THE PARDONER’S TALE

TEACHER RESOURCE PACK

FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH PUPILS IN YEAR 3 – 7

16 – 31 JAN

THE UK’S THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES
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INTRODUCTION

Tangere Arts and the Unicorn Theatre’s co-production of The Pardoner’s Tale is not only an engaging piece of adventurous theatre it is also an introduction for young audiences to one of the most influential literary works written in English: Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales.

These resources provide a brief introduction for teachers to the historical context of The Pardoner’s Tale, the period in which The Canterbury Tales was written and the language of the time. At the end of the pack are practical drama and other classroom activities that use drama, reading, writing and visual responses to explore themes in the play. The activities are designed to support teachers in developing active ways to contextualise The Pardoner’s Tale before coming to the theatre and for reflective work after the visit. They aim to enable young audiences to tune into the performance and to Chaucer’s England and his place in English literary heritage.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Coming to the Unicorn to see The Pardoner’s Tale as a school visit will be a special event and teachers will want it to be an enjoyable and engaging experience for their class. Pre-show activities will support teachers in establishing a connection to the play. Post-show activities will support teachers in exploring responses to the play and the approach Tangere Arts have taken.

Whilst activities in this resource pack do not take an objective led approach, teachers will be able to establish links to the relevant curriculum objectives for their particular year group at Key Stages 2 and 3 and can adapt these for their particular educational setting.
In Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* a group of people from different walks of life are on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas a Beckett in Canterbury. Some of their trades and professions still sound familiar to us in the 21st Century: the Cook, the Miller, the Nun, and the Merchant, and there are others whose roles reflect life in the 14th Century: the Squire, the Canon’s Yeoman, the Franklin, the Reeve and the Pardoner. The journey of about 60 miles from Southwark to Canterbury can be made in just over an hour today but in Chaucer’s time it would have taken much longer. To pass the time the pilgrims agreed to take part in a storytelling competition, drawing straws to determine whose turn it is to tell a tale. Romances, bawdy stories, legends, lives of the saints, fables, morality tales and sermons are told as they journey and the prize for the best story is a meal on their return at The Tabard Inn in Southwark, not far from where the Unicorn Theatre stands today.

**William Blake’s Canterbury Pilgrims, painted in 1808**

Tangere Arts have taken Chaucer’s *The Pardoner’s Tale* and created a piece of contemporary theatre that bridges the centuries. The story the Pardoner tells, *The Three Young Men and Death*, which was already well known when Chaucer included it in *The Canterbury Tales* in 1387, is as fitting a moral tale for 2013 as it was then.
THE PARDONER
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It will be helpful for teachers to know a little about who pardoners were in Chaucer’s time so that they can tune their class in to his job and character before seeing the play. In 14th Century England a pardon would have been familiar figure in towns and villages.

Pardoners were men licensed by the Church to raise funds for the maintenance of church property. They travelled the country selling ‘pardons’ to people who either knew they had committed minor sins and wanted to be forgiven or wanted to be excused from fasting on holy days.

Pardoners also sold ‘holy relics’ which were artefacts that they claimed were the bones, body parts, scraps of clothing or personal belongings of saints and which held miraculous, curative powers. Although the pardon was a role set up by the Church it became open to fraud and corruption and most relics were in fact made by the pardoners themselves. Even though 14th Century England was a deeply religious country, most people recognised pardoners to be fraudsters who were out to sell fake relics to anyone foolish enough to buy them, pocketing the money they made rather than donating it to the Church.

The Pardoner that Chaucer depicts in The Canterbury Tales with his quick wit and amazing claims for relics would have been a recognisable figure. He is a trickster who lets his audience into the secrets of his trade and confesses his fraudulent ways whilst trying to get the pilgrims to part with their money.

Whatever it is the pardon sermonises against it is evident in what he says that he is guilty of such sins himself. For his story he takes as his motto Radix malorum est Cupiditas – the love of money is the root of all evil - and tells the pilgrims a moral tale of three ‘roisterers’ to warn them of the sins of greed and avarice. Like a market trader who knows that a good line in patter helps trade, Chaucer’s pardon is a performer who knows how to hold the attention of his audience when he tells the story of The Three Young Men and Death.
TANGERE ARTS & THE UNICORN THEATRE’S VERSION OF THE PARDONER’S TALE

In this contemporary production of *The Pardoner’s Tale* the Pardoner, played by Gary Lagden, is a quick-witted, silver-tongued trickster - part magician, part sermoniser - who uses his persuasive storytelling powers to sell pardons and excuses to his audience. Just like Chaucer’s pardoner, he reveals his tricks to the crowd, shows his disdain for the fools who fall for his trickery (not you; last week’s crowd!) but still suggests that the audience should buy his ‘notes’ to buy their way out of their own wrong doing.

This is a production full of striking visual images, music that is integral to the storytelling and foley art – using everyday objects to create sound effects and underscore the story. The tale of *The Three Young Men and Death* will be told using some of Chaucer’s rich language and the Pardoner’s Latin motto - *Radix malorum est Cupiditas* - is one of the first lines the audience will hear. Whilst the Pardoner lets the audience into the secrets of his trade, the production lets them into the secrets of theatre - the audience will see how sounds are made, how lights are moved, scenery shifted and illusions created.

CHAUCER’S THE PARDONER’S TALE:
A SUMMARY

In Chaucer’s *The Pardoner’s Tale* the Pardoner is invited to tell a story to the pilgrims that has a moral, that will ‘tell us some moral thing that we may learn’. The pardoner says that before he begins he would like to have drink and a little time to think about which story to tell. He then begins by explaining to the pilgrims that whenever he preaches he always chooses the same theme: *Radix malorum est Cupiditas* - the love of money is the root of all evil.

He tells the pilgrims about how he presents his holy relics to a congregation and tells them what miraculous powers they have and the tricks he uses for getting people to buy his pardons - suggesting that if they refuse it is because they are so sinful that the pardons won’t work.

The pardoner doesn’t hide from the pilgrims the fact that he has disdain for the people he is tricking, that his holy relics are fake and that he keeps most of the money for himself, becoming rich through his deception.

The pardoner then sermonises on gluttony, drunkenness and gambling, arguing that to consume in excess is to waste and dishonour God’s gifts.
One day three young men, who are friends, are drinking in a tavern when they hear a funeral procession passing by and the Landlord tells them it’s a friend of theirs. When the three friends demand to know who has killed him the Landlord tells them it was Death.

The young men become angry and decide to go and find Death and murder him. They swear an oath of friendship and set off together to find Death.

On the road they meet a very old man who says he has been waiting for Death and he still hasn’t come for him. But he tells that them that he has seen him under a tree which he points out to the young men.

The three friends hurry to the tree where they find three bags of gold coins. They decide they can move the gold only when night falls and it is dark. They draw straws to decide who should go to the town to buy food and wine. The youngest pulls the short straw.

The youngest sets off on his journey. As he gets to town he makes a plan; he will poison the other two and keep all the gold for himself.

In town, he buys some food and three bottles of wine. He buys poison from the apothecary and adds it to two of the bottles.

Back at the tree the other two have plotted to kill the youngest on his return, so that they can share the gold between the two of them. When they see the youngest coming they jump out and stab him.

The two celebrate by drinking the bottles of wine – they drink the two with the poison in and die. They have all found death.
Many teachers will be aware of *The Canterbury Tales* as a title but may not have read it. There are many versions adapted for young readers that will help introduce both teachers and children to Chaucer’s work. These include:

**The Canterbury Tales** (1993) Selina Hastings
Now out of print but available as a used copy

**Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales** (2008) Marcia Williams
Written in her familiar cartoon style and still in print

**Canterbury Tales** (1997) Geoffrey Chaucer
A Penguin Classic now out of print but available as a used copy
MIDDLE ENGLISH: THE LANGUAGE OF CHAUCER

Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* in English which, in the 14th Century, was the language of ordinary literate people. In Chaucer’s time Latin was the written language read by educated scholars and Norman French was still the language of the courts, so in choosing to write *The Canterbury Tales* in English, Chaucer was aware of who he wanted to hear his stories.

The English of Chaucer’s time is called ‘Middle English’ and it can look and sound like a different language to contemporary speakers of modern English. However, when we look at the Middle English of Chaucer’s time, the spelling patterns and some words are still familiar to us today and when we hear Middle English read aloud there is also a familiarity to the pattern and cadence of the language. Looking at and listening to Middle English creates a link between us and the voices of people living in the same country 700 years ago. It is also a reminder that language is a living thing that changes over time.

THE OPENING TO CHAUCER’S THE PARDONER’S TALE – DISCOVERING MIDDLE ENGLISH

Have a look at the opening of Chaucer’s text in Middle English. The ‘englishness’ of it is immediately recognisable: some of the words will be easily understood, in some the spelling looks to us as if Chaucer has made mistakes, the syntax will be familiar and only a few of the words seem as if they are not English. You can listen to audio of Gary Lagden (the actor who plays the pardoner) reading this section of the text here: unicorntheatre.com/the-pardoners-tale/for-schools#resource-packs

Look closely and even if a reader can’t understand what is written, the spelling patterns reveal the end rhymes and the discovery that Chaucer wrote in rhymed couplets.

‘Lordynges’ quod he, ‘in chirches when I preche
I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche,
And rynge it out as round as gooth a belle,
For I kan al by rote that I telle
My theme is alwey oon and evere was -
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.’

Knowing what the pardoner is saying will be helpful in trying to puzzle out the language: he is saying that when he preaches in church he always makes sure he uses a loud voice, that he knows everything he wants to say by heart and that he has only one theme - *Radix malorum est Cupiditas.*
DISCOVERING MIDDLE ENGLISH CONTINUED...

This exploration of the meaning and pattern of language is explored in the practical activity Translating Chaucer - text detectives on page 18.

This version of The Pardoner’s Tale is not in Middle English but it is a production that explores the boundaries of language and time through adventurous theatre. It draws on the language that Chaucer used and matches it with the exuberance of contemporary English.

CHAUCER’S CANTERBURY TALES: ITS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF PRINTING

In the 21st Century we are used to the immediacy of print and the quantity of printed material is almost beyond reckoning. In the 14th Century, however, books were still written by hand with any other copies being made by scribes. Chaucer wrote The Canterbury Tales in 1387 and in his lifetime there were only two copies made but it became the first work of English literature to be printed by William Caxton (who bought printing to England) in 1476, 68 years after Chaucer’s death.

Whilst teachers may not be in a position to create a full scale project on the history of printing with their class, coming to see The Pardoner’s Tale is an opportunity to widen the class’ understanding of the ways in which printing and the reproduction of texts has developed over time. The British Library holds Caxton’s two editions of Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales and these can be viewed online: www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/homepage.html The British Library’s Treasures in Full pages also give a helpful introduction to both Chaucer and the history of printing.
INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR - LEWIS GIBSON

WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF THIS STORY FOR YOU?

The dream of becoming rich, famous, to have a completely different life from the one we are in is as present today amongst young people as it ever was. Some might say even more so since ‘celebrity’ culture has taken hold.

This is all well and good and we can probably agree that the behaviour in the story is not very good, and the moral lesson learnt is pretty clear.

TELL US ABOUT THE CHARACTER OF THE PARDONER

The pardoner tells us this story for his own reasons. He is using the moral high ground to aid his business. Originally, in Chaucer, this would have been to sell us fake religious artefacts which were supposed to hold magical powers, or pardons signed by the Pope to forgive us of certain sins. In our production, the pardoner has a similar agenda. He tries to get you on board, to like him, he tells you what a special bunch of people you are. Instead of artefacts and pardons, he sells pills and creams that can make you stronger, smarter, more beautiful and he sells notes; excuse notes that can get you off homework, or out of sports, or off work, fake exam results and fake OFSTED reports. You name it, he can provide it.

The character of the pardoner appeals to our own sense of greed and wanting a quick route to success.
INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR CONTINUED...

HOW WILL YOU EXPLORE THE CHARACTER OF DEATH IN THE PLAY?

Another strand that features in Chaucer’s tale is the notion of death. It was written at a time when the plague could devastate whole communities and many factors caused untimely death. The idea of being able to cheat death, to buy more time, or even, as is attempted in this tale, to actually kill death is something that features quite a bit in our production. There is even a character who wishes to die, but cannot. We are thinking of this as a metaphor for having control over our lives, to be able to shape our own destiny, rather than everything being in the hands of others. This is, I believe, a concept that the young mind can understand.

HOW WILL YOU BE EXPLORING ILLUSION AND TRUTH IN THE PLAY?

We are encouraged as young people to believe what we are told; our elders know best and ours is not to reason why. But the inquisitive mind cannot help asking questions, challenging ideas, and it is this facet of the human mind that has been very important in our social development and making this modern world of ideas that we are lucky enough to inhabit.

People often spin a story or a yarn or a particular political or religious point of view for selfish reasons. The pardoner is one of these. He tries to fill us with fear of the future, be this eternal damnation in hell or awful times ahead in our lives.

He tries to sell us items that can alleviate us from any of these worries. He might be aligned to a modern insurance salesman. What he offers is peace of mind, but is of little use when push comes to shove.

For so many children, they will receive wisdom from home, friends, school teachers, television and the internet that are often very conflicting. Who to believe? I hope that this piece helps them to ask that question in a light hearted way.

It is ironic, of course, that I am trying to discuss artifice through the means of the greatest fraud of all – theatre.
INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR CONTINUED...

Our pardoner uses theatrical tricks to help his cause, and we allow the audience to see through these (most of the time), to let the artifice of the theatre stand in for the fraudulent opinions and actions of the pardoner and the characters in his tale.

Everyone knows that what they see in a theatre is not real, yet can be swept up into a story and feel all sorts of real feelings in response to it. It is a very sophisticated game that we all play and this production will try to use this game and bend the rules to our advantage. Beware.

CHAUCER’S LANGUAGE – HOW WILL YOU TUNE YOUR AUDIENCE INTO THIS?

Chaucer wrote this tale in English and not Latin as was often done in his time, making the work accessible to many more people.

*The Pardoner’s Tale* is written in Middle English, which can be very hard to follow. However, part of the attraction to doing this story is the unusual language, so we do not want to lose it all together. Our last four plays have been in verse and a good actor can make verse read like prose, avoiding the ‘dum dee dum’ rhythms that can become very dull.

Rhyme, especially when a little hidden, can really help text sink home for the audience, it stays in the memory for a while longer and our brains seem to enjoy the sport of poetry.

Like with Shakespeare, it is what Chaucer does with language, the beauty and skill he employs with words that make his work so appealing across centuries.

We are going to use as much original Middle English as possible, but we are speaking it in a modern voice, with modern spelling, so it is accessible. However, even that can be hard for the ears, so we are going to slowly introduce this enigmatic language during the first part of the piece.
INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR CONTINUED...

We will begin in modern poetic prose, sliding into modern verse and then eventually add in the Middle English. Often it is the vocabulary rather than anything else that is a problem; simply the use of words that no longer exist. Sometimes we will keep these if the action explains them, and sometimes we will replace them with a suitable modern word. For instance ‘lecherye’ meant ‘luxury’, so we will use the latter.

Chaucer also uses a lot of references to Christian doctrine of the time, and to the over use and large consumption of alcohol. Neither of these subjects are that useful to a modern child. Of course some young people will have experience of organised religion and some will know of the effects of alcohol, but a lived experience of these subjects will not be so common. So we will replace drunkenness with the sugar rush and with more general types of gluttony and excess such as over eating the ‘wrong’ kinds of things. Religion will still be present, but moral dilemmas are expressed in a way that all young people from a diversity of backgrounds can engage with.

HOW WILL YOU BE USING MUSIC AND FOLEY IN THE PIECE?

For me, music, sound and song can be really useful tools in helping support a story, or give a different take on what is happening. For instance, we might have a charming character underscored with a menacing soundtrack. Music gives us clues to emotional states and can help tell us where and when we are.

We will have elements of medieval music in this production, to give a flavour of the period mixed with more contemporary references to ‘gothic’ and pompous granduer such as Doom Metal / Phantom Of The Opera.

We are using song in this piece to do a number of things: To help recap or pre-empt the story in a clear and simple fashion, to give the audience some light relief and have a break from the plot for a while, and to go places in language and style that are very different from the rest of the piece. A song interlude can be seen as a bubble that exists on its own, but nestled quite comfortably amongst the rest of the show.
INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR CONTINUED...

In this production we are making use of the world of foley (live sound effects). We are doing this for a variety of reasons: So the audience can see the mechanics whilst still being ‘in the moment’, so we can musicalise sounds and turn them into rhythms and melodies, for visual fun and so we can depict the violence in this story without showing it acted out on stage.

Using two talented musicians and an actor with a sensitive ear allows me to mix sound with music and for the story to be told sometimes almost as a radio play, just with words and sounds.

In the murder scene, for instance, we might chop up a watermelon which is a very messy business, to illustrate the killing of a character with swords, whilst the actor ‘acts’ being hurt, but no actual violence is shown.

Exploring foley sound in the rehearsal room
WORKING THROUGH DRAMA: PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES

These pre and post show activities are designed to enable teachers and their pupils to get the most out of their visit to the theatre and to explore ways of linking the play to work in the classroom.

ACTIVITY ONE
RADIX MALORUM EST CUPIDITAS – LEARNING THE MAXIM

INTRODUCTION
Radix Malorum est Cupiditas, which is translated as ‘greed is the root of evil’, is the Latin maxim on which the Pardoner bases his tale. The words are sung at the opening of the play and referred to by the Pardoner throughout the performance. This activity, which is based on the drama game Fruit Bowl, is a way of making the Latin words, and their meaning, familiar to young audiences.

TIME
Once the class knows how to play Radix Malorum est Cupiditas, the game can be played for 10 minutes as a starter to a hall based drama work.

ORGANISATION
Radix Malorum est Cupiditas has to be played in a space big enough for the class to form a circle of chairs. There should be one less chair than there are participants as there will always be one person in the centre of the circle. It is a good idea to establish a ‘no running, no pushing’ rule from the start to guard against accidents.

CONTEXT
The maxim is in Latin and teachers who are unfamiliar with Latin need to be clear about how the words translate into English. Radix translates as root; Malorum as of evil. Cupiditas is translated as greed although it also means desire which explains why we can see the familiar word ‘cupid’ embedded there.

Teachers who are working at Y5 and above could take time to discuss etymology in connection with the Latin words: rad and mal, for example, are found in words that have a connection to English words such as ‘radical’ or ‘radish’ and ‘malice’ the prefix mal- as in ‘malpractice’.
RUNNING THE ACTIVITY

• Introduce the Latin words and explain to the class what a maxim is and how *Radix Malorum est Cupiditas* connects to their theatre visit to see *The Pardoner’s Tale*. The class will need to see the words as well as hear them.

• Teachers might want to discuss with the class what they notice about the language – any familiar sounds, similarity to any English words, syllable count etc.

• Explain that that they are going to play a game as a way of becoming familiar with the Latin words. Ask the class to form a circle of chairs and to sit down.

• Go round the circle and give each person their word: *Radix Malorum Est Cupiditas*

• Check that everyone knows what their word is by asking them to raise their hand when you say the phrase.

• Explain that when you say one of the words the person who has that word has to stand up and move across the circle to find another seat.

• Practice this in slow motion to make sure that everyone understands and remind the class of the ‘no pushing, no shoving’ rule.

• Explain that if the person in the centre says the whole line: *Radix Malorum est Cupiditas* everyone has to stand and say the line together. The line can be said in a range of different ways that the class have to echo.

• Once the class is familiar with how to play the game, explain that you are now going to join in and whoever is left without a chair has to choose which word to say.

• Once the game has been played successfully and the class are familiar with the Latin words, teachers can introduce the English translation: *Greed is the root of evil*. Teachers might wish to discuss that way in which the order of the words differs in English and Latin:

  - *Radix* = the root
  - *Malorum* = of evil
  - *Est* = is
  - *Cupiditas* = greed

• Give each participant the English translation of their words so that they change seats when you say, for example, either *radix* or *root*.

• Continue to play the game so that the participants become familiar with the English and the Latin words and the whole maxim in both languages.

• At another time teachers might want to discuss with the class what the maxim means to them.
ACTIVITY TWO
TRANSLATING CHAUCER – TEXT DETECTIVES

INTRODUCTION
This activity enables the class to engage with the language of the original text of The Pardoner’s Tale. It helps to develop their awareness of the English language and the ways in which it has changed and developed over time. Understanding that language is flexible and open to change over time makes an important contribution to young learners’ experience as language users. This activity develops the class’s phonic; semantic and syntactic knowledge and their understanding of spelling pattern.

TIME
This is a 50 minute activity with the opportunity for further development and presentation.

ORGANISATION AND RESOURCES
This is a classroom activity as a whole class and in pairs.
The recording of actor Gary reading the opening is on the Unicorn Theatre website and teachers may also want to look at the section on Chaucer on the British Library website.
Teachers will need copies of the opening of The Pardoner’s Tale for everyone and a copy in the IWB would also be useful.

CONTEXT
For context around this activity see p. 9.

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY
• Start by introducing Chaucer to the class. The British Library website has images of him that will give the class an idea of who he is.
• Explain that The Pardoner’s Tale is one of a set of stories from The Canterbury Tales that Chaucer wrote in 1387.
• The class will already be aware that people speak English with different accents in different parts of the country and this can be a helpful analogy when explaining that language alters over time as well. In the 14th Century the English that people used may seem strange but that it is a version of the English that we speak today.
• Listen to Gary Lagden, the actor who plays the Pardoner, reading the opening of The Pardoner’s Tale in Chaucerian English. Listen several times and ask the class if they can hear the pattern of the language and how it sounds like English.
• As they listen, ask the class to be aware of any words that sound in any way familiar.
RUNNING THE ACTIVITY CONTINUED...

Ask the class to work in pairs:

- Give out the sheet with the opening lines on it, ask the class to listen again and to underline any words that they hear that they think are familiar on their own sheet and then compare it with their partner.

- Draw attention to the spelling and ask the partners to spot any words on the page that look like words they recognise. If teachers have played the Radix Malorum game with the class, many will recognise this phrase.

- It is possible to puzzle out most of the words from the context and any that prove elusive such as hauteyn can be checked out on line at: quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/

- The Canterbury Tales was one of the first books to be printed in this country but most texts were still written out by hand. The British Library website has excellent examples of these. When each of the pairs has created their own translation of the lines, or the class has agreed a version, each person could make a ‘manuscript’ of it with best handwriting and margin illustrations.
THE OPENING LINES OF ‘THE PARDONER’S TALE’
BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER 1387

Lordynges, quod he, in chirches whan I preche
I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche,
And rynge it out as round as gooth a belle,
For I kan al by rote that I telle
My theme is alway oon and evere was -
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.
ACTIVITY THREE
EXPLORING THE VILLAINS – ‘in Flanders once there was a company of three friends who lived for villainy’

INTRODUCTION
This activity focuses on the three villains in the story the Pardoner tells. It creates, through drama, a history to their friendship and to their unremitting villainous behaviour. In keeping with the Pardoner’s morality tale, the activity distances the participants from the behaviour of the three friends by asking them to view what they do from the viewpoint of victims and onlookers.

TIME
Each of the 4 sessions outlined will take about 40 minutes.

ORGANISATION AND RESOURCES
This activity will need a space big enough for drama although the first session can take place in the classroom. Teachers will also need: copies of Breughel’s painting of Children’s Games; a set of sticks or straws of three different lengths - one for each group of three in the class; some prop banknotes.

CONTEXT
In order to make a moral point about greed being the root of evil, the Pardoner tells the story of The Three Friends who went to look for Death. The friends are bad through and through and there is no redemption of the characters in the story. This activity creates as narrative of their road to ruin and gives the characters some ‘back story’ to animate the imagination and make a connection to the play without explaining the story the Pardoner tells or pre-empting the theatre experience. It asks the participants to create three scenes in the friends lives at three different ages: children, teenagers and young adults. It ends with reflecting on what might happen when they are faced with money that does not seem to belong to anyone. The work starts with looking a Breughel’s painting Children’s Games.
RUNNING THE ACTIVITY

Session 1 – creating a setting

• Explain to the class that you are going to be exploring some of the characters who appear in the story the Pardoner tells in the play.

• Introduce the Breughel painting and look at it together as a class – a version on the IWB would be helpful. Begin to look at the detail of the setting as well as the games the children are playing and how old the children are. Notice that the games are taking place in the town square.

• Organise the class into groups of three and ask them to look carefully and talk about the painting - they might recognise some of the games that are being played even though Breughel painted the work 450 years ago. The idea that things can be familiar even though they were created a long time ago can be linked to Chaucer who wrote *The Canterbury Tales* in 1387.

• Ask the groups to focus on one of the games that they think they could play if they were asked – one that isn’t too dangerous!

In the hall:

• Explain to the class that they are going to create the town square where the children are playing.

• Orientate the action to the setting of the painting so that it begins to become alive in the imagination and everyone has a sense of being in the same place: *If we are in the square in which direction would the river be? Where’s the building with the fence?* etc.

• Ask the class to create the image of the game they have chosen from the painting and to hold it as a freeze.

• Once the still scene is established, relax the class, commenting on what you have observed, and tell them that they are going to take their positions again and this time when you say action they are going to bring the scene to life for a few seconds. Silently!

• Freeze the class and comment on what has happened – the activity; the business; each group focused on their own game etc.

• Ask the class to take their positions again and this time they must be prepared to bring the sound of the game alive as well as the action. Give the groups time to think about what they will do then bring the scene alive – then freeze it and ask the class to relax.

• Discuss what it is like when you are absorbed in playing a game. Do you notice what is going on around you?

• Ask the class to think about where, in the setting they have created, three really naughty boys would be if they didn’t want to be seen when they were doing something wrong.

• Discuss their responses. Teachers may want write these down to have a record of the ideas to return to in the next session.
RUNNING THE ACTIVITY CONTINUED...

Session 2 - the three friends as children

• In the hall, tell the class that in the Pardoner's story there are three friends; villains who have always been up to no good. They are going to begin looking at events in their lives when two of them are around age 10 and the youngest one is about 7.

• Returning to the setting: Ask the class to recall what the town square looks like and where the buildings are and then replay the scene of the children playing games.

• Return to the ideas created in the first session and ask the class to think about where the three friends who are up to no good might be. Would they want to be somewhere where they could be seen or would they find a place where they think no one will see them? Ask the groups to imagine where they might be and what they might be up to.

• Tell the class that they are now going to show what is happening when the rest of the children are playing games. The way they are going to decide who plays which friend is by drawing straws - because that's how the three friends make a decision in the play.

• Model what is meant by ‘drawing straws’. The person who draws the longest straw is the oldest of the three friends, the middle straw is the next oldest and the shortest straw is the youngest friend.

• Ask each group to create a freeze frame of what the three friends got up to and then ask the class to bring their image to life for a moment.

• Gather the class together and look again at the Breughel picture drawing attention to the balconies and the windows that overlook the square - people can see what is happening from these places and what the three friends are doing has not gone unnoticed.

• The groups are now going to be the adults in the town who have seen what the three friends have been up to - what might the people of the town have to say about what they seen? Why do they think what the three friends are doing is so wrong? Then ask the groups to take on the role of the adults and to talk about what the boys have been up to.

• Replay the conversations individually, using a ‘listening hand’, so that the whole class can hear the different responses of the townspeople to the boys' behaviour.

• Discuss the responses with the class out of role and tell them the behaviour of the boys is going to continue to get worse as they get older.
RUNNING THE ACTIVITY CONTINUED...

Session 3 - the three friends as teenagers

- Discuss with the class the concept of ‘greed’ and how it can take many forms.
- Return to the experience of creating the town square and the responses of the townspeople to the action of the three friends. Tell the class that they are now going to imagine what the townspeople see as the friends get older. This time the scene they create has got to be based on the saying: *Greed is the root of evil*.
- Discuss with the class what other parts of the town there are: the market place; houses; the inn; etc where their scene might take place.
- Ask the groups to create a freeze frame that they might be asked to bring to life. They need to know where and when it is taking place; who the characters are and how it shows *greed is the root of evil*.
- If necessary teachers can take part in the freeze frame when they are being shown to the class if the scene requires an additional person.
- Ask the class to look at the freeze frames and to interpret what they see. Discuss how each of the images reflects Pardoner’s maxim.

Session 4 - The three friends as young adults

- Tell the class that you are going to move the action forward to when the three friends are age 20 with the youngest being about 17.
- Start with a game of STOP / GO: Ask the class to move around the room when you say GO and freeze like a statue when you say STOP.
- Now when you say STOP read a description of one of the friends and ask the children to create a statue of him.
- When you say GO ask them to move around the room as the character.
- Repeat with the other two friends.

*The first, the boss as he liked to be known
Hardy and big of belly and big of bone.
He was a chunky fellow, broad of build
He'd heave a door from its hinged if he will'd.*

*The next a weasel of a man
And like a rat had hair as yellow as wax
And lank it hung as does a string of flax.
Long were his legs and they were very lean.
Yeah, like a stick with no calf to be seen.*
The third was young and plump and dumb
With locks well curled as if they laid in a press.
The vain young thing was an innocent naïve man
Who shaved his beard as close as a razor can.

• Set up a table and three chairs to represent the inn in the town and ask for three people who are prepared to take on the roles of the friends. Ask the players to draw straws for who will play each role.
• As the straws are drawn read the lines from the play that describe each of the characters.
• Ask them to sit at the inn table in a way that they think suits their character. The rest of the class can help with this, with the players altering their positions at their suggestion. Remember and draw on information about the characters that has been created in the previous sessions.
• Place the banknotes on the table and ask the class to imagine what would happen if each of the three friends had noticed that the money had been left on the table, but weren’t sure if the others had seen it.
• None of the characters are allowed to touch the money - but what might they be thinking? Ask the class to voice the thoughts of the friends at this moment and discuss what the responses are and whether they differ.
• Move the class back into their groups of three friends and ask them to create what happens when one of the friends touches the money. Give the groups time to prepare their short scenes.
• Watch each of the sets in turn and reflect on the different ways the friends behave in each of the scenes depending on age and status. Does each of the stories that they have created reflect the Pardoner’s maxim, greed is the root of evil, in any way?
ACTIVITY FOUR
PROVERBS

INTRODUCTION
This activity focuses on proverbs and the way in which we use them to give both moral and practical advice and guidance; to comment on events; to give advice about expected behaviour and to warn about potential outcomes of actions. These compact memorable figures of speech work through analogy and metaphor and are a part and parcel of everyday written and oral language. This activity invites the class to explore how proverbs are used and the situations in which they are useful. The work develops understanding of the distinction between literal and figurative language. For learners who have English as an additional language, the work provides an opportunity to encounter aspects of colloquial English in a setting that makes it meaningful. Teachers might want to link this work with reading Aesop’s Fables to the class as these are stories about animals that illustrate proverbs and morals whose meanings are relevant to people.

TIME
Sessions 1 and 2 will take 30-40 minutes.
Sessions 3 and 4 will take between 40-50 minutes.

ORGANISATION AND RESOURCES
Introducing and discussing the concept of proverbs is a classroom based activity and the scene making activity will need to take place in the hall. Copies of the proverbs on paper and on the IWB

CONTEXT
Greed is the root of all evil – radix malorum est cupiditas – is the maxim that the Pardoner uses in his sermon and the story of The Three Friends is a way of illustrating the meaning. Although the Pardoner’s maxim for his morality tale is conceptual rather than concrete, his use of a saying that can be applied to many situations provides an appropriate starting point for exploring proverbs. Many proverbs and sayings can seem arcane and with no relevant connection to life in the 21st Century but the list provided in the resources has been selected because they will be accessible to contemporary children. The class may also know some proverbs that are used in their family. It is important to remember when having the discussion with the class that proverbs are not always used positively and that their meaning depends on who is saying them and in what situation. For example: you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink has a different nuance for the one leading the horse and the horse!
RUNNING THE ACTIVITY

Session 1 - Literal meanings

• The class will already be familiar with radix malorum est cupiditas from The Pardoner’s Tale. Remind them of the meaning and the way that Chaucer’s Pardoner used the story of The Three Friends to illustrate it.

• Introduce the proverbs to the class - you don’t have to use them all.

• Read one of two of them together and ask the class to imagine the scene that each one brings to mind. Teachers will want to introduce the term ‘literal’ as part of this discussion and to clarify the meaning of some words. Broth, for example, is a rather archaic term and may not be familiar to some students.

• Ask the class to work in pairs and give each two or three proverbs to focus on - to discuss the literal meaning and the scene that they imagine has given rise to the proverb.

• Return to the whole group and share what has been discussed by each pair.

Development: Teachers can ask the class to choose one of the proverbs and to make a story board of their interpretation of the literal meaning in four frames.

Session 2 - Proverbs as figures of speech

• Return to the proverbs and their literal meanings. Explain that proverbs can be applied to different situations and that they work metaphorically as figures of speech.

• Have a choice of three proverbs on the board one of which is: Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.

• Give the class an example of a proverb being used as a figure of speech to comment on another situation, For example:

  It is the middle of winter and snow, deep snow, has been forecast for later in the week. The whole school has been told that, because of the snow that has been forecast, it is likely that the school will be closed. Everyone is excited about having time off and a chance to play in the snow. Friends are talking about what they will do when they don’t have to be at school: building snowmen, sledging, throwing snowballs. They are sure they are going to have the best of times. But the snow never comes and school stays open.

• Teachers may want to invent another example to illustrate the same proverb so that the class is not dependent on one narrative.

• Ask the class to work in pairs and to decide which one of the proverbs fits the story and explain their choice.

• Share what the class think and why.

• Remind the class about literal meanings and what the literal meaning is of don’t count your chickens before they are hatched.
ACTIVITY FOUR CONTINUED...

• Introduce the term ‘figure of speech’ and explain how, because they are figures of speech that are used metaphorically, proverbs can be applied to a whole range of different situations that are analogous to ‘counting your chickens’.
• Teachers can look at several of the proverbs in the same way.

Session 3 - Proverb Plays
• Explain to the class that they are going to be creating a short play that illustrates one of the proverbs. Make the connection to The Pardoner’s Tale.
• Organise the class into groups of four and ask the groups to agree which of the proverbs they are going to focus on.
• Give them time to discuss ideas about the situation their proverb could apply to then explore their idea by acting it out.
• Ask the groups to choose the three most important moments from their idea and to turn these into freeze frames: one that starts the play; one that shows the main event and a final moment. They will need to keep in mind what the audience needs see to be able to make a connection between what they see and the proverb without it being literal.
• Give the groups time to create their freeze frames and then share these briefly with the whole class.
• Groups can develop the work by adding the action that links the frames and the dialogue that characters say.
• Ask the groups to think about how they will use the proverb. It could be the title; it could be part of the dialogue; it could be the epilogue; it could be said in full or alluded to in some way, as in ‘you’re counting chickens’
• Give time for groups to refine and rehearse their performance.
• The audience for the plays could be the rest of the class or the work could be prepared for assembly.
LIST OF PROVERBS
FOR ACTIVITY FOUR

- When the cat’s away the mice will play.

- Too many cooks spoil the broth.

- A fool and his money are soon parted.

- Don’t count your chickens before they are hatched.

- You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink.

- The grass is always green on the other side of the fence.

- As stitch in time saves nine.
ACTIVITY FIVE
FOLEY SOUNDS

INTRODUCTION

‘In this production we are making use of the world of foley (live sound effects). We are doing this for a variety of reasons: So the audience can see the mechanics whilst still being ‘in the moment’, so we can musicalise sounds and turn them into rhythms and melodies, for visual fun and so we can depict the violence in this story without showing it acted out on stage. In the murder scene, for instance, we might chop up a watermelon which is a very messy business, to illustrate the killing of a character with swords, whilst the actor ‘acts’ being hurt, but no actual violence is shown.’ Lewis Gibson director of The Pardoner’s Tale.

This activity takes short moments of action from the story the Pardoner tells and allows the children to explore one of the theatrical devices they have seen in the production; the use of foley to underscore the story telling.

TIME
One session of around 50 minutes

ORGANISATION AND RESOURCES
This activity needs to take place in a hall space. You will need a table, a microphone with amplifier and speakers, a range of objects to create sounds for the foley (celery, gravel in a tray, coconut halves, plastic bags, bubble wrap etc.) and copies of the short scenes from The Pardoner’s Tale.

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY
• With the table set up ready with the foley objects displayed and another with the microphone ask your class to close their eyes and listen to the sound you create and imagine what it could be. Hear the range of responses – there should be many possibilities for each object/sound.
• Ask for volunteers to come up, choose an object and repeat the process with a number of the foley objects.
• Now with everyone opening their eyes choose a sound that you thought could be effective as a sound effect for some action and ask for a volunteer who could co-ordinate acting in response to the sound effect. For example, the sound of someone walking up a path could co-ordinate with the crunching of the gravel; when the gravel sound stops the person acting has to stop, when the crunching starts again they start up again.
ACTIVITY FIVE CONTINUED...

• Once everyone has a sense of the potential of the different objects put the class into groups of five or six and give each group one of the scenes from the story. Ask them to decide in the group who will be the actors, who will narrate the story and who will create the foley underscoring.

• When the groups have decided on their roles ask them to think about what foley objects would create good sounds for parts of their story.

• Ask the children to act out their story, adding in the narration and the foley (at this stage without the microphone and amplifier). Emphasise how important it is to coordinate the sound with the action and think about the best way to do that.

• Each group performs their story, this time with the use of the microphone and amplifiers.
POST SHOW REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

After seeing *The Pardoner’s Tale* teachers will want the class to respond to the experience and to develop their ability to interpret and evaluate the performance. Talking about the performance is an integral part of the theatre experience and young audiences need the opportunity to make personal responses and the encouragement to develop their analytical, interpretative and evaluative skills. One of the ways that teacher might encourage the class to reflect on *The Pardoner’s Tale* is by using a ‘theme cube’.

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY

• A theme cube is a large cube that has a different theme or aspect of the performance on each face. For example, to extend the class’ memories and personal responses to *The Pardoner’s Tale* put a different question on each face:

  - Did you notice anything about the music that you found interesting?
  - Was there anything that drew your attention in the way the actors spoke and the lines they said?
  - How did the lighting help to create an atmosphere?
  - How was the set different from real life?
  - Was there anything that surprised you about the production?
  - What was the most memorable moment in the play and what made it memorable?

• Ask the class to sit in a circle and show them the cube and the questions on each face.
• Tell the class that you are going to roll the cube and anyone in the circle can respond to the question that is on the top face.
• Roll the cube; ask the question and invite responses. Follow up the responses with appropriate questions and invite any other comments from the group.
• Roll the cube again and ask another question.

Teachers who are interested in developing their understanding of how to support the class in responding to theatre performance might find the work of Matthew Reason helpful. Matthew Reason’s book, *The Young Audience - exploring and enhancing children’s experience of theatre* (Trentham Books 2010) includes a framework for post-show discussion that will support teachers in extending and developing young learners’ insight and reflection. The framework is based on a model of art criticism that involves description; analysis; interpretation and evaluation and can be adapted for both the age of the learners and the specific theatre production they have been to see. Teachers need to be selective about the questions they ask, however, and to ensure that they are relevant to the production.
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