



**UNICORN**

THE UK'S THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

# GULLIVER'S TRAVELS TEACHER RESOURCE PACK

FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH PUPILS IN YEARS 7 AND 8



**A Unicorn Production**

# **GULLIVER'S TRAVELS**

Inspired by the book by Jonathan Swift

Adapted by Lulu Raczka

Directed by Jaz Woodcock-Stewart

**FROM SUN 6 MAR – SUN 17 APR 2022**

## **A WONDEROUS WORLD, A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE...**

This perfect family show is an adventure-filled modern adaptation of Jonathan Swift's surreal masterpiece.

Lemuel Gulliver sails away to a world of strange islands and even stranger creatures – from the tiny inhabitants of Lilliput, to the giants of Brobdingnag, and the mysterious Houyhnhnms - and embarks upon an epic adventure of survival, unexpected friendship and self-discovery.

Gulliver's fantastical imaginings are vividly brought to life using video camera, intricate table-top sets and projection alongside live performance in this playful, funny and highly inventive show that uses Swift's biting satire to explore reality and escapism, home and family, and the power of stories to transform our view of the world.

Duration: 1 hr 30 mins (approx)

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# INTRODUCTION

*'What's so captivating about Gulliver's Travels is how complex and nuanced it is; it's not the simple fairy tale it's often made out to be in popular retellings. It's one of those stories everybody knows, but no-one really knows. What you might expect from it isn't necessarily what it is.'*

**Jaz Woodcock-Stewart**

The aim of this pack is to provide useful information about the Unicorn Theatre's production for secondary teachers, as well as a series of drama activities which explore key themes, ideas and characters, and provide teachers with practical ideas to use in the classroom with their pupils before and after their visit. This is the secondary teachers' resource for use with Years 7 and above. A separate resource for primary teachers is also available online.

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a savage satire depicting absurd places and the beings which inhabit them, as a way of expressing the anger and frustration with which he viewed the failings of human beings: namely, that people are petty, greedy, and self-serving. Swift's book gave his reader a distorted mirror through which to view British society and values.

The Unicorn's production will follow four storytellers as they bring to life the travels of Gulliver, a young woman in contemporary Britain, journeying to strange lands. As the four actors begin to tell and act out the adventures of Gulliver, we witness the power of the imagination to take us to other places, to escape reality for a while, and to reflect on and process our present reality.

The play illustrates the power of the imagination, and speaks to the transformational power of storytelling and theatre as a way to enable us to escape our lives for a time, and reflect on who we are from a different perspective.

**Jaz Woodcock-Stewart** is co-artistic director of Antler, an associate company at Bush Theatre. She was a finalist for the RTST Sir Peter Hall Director Award 2018 and finalist for the JMK Award in 2016. She was recently on attachment at the National Theatre Studio working on a new play, and was nominated by National Theatre as part of MITOS21, the European Theatre Network, to workshop a piece at Performance Laboratory Salzburg 2019.

For the theatre, Jaz has directed *Civilisation* (Underbelly, Yard), *Lands* (Bush Theatre), *The Bacchae* (East 15 Acting School), *Days Like This* (BAC/BeFestival), *You're So Relevant* (Five Plays, Young Vic), *If I Were Me* (Soho Theatre/Underbelly), *Where The White Stops* (as co-creator; Underbelly/ Bush Theatre/UK Tour). Film includes: *Emmeline* (short) winner of BFI Future Film Award for Best Fiction. Work as a Staff/Resident/Assistant Director includes: *Book of Dust* R&D, Dir. Simon McBurney (Complicite); *Network*, Dir. Ivo van Hove (National Theatre); *Lazarus*, Dir. Ivo van Hove (Kings Cross Theatre); *Shape of the Pain*, Dir. Rachel Bagshaw (R&D); *Adler and Gibb*, Dir. Tim Crouch, Karl James, Andy Smith (Royal Court tour); *Measure for Measure*, Dir. Joe Hill-Gibbins (Young Vic); *Stink Foot*, Dir. Jeff James (The Yard).

**Lulu Raczka** is an award-winning young playwright and Company Director of Barrel Organ Theatre. In the past she has been a contributor to Exeunt Theatre Magazine. Her plays include *Antigone* (New Diorama), *A Girl In School Uniform (Walks Into A Bar)* (New Diorama), *Some People Talk About Violence* (Summerhall/Camden People's Theatre), *Clytemnestra* from *The Iphigenia Quartet* (Gate Theatre), and *Nothing* (Summerhall/Camden People's Theatre).

She is a winner of the Sunday Times Young Playwriting Award.

**The Unicorn Theatre** is the UK's leading professional theatre for young audiences, dedicated to inspiring and invigorating young people of all ages, perspectives and abilities, and empowering them to explore the world – on their own terms – through theatre. Purpose-built for children and based in London, the Unicorn is one of the most prolific producing theatres in the UK, presenting 12 to 15 productions for children of all ages every year, and touring widely across the UK and beyond.

# ABOUT THE PLAY

The Unicorn production will be a fresh response to the 18th century novel, and will bring key elements of the book to life with a contemporary perspective on Gulliver's journeying.

It is not a traditional production of *Gulliver's Travels*, and will focus on the question of why we tell stories and how we reconcile living in the painful reality of the world and escape into story in order to find meaning in chaos.

Four performers share the storytelling and the many roles imagined in this adaptation. They tell the story of Grace, a young woman whose home life is difficult; her mother is sick and her sister - who Grace used to make up dances and have fun with - is now running the house, asking Grace to do chores and reminding her of her homework. Grace escapes all of this through her imagination; she finds herself enacting the story of Gulliver and his travel. She imagines a ship and sets off to sea where her life gets swept off course in a huge storm. No longer in control of her life, she gets taken to extraordinary lands, where she encounters strange people and creatures beyond her imagining.

The Unicorn production is full of humour, music, dance and theatrical technical wizardry. The actors bring props, costumes, lights, cameras, projectors and intricate table top worlds on stage to help Grace conjure the strange worlds Gulliver finds herself in.

Firstly, she arrives at Lilliput, where the people are tiny and Gulliver is a giant. The use of multimedia, with live camera and projection will help realise this world of big and small, and enhance the concepts of power, scale, contrast and perspective in the production.

She longs to go home, but instead is taken to the land of the Brobdingnagians, where she is now tiny and the Brobdingnagians are giants. Here Gulliver is forced to sing and dance for the giants' entertainment, and experiences what it is like to be small, insignificant and at the mercy of others.

Grace, or Gulliver, wants to find her way home; she doesn't understand the rules, customs and traditions of the places and people she comes across but she sees that they share the same problems of poverty, inequality, rivalry, hunger, and war.

Unable to get home, and finds herself in Laputa, a floating island where the people are obsessed with science and mathematical equations. She witnesses a laboratory where surreal experiments take place and absurd inventions are created - a scientist is working out how to turn all hard substances into pillows, another has discovered how to bring people from the past, like Elizabeth I, back to life so that they can ask them about their life and times.

When she sees the Strudlburgs - people who are immortal - she has to make a decision as to whether she will take a potion that will make her immortal, too.

Eventually, Grace is helped to return home, but home is still a hard place to be; her mother is still sick and her sister only has time for what's needed to keep the household running. She feels strange, separate and dislocated from those she had longed to return to. She longs to go back to her travels and so she seizes the narrative, insisting that the story continues and she can go back to her adventures. The actors try to argue that it is over, but eventually agree to help her construct the next

chapter.

The final stage of her journey takes her to the land of the Houyhnhnms, beautiful horses who sing to each other of peace, beauty, love, freedom and equality.

Gulliver is entranced by the Houyhnhnms but at first cannot understand their language. She longs to stay with them and learn their song. They teach her their song, but then it changes and the Houyhnhnms begin to sing “We’ll rub your hands when you are cold... Turn on the lights when you are scared... Put your drawing on the fridge.”

Grace, hearing this call from home, finds herself back with her sister, who still wants to know whether she’s done her homework, and reminds her that her mother is still ill in bed and she hasn’t been in to talk to her today. Grace reminds her sister how they used to make up dances together and shows her sister the moves - they dance together.

Grace understands she needs to go into the bedroom and talk to her mother. She is scared, but she goes in, and when mum asks her to tell her all about her day, she does, and it all pours out of her.

# MAKING THE PLAY

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JAZ WOODCOCK-STEWART

### WHY DID YOU WANT TO DIRECT A CONTEMPORARY ADAPTATION OF GULLIVER'S TRAVELS?

What's so captivating about *Gulliver's Travels* is how complex and nuanced it is; it's not the simple fairy tale it's often made out to be in popular retellings. It's one of those stories everybody knows, but no-one really *knows*. What you might expect from it isn't necessarily what it is. It's angry, political, and dark, and I think what appeals to me most about it for a show at the Unicorn, for young people, is that as a young person I loved all that stuff. People assume they can't handle that material, but I feel they absolutely can.

Why it's so great to be telling it on stage is that it's sort of impossible. How do you create not only one world, but a series of worlds that evolve and change every chapter? The challenge of you how you translate that to the stage for the audience's imaginations is an incredibly exciting one.

It's super, super silly as well. It completely appeals to my sense of humour. It's so surreal. There's a lot of naturalism in contemporary play-making (which I also enjoy), but *Gulliver's Travels*... Art can be anything, stories can be anything and they can take you anywhere. There are no limits.

It feels like a really good request to an audience to imagine what the world could be and what this could look like.

The headlines would be: it's cruel, it's impossible and it's mad.

### HOW WILL YOUR VERSION BE DIFFERENT TO THE ORIGINAL NOVEL?

In the novel Gulliver is a man, we are making Gulliver a young woman, called Grace. We didn't find any reason not to, and we felt the well-known narrative about men and adventures could do with being diversified. Girls love an adventure too.

To condense such a huge book into ninety minutes, we can't stage it all. In the book, Gulliver returns home after each section, whereas we're going to keep her away from home; this attempt to get home gives her a clear and simple objective - and a universal story that you can relate to at any age. And what happens when she gets home? Will she be satisfied? Is that the end of the story?

There is something here about art and the imagination and our need for it - even when you achieve what you want to achieve, even when you've found somewhere to belong, sometimes that's not enough - she has this yearning to return to the story. When there are difficult and painful things going on in the world, that's a place we will return to again and again.

How do you hold these two worlds, how do you keep a healthy balance between wanting to stay and wanting to go?



## **HOW DO YOU THINK YOU WILL CREATE THE DIFFERENT WORLDS GULLIVER TRAVELS TO – WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS FOR STAGING?**

Rosanna and I are stripping the theatre right back, exposing all the walls, keeping it completely open; a blank canvas. They'll be nowhere for anyone to hide. An abyss of space, an abstract space which is huge, and our performers will look very, very small and insignificant in it.

That image does a lot to convey the emotional reality of the play; what are we all doing here? We're just these little people walking around, creating things to try and understand it all.

## **WILL THERE BE ANYTHING OF THE 1726 GULLIVER'S TRAVELS IN THE DESIGN?**

I think there might be historical elements in different places – it might depend world to world, it might be a mix of contemporary and historic.

A key element to our design is the use of live video. Using video is very effective for the first section, a playful way of playing with scale, the big and small, but it will also be embedded throughout the show. It's fantastically useful in terms of visually symbolising, and thinking about how we tell and construct stories. It's also interesting in that a huge part of the stories we create today are in digital content, whether that be film, TV or social media. Video is the most popular way of communicating, so it's the perfect form for a show that is, amongst other things, very concerned with the nature of storytelling, with the relationship between real life and escapism.

The last part with the horses is the darkest and weirdest section, the most disturbing, but also really beautiful. It asks a question to the creative team; how do you reinvent the form that you've introduced? How do you take us somewhere completely new? Sound design and music felt like a fascinating and exciting solution. Music is so powerful; it felt right that this is the section where everyone sings. [It's] absurd and strange, and it comes at an emotional turning point in Grace's journey. As an outsider, she can't access the language, and it felt important to dig into how we make that situation clear to an audience.

## **HOW WILL THE FOUR ACTORS BE SHARING THE ROLES IN THE PRODUCTION?**

We will have one person playing Grace throughout, and three actors multi-roling everyone else in the story. There are about thirty characters, so that's going to be very fun and very exhausting for them.

# CONTEXT

## SWIFT'S GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

*'Swift's satirical fury is directed against almost every aspect of early 18th-century life: science, society, commerce and politics.'* **Robert McCrum**

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* was published anonymously in 1726, with the original title *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World*.

An elaborate practical joke, Swift had half of the manuscript delivered to a publisher with the promise that the other half would be provided on the payment of £200 – a huge sum at the time. The publisher paid the money without knowing who the author was.

A parody written in the tradition of the travel journal, a very popular genre at the time, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* claimed to be written by Lemuel Gulliver and to tell of his travels to strange lands around the world.

The book contains detailed records, maps and description of the fantastical places Gulliver visited and the beings he encountered there. Places on his travels are located on the edges of what was known and mapped of the world at the time, so for example, the land of the Houyhnhnms is shown on a map in the book as just south of Australia.

The journal is written with an observational distance. Gulliver is curious and scientific, not becoming swept up in what is happening, but instead recording in a dispassionate, factual way what he finds on his journey: *'I felt something alive moving on my left Leg ... I perceived it to be a human Creature not six Inches high, with a Bow and Arrow in his Hands, and a Quiver at his Back.'*

The book became an immediate hit and from the beginning had broad appeal, with adults appreciating the anger-fuelled satire and children enjoying the adventure and wild creations of Swift's imagination.

## GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

The book divides the journeys of Lemuel Gulliver, a sea captain and a surgeon, into four sections.

The ship carrying Gulliver is shipwrecked and he finds himself on Lilliput, the only survivor. This is a land where the people are only six inches high. The most famous image from the book is of the giant Gulliver being tied down by lots of tiny people. Imprisoned by the Lilliputians, Gulliver hears about their absurd customs, including the political rivalry between those who wear high heels and those who wear low heels. Meeting the king later, Gulliver hears about the fighting between the Lilliputians and the empire of Blefuscu over whether boiled eggs should be opened at the bigger or the smaller end.

Next, Gulliver travels to Brobdingnag, whose inhabitants are giants within a gigantic landscape. Now it is Gulliver who is tiny, having to fight off giant wasps. Captured by a farmer, Gulliver is exhibited as a curiosity and eventually sold to the queen. When talking to the king, he proudly describes life back home in England and the political and historical achievements of the Europeans. The king responds in

surprising way: he thinks that the people Gulliver describes sound appalling. *'The most pernicious race of odious little vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.'*

Gulliver then offers to make gunpowder for the king, but the king is horrified by the thought of such weaponry.

Gulliver is picked up by an eagle and dropped into the sea, where he is rescued by people his own size and taken to Laputa, whose people have eyes pointing in different directions: one inward, and the other upward. The people of Laputa study maths and music, but are so lost in thought that they do nothing practical with their knowledge. On the island of Lagado, Swift satirizes contemporary science as Gulliver describes an experiment which attempts to extract sunbeams from cucumbers.

On Glubbudubdrib, an island of sorcerers, Gulliver speaks with great men of the past and learns about the lies of history from them. In Luggnagg, he meets the Struldbrugs, a people who are immortal but still age as though they were mortal.

His last visit is to the land of the Houyhnhnms - horses who are rational and humane. They have no words for evil or deception and live a communal, harmonious life. Living alongside them are the Yahoos; brutish, greedy, and dirty, the Yahoos look like humans and display human beings' worst traits.

The Houyhnhnms are curious about Gulliver as he looks like a Yahoo, but behaves in a more civilised way. But when Gulliver describes his people and their history to the king of the Houyhnhnms, they both see that the English are not more civilised than the Yahoos.

Gulliver returns home, having learnt from his travels the true nature of his own society. Disgusted with human beings, he chooses to spend the rest of his days with horses.

A biting satire on contemporary British politics, it is Gulliver's failure to really see and understand what he encounters that is essential to the satire. He attempts impartiality, but his lack of awareness about the realities of his homeland becomes more and more apparent. In the land of the Houyhnhnms he is finally brought to a realisation about the nature of his own civilisation, and so returns home changed by his travels.

*'Swift's genius is to see that pride and self-disgust are near neighbours. Gulliver begins his voyages as a prideful modern man, confident in the values of his culture; he ends as a maddened misanthrope, and, disturbingly, the unwitting object of the book's satire.'* **John Mullan**

# DRAMA ACTIVITIES

These teacher resources and the accompanying CPD aim to equip teachers to make the most of their visit to *Gulliver's Travels* and develop work that connects to the form and content of the play with their students.

The drama activities offer a range of practical exercises and theatre making tasks that link to KS3 - KS5 Drama and English. Using approaches director Jaz Woodcock-Stewart employed in the rehearsal room with her actors, they extend the imaginative reach of the play, and allow students to give shape to their thoughts, feelings and understanding in drama and theatre form.

## OVERVIEW

In this section, there are four separate suggested sequences for teachers to work through with their classes. Sequences One to Three can be run before or after your visit to the Unicorn to see the show; sequence Four provides suggestions for responding to the show after your visit. The activities are designed to build sequentially, but also to be flexible enough for you to adapt to your own classroom priorities and curriculum planning.

**Sequence One: Devising** is designed to introduce students to key characters and themes in the Unicorn's adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Working with fragments from the production, this sequence enables students to engage with and deepen their understanding of key themes and events in the play and, in a short devising activity, begin to piece together their own ideas about what might lie at the heart of the piece.

**Sequence Two: Storytelling** asks students to develop storytelling and narration techniques, building confidence in convincing and communicating to an audience. Using an exercise used by the director in the R&D development period at the Unicorn, students act as 'experts' in the story, improvising what they imagine the story could be.

**Sequence Three: Creating Characters** is designed to support students in developing physicality and simple choreography in creating the characters described in *Gulliver's Travels*.

Working with fragments from Swift's novel, this sequence enables students to engage with and extend their understanding of key characters in the play before seeing how the creative team realise them in their adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*.

**Sequence Four: Staging *Gulliver's Travels*** provides information about some of the decisions made by the creative team, and questions to guide a discussion that relate to the staging of *Gulliver's Travels*.

## SEQUENCE ONE

# DEVISING

### AIMS

**To introduce key themes from the play.**

**To explore fragments of text from the script.**

**To create simple devised pieces based on the themes and text extracts.**

### RESOURCES

Text extracts from the script of *Gulliver's Travels* (**resource one**).

### STRATEGIES

Ensemble work, still image, small group devising.

### INTRODUCTION

This activity is designed to introduce students to key characters and themes in the Unicorn's adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Working with fragments from the production, this sequence enables students to engage with key themes and events in the play and begin to piece together their own ideas about what might lie at the heart of the piece. The idea is to open up possibilities, rather than tying the play down to one narrative or meaning at this stage.

The extracts in these activities are taken from the rehearsal script and may not remain intact in the final production.

After seeing the play you could discuss the process of writing for the stage: from first draft, to rehearsal script, dress run, and the preview stages of a production, where dramaturgy continues. The script will be adapted, cut and changed right up to the first night performances.

The content of these text extracts, even if the words are no longer in the play, will have informed the final piece and reflecting on this after seeing the production could prove instructive for students considering the process of shaping and editing a new work.

## STAGE ONE: ENSEMBLE WARM UP

- Ask students to move around the room and STOP and GO when you say – aiming to stop at the same time and move off at the same time.
- Now ask them to STOP and GO without your instruction; they need to work together as an ensemble to feel the moment as a group, stopping and starting with no obvious leader.
- Continue the exercise, but when you call ‘*Lilliput*’, everyone should drop to the floor and leave one person standing. This should not be discussed, but again should be felt by the group and negotiated nonverbally. Then ask them to feel the moment when they should move off again and resume moving around the space.
- Now when you say ‘*Brobdingnag*’, one person from the group should drop to the floor and everyone else should remain standing.
- Discuss how easy they found the activity, and how it felt when they were working well as an ensemble, communicating across the whole group.

## STAGE TWO: DEvised MOMENTS

- Find out what, if anything, the class know about *Gulliver’s Travels*. It’s likely that they will know very little, which is fine. Explain that the novel and the Unicorn’s adaptation are about Gulliver’s journeys to imaginary lands, and that one of the key themes of the play will be storytelling, and escaping the world we are in by travelling to new worlds in our imaginations. Lilliput is a land of tiny people, where Gulliver is a giant, and Brobdingnag is a land of giants where Gulliver is tiny.
- Move the class into six groups and give each group a theme from the list below. Ask them to make a physical image that represents their theme.

**RESTLESSNESS   REALITY   BELONGING   CONFLICT   HOME   IMAGINATION**

- Briefly see each group’s image, around the room.
- Now give each group the corresponding text fragment from the play (**resource one**) and ask them to use it in conjunction with their image in some way. Ask them to retain their original image somewhere in their piece, but they can now move and develop their physical work as they add the lines of text. They will need to decide how to share the text out amongst them; they could decide to speak in unison, allocate solo lines and/or repeat phrases. This work can still be abstract, with the focus on finding a way of combining images and words to express their response to the stimulus.

## STAGE THREE: SHARING AND RESPONDING

- See each group’s work around the room - perform them seamlessly, one after the other, before discussing. Ask the students what kind of a story they see emerging, reflecting on the way themes connect across the moments that they have created.

**EXTENSION: DEvised NARRATIVES**

- If you would like to develop the idea of creating stories, move the students back into their small groups and ask them to create their own narrative, bringing together some of the fragments the whole class have created with new ideas of their own. They can decide who is the protagonist in their piece and decide what happens to them on their journey.
- Ask them to create three short scenes that show the key episodes in their imagined narrative and use a narrator or storyteller to stitch the episodes together.
- Decide on a title for their piece before performing to each other.

## SEQUENCE TWO

# STORYTELLING

### AIMS

To improvise in pairs, creating stories in the moment.

To develop storytelling techniques.

To develop confidence in narration and direct address.

### RESOURCES

Text extract from the script of *Gulliver's Travels* (resource two).

### STRATEGIES

Improvisation, paired storytelling and story acting, narrating, and direct address.

### INTRODUCTION

This sequence asks the students to develop storytelling and narration techniques, building confidence in convincing and communicating with an audience. Using an exercise used by the director in the R&D development period at the Unicorn, students act as 'experts' in the story, improvising what they imagine the story could be.

*'They had to work together as a pair to convince, to communicate the story to the audience.'*

**Jaz Woodcock-Stewart**



## STAGE ONE: FORTUNATELY/UNFORTUNATELY

- Start with a warm up that asks students to work in pairs, concentrating on building communication between them.
- Facing each other, ask them to count from one to three as a pair continually, taking it in turns, and to keep going as long as they can. See how well they can get into a rhythm, keeping pace and momentum going. If they need to stop and begin again, do so, but the aim is to keep going at a smooth and even pace.
- Now add in new instructions gradually: replace the number one with a clap, then two with a jump, and finally three with a click of the fingers (if they struggle with this, find another action – a nod of the head, perhaps, or a foot stamp).
- Discuss how easy or challenging they found the activity and what they need to do in order to do the activity well.
- Now ask them to play a game of Fortunately/Unfortunately in their pairs, creating a story between them, a sentence at a time. The person who begins will start telling a story of someone going on a journey, and will include the phrase '*Fortunately...*'. The second person adds to the story with the phrase '*Unfortunately...*'
- Ask some of the pairs to perform their storytelling for the rest of the class – they could go back to the beginning of their improvisations, or they can carry on from where they left off.
- The storytelling may well be difficult at first and the stories incoherent – the idea is to keep going, responding in the moment to see what comes up. It is about releasing the imagination, trying not to censor ideas, and the discovery of unexpected and surprising ideas as the game progresses.

## STAGE TWO: PAIRED STORYTELLING

- In pairs, ask students to pick a well-known story that they both feel reasonably familiar with (for example 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', 'Little Red Riding Hood'), and give them a couple of minutes to check they know the key points of the story. Now ask one to narrate the story using direct address, and the other to act out the action as they hear it.
- Swap over, so that both students have had a chance to try both roles. This is a playful activity, so stress that it doesn't matter if they have different versions of the story, or that details may be different; they can embellish or add details, and this can be part of the fun.
- Now ask them to share both the narration and the acting out, and to find points in the storytelling where they swap roles. They might choose to find a way to hand over the narration, or one could jump in and take over from their partner. Ask them to practice working together to make the storytelling smooth, and to find an energy and pace together that works for their story.
- Perform some of the stories for each other, and ask students to comment on what is challenging and satisfying about this way of telling a story for an audience.

### STAGE THREE: EXPERTS ON THE STORY

*'On the first day I put the actors in pairs, they had to improvise telling the story to the audience regardless of them knowing it or not. It's about discovering that story telling dynamic between narrators and they had to make it seem, to the audience, that they knew the story inside out. They had to work together as a pair to convince, to communicate the story to the audience. And if they seemed to be struggling, I would interrupt and say 'Oh don't you know the story, I thought you'd come prepared!' And they'd have to act like they knew it, 'Oh no, we do know it,' and carry on.*

*It's not about knowing the story; it's about how you interact with the other performers whilst trying to tell the audience the story.'* **Jaz Woodcock-Stewart**

- Move the class into pairs (or groups of three or four, depending on what would work best for your students), and give them the text from the script of *Gulliver's Travels* (**resource two**), asking them to read through it together. In the text, Gulliver recounts different stages of her journey, but without giving details. Ask them to speculate, based on the text (and the previous activity in Sequence One), what some of the episodes in Gulliver's journey may have been.
- Bring the class back together, and ask for a pair or group to volunteer to tell the story of *Gulliver's Travels* as if they know it inside out. The aim is for them to share the storytelling with confidence, passing it back and forth between them.
- If they start to lose confidence and the thread of the story, interrupt with *'Oh don't you know the story? I thought you'd come prepared'*.
- You could also ask questions, asking them to give more detail about particular episodes requiring them to improvise in the moment – although try not to interrupt the flow of the storytelling too much.

Reflect on this activity and what worked well and why. *How could they improve their improvisation skills? How do they balance listening to each other and taking the lead in the storytelling?*

**SEQUENCE THREE****CREATING CHARACTERS****AIMS**

To introduce characters from *Gulliver's Travels*.

To use movement and physicality to create simple choreography based on the characters Gulliver meets in the play.

To think about the challenges of staging the different worlds and characters Gulliver encounters on her travels.

**RESOURCES**

Character names (**resource three**), and descriptions (**resource four**), extracts from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (**resource five**).

**STRATEGIES**

Ensemble work, Laban efforts.

**INTRODUCTION**

This sequence is designed to support students in developing physicality and simple choreography in creating the characters described in *Gulliver's Travels*.

Working with fragments from Swift's novel, this sequence enables students to engage with and extend their understanding of key characters in the play before seeing how the creative team realise them in their adaptation.

## STAGE ONE: FLOCKING WARM UP

- Begin by asking students to group themselves in a rough triangle, with you initially taking the lead position to demonstrate this activity.
- Explain that the aim of the activity is for everyone to move together as a flock of birds (or as a shoal of fish); in order for this to happen, everyone must follow and copy the movements of the person at the head of the flock.
- Try out a few movements of the arm, torso and head on the spot, and ask everyone to copy what you are doing, moving at the same pace as you do – keep the movements relatively slow and smooth so that people can move with you in unison.
- Now introduce the element of travelling and begin to move around the space, gently changing direction. Explain that when the flock change direction someone else will take the lead as they find themselves at the front of the flock.
- This strategy will be used later in the session when students bring to life the people (or creatures) that Gulliver encounters on her journey.

## STAGE TWO: LABAN EFFORTS AND LEADING WITH BODY PARTS

- Introduce the concept of Laban Efforts. This movement practice was first developed as a notation system for dancers, created by dancer and choreographer Rudolph Laban. It was adopted for use by actors and directors who saw its potential to extend actors' movement vocabulary and develop the physicality of their characters. Laban categorized human movement into four component parts:
  - **Direction:** either direct or indirect
  - **Weight:** either heavy or light
  - **Speed:** either quick or sustained
  - **Flow:** either bound or free

For example, if you're exploring **flow** and the movement is **bound**, then the physicality will be very tight and held in. A **free** movement in **flow** is the opposite of bound, it should be open and fluid.

- Teach students the Laban elements; ask them to move around the room embodying each of them as you call them out. You could combine elements, with half of the group doing **speed: quick** and the others **speed: sustained**, for example. Allow students to make their own interpretations of the movements, discovering what they mean to them.
- Split the group in two, and ask one half to be audience while the other half do the exercise, and to 'read' what they see. *What do they observe about each of the efforts? Who do they imagine these people might be? What is their relationship?* You can also ask participants how it felt to embody each of the movements.

It is worth mentioning that we are using just the first stage of the Efforts which identifies the four elements of movement. Laban goes on to identify eight Efforts: wring, press, flick, dab, glide and gloat are the others. There are many online tutorials for those interested in exploring this in more detail.

- An alternative activity to splitting the class is to ask the class to move around the room as an ensemble; finding a common tempo, and working together to fill the space evenly.

- Now ask them to move leading with one body part: by the nose; by the groin; the top of the head; the chest; the knees, etc. As they travel around the room, ask them to exaggerate the way of moving they have found. Next, bring the movement right down so that they are still leading by the particular part of the body, but the movement is now naturalistic. You can move along a scale of one to ten, with one being barely perceptible, and ten the most exaggerated version of the movement.
- Discuss how different it felt doing the activity depending on the part of the body they were leading with, and whether any characters or personality types came to mind with the different ways of moving.

### STAGE THREE: CHARACTER 'FRUIT BOWL'

- Move the class into a circle (ideally sitting on chairs, but it can be played standing) and play a game of 'Fruit Bowl' using the names of the characters from *Gulliver's Travels* (**resource three**). Go around the circle giving each person the name of a character in turn; you should have at least two or three of each character. Practise the pronunciation of the names as you give them out as a whole class - they are quite strange and difficult.
- When you call the name of one of the characters, they should cross the circle and find a seat on the other side. If you call '*Gulliver's Travels*', everyone should cross the circle at the same time. Once you have played a few rounds, the caller can then take a seat while people are crossing, and the person left without a seat becomes the caller.

### STAGE FOUR: CHARACTER PHYSICALITY

- Move students into groups of the same character – so all of the Lilliputians are together etc - and give them the information about who they are in the story (**resource four**).
- In their groups, ask the students to decide on a gesture for their character and a way of moving, drawing on the earlier physical work.
- Now ask them to create a movement sequence of the people or creatures which shows what Gulliver might see if she observed them without being seen. They should include:
  - the repeated gesture
  - a sequence where they 'flock', moving together in unison
  - a moment where they separate and move off individually, in different directions
  - coming back together and moving in unison again
- See each group's movement piece, and ask the audience to comment on what they see and what type of people or beings they imagine they are, before groups share the information they were given to shape their character work.

## STAGE FIVE: SHORT SCENE-MAKING

- In their groups, ask students to create a scene based on the extract from Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (**resource five**) and which shows the first meeting between Gulliver and the characters they have created.
- Try to show what happens in the first encounter between Gulliver and their characters, including moving in the way they developed in the previous physical work.
- In most of the episodes in the play, Gulliver spends some time with these people/beings, and eventually is able to communicate with them. She tells them about life back in Britain and some of the things in her world that she has wanted to escape.
- Ask the groups to script a conversation between Gulliver and the people/beings in which she shares something about her life back in London in the 21st century. *How do the characters respond to what she describes? What do they share about their way of life?* It may be that their world contains some of the same problems, or that they do things very differently.
- Perform their scenes for each other, and discuss whether Gulliver has discovered anything in each of the scenes about herself, about the world she has left behind, and about the new places she has visited.

## SEQUENCE FOUR

# STAGING GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

**AIMS**

To reflect on the different contributions of the creative team and the way in which their work creates the story and meaning of the play.

To identify the specific challenges for the actors in the performance.

To analyse and evaluate the ways in which the different performance and production elements are brought together in *Gulliver's Travels*.

**RESOURCES**

Description of the design of the Unicorn's production of *Gulliver's Travels* (**resource six**), design images from the production (**resource seven**)

**STRATEGIES**

Discussion.

**INTRODUCTION**

This post-show sequence provides questions to guide a discussion exploring the decisions made by the creative team in their staging of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Director Jaz Woodcock-Stewart talked about one of the reasons she wanted to direct a contemporary adaptation of *Gulliver's Travels* being the challenge of creating so many strange and different worlds and characters.

*'Why it's so great to be telling it on stage is that it's sort of impossible.'* **Jaz Woodcock-Stewart**

## STAGE ONE: RESPONDING TO THE PLAY

Begin by discussing initial responses to the play, and what the students felt was the main thing that the writer and director wanted to convey in their production.

- What do you think they wanted an audience to experience in this production?
- Do you think they wanted the audience to feel or think anything in particular?
- Do you think there was a message, or something they wanted the audience to understand?

## STAGE TWO: DESIGN DECISIONS

- Share the information provided in **resource six** about what the designers and director were hoping to achieve with their staging of *Gulliver's Travels*. Explain that these ideas had been originally developed during two R&D (research and development) workshops months before the rehearsal period and in a number of subsequent production meetings.
- Using images from the production as reference (**resource seven**), discuss the extent to which the creative team realised their aims outlined in the staging of the piece. Discuss the contribution of each member of the creative team; the director, the set, lighting, AV and sound designers. *What moments do they remember when these elements of the production were particularly effective?*
- Finally discuss the actors and the nature of their performances. *What skills did they need to develop for this production? What were the challenges the style of performance presented them with as actors? What was the role of dance in the production? How would you describe how comedy was used in the production and how this related to the themes of the play?*



## RESOURCE ONE

### RESTLESSNESS

The world around her is boring her –  
And why wouldn't it?  
It's boring.  
So she takes a job going to sea –  
She packs her bags  
Says her goodbyes  
And she's off

### REALITY

But she sees in their world the same problems as in hers  
The rich and poor  
The respected and the un-respected  
The same discriminations

### BELONGING

She spends weeks trying to make herself as small as possible  
Her bones crushed from the effort  
Exhausted and aching  
From making herself smaller and smaller and smaller  
Looking down at their perfect craft  
Their absolute perfection  
She feels so lumbering and clumsy  
So wrong  
So not fitting

**CONFLICT**

What civilised society could do this?

After many years of strife

Of rioting

Of families against families

Of hatred festering

Of not knowing if you could trust the person beside you at work

Or in the house next door

Not knowing if your child sat at a school desk next to someone

Who engaged in this

**HOME**

And she pulls into London

And from there she travels to her home

And outside the door she pauses

She doesn't have her keys.

She lost them along the way.

She knocks on the door

She waits.

She knocks again.

She waits.

And the door opens.

**IMAGINATION**

**Houyhnhnms** (They teach Gulliver)

We believe in beauty

In perfect beauty always

In kindness

And goodness

And beauty

And truth

And in freedom

And equality

And love

And hope

## RESOURCE TWO

And Gulliver starts to tell them about  
Being bored at home

About the ship -

The storm -

Almost dying at sea -

Waking up with little people on her chest -

The big and little end of the egg

Them trying to cut her eyes out

Escaping -

Almost dying again -

Finding land -

Meeting the giants -

Making friends with the little boy -

Singing and dancing for everyone -

The Queen -

The bird capturing her -

Almost dying again -

Landing on the floating island -

The mathematicians -

The Laboratory -

The pillows -

The people being raised from the dead -

Meeting Elizabeth 1st -

Meeting the immortal people -

Not wanting to become immortal -

Almost dying again -

## RESOURCE THREE

# Lilliputians

# Brobdingnagians

# Laputians

# Glubdubdrib

# Struldbrugs

# Houyhnhnms

## RESOURCE FOUR

**Lilliputians:** people who are only six inches tall.

**Brogbdingnag:** giants, over 20 feet tall.

**Laputians:** people have one eye looking inward and one eye looking to the sky, they spend all their time working out mathematical equations so never look where they are going.

**Glubdubdrib:** sorcerers and magicians who can bring people from history back to life.

**Struldbrugs:** people who will live for ever, but continue to age, getting older and older and older.

**Houymhmns:** horses who are peaceful and kind, they love music.

## RESOURCE FIVE

Gulliver's Travels text extracts taken from the novel, accessible here <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/829/829-h/829-h.htm>. Extracts have been abridged for their purpose here.

### **Lilliputians**

I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir; for as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner.

I felt something alive moving on my left leg. I perceived it to be a human creature not six inches high, with a bow and arrow... then at least forty more of the same kind following the first.

### **Brobdingnagians**

He appeared as tall as an ordinary spire steeple... with the next step I would be squashed to death under his foot. I screamed as loud as fear could make me: whereupon the huge creature – looking about under him for some time, at last espied me as I lay on the ground.

At last he ventured to take me by the middle, between his fore-finger and thumb, and brought me within three yards of his eyes, that he might behold my shape more perfectly.

Seven monsters like himself came towards him with reaping hooks in their hands.



### **Laputians**

Their heads were all reclined; either to the right or the left; one of their eyes turned inward, and the other one directly up to the zenith.

Their outward garments were adorned with the figures of suns, moons and stars.

### **Glubdubdribians**

The governor of Glubdrubdrib has the power of calling whom he pleases from the dead, and commanding their services for twenty four hours, but no longer.

The governor ordered me to call up whatever persons I would choose to name among all the dead from the beginning of the world to the present time and command them answer any question I should think fit to ask.

### **Struldrugs**

Born with a red circular spot in their forehead, directly above the left eyebrow – in the course of time it grew larger and changed colour. At twelve years old it became green, so continued until five and twenty then turned to a deep blue; at five and forty it grew coal black.

Envy and impotent desires are their prevailing passions. They have no remembrance of anything, but what they learned in their youth and middle age. At ninety they lose their teeth and hair; they have at that age no distinction of taste, but eat and drink whatever they can without relish or appetite.

**Houymhmns**

I saw a horse walking softly in the field.

The horse looked full in my face with manifest tokens of wonder. He viewed my hands and feet, walking round me several times.

He placed himself directly in the way, looking with a very mild aspect, never offering the least violence. We stood gazing at each other for some time; I took the boldness to reach my hand towards his neck, but he shook his head, bent his brows, softly raising his right forefoot to remove my hand.

Another horse came up; they gently struck each other's right hoof. They went some paces off, as if to confer together, walking side by side, backward and forward, but often turning their eyes towards me, as if were to watch I might not escape.

## RESOURCE SIX

### DESIGN CONCEPTS FOR THE UNICORN'S PRODUCTION OF *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

1. We decided to use the whole space in the Unicorn Theatre, stripping the set back to the bare walls of the theatre so that it looks vast and overwhelming. *'An abyss of space, an abstract space which is huge, and our performers will look very, very small and insignificant in it.'*

2. The play is about someone escaping their reality through storytelling; *why* we tell stories is an important theme for the creative team. They made the decision for the design to have the feel of a big film set, with tables full of the props needed to tell the story. The audience can see how everything is made and are fully aware that the actors are constructing the story for them. The production is not trying to create a world where the audience get lost in the performance and 'suspend disbelief', but a place where we are always aware that we are exploring the idea of why we tell stories.

3. The use of live camera and projection enabled the creative team to play with scale and perspective; with projections bringing to life the tiny and giant people Gulliver meets on her travels.

*'A key element to our design is the use of live video. Using video is very effective for the first section, a playful way of playing with scale, the big and small, but it will also be embedded throughout the show. It's fantastically useful in terms of visually symbolising, and thinking about how we tell and construct stories. It's also interesting in that a huge part of the stories we create today are in digital content, whether that be film, TV or social media. Video is the most popular way of communicating, so it's the perfect form for a show that is, amongst other things, very concerned with the nature of storytelling, with the relationship between real life and escapism.'*

**Jaz Woodcock-Stewart**

4. When Grace finally manages to get home, this is the first time we see something that is naturalistic; a representation of home which contrasts with the vast, mad world of story, where you can play and do anything. This part of the set is intended to be homely and lovely, but also claustrophobic, creating a stifling moment. Gulliver is back home, but we're not sure that's what she wants.
5. Grace tries to get back into the story where she encounters the Houynhymns. This final part of her journeying needed to be different to everything seen before on the stage.

*The last part with the horses is the darkest and weirdest section, the most disturbing, but also really beautiful. It asks a question to the creative team; how do you reinvent the form that you've introduced? How do you take us somewhere completely new? Sound design and music felt like a fascinating and exciting solution. Music is so powerful; it felt right that this is the section where everyone sings. Absurd and strange and it comes at an emotional turning point in Gulliver's journey.'* **Jaz Woodcock-Stewart**

## RESOURCE SEVEN

Images of the design for the Unicorn's production of *Gulliver's Travels* will be accessible at this link when the show has opened in March 2022.

You can view them on our Pinterest here: <https://pin.it/4lkx55iitn4ik5>

# THE CREATIVE TEAM

**Director** Jaz Woodcock-Stewart

**Writer** Lulu Raczka

**Set & Costume Design** Rosanna Vize

**Lighting Design** Jess Bernberg

**Sound Design and Composer** Ben Ringham

**AV Design** Jack Phelan

**Assistant Director** Alice Wordsworth



THE UK'S THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

# GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

**A Unicorn Production**

Inspired by the book by Jonathan Swift

Adapted by Lulu Raczka

Directed by Jaz Woodcock-Stewart

Resource pack written by Catherine Greenwood

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