

Active Citizenship Using Drama

A Stone's Throw



Lesson 4: Jack's Mental Health

This lesson looks at being isolated, locked up and alone with your thoughts, and the effect it can have on your mental state. It creates a nightmare scenario for Jack when he is in the Young Offenders Centre and it helps pupils understand how being locked up can affect an individual. The lesson uses choral speaking and improvisations to explore these issues.

Planning	
Prior Learning	<p>Pupils should have gained prior knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active citizenship; • the legal system for young people; • the young offenders system; • human rights for young people; and • mental health issues with young people.
Learning Outcomes	<p>Pupils will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand what it is like to be locked up; • discuss mental health issues; • justify fairness and the legal system; • talk about and ask appropriate questions of others; and • use verbal dynamics, choral speaking, and flashback and flash forward improvisations effectively.
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Focus	<p>Pupils will have opportunities to develop the following:</p> <p>Managing Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research mental health issues of young people <p>Being Creative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use verbal dynamics and choral speaking • Use flashback and flash forward improvisation <p>Working with Others and Self-Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work as whole class and in groups • Work as an individual and create a soliloquy <p>Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make decisions about using script in different ways and developing roles • Discuss viewpoints with appropriate reasons and by listening to other viewpoints.
Attitudes and Dispositions	<p>Pupils will be encouraged to develop the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to new ideas • Flexibility: being flexible when using a more practical drama approach • Respect: demonstrating a more caring and respectful attitude towards others.
Resources	<p>Film and script of 'A Stone's Throw'</p> <p>Music for warm up</p> <p>Musical instruments such as drum, triangle, woodblock or bells</p> <p>Further resources might include lighting, a smoke machine and masks</p>

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A Stone's Throw



L4

Suggested teaching and learning strategies

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Launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to the lines 'I was sent to a Young Offenders Centre. Got out on my 16th birthday.' • Ask pupils to clear a space in the centre of the classroom by moving the tables and chairs to the sides and stand in a circle. • Introduce the theme of the lesson and briefly explain verbal dynamics, flash forward and flashback improvisations to the pupils. • Ask the pupils what they know about mental health issues that affect young people. • Warm up: Introduce a short warm up with the following exercises.
	<p>Breathing exercises</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the class in simple breathing exercises to generate energy. Breathe in for a count of 4, hold the breath for a count of 4 and exhale slowly for a count of 10. • Repeat the exercise and close your eyes and hum on exhalation.
	<p>Movement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the pupils to do some movement exercises. These might be led by pupils who have been asked to prepare a short sequence to music. • Ask pupils to do diagonal stretches to right and left and then to create a range of different movements enhanced by appropriate facial expressions, for example smooth balletic movements, sharp angular movements or giant angry aggressive movements.
	<p>Verbal dynamics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask pupils to think of other words for 'throw', such as hurl, fling, fire, propel or launch and accompany each word with a different movement. • Ask pupils to create an echo effect with words. Begin a word loudly and soften it slowly to a whisper as the word is repeated in turn with each pupil. Mexican wave movements can be added for more effect. • Lead pupils in singing 'Happy Birthday' in slow motion, as a robot, a witch, a king, as a deep whisper, a growl, loudly, angrily, gently etc.

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L4

Activities

Activity 1: Nightmare scenario – choral speaking using verbal dynamics

- Tell the pupils they are going to create a 'nightmare scenario' for Jack. He is in the Young Offenders Centre and he has been locked up in his room.
- Lead a discussion about what this would have been like for Jack. Use prompt questions such as:
 - *What must it be like to be locked in a room every night?*
 - *How would you feel?*
 - *What would be you thinking?*
 - *What would it be like to be Jack at this time?*
 - *What is in his head?*
- Help the pupils to collect their thoughts and arrange them in a sequence using a flip chart or whiteboard to record ideas.
- Tell the pupils they are going to create a vocal improvisation using words or phrases directly from the script or something suggested by it.
- Encourage the pupils to be as creative as they want by changing the pitch, pace, tone, volume and inflection of their voices as they speak and add vocal and instrumental sound effects and movement to make the presentation a dramatic nightmare. They can also add lighting, smoke or large shapes of material if they are available.
- Choose which of the choral ideas work best for the pupils and co-ordinate an appropriate sequence in which to present them. You could use a drum, woodblock or other musical instrument to time the sequence and to link the sequence together or you may wish to underscore the sequence with other appropriate music for a nightmare, which can be found on YouTube. For example:
 - 'Music for Nightmares' by Bill Schaeffer
 - 'Nightmare Music' by Cryo Chamber
 - 'The Dream Catcher' by Brainwave Power Music.
- The pupils may wish to use the full space of the classroom and different levels. Jack should be positioned centrally.
- Different pupils can play Jack at different times and encourage him to react to the dynamics of the choral work using movement, voice and facial expressions.
- The improvised script does not need to be written but arranged in a sequence from prompts that the pupils can remember, for example using a hand gesture or pointing to the relevant section on the flip chart. *The learning comes from the pupils creating and sharing the original ideas and performance skills are not important.*

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A Stone's Throw



L4

Tips

The whole class will be involved in this activity and they can build up a sequence of text and movement of any length to suit the time available and the ideas suggested by the pupils.



Ideas might include:

- *Pupils divide into groups and hum – each group at a different level from low to high. The groups snake around the room conga style as Jack covers his head in the centre and then shouts 'Stop!' when he decides and the humming repeats.*
- *One group of pupils creates a heartbeat using a vocal sound 'bh-bom' or musical instrument such as drum or woodblock. The other groups take on a phrase in the rhythm of the heartbeat such as 'You must not cry', 'Now lock him up' or 'So sweaty with fear' and each group speaks the phrase beginning with a whisper and circles around Jack getting louder in tone until he screams 'No!'*
- *The pupils each take on a character role from the film script and select a phrase to speak aloud in an unusual or strange voice. For example:*
 - *an arrogant solicitor: 'This is his first offence, my lord.'*
 - *a gentle social worker: 'He comes from a broken home.'*
 - *sneering neighbour: 'He was always a bad boy.'*
 - *nasty neighbour: 'Your Ma's a drunk.'*
 - *loud police officer: 'Put the handcuffs on him.'*
 - *crying friend: 'Leave him alone you bully.'*
 - *laughing teenager: 'He deserves all he gets.'*
 - *drunk Ma: 'You're no son of mine.'*
 - *stern paramedic: 'You threw the stone.'*
 - *angry driver: 'You stopped my ambulance.'*
 - *upset Grandad: 'What did you do Jack?'*
- *They could use an accent, elongate the sound, whisper, use slow motion or change the pitch, pace, tone, volume or inflection to make it sound like it is part of Jack's nightmare. Each pupil starts from a 'freeze' position, speaks in a chosen style with a gesture and appropriate facial expression and returns to the 'freeze' position.*
- *Only one group at a time speaks the phrases while the other groups make background sounds, for example pupils in one group hum, each on a different note, and move their arms in a wave-like motion.*

Active Citizenship Using Drama

A Stone's Throw



L4

Activity 2: Flashback and flash forward improvisations

- Divide the pupils in the class into two groups.
- Tell the pupils they are going to devise an improvisation as part of Jack's nightmare.
- Ask one group to devise a flashback improvisation and one group to devise a flash forward improvisation.
- *The improvisations can begin as reality and become as abstract and strange as the pupils can imagine. Remind the pupils that these are part of Jack's nightmare.*
- After both groups have performed their improvisation, the scene should return to Jack alone in his room at the Young Offenders Centre.

Tips

Some examples of flashback and flash forward improvisations are below.



• Group 1 – Flashback improvisation

- *The scene is set in a courtroom and the pupils are cast as judge, bailiff, prosecution and defence barristers, witnesses such as neighbours, paramedic, police, also Jack, Jack's friends and jury who could wear masks.*
- *The improvisation begins as the bailiff shouts, 'All rise for the honourable Judge Citizenship!' and all the other pupils walk quickly into their places to create a courtroom using appropriate tables and chairs.*
- *The judge says, 'Jack Citizen, you have been accused of the murder of your grandad. How do you plead?' and everyone shouts 'Guilty'.*
- *The judge continues, 'Prosecution, call your first witness'*
- *The jury can chorus, 'Raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth...'*
- *A paramedic is called and briefly asked what happened and points to Jack and calls him a murderer.*
- *A policeman and a neighbour can then be called who will exaggerate the incident, for example making the stone a brick or calling him a thug.*
- *For the defence, Jack's mother, father and a friend can be called and they can respond in a similar way, saying he never loved his grandad or visited him, was always in trouble at home and in school etc.*
- *The jury are then asked for their verdict and everyone choruses 'Guilty!'*
- *The judge imprisons him for life and asks for the key to be thrown away and everyone laughs in a sinister way.*

Group 2 – Flash forward improvisation

- *These improvisations are based on the end of the script, which refers to Jack going to a concert and a football match. He says, 'I'm a role model for the other ones coming up who are just like me.'*

Active Citizenship Using Drama

A Stone's Throw



L4

The pupils are cast in a number of short improvisations such as:



- **At the Football Final**

- *The pupils choose appropriate teams to be in the final.*
- *The improvisation begins when a commentator says, 'Welcome to Wembley Stadium for the FA Cup Final.'*
- *A chant is devised by the pupils who take their place in the stand as Jack scores the final penalty goal.*
- *The commentator builds up the suspense and Jack is mobbed as the youngest footballing star Jack Citizen wins the match for his team.*

- **Britain's Got Talent**

- *The improvisation begins when the announcer welcomes 'the winner of this year's 'Britain's Got Talent – Jack Citizen.'*
- *He could be a singer who can mime to a short burst of a song or a comedian who can tell a joke, followed by huge applause from the other pupils and is mobbed by his friends on stage.*

- **Snooker World Champion**

- *The commentator asks everyone to be quiet as the finalist, Jack Citizen, pots the black and becomes the youngest World Snooker Champion.*
- *There then follows an interview with Jack as he accepts the trophy and makes a short speech.*
- *He thanks his mum, dad and grandad who join him as the other pupils, as fans, cheer loudly and chant his name.*
- *As the chant continues, it is then spoken in slow motion as the scene returns to Jack alone in his room at the Young Offenders Centre and the warden bangs on his door and shouts 'Wake Up!'*

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A Stone's Throw



L4

Debrief

- Ask pupils to find a chair and return to the circle.
- Lead a class discussion using prompt questions such as:
 - *Do you feel that you understand more about what it is like to be locked up every night for a long period of time?*
 - *What effect can being locked up have on your mind?*
 - *How would you survive being locked up?*
 - *Is the legal system fair for young people?*
 - *Was it right to lock Jack up for six months?*
 - *What effect did being locked up have on Jack?*
 - *Did verbal dynamics, choral speaking and improvisation help you to better understand the issues discussed?*
- You might wish to discuss different organisations who give help, advice and support to young people when they are lonely, homeless or have mental health issues.

Such organisations are:

- SupportLine – Loneliness
www.supportline.org.uk
- Anxiety – Young people
youngminds.org.uk
- Simon Community – Homeless in Northern Ireland
www.simoncommunity.org
- Youth homelessness
www.centrepoin.org.uk
- Services for young people
www.changegrowlive.org/services