THE
CAUCASIAN
CHALK CIRCLE

Written by
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TEACHER RESOURCE PACK
FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH STUDENTS IN YEAR 7+
THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

TERRIBLE IS THE TEMPTATION TO DO GOOD.

By Bertolt Brecht
A version by Frank McGuinness
Directed by Amy Leach

Blood runs through the streets and the Governor’s severed head is nailed to gates of the city. A young servant girl must make a choice: save her own skin or sacrifice everything to rescue an abandoned child...

A time of terror, followed by a time of peace. Order has been restored and the Governor’s Wife returns to reclaim the son she left behind.

Now the choice is the judge's: who is the real mother of the forgotten child? A bold and inventive new production of Brecht’s moral masterpiece, accompanied by a live and original soundtrack.
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Welcome to the Unicorn teacher resources for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht.

This pack is designed to provide teachers and students with materials that can extend and deepen students’ visit to the play. The resources support work before and after seeing the play and aim to enrich the experience through active and reflective engagement with the piece and connect with students’ classroom learning.

The play and resource are relevant for students of Drama and English and are designed to be adaptable for students at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5.

The resources are written for those who have prior knowledge of or are studying *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, as well as those who are encountering the story for the first time and have no experience of the play or of Brecht.

The Unicorn’s production of Brecht’s epic tale will be given a contemporary staging which speaks to an audience of young people and will resonate with their concerns about the world and how it is organised politically. We hope the play will challenge the audience to think critically and provoke them to consider the possibility of change.

‘What to me makes something contemporary is not necessarily when it was originally written but the way the recreation of it now speaks to the world we live in now. So to me Brecht is as contemporary as a piece of new writing.’ Purni Morell, Artistic Director, Unicorn Theatre

Brecht’s 1944 play addressed the concerns of a post war Europe. The Unicorn production will speak to the 21st Century, opening up questions of justice, power and inequality for us now.

‘There are lots of things in the world today that resonate with Brecht’s views and arguments, questions like social justice, questions like the relationship between justice and the law, questions about the sort of society we want to live in, whether we’re satisfied with the way things are at the moment.’ Dr Laura Bradley

Brecht was the great innovator of theatre in the 20th century; much of what we see and take for granted in the theatre today was originated in Brecht’s productions and articulated in his theories on the theatre. This resource pack will give clear definitions for Brecht’s innovations; epic theatre; Gestus; removal of the fourth wall; the V effect (verfremdungseffekt) and give practical ways for students to explore these approaches for themselves.

Our production aims to retain Brecht’s intention – that the story of the *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is given contemporary, political resonance. Brecht frames how the audience watches the ancient story through a prologue that asks the audience to think about the story in the context of the reshaping of society out of the ruins of the war in 1944. The Unicorn production will re-write the prologue so that it raises questions about the world we are living in now and the political questions of our time.

In October, we spent a day at Harris Academy South Norwood exploring ideas for a contemporary prologue to the play with students in Year 9.
SECTION ONE: CONTEXT
Section one will provide a summary of the play; historical background placing Brecht in the context of the times he was living through; an outline of Brecht’s theory and practice with a description of the key features of epic theatre; an interview with the director Amy Leach and writer Frank McGuinness and links to two films created to accompany the production.

SECTION TWO: PRACTICAL DRAMA ACTIVITIES
Activities will enable students to engage with the play before and after their visit, exploring the characters, narrative and themes, as well as the historical, social, cultural and political aspects of the play and make comparisons with the contemporary world.

The drama activities will also employ Brechtian techniques throughout allowing students to understand these techniques through practical application.

There are five flexible drama sessions which focus on:

• Introducing Brecht and political theatre.

• An exploration of the Prologue; using Brecht’s original text to understand the framing device for the story of The Caucasian Chalk Circle.

• Exploring Brecht’s techniques for distancing and highlighting the social and political relationships on stage; including a practical understanding of Epic theatre; exploring verfremdungseffekt, Gestus, the removal of the fourth wall and the use of narration to contextualise scenes.

• The story of how Azdak became judge and a practical exploration of justice and the law in Brecht’s play and in the modern world.

• An activity that allows students to explore the moment of Grusha’s decision to take the baby Michael and the implications of that decision.
THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE

A SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

THE PROLOGUE

It is 1944 in a valley in the Caucasus, the Nazis have been defeated but the fighting has been long and hard and much of the village and dairy buildings have been destroyed.

Two soviet farm collectives meet to debate what should be done with the valley and village.

The first kolchos (collective) are fruit farmers who have been fighting the Germans in the area, defending the land. They have seen the potential in the valley for planting and growing food and have an expert with them who has plans to irrigate the land, which will substantially increase the crop yield.

The other kolchos are goat farmers who have lived in the valley for many generations; they kept goats and made cheese, but moved out with their goats when the fighting got too close.

An expert from the Reconstruction Commission is there to help them make the best decision about what should happen to the land.

After much debate it is agreed that the fruit farmers should take control of the land, as their plans would benefit most.

Both kolchos sit down to a meal together. A famous singer (storyteller) and some musicians are invited to tell a story by a member of the fruit farming kolchos:

'We plan to show a play that has some connection with our problem.'

THE MIGHTY CHILD

The story they tell takes place a long time ago in the small Georgian town of Nukha. The Governor of the town, Georgi Abashvili, and his wife, Natella, present their baby son and heir, Michael, to the crowd of beggars and petitioners outside their palace.

The Grand Duke of Georgia is away leading a disastrous war in Persia. While he is gone a group of princes plan to take advantage of the Duke’s absence and seize power. In Nukha, the Fat Prince orders his soldiers to capture the governor Georgi Abashvili and behead him.

In the panic that follows, the governor’s wife, Natella, hurriedly packs her things to make her escape. She orders one of her servants to pick up the baby, Michael, and bring him too, but the servant isn’t there to hear the command and the baby is left behind.
At the same time a servant girl, Grusha, and soldier, Simon, hurriedly get engaged, they know in the chaos of civil war it may be some time before they see each other again, so they say their goodbyes.

Grusha prepares to leave the Palace, but spots baby Michael lying amongst the abandoned clothes. Other servants urge her to leave him; whoever is found with Michael will risk their own life. She sits by the baby waiting for someone to return for him, but by morning, when no one has, she picks up the baby and runs from the palace.

Grusha is in danger; the Fat Prince has ordered his soldiers, the Ironshirts, to find the baby and has offered a large reward.

Grusha heads for the mountains to find safety with her brother Lavrenti.

On her journey she faces a number of challenges; she is overcharged by a peasant when she needs milk for Michael. She tries to pretend she is a wealthy woman to join a coach of ladies but they see her hands are not the hands of a lady and scream ‘murder’. She tries to leave the baby by the house of a kind looking old couple, but when she sees the Ironshirts go into their cottage she hits one of them over the head with a shovel, grabs Michael and makes her escape. Finally she reaches a bridge across a steep glacier. The bridge is rotten and full of holes but when she sees the Ironshirts behind her, she steps onto the bridge with Michael and finally makes it safely to the other side.

Grusha does not get the welcome she is hoping for from her brother. He has married and his wife (who is very religious) is horrified that she has a single mother in the house. Grusha is allowed to stay, but only in the cold kitchen out of sight and only until the snow melts and she can move on.

When spring comes, her brother Lavrenti arranges for her to marry a man who is on his death bed in order to make her respectable; when he dies she will become a widow. Grusha agrees but a soon as the wedding is over, the end of the war is announced and her new husband makes a miraculous recovery; he had been pretending to be dying to avoid conscription. Grusha is trapped in a marriage she did not want.

One day Grusha and Michael are by the stream and Grusha sees Simon on the other side. Simon is devastated when he overhears Grusha say that Michael is hers when asked by a group of soldiers.

The soldiers have been sent by Natella. Now that the war is over and the Grand Duke has regained control she wants to find her son and claim his inheritance back from the rebellious princes.

The story of the judge takes us back in time, to the time of the coup, to the night that the Fat Prince captured and beheaded the Governor.

While the coup has been taking place Azdak, the town clerk, is poaching in the woods and comes across a man hiding who he thinks is a refugee. He takes him home and feeds him.
THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE – CONTEXT

But Azdak becomes suspicious that he is not the poor beggar that he first thought and asks to see the man’s hands, he realises they are the hands of a rich man. The man says he can pay Azdak handsomely, but he hasn’t any money with him now. Azdak is about to throw him out when a policeman knocks on his door and wants to arrest Azdak for poaching.

Azdak thinks about handing the man over to the policeman, but changes his mind and tells the policeman to go.

The next day Azdak realises it was the Grand Duke he had been hiding and that the Prince’s soldiers are still looking for the Duke.

He goes to find the soldiers to hand himself in. He demands that the soldiers call the Judge and that he is put on trial for harbouring the Grand Duke. But the soldiers point out the Judge, who is on the scaffold who was hanged the day before.

The Fat Prince wants his nephew to be appointed the new Judge but makes a pretence of allowing ‘the people’ to decide, he hopes this will keep the soldiers on side.

The soldiers choose Azdak for Judge and not the Prince’s nephew and place the Judge’s robes around his shoulders.

We then witness a series of Azdak’s cases and the judgements he makes. He openly invites bribes from those who are brought before him and makes unpredictable, unconventional and, at times, amoral judgements.

THE CHALK CIRCLE

Finally Natella, Grusha and Michael are brought before Azdak for judgement. Azdak continues to behave erratically as a judge, showing respect for neither Grusha or Natella.

Azdak declares he will use the test of The Chalk Circle to decide who is the real mother.

A chalk circle is drawn on the ground and the child is placed in the centre. Azdak instructs Natella and Grusha to each take an arm and whoever pulls Michael out of the circle will be declared the mother.

When Natella starts to pull Grusha lets go of Michael.

Azdak instructs them to do the test again, but again Grusha lets go rather than hurt the child.

Azdak declares Grusha to be the real mother. He then grants Grusha and her husband a divorce and Grusha and Simon are reunited.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

‘Truly, I live in dark times!
An artless word is foolish. A smooth forehead
Points to insensitivity. He who laughs
Has not yet received
The terrible news’.

From Brecht’s poem To Those Who Follow in Our Wake

Bertolt Brecht wrote The Caucasian Chalk Circle while taking refuge in the United States during the Second World War. Brecht had fled his native Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933, and was stripped of German citizenship by the Nazi regime in 1935. Brecht needs to be understood in relation to the times he lived in: the desperate poverty of Germany post World War One, hyper inflation and the depression in the 1920s, and the subsequent rise of Hitler and his fascist ideology and policies. Brecht had been vocal about his opposition to the Nazis and his plays were often attended by Nazis who protested and interrupted these performances. He was drawn to Marxism and socialism as an answer to the difficulties of the times he lived in, with its ambition to end inequality and injustice.

Marx insisted on the prominence of reason; believing that humans were capable of understanding the world they lived in and gaining control of their destiny. The working man and woman and the poor were held back by their inability to see clearly the social structures, the class relations that kept them in their place and needed to clearly see how to overthrow the system that held them there. Religion and sentimentality for Marxists was an enemy of change; reason and class consciousness the tools of change.

Brecht’s writing came out of his experience of 1920s and 1930s Germany; the plays he wrote had explicit messages and aimed to challenge the audience to think politically, to be analytical and identify the roots of their oppression. The Caucasian Chalk Circle was written after Brecht had taken refuge in America. The war was almost over, the Red Army had driven the Nazis out of the Caucasus and a victory for the Allies, including America and the Soviet Union, was in sight. Brecht’s play asked the audience to consider what post-war Europe might look like, and what principles might shape that world. Fascism had been defeated throughout Europe - what would be created in its place?

The concerns of young people in 2014 are very different to those just emerging from that terrible war, but questions about what kind of a society we want, about justice and how we share the world’s resources are as relevant now as they were in 1945.
The videos are designed to be a useful resource for teachers and students who are coming to watch the show or who are studying Brecht. Both videos can be watched online on the Unicorn Theatre YouTube channel.

**Video 1:** An insight into the play featuring interviews with director Amy Leech, Brecht scholar – Dr Laura Bradley, Unicorn Artistic Director – Purni Morell and actress Juliette Stevenson – who played Grusha in the 1997 Complicite production: [http://youtu.be/MoSEFUzhVTw?list=UU4yP9KT5p1ZyfN1CwqP33Wg](http://youtu.be/MoSEFUzhVTw?list=UU4yP9KT5p1ZyfN1CwqP33Wg) (6 mins long)

**Video 2:** An in-depth interview with Dr Laura Bradley who answers the questions below. [http://youtu.be/t-A8mCjRu5g?list=UU4yP9KT5p1ZyfN1CwqP33Wg](http://youtu.be/t-A8mCjRu5g?list=UU4yP9KT5p1ZyfN1CwqP33Wg) (20 mins long)

- Can you tell us about the context in which Brecht was writing?
- What makes Brecht a unique writer?
- Can you talk about Epic Theatre in more detail?
- What does it mean when we talk about Brecht’s removal of the fourth wall?
- Why is Brecht so relevant to audiences today?
- Why might Brecht be relevant to a young audience?
- What is the purpose of the prologue?
- What does *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* have in common with other Brecht plays?
- Why is Grusha such a powerful character?
- In what way is Grusha an anti-heroine?
- What are the key questions that Brecht was challenging his audience to consider?
- Are there any issues in the world today that really resonate with Brecht’s ideas?
- Why has Brecht’s work been translated so widely?
BRECHT’S LIFE IN BRIEF: TIMELINE

1898  Born in Augsburg, southern Germany.
1914  First World War.
1917  Brecht enrols as a medical student at the University of Munich, but also studies theatre history.
1918  Germany defeated.  
       Brecht writes his first play, Baal.
1919  Treaty of Versailles: Germany loses colonies and is ordered to pay massive reparations.  
       Brecht joins the Independent Social Democratic Party.
1920s  Germany suffers high unemployment and inflation.
1921  Brecht has a small part in a political cabaret of Karl Valentin.
1927  Brecht becomes part of Piscator’s collective, who make epic, political, confrontational documentary theatre.
1933  Hitler is elected chancellor. Supporters of Hitler interrupt several of Brecht’s plays.
1933  Brecht flees and settles in Denmark.
1935  Brecht stripped of his German citizenship.
1939  German threat of invasion of Denmark. Brecht flees to Sweden.
1941  Brecht flees to America and settles in Los Angeles.  
       Mother Courage and Her Children premieres in Switzerland.
1944  Brecht writes The Caucasian Chalk Circle.
1947  Brecht is called to testify in the House Un-American Activities where he is asked about the socialist messages within his work and whether he has ever been a member of the communist party. He leaves America the next day to return to Europe. You can watch the film of Brecht testifying on you tube:  www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkiqGxD4CZ8
1948  Brecht returns to Germany and settles in East Berlin. The first production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle is performed in English by students in Minnesota.
1949  Brecht is asked to form The Berliner Ensemble, a state subsidised theatre that will become the most highly regarded progressive theatre in Europe.
1954  The Berliner Ensemble’s production of Mother Courage causes a sensation in Paris.
1955  Brecht receives the Stalin Peace Prize.
‘The theatre becomes a place for philosophers, and for such philosophers as not only wish to understand the world but wish to change it.’ Brecht

‘The most beautiful of all doubts is when the downtrodden and despondent raise their heads
And
Stop believing in the strength
Of their oppressors’

‘Oh, how laboriously the new truth was fought for!
What sacrifice it cost!
How difficult it was to see
That things were thus and not thus’

Extract from Brecht’s poem In Praise of Doubt

A great deal has been written about Brecht and the relationship between his theories on theatre making, which he started to document in the 1920s, and the practice of making his theatre. Brecht was an artist and his process was first and foremost an artistic process.

‘The key test was: does it work on stage? If not then throw it out. If it does work, and if it conflicts with the theory, throw away the theory.’ Brecht

Brecht’s theories were part of his process, helping him shape his work in relation to the aims he had for his theatre and the impact he wanted to have on his audience. Brecht aligned himself with Marxism and wanted to create art for a scientific age, work that had a practical application in the world outside of the theatre. He wanted to make work that did not accept the way the world was as inevitable and unchangeable.

So the primary intention of Brecht’s theatre was to create a theatre that appealed to reason rather than to the emotions and a theatre in which the possibility for change, for things to be different, was present and the audience were made conscious of these possibilities. The content and structure of the plays would highlight the historical and socio-political relationships between people.

‘The epic theatre is chiefly concerned in the attitudes which people adopt towards one another, whenever they are socio-historically significant. It works out scenes where people adopt attitudes of such sort that the social laws under which they are acting spring into sight.’ Brecht

It is useful to look at Brecht’s theories when studying his plays and exploring the techniques and approaches he promoted in practice.

Brecht defined his theatre practice in relation to the dominant theatre forms of the time; avant garde and expressionist theatre was of interest to Brecht and he drew on these in his own work. But he despised bourgeois ‘culinary theatre’ as he described it; theatre which through identification, emotion and empathy left its audience satisfied and inert.
Piscator was particularly influential and important to Brecht. In 1920 Piscator formed a proletarian theatre which toured the working class districts of Berlin, performing agit prop theatre.

“The real front line battles were fought mainly by Piscator, whose Theater am Nollendorfplatz was based on Marxist principles, and by myself at Theater am Schiffbauerdamm. We denied ourselves nothing. We wrote our own texts – and I also wrote plays – or sliced other people’s in all directions, then stuck them together quite differently till they were unrecognisable. We introduced music and film and turned everything up top to bottom; we made comedy out of what had originally been tragic, and vice versa. We had our characters bursting into song at the most uncalled for moments. In short we thoroughly muddled up people’s idea of the drama.’ Brecht: Interview with an Exile around 1939.

Brecht began with a small part in comedian Karl Valentin’s political cabaret in 1921; he was attracted by popular forms of entertainment as well as being drawn to the aesthetic of the boxing ring.

Below is a brief outline of the key theories underpinning Brecht’s approach to making theatre.

**EPIC THEATRE**

Brecht wished to disrupt the traditional response of the audience to identify with the story and the characters. The alternative he proposed was the construction of the epic play.

Brecht wanted to create work which worked against the Aristotelian model of theatre which he thought created a hypnotic and magical effect and a sense of the inevitable, where empathy with a character within the narrative leads the audience to think and feel that there is a naturalness, a rightness to events and characters actions within those events (fate). The epic theatre broke with this smooth and natural through line and worked to disrupt any sense of inevitability, and as a result of that an acceptance that this is the way things are and will remain.

‘Briefly, the Aristotelian play is essentially static; its task is to show the world as it is. The learning play is essentially dynamic; its task is to show the world as it changes (and also how it may be changed).’ Brecht

Brecht described how Epic Theatre differs from Dramatic Theatre:

The dramatic theatre’s spectator says: ‘Yes, I have felt like that too – Just like me _ it’s only natural – it’ll never change – the sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable – that’s great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world – I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.’

The epic theatre’s spectator says: ‘I’d never have thought of it – that’s not the way – that’s extraordinary, hardly believable – it’s got to stop – the sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary – that’s great art: nothing obvious in it – I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh.’

‘With an epic work, as opposed to a dramatic one, one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life.’ Brecht

There are a number of ways Brecht found to break the narrative; the episodic structure of his plays; interruptions by a chorus, narrator, or singers; banners with headings for scenes and intercutting with film and photographs, all break up the natural flow of the story and interpose questions and a wider context to what’s happening on stage.
THE CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE – CONTEXT

“We cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried hither and thither; the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgement.” Brecht

In The Caucasian Chalk Circle at the point when we are most caught up in the story of Grusha, when she meets Simon again and he realises she is married and has a child, Brecht breaks the story and takes us back in time to look at the story of Azdak and how he became a judge. He interrupts our emotional involvement in the story and asks the audience to take a step back to think about things in a more contradictory, complex way.

VERFREMUNDSEFFEKT

“When something seems ‘the most obvious thing in the world’ it means that any attempt to understand the world has been given up’. Brecht

The closest translation of Vefremdungseffekt is ‘to make strange’. Brecht’s alienation or V effekt was an attempt to distance the audience from identifying too closely with a character. The aim was to work against the sense of something being ‘right’ or ‘natural’ and ask the audience to think more clearly about what is happening; to be critical and to question characters’ actions.

“The V effect consists of the turning the object of which one is to be made aware... from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected... Before familiarity can turn into awareness the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming that the object in question needs no explanation.” Brecht

For the actors performing Brecht they were not trying to get under the skin of the character or find the emotional truth and transform themselves into that character, but to be critical of the character they were playing and to show and hold up for scrutiny a character and their actions.

Brecht wanted to emphasise the possibility for change in ‘A short description of a new technique for acting which produces the Alienation (V) effect’. Brecht describes an actor’s responsibility to this in performance:

“When he appears on stage, besides what he is actually doing he will at all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is to say he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly as possible, that his acting allows other possibilities to be inferred and only represents one out of the possible variants.” Brecht

Brecht developed a style of performance where the actor was both themselves and their character on stage at the same time, and the audience are aware of the actor showing, demonstrating and at times, commenting on a character’s actions.

Brecht was concerned that his audience did not get swept along by emotion and empathy with a character, but were critical and alert. This did not mean that emotion did not have a place in his theatre; it was a question of emphasis.
'This contradiction is dialectical. As a writer I need an actor who can completely empathise and absolutely transform himself into a character. This, indeed, is what Stanislavski holds to be the first goal of his System. But at the same time and before all else I need an actor who can stand away from his character and criticise it as representative of society.' Brecht.

**GESTUS**

John Willet, collaborator and translator of Brecht, describes Gest or Gestus as a combination of ‘gesture and gist, attitude and point’. Actors would be asked to find actions, gestures, movement and intonation which commented on or revealed the socio-political aspects of a scene. Brecht would photograph rehearsals in order that his actors could examine what they were doing and see how clearly what they were communicating.

**SPASS**

Brecht also understood the power of humour to reveal and comment on political truths. Comic and grotesque exaggeration would be used to highlight inequality and hypocrisy. This style of writing and performance can be seen clearly in CCC during the wedding scene. The groom’s mother has to drag the Monk out of the pub to perform the wedding as her son lies on his death bed (she’s scrimped on a priest to save money). Grusha’s brother Laventi hides Michael from the local gossips who all gather for the two-in-one, wedding and wake. Everyone is out for what they can get and the grotesque and very funny performances underline the contrast with Grusha’s actions and her agonising decision to marry in order to protect Michael.

‘And where was amusement in all that?... We have to defend the epic theatre against the suspicion that it is a highly disagreeable, humourless, indeed strenuous affair.’ Brecht

**THE REMOVAL OF THE FOURTH WALL**

Brecht is associated very closely with the idea of breaking the fourth wall. Breaking away from action and speaking directly to the audience has been around since the Greeks, however Brecht very consciously wanted everyone in the theatre to be aware and conscious that we are in a theatre and that we have constructed the play in order to examine human behaviour. There is no illusion of reality, no pretence that we are looking at a slice of life.

By reminding the audience that what they are watching is a representation of reality constructed by theatre makers, this reinforced Brecht’s message that reality is constructed and can be shaped and changed by us.
BRECHTIAN STAGING

The staging and design of Brecht’s productions worked to reinforce the awareness that the audience were watching a construction of reality. There was no pretence that we were anywhere other than in a theatre, the source of lights and sound were revealed, there was no magic or mystery.

Brecht was also able to employ the new technologies of the age to support and enhance his epic theatre.

‘The possibility of projections, the greater adaptability of the stage due to mechanization, the film, all completed the theatre’s equipment, and did so at a point where the most important transactions between people could no longer be shown simply by personifying the motive forces or subjecting the characters to invisible metaphysical powers.’ Brecht

FURTHER READING

Brecht on Theatre translated by John Willet

For students who want an in-depth study of Brecht and how his theory and practice relates to Stanislavski: System’s of rehearsal: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski and Brook by Shomit Mitter Routledge 1992

Simon Callow’s article about the impact of Stanislavski and Brecht on British Theatre: www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/mar/16/stanislavski-man-method-simon-callow

Lyn Gardner’s article on Brecht bashing: www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2008/may/26/dontbashbrecht
AMY LEACH – DIRECTOR

Why did you want to direct The Caucasian Chalk Circle?

Like many a teenager studying drama, I was introduced to the work of Bertolt Brecht as part of my A-Levels. Our studying of his work coincided with the centenary of his birth in 1998, and therefore a number of his plays were being performed not far from where I grew up. So I saw Mother Courage and The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui in Manchester, I saw The Good Person of Szechwan in Leeds, and The Caucasian Chalk Circle in a huge, drafty tent that had been erected on a car park in Liverpool. Brecht’s work had a huge influence on me at that point in my life, but none more so than that production of The Caucasian Chalk Circle. Created by Theatre de Complicite with the National Theatre, I remember feeling freezing cold and being sat at a weird angle for three hours, and yet I was completely and utterly gripped by both Grusha’s extraordinary tale and the theatricality and inventiveness with which it was told. It was one of the best theatre experiences of my life and set me on a path to tell epic stories in ways that invite the audience to actively use their imagination to create the magic of theatre.

Returning to read The Caucasian Chalk Circle all these years later, I found myself once again enthralled by Grusha’s tale and amused by Azdak’s judgements. And after banishing worries of how I could possibly compete with the memory of that production in chilly Liverpool, I became very excited by the challenges posed by the script. I am drawn to plays that feel impossible to stage – that require imagination, inventiveness and ensemble playing to tell an epic tale. I can’t wait to bring this story to life.

At the Unicorn Theatre the play will be aimed primarily at young people aged 14 and above.

What in the play do you think will particularly speak to that audience?

At the heart of this story is a young servant girl, Grusha. At the beginning of the play, Grusha isn’t perfect – she’s immature and naïve. She’s not a born hero. And yet she makes a courageous decision to rescue an abandoned baby. Through the physical and emotional journey she undertakes to protect the child, Grusha matures into a responsible young woman. So The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a coming of age story in many ways and I think this has appeal to all audiences, but to young people especially.

The play also examines morality, questioning, through the actions of the many characters, what is right and wrong in the world. Part of growing up is working out for one’s self where one stands on things and developing our own sense of what is right and wrong, so I think the play taps into this.
Finally, for any young person interested in the theatre, Brecht is the man who kickstarted everything we take
for granted in modern theatre making, and his once ground breaking approach is still worth seeing in this
brilliant play.

What are the themes of the play? Why do you think Brecht matters to contemporary audiences?
In what way is his work still relevant?

I think Brecht still has huge relevance to a contemporary audience. He told stories which feel simultaneously
ancient and modern, which examine questions that people have striven to answer for thousands of years, and
will continue to search for answers far into the future.

For me, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* is about moral and emotional crossroads. When Grusha sees the abandoned
baby Michael, she has a choice – she can leave him there and save her own skin, or she can put her life in
jeopardy and rescue him. When Azdak is asked to decide who is Michael’s real mother, he has a decision to
make between nature and nurture. The decisions these characters face could come from the Bible or from
the ‘Ten O’Clock News’, and there are times in all our lives where we meet tough decisions and must choose
which path to follow. For Brecht, those who are good and make the brave, selfless decisions are the ones who
win in the end. And yet he explores this in a complex way.

I also think that Brecht’s play is about our responsibility to care for the things and people in our lives. In the
prologue to the play, villagers are arguing over the ownership and care of land. In the play proper, a human
life is hanging in the balance. At the end of the play, Brecht says, ‘What there is should belong to those that
are good at it.’ In a modern world where so much is disposable, this is an inspiring and uplifting point of view.

Brecht has a very serious intention for his theatre, but his plays are also very funny. How do you think the
humour works in the play?

One of the things I love about Brecht’s plays is that the ridiculous sits alongside the serious, and the two work
a special magic together. So he creates characters like Grusha who feel very real and knowable, alongside
larger than life grotesque caricatures like the Fat Prince who provide entertainment as well as making a
serious point. I think the juxtaposition between the daft and the serious keep the audience on their toes and
make us think about what is being ridiculed as well as providing amusement.

Brecht influenced contemporary theatre to such a great extent that it is hard now to see how radical
his work would have been at the time. What is the most important thing for you about Brecht’s
approach to making theatre and engaging with an audience?

Brecht’s work has had an incredible influence on contemporary theatre, and I am one of many theatre makers
who create work in a Brechtian inspired style. For me, the most important aspect of Brecht’s approach is the
removal of the ‘fourth wall’. Rather than ‘us’ and ‘them’, there is a shared acknowledgement between actors
and audience that they are all in a theatre and that both sides are part of making the story happen. So the
cast acknowledge that they are actors performing a play, and invite the audience to use their imagination to
help create the impossible.

Take, for example, Grusha carrying baby Michael on the rickety bridge over the deep ravine. This would be
impossible to stage in a naturalistic way, and even if we somehow managed to create a real rickety bridge
and ravine on stage, the audience would never be able to truly believe it because we know deep down that
the bridge won’t really break, the ravine is carved out of painted polystyrene, and the actress won’t really
be killed. Yet with inventive use of props and suggestive staging, we can invite the audience to imagine that
Grusha is making the terrifying crossing and what she might be feeling as she does so. So perhaps by staging this in a theatrical way, we might be better able to communicate the truth of Grusha’s frightening journey.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle is set in the Caucasus, what do you think is important for the audience to understand about the context of this setting and to what extent will this influence your staging of the piece?

With our version of The Caucasian Chalk Circle, we’re intending to stage the story in the ‘here and now’. By being given permission to rewrite the prologue, it means we can make the play contemporary and relevant to the world today. However, we didn’t want to suddenly set the play in 21st century London. It feels that we need to protect the ‘otherness’ of the world in which Brecht sets the story, and therefore we’ve still been looking to the Caucasus region for inspiration and the story will still be set there.

Hayley (our Designer) and I work in a visual manner and whenever we start work on a new production, the first thing we do is look at lots and lots of images. Goodness knows what we did before Google images came along! For this production, we’ve been looking at lots of modern images from Ukraine and Russia. It feels that there are relevant parallels between the context of Brecht’s play and the conflicts happening there now. Also, in the Caucasus region today, there is still a stark difference between the rich and the poor – from billionaire Oligarchs to modern ‘peasants’ who have no fresh water supply. It is a land where orthodox religion continues to play a huge part, and where conflict, especially over land, is part of the everyday.

How will you approach the Prologue?

From the first moment of reading this play with a view to staging it at The Unicorn, I felt the prologue needed to change. Brecht wrote this play in 1945 and set the prologue in 1945 too, intending the frame of the play to feel contemporary. His hope was that by giving the piece a modern setting, it would stop Grusha’s tale becoming just a fairy story and ask the audience to consider the relevance of her journey on their lives and decision making now. To stay true to Brecht’s ideals, we wanted to update the prologue so that it is still set ‘now’, in the hope of guiding our audiences to question the relevance the play has in our times.

The original prologue poses a series of questions about ownership, responsibility, human rights and the meaning of the word ‘home’ - all questions with huge relevance today. For our new prologue, we wanted to strip away the situation and events of the original but maintain these questions. Our hope is that in the characters, statements and questions of our new prologue, our audience see their own world reflected back at them and that this will inspire them to question the actions and attitudes of the characters in the play.

Have you made any decisions about the design and visual language of the piece, can you tell us a little about your thoughts at this stage?

Our hope is that we’ll create a fresh retelling of this classic story, and that we’ll stage it in a way that feels simple, uncluttered, theatrical, inventive and urgent. We want to stay true to some of Brecht’s staging principles, keeping everything visible so that the audience can see the workings of the stage and are invited to use their imagination and brain. We hope the production will look and feel very modern and a bit grubby, and yet will have a soupçon of the ancient mixed in too.
Images from designer, Hayley Grindle's set model box

How will music and sound be used as part of the production?

The script for the play features a character called The Singer who acts as a narrator and guides us through the play using a number of songs. We’re working with Dom Coyote, a superb singer-songwriter, who will create and perform these songs, as well as leading an on-stage band of actor-musicians who will perform and sing too. The production will have a gig-theatre style with all instruments visible throughout. We’re planning to mix very modern music with a hint of ancient Georgian folk music, and the soundtrack should help to really tell the story and give the play a sense of its epic nature.

Working with Harris Academy South Norwood

We had a fantastic day exploring the play with a group of Year 9 students at the Harris Academy in South Norwood. One of the exercises we did was reading through a synopsis of the play whilst the group instantly acted it out. It was brilliant for me to see how engaged the young people were by Grusha and Michael’s story and how simply the story could be brought to life. As a young girl tiptoed across the drama studio floor, we held our breaths as we imagined her carrying a small baby on a broken bridge across a deep ravine, and we applauded her achievement as she reached the other side.

One of the best things about the day was being reminded of how passionate and intelligent young people are. We asked them moral question after moral question after moral question, and every time their opinions would come back thick and fast. Not always in agreement with their fellow classmates, but always heartfelt and articulate. It was a privilege to work with the group and they gave me renewed courage that The Caucasian Chalk Circle is a masterpiece and the perfect choice for the Unicorn.
How do you go about adapting a play?

I get a detailed, scholarly literal translation. It can read strangely if necessary: it should have no claims for literary style, it's just for me to use as my building blocks. The translation should be by a reputable scholar with an ear for language. The translation should be full and uncut. I don't look at other versions.

Do you have an idea of what you want to bring to the play before you start?

I usually have a working knowledge of the play and its production history before I start but I never pre-judge or pre-plan what I'm going to do. I will do the text in its entirety even if ultimately some bits are cut. This is because I could come across something that seems nothing initially but as I get to know the play more I might realise it is a crucial detail.

What is your rewriting process?

Writing and rewriting an adaptation is all about learning the secrets of another writer. The more you work the more clearly you can interpret the codes. But even with the most demanding and rewarding play you get to a point where you have to leave it aside.

Is *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* the first Brecht play you have adapted?

No, I did *The Threepenny Opera* at the Gate in Dublin, which Marianne Faithfull appeared in.

And how does *Chalk Circle* compare?

*Chalk Circle* is a more ambitious play, better written as a theatre piece although the songs in *The Threepenny Opera* are wonderful. I came out of working on *Chalk Circle* with a great respect for Brecht as a writer. But it was doing *The Threepenny Opera* that I realised what a fine and accomplished poet he is. The simplicity in his writing is the product of an extraordinary poetic intelligence. The easy rhymes, the obvious repetition – all of them are meant, deliberate. He is incredibly knowledgeable in his use of metre and imagery.

Do you worry about grammatical differences between the German and the English? I'm thinking in particular of the formality between Simon and Grusha which is perhaps easier to understand in German.

No, I see it as a fabulous device, liberating for both the writer and the actors because it allows enormous accuracy of feeling to be communicated without linguistic excess. That's the key to his theatre – he's always exact.

How did you approach the songs?

The songs are an absolutely integral part of the play. I didn't do them separately – there is no break in my mind between the prose and the poetry. By that I mean there's a prosaic quality to the poetry and a poetic
quality to the prose that is wonderful to work on. Brecht loves language – he puts such store on the pleasure of the human ear.

**What’s your feeling about the role of the Singer and the musicians?**

The play was written at the end of the war. There’s an unquenchable joy at the heart of it and much of that is found in the music. There’s a sense of relief in the play – something mighty has been endured, something terrible defeated.

**There’s a belief in happiness in the play: the ending is in fact a tentative beginning. What do you think Brecht intended the audience to take from this play?**

He wanted people to enjoy it and not be ashamed of enjoying it. It is an extraordinary vision of the human struggle – he had more hope for the species than he preached. The flicker of sweetness in the play is there to temper his most stringent pills. His humour and hope saved him from the severity of his own politics. How do you feel about the Prologue? People often find it difficult and many productions cut it.

The Prologue is the key to the play. *Chalk Circle* is not a folk tale. Without the Prologue you miss a whole dimension. In fact, it is also a great theatrical in-joke – it’s a marvellously subtle piece of Chekhovian writing. I really think Brecht is parodying Chekhov – the prologue is full of nuances and tiny character revelations. It’s one of the best literary jokes but with an absolutely steel sense of purpose – the Singer’s ‘No’ at the end of the prologue is Brecht siding with the poets. That’s not sentimentality; it’s a mark of how tough he is. It’s him saying that the House Un-American Activities didn’t grind him down [Brecht appeared before the Committee in 1946, as he was writing The Caucasian Chalk Circle and that he certainly wouldn’t let the bastards on the other side grind him down either.

* [It is interesting to see what Brecht wrote about the Prologue: ‘The questions posed by the parable must be seen to derive from the necessities of reality. Without the prologue it is not evident why the play has not remained ’The Chinese Chalk Circle’’]

**Did you study Brecht’s theories when you were working on the play?**

When I started out I thought his theories were smug and overwritten and not helpful to someone trying to examine him as a writer. Only when I learnt how he got his hands dirty in his theatre did I realise how much he knew. It’s his practical work that makes him great, not his theories. I see the theories now with more respect but still believe his politics were often ludicrous. Today, the theory often weighs down the plays. Do the plays work or not? That’s all that matters. Brecht used his theories as a form of censorship by saying there’s only one way to do his plays. He, in effect, imposed a single reading but his plays are better than that. He was reductive of his own work – he’s his own best champion and his own worst enemy! Because of that contradiction we should never forget what a great comic he is, even when at his most didactic. And as for expecting the audience not to feel emotion? Look at the end of Mother Courage. He puts a deaf girl on stage, who bangs a drum to save children from dying and has her shot, leaving her mother childless. But the audience shouldn’t cry. Really?!

**Brecht wrote this play in exile [in America]. How do you think that affected his writing?**

He experienced poverty and homelessness and had to write without having a theatre, which is incredibly hard. And he loved Germany deeply so having to leave it must have been terrible. Becoming a refugee gave him a tremendous sympathy with the dispossessed which burns through *Chalk Circle*. 
THE CAST

AZDAK
Nabil Shaban

GRUSHA
Kiran Sonia Sawar

SIMON
Caleb Frederick

SINGER
Dom Coyote

ENSEMBLE
Emily Wachter

ENSEMBLE
Mia Soteriou

ENSEMBLE
Tom Espiner

ENSEMBLE
Christopher Wright
INTRODUCTION

The following activities provide practical ways for students to become familiar with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and to explore Brecht’s theatre by employing a range of Brechtian techniques in their own work. Activities can be done before or after your visit to the theatre and can be adapted for use across Key Stages 3, 4 and 5.

The activities aim to allow students to:

- **EXPLORE** the form and content of the play, in order to get more out of their experience as an audience.

- **RESPOND** to characters, themes and ideas in the play, considering the drama medium and the elements of drama with a focus on Brechtian techniques.

- **PERFORM** their own practical responses to key moments from the play.
SESSION 1: BRECHT AND POLITICAL THEATRE

‘For me there’s this myth that young people aren’t interested in politics, the young people I know are very interested in politics.’ Purni Morell, Unicorn Theatre Artistic Director

AIM
To engage students with the idea of political theatre and introduce Brecht and his aim as an artist.

Explorative strategies: still images of key characters from the play.

The drama medium and the elements of drama: exploring the theme of politics and political drama.

TIME
40 minutes

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY

1. Stop/Go. Start with a game of Stop/Go, then add in characters and ask students to make a still image of these characters: judge – servant – soldier – wealthy governor – prince – peasant – mother.

   • Explain that these are some of the characters they will see in the production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In Brecht’s epic theatre he created archetypal characters, so we are looking at the social and class relationships between people, rather than creating a fully rounded, psychologically true character in the way Stanislavski would.

2. Introduce Brecht. Find out what the students know about Brecht. Introduce the idea of a theatre that challenged its audience to make connections between the play and the social and political questions of the times. He wanted to encourage audiences to think about the possibility for change and not accept things as they are.

   • Give some information about Brecht and the play; written in 1944, Brecht was a German political writer who fled Germany in the 1933 to escape persecution by the Nazis who treated Socialists in the same way that they treated Jewish, gay, Romany and disabled people. The play was written as the War was coming to an end. The War had cost a great deal and people were questioning what kind of society they wanted to create out of the destruction of the War.

3. Agreement Line. If Brecht is trying to challenge his audience politically we are going to look at how political we consider ourselves to be. Set up the agreement line – with ‘strongly agree’ at one end of the room, and ‘strongly disagree’ at the other end. Ask students to place themselves along the line in relation to their answer to a range of the questions posed. (Resource 1)

   • Question a range of students about why they have placed themselves where they have and hear opposing views.
• After you have heard a range of responses you could ask if anybody would like to now change their position on the agreement line and why that is.

4. Discussion. If Brecht was alive today what do you think he might want to make theatre about? Brecht’s key concern was that his audience didn’t accept the way things were as the way they will always be. He believed that change was possible.
RESOURCE 1: AGREEMENT LINE

- I would describe myself as political

- I feel I can have an impact on the world, I can change the world for the better

- Politicians try to make the world better for everyone

- Politicians understand the way the world runs in a way I never could.

- There will always be the rich and the poor, it’s just the way of the world

- Everyone is equal in the law

- I believe in equality

- I believe it isn’t possible to achieve equality

- People who earn millions deserve their wealth because they have created or earned it

- The gap between rich and poor is immoral

- Competition in life is good

- There is never a justification for stealing
SESSION 2: THE PROLOGUE

AIM
To stage the Prologue and explore contemporary alternatives to Brecht’s framing of the story.
To highlight the way the prologue contextualises the story of a chalk circle in order to pose political questions and challenge the audiences thinking.

Explorative strategies: teacher narration, still image, improvisation and role-play.

The drama medium and the elements of drama: considering the form, staging and purpose of the prologue.

TIME
One hour

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY
This session requires students to have a basic understanding of the Soviet system and some of the key concepts of Marxist thinking. Understanding these concepts will be important to unlocking an understanding of Brecht’s intention and the context within which he was creating the work. We have attempted to thread these conceptual understandings into the practical activity of staging the prologue.

1. Run a warm up game which focuses on co-operation and ensemble.

2. Explain how Brecht was a socialist theatre maker and supportive of Marx and the Soviet Union.
   Ask students what they know about Soviet collectives and the principles behind the soviet system. Make sure students are clear of the key concepts necessary for this practical activity:
   • In the Russian Revolution the idea of private ownership was overturned.
   • Collectives were established which meant there was no individual ownership, but shared ownership of land and resources.

3. In pairs discuss what the phrase ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs’ means. Can you put this phrase into your own words? What might that mean to people at the end of the war? Feedback briefly to whole group.

4. Explain that Russia and the Soviets fought alongside the allies to beat Hitler and the Fascists in WW2.
   Part of the soviet model was for farming collectives. These collectives were required to make decisions. After the destruction of war, many were injured and people were hungry, there was a real imperative to use natural resources in the best way, to benefit the most.

5. Run the ‘story whoosh’ of Brecht’s prologue to The Caucasian Chalk Circle - Resource 2
   • A ‘story whoosh’ is a way of acting out a story with the whole class and allows you see the main narrative, action and characters in a story in broad brush stroke.
   • Set up a circle for performance and explain that you will narrate the story of the Prologue.
   • The students around the circle will take it in turn to step into the performance area and depict the characters and action as you describe it.
• At the end of a scene ‘whoosh’ the actors out of the way and then narrate the next scene inviting the next in turn in the circle to create a freeze frame of the action you describe.
• Teachers will need to direct the ‘story whoosh’, sensing when to hold moments of action in freeze frame and when controlled movement will best tell the story.
• Students can be given sections of text to speak as part of the ‘story whoosh’.

6. **In groups of 6 or 8, cast the fruit farmers and the goat farmers.** Give the groups the information about the groups Resource 3 and the photograph of soviet collectives.

7. **Ask students to improvise the scene; remind the students each Kolchos (collective) thinks that their case for control of the valley is strongest, but that they listen to each other with respect.** It will be more interesting for the audience if the decision is not straightforward, if the argument on each side carries weight. Really work up the argument for each side. Why you think your group should have stewardship of the land?

8. **Ask students to rehearse their improvisation for performance – focussing on how they can show the audience the key arguments for each side?**

9. **Perform the scenes, then reflect on how successfully the scenes demonstrated each side of the argument.** Draw out some of the themes of the prologue:

   • The idea of what would serve the greatest good
   • The idea of old ways of doing things versus new ways
   • The idea of progress and change – is change always good? Sometimes people resist change
   • The idea of an emotional argument (this is my home, we have lived here for generations) versus a rational argument (we will be able to generate more food and wine for everyone).

10. **Back in groups ask students to think of a contemporary scenario where two groups may be arguing over what should happen about something.** Make it an argument between old and new ways of doing things. Try to make it a political discussion and make each side of the argument hold weight.

11. **Ask each group to improvise their scene.** It will work best if this activity is done in the spirit of exploration and each group has a go at experimenting with ideas. Improvising a contemporary scenario and testing it out in action will be more freeing than trying to script and perform an alternative modern scenario. The world we live in is very different to the time Brecht was writing in; his challenge to us is to imagine how things might be different, if there are other ways we can live together and use the earth’s resources.
It is at the end of the War. The fighting has been long and hard.

Two soviet farm collectives, meet to discuss what should be done with the valley they are meeting in.

The first collective – fruit farmers (bring a number of students into the circle) has been fighting the Germans in the area (some of them are wounded). While here they have seen the potential in the valley for planting and growing food.

The other group – goat farmers (bring out same number into the circle) used to live in the valley before the War, they kept goats and made cheese, they had to move out when the fighting got too close.

An expert from the Reconstruction Commission is there to help them make the best decision about what should happen to the land.

WHOOSH

An old woman takes out a huge cheese. Everyone laughs and applauds it (this can be done from a seated position).

The old woman offers it to members of the fruit farming collective saying ‘this will show you why the valley should be returned to us.’ She offers them some cheese; they all taste and say ‘it’s very nice, it’s delicious.’

She says they know nothing, that ‘it is tasteless because the goats are not grazing on this valley but on poorer land far away’.

WHOOSH

Soldier Kato, one of the fruit farmers, brings out a big irrigation plan and shows it to the goat farmers. He says ‘If we build a dam, we can grow fruit and wine for everyone.’

An old goat farmer says ‘This valley has always belonged to us.’

A wounded soldier (one of the fruit farmers) says ‘nothing’s belonged to anyone always.’

Another old peasant says ‘I knew that project would be good. You will take our valley.’

WHOOSH

Both collectives agree to sit down and have something to eat together.

A woman from the fruit collective brings on the Singer (a very famous story teller) and some musicians to tell them a story while they eat. She says it may shed some light on their problem.

Both groups applaud the singer and his musicians. WHOOSH
RESOURCE 3: INFORMATION ABOUT THE TWO COLLECTIVES

FRUIT FARMERS

• Have defended the land during the war. Some were in a battle with the Nazis and drove tanks from the Valley.
• Many have been injured.
• Have lost family members in the War.
• Were born elsewhere – have not lived in the valley before now.
• See the potential of the land for fruit farming; think they can provide lots of food for everyone.
• Have big plans for irrigating the land – build dam, flood part of valley so that crops will grow.
• The goat farmers’ dairy has been destroyed in the War.

GOAT FARMERS

• Generations of their family have lived here. Born and bred in the valley.
• Make delicious cheese from Goats milk.
• Had to move away during the War, took their goats with them.
• The cheese made from the other grass, the pastures they had to move to, is tasteless.
• Have lost family members in the war.
• They want to move back to their homes in the valley and continue to farm and make cheese.
• Many of their homes and the dairy have been destroyed.
SESSION 3: PERFORMING BRECHT

AIMS
To explore performance in Brechtian Theatre in contrast with a naturalistic, Stanislavskian approach; exploring the V effekt, narration, gestus and archetypes.
Explorative strategies: still image of key characters from the play, improvising short scenes, marking the moment and narration.
The drama medium and the elements of drama: exploration of Brechtian form using space/levels, gesture and voice

TIME
1 – 1.5 hours

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY
This session is designed to allow students to move from a psychologically truthful and naturalistic approach to performance, to a Brechtian approach which highlights social relationships and comments on the characters within these scenes.

Students will use archetypal characters from the play to create their own improvised scenes in a contemporary setting and explore social relationships, status and power.

1. Start with a simple game of Stop/Go. Develop the ensemble within the game, working together to find a common pace and energy, and working to cover the room without gaps or clusters. Build the activity to the point where the group stop and go without instruction; feeling the moment together.

2. Now add in two more instructions. Leader – where the whole group sink to the ground apart from one person who is the ‘leader’. This person is not chosen in advance, but negotiated silently within the exercise. Ask the group to show physically their relationship to the leader. The second instruction – Sacrifice – will see one member of the group fall to the ground. Again this is found by the group in the moment, as one member sacrifices themselves.

3. Now call out numbers for the students to move into groups and ask them to create instant images, showing the relationships between the characters in these groups.
   • In pairs show a mother with the nanny she employs to look after her baby
   • In groups of three or four show soldiers guarding a politician
   • In pairs an adviser with a prince
   • In pairs a judge with a defendant
   • In pairs a sister asking brother for help
4. **Move the class into groups of 2 or 3.** Ask the groups to create a short scene that shows the relationship between characters.
   - **Mother with nanny** – a wealthy woman with her live in nanny and baby.
   - **Soldiers guarding a politician** – this could be a situation where soldiers are present or armed undercover officers
   - **An adviser with prince** – the adviser has an urgent message but the Prince is not ready to hear.
   - **A sister asking her older brother for help** – the brother is worried about what the neighbours might think.

They will need to decide:
- Where their characters are
- What is happening
- What each character is saying; a maximum of two lines for each

The aim is not to develop a complex plot, but to show a moment from their lives which feels, looks and sounds truthful. So we think how these characters would behave in real life.

Think in terms of the **fourth wall**; we could imagine that we are removing a wall and seeing into their world and how we imagine they might behave.

We want these scenes to be **naturalistic**. We want students to show **a slice of life**, not over dramatic, or exaggerated in performance terms. We want it to be **balanced**, for students to empathise with and try to understand the characters’ **motivation** - what they **want** in the scene. We want students to try and get **under the skin** of their character. We are looking for **emotional, psychological truth**.

5. **See a couple of these scenes and discuss:**
   - Do we recognise these people, their situations and relationships?
   - Have we managed to create something that appears natural and truthful? That shows the world as we understand it to be?

6. **Back in small groups develop the scenes.** Keep the situation and characters the same but:
   - Make the **power, status, and class relationships** really clear. Exaggerate or heighten these relationships.
   - See if you can find a **physical action, a Gestus**, which demonstrates the essence of each of the characters in terms of their social or power relationships.
   - Is there a way to make the audience aware of what the characters are not doing, as much as what they are doing – working for the presence and tension of other possibilities.

7. **Now ask students to mark the moment** – make a still image and hold it at the point in your scene that you think most clearly shows the power and social relationships.

8. **Finally add a narrator** – ask one of the actors to break the action, to step out and ask the audience a question.
   - The aim of the narration is to challenge the audience to think differently about what is happening. Ideally it would suggest the potential for change; that things might not always be the way we expect them to be, to think about the broader context and the possibility for things to be different, not just accepting that this is the way things are and should remain.

See the scenes and discuss how effective they have been in terms of placing the audience in a more critical and questioning relationship to what is happening on stage. How successful were the scenes at suggesting that the socio-political relationships are not fixed, that things could change?
SESSION 4: THE STORY OF AZDAK

AIMS
The play raises questions about the relationship between justice and the law. This session explores how justice is administered and who the law serves.

Explorative strategies: teacher narration, still image, improvisation and scene making.

The drama medium and the elements of drama: considering the character of Azdak.

TIME
1 – 1.5 hours

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY
1. Set up the agreement line and ask the question: In our society, is everyone equal under the law? Discuss the responses students come up with drawing out any examples they have to back their position.

2. Ask students what they know and understand about our legal system. Talk a little about the protection of the law, the magistrate and jury system, prosecution and defence and legal aid.

3. Create a role on the wall; an outline of a character and ask students how they would describe a typical judge? What might their characteristics be? What might their background be? Why might they have chosen to go into law and become a judge?

4. Explain that in The Caucasian Chalk Circle one story line in the play focuses on the character of Azdak and the story of how he became a judge. Azdak is the least likely person you would expect to be a judge.

5. Run the story whoosh – How Azdak Became Judge (resource 4). A story whoosh is a way of acting out a story with the whole class and allows you see the main narrative, action and characters in a story in broad brush stroke.
   • Set up a circle for performance and explain that you will narrate the story of the Prologue.
   • The students around the circle will take it in turn to step into the performance area and depict the characters and action as you describe it.
   • At the end of a scene ‘whoosh’ the actors out of the way and then narrate the next scene inviting the next in turn in the circle to create a freeze frame of the action you describe.
   • Teachers will need to direct the story whoosh, sensing when to hold moments of action in freeze frame and when controlled movement will best tell the story.
   • Students can be given sections of text to speak as part of the story whoosh.

6. Talk about what they understand about the law in the world of the play:
   • What kind of a judge do you think Azdak will make?
   • Why do you think the soldiers chose Azdak over the Prince’s nephew as the judge?
   • What had happened to the previous judge?
7. Explain that you are going to create some short scenes based on contemporary cases and our legal system today. Move the class into groups of four and ask them to create a short scene based on modern day court cases, in which the defendants have been found guilty:

- A young man during the riots, walking past Lidl on way home from his girlfriend's takes a bottle of water. The police chase him, he runs. He has said that he is ashamed of his actions; he has a clean record and is his first year at college.
- A young woman takes nappies and doesn’t pay. She is in part time work and on benefits to top up low pay. She had run out of money at the end of the month. This is her second shoplifting offence.
- A politician has been accused of fiddling his expenses; he has claimed £40,000 he wasn’t entitled to.
- Students can find their own scenario.
- In each group of four you need the defendant, the prosecution council, the defence council and the judge. In their scenes they need to include: the prosecutions summing up and recommendation for punishment; the defences summing up, mitigation and recommendation for leniency; the defendant’s statement to the judge and the judge’s judgement.

8. See the group’s scenes and reflect on what the scenes revealed about the class’ understanding of the legal system in this country, its strengths and failings.

9. Now use one scene as an example and introduce the idea of turning the law on its head. In the play Brecht depicts a corrupt world where the law is controlled by the rulers; the Duke and the Prince’s. As we have seen, Azdak becomes judge, but he is the least likely person to be a judge and he rules by his own anarchic whims. At times he is compassionate towards the poor but it is not as simple as that, he is just as likely to ask for a bribe and rule in favour of the wealthy. How could you change the scene in a way that the Judge’s summing up and judgement surprises the audience and makes them think? Think about the kind of language the judge could use and his or her physicality, how they sit or stand.

10. Groups could change their scenes and see what happens when they add an anarchic, unpredictable and unexpected judge.
RESOURCE 4: STORY WHOOSH – HOW AZDAK BECAME JUDGE

Give the singer’s lines to actors around the circle as part of the whoosh, they can stand and say their lines from their seat in the circle:

Listen to the story of the judge
How he became a judge
How he gave judgement
And what make of judge he is.

• Georgia, many years ago. The Grand Duke is fighting a disastrous war with Persia.

• While he is away fighting there is civil war in Georgia. A group of princes unhappy by the Duke’s failure abroad have rebelled. One of these princes ordered his soldiers and surround the palace where the Governor Georgi Abashvili and his wife Natella are eating. The soldiers enter, seize the Governor and take him away. Natella hurriedly packs her clothes and flees.

• Later that day the Governor is killed and a soldier nails his head above the gateway of the palace.

WHOOSH

• Meanwhile out in the woods Azdak, the town clerk, has been poaching, catching rabbits in traps. He comes across a man hiding in the woods, who he thinks is a refugee. He takes him home and feeds him.

• But Azdak becomes suspicious that he is not the poor beggar that he first thought. He asks to see the man’s hands and realises they are the hands of a rich man. The man says he can pay him, but he hasn’t any money with him now. He is about to throw him out when a policeman knocks on his door and accuses Azdak of poaching.

• Azdak looks at the rich man disguised as a refugee and thinks about handing him over to the policeman, but changes his mind and tells the policeman to go.

• He tells the man ‘I didn’t hand you over eh? It goes against my nature. Eat up your cheese, but eat it like a poor man or they’ll get you yet. God, I even have to show you how a poor man behaves?’

WHOOSH

Times gone by, when the streets were blood,
When this town was like a living hell,
Who ruled?
This was a time of terror, the town
Full of terror, this was a time of hell.

• The next day Azdak realises it was the Grand Duke he had been hiding and that the Prince’s soldiers are still looking for the Duke.

• He goes to find the soldiers to hand himself in. He demands that the soldiers call the judge and that he is
put on trial for harbouring the Grand Duke. But the soldiers point to the judge, who is on the scaffold; he was hanged the day before.

- The **Prince** enters with his **nephew**. He says that now that the Duke’s judge is dead they must appoint a new one and puts his nephew forward as the obvious choice.

- But the Prince says ‘**let the people decide who the new judge should be.**’

- ‘**Is that us?**’ say the soldiers.

- The Prince turns to his nephew and whispers ‘**The job is yours. As soon as we’ve got our hands on the Grand Duke we won’t need to lick the rabble’s arse anymore.**’

- The soldiers turn to each other:

  ‘**They’re dirtying their trousers because they haven’t caught the Grand Duke yet.**’
  ‘**We have the odd boy there (pointing at Azdak) to thank for that.**’
  ‘**They don’t feel safe, that’s why there’s all this ‘my friends’ and ‘let the people decide.’**’

- The soldiers choose Azdak for judge and not the Prince’s nephew. They place the judge’s robes around his shoulders.

- One of them says: ‘**The judge was always a chancer, so now a chancer should be a judge.**’

*WHOOSH*
SESSION 5: GRUSHA TAKES THE BABY

AIMS
To explore the character of Grusha.

Explorative strategies: teacher narration, still image, thought-tracking at a moment of decision and conscience alley.

The drama medium and the elements of drama: exploring a character’s inner thoughts and motivations.

TIME
1 hour

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY

1. Run a warm up activity that gets the group ready to work together; listening and responding to each other as an ensemble.

2. Run the Grusha's Decision story whoosh (resource 5). If you have already seen the play you may want to adapt it so that it reflects the play that you have seen. A story whoosh is a way of acting out a story with the whole class and allows you to see the main narrative, action and characters in a story in broad brush stroke.
   - Set up a circle for performance and explain that you will narrate the story of the Prologue.
   - The students around the circle will take it in turn to step into the performance area and depict the characters and action as you describe it.
   - At the end of a scene whoosh the actors out of the way and then narrate the next scene inviting the next in turn in the circle to create a freeze frame of the action you describe.
   - Teachers will need to direct the story whoosh, sensing when to hold moments of action in freeze frame and when controlled movement will best tell the story.
   - Students can be given sections of text to speak as part of the story whoosh.

3. Ask students to find a space in the room and take up an image of Grusha from when she sees the baby lying where she left it when she went to pack.
   - Run the final section of the story whoosh, asking all the students to act out Grusha as she sits beside the baby and finally takes the baby with her.
   - Thought track a few people at different stages of the story whoosh.

4. Ask students to work in groups of four or five. Ask half of the groups to come up with four reasons why Grusha shouldn’t take the baby with her and the other half four reasons why she should.

5. Now create a conscience or decision alley; ask for a volunteer to play Grusha and walk down the alley as the voices inside her head speak the reasons why she should or shouldn’t pick up the baby.
Outside the palace are a group of beggars begging and petitioners waving their petitions. They are waiting for the governor Georgi Abashvaili to leave for church.

The Governor and his wife, Natella, approach the palace gates, guarded by two soldiers.

The beggars and petitioners call out (give them the lines) ‘your taxes are killing us, I lost my leg in the Persian war; he’s dying of hunger; we have only one son left; I beg you.’

They spot the Governor and his wife’s baby son, Michael, being wheeled behind by a servant in a very grand pram.

The beggars and petitioners cry out ‘The boy, the boy’.

WHOOSH

At night the town is still and quiet, but slowly the rebel prince’s soldiers creep out into the night and surround the Governor’s palace.

Inside the Governor and his wife don’t know what is happening outside.

Armoured soldiers enter and point their lances at the Governor.

The rebel prince enters and orders the soldiers to take the Governor away.

WHOOSH

The governor is taken to a block by the soldiers and made to kneel.

A soldier takes out a sword, cuts off his head and puts it on a spike.

WHOOSH

The Governor’s wife, Natella, is with a servant and the nanny who is holding the baby. They are packing clothes into a chest. They don’t have much time, the soldiers might return.

The Governor’s wife orders the servant around ‘get the green and the one with furs. The one with the pearl buttons. Don’t tear the sleeve’.

The secretary enters ‘Hurry’ he urges, then rushes off.

Natella asks ‘is Michael sleeping?’ The nanny nods. ‘Then put the baby down somewhere and get me the little boots from next door’ she orders.

‘Don’t just stand around’ she shouts. The nanny puts the baby down and leaves.

The secretary runs back in ‘They have just hanged the greatest judge in the country. The riots have broken out we have to leave now.’

WHOOSH

The Governor’s wife is finishing packing, throwing clothes into the case and then taking them out again.

The secretary says ‘we have to go now’.

Natella orders the servant to carry the case, she shouts to the nanny to ‘bring the child’ and rushes off clasping the clothes to her, but the nanny isn’t there.

The nanny comes back in with the little boots, she sees they have left and sees the baby left behind. She picks the baby up, ‘Hold this’ she says to the servant, Grusha. ‘I’ll run after the carriage’, she says and runs off.

Grusha is left holding the baby. A servant girl, the cook and a groom come in and look at the baby, Michael. The servant girl, the cook and the groom all urge Grusha to put the baby down and run for her life.

The Groom says ‘put him down. I wouldn’t like to imagine what might happen to whoever is found with that
The cook agrees ‘once they start they’ll slaughter family after family.’

‘The nanny asked me to hold him for a minute’ says Grusha.

The servant says ‘She’s done a runner you fool.’ The servant, groom and cook all rush off.

WHOOSH

Grusha looks at the baby and the baby looks back at her.

She puts the baby down. Looks around, finds some pieces of clothing and covers the baby.

Grusha rushes off to get her things.

The rebel prince and a soldier enter the palace with the Governor’s head on a spike. The soldier nails it above the doorway with a hammer and nail. The Rebel Prince announces a 1000 piastres reward for the baby, Michael, ‘search the whole of Georgia for the brat’ he says.

They leave.

Grusha enters cautiously, checking around for soldiers.

She heads for the exit but spots the child lying where she left it.

She stops and looks.

She sits down opposite the baby.

Time passes as she waits for his mother or nanny to return.

She wraps him in a beautiful brocade coat and puts him back down.

Sometimes she looks and listens to see if anyone else comes.

When morning comes she stands up, picks baby Michael up and left the palace.

WHOOSH
THE CAUCASIAN 
CHALK CIRCLE

A Unicorn co-production

CREATIVE TEAM
Devised and directed by Bertolt Brecht
Translated by Frank McGuiness
Directed by Amy Leach
Resource pack written by Catherine Greenwood
Developed with Ella Macfadyen and students and staff at Hammersmith Academy

CAST
Azdak          Nabil Shaban
Grusha         Kiran Sonia Sawar
Simon          Caleb Frederick
Singer         Dom Coyote
Ensemble       Emily Wachter
Ensemble       Mia Soteriou
Ensemble       Tom Espiner
Ensemble       Christopher Wright