

FACTFILE:

GCSE

DRAMA

Component 3



Knowledge and understanding of Drama, exploration of the set text

Across the Barricades

by Joan Lingard, adapted for stage by David Neville

Social Content

- The play is set in inner-city Belfast in the 1970's during 'the Troubles';
- It reflects both the Catholic and Protestant working-class communities during this time and how families, especially young people, survived;
- There is a lot of street violence between the two communities and British soldiers with guns are walking the streets of Belfast at this time instead of policemen;
- The action takes place during the days leading up to the Twelfth of July parades and marches when there is a lot of social unrest between the two communities;
- The scenes take place in various parts of the city reflecting wasteland and junkyards and twisted barriers which represent a symbolic divide between the two communities;
- Scenes also take place in the small street houses of Kevin and Sadie;
- The play features children, young people and adults who are living through poverty and hardship as well as the continual threat of violence. The characters are all struggling to get by in their daily lives;
- As there are no policemen on the streets, there is a lot of anti-social behaviour, petty crime, delinquency and drug misuse;
- The play deals also with the problem of relationships for two young people who are in love and from different communities.

Cultural

- The play relies heavily on the cultures of the Protestant and Catholic communities in Belfast during the 1970's;
- The people in the play are divided into Protestants and Catholics. The Protestants want to stay part of the UK and are generally called Unionists and Loyalists and the Catholics want to join with the Irish Republic and are generally called Nationalists or Republicans;
- Both communities have their own private armies willing to use the bullet rather than the ballot to solve their problems;
- Violence occurs more in the working-class communities than in any other part of the city;
- Sectarian songs and slogans were popular and strong at this time and each community has their own form of music from their cultural tradition.

Historical

- The play is based on a novel written by Joan Lingard in 1972. It was adapted to a stage play by David Neville in 1989;
- It was first performed by Tag Theatre Company in 1986 on tour in Scotland;
- The play then toured schools in Northern Ireland;
- The play is set during the conflict in Belfast during the early 70's;
- The Twelfth of July commemorates the victory of King William of Orange, otherwise known as King Billy, over the Catholic armies of James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690;
- In 1916 the North of Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom and the South became an Irish Republic;
- During the 70's the governments of the UK and the Irish Republic could not agree on how to solve the problems of Northern Ireland.

Theatrical Conventions

- 'Across the Barricades' was first performed as a 'Theatre-in-Education' experience on a thrust stage with an audience on three sides;
- When the play was first performed it did not use the slide projections but these references are in the script and are generally projected on the cyclorama in the production;
- The stage directions are often quite general and allow for improvised detail from the cast;
- The play changes from scenes in the present to scenes in the past through flashbacks;
- The set for the play is a wasteland or a junk yard filled with assorted objects which can be used to suggest various locations of Belfast;
- Actors often become narrators to tell the story and the device of 'voice-over' is used often as a news report;
- Actors at times talk directly to the audience to comment on the action or move the story along;
- Sound effects such as seagulls, marching bands etc are often used to suggest location.

Form and Style

- The play is set in inner-city Belfast with 14 named characters and the cast multi-role and also play other children, teenagers, soldiers, newsreader, neighbours and extras in crowd scenes;
- The text is natural dialogue in the Northern Irish/Belfast idiom and at times the text becomes commentary;
- The stage is multi-locational using the portable set and many props which remain on stage throughout the play;
- There is a twisted barriers which is used symbolically to divide the two communities;
- A car is made up of some old seats and perhaps a steering wheel;
- The style of the play is naturalistic and there are realistic violent fight scenes which are intended to as close to real life as possible;
- There are 2 main entrance/exits upstage at the cyclorama but cast may also enter through the audience.

Genre

- This is a contemporary play capturing a specific recent period in the history of Northern Ireland and written for a youth audience;
- The acting is generally realistic with some very tragic elements presented;
- The suggested set attempts naturalism but uses simple props and pieces of furniture to try and create a particular location for a scene;
- The play deals with the conflict and violence between two opposing communities and the love which emerges between two young people from each of these backgrounds;

- There is a moral contained in the play about overcoming the issues of bullying, fighting and taunting and ultimately how to solve the problem.

Language

- The language is contemporary in the interactions between the characters. Sentences are short and often abrupt to reflect the context of characters in the play.
- ‘Stream of consciousness’ is used at times to reflect the characters’ innermost thoughts, such as, ‘It’s okay... I’m fine... just a bit weak...’;
- The play is set in inner-city Belfast and the language is quite colloquial but the playwright has made it more formal to make the sense clear, ‘You sound pretty sure’, ‘What in the name’s going on?’;
- British soldiers can use English accents to suit the text, ‘(shouts) get down on the ground’;
- The local newsreader’s language is more formal and correct, ‘Loyalists have claimed responsibility for a petrol bomb...’ while the London newsreader would have an English accent using language of the same formality.

Structure

- The play takes place over a period of months and refers to incidents which took place some years before which are narrated by the main characters;
- There are 20 short, episodic scenes which all take place in Belfast and in the last scene Kevin and Sadie are travelling to London;
- The scenes are fast-moving and continuous and the technical devices, links and images are suggested but optional and some of the text can be improvised;
- The scenes are linked by a range of different types of music, sound effects including sirens, gunshots, explosions etc. and images which can be presented on a cyclorama screen. The images might be of the IRA, UDA or RUC in action, Belfast landmarks or seascape depending on the location of the scene;
- The play moves seamlessly from realistic script to direct narration when a character can speak directly to the audience and then back into a scene.

