KEY STAGE 2
TEACHER RESOURCE PACK
A WINTER’S TALE

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1. INTRODUCTION

An introduction to Ignace Cornelissen’s play A Winter’s Tale and the Unicorn Theatre’s resources for teachers.

2. MAKING THE PLAY

This section gives an insight into the creative team behind A Winter’s Tale and opens up their creative process when staging the piece.

Interview with the director
Purni Morell talks about why she chose to stage A Winter’s Tale and what she thinks is in the play for the children who will come to see it.

The design of A Winter’s Tale
James Button talks about his ideas for set and design and how they relate to the director’s vision for the play.

Meet the actors
Watch a short video of the actors rehearsing the opening of the play and see how they are approaching ‘the play within a play’.

3. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

These activities are designed to prepare your class for their visit to A Winter’s Tale by opening up some ideas and themes of the play.

Transforming objects – drama activity
This simple drama game will help develop imaginative thinking and links to the use of the silk in the production of A Winter’s Tale as a way to transform the space.

Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale - Story Whoosh
This drama activity will give an overview of the narrative of Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale and will enable children to become familiar with the relationships between characters and the sequence of events in this complex narrative.

What’s in a title?
This activity asks pupils to distinguish between the definite and the indefinite article and the grammatical significance of this through comparing Shakespeare and Cornelissen’s titles.
Welcome to the teacher resource pack for the Unicorn Theatre’s production of *A Winter’s Tale* by Ignace Cornelissen. In these resources, the Unicorn sets out to prepare teachers and their classes for their visit to see *A Winter’s Tale*, not by explaining the play, but by engaging with some of the action, characters and background so that the individual responses to the performance can be expanded and deepened.

Coming to the Unicorn to see *A Winter’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. Coming to the theatre will introduce children to watching live performance - which might be less familiar to them than watching moving image, broaden their cultural horizons and also make possible connections with the priorities of the school curriculum.

The activities in this pack use drama, storytelling, and writing as ways of exploring and creating meaning. They do not take an objective led approach; however, teachers will easily be able to establish links to the relevant curriculum objectives for their year group and can adapt them for their particular educational setting.

*A Winter’s Tale*

Children often encounter intertextual playfulness and postmodern construction in contemporary picture books. Lauren Child, for example, plays with the reader’s previous experience of wolves in traditional stories in *The Story Book Wolves*; Allan Ahlberg’s *Jolly Postman* makes his round through a landscape populated with characters from nursery rhymes and traditional stories; the reference to *The Beanstalk* in the title of Mick Inkpen’s *Jasper and the Beanstalk* creates an immediate association for the reader with the story of Jack and the giant. Although such books can be enjoyed without prior experience of traditional stories and nursery rhymes, pleasure and engagement for the reader is heightened when the connections with other texts are recognised.

Through their reading, and through watching film, children are also aware that there can be different versions of narratives where writers bring their particular spin to a story: *Roald Dahl’s Rude Rhymes*, for example, the confessions of Alexander T. Wolf in *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* or the many different retellings of familiar fairy tales. It is the reader’s awareness of other versions and interpretations that enriches and deepens reading and contributes to young readers’ experience of the way in which cultural texts are interconnected, open to different interpretations and reworking, not only in different modalities, but across time and place.
A Winter’s Tale is a play that works in this intertextual, post-modern way. It is not Shakespeare’s play The Winter’s Tale but, as the title suggests, it has a connection to it and being familiar with the narrative of Shakespeare’s play lets the audience in on one layer of meaning. A Winter’s Tale also echoes the way in which Shakespeare structured some of his plays because it is a play within a play where the real actors become the actors who are performing the play – as in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, for example, where the audience sees the Mechanicals rehearse and then perform Ovid’s story of Pyramus and Thisbe. There are also connections between the actors’ relationships with each other and the events that happen in the play they are performing. The real lives of the actors mirror the action in their version of The Winter’s Tale with love, jealousy, abandonment and grief being as much part of their lives as it is the lives of the characters they are playing.

Finding ways of hooking young audiences into this interweaving of stories, roles and action so that the play can speak for itself is at the heart of this resource pack.
Understanding how the creative team have approached A Winter’s Tale will give teachers and children an insight into what to expect from the play.

Purni Morell talks about why she chose to stage A Winter’s Tale and what she thinks is in the play for the children who will come to see it.

Why did you want to stage this version of A Winter’s Tale?

I came across this version of A Winter’s Tale in about 1995 at a theatre festival in Holland. What I really liked about the play was the way in which the relationships between the performers mirror and reflect the relationships between the characters in the story that they’re telling the audience. For me, that’s kind of what theatre is about; the relationship between what happens in real life and what happens in art can be very difficult to unpick. When you’re rehearsing a play, what often happens is that you discover that the subject of the play turns out to have some relevance in your life, but also, who you are and how you feel about what’s going on in your life at that moment can very much influence the way you understand a play, or see a film, or read a book.

So in A Winter’s Tale, there are four performers who play themselves, but who also play characters in the story they are making up for the audience. For me, this play is also about the way in which rehearsing a play is quite similar to playing a game. In the playground, you might get into an argument with 2 or 3 friends about which is the best way to play the game, and whoever ends up winning the argument then decides how the game goes. And that’s a bit like what happens when you’re rehearsing a play, sometimes one actor will want to do a scene one way and the other actor will want to do the scene another way, and they eventually have to agree between them the way in which they’re going to do it – and it’s those dynamics between characters that are very realistic and clear in this production.

What is your vision for the play?

When we initially looked at the play, we decided it was important that everything that happens on stage is done by the four performers telling the story. So we weren’t going to have a Stage Manager who sits backstage deciding when to turn the lights on and off, and weren’t going to have somebody operating the sound; everything that you see happen in the play is done by the actors. We liked the idea that a group of people can make up stories from nothing – without needing complicated effects to make it happen, just their imaginations.

In this play, the performers are playing themselves on stage and we’re always at the real Unicorn Theatre, rather than pretending that we’re somewhere else, but obviously the
story that the performers tell us is set somewhere else - in Bohemia or Sicily. So the
difference between when we’re in the story and when we’re in real life is sometimes
obvious and sometimes a bit more complicated, and I think that’s what makes this play
exciting.

How do you think the audience will connect with the play?
I think the way the writer has written the relationships between the characters is very
realistic and is very like the kinds of arguments you might have with your friends when
you’re playing a game. What I’m hoping is that the audience will recognise the way
these people are behaving as very similar to how people behave when they’re in school
and that those sorts of arguments can lead to much bigger problems than you might
expect. For example, Ben (who’s playing King Freddy) pushes the story in a certain
way because he’s angry with Ginny (who plays Queen Tamara) but he pushes the story
a bit too far and loses control of where its going, and I think we all know what that feels
like. Sometimes, when you do get your own way, it can end up not being quite what you
meant or things end up going much further than you expected – I think that’s a feeling
that everyone can recognise.

I deliberately chose performers that I think are quite similar to the characters they are
going to play. I think it’s more interesting when you have someone playing King Freddy
who’s actually a little bit like King Freddy, who in real life can do things that are a bit
King Freddy-like. In rehearsals, we’ve been playing lots of games to find out the ways
in which we’re similar to each other and the ways we’re different to each other, as I
think it’s important that all of us making the play know each other quite well and can
understand that even though we have different ways of doing things, all those different
ways have their advantages and disadvantages.
“This type of design really asks the audience to use their imagination to fill in the gaps”

James Button talks about his ideas for set and design and how they relate to the directors vision for the play.

The main thing about this version of A Winter’s Tale is that it’s a play within a play – it’s a story about four actors who are telling us the story of The Winter’s Tale. The idea behind the set is that the actors have found all the items we see on stage and have then created the show out of what they’ve got. The set is created and also manipulated by the actors. We started thinking about the four actors, and that there are four sides and four corners to a square. So we came up with the idea of a large piece of square silk, with each actor manipulating a corner of the silk to tell the story. So the silk became the tool with which we move the play to each new location.

This type of design really asks the audience to use their imagination, to fill in the gaps. It sounds a bit like a cheat, but the magic of theatre is that we don’t need to see the actual thing – the audience don’t need to see an actual door or window on stage, we can just suggest it (by using the silk) and they will understand that is there.
In each scene of the play we change the location; we use the silk to give the idea and feel of the location, but then it is up the audience to use their imagination to see where we are going. This idea is also true in other elements of the piece – in the sound and lighting effects too – the actors will create the sound and shift the lights around the stage themselves.

In terms of props, we have decided to use a mixture of objects that are very real and objects that are very theatrical and beautiful. So, for example, the actors will have with them on stage bags that they would actually come to work with, with their real packed lunches inside. But then the crowns will be very beautiful, lovely, theatrical items. So there’s a real contrast of objects within the piece.

The queen’s dress will be very beautiful – when the queen dies it will be removed from the actress and placed on a very old dress-makers mannequin. The audience will see it age and be broken down, as if many years pass. Throughout the whole show it will have a presence close to the audience, so that we are always remembering the land that the story has moved away from.
Below is a link to a short video of the actors rehearsing the opening of the play which shows how they are exploring the idea of ‘the play within a play’.

At the beginning of A Winter’s Tale the actors are introduced to the audience with their real names. In this clip Sam, Ben, Ginny and Kae are rehearsing the opening of the play where they are deciding who will play King Freddy, Queen Tamara, King Tunde and the gamekeeper.

youtube link
ORGANISATION
This is a whole class circle activity

AIM
To develop imaginative thinking and link to the way the silk is used in the design for A Winter’s Tale to transform the space

RESOURCES
A piece of silk or other fabric

TIMING
15-20 minutes

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY WITH THE CLASS
Start by holding the silk and saying: ‘if this wasn’t a piece of silk it could be …’ and then add your idea and make the silk suggest the imaginary object. For example: “if this wasn’t a piece of silk it could be ...a river” and the silk is used briefly as a river.

The idea that is suggested has to reflect some quality of the silk.
The silk is passed round the circle with each person saying the line and adding their idea.

It can be quite a challenging game for some children and sometimes there are those who can’t think of an idea immediately. Staying focused on the game, listening to what is being said and watching what is happening can give children the confidence to join in.

The teacher can ask questions to encourage the children to explore possibilities and develop their ideas.
ORGANISATION
Whole class in a circle, a hall space or cleared classroom

AIM
To give the class an overview of the narrative of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* and become familiar with the relationships between characters and the sequence of events in this complex narrative.

RESOURCES
A copy of the Story Whoosh narrative

TIMING
30-60 minutes

OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIVITY
Even though the Unicorn Theatre’s version of *A Winter’s Tale* is not a direct retelling of Shakespeare’s play, the Shakespearean narrative is at the heart of the play and becoming familiar with it is a way of making a connection for the audience prior to their visit.

The teacher takes the role of narrator and as each event is told the children make a physical representation of the moment, showing what is happening. As the narration moves on the group is ‘whooshed’ out of the way and the next part of the action is portrayed as a ‘freeze frame’ by the next children in the circle. Teachers can encourage reflection on the meanings and relationships being portrayed but, in general, the whoosh is a strategy that requires pace as well a playful approach.

We have supplied the narrative for *The Winter’s Tale* up to the point where the baby is found by the Shepherd. Both Shakespeare and Cornellison’s plays show what happens when the baby grows up and becomes a young woman.

RUNNING THE ACTIVITY WITH THE CLASS
- In a circle, using the Story Whoosh narrative, ask children to take on roles and to show the event being narrated.
- You can ask children to represent things as well as characters if it is helpful; for example trees in a forest or prison bars.
- When the space becomes too crowded or it feels right to clear the images and move onto another chapter ‘whoosh’ the group back into the circle. Continue the story with the next children in turn.
- When you finish the narrative, explain to the class that this is not the end of the story. Discuss what they have enjoyed so far and what they think might happen next.
THE WINTER’S TALE

• In Sicily there is a King, a Queen and their 7 year old son
• Their friend the King of Bohemia arrives in Sicily to visit them
• Everyone has a wonderful time hunting, feasting and dancing
• The King and Queen of Sicily invite the King of Bohemia to stay a little longer
• At first the King of Bohemia refuses saying he has important business back in his own Kingdom
• But the King and Queen of Sicily persuade him to change his mind and eventually he agrees to stay a few more days

WHOOSH!...

• Later that day the King of Bohemia and the Queen of Sicily are laughing and joking together
• The King of Sicily sees them and starts to feel jealous
• He gets more and more jealous

WHOOSH!...

• The King of Sicily calls his servant and gives him a small bottle of poison and commands him to poison the King of Bohemia
• The servant goes to the King of Bohemia, but instead of poisoning him he tells him of the King of Sicily’s plan and urges him to escape
• The King of Bohemia escapes taking the servant with him and they sail back to Bohemia together

WHOOSH!...

• The King of Sicily is furious when he hears about their escape
• The King is still feeling jealous and now thinks that the baby the Queen is about to have is not his. He thinks the King of Bohemia is the baby’s father
• The Queen denies it. But the King of Sicily is now convinced that the Queen is having a baby by the King of Bohemia
• The King calls the guards and has his pregnant wife thrown into prison
• The King’s 7 year old son misses his mother and falls ill
• The King then sends a message to the oracle at Delphi to ask the Gods if what he suspects is true

WHOOSH!...

• Meanwhile, in prison, the Queen gives birth to a little girl and her loyal servant has an idea
• The Queen’s servant takes the baby to the King and shows her to him hoping that the sight of the baby will soften his heart and make him change his mind
• But seeing the baby only makes the King angrier
WHOOSH!...

- The King takes the baby, gives her to his servant and commands him to take the child out of the Kingdom to a wild and desolate place and leave her there to die
- The King’s servant takes the baby and leaves

WHOOSH!...

- The King’s messenger returns from Delphi. The gods have spoken: The Queen of Sicily and the King of Bohemia are innocent
- The gods also say that there will be no heir to the throne until the King’s lost daughter is found
- But the King refuses to believe the prediction. He insists his wife is guilty
- A servant comes in with the news that the King and Queen’s son has died
- When she hears the news, the Queen faints and has to be taken away to recover

WHOOSH!...

- The Queen’s servant brings news to King: The Queen is dead
- When the King hears this he is heartbroken, overcome with grief and regrets all the accusations he has made and the things he has done
- Meanwhile the King’s servant does not abandon the baby. He travels across the sea with her
- When he is asleep on the ship the baby’s mother appears to him in a dream and tells him to write a letter that tells the story of what has happened and to leave it with the baby, along with a bag of gold
- The servant arrives on the coast of Bohemia where he leaves the little baby with the letter and the gold as promised
- The servant is chased by a bear
- The bear kills him

WHOOSH!...

- The baby is left alone on the shore
- A shepherd comes by and sees the baby lying there
- He picks her up, he finds the letter and the bag of gold

Explain to the class that the baby is named Perdita in Shakespeare’s play but in the Unicorn Theatre’s version she is called Vicki, and you can find out what happens to her when you come and watch the show.
ORGANISATION
Talk partners and whole class

AIM
To enable the class to distinguish between the definite and indefinite article and the grammatical significance of this through comparing Shakespeare and Cornelissen’s titles

RESOURCES
Titles sheet

TIMING
20-30 minutes

OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIVITY
When A Winter’s Tale begins it may not be immediately clear to the children what is happening, who characters are or where and when the action is taking place. Giving the class some ‘hook’ into the performance is a way of establishing a connection that allows for both expectancy and uncertainty to be part of the thrill of watching the performance.

Teachers will be familiar with introducing books to the class through looking at the front cover and reading the blurb to try and tune in to what the book may be about. It’s important to stress may in this context because any discussion about a book at this stage is speculative and as readers become engaged with the story their initial views can – and indeed should – alter as the story unfolds. The ‘possibility thinking’ this involves is a way of developing children’s capacity to tolerate the uncertainty of not knowing that is central to how experienced readers read and how an audience watches a play. This activity takes a similar approach through reading the title of the two plays: The Winter’s Tale by William Shakespeare and A Winter’s Tale by Ignace Cornelissen. The shift from the definite to the indefinite article - from The to A – in the title offers the opportunity for a discussion on the possible significance of that change.

This activity builds on The Winter’s Tale story whoosh. The class will already have a sense of the narrative of Shakespeare’s play and it is this that informs this work.

When facilitating the children’s responses it will be important to keep the discussion speculative and open up possibilities which the contributors have to justify. The activity will enable the class to distinguish between the definite and indefinite article and the grammatical significance of this.
RUNNING THE ACTIVITY WITH THE CLASS

- Introduce the two titles and the names of the playwrights.
- Ask the class to observe the differences between the two titles. Teachers will want to discuss the difference between the use of the definite and indefinite articles at this point: when and why do we use a and the?
- In talk partners, ask the class to think about: how the two titles are connected; how the two plays might be connected and why they think the play they are going to see might be called A Winter’s Tale.
- As a whole class, discuss the responses and what you thought might be the connections between the known, i.e. Shakespeare’s narrative (from the previous Story Whoosh activity) and the as yet unknown, i.e. the Unicorn Theatre production.
- Record the points that have been raised so that they can be revisited and reflected on after the class have seen A Winter’s Tale.
Look at the information on the two plays: What do you notice about the titles? What do you notice about the playwrights? How do you think the plays might be connected? Why do you think the play you are going to see might be called A Winter’s Tale?