The aim of this Digital Theatre+ Practical Workshop Guide is to deepen and enrich understanding of the play as a blueprint for performance, encouraging the student to approach the material using the investigative and interpretive methods of the actor, director or voice coach.

The workshop, suitable for Key Stage 3 and above, can either be divided into 4 x 40 minute sessions or run for 2.5 hours all the way through.

CONTENTS

- Tangible learning benefits .......................................................... 2
- Session one .............................................................................. 4
- Session two ............................................................................ 12
- Session three .......................................................................... 23
- Session four ............................................................................ 31
TANGIBLE LEARNING BENEFITS

Below is a list of tangible learning benefits, tailored to the UK further education curricula, which this guide supports.

- Interpret text.
- Create and communicate meaning.
- Realise artistic intention in text-based drama.
- Analyse and evaluate their work.
- Understand the connection between theory and practice in a range of periods.
- Evaluate live/captured production.
- Explore the relationship between theory and practice.
- Refine analytical thinking and research.
- Develop an analytical framework for the making, performing, interpreting and understanding of drama and theatre.
- Understand the construction of performance text to convey meaning.
- Appreciate the influence of social, historical and cultural context on performance text.

PREPARING THE SPACE

Welcome students to the session, in which they will be experiencing the play as if in the REHEARSAL ROOM, rather than the classroom. Today is a chance not to study but to play; to try to work together on the text as actors and as a director might work. It isn’t about being a good actor, but about seeing how we can deepen our understanding of the play by playing with it in the kinds of ways that actors might do in the rehearsal room.

- Turn the classroom into a rehearsal space by moving the tables and chairs out of the way and making sure all bags/coats etc. are not blocking the space.
• **Come** and stand in a circle to begin.

• **When** we make a production, we start with just this – the company, an empty space, and some text.
SESSION ONE

Objectives: Introducing students to ways of working together and to the story of the play.

Length: 40 minutes.

What you will need: Nothing for this session, but see sessions two, three and four if you are running the workshop in one complete 2.5-hour session.

WARMING UP

Even for professional actors, it can be hard to just start speaking or acting big chunks of text, especially when that text was written hundreds of years ago and may have some pretty complicated words and ideas in it. So, like actors, we are going to make that easier by warming ourselves up, which will also get us feeling more playful, alert and engaged.
MOVEMENT

Teacher starts by clapping towards the student on their left. That student then claps to their left and so on all around the circle until it gets back to the teacher.

- **Ask** the students to give the clap a rating out of 10 for enthusiasm, energy and speed (where 10 is highest). They will probably give a 4 or 5 because the clapping will have been quite slow and cautious.

- **Ask** them to pass the beat again, but this time see if they can get a rating which is a bit higher.

- **Take** a step out at this point to give yourselves a bigger circle. This way the students will have to be much more physical with their clapping.

- **Keep** the beat going round and encourage the students to challenge themselves more and more until they get their rating up to a 10.

- **When** you think they have peaked and you can feel the energy whizzing round the circle, stop and get them all to have a celebratory clap together.

**Ask them:**

- **What** made us get better at the task?
- **What** made us able to pass the beat more quickly and dramatically?
DISCUSSION:

Encourage as many responses from different students as possible, so that they can feel right from the start how much an actor is able/expected to contribute to the rehearsal process, and how helpful it is that they share their observations.

Prompt them if they are unconfident or unsure what you mean:

- **What** did we have to DO to pass the beat more successfully?

Elicit responses about having to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listen</th>
<th>Be more alert</th>
<th>Concentrate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipate</td>
<td>Be ready</td>
<td>Be energetic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Ask** them to think about the importance of being both ready to receive, and passing on with precision, focus and direction.

- **Encourage** them to notice that we feel less inhibited or self-conscious when we really put all our attention into doing something for the group (or the ‘story’.)

- **Ask** them what we did physically to help us get better. Elicit ‘we bent our knees to get more grounded/ we twisted/turned/we were much more physically engaged’.

All the qualities and skills we have identified are going to be invaluable to us throughout the workshop, since they are the crucial elements of good acting, especially in Shakespeare. Otherwise, the language and ideas will sound very dead and boring, and the actors will seem overwhelmed by the material.
DEVELOPING THE TASK

Put into practice everything you have talked about by having another go at passing the beat, challenging them to start immediately at rating 10.

- **Call** out reminders of all the things you have got them to notice, so that they are all concentrating, listening, bending their knees to feel more grounded, twisting energetically, breathing deeply, and passing with real focus and intention.

- **Encourage** them to go incredibly fast and be as physical as possible. (Again, make the circle bigger so that they can twist more.)

- **When** you have got it going really well in one direction, stop them and make them do it in the other direction so that they are warmed up on both sides.

VOICE

Explain you are going to pass the beat round the circle again but this time you are also going to count out loud as you clap.

- **Begin** at one and the student to the left says two and so on until you have got all the way around the circle.

- **Keep going** round and round, encouraging them to make the counting as energetic and enthusiastic as the clap.

- **Remind** them it is really important that everyone hears the number really clearly so that they know where they are in the chain.

- **Change** places in the circle once they are confident but tell them to remember which number they are.
Finally, ask them to keep counting as above, but, this time, Respond to Your Directions, so they have to do the counting as if it is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A warning</th>
<th>A joke</th>
<th>A threat</th>
<th>A cry for help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An advert on the shopping channel</td>
<td>A BBC reporter</td>
<td>A ghost story</td>
<td>A secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A love song</td>
<td>Saying goodbye to someone you love</td>
<td>Asking someone out on a date</td>
<td>Turning someone down</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCING THE STORY OF THE PLAY

• **Tell** the students they are going to work on the story of the play together.

• **With** the students standing in the circle, elicit the names of the principal characters and ask for volunteers to ‘be’ them for the exercise.

• **Make** sure you get Maggie, Brick, Big Daddy, Big Mama, Gooper, Mae and the no-neck monsters. They won’t be acting so much as representing.

• **The other students** are now going to tell the story of the play, without pre-planning, by speaking round the circle one sentence per person.

• **When** they describe what happens in the story, the actors in the middle should strike a pose to encapsulate the idea or event (such as Maggie begs Brick / Brick keeps drinking / Brick and Big Daddy fight / Mae accuses Maggie etc.)

• **You** can steer them or they can help each other out if they get stuck – it should feel like a fun, slightly mad-cap exercise.

**DISCUSSION:**

When they have made it to the end ask them to debrief about how it felt to represent the story in this way.

**Encourage them to think about:**

Written by Zoe Waites
• It feeling very extreme, maybe even silly! There is tremendous absurdity in the play and a sense of the adults being very ‘un-adult’ in the way they relate to each other and the world. Is this perhaps because they are so emotionally stunted? Or because they come from a very privileged social background? Also, the emotions experienced in the play are extremely intense so can be very challenging to work on.

• How identifying the pure essential thing that is happening can be very important in a play with a small cast in one room, in which so little appears to happen or when so much is dealt with (or covered up by) talking. So, identifying the visceral undertow in the relationships is vital.

• It also connects us to the more mythic nature of this play, where the characters feel like they are in a Greek tragedy, and could be any individual dealing with the big issues that plague all people – death, truth, honour, shame, society, self-identification. Is this why the characters have symbolic names? (Big Daddy etc.). What do ‘Brick’ and ‘Maggie the Cat’ mean?

• The ways in which the characters in the play are trapped in the identities which they and society have created for themselves.

LOCATION

• **Ask** them to create a ‘wordscape’ to conjure up the atmosphere of the location.

• **Talk** a little beforehand about why location or a sense of place is important, then have them all close their eyes and quietly say words that capture the atmosphere of this location.

• **They** should softly echo back the words that seem particularly resonant so that they are creating a kind of echo chamber of both sounds and ideas.
• Encourage them to really be creative and exploratory – the words can be nouns/adjectives/verbs, anything really as long as it contributes to the atmosphere.

DISCUSSION:

When you feel it has had enough time, ask them why sense of place is so important.

Perhaps:

• It roots the characters in the past (both theirs and their country’s.)

• It creates this overwhelming feeling of nostalgia, which is something the characters feel and which we both empathise with and are suspicious of.

• It’s a very heady, sultry, overheated environment.

• They are surrounded by evidence of money and privilege which cannot buy them what they need, and has maybe even contributed to their sense of shame.

• They are trapped in a world that feels very isolated and self-perpetuating (rather than say the hustle and bustle of a city, or being by the ocean, or on a river.)

• It draws the audience in so that they really experience it with them, and may be fascinated by it but at the same time, they want to escape it.
SESSION TWO

**Objectives:** Developing an understanding of the characters and language of the play.

**Length:** 40 minutes.

**What you will need:**
- Paper and pencils
- Copies of Maggie’s speech in Act I (below).
INTRODUCING CHARACTER

- **Put** the students into two groups: **Group Maggie** and **Group Brick**.

- **Each** group must imagine they are friends with either **Maggie** or **Brick**.

- **In five minutes**, you will interview them for a dating programme, asking them to describe why **Maggie** or **Brick** would make a great life partner. They will make a short presentation, and then you will ask them questions.

- **They have** five minutes to prepare their presentation (they should remember that they need to think of all the positive traits their character has, and they might frame less positive things in a generous way.)

- **After** the five-minute prep time, invite each group into the ‘interview studio’ with the other students being a studio audience (perhaps set up a few chairs and ask one or two other students to pretend to be camera operators/improvise a theme tune etc. – make it as fun and extravagant as you can).

- **Get** them to give their presentation and then quiz them as much as feels useful on aspects of **Brick** and **Maggie’s** characters that they have avoided or glossed over.

- **Do** the same with the second group.
DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING OF CHARACTER

- **Clear** the ‘studio’ set up, and bring the students back into the circle.

- **Now** you are going to focus on the inner life of the same characters.

- **Choose** a volunteer from each group to come and sit in the middle of the circle – one Maggie and one Brick.

- **Ask** them to sit cross-legged opposite one another looking into each other’s eyes.

- **Tell** them they are first going to voice Maggie’s and Brick’s feelings about the other person. They will do it in this way: “You make me feel:

  - Excited
  - Frightened
  - Alive
  - Vulnerable
  - Claustrophobic
  - Strong
  - Happy
  - Confused

- **You** can let them alternate, and encourage them to let the words be contradictory.

- **At any point,** a student can come from the circle, tap an actor on the shoulder, silently swap places with either Maggie or Brick and carry on the exercise, as long as the intimate atmosphere and connected energy are maintained.

- **When** they have reached the natural end of the exercise, tell them to finish off by having them close their eyes and voice the characters’ super-objectives (what they most want in life) and their deepest fears.
DISCUSSION:

Debrief from the two exercises about how we unpack the notion of ‘character’.

What did the dating show reveal/help with?

Elicit:

• Outer characteristics.

• What might be considered valuable or important assets by either the characters or their immediate culture.

• The pressures on their marriage in terms of expectation and approval.

• Seeing the characters’ traits in positive ways, rather than focusing on their flaws or falling into the trap of judging them.

• Inner characteristics that might be hidden but could still influence a relationship, either positively or negatively.

What did the intimate exercise contribute?

Elicit:

• How the other character makes them truly feel, in comparison to the positive ‘selling points’ of the dating game.

• The disappointment and fear that might exist because of those discrepancies.

• The implicit question of whether the feelings are things that Maggie and Brick are trying to make one another feel, or whether the feelings are unsought.
• The distance or closeness of Brick and Maggie’s super-objectives. Does this tie them closer together or place them irretrievably apart?

• The driver of fear being very intense in this play. Are the fears stronger or as strong as the desires? Which is most useful imaginatively if you were playing this part?

• Reassure them you are not looking for ‘correct answers’ but for ways of stimulating the actors’ imagination, always remembering that precise analytical work is what the actor needs to excel at and return to again and again.
Hand out copies of the attached speech below (Maggie – Act One):

Yep, they're no-neck monsters, monsters.... All no-neck people are monsters....

[Children shriek downstairs.]

Hear them? Hear them screaming? I don't know where their voice-boxes are located since they don't have necks. I tell you I got so nervous at that table tonight I thought I would throw back my head and utter a scream you could hear across the Arkansas border an' parts of Louisiana an' Tennessee. I said to your charming sister-in-law, Mae, honey, couldn't you feed those precious little things at a separate table with an oilcloth cover? They make such a mess an' the lace cloth looks so pretty! She made enormous eyes at me and said, 'Ohhh, noooooo! On Big Daddy's birthday? Why, he would never forgive me!' Well, I want you to know, Big Daddy hadn't been at the table two minutes with those five no-neck monsters slobbering and drooling over their food before he threw down his fork an' shouted, 'Fo' God's sake, Gooper, why don't you put them pigs at a trough in th' kitchen?'--Well, I swear, I simply could have dieed! Think of it, Brick, they've got five of them and number six is coming. They've brought the whole bunch down here like animals to display at a county fair. Why, they have those children doin' tricks all the time! 'Junior, show Big Daddy how you do this, show Big Daddy how you do that, say your little piece fo' Big Daddy, Sister. Show your dimples, Sugar. Brother, show Big Daddy how you stand on your head!'--It goes on all the time, along with constant little remarks and innuendoes about the fact that you and I have not produced any children, are totally childless and therefore totally useless!--Of course it's comical but it's also disgusting since it's so obvious what they're up to!
• **Standing** in a circle, ask the students to read round one line at a time, as if they are one voice.

• **Clarify** any meaning issues.

• **Get** the students to read round again and focus this time on really passing the energy to one another to tell the story (as with the beat in **Session One**) so that it really flows and has lots of natural conversational vigour.

• **Ask** one volunteer to come and sit in the centre of the circle to ‘be’ Brick.

• **All** this actor needs to do for the exercise is to focus on something (a spot on the wall or their hands for instance) and not give the speakers any attention.

• **The rest** of the group read around again, trying to get a reaction from silent Brick.

**DISCUSSION**

• **When** they have finished, ask them all how this made them feel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angry?</th>
<th>Desperate?</th>
<th>Stupid?</th>
<th>Annoyed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Written by Zoe Waites
• **What** did it make them want to do to Brick?

|--------------|----------------|------------|---------------|

• **Ask** the students what possibilities this exercise opens up about why Maggie is speaking:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To fill the void of their relationship?</th>
<th>To goad him into a response?</th>
<th>To prevent him from talking?</th>
<th>To keep other things at bay?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

• **Ask** them to identify what about the LANGUAGE enables these actions and supports the circumstances. Encourage them to notice:

- The long drawn out vowels.
- The repetitions or small alterations of particular phrases.
- The almost incantatory use of the personal pronoun ‘I’.
- The number of question marks and exclamation marks (we begin with one and end with another!)
- The way Maggie builds rhythm through building ideas on top of one another, creating a kind of force field of energy and dynamism.
• **Ask** for two volunteers to come into the circle – one student to be Maggie and one to be Brick.

• **Maggie** will read the speech again. Encourage them to see if they can allow the things we have just been discussing to bear fruit.

• **Tell** the other students that this time they need to be listening very hard for language that they think reveals not only information for the characters but for the whole play, in terms of thematic layering.

• **Remind** them this is a very early section of text, so actors and directors are looking for clues, and small hints.

• **When** they have heard it once, ask the students if they can identify the seeds that have thematic significance in the whole play. Elicit:
  - Disgust / monstrous behaviour (a channel for self-loathing perhaps?)
  - The claustrophobia and centrality of the extended family unit.
  - The relationship with the notion of having children.
  - The fecundity versus barrenness (both in itself and as a metaphor for a love).
  - Things looking ‘pretty’ but being despoiled by unchecked behaviour.
  - Truth and deception (of oneself and others).
  - Eating as a metaphor for consuming with no regard for the consequences?
DISCUSSION:

Support the students in discussing the following thoughts:

- The recurrence means the audience has no way to escape from the claustrophobia of the themes.

- The almost obsessive, mantra-like repetitions make us feel how acutely Maggie is hemmed in to her own turmoil, how desperately she tries to refute it and change it, but with little practical way of extracting herself if Brick continues to resist her.

- The motifs are mainly established by Maggie, thus ensuring that we are caught in the net of her thoughts and therefore can have sympathy for her.

If the students have access to copies of the whole play, put them into pairs and ask them to spend five minutes flicking through the play to find some echoes or developments of these themes.

Bring them back to the circle and ask them to read out all their offers. (This is a speedy exercise and not one to get bogged down in.)

- What do all the things we have identified in the writing do to the listener?
- How do they impinge on us and bring us into the world of the play?
• The relentless sense of disgust and self-loathing make us feel permanently uneasy and connect us to our own shames, whilst also making us feel like we can’t look away even if we wanted to.

• The constant reiteration of secrets and lies (mendacity) forces us into a relationship with the deceptions in our own lives, as well as putting us in the uncomfortable position of voyeur.

• The sense of Maggie trying to talk herself free both exhausts us and inspires us, which gives us a glimpse into what it feels like to be her.

• The need for women to please men is an insight into the rigidity of the social mores of the period, as well as a universally familiar and hugely damaging relationship trap.

• The terrific verbal richness of the play, with its extraordinary poetry, muscular rhythms, wit and individualised colloquialisms, serves in itself as a metaphor for the ability of humans to be creative and fertile even in the most barren of circumstances.
SESSION THREE

**Objectives:** Gain further understanding of the role of the actor and the relationship between language and character.

**Length:** 40 minutes.

**What you will need:**
- Copies of the scene between Maggie and Brick (below).
• **With** the students in a circle, hand out copies of the following scene.

• **Tell** them you are going to try out various rehearsal exercises together, which will give them a glimpse into how an actor might start not only to understand a scene but, crucially, explore how to actually play it.
MARGARET [as Mae closes door]: I wonder what Dixie's real name is?

BRICK: Maggie, being catty doesn't help things any...

MARGARET: I know! WHY!--am I so catty?--'Cause I'm consumed with envy an' eaten up with longing?--Brick, I've laid out your beautiful Shantung silk suit from Rome and one of your monogrammed silk shirts. I'll put your cuff-links in it, those lovely star sapphires I get you to wear so rarely...

BRICK: I can't get trousers on over this plaster cast.

MARGARET: Yes, you can, I'll help you.

BRICK: I'm not going to get dressed, Maggie.

MARGARET: Will you just put on a pair of white silk pyjamas?

BRICK: Yes, I'll do that, Maggie.

MARGARET: Thank you, thank you so much!

BRICK: Don't mention it.

MARGARET: Oh, Brick! How long does it have t' go on? This punishment? Haven't I done time enough, haven't I served my term, can't I apply for a--pardon?

BRICK: Maggie, you're spoiling my liquor. Lately your voice always sounds like you'd been running upstairs to warn somebody that the house was on fire!

MARGARET: Well, no wonder, no wonder. Y'know what I feel like, Brick?

[Children's and grownups' voices are blended, below, in a loud but uncertain rendition of 'My Wild Irish Rose'.]

I feel all the time like a cat on a hot tin roof!
BRICK: Then jump off the roof, jump off it, cats can jump off roofs and land on their four feet uninjured!

MARGARET: Oh, yes!

BRICK: Do it!--fo' God's sake, do it...

MARGARET: Do what?

BRICK: Take a lover!

MARGARET: I can't see a man but you! Even with my eyes closed, I just see you! Why don't you get ugly, Brick, why don't you please get fat or ugly or something so I could stand it?

[She rushes to hall door, opens it, listens.]

The concert is still going on! Bravo, no-necks, bravo!

[She slams and locks door fiercely.]

BRICK: What did you lock the door for?

MARGARET: To give us a little privacy for a while.

BRICK: You know better, Maggie.

MARGARET: No, I don't know better...

[She rushes to gallery doors, draws the rose-silk drapes across them.]

BRICK: Don't make a fool of yourself.

MARGARET: I don't mind makin' a fool of myself over you!

BRICK: I mind, Maggie. I feel embarrassed for you.

MARGARET: Feel embarrassed! But don't continue my torture. I can't live on and on under these circumstances.
BRICK: You agreed to--

MARGARET: I know but--

BRICK: --accept that condition!

MARGARET: I CAN’T! CAN’T! CAN’T!

[She seizes his shoulder.]

BRICK: Let go!

[He breaks away from her and seizes the small boudoir chair and raises it like a lion-tamer facing a big circus cat. Count five. She stares at him with her fist pressed to her mouth, then bursts into shrill, almost hysterical laughter. He remains grave for a moment, then grins and puts the chair down. Big Mama calls through closed door:]

BIG MAMA: Son? Son? Son?

BRICK: What is it, Big Mama?

BIG MAMA [outside]: Oh, son! We got the most wonderful news about Big Daddy. I just had t’ run up an’ tell you right this--

[She rattles the knob.]

--What’s this door doin’, locked, faw? You all think there’s robbers in the house?

MARGARET: Big Mama, Brick is dressin’, he’s not dressed yet.

BIG MAMA: That’s all right, it won’t be the first time I’ve seen Brick not dressed. Come on, open this door!
• **Put** the students into pairs and tell them they have a short time to sit back-to-back and read the scene out loud together, up until Big Mama interjects.

• **They** should read it twice, firstly just to get to grips with what is happening, and then to really try and connect to their partner, even though they can't see them.

• **Bring** the students back to the circle and ask them to discuss:
  
  a) What they think is happening in the exchange between the characters.
  
  b) What does sitting back-to-back do to the way the two actors have to talk to one another?

• **Elicit**:
  
  – Increases intimacy
  
  – Less inhibition
  
  – Less self-conscious, especially about their physicality
  
  – Makes them have to really listen and respond more attentively.

• **Invite** a pair of volunteers to come into the circle and read again, but this time have the other students as the voices in the house, and invite someone to play Big Mama, calling from the circle.

  – **What** does this presence from the circle do to the pair inside it?
  
  – **Did** they feel more or less of a team?
  
  – **Did** it create more tension because they were more conscious of their need to create a private space to talk?
• It is the job of the actor to identify very carefully where and when a scene takes place, and what that location means to them.

• What are the obstacles that are created in their conversation, and what feelings are conjured for the characters?

• Let’s remember too that they are effectively trapped (imprisoned even) in this room since Brick can’t seem to leave it with his injury.

• Ask a new pair to read, but this time ask for a volunteer to do a rehearsal exercise.

• This actor is going to ‘be’ the dead Skipper and needs to lie down in the space in between Maggie and Brick.

• The actors playing Maggie and Brick play the scene again, but this time they can choose whether their attention is on the other actor or on Skipper. There is no right or wrong, it’s just an experiment.

• Stop and start the scene if the students need encouragement or support.

DISCUSSION

Discuss with the students what they all felt during the exercise.

• Could they feel how important it is to begin to identify the characters’ points of concentration?
Previous circumstances are always incredibly important, but are especially so in this play, where unresolved personal history and buried secrets give the characters their drive and the story its texture and pain.

Finish off by reminding them that these are just some of the ways of getting under the skin of a scene, engaging more imaginatively with the circumstances, and that being able to improvise in different ways through the material is part of an actor’s skill and necessary playfulness.
SESSION FOUR

**Objective:** Gain further understanding of the themes and various voices in the play.

**Length:** 40 minutes.

**What you will need:**
- Copies of the scene between Brick and Big Daddy (below) for each student.
BRICK: Big Daddy, you're on a talkin' jag tonight.

BIG DADDY [ignoring this remark]: Yes, sir, that's how it is, the human animal is a beast that dies but the fact that he's dying don't give him pity for others, no, sir, it----Did you say something?

BRICK: Yes.

BIG DADDY: What?

BRICK: Hand me over that crutch so I can get up.

BIG DADDY: Where you goin'?

BRICK: I'm takin' a little short trip to Echo Spring.

BIG DADDY: To where?

BRICK: Liquor cabinet...

BIG DADDY: Yes, sir, boy--[He hands Brick the crutch.] --The human animal is a beast that dies and if he's got money he buys and buys and buys and I think the reason he buys everything he can buy is that in the back of his mind he has the crazy hope that one of his purchases will be life everlasting!--Which it never can be--The human animal is a beast that—

BRICK [at the liquor cabinet]: Big Daddy, you sure are shootin' th' breeze here tonight.

[There is a pause and voices are heard outside.]

BIG DADDY: I been quiet here lately, spoke not a word, just sat and stared
into space. I had something heavy weighing on my mind but tonight that load was took off me. That's why I'm talking.--The sky looks diff'rent to me....

**BRICK:** You know what I like to hear most?

**BIG DADDY:** What?

**BRICK:** Solid quiet. Perfect unbroken quiet.

**BIG DADDY:** Why?

**BRICK:** Because it's more peaceful.

**BIG DADDY:** Man, you'll hear a lot of that in the grave.

*[He chuckles agreeably.]*

**BRICK:** Are you through talkin' to me?

**BIG DADDY:** Why are you so anxious to shut me up?

**BRICK:** Well, sir, ever so often you say to me, Brick, I want to have a talk with you, but when we talk, it never materializes. Nothing is said. You sit in a chair and gas about this and that and I look like I listen. I try to look like I listen, but I don't listen, not much. Communication is--awful hard between people an' somehow between you and me, it just don't—

**BIG DADDY:** Have you ever been scared? I mean have you ever felt downright terror of something?

*[He gets up.]*

Just one moment. I'm going to close these doors....

*[He closes doors on gallery as if he were going to tell an important secret.]*

**BRICK:** What?

**BIG DADDY:** Brick?
BRICK: Huh?

BIG DADDY: Son, I thought I had it!

BRICK: Had what? Had what, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY: Cancer!

BRICK: Oh...

BIG DADDY: I thought the old man made out of bones had laid his cold and heavy hand on my shoulder!

BRICK: Well, Big Daddy, you kept a tight mouth about it.

BIG DADDY: A pig squeals. A man keeps a tight mouth about it, in spite of a man not having a pig's advantage.

BRICK: What advantage is that?

BIG DADDY: Ignorance—of mortality—is a comfort. A man don't have that comfort, he's the only living thing that conceives of death, that knows what it is. The others go without knowing, which is the way that anything living should go, go without knowing, without any knowledge of it, and yet a pig squeals, but a man sometimes, he can keep a tight mouth about it. Sometimes he—[There is a deep, smouldering ferocity in the old man]—can keep a tight mouth about it. I wonder if—

BRICK: What, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY: A whisky highball would injure this spastic condition?

BRICK: No, sir, it might do it good.

BIG DADDY [grins suddenly, wolfishly]: Jesus, I can't tell you! The sky is open! Christ, it's open again! It's open, boy, it's open!
• **Tell** the students to get into pairs, find a space in the room and read the scene aloud together.

• **When** they have finished reading, they should discuss with their partner what they think is happening in the exchange.
  
  – **What** do they think each character wants to get out of the encounter?
  – **What** is each one’s objective?
  – **What** tactics do the characters use to try to get what they want from each other?

• **These** will be in the form of active/transitive verbs: to threaten, to warn, to intimidate, to charm, to warm, to tease, to provoke, to control, to admonish, to scare, to deceive, to seduce... just a few examples.

• **Bring** the students back into the circle and get them to share their thoughts so far.

• **It** will be useful here to really hone in on the idea of playing AN ACTION rather than a state. For instance, rather than playing being irritated or sad, you might play the actions to distance or to disable.

• **Ask** the students if they can see how focusing on getting something from the other person will stop the actor watching themselves or ‘showing’, and instead make them more believable and in the moment?

• **Ask** for two volunteers to come into the circle and read, sitting facing each other a metre apart and trying to be as ‘in action’ as possible.
DISCUSSION:

Ask the students what thoughts/responses they have now to the characters:

• **Can** they see how this approach might start to let the characters be more multidimensional?

• **Can** they start to identify any particular tactics that either Brick or Big Daddy might use a lot?

• **Are** there any moments in the scene which propel them into using a new array of tactics?

• **How** are they different from one another in this scene?

• **Are** there things they seem to have in common?

• **Is** this something Williams seems interested in exploring? The way fathers pass things down to their sons or the way children react to their parenting?

• **How** do they both use language? (Brick is deliberately minimal and evasive, whilst Big Daddy uses a more colloquial, idiosyncratic and verbose, even florid way of speaking.)
• Do the students have sympathy for them both or do they feel very strongly inclined towards one or the other?

• Why might Williams play with our responses in this way?

• What do the students think about Brick not revealing that he knows that Big Daddy is, in fact, dying of cancer?

• Is he too frightened to tell him the truth?

• Does he want Big Daddy to be happy for as long as possible?

• Does he somehow enjoy Big Daddy deceiving himself?

Discuss the fact that this is the start of a huge scene in which Brick is eventually forced to disclose the truth of his self-disgust, and in response reveals the truth about Big Daddy’s cancer.

• What does this knowledge do to the actors?

Discuss the tension between what the actors know, and what the characters know.

**FINAL TASK**

• To finish, ask two more volunteers to read the scene again, but this time give the actor playing Brick a small object.

• This object represents Brick’s secrets. He should try to keep the object hidden from the actor playing Big Daddy, who needs to try and get it away from Brick. (All whilst reading the scene.)

• What happened?
- An increased sense of watching and waiting?
- A stronger relationship with the idea of deception and mendacity?
- A way of leading the actor towards deeper internal preoccupations, and a life that is under the words?
- Heightened listening and observation of the other character?
- More natural and spontaneous decisions made by the actors?
- Less sense of a planned (‘rehearsed’) scene and more genuine surprises?

• **Remind** them that this is not a suggestion for how to stage the scene but a rehearsal exercise designed to release the underlying energy inside the encounter, and to free the actors to be more playful and alive with the material.