

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

EDUCATION PACK

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“This is intended to be of interest, I take it?”



INTRODUCTION

The Woman in Black was adapted by Stephen Mallatratt as a low-budget ‘filler’ for the Christmas season in Scarborough, where it opened to rave reviews on 12 December 1987. It arrived in London’s West End in January 1989, opening at the Lyric Hammersmith before transferring to The Strand and The Playhouse and then taking up residence at The Fortune Theatre on 07 June of the same year.

Decades later, the play is still going strong, with producers cheerfully informing audiences that “it will haunt you for the rest of your life”! Plaudits from the critics have continued throughout the run of the The Woman in Black and audiences and critics alike have left the theatre having experienced one of the most terrifying nights of their lives.

The simplicity and theatricality of The Woman in Black makes it an ideal vehicle for study with students in many subject areas. As both the novel and play are set texts for English, Drama and Theatre Studies, what better reason to take a trip to the West End to experience the thrills and the chills with your students!

This pack is aimed at teachers across the curriculum. It contains activities suitable for students of Drama, Art & Design, Dance, Media Studies, English, Music, ICT, RE, PSHE and Citizenship, from KS3 to KS5, including some of the specialist units of BTEC Performing Arts courses and the new Creative and Media Diploma.

The pack is put together in sections, each utilising a chapter heading from Susan Hill’s original novel of The Woman in Black. Each section offers a variety of suggestions that can be used either as isolated activities or as building blocks for a larger Scheme of Work. Subject headings are given as a guide and should not be considered to be rigid.

We hope that this pack will be just a starting point for your students’ work and that you will feel inspired to explore with them the horror and the magic of The Woman in Black.

“It must be told.”



ABOUT THE WOMAN IN BLACK

The Woman in Black was first published as a novel by Susan Hill in 1983. She did not plan her story in any great detail, beyond having listed the key elements of a successful ghost story before she started.

“I have no plans or intentions when I write... I make none, I just follow my nose. I tell a story... it just comes out the way it does. Anything else that may be there may indeed be there but was not my conscious intention.”

from interview with Susan Hill, 2008

What she created, however unintentionally, was:

“a rattling good yarn, the sort that chills the mind as well as the spine.”

The Guardian

In fact, in many ways, The Woman in Black is more than just a ghost story – it is a story of human tragedy.

Stephen Mallatratt read The Woman in Black on a beach in Greece, not the most conducive environment, he later conceded, for being drawn into Susan Hill's misty, terrifying world, and yet he was. He remembered this effect when he was commissioned by Robin Herford to come up with a Christmas show for the small theatre in Scarborough that he was then running. As his season was ending, Herford had little money to spare for the production and told Mallatratt to restrict himself to just four actors and minimal sets.

In a flash of inspiration, Mallatratt determined to admit to his audience that they were in an empty theatre, thus dispensing with the need for all but the most minimal of scenery. And he remembered the effect that Susan Hill's novel had on him when he originally read it, on the beach in Greece, with sunbathers and holidaymakers surrounding him.

“The initial triumph of the book, for me, was that, in spite of all that, it frightened.”

from The Woman in Black programme notes, written by Stephen Mallatratt, 1988

His imagination carried him through the story, painting the pictures of Susan Hill's distant coastal town, the eerie isolation and grandeur of the empty house, the graveyard, the marshes and the horror that pervades. Stephen Mallatratt realised that the imagination of his audience could work in the same way, creating a truly theatrical experience which Robin Herford, who also became the director of the play in Scarborough and subsequently of every cast in the West End, calls *“a crossover of mutual respect and acceptance”*. Thus, the audience willingly submits to the make-believe, suspending their disbelief and yet is totally absorbed in the magic and the horror of the events that are so simply and effectively acted out in front of them. As Robin Herford so astutely puts it:

“It takes so little to create a whole world!”

both quotes from an interview with Robin Herford as part of The Woman in Black tour of India

Interview by S.Bageshree, published in The Hindu, 23 Aug 2004

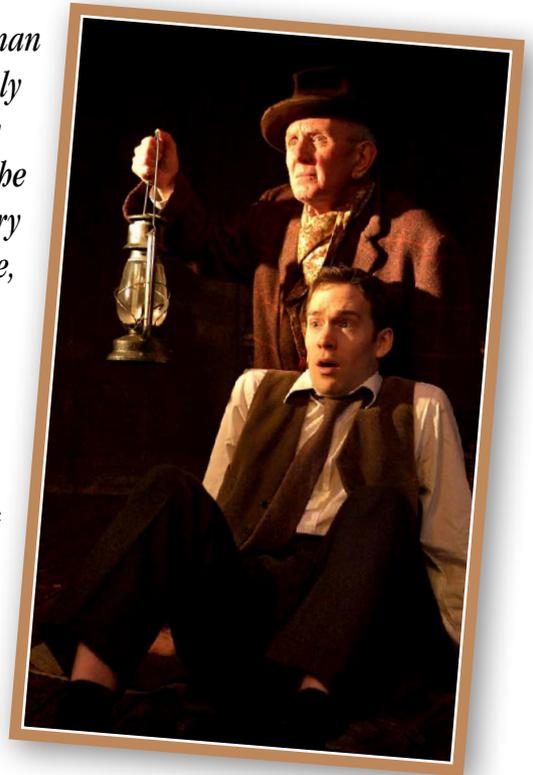
From the moment The Woman in Black opened in Scarborough in 1987, audiences were enthralled, and have continued to be so as this truly unique play has been performed in the West End of London and worldwide ever since.





CHRISTMAS EVE

*The opening words of Stephen Mallatratt’s adaptation of *The Woman in Black* are identical to those in Susan Hill’s novel, immediately drawing upon one of the traditional elements of the ghost story genre, the Christmas setting. Of course, in the play, this is not the beginning of the story ‘proper’, as the character of *The Actor* very quickly enters to berate Kipps for his mumbling of his tale. Here, immediately, is an opportunity to work with students on the creation of a suitable opening for a ghost play.*



ENGLISH

Ask students to compare the respective openings of the play and the novel. Although Mallatratt uses the same words, his situation differs significantly – Kipps is in an empty Victorian theatre rather than in the comfort of his home at Monk’s Piece.

In table form, ask students to create a list of elements for comparison: character, setting, events, for instance. They should complete their table firstly with reference to the first chapter of the novel and then to the first five pages of the playscript.

Ask students to consider why the two are so different. Does the fact that Esme is not mentioned in the play matter? In the novel, Kipps is settled and reasonably happy at Monk’s Piece, around 26 years after the events at Crythin Gifford and Eel Marsh House. In the play, he is less than content, nervous and edgy. Although he talks about his family, there is no mention of a new wife. Why is this? Which version is most successful? Why?

Ask students to write a new version of the opening of the play, this time with no restriction as to the number of characters and no requirement for a play-within-a-play. Their setting is Monk’s Piece. It is Christmas. The characters are Kipps, Esme, Isobel, Oliver, Will and Edmund (Esme’s children by her first marriage to Captain Ainley) and Isobel’s husband Aubrey. Students’ most significant challenge is to create the atmosphere of a ghost story. This will come through the successful construction of their opening to the play.

DRAMA

Narration is an incredibly important drama technique utilised all the way through *The Woman in Black*, but is perhaps particularly important at the beginning, as Stephen Mallatratt works to introduce the characters and the settings that will become significant during the play.

Challenge students to create their own opening to the play. Provide them with Kipps’s opening narrative (see ‘resource’ section) and ask them to create a piece of drama that offers a mix of live action and narration. They must consider whether Kipps will be their narrator. If so, will he be part of the main action or separate from it? Will his story be told in first person or third person? And will the narration provide only an introduction to the story, or re-occur throughout it?

Mallatratt’s version offers suggestions as to dialogue for the characters of Kipps and his family, but students may want to add additional dialogue of their own to help to create the close family atmosphere of this part of the story.

As a plenary, ask students to consider where their version of *The Woman in Black* would go after this introductory segment. Would their next scene be in Bentley's office? Or would they want to create a scene between Kipps and Esme to explain his departure from the Christmas festivities? And significantly, would they retain the play-within-a-play?

PERFORMING ARTS / ENGLISH

In the widest sense, ask students to consider what the opening of a play must achieve and then, how successfully *The Woman in Black* does this.

As an exercise, ask students to create a chart to represent the elements that need to be present at the opening of a play – introducing the characters, settings and genre, for instance – and then to plot their introduction in *The Woman in Black*. By way of comparison, it may also be useful to plot similar segments of other plays that students have studied and to identify patterns. Encourage students to focus on their analysis of the play by being able to identify, not only whether an element is present, but also to provide evidence to show how they know.

RESOURCES

The Woman in Black, opening

"It was nine-thirty on Christmas Eve. As I opened my front door and stepped outside I smelled at once, and with a lightening heart, that there had been a change in the weather. All the previous week we had had thin chilling rain and a mist that lay low about the house and over the countryside. My spirits have for many years been excessively affected by the weather. But now the dampness and fogs had stolen away like thieves in the night, the sky was pricked over with stars and the full moon rimmed with a halo of frost. Upstairs, three children slept with stockings tied to their bedposts. There was something in the air that night. That my peace of mind was about to be disturbed, and memories awakened that I had thought forever dead, I had, naturally, no idea. That I should ever again renew my acquaintance with mortal dread and terror of spirit, would have seemed at that moment impossible. I took a last look at the frosty darkness, sighed contentedly, and went in, to the happy company of my family. At the far end of the room stood the tree, candlelit and bedecked, and beneath it were the presents. There were vases of white chrysanthemums, and in the centre of the room a pyramid of gilded fruit and a bowl of oranges stuck all about with cloves, their spicy scent filling the air and mingling with the wood-smoke to be the very aroma of Christmas. I became aware that I had interrupted the others in a lively conversation. "We are telling ghost stories – just the thing for Christmas Eve!" And so they were – vying with each other to tell the horriest, most spine-chilling tale. They told of dripping stone walls in uninhabited castles and of ivy-clad monastery ruins by moon-light, of locked inner rooms and secret dungeons, dank charnel houses and overgrown graveyards, of howlings and shriekings, groanings and scuttlings. This was a sport, a high-spirited and harmless game among young people, there was nothing to torment or trouble me, nothing of which I could possibly disapprove. I did not want to seem a killjoy, old, stodgy and unimaginative. I turned my head away so that none of them could see my discomfiture. "And now it's your turn." "Oh no," I said, "nothing from me." "You must know at least one ghost story, everyone knows one." Ah, yes, yes indeed. All the time I had been listening to their ghoulish, lurid inventions, the one thought that had been in my mind, and the only thing I could have said was "No, no, you have none of you any idea. This is all nonsense, fantasy, it is not like this. Nothing so blood-curdling and becreeped and crude – not so...so laughable. The truth is quite other, and altogether more terrible. "I am sorry to disappoint you," I said. "But I have no story to tell!" And went quickly from the room and from the house. I walked in a frenzy of agitation, my hear pounding, my breathing short. I had always known in my heart that the experience would never leave me, that it was woven into my very fibres. Yes, I had a story, a true story, a story of haunting and evil, fear and confusion, horror and tragedy. But it was not a story to be told around the fireside on Christmas Eve."

from *The Woman in Black*, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill

“You become the people that you met.”



A LONDON PARTICULAR

*From the very beginning of the play-within-a-play, Kipps begins to play the parts of all of the characters that he met during his fateful journey to Crythin Gifford and to Eel Marsh House. One of the devices that Stephen Mallatratt uses in his version of *The Woman in Black* is the convention that a simple change of coat, hat or scarf will create a unique and distinct character. The audience is required to use their imagination in order to accept this, although, of course, the skills of the actor playing the part of Kipps will help to make the transition between characters both smooth and believable.*

DRAMA

Store up a collection of hats, this can be as random a collection as you like (the more varied the better) – or ask your students to bring in a hat to the session. Tell them that they should try to find the most unusual hat that they can.

Collect all of the hats in and then divide them up randomly so that every student has a hat that they have not provided. Their task is to create a character they feel ‘fits’ with the hat. Their character should be rounded and believable – serious and not comedic. Place students together in groups of three and ask them to create a scene in a pub. This allows for the students that are working together to have entirely distinctive characters that do not necessarily have to know each other. Provide students with a stimulus line from *The Woman in Black* (see ‘resource’ section) that must be the opening line of their scene. Their challenge is to make their characters as strong and believable as possible, considering aspects such as body language, facial expression and accent.

DRAMA / PERFORMING ARTS

Divide the students into groups of five or six so that you have roughly four groups in total. Provide each group with one or two elements of costume – such as a coat, jacket, scarf or hat. Ask the group to collaboratively create a character that will wear the elements of costume that you have given them. They should try not to fall into the trap of stereotyping, but should aim to create a character that has a background and personality. Students should then choose one member of their group to portray this character, based upon the characteristics that they have agreed.

Select one student from the group to introduce their character to the rest of the class. When this is done, ask the remaining students to become an audience and the actors to create a spontaneous improvisation starting with a stimulus line from *The Woman in Black* (see ‘resource’ section). At intervals, pause the improvisation and ask students in the audience to influence its direction in Forum Theatre style. Actors should incorporate these ‘notes’ as they continue to improvise. If it feels appropriate, introduce additional characters using member of the audience as extra actors.

RESOURCES

Stimulus lines

“It’s a strange part of the world I’m going to.”

“I would have travelled a thousand miles to see this.”

“I wonder who she was? Is?”

“There was nothing here to frighten or harm me.”

“People have drowned in that marsh before now.”

From *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill and *The Woman in Black* adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill

“Here pony, here trap, what could be clearer?”



THE JOURNEY NORTH

*Michael Holt, designer of the London production of *The Woman in Black*, cleverly provides set elements that can be utilised by the cast for different purposes. A large wicker costume trunk, for instance, becomes a bed, a desk and a pony and trap. A random collection of chairs along with the trunk become a train carriage. This idea can be used with students in several ways to extend their study of *The Woman in Black* as well as their imagination and their suspension of disbelief.*

ART & DESIGN

One very simple way of utilising Michael Holt's design idea is to ask students to create a piece of artwork in which the image that they design is made up of everyday items that would not normally go together to create the result. It may be helpful to provide students with a description of the image that you want them to create. The description of Eel Marsh House provided in the 'resource' section works, but you could use a description of anything. The piece could then be created as a collage of everyday images cut from magazines, or, for more able students, drawn from scratch.

DRAMA

Provide students with a collection of random props and ask them to create their own ghost story using them. Each item must be used for a purpose that was not its original intention. For instance, an upended suitcase could become a gravestone. Students can choose as many props as they like (or as many as you are able to make available) but each and every one must be used for an alternative purpose. Students may find it easiest to select one or two props that can become significant in their story rather than select a larger number and then struggle with how to use them. Most importantly, students must maintain their roles and sustain their make-believe. Only by doing so will the audience successfully suspend their disbelief as they do in *The Woman in Black*.

DRAMA (2)

One of the most successful elements of Michael Holt's design for *The Woman in Black* is the nursery that exists behind the gauze at the back of the stage. When covered in white sheets, the furniture for this room becomes, entirely believably, a graveyard full of headstones. Collect a few items of furniture (desks, chairs etc) and cover them with dust sheets or old bed linen prior to your session. When students arrive, ask them to form a circle around the items and, without touching, decide in their heads what each item could be. Be clear that they are not trying to guess what is under the sheet, but rather what each item could represent by using their imaginations. Ask students, one at a time, to step into the circle and to individually create a piece of drama that makes clear what they have decided that the object will be. Other members of the group should try to interpret the improvisation.

RESOURCES

Description of Eel Marsh House

“Then I looked up ahead, and saw as if rising out of the water itself, a tall, gaunt house of grey stone with a slate roof. It stood like some lighthouse or beacon or Martello tower, the most astonishingly situated house I had ever seen or could ever conceivably have imagined – isolated, uncompromising, but also, I thought, handsome. For a moment or two, I simply sat looking about me in amazement. I felt a strange sensation, an excitement mingled with alarm.”

From *The Woman in Black*, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill

“I did not see a young woman.”



THE FUNERAL OF MRS DRABLOW

The funeral of Mrs Drablow heralds the first appearance in the play of The Woman in Black herself. In terms of students' learning, it is important that they begin to understand how fear works and what an audience expects when they go to see a play such as The Woman in Black.

DRAMA

Much of the success of *The Woman in Black* comes from the manipulation by Stephen Mallatratt and Robin Herford (the director) of the audiences' expectations – loud screams followed by moments of silence, repetition of events, climax and anti-climax. Discuss these elements with students, asking them to reflect honestly on their own expectations during the play, when they got what they expected and when they did not. Consider, for instance, Kipps asleep in Eel Marsh House with Spider the dog. Most audiences are perfectly well aware that the actor playing Kipps will make them jump when he wakes up – they wait in the silence for it to happen, knowing that it will come and they are not disappointed. Interestingly, despite knowing that it will happen, most members of most audiences are startled nevertheless. Why?

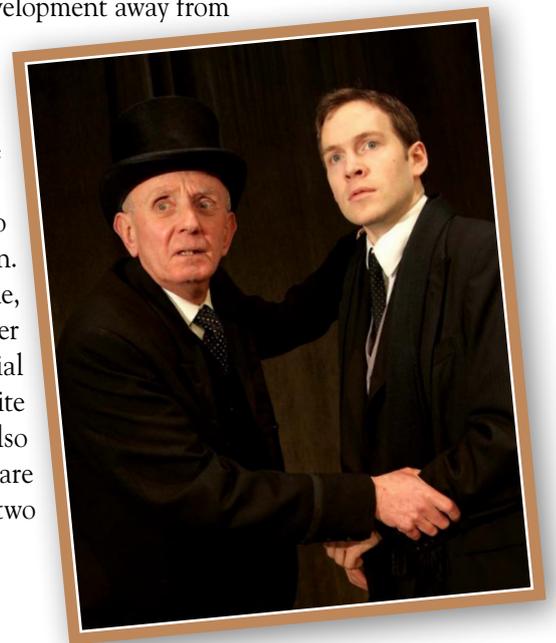
Ask students to create their own piece of drama that must build up an atmosphere and in some way surprise their audience. It does not have to be a ghost story, or indeed anything related to *The Woman in Black*, but they must use what they have learned about audience expectations to tell a story in which something unexpected occurs.

ART & DESIGN / MEDIA STUDIES / CREATIVE & MEDIA

Throughout the run of *The Woman in Black*, producers have needed to ensure that the show maintains a high profile with the public. To do this, they periodically vary their artwork and publicity material. Media Studies students will be familiar with the process of creating a campaign in advertising – in the theatre industry the same principles of advertising apply, although sometimes, as in the case of *The Woman in Black*, they apply over an extended period.

There have so far been three significant changes of artwork during the run of *The Woman in Black* in London (see 'resource' section). Ask students to study the three versions and to consider their individual effectiveness as images. Over the years, there has been a clear development away from artwork towards a photographic style. Why might this be? Which of the three do students prefer? Why? Once you have seen the play with your students, ask them to consider which of the three has the greatest relevance to the play and which best reflects the production as a whole.

Ask students to create their own artwork for the show and to incorporate it into a new poster for the West End production. You may wish to give them a choice of styles, or to specify one, depending on your needs. Make sure that students also consider the other aspects of a successful poster – ensuring that no crucial information is omitted (place and times of performances, website address, telephone number for booking of tickets). They may also wish to read some reviews of the show on the internet (several are available at www.thewomaninblack.com) and to include one or two appropriate quotes on their finished poster.



THE MOST TERRIFYING LIVE THEATRE
EXPERIENCE IN THE WORLD

TERRIFYING
20th
YEAR



THE WOMAN IN BLACK

Adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill

ANDREW
JARVIS

TIMOTHY
WATSON

Directed by
ROBIN HERFORD

Designed by
MICHAEL HOLT

Lighting by
KEVIN SLEEP



Fortune Theatre

Russell Street, Covent Garden, London WC2



ACROSS THE CAUSEWAY

*Many of the tools that are used by Robin Herford in his direction of *The Woman in Black* are simple theatrical techniques that can be adapted for use in the classroom. Students should also be aware of the process of adaptation and how certain key moments differ in the novel, the play and indeed Robin Herford's production.*

DRAMA

One of the key tools that Robin Herford uses in his staging of *The Woman in Black* is the wicker costume trunk. Students can use a table in drama to perform a similar function. With imagination and commitment, the table can become anything that students want it to and, as in *The Woman in Black*, their audience will go with them as long as their performance is given with conviction.

Introduce students to the following scenario (they will need to be in small groups of 3-4 for this activity – each group will need one table). Students are going to take on the role of younger children, around 8 years old, who are exploring an old derelict house ‘for a dare’. The house has stood empty for many years and there are rumours of a ghost that haunts it. Their drama should include the exploration of three contrasting rooms in the house, each of which is characterised by their table, which must become something different and significant in each room. It could, for instance, become a bed in one scene by being placed lengthways, and a dresser in another scene by being placed upright. They should think very carefully about the way in which they organise their scene changes so that their audience does not lose focus. Suspension of disbelief is the key to the success of this activity – and whether or not the audience successfully adopt this is very much in the hands of the actors. What the characters discover in the derelict house, if anything, and whether or not their story is resolved, is very much up to them.

DRAMA / ENGLISH

Stephen Mallatratt's adaptation of *The Woman in Black* includes the drama technique of monologue, as both The Actor and Kipps use this method to tell the story of the events at Eel Marsh House. In fact, the ghost story genre provides an excellent focus for the study of monologue.

Discuss with students why this technique is so successfully employed by Stephen Mallatratt. His adaptation is unusual in that many of Susan Hill's descriptive passages are retained and the audience has to work hard, using their imaginations, in order to picture the various different scenes.

Ask students to write their own ghost story in the form of a letter. They should imagine that they are an old man or woman, living alone in a remote house in a distant corner of the country. It is important to them that the terrible events that have taken place in this house are relayed to their family, all of whom live miles away from them and rarely visit, but who will eventually inherit this home. Their letter must explain the story of the house and their life within it, what they have had to suffer and what they want to happen to the house after their death.

Once this is completed, offer students a chair in the middle of your classroom or studio. If possible, blackout the room and light the chair with a solo spot. A torch would work really well for this. Ask students, individually, to perform the monologue that comes from reading their letter out loud.

In terms of adaptation of a novel and direction of a play, students need to understand why some elements are changed from the original.

Ask students to study the section of the story where Kipps returns to the nursery, when he again becomes aware of the rhythmical noise from within. In both the novel and the play, he has just been outside to hear once again the terrible sound of the pony and trap accident in the marshes and the screams of the passengers as they draw their last breath.

However, what happens next is different in the two forms (see ‘resource’ section). Ask students to consider why they think that this might be. If your students have seen the West End production, directed by Robin Herford, ask them to try to remember how this section is staged. This differs again, as this is the moment where the nursery door flies open with Kipps standing yards away from it. Herford’s interpretation, which works fantastically as a terrifying staging device, adheres to neither Susan Hill’s or Stephen Mallatratt’s text. Again, ask students to consider why.

Set students the task of plotting some of the elements of the play that they remember vividly onto a chart and then looking up those moments in the novel and the playscript. How many of them are the same and how many of them are different? The perception of most playgoers is that Stephen Mallatratt has stuck quite rigidly to Susan Hill’s novel, and indeed he has in many ways, but there are certainly significant differences. In the play, for instance, we hear the priest at length taking us through Mrs Drablow’s funeral service. In the novel, no priest is quoted at all. And, most obviously perhaps, at the end of the novel, Kipps finishes his story. At the end of the play, Stephen Mallatratt’s dark twist leaves us feeling that the horror may still not be over. Ask students to consider this moment specifically and to decide, through discussion in small groups, why Mallatratt has decided to end the play like this and what the effect is of this additional layer of terror.

RESOURCES

The opening of the door to the nursery

1. *“The door of the room from which the noise came, the door which had been securely locked, so that I had not been able to break it down, the door to which there could not be a key – that door was now standing open. Wide open.”*

From *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill

2. *“Silence.*

From the interior of the house, now distantly, we hear again the rhythmic bump, bump, pause.

Kipps moves inside.

A light illuminates the door, and as we look, we see it slowly open.”

From *The Woman in Black*, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill



THE SOUND OF A PONY AND TRAP

*It is the technical aspects of Robin Herford’s production of *The Woman in Black in the West End of London* that seem to be the most complex and impressive in terms of the staging of Stephen Mallatratt’s play. The technical tricks that he uses, however, are actually incredibly simple and many can be recreated in the classroom, even without the help of the fictional technician Mr Bunce (named by Mallatratt after Samuel Daily’s driver in the novel)!*

DRAMA

Provide students with Kipps’s description of the marshes from *The Woman in Black* (see ‘resource’ section). Ask them to study his words and to think about how this mist would make them feel if they were walking through it. Ask them to find words to describe their emotions, the rising sense of panic as the sea-frets close in around them, for instance.

In small groups, ask students to develop a soundscape to represent the marshes. They should each create a sound that they feel to be appropriate and put them together to create an ever-changing sound effect that will provide the backdrop to their drama.

Next, join two groups together. They will take turns to act and to perform their soundscape as a backdrop for each other.

Ask students to improvise a scene in which three or four friends have become lost on the marshes. They have been camping nearby and decided to go out walking when the sea-fret has come down and confused them. They do not know where they are. Suggest to students that each character in their drama should have a unique personality – one might put on an air of bravery, one might be nervous and scared, for instance. Tell students that, at some point in their drama, something unexpected should happen. They must decide what this will be and use their knowledge of the staging of *The Woman in Black* to create the surprise for their audience.

An excellent way for students to perform their scene is in a darkened classroom or studio, with simply torches for light. This really helps to create the atmosphere of the marshes, particularly when students have created really effective soundscapes.

MEDIA STUDIES / MUSIC

Investigate with students how the simplest sound effects can be created using ordinary, everyday items. Musical instruments, sometimes played in unusual ways, can be used to create sounds – a key scraped down a cello string, for instance. These can be recorded using basic recording equipment, manipulated via computer editing programs (altering the tempo can have a marked effect on the ‘feel’ of a recording), or simply played back as they are.

RESOURCES

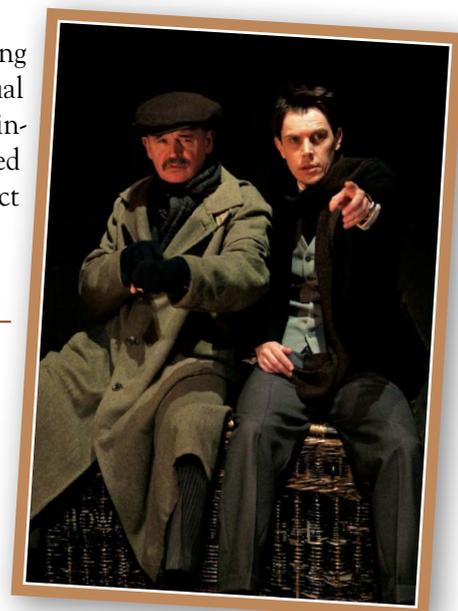
Kipps describes the marshes

“A thick, damp, sea-mist. Damp, clingy, cobwebby, fine and impenetrable.”

“The mist was salty, light and pale and moving in front of my eyes all the time. I felt confused, teased by it, as though it were made up of millions of live fingers that crept over me, hung onto me and then shifted away again.”

“Step by slow step he goes, baffled by the moving, shifting mist...”

From *The Woman in Black*, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill



“There was only emptiness, a curious air of sadness.”



MR JEROME IS AFRAID

The atmosphere created by Robin Herford’s direction and Stephen Mallatratt’s adaptation of The Woman in Black has the effect of engaging even the most sceptical audience member. But how is this done? What techniques draw the audience in and what is it that actually frightens them? After all, as Stephen Mallatratt point out in his introduction to the playscript, “there are no gouts of blood nor any but the simplest of special effects.”

DRAMA / PERFORMING ARTS / ENGLISH

Students need to be aware of the power of the audience’s imagination and how the success of *The Woman in Black* hinges on the audience being drawn in to the make-believe. Atmosphere is partly created through the use of lighting and sound effects, but it is crucial that Susan Hill’s story is believable – the audience can empathise with Jennet Humfrye and understand her grief. Her haunting and revenge is grounded in the reality of her terrible experience when she was alive.

Ask students to study a selection of quotations about *The Woman in Black* to help them to understand how and why the audience becomes scared when they come to see the play (see ‘resource’ section). They should attempt to list the elements of a ghost story that are present in *The Woman in Black* and that contribute towards the creation of fear.

In small groups, ask them to write a small section of a ghost story of their own. It should be set in a graveyard and should include as many elements of a ghost story as possible that they have identified from their study of *The Woman in Black*.

Their ghost should have a genuine reason for haunting and they should consider why any characters are present in the graveyard so that their *raison d’être* is also believable.

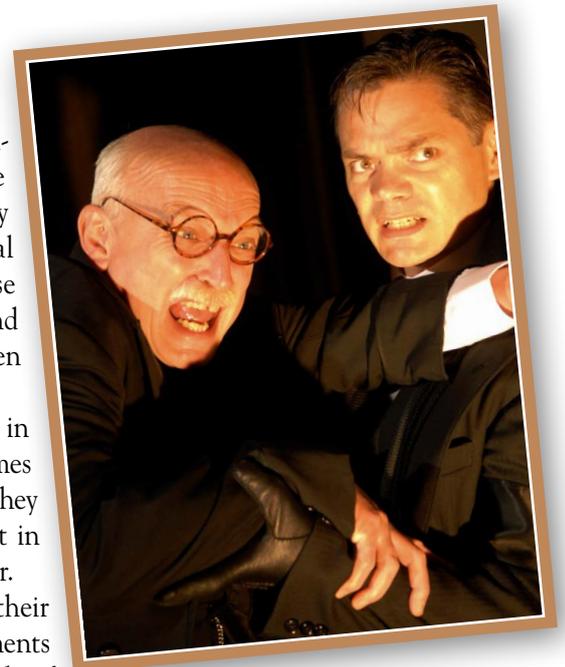
Once this is complete, ask students to plot the technical requirements for a stage version of their story. They should think about sound effects (background sound effects as well as any specific shrieks or thumps), lighting, set and props.

Drama students may then wish to attempt to stage their ghost scene, using the simplest theatrical techniques to see whether they can create an atmosphere and frighten their audience in the way that *The Woman in Black* does so successfully.

PERFORMING ARTS / ICT / ENGLISH / CREATIVE & MEDIA

The creation of atmosphere and the build-up of tension are key to the success of *The Woman in Black*. Students can begin to understand the success of the structure employed by Stephen Mallatratt by analysing moments of tension and how they are interspersed with less climactic moments in the play. Firstly, students need to understand that the plotting of tension in a play such as *The Woman in Black* is a subjective exercise and that their decisions in this regard may be different to their peers.

Ask students to begin by trawling the script (or the novel, this activity will work with either) and deciding on the most significant moments of the story. These should be broad segments and should include any particularly scary sections. Having done this, students should decide upon the degree of tension that they think is present for the audience (or reader) during each segment and record this tension numerically where



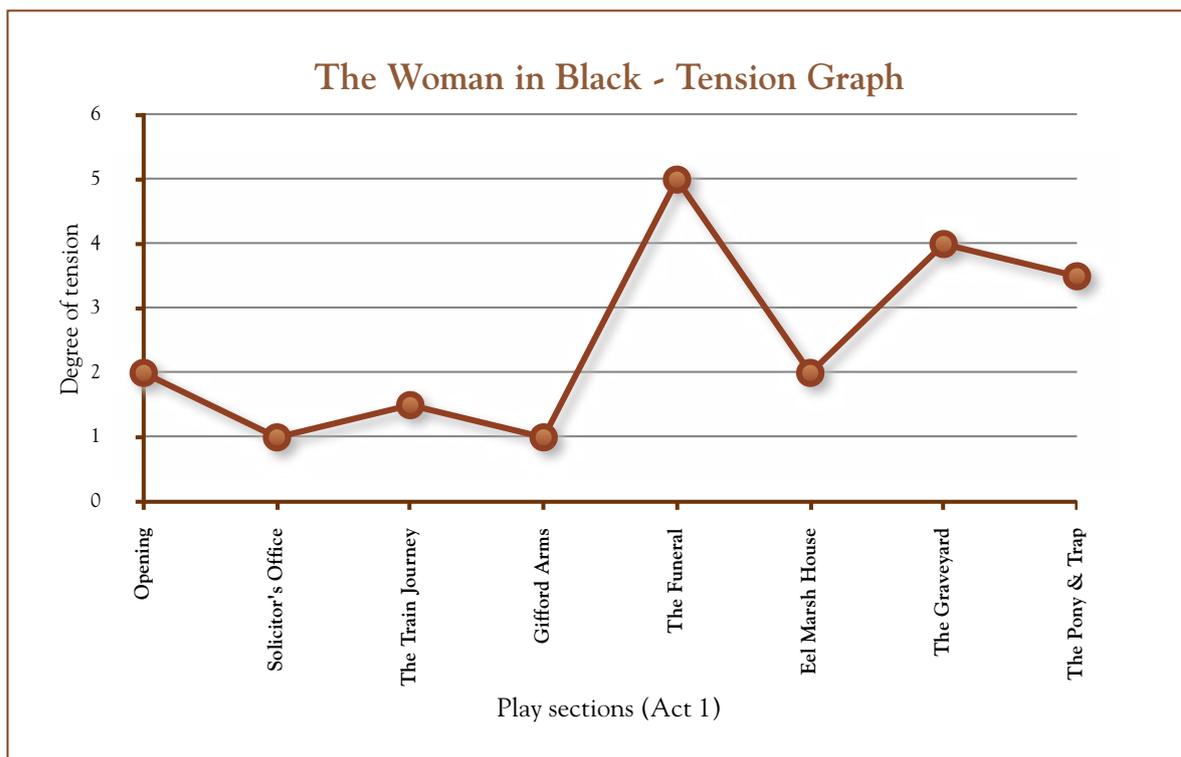
the higher the number, the greater the tension. Decisions can then be plotted on a graph to show that the tension rises and falls throughout the play (see 'resource' section for example).

This activity works best in small groups involving quiet discussion. Some students will feel that the beginning of the play should be plotted as 'zero' on the graph as there is little action at this point. Others will argue that their expectations of what might happen justify a 'one' or 'two'. Some will automatically plot the 'door handle' moment at the top of their scale, whilst others will feel that Kipps approaching the door at other points, when nothing happens but they think it will, is, in fact, more tense. Such discussions will help students to appreciate that there are alternative views on almost every section of the story.

Once the graphs are complete, ask students to consider why the level of tension varies and what effect this has on the audience (or reader).

RESOURCES

Tension Graph (example)



This is an example of how a tension graph might look. The sections are not in any way definitive and students may well want to break the play down in a different way, to use a different numbering system to illustrate the tension, or to utilise an alternative style of graph.

- Quotations about "The Woman in Black"

"Ghost stories have to have a point beyond frightening." (Susan Hill)

"Darkness is a powerful ally of terror; something glimpsed in a corner is far more frightening than if it's fully observed." (Stephen Mallatratt)

"When you see horror stories, particularly those about aliens, we know they couldn't exist, so ultimately they don't frighten us." (Susan Hill)

"As the play progresses, the tension tightens so that the pauses become more terrible than anything you actually see." (Sarah Crompton, Daily Telegraph, 03 June 2004)

"The fear is not on a visual or visceral level, but an imaginative one." (Stephen Mallatratt)

"A fictional ghost has to have a *raison d'être* otherwise it is pointless and a pointless ghost is the stuff of all the boring stories about veiled ladies endlessly drifting through walls and headless horsemen riding by – and riding by – and riding by...for no good reason, to no purpose. My ghost cannot let go of her grief or her desire for revenge, she has to go on extracting it..." (Susan Hill)



SPIDER

*Not only must the audience use their imagination and suspend their disbelief when it comes to the settings and locations in *The Woman in Black*, they are even charged, by Stephen Mallatratt, with believing in an invisible dog! Teg Davies, long term Company Manager of the West End production of *The Woman in Black* maintains that audience members not only see a dog during the play, but when asked, they can pin it down to a specific breed. Most, apparently, see a Jack Russell or a Spaniel! But how is it possible that the entirely imaginary can seem so real in the minds of the audience?*

DRAMA / PSHE / CREATIVE & MEDIA

Students will find it difficult to contemplate acting with imaginary people, animals or objects and yet, when they think about it, they will probably find that they have done so before. They will almost certainly have created pieces of drama in school, in which they have mimed teacups, or thrown imaginary balls. It is merely a short leap of imagination and the application of similar acting skills in order to do the same with living characters.

Ask students to write a letter to a loved one to reveal a secret about something. This should in most cases relate to an imaginary event. It could suggest something that happened to them as a small child, or it could describe the way that they might feel in an imagined situation. Their experience could just be related, or could be a cry for help. Either way, their story must take the experience seriously and not make light of it.

Once this has been done, ask students to imagine that, having written this letter, they have decided not to send it. They are now going to create the scene in which they are with the person or people that the letter was written to and they have made the difficult decision to read it to them. The atmosphere is tense and their character is nervous. They will be attempting this improvisation as a monologue, with no other characters present. However, the audience should get a sense of who is in the room, where they are sitting and how they are reacting to the letter as it is read out. Students may feel more comfortable working in small groups so that they can watch and advise each other.

PSHE students may then wish to discuss the situations that have been presented and how they should be dealt with by both the letter-writer and by their listeners.

DANCE

Students of dance will be used to creating routines in which they have to imagine their surroundings, but imagining their partner in an improvisation may be more challenging. In this activity, their partner could be a dog, such as Spider in *The Woman in Black*, or a person. Provide students with a chair that will act as a prop and become the focus of their dance. Ask students to choreograph a routine in which an imaginary character is sitting on the chair. Tell them that, in the story, the character is ignoring them and that they must create a motif or phrase that aims to gain the attention of that character. They will need to decide for themselves if the character (in their mind) moves during their routine, but they may find it easier if the character stays routed to the chair. Their dance should make it clear how they feel about being ignored by the character and afterwards they should be able to say why their own character is being ignored.

DRAMA

In order to create an imaginary dog, students will need to be clear in their own mind as to what the dog looks like. Use books or the internet to show students examples of different breeds of dog. Ask them to choose one and to make sure that they know as many details as possible about the dog. They should be clear as to its height, its shape and its personality. Additionally, ask students to research the behaviour of their chosen breed. Whilst most students will say that they know how a dog acts, they will find through investigation and observation that all dogs act differently – some are exuberant, some are docile, some are playful, some are lazy.

Once students have a clear picture of their imaginary dog in their mind, they can begin to think about acting with it, as the actors do with Spider in *The Woman in Black*. Firstly, ask students to work in small groups. They should collaboratively create an imagined obstacle course for the dogs to run around – including tubes for them to run through, poles for them to jump over etc. Each student should take their dog around the course, adhering to the layout that they have agreed with the rest of the group. The remainder of the group should stay in character, supporting and encouraging each dog and owner.

Students should then be ready for their individual task, which is to work on and perform a segment of *The Woman in Black* (see ‘resource’ section). This section involves Kipps exploring the graveyard at Eel Marsh House with his dog, Spider. Students should use the dog character that they developed in the previous exercise to ‘play the part’ of Spider. They will need to show focus and commitment throughout in order to convince their audience that Spider is there with them in the scene. You may wish to challenge the audience after each performance to guess the breed of dog that the actor has chosen.

RESOURCES

‘Spider’

Kipps starts sorting the letters into piles – those to be dealt with, those to discard

Kipps Well, Spider, have you ever seen a more worthless collection of papers? I do believe Mrs Drablow kept every bill, receipt and Christmas card she ever had. (He fondles Spider) There’s even shopping lists, would you believe!

Kipps works on a moment, then yawns and stretches. He stands, crosses the stage and we hear the door slam. He whistles for the dog

Kipps (calling) Spider! Spider – rabbits! (He moves through the gauze into the old graveyard) Last time I was here, among these graves, I saw a woman. (He bends to the dog). Where is she, Spider! Where is she, girl! (He pats the dog, then stoops to decipher an inscription) In Loving Memory... Something net... Humfrye... nineteen o-something... and of her something... something iel Drablow... He contemplates the stone a moment, then whistles the dog) Spider!

From *The Woman in Black*, adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill

“Oh, forgive me. I think my heart will break.”



IN THE NURSERY

*The central issue dealt with by *The Woman in Black* is that of grief. Jennet Humfrye cannot come to terms with the loss of her child and thus pursues her ghostly hauntings in a quest for revenge for his death. However, her story is more complicated than this. Jennet is a victim of the time in which she lived and the strict moral code that would not allow her to have a child out of wedlock. The 18 year old Jennet is pregnant. Decisions are made for her and the child is taken away. Eventually, brought up by her sister, Jennet is allowed to see the child, Nathaniel, but is forbidden to tell him who she really is. The possibility of making parallels with the modern world is clear.*

PSHE & CITIZENSHIP / RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Part of the study of teenage issues in society today involves students understanding that choices are not always simple and that there are different sides to every story.

Ask students to study the facts of the story of Jennet Humfrye. What, if anything, would be different if Jennet were a teenager in the 21st century, going through the experience that she went through according to *The Woman in Black*? Is the answer different for teenagers living in different cultures around the world?

Ask students to study the elements of Jennet’s story and to discuss each segment (see ‘resource’ section). What choices were available to Jennet? Who was making the decisions for her and why? Why did she find it difficult to accept those decisions? How would this story play out today?

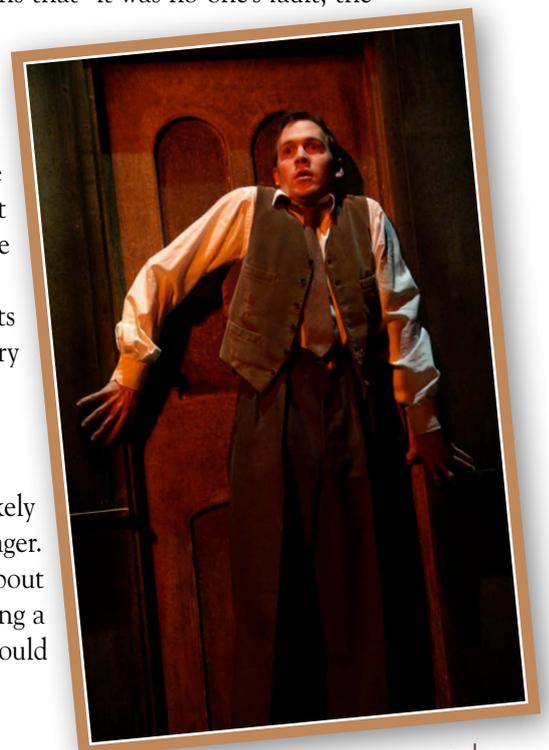
Using the bullet points as a guide to the order of events, ask students to produce a series of diary entries that Jennet Humfrye might have written. These should make clear the changes in her state of mind throughout the experience and how she feels about the various different people that are involved in her life – her parents, her sister Alice and Alice’s husband Morgan, as well as Nathaniel, her son. At the end of the story, Jennet blames Alice for the fatal accident, although Samuel Daily maintains that “it was no-one’s fault, the mist comes without warning.” Jennet’s diary, however, should reflect her belief in what happened and who was responsible.

Once this is achieved, ask students to repeat the exercise, this time from the point-of-view of Alice Drablow. They must decide how Alice feels about her sister at the various different points in the story. Is Alice complicit in Jennet’s suffering, or an unfortunate accessory in a difficult situation? Does she sympathise with her sister, or does her sister become a nuisance to her as she tries to bring up the little boy as her own?

Finally, ask students to compare and contrast the two versions of events and discuss who or what would need to change in order that the story might turn out more happily than it does in *The Woman in Black*.

MEDIA STUDIES / ENGLISH

If Jennet Humfrye’s story were to be set in the 21st century, it is likely that she would be perceived by the media to be a stereotypical teenager. Discuss this with students and ask them to recognise what it is about the story that could be seen as stereotypical. If they were to be filming a modern-day version of Jennet’s story for television or film, where would it be set? What would Jennet look like?



Ask students to imagine that, rather than Eel Marsh House, Jennet lives on a council estate in one of the large inner-cities in modern-day Britain. She wears a large amount of cheap jewellery, large hooped earrings, signet rings, tracksuits and expensive-looking trainers. She has an iPod and a pink mobile phone.

Explain to students that they are going to be taking on the role of journalists, researching and writing a series of articles on 'Teenagers Today'. They will be following Jennet's story for six months, at the beginning of which she is seven months pregnant. How are they going to write their articles without falling into the trap of being stereotypical? Can they find a way for their readers to see Jennet as an individual rather than a statistic?

Students should produce three or four articles at intervals throughout the six month period. They may find it useful to refer to the main points of Jennet's story from *The Woman in Black* (see 'resource' section), although they should not feel that they must stick to this rigidly.

DRAMA

Students could use the story of Jennet Humfrye as it appears in *The Woman in Black* (see 'resource' section) to produce a modern-day dramatised version of her story. They must first decide how they are going to tell the story and from whose perspective. Will it be from Jennet's point-of-view or from Alice's? Will Jennet herself be sympathetic in their story, or a typically annoying teenager who deserves everything that comes to her?

Students should aim to create a narrative story, utilising one or two specific drama techniques that they have studied – it may be appropriate for them to 'mark' a specific moment in their story, or to flashback to a moment in Jennet's past (her boyfriend convincing her to sleep with him, perhaps). They may choose to use narration, or the split screen technique to show two different locations simultaneously.

They must be clear from the outset, where they intend the audience's sympathy to lie. When the drama pieces are watched back, check with the audience to see whether this has been successful and whether they can identify what the group did to ensure their success.

RESOURCES

Key moments in the story of Jennet Humfrye

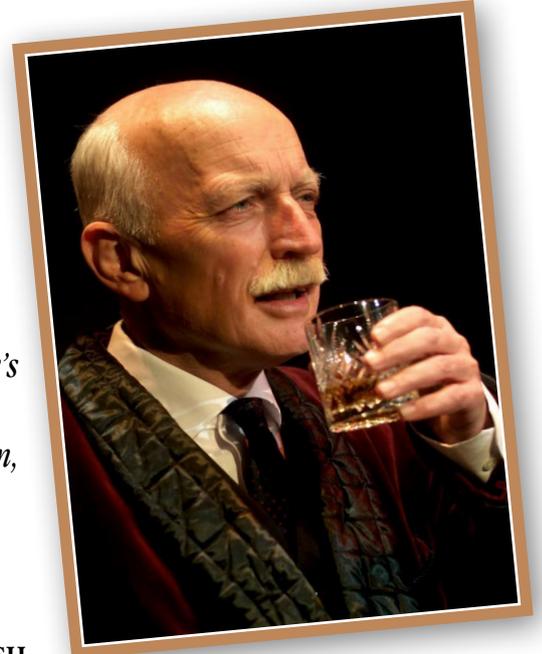
- The teenage Jennet discovers that she is pregnant.
 - Jennet's old-fashioned parents react badly.
 - Jennet is sent to live away from her family and away from the boy who got her pregnant.
 - Jennet receives a letter, telling her that the child is to be adopted. She has no say in the matter.
 - The child is born and taken away from her. She can't stand to be without him. The child, Nathaniel, is adopted by Jennet's older married sister Alice.
 - Jennet runs away to be with the child, renting a poky one-roomed flat to be near to him.
 - Jennet threatens violence when her sister will not allow her to see her child.
 - Eventually, Jennet is allowed to visit occasionally, but she is not allowed to see him alone or to say who she really is.
 - Nathaniel turns out to look like Jennet and the bond between them grows.
 - Nathaniel begins to act increasingly coldly towards Alice.
 - Jennet begins to make plans to steal the boy away to live with her.
 - A fatal accident occurs in which the child is killed. Jennet watches the accident but is unable to do anything to prevent it.
-

“You’re a fool if you go on with it.”



WHISTLE AND I’LL COME TO YOU

*In the famous ghost story *Oh, Whistle and I’ll Come to You, My Lad*, by M.R. James, one time Provost of King’s College, Cambridge, the theme is of an arrogant individual who learns to regret his meddling in supernatural things that he does not understand. Susan Hill has described James’s work as “one of the best ghost stories ever written” and reflects his title in her chapter about Spider getting stuck in the marshes. It is perhaps Jerome, however, who best mirrors Professor Parkins from James’s story, with his uneasy air and determination not to discuss his experiences. How, then, should students approach the performance of a character such as Jerome from *The Woman in Black*?*



DRAMA / PERFORMING ARTS / CREATIVE & MEDIA / ENGLISH

Little firm evidence is available in Stephen Mallatratt’s playscript to guide the actor in the playing of Mr Jerome, the Solicitor’s Agent in *Crythin Gifford*. All that is given by way of description when Jerome first appears, just prior to Mrs Drablow’s funeral, is:

“The Actor, as Mr Jerome, comes up to Kipps. Like Kipps, he wears a black tie and armband.” (pg18)

So, as actors, students must study Jerome’s words in the remainder of the script, and almost certainly return to Susan Hill’s novel to discover what manner of man Jerome is and how to interpret his character.

Drama students will be familiar with the concept of ‘backstory’: filling in the gaps in a character’s past history in order to inform the portrayal of his present. Firstly, ask students to use the script and the novel to find firm evidence that give them clues about Mr Horatio Jerome. They may find it useful to copy these around the outside of a ‘role-on-the-wall’, an outline shape of a person that will represent Jerome for the purposes of this exercise (some examples of evidence are given in the ‘resource’ section). They should then use the inside ‘body’ of the ‘role-on-the-wall’ to write single words or phrases that describe Jerome’s personality. They should end up with a comprehensive document that details as much as they can discover about Jerome from the text.

Inevitably, as Jerome is a relatively minor character in the story of *The Woman in Black*, there are not many details available. Students should then concentrate on creating a ‘backstory’ for Jerome, that fills in what they consider to be the missing areas of his life that have not been provided by Stephen Mallatratt or Susan Hill. For instance, what precisely happened to Jerome’s child? There is no mention in the story of Mrs Jerome. What happened to her? How did she cope with the death of her child, particularly given that she would have been aware of how Jennet Humfrye had dealt with the death of hers.

Some clues are given to suggest that, at one point, Jerome was a confident and decisive man in regards to *The Woman in Black*. What did he try to do? And what was the result?

Ask students to write a biography of Jerome, detailing his past as fully as possible, merging the evidence with the details of their own invention, to create a fully rounded life story.

Drama students can then use the explorative strategy of ‘hot-seating’ in order to test their knowledge of the character that they have researched. In small groups, ask students to take turns in the ‘hot-seat’. Here, they become the character of Jerome and are asked questions by other members of the group. The questions

are not designed to catch them out, but rather to further explore his character – to deepen and expand their understanding of who he is and how he might react or have reacted in any given situation. It may be interesting to ask other members of the group to ask their questions in character as well – with one of them playing Bentley, one Kipps and one Keckwick, perhaps.

A similar investigative exercise could be undertaken for any of the characters in the play – bearing in mind that the more significant the character and the larger their part in the story, the more research is possible, simply by virtue of the fact that they appear more often and the less imaginative ‘filling in the gaps’ may be required.

Students studying the play in depth may also find it useful to create backstories for characters such as Alice Drablow, or Rose Judd, the nursemaid, in order to aid their better understanding of the text.

RESOURCES

Evidence on Mr Horatio Jerome

“He was a particularly small man, only five feet two or three inches tall at most, and with an extraordinary, domed head, fringed around at the very back with gingerish hair, like some sort of rough braiding around the base of a lampshade. He might have been anywhere between thirty-five and fifty-seven years of age, with a blandness and formality of manner and a somewhat shuttered expression that revealed nothing whatsoever of his own personality, his mood or his thoughts. He was courteous, businesslike and conversational... And yet he told me nothing at all, nothing personal, nothing revelatory, nothing very interesting.”

“I noted that he had very large, and slightly protuberant and pale eyes of a colour somewhere between blue and grey, that reminded me of gulls’ eggs.”

“Jerome grabs his wrist, evidently in an extreme terror. He avoids looking where Kipps is pointing.”

“At last he managed to shake his head – I almost would say, that he shook himself, as though making an extreme effort to pull himself together after suffering a momentous shock, though the colour did not return to his face and the corners of his lips seemed tinged with blue.”

“I noticed that his hands, which rested on the sides of his chair, were working, rubbing, fidgeting, gripping and ungripping in agitation.”

“Mr Jerome’s hands continued to scrabble about like the paws of some struggling creature. His pale domed forehead was beaded with perspiration.”

“I must face it out, Mr Jerome. Such things one must face.

‘So I said’, Mr Jerome was looking at me pityingly.

‘So I said... once.’

“He had been weakened and broken, by what? A woman? A few noises? Or was there more that I should discover for myself? I knew that, if I asked him, he would refuse to answer...”

“In some violent or dreadful circumstances, a child has died.

Any child. Jerome’s child.”

From *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill

and *The Woman in Black* adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill

“You’re to go through Mrs Drablow’s documents.”



A PACKET OF LETTERS

For Arthur Kipps, Mrs Drablow’s papers provide some of the answers that he has been looking for in his search for information on The Woman in Black. They also provide an opportunity for additional study with students.

HISTORY / ENGLISH

In *The Woman in Black*, Kipps reads Jennet Humfrye’s letters as a way of ‘filling in the gaps’ as he pieces together her story. Clearly, the letters and other documents that he discovers at Eel Marsh House are an important record of events. Students of history will be familiar with the use of primary sources in the study of the past. But they should also be aware that, letters particularly, only provide one side of the story.

Ask students to work through the body of evidence that Kipps discovers in Mrs Drablow’s papers and to decide which are reliable statements of fact and which provide a biased view of events (look predominantly in the chapter ‘In the Nursery’ in *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill).

As an activity to reinforce the biased nature of Jennet’s letters, which are crammed full of her naturally emotional response to her situation, ask students to write their version of Alice’s replies to her sister. They will need to make some informed decisions, based on the text, as to whether Alice was complicit in Jennet’s removal from Crythin Gifford, or whether she had sympathy for her sister’s plight. Of course, the truth may not mean that these two positions are mutually exclusive!

Compare students’ work and ask them to justify their response through the use of textual evidence that has informed their opinion of Alice.

HISTORY / ENGLISH

Historians use documentary evidence in the same way as detectives investigating a case. This activity, therefore, combines the two!

Tell students that they are going to work on an alternative version of *The Woman in Black* and that, to do so, they will need to imagine themselves as contemporary investigators at the time of the story. Imagine that Arthur Kipps went to Crythin Gifford, as he did in the original story. He attended the funeral of Alice Drablow with Mr Jerome and he saw *The Woman in Black*. For a while, he stayed at the Gifford Arms, prior to him deciding to visit Eel Marsh House and stay there until his work was done. He was taken across the causeway by Keckwick in the pony and trap at low tide, with Keckwick planning to return to collect him in a few days time.

At this point in the story, inform students that news has come through that Arthur Kipps has been found dead at Eel Marsh House. Their job is to piece together a portfolio of evidence that suggests what may have happened to him. Did Kipps venture out into the marshes, lose his way and drown? Did he fall and knock himself out on the edge of a headstone in the graveyard? Or does his death have a more sinister cause? Is the ghost of Jennet Humfrye involved?

Students will need to consider what evidence would be appropriate and reliable to seek out and to include in their portfolio. Kipps’s letters to his fiancé, Stella, might provide some clues. They may need to obtain



his train tickets from London, the funeral order of service and the times of the tides so that they can piece together his last movements. And they may need to conduct interviews with Jerome, Keckwick, the landlord of the Gifford Arms and Sam Daily. And is there a possibility that Mr Bentley, the London solicitor and Kipps's boss, knows more than he is admitting?

ENGLISH

Sometimes, apparently insignificant characters in a story can provide a wealth of possibilities for follow-up work with students.

Very little information is offered in *The Woman in Black* about Rose Judd, the nursemaid who died with Nathaniel Pierston (Jennet Humfrye's son), his little dog and Keckwick's father in the pony and trap accident in the marshes. We know that Morgan and Alice Drablow obtained a reference for Rose from a Lady M in Hyde Park Gate. And we know that she died on the same day as Nathaniel, as Kipps discovers a death certificate in the Drablow papers.

It is fair to assume, however, that a nursemaid in a strange situation such as this, with Alice Drablow adopting her sister's baby, would have been privy to all sorts of conversations that might shed light on Alice and Jennet. According to Samuel Daily, for instance, "the boy was brought up a Drablow and was never intended to know his mother." Then Jennet returns to Crythin Gifford. The situation must have been awkward. Alice would not let her see the child. Jennet threatened violence, Alice relented. Rose Judd would have been aware of all of this.

Although it is likely in the late Victorian era that Rose would have been ill-educated, this exercise assumes that she was literate. Ask students to put together extracts from the 'Lost Diaries of Rose Judd'. They may like to imagine that this is a document that comes to light when Kipps is exploring the nursery at Eel Marsh House, which, after all, was left untouched after the death of Nathaniel and may well have been a place where the diaries might have been written.

Ask students to use the text to inform their writing, imagining the rest so as to fill in any gaps and create a unique perspective on an unusual and difficult situation.

RESOURCES

Extracts from the letters of Jennet Humfrye

'Dearest Alice'

'P. will not come back here.'

'I think P. was sent abroad.'

'We [N. and I] will never be parted.'

'He is mine. Why should I not have what is mine? He shall not go to strangers. I shall kill us both before I let him go.'

'What else can I do? I am helpless. If you and M. are to have him I shall mind it less.'

'I suppose it must be.'

'Love him, take care of him as your own. But he is mine, mine, he can never be yours. Oh, forgive me. I think my heart will break.'

'J.'

'Jennet'

From *The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill

and *The Woman in Black* adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the novel by Susan Hill

P. is the unnamed father of Nathaniel – presumably a teenage boy who was shamed as Jennet was.

N. is Nathaniel – infant son of Jennet Humfrye who will later die in the pony and trap accident.

M. is Morgan Thomas Drablow, husband of Alice Drablow, of Eel Marsh House.

J. is Jennet Humfrye herself, later to die of a wasting disease and become *The Woman in Black*.

“You asked for my story. I have told it. Enough.”



THE WOMAN IN BLACK

*In this section, key players in the story and adaptation of *The Woman in Black* discuss its genesis, power and success.*

THE STORY

*“I have always enjoyed and admired the classic English ghost story. I played a part in a dramatisation of Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* when I was at school and I think this began my love of the genre.”*

from *The Woman in Black* pages at www.susan-hill.com

“I wrote the book because I love ghost stories and I was sad that there were not more full length ones around.”

from blog entry at www.susan-hill.com, 06 March 2007

“I made a list of ingredients:

- 1. A ghost – not a monster or a thing from outer space but the ghost of a human who was once alive and is known to have died, but whose recognisable form re-appears or occasionally is not seen but heard, or possibly even smelled.*
- 2. The Haunted House...usually isolated.*
- 3. Weather...atmospheric weather conditions – fog, mist, snow, and of course moonlit darkness on clear nights.*
- 4. A sceptic. A narrator or central character who begins as a sceptic or plain disbeliever and scoffer who is gradually converted by what he or she sees and experiences of ghostly presences.”*

from *The Woman in Black* pages at www.susan-hill.com

“My ghost has a reason to return and her reason is revenge for the loss of her child. She cannot let go, cannot forgive, cannot ‘move on’. She must go on and on haunting to extract her revenge for the death of her son. This is a terrible fate.”

from blog entry at www.susan-hill.com, 27 Jan 2008

“He [Robin Herford] points out that Susan Hill, the author of the eponymous novel on which the play is based, had lost a child herself a little before she wrote it.”

from interview with Robin Herford as part of *The Woman in Black* tour of India

Interview by S.Bageshree, published in *The Hindu*, 23 Aug 2004

[In fact, Susan Hill’s premature daughter, Imogen, died aged just 33 days in 1984. *The Woman in Black* was published the previous year. There is, nevertheless an undoubted irony that Susan Hill was to suffer a similar tragedy to that of her ghostly antagonist.]

*“It is a terrific story and it has got heart. I think that is the strength of *The Woman in Black*: that you genuinely feel for the woman.”*

from interview with Stephen Mallatratt by Kim Greengrass, 1998



THE ADAPTATION

“Stephen Mallatratt wrote and asked permission to adapt. I said yes and the next thing was the finished script in the post. The author of a book is never consulted or interferes in any way, rightly so.”

from interview with Susan Hill, 2008

“She [Susan Hill] was amazed to be honest, because she thought it was a stupid idea.”

from interview with Stephen Mallatratt

Interview by Hap Erstein, published in *The Washington Post*, 02 Oct 1990

“I thought he was mad and said so.”

from blog entry at www.susan-hill.com, 06 Mar 2007

“I told him [Stephen Mallatratt] that I can’t afford to have more than four actors or elaborate sets.”

from interview with Robin Herford as part of *The Woman in Black* tour of India

Interview by S.Bageshree, published in *The Hindu*, 23 Aug 2004

“It’s one of those happy things that happen occasionally in one’s life that you get a bloody good idea.”

from interview with Stephen Mallatratt

Interview by Hap Erstein, published in *The Washington Post*, 02 Oct 1990

“As soon as the idea came of admitting that we were on a stage, all the other problems sorted themselves. The imagination does everything in this play.”

from interview with Stephen Mallatratt by Kim Greengrass, 1998

“It’s an acting piece, that’s what it is, really. It’s got a great story, which I nicked and managed to find another dimension to.”

from interview with Stephen Mallatratt

Interview by Hap Erstein, published in *The Washington Post*, 02 Oct 1990

“I remember that the idea of the ghost not being seen by the genuine Mr Kipps grew gradually. At first she was going to be another actor – they were going to give her directions on where to move and so on. Then I realized that the best way to do it is for her to appear by magic and not be seen by the older Mr Kipps.”

from interview with Stephen Mallatratt by Kim Greengrass, 1998

“I was lucky to have Robin [Herford] to work with. Ghost stories aren’t that many in play form, and we were both a bit in the dark. His contribution to the play was much more than as director alone.”

from *The Woman in Black* programme notes, written by Stephen Mallatratt, 1988

SUCCESS

“It works as a theatrical experience...it uses all the devices of theatre, especially making the audience use its own imagination. It conforms to Shakespeare’s Henry V prologue about this...”

from interview with Susan Hill, 2008

*“O for a muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene.”*

from Henry V by William Shakespeare

“We don’t give everything away and actually make our audience work very hard.”

“This is a celebration of what theatre can do.”

from interview with Robin Herford as part of The Woman in Black tour of India

Interview by S.Bageshree, published in The Hindu, 23 Aug 2004

“There aren’t many writers around who could use so lightly the key tool of theatre – the audiences’ imagination – to create so hardy perennial as The Woman in Black. Stephen [Mallatratt]’s gift was rare.”

from The Woman in Black programme notes, written by Peter Wilson (Producer), 2005

“It is always a poignant moment when something or other happens to it [the play] and I reach for the phone to talk to Stephen Mallatratt who adapted it. Stephen died 18 months ago. We used to laugh about the show we called ‘the dark lady’ and which we expected to run for 6 weeks in the tiny studio theatre in Scarborough one Christmas. We could never really believe its good fortune.”

from Susan Hill’s newsletter for April 2006 at www.susan-hill.com

“The Woman in Black, good old stalwart. It has sold a vast number of copies. It has been a set text for AS and A level for a good few years and the play, of course, has been running for 18 years in the West End, is out on another UK tour as we speak and plays on and off in just about every country in the world.

A blogger lets me know this morning that he has reviewed the book...which is kind of him.

He says ‘the action needs some refinement’.

Do you know, in view of all the above, I don’t think I’m going to let that spoil my day.”

from blog entry at www.susan-hill.com, 22 Mar 2007

“We all hope that Fortune will continue to smile on us.”

from Cherchez La Femme, written by Peter Wilson (Producer), 1994

The Woman in Black continues at The Fortune Theatre, London, regularly tours the UK and plays numerous productions at numerous theatres around the world.



RESOURCES AND LINKS

Books

- “The Woman in Black” ISBN: 978-0099511649
Written by Susan Hill, published by Vintage
Paperback edition
- “The Woman in Black” ISBN: 978-0573040191
Adapted by Stephen Mallatratt from the book by Susan Hill, published by Samuel French
Acting edition
- “The Woman in Black” ISBN: 978-0582026605
Written by Susan Hill, published by Longman
Study edition - paperback
- “The Woman in Black” ISBN: 978-1854961181
Written by Susan Hill, read by Christopher Kay, published by Soundings
Unabridged audiobook
- “The Woman in Black” ISBN: 978-1902421131
Written by Susan Hill, read by Paul Ansdell, published by Long Barn Books
Unabridged audiobook
- “Susan Hill – The Essential Guide”
Written by Jonathan Noakes and Margaret Reynolds ISBN: 978-0099452188
Includes exclusive interview with Susan Hill on *The Woman in Black*

DVD

- “The Woman in Black”
1989 TV Film, starring Adrian Rawlins and Bernard Hepton
BFS Entertainment
Very rare, beware of illegal copies, only available as Region 1 DVD

Websites

- www.thewomaninblack.com
Official website of the London production of “The Woman in Black”
- www.susan-hill.com
Website of novelist Susan Hill, author of “The Woman in Black”
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Woman_in_Black
Wikipedia page for “The Woman in Black”