

## **ARTICLE FOR ANGLO-FILES/UVM WEBSITE**

### **A WIN-WIN SITUATION**

*Good Theatre helps make English Education varied, inspirational and fun. It also helps students gain confidence with the English language and to pass their exams.*

*By Birgitte Holm Halkjær, Gitte Schwaner  
(Borupgaard Gymnasium) & Ian Burns  
(Artistic Director of That Theatre Company)*

One of That Theatre Company's aims is to inspire and engage teachers & students as they present both classic and modern English drama of a high and challenging standard. Going in to see their productions will bring the texts that you study to life.

You can have your own classroom – stage as you go through the educational material provided for each production on their website. ([www.that-theatre.com](http://www.that-theatre.com))

Studying English drama as literature in the class-room is one thing, but going in to see a text being performed after you've studied it in the classroom is another kettle of fish

which opens up a realm of possibilities for both teachers and students.

Students are also given the chance to meet the actors after each performance for an informal question-answer session and they can also blog with the company.

An opportunity to really see and hear the nuances of well-written texts presents itself with these performances. Whether the students agree or disagree with the staging, it starts them wanting to talk in English and gives them the confidence to try.

Students can experience that a play is not made of words alone, but of sights and sounds, stillness, motion, noise, silence, pauses, relationships and responses. To leave the classroom and take a trip to Copenhagen to see the play is an experience in itself.

For many students this is the first time they have actually been in any theatre. To sit with other members of an audience in a small space (only 100 seats) has other demands than sitting in a cinema.

Mobile phones are politely asked to be switched off before the play begins, and no eating or drinking is permitted for the duration of the play.

A different concentration is demanded and most students are transported into whatever make-believe situation the play conjures up. Many students say that they have forgotten where they have been as the lights come up at the end. When that happens then the professional actors

know they have done their jobs.

## **FEEDBACK**

The feedback from teachers and students to this opportunity of watching well-written plays performed over the past years has been only positive.

They find the educational material written by Birgitte Holm Halkjær very useful as it focuses not only on one aspect, but also on many aspects of studying drama in the classroom integrating both oral and written activities.

For example last year That Theatre did a play called IN EXTREMIS by Neil Bartlett about Oscar Wilde and his last few days of freedom before the trials against him began which resulted in him being sent to prison for being homosexual.

The themes this play brought up were vast: Victorian family values, Wilde's witticisms, attitudes towards homosexuality- then and now, The Marquis of Queensbury, Wilde's nemesis, and the beginnings of the Aesthetic Movement.

Before coming in to see the show being performed at Krudttønden the students at Borupgaard Gymnasium studied the play IN EXTREMIS from many different angles.

The students were among other things asked:

- to discuss the issue of homosexuality (cif. tasks on That-Theatre's site)
- to focus on the time, setting and historical context of the play (cif. tasks on That-Theatre's site)
- to reflect on and account for the minor and major themes dealt with IN EXTREMIS (cif. tasks on That-Theatre's site)
- to give character sketches (cif. tasks on That-Theatre's site)
- to discuss the genre of the play (cif. tasks on That-Theatre's site)
- etc.

They were also asked to focus on Neil Bartlett's style and language:

*Task: "Style" refers to the way a writer says what he wants to say. It is usually analyzed in terms of diction. The term "diction" refers to the choice of words in a literary work. Describe and characterize the style and language in the following excerpt: "Your name rose to my lips. Dear boy, dearest, my darling, my golden-haired darling ... O my love, from your hair to your feet you are perfection to me. I love you, I love you, my heart is a rose!. Love me always, always ..always", (p.50, In Extremis).*

*Task: Dialogue often has two main functions in drama. It contributes to the telling of the story and it reveals/creates character(s). Dialogue, is, therefore, an essential storytelling device in drama. Consider the role of descriptive passages and of dialogue, monologue in "In Extremis". How would you characterize the dialogue in the play? Find evidence in the text that dialogue reveals character(s). Finally, discuss the effect of the choice of descriptive passages, monologue etc.*

*Task: Point out (find) an essential dialogue in "In Extremis" e.g. between*

*Wilde and the palm-reader. Consider what elements in this dialogue contribute to building up pathos (i.e. passions, deep feelings, tenderness, pity, sympathetic sorrow etc.) from the reader.*

*Task: It is characteristic of Bartlett's play "In Extremis" that we, as readers, and audience are very often inside the minds of the characters. Find examples of this in the text. Next, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this narrative technique.*

The above tasks were just some of the tasks the students were asked to do in connection with the study of Bartlett's style and language. See other tasks for IN EXTREMIS on [www.that-theatre.com/educational](http://www.that-theatre.com/educational) material.

## **WORKSHOP**

There will be a workshop on Oct the 13th at Borupgaard Gymnasium with Gitte Schwaner & Birgitte Holm-Halkjær organized by Mette Grønvold,  
mg@egedal-gym.dk

You can sign up by contacting her or visiting:  
[www.engelskforeningen.dk](http://www.engelskforeningen.dk)

The focus of the workshop will be the genre of drama. In this case it will among other things be the disturbingly brilliant first novel by John Fowles, *The Collector*, adapted as a play by Mark Healy, an actor and playwright who enjoys bringing classics like *Wuthering Heights*, *The Woman in Black* and *Jayne Eyre* to the

stage.

The workshop activities will for instance include;

- how to write and prepare educational material for a specific play text.
- how to make the genre of drama more interesting and come alive for the students in the classroom by e.g. acting-out activities
- how to find everything encompassed in a text, for example to make the students focus on grammar, the style of language etc. to help them hopefully pass their oral and written exams.

Another aim of the workshop is also for teachers to come together to discuss how to study the genre of drama. In this connection participants of the workshop are requested to bring along their own material produced for the teaching of drama in the class-room. An excellent opportunity to share one's knowledge and teaching experience with other teachers of the English language.

As we pointed out at the start of this article we feel that studying drama in the class-room has a definite point, namely that at the end of the day a deeper understanding of how the English language works in a text and on stage gives students the right "tools" to pass their oral and written exams (without them knowing of course eh?)

If you would like to see previous examples of the educational material please check under “Educational material”, [www.that-theatre.com](http://www.that-theatre.com).

2007: “The Lover” - Pinter

2007: “The Dumb Waiter” - Pinter

2008: “Urban Legends” – devised by the company

2008: “Sleuth”- Anthony Shaffer

2009: “Casanova Undone” Dic Edwards

2009: “In Extremis” – Neil Bartlett

2010: “Hancock’s Last Half Hour – Heathcote Williams

For general information regarding performances, tickets please write to [pr@that-theatre.com](mailto:pr@that-theatre.com) or call 2840 0723