



Diversity in the National Curriculum - Drama

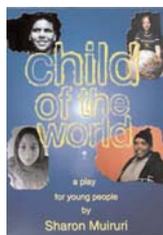
Surya's Story: Having a voice



Bournemouth Theatre in Education believe that theatre has the power to engage young people, to help them empathise with others and to offer glimpses into other cultures.

BTIE creates programmes of live performance and participatory drama, storytelling, forum theatre, community plays, publications, courses, workshops and training courses for students and teachers. Theatre in Education allows children the opportunity to formulate their ideas and to raise important questions about our world. Pupils can become imaginatively involved in the issues that are explored through the drama process and theatre can encourage its audiences to think and make choices. Active participation can inspire young people to have a voice in society.

Surya's Story is a short playlet from a much bigger Theatre in Education play *Child of the World*, first performed in 2001. Focusing on four young people from four developing countries, it was inspired by the Christian Aid-organized Global March of 1998. Children from all over the world walked hundreds of miles to Geneva to protest against child labour. What would young people walk for today in 2008?



The BTIE team has successfully been running its development programme *Surya's Story* for nearly ten years. The playlet could be used as a vehicle for a GCSE drama group working with their drama teacher and possibly linking in with geography and humanities to consider questions around the



Rights of the Child and the issue of Fair Trade. *Surya's Story* asks young people to reflect on what is important for them and to think about principles and there could,

therefore, be follow-up activities for Arts, Citizenship, History and PSHE.

Surya's Story tells the tale of a young girl from a rural village in India who has to sew footballs for a

living. One day a dancer visits the village and Surya is so transfixed that she stops sewing the footballs. This angers the middleman, her boss Mr Chatterjee. His own future is threatened by such 'insolence' since he has to satisfy big corporations in the west with his cheaply sourced goods. When Mr Chatterjee's anger gets the better of him, and he strikes her hands, Surya runs away to join the Global March.



For many children who work, conditions are only a little above slavery. The programme includes film footage provided by Christian Aid to show current images of child labour.

We have found that the children in the audiences loved the live Indian music and dancing and were struck by the back projection, which was how we portrayed the little girl Surya using video imagery.

After watching the play, children had the opportunity to hot seat the characters. 'Hot seating' is a Theatre-in-Education term for enabling the audience to question the characters. The mother of Surya, played by Shahana Chowdhury, was hot seated first. The children asked a range of questions from what kind of food she ate, to what did her husband die of? Some were specifically directed at the issue of child labour:



Student: *Why did you let your child work?*

Mother: *I don't like her working but we have no choice.*

Often the children would counsel her:

*I hope your daughter comes back.
I am sure she will come back.*

Shahana was able to use her knowledge as a Theatre-for-Development worker to answer the students' questions. She had first-hand experience of what it is like to live in a developing country (Bangladesh) and some of the situations that women find themselves in.

At one performance, a teenager with EBP (emotional and behaviour problems) said that she wanted to cry because the mother had lost her child. For her the play was not just about fair trade but about loss.

When the angry overseer, Mr Chatterjee, was hot seated, there was always a lively debate about corporal punishment:



Children: *How can you hit a little child?*

Mr Chatterjee: *I was angry... don't you ever get angry?*

Children: *Why do you employ children?*

Mr Chatterjee: *Because I am kind. Without work they would starve.*

Children: *Why don't you pay them more?*

Mr Chatterjee: *Ask that question to the West, to the big corporations.*

The young people involved soon realise that things are not as straightforward as we think, that we have responsibilities and also a voice. It is all right to be angry with Mr Chatterjee, the middleman, but what about the shops in the UK that do not sell Fair Trade goods? Children have the chance to use their emotional intelligence. This can be liberating for those young people who sometimes struggle with a more academic approach to learning. After one performance for members of Bournemouth Youth Council, the young people started to actively campaign for greater access to Fair Trade products.

The Theatre in Education piece has also been followed by workshops in music, drama, dance and banner making, aimed at unpacking the implications of the play's issues. Children have made banners with storyteller Wendy Wharam that explore the rights of the child, coming up with ideas such as 'More Play for Children' and 'Let the Children Play'. In drama, the focus has been on empathy as they re-enact the workshop in India where Surya sews her footballs. In music workshops, they have recreated Surya's emotional journey away from the village to joining the Children's March. In dance work, young people have taken part in Indian folk dances.



For real change to happen in the world, we need to give young people informed choices. Frequently their view and interpretation of the developing world is one where people are starving and that we need to give charity. However, we have also visited some schools where the pupils have an emerging understanding of what Fair Trade means. It is only by realising that the commercial west is part of the



developing world's problem that we can begin to change things. As one girl wrote in her questionnaire in response to the question 'Is there anything in the project that has made you change the way you think?':

It makes me think how much longer it will take until people realise that there isn't enough fair trade.

Another commented:

I never knew that other people made footballs for us, that the footballs we use we have got them from kids that are being put through child labour.

Our BTIE programme was supported by the Arts Council, SoundStorm, Bournemouth Borough Council's Inclusion and Achievement Business Unit, Christian Aid and the Co-op. Their support made it possible for us to provide a highly experienced cast of performers to take part in the play. Last year the team included a renowned traditional dancer from South India, Reghu Nadhan, who flew



over to England especially to work on the project. He joined an impressive team of performers including Bangladeshi actress and broadcaster Shahana Chowdhury, now resident in London; Pardip Kumar an actor from Birmingham; Greta Hennessey, a musician from

Poole specialising in Indian instruments; and Dorset-based storyteller Wendy Wharam.

Reghu Nadhan offered an enriching experience. An excellent dancer, he added an authentic cultural dimension to the piece. He also mixed his own Indian dialect into the piece. We found that young males in the audience really enjoyed watching him and participating in his workshops. All responses from schools have been very positive. They particularly respond to the colour and richness of the piece.



Over the years we have seen high quality work being generated through this project. Debates and discussions have taken place as a result of hearing about *Surya's Story*. Do you think children should work? How many of you work or want a job? What kind of pay should young people have? Do we know how many people are working in the world? Do we know how many children are working in this country both legally and illegally?

Excellent written work has also been produced including poetry, short stories and letters - fictional letters home to Surya's mother and letters written to companies asking them to use more Fair Trade

products. New dramas and assemblies have been devised for the rest of the school, some including banners and children's version of the rights of the child made in the Arts workshops.

The programme has been running for several years but is kept alive by changing and developing. Our 2008 tour plans to link with UNICEF in encouraging schools to take part in their Rights Respecting Schools Award. Through the UNICEF scheme, young people have the opportunity to know what it is to be a global citizen and have an understanding of their own rights as children and 'their responsibility to respect others' rights in all relations in the community'. *Surya's Story* is an example of how schools can be encouraged to embrace the *Creative Curriculum* through exploring a cross curriculum approach to the Rights of the Child.

Children who constantly experience a world of war and inequality, especially through the media, can end up feeling that they cannot affect what goes on around them. They feel that they are pow-



erless. Projects like *Surya's Story* demonstrate that young people can have a say; their actions can have a positive impact not just on their own lives but on the lives of other children like Surya.

Sharon Muiruri

Co-director, Bournemouth Theatre in Education Team

Copies of the play *Child of the World* and an accompanying resource book, both by Sharon Muiruri, can be obtained from the Bournemouth Theatre in Education Team. Tel: 01202 45272
Email: tie@bournemouth.gov.uk

For more information on *Child of the World* see the website at www.swgfl.org.uk/childoftheworld/
Child of the World also draws on Beverley Naidoo's book *No Turning Back* - www.beverleynaidoo.com

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Additional Resources

The **Real Histories Directory** has a number of resources that can help with the teaching of Drama. If you're looking for texts that can be used in the classroom or for after-school productions, Alexander Street Press publishes *Black Drama*, (www.alexanderstreet.co.uk/products/blldr.htm) which brings together 1200 plays by writers from the United States, Africa and the African Diaspora. Nearly a quarter of them are previously unpublished. The **Young Vic** theatre (www.youngvic.org/get-involved/resource-packs) has online resource packs that can be downloaded in pdf format. They include Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Langston Hughes' *Simply Heaven*.

There are a number of storytellers in the Directory, such as **Storytree** (www.storytree.co.uk/) in Somerset, who are able to work with schools. Many nationally-known theatres work with their local education departments to provide workshops and other activities specifically designed for schools. They include the **Young Vic** (www.youngvic.org), **Blue Elephant Theatre** (www.blueelephanttheatre.co.uk/education.htm) and the **Southwark Playhouse** (www.southwarkplayhouse.co.uk/) in London, **Birmingham Repertory Theatre** (www.birmingham-rep.co.uk/), **The Norwich Playhouse**, (www.norwichplayhouse.co.uk/) the **Octagon Theatre** in Bolton (www.octagonbolton.co.uk/) and The Carriageworks in Leeds (www.carriageworkstheatre.org.uk/). **London Diaspora Capital** (www.culturalco-operation.org/artists/ldc_index.htm) is a London-based database of artists from diverse backgrounds. It is searchable by artform, genre, culture/faith region, country of origin and London borough. **The London Bubble Theatre Company** (www.londonbubble.org.uk/) also has a programme for Early Years settings (though it has recently lost its funding and is campaigning for survival). **Two's Company**, (www.geocities.com/twostheatre

companyuk/index.html) based in Greenwich, aims to provide a creative environment in which both children and adults can develop culturally, mentally and physically through drama, dance and music. **Ankur Productions** (www.ankurproductions.org.uk/) run weekly drama workshops in Glasgow and Edinburgh as well as writing workshops. Other Theatre-in-Education groups include **The Fairgame Theatre Company** in Cheltenham (www.fairgametheatre.com/), **Actionwork** in Weston Super Mare (www.actionwork.com/), **Primary Colours** in Huddersfield (www.primarycolours.net/) and **Kuumba Arts** in Bristol (www.kuumba.org.uk/).

If you're interested in the history and traditions of Black and Asian artist in the theatre, **Theatre Collections Online** (www.vam.ac.uk/tco/subjects/black_performance/index.html) have developed a publication called 'A Guide to Black and Asian Performance' which described the materials available within Theatre Collections' playbills, library books, videos and specialised archive collections. It can be downloaded as a pdf from the website. There, you'll also find an interview with director, Yvonne Brewster, a timeline charting key moments in the history of black performance in Britain and a reading list that gives details of other sources that focus on Black and Asian performance.

If you have any comments or other suggestions about resources to help in the teaching of Drama, please do contact us at realhistories@runnymedetrust.org

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The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** (www.realhistories.org.uk) has been created as a resource tool for teachers, parents, pupils and the wider community to support them in their teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK. The website helps you to locate **resources** in your and other LEAs, such as storytellers, dual language books, culturally diverse toys and relevant **events** taking place in the UK. There are also items of **news** that may be of particular interest to schools and teachers.

You can also submit resources that you would like to include in the directory free of charge by visiting the site, clicking on 'Submit an entry' and following the on-screen instructions.

As well as the varied resources available, each month a new **Topic of the Month** is added with suggestions for using the Directory in the classroom and at home.

We are interested in hearing your views on our Topics and the Real Histories website. You can email comments and suggestions to: realhistories@runnymedetrust.org.