



We Made Ships

Drama Resources

There are many ways that **oral history** and the topic of **shipbuilding** can be used successfully in Drama and Theatre.

Students may be lucky enough to see a verbatim play or a piece devised from the words of real people, or be inspired by research into historical events.

Our resources could be used to inform freeze frames, dialogue or monologue, soundscapes and more.

Dialogue and monologue

What is the difference between dialogue and monologue?

In drama a dialogue can take place between two or more characters (sometimes referred to as a multilogue). The speakers may not be equally balanced but they are considered to be *interacting* with one another.

A monologue involves only one speaker and is usually an extended piece of speech directed to the audience (if breaking the fourth wall) or else just 'aloud' (often in the form of a soliloquy). Students are often asked to perform one or two monologues during auditions for plays or drama courses.

Creating a dialogue

Devising a short script for two or more actors depends on more than just the words chosen. Characters are made believable through their vocal qualities, idiolect and physical mannerisms. In naturalism, actors should try to sound real and natural. The inclusion of imperfections and non-fluency features (such as overlaps) can enhance for dialogue, but is also important that the conversation is clear.

Some of the oral history interviews on the [We Made Ships](#) site could be used to inform a script (either between interviewer and interviewee, between people in a shipyard, between husband and wife etc.) or articles relating to the closures of the shipyards could also be a useful source of inspiration.

Creating a monologue

A monologue is, in some ways, easier to write and the resources on the [We Made Ships](#) site would be helpful for students working alone. In any monologue it is important to build in opportunities to show light and darkness, a change of mood or tone.

One monologue could see the speaker looking back over a series of memories, or try to replicate a series of moments in a more abstract way. Alternatively, a monologue could tell – in third person – about the life of a person working in the shipyards.

Verbatim theatre

What is verbatim theatre?

In verbatim theatre plays are constructed from the precise words spoken by people interviewed about a particular event or topic.

Variations

Some plays are pure verbatim (such as the National Theatre's 'John' and 'Leaving' by Paddy Campbell) whilst others have sections of verbatim word (such as 'Rattlesnake' by Open Clasp) or sections *inspired by* interviews with real people (such as 'Our Country's Good' by Timberlake Wertenbaker).

Creating verbatim theatre

1. Using existing oral history testimony

There are a number of oral history interviews available on the [We Made Ships](#) website, and the British Library also have a number of publically available interviews. Consider, for example, using the stories told by Joan Boon (pictured below).

Using pre-recorded interviews, students would make a word-perfect transcript (unless this is already available) before considering how the words would be performed and directed. If the final piece is not dependant on being purely verbatim, the words could instead be used to inspire performance, although there are certain ethical considerations in the standards recommended by the British Library and Oral History Society.

In any variation, it is important that students are sensitive and respectful when dealing with the spoken word of others.

2. Generating spoken materials

A good alternative is to generate your own interviews and materials. Guidelines on undertaking oral history interviewing are available via the Oral history Society website, but one of the most important things to note is that a signed consent form is required for students to make educational use of the material.

Examples of consent forms can also be found on the Oral History Society website: <http://www.ohs.org.uk/advice/how-to-do-oral-history/6/#consentforms>

Top tip:

The retention of non-fluency features such as pauses, hesitations and errors can make a performance much more authentic. Staying true to the original *tone* and *style* of the speaker can demonstrate attention to detail and give students nuances with which to work.



http://archive.blythallship.co.uk/content/catalogue_item/port-of-blyth/oral-history/oral-history-recording-of-joan-boon-of-blyth-northumberland-recalling-her-experiences-working-as-a-female-tack-welder-in-blyth-shipyard-between-1963-and-1966

Devising drama from still image

Just as you may be asked to compose a piece of descriptive writing from a still image in English, so you can use photographs, sketches and diagrams in Drama.

Consider these images of the demolition of the Swan Hunter Cranes and of Eddie Darke as he looks on, taken from the BBC:



http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/tyne/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_8722000/8722475.stm

You could give students the image of Eddie only, and ask them to begin devising. Alternatively, you could give them some background into who Eddie is and what he is looking at. Perhaps you could try both methods with different groups and then compare the outcome.

Students can begin by annotating the image or mind-mapping it in groups, generating adjectives and establishing mood. Some students will want to create plot and backstory, whilst others will be able to generate abstract ideas, movements and sounds.

You could give a check-list such as:

- You must/must not include 'Eddie' in your devised piece
- Use at least one element of physical theatre
- Do/do not include spoken word in your piece
- Use at least one prop
- You must begin and finish your piece with the same freeze frame

Using the same image with multiple groups is effective because students can see the many avenues that one stimulus can take us in theatre and if there are any consistent themes or motifs.

Explore [We Made Ships](#) for more examples of images that could inspire your students' work.

Creating soundscape from video or audio

What is a soundscape?

A soundscape is a combined piece of audio drama, built up when individuals create sound with their mouths, bodies or with props. Sometimes a leader will act as 'conductor', indicating which sounds should increase or decrease in volume, become more or less animated etc.



Illustration: David Hurtado (www.davidhurtado.com)

Soundscape can be used to depict many things, a great example of how the weather can be created with voice and body can be found on YouTube if you search for 'Africa - Angel City Chorale'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c9-poC5HGw>

Creating an original soundscape

To create a soundscape relevant to the North East shipbuilding industry and the [We Made Ships](#) site, follow the instructions below.

Watch the clip entitled 'Swan Hunter Crane demolition at Wallsend':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZaya3ACAUw>

Listen to the clip a number of times and ask students to plot or track the sounds that they hear. Once students have an overview of the types of sounds (people, nature, explosions) ask individual students to re-listen and focus on just one sound. As a group, students can then reproduce the sound from the clip, considering pace, volume, timings, duration etc.



When the group perform the soundscape they have created, you could ask one or two to sit out and offer feedback. The soundscape may sound very similar to the original, or it may take on an identity of its own.

Reflect with the students on what they have created and ask them to generate ideas for other soundscapes that could be made, or how this soundscape could lead to something new.

Hot-seating inspired by oral history

What is hot-seating?

Hot-seating is a popular and effective way to get students to engage with being *in role* and working as a group.

One student sits, in role, in front of another or a group. The students may have undertaken research in order to inform his or her understanding of the character. Other student(s) ask questions and the hot-seater answers in the way that his or her character would respond.



Illustration: David Hurtado (www.davidhurtado.com)

Creating a hot-seating environment

If students have undertaken general research or are familiar with the north east and its shipbuilding heritage, you could ask them to create a character. This will allow them to use elements they have picked up during their research in a creative and independent way.

You might ask students to complete a set of notes on their invented character, and to write about the experience of being hot-seated afterwards. Students observing should prepare questions. Having a conversation about successful questioning and the difference between closed and **open questions** would be a useful place to start.

Alternatively, students could listen to the testimonies of real people before taking on the role of one individual for the hot-seating. This will encourage students to take forward existing information (and even mannerisms) to inform responses to new questions.



