their two children, Simon and Jenny.
- It takes 10 minutes for Bob to drive from his and back to drop Rita and Sue off, therefore Bob lives around a 5-minute drive from their houses
- There is an ironing board in the house
- They have a television
- Bob and Michelle don't have a doorbell
- They have at least one bedroom
- They have a kitchen, which has tea, coffee, milk, sugar, biscuits, bread, ham and salad in it
- There are some of Michelle's Avon products to sell in the kitchen
- They have a lounge with a television
- The kitchen and lounge are within shouting distance from each other
- There are toy cars in the house
- There are lots of Michelle's clothes in the wardrobe

The estate

- There are moors, which are a driveable distance from Bob and Michelle's house
- There are cows on the moors
- There is at least one nightclub on the estate
- There is a school on the estate
- There are mills, called Albion Mills, which are close by and located south of the estate
- There is a house belonging to somebody that Bob claims to be "his friend"
- There is a shop that sells sanitary towels within walking distance from Rita's house
- There are at least two pubs on or near to the estate
- Rita and Sue live within short running distance of each other
- There is a road called 'Manningham Lane' where prostitutes can sometimes be found
- There are two areas called Wilsden and Bingley, which are not too near the estate. Wilsden is much quieter than the estate

Sue's house

- Sue lives in a house with her mum and dad
- They have a kitchen
- There is a brush in the kitchen
- They have a living room
- There is a sofa in the living room, big enough for someone to sleep on
- They have a telephone in the house
- They have at least two bedrooms

Facts about characters in the play

Rita

- Rita babysits for Bob and Michelle's children with Sue
- She has a mum but doesn't have/know her dad
- Her mum won't talk to her about sex
- She has never been to the moors before
- Her mum sends her brothers out looking for her if she's late
- She has brothers
- She smokes
- She lives within walking distance of Sue
- She lives with her mum and dad
- She doesn't know words such as 'durex', 'sperm' and 'ejaculates'
- She goes to school
- Her school has a headmaster
- Her school has a games kit that you can wear
- Her school uses corporal punishment (cane)
- She is fifteen
- She doesn't like ham
- She has tea with two sugars
- She doesn't have a boyfriend
- She wants to be a policewoman in London when she's older
- She wants to have two children when she is twenty-five; a boy and a girl
- She has started her period
- She tells her mum when she gets her period every month

Sue

- Sue babysits for Bob and Michelle's children with Rita
- She has never been to the moors before
- She smokes
- She has a mum and dad
- She has two older siblings
- Talk about sex is "dirty in her house"
- She lives within walking distance of Rita
- She lives with her mum and brothers
- She doesn't know words such as 'durex' 'sperm' and 'ejaculates'
- Sue's mum and dad can't afford to buy her games kit
- She goes to school
- Her school has a headmaster
- Her school has a games kit that you can wear, but she doesn't have one because her parents can't afford it
- Her school uses corporal punishment (cane)
- She has tea with one sugar
- She is fifteen

- She doesn't have a boyfriend
- She has started her period
- She didn't tell her mum when she first started her periods

Bob

- Bob is married to Michelle
- He has two children, Simon and Jenny
- He lives in a house with Michelle and their two children
- He drives a car, which has reclining seats and a radio
- He works as a handyman – plumber, electrician, joiner, bricklayer
- When he left school, his dad encouraged him to buy a toolbox
- He has previously employed Sue's Dad to work for him
- He used to go to the same pub as Sue's Dad
- He can describe the process of conception very accurately and knowledgeably
- Bob is unsatisfied by his marriage, and specifically his sex life with Michelle
- He is twenty-seven
- He drinks coffee
- He watches Coronation Street, because he fancies the character Suzy Burchill
- He previously had an affair with an old babysitter
- He doesn't like Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative government

Dad

- Dad previously worked for Bob as a handyman
- He is married to Sue's mum
- They have at three children, two of which are girls
- He can't afford to buy Sue kit for games
- He hits Sue as a form of punishment
- He goes to the pub on a regular basis
- He thinks "kids should be seen and not heard"
- He doesn't spend much time with his children

Historical Events from 1930s - 1982

1930s - 1940s

- 1930 – Pluto discovered by astronomers.
- 1933 – Hitler appointed German chancellor.
- 1936 – “Nazi Olympics” in Berlin. King Edward VIII abdicated.
- 1939 – Beginning of World War II.

1940s - 1950s

- 1940 – Churchill became Britain’s prime minister.
- 1941 – Japan attack the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbour. U.S. join WW2.
- 1944 – D-Day, allies landed in Normandy.
- 1945 – World War II ended. United Nations was founded. The first computer was built.
- 1947 – Britain nationalized coalmines.
- 1949 – NATO was established. The Soviet Union developed the atomic bomb. China became communist.

1950s - 1960s

- 1951 – The color TV was introduced.
- 1952 – George VI died and his daughter became Elizabeth II.
- 1959 – Fidel Castro took over Cuba. *The Sound of Music* opened on Broadway.

1960s - 1970s

- 1961 – The Berlin Wall was built.
- 1963 – John F. Kennedy was killed. Martin Luther King gave his ‘I have a dream’ speech.
- 1965 – US send troops to Vietnam.
- 1966 – England won the football World Cup.
- 1967 – Abortion and Homosexuality were legalised in the UK.
- 1969 – Neil Armstrong became the first man of the moon.

1970s - 1980s

- 1973 – The mobile phone was invented. The UK entered the European Economic Community, the EU.
- 1975 – The war in Vietnam ended. Microsoft founded by Bill Gates.
- 1976 – Apple Computer founded by Steve Jobs and Wozniak.
- 1979 – Margaret Thatcher became Britain’s first female prime minister.

1980 – 1982

- 1980 – John Lennon was killed in New York City. Ronald Reagan was elected president.
- 1981 – The first cases of AIDS were identified. Prince Charles married Lady Diana Spencer.
- 1982 – Great Britain defeated Argentina in The Falklands War.

Prompt questions for Timeline exercise

- What was Bob's reaction when his Dad suggested he buy a toolbox? Was there another life he wanted?
- Why does Rita want to be a policewoman?
- How sexually experienced are Rita and Sue? Are they lying about being virgins to Bob, or to each other?
- How recent was Bob's previous affair?
- Why does Sue's dad drink so much?
- What was Sue's dad's first job?
- Is Bob's Dad alive?
- Where is Rita's dad?
- How long have Rita and Sue been friends?
- When did Sue's mum and dad get together? How did they meet?
- When did Rita and Sue start smoking?
- Did Michelle mean to get pregnant? Did she love Bob when it happened? How long had they been together? When did they get married?
- How badly is Bob's business going?
- Is Sue's dad regularly violent?
- How old is Sue's dad?
- How old are Rita and Sue's siblings?
- How old are Bob and Michelle's children?
- When did Rita and Sue start their periods?

Actioning in practice

Throughout Max Stafford-Clark's career, he has used a process called 'actioning' in rehearsals, which encourages the actors to explore their intention in every line, rather than simply their thoughts behind it.

An action is a transitive verb, which means something that you want to do to the person that you are talking to (whether physically present or not). The way to remember transitive verbs is that it is something one does to someone else. Sad isn't a transitive verb, but sadden is. You might tell someone a piece of news in order to shock them please them or impress them. The shocks, pleases or impresses is the action of the line.

Imagine that you are a military strategist and every line in the script is your munition. You need to make each and every one count. So by assigning an action to each of the lines, you are ensuring your aim is as close to being fulfilled as possible. Have a look at the extract below.



Scene Three

Bob meets **Rita**. **Sue** doesn't know. He takes her to his friend's house. His friend is away on holiday.

Rita (Worries) They won't mind us being here will they?

Bob (Teases) I shouldn't think so or they wouldn't've given me the key.

Rita (Compliments) (looking round) Nice house they got. (Pursues) Where've they gone?

Bob (Impresses) Spain.

Rita (Amuses) Lucky buggers. (Quizzes) Are you sure they won't mind?

Bob (Reassures) Course I am. (Cautions) You didn't tell Sue you was coming did you?

Rita (Enlists) No, and I don't think I should.

Bob (Reassures) I like Sue.

Rita (Grounds.) So do I, (Manipulates) but she can be a bit miserable with you sometimes. (Tends) How's your Jenny? She wasn't very well the other day.

Bob She's OK now. (Pause.) (Interests) I think it was a tummy bug that she may have picked up from school.

Rita (Flatters) She's a very pretty child isn't she?

Bob (Entertains) Well she certainly doesn't take after her mother.

Rita (Joshes) Don't be so rotten.

Bob (Interests/ engages) Her and Simon are always fighting. Simon is very spiteful. Jenny was once playing with one of his cars, he asked for it back, she wouldn't give it to him, (Shocks) so he took it off her and hit her over the head with it.

Rita (Amuses) I hope she hit him back.

Bob (Impresses) She didn't, I did. I felt ever so sorry for her. (Involves) She cried for ages after.

Rita (Prepares) Is it all right if I ask you a question?

Bob (Encourages) Sure.

Rita (Quizzes) How old are you?

Bob (Prompts) I thought I told you a month since. That first night.

Rita (Persuades) You didn't. Well not that I can remember.

Bob (Teases) I'm twenty-one.

Rita (Joshes) You never are.

Bob (Reassures) No I'm not. I'm only kidding. (Invites) Have a guess.

Rita (Flatters) Twenty-five or twenty-six I'd say.

Bob (Prepares) Wrong. I'm twenty-seven.

Rita (Chides) I was only a year out. How old's Michelle?

Bob (Teaches) She's just gone twenty-five last month.

Rita (Pursues) So she was eighteen when she had Simon.

Bob (Satisfies) Yes.

Rita (Impresses) I want to be about twenty-five when I have my first.

Bob (Probes) And how old are you now?

Rita (Dazzles) Eighteen.

Bob (Teases) You never are.

Rita (Reassures) Sixteen then. **(Entrusts)** Well nearly.

As an exercise, read through the scene a few times.

1. Ignore the actions in brackets.
2. Read the lines with the action, and discuss with your teacher and classmates whether you think it is the right action for the line or not (you can tell if you read out the action and then the line playing the action and you see what the effect is). Make adjustments as needed.
3. Read the lines without naming the actions out loud, but *play* them. You should be able to perceive that the actions add a level of depth, perception, rhythm, and overall meaning which otherwise would be lacking.



Have a go at doing your own actioning on the next section:

Scene Seven Sue and Rita are sat in Michelle's house, baby-sitting. They are waiting for them to come in.

Rita One of the lads in the finishing shed asked me to go out with him.

Sue Who was it?

Rita I don't think you know him. He's called Ian.

Sue Do you fancy him?

Rita Oh yes. He's a right fit-bit.

Sue Well if you like him you should go out with him.

Rita Here don't you think I get enough with Bob?

Sue That won't last forever you know.

Rita You never know, it might.

Sue Before long either he'll get fed up or we will, then we'll all stop seeing each other.

Rita What would you do if Bob's wife found out about us?

Sue I'd deny it.

Rita Well if it came to it and she stood there and asked me I think I'd tell her.

Sue But if we wormed our way out of it it would save a lot of trouble all round.

Rita Why? Could we get into trouble?

Sue God we'd be in serious trouble - Bob would get sent to prison, he'd be charged with unlawful sex and we'd get put in care. And just think about Michelle. If he went to prison she wouldn't know what to do.

Rita Wouldn't it be awful if we had to go to court. I wouldn't feel half ashamed. And what if it got in the papers? *Pause.* Do you think it would be better if you and me got ourselves steady boyfriends?

Sue Well it wouldn't be such a bad idea would it? Why don't you go out with that boy you was talking about?

Rita Yes I think I might.

Sue But don't go out with him unless you want to. Don't think I'm trying to tell you what to

do.

Rita I think I'd feel guilty going out with Bob and another boy as well.

Sue Oh shut up Rita. You feel guilty of every bloody thing.

Rita I'm just not as strong as you.

Sue Well if you're gonna do things like this it's about time you learnt to be.

