THE IRON MAN

FROM 24 JAN – 5 MAR 2017
FOR PUPILS IN YEARS 3 – 6

TALLER THAN A HOUSE, THE IRON MAN STOOD AT THE TOP OF THE CLIFF, ON THE VERY BRINK, IN THE DARKNESS.

The Iron Man has been eating every single piece of metal in sight: tractors, old cars, fences, right down to the last rusty nail, destroying farms everywhere. The angry farmers try and trap him, but in the end it’s down to a young boy to try and tame the monster.

Using paper-cut silhouettes, puppetry and stop-motion animation Matthew Robins, co-creator of Something Very Far Away, brings to life the world of The Iron Man so vividly that you’ll feel you are there. His distinctive handmade and visual style of storytelling lets you watch this atmospheric tale being created live on stage.
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE PACK  p.4
A SHORT SUMMARY OF THE IRON MAN  p.5
MAKING THE PLAY: INTERVIEW WITH CREATOR MATTHEW ROBINS  p.6
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES – OVERVIEW  p.9

We are currently developing the full sequence of classroom activities with our partner school. They will be added to this pack by July 2016.
This pack is for teachers bringing pupils to see *The Iron Man* in spring 2017.

The Unicorn production of *The Iron Man* will be a fresh, imaginative and highly visual new version of this modern classic.

The classroom activities (which will be added to the pack by mid July) will be designed to support and extend pupils’ visit to the theatre and offer teachers ways to pick up on and explore the themes in the play, before and after a visit. They will use drama and storytelling as ways of exploring ideas that are relevant to the play and to support National Curriculum requirements:

> ‘All pupils should be enabled to participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama. Pupils should be able to adopt, create and sustain a range of roles, responding appropriately to others in role. They should have opportunities to improvise, devise and script drama for one another and a range of audiences, as well as to rehearse, refine, share and respond thoughtfully to drama and theatre performances.’ National Curriculum

The resources will also provide National Curriculum links at Key Stage Two: to Literacy through the development of spoken word and writing tasks, to IT thorough the creation of animations and to SMCS aspects of learning.

There will be a **free teacher CPD day** for *The Iron Man* on Thu 17 Nov 2016 where teachers can find out more about the show and gain practical experience of the classroom activities, before leading them with a class.

To find out more about the CPD or to book your place, email schools@unicorntheatre.com.
A SHORT SUMMARY OF THE IRON MAN

Ted Hughes’ *The Iron Man* is a modern classic, an extraordinary story of a giant Iron Man who arrives from nowhere.

*The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff. How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where did he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows.*

The Iron Man begins consuming anything made of metal and in particular all the farming machinery. The people are terrified and outraged and need to stop the Iron Man but they don’t know how. The farmers decide to set a trap and bury the Iron Man under hundreds of feet of earth. They dig a giant hole and cover it with leaves and twigs and on top place a red lorry as bait. But the Iron Man doesn’t come and eventually they take the lorry away.

One day a small boy sees the Iron Man near where the great pit has been dug and cleverly and gently he lures the Iron Man towards the hole by making the sound of metal; clanking a nail against a knife. With a great crash the Iron Man falls through the leaves and sticks and into the giant hole.

The farmers are delighted and bury the Iron Man in earth; but the boy feels guilty for luring the Iron Man to his fate.

The following spring, the Iron Man emerges from where he was buried and begins devouring the farm machinery again. Once again the boy has an idea; he leads the Iron Man to a scrap yard and there he is given all the scrap metal that he wants. And so they have found a way for them all to co-exist.

But one day there came strange news. One of the stars in the constellation of Orion was changing, growing bigger and bigger and getting closer to earth. It was a terrible space-bat-angel-dragon and it wanted to devour everything on earth. The space-bat-angel-dragon is so big and so powerful it seems that nothing will be able to overcome it. Until the Iron Man steps up and challenges the space-bat-angel-dragon to a contest and the two of them battle for the future of the earth.

The Unicorn production of *The Iron Man* will combine Ted Hughes’ classic text with puppetry, animation, movement and sound, creating a powerful collage which will bring the story alive.

The classroom activities in this pack will offer a range of ways of exploring both Ted Hughes’ text and the Unicorn production. One sequence will provide materials which echo Matthew Robin’s creative process in adapting the book for the stage and in particular his work as an animator. Using the idea of collage and combining this with stop motion animation, the resource will take you through a step by step process of planning, preparing, filming and editing a short piece of animation based on the pupil’s responses to the play and their own creative ideas.
INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW ROBINS
CREATOR OF THE IRON MAN

The process of creating this production of *The Iron Man* is a long one. From the initial idea and commitment to making the piece, Matthew Robins will have been working on the play for around two years when it is finally shown at the theatre. In this time he will spend time exploring Ted Hughes’ book, developing his own personal responses to the story and beginning the process of translating it into something which will work on stage.

He will also spend time with creative collaborators; actors, sound designers and puppeteers, who will help him create the final piece through practical workshops at different points over the two year process.

The conversation below takes place after Matthew has led two workshops developing his ideas for the show. However with nine months to go until the production opens, many questions are still unanswered at this point.

**WHY DID YOU WANT TO ADAPT TED HUGHES’ THE IRON MAN FOR THE STAGE?**

Purni (artistic director of the Unicorn Theatre) gave me a few choices of the things she thought I might want to do, and with the other options I could picture them so clearly I thought ‘there’s not really that much point doing it’, whereas with *The Iron Man* I thought ‘oh, that will be really difficult, it will be a challenge.’

I really like a challenge - it’s so stressful, not in a bad way, but every time you make a decision you think about what someone else might think. Yesterday I was trying to write one of the scenes and I thought ‘oh no, I can imagine Purni not liking that and Carol Hughes (Ted Hughes’ wife) not liking that.’ And then I have to work out why I think that and I come to realise it’s often because I don’t like it or it’s maybe a bit of a lazy idea.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OF ADAPTING THIS BOOK?**

In the book there’s the line ‘where has The Iron Man come from? Nobody knows.’ And I think it’s my job to know where he’s come from in a way, because it then forms his behaviour in the show. He keeps coming out from the sea, so I’ll think about why he is down there - why is he living in the sea? Maybe it’s the silence that he likes?

The book is told like a fable, quite fairytale like; it doesn’t have the realism of a novel. But I think when it’s on stage it will need a bit more structure to it. There’s the part where the Iron Man is buried in a pit for a hundred years, but the book doesn’t really say how he feels about it. It might be that he loves it; he might love the silence and the dark for a while. I’ve got to find a way to make those things make
sense to an audience - it can’t be so much of a fable on stage.

With the role of the boy, I’m trying to give him more of a character. I’m trying to create the show without using too much talking or too many words, so the boy has to have attributes that he doesn’t have to have in the book. The route I’m going down is that he’s much more interested in the natural world than the book might suggest - he’s kind of based on me when I was younger, he’s out in the fields looking at insects and drawing them or taking photos of them. I think that opens him up a bit more, maybe that’s why he’s less frightened of the Iron Man than everyone else? Because he’s curious and sees him as he would see a weird insect or something.

**CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT HOW THE PRODUCTION MIGHT LOOK AND FEEL?**

The production will combine lots of different elements; object manipulation, puppetry, animation, sections of choreography and even some singing. I want the show to have quite a collaged feel; to feel really layered. The way I’m thinking of it, I’m not trying to paint a masterpiece, instead it’s a collection of paintings. Or like it’s like a circus, where something will come on and then something else and then something else - I want to try and find different ways to keep this story going. It is my job to make a visual version of the words, so I hope this slightly collage-like structure will work.

There might be little snippets of documentaries about nature that I can make and include. Or for the end, where the Iron Man has to fight the space-bat-angel-dragon creature, I was thinking about birds and insects that have war like patterns on them to make them seem more scary than they are, and I was thinking the boy could be more interested in that.

There will be three performers in the show and I want to work with people who aren’t just actors but who are comfortable with different kinds of performing. So one of them I hope will be a dancer, one a choreographer and another a puppeteer.

The sound designer, Owen Crouch is really into the idea of using organic sounds; for example sound created by banging metal things - you can create so many weird noises it out of it. Exploring a building and finding lots of real sounds, he’s going to use that as his instruments.

**HOW ARE YOU WORKING WITH THE TEXT AND ADAPTING IT FOR YOUR PRODUCTION?**

Mainly what I’m doing is going through the book and trying to write a description of what actually happens; so when things happen in the book that will be difficult because they wouldn’t make sense on stage, I have to look at them and say ‘what would my version of that event be’?

For example, in the book, the boy and his dad are driving along and they see the Iron Man and knock him over. It’s quite funny in the book, but I think on stage it wouldn’t work visually, so I’m exploring what that scene is doing that we can show in a different way. Maybe it’s that the Iron Man is sitting on their house but they can’t see him; they’re trying to persuade the farmers that this Iron Man exists, but he’s so big they don’t see he’s there. I’m not saying this is definitely going to happen, but I’m just trying to find ways of matching the emotion of the book and not change it for the sake of changing it. I do things quite visually, or with little language, it’s a different medium.
Every time I’ve told people I’m working on this show they say ‘oh it’s my favourite book.’ I think everyone has an expectation, but I also think many people may not have read it for 20 years and so what they’ll want to go away with is that feeling they got from the book when they read it. That’s why I feel I need to make the show feel satisfying, to give them that emotion rather than create an exact replica of the narrative.

**HOW ARE YOU THINKING OF CREATING THE SPACE–ANGEL–BAT–DRAGON CREATURE?**

I think it will be quite interesting working with a choreographer on the creature, because that might be where we come up with something new, rather than just another puppet and it might have a more organic movement to it. We’ll also need to think about scale because it’s meant to be huge, (the size of a planet).

In the story things just change scale; at one point the Iron Man is meant to have a head as big as a house, and at the next point he’s sitting in a scrap yard. I think hopefully a lot of this can be shown using darkness, with things appearing in the darkness and showing the shadows of things. I was thinking at one point maybe we only need to see the space-bat-angel-dragon’s eyes, otherwise the Iron Man will have to be tiny for the scale to work. It’s the bit I’m most nervous about because I haven’t thought enough about it yet.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK THE SPACE–BAT–ANGEL–DRAGON REPRESENTS?**

Obviously it’s meant to represent something in the book, like a threat, or some kind of war. In a way, it could be a mental or emotional thing, like depression, but I think it could be anything. I’ve decided I don’t need to be thinking about what it represents. I’m sure a lot of people will read into it, as I think that’s what fables are for. That’s why you have to put yourself into the story, so at least if it works or doesn’t work you’ve done something genuine; your own sort of metaphor.

One way of representing it would be through animation, but for me that feels like a cheat, as it would be so easy to have an animation on screen with the Iron Man puppet reacting to it. I just feel because it is so easy now to bring projection into live shows, people use it to solve lots of problems.

I feel that my whole goal with this show is that anything that feels like the easy way to do it is the wrong way. And I don’t know if I’m just giving myself a load of work that I don’t need to - I could have a much more pleasant year just getting on with it and making all the parts, but I sort of think there is more of an opportunity to make something that feels quite immersive.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITIES WILL INCLUDE

• A learning sequence which uses the idea of collage and simple stop-motion animation that allows children to respond creatively to the story of *The Iron Man* and devise and produce their own stop-motion animation. Matthew Robins will work with us to write the resource for this and create a short ‘How to make an animation’ film.

• Drama and writing activities which support the children in an exploration of Ted Hughes’ text, bringing the story to life and imagining and extending key moments through dramatic investigation.

These activities are currently in development with our partner Collaborate school and will be available before the end of term. Please email schools@unicorntheatre.com if you would like notification as soon as they are online.
THE IRON MAN

A Unicorn production

By Ted Hughes
Created by Matthew Robins
Resource pack written by Catherine Greenwood