

My Mother Said I Never Should

by Charlotte Keatley



Education Pack

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Introduction

This Education Pack has been designed to support your visit to London Classic Theatre's production of **My Mother Said I Never Should** by Charlotte Keatley in 2018/2019.

Conceived primarily for those pupils studying GCSE English Literature or Drama, we hope to provide a further insight into the play and this particular production. Please feel free to photocopy information from this pack to use in the classroom or in workshops.

The Education Pack aims to cover the following points on the National Curriculum for English Literature Key Stage Three:

Pupils should be taught to read critically through:

- Knowing how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice, grammar, text structure and organisational features, presents meaning.
- Studying setting, plot, and characterisation, and the effects of these.
- Understanding how the work of dramatists is communicated effectively through performance and how alternative staging allows for different interpretations of a play.

Pupils should be able to speak confidently and effectively, including through:

- Using Standard English confidently in a range of formal and informal contexts, including classroom discussion.
- Giving short speeches and presentations, expressing their own ideas and keeping to the point.
- Participating in formal debates and structured discussions, summarising and/or building on what has been said.
- Improvising, rehearsing and performing play scripts and poetry in order to generate languages and discuss language use and meaning, using role, intonation, tone, volume, mood, silence, stillness and action to add impact.

Charlotte Keatley's assistance in compiling this Education Pack has been invaluable. She has allowed us unrestricted access to her commentary in the Methuen Student edition of the play, as well as contributing new material which aims to enable further classroom discussion.

NB; At the time of publication, London Classic Theatre are in the process of recasting the role of *Doris*. Due to ill health, the actress originally cast to play the role had to withdraw from the tour. As soon as the role is recast, we will update the pack with additional content including a finalised cast list and the new actress' perspective on *Doris*.

About the Playwright

Who is Charlotte Keatley?

Charlotte Keatley was born in London on 5 January, 1960. She read Drama at Manchester University (1979-82) before studying for an MA in Theatre Arts at Leeds University (1982-83).

Playwriting includes:

The Iron Serpent, Leeds Theatre Workshop 1983

An Armenian Childhood, Leeds 1983, with Impact Theatre

Waiting For Martin, English Shakespeare Company 1987

My Mother Said I Never Should, Contact Theatre Manchester 1987

Fears And Miseries In The Third Term, Young Vic 1989

The Ringing Singing Tree, Contact Theatre Manchester 1992

The Sleep Of Reason Produces Monsters, Leeds Theatre Workshop & Shanghai Academy Theatre 1999

Our Father, Watford Palace Theatre 2012 (published by Methuen)

I Am Janet, The Gap, Manchester, 2015

Awards

George Devine Award

Manchester Evening News Best New Play

Nominated for **Olivier Award - Most Promising Newcomer**

Time Out Theatre Award

Sunday Times Outstanding Performance Award

Prix Danube

Edinburgh Fringe First

Moliere Award nomination

EMMY for co-researcher filming in Children's Prisons in Georgia, for C4 documentary "Kids Behind Bars"

Television, Film and Radio

Charlotte has written numerous dramas for BBC Radio 4, a children's drama **Badger** for Granada TV & Film. As a journalist she has written for the **Observer**, **Financial Times**, **Yorkshire Post**, **Scotsman**, **Spare Rib**, **Performance Magazine**, **The Guardian**, and reviews for **BBC Front Row**.

Charlotte has also written and directed performance art, community theatre and plays for schools. She has taught creative writing from Burnley to Shanghai and continues to run workshops in schools, universities and for community groups of all ages on request.

She lives in Manchester, has a daughter, Georgia and goes rock climbing instead of cleaning the house.

A Timeline of the Play

- **1985:** My Mother Said I Never Should is written in August and entered for the Royal Exchange/Mobil Playwriting Competition from which it is rejected.
- **1986:** Rehearsed readings of My Mother Said I Never Should with Paines Plough Theatre Company, London and at North West Playwrights' Workshop, Manchester.
- **1987:** The play premieres at Contact Theatre, Manchester on 25 February, directed by Brigid Larmour. It wins the Manchester Evening News Best New Play Award and is joint winner of the 1987 Royal Court/George Devine Award.
- **1989:** My Mother Said I Never Should is broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 30 January, produced by Susan Hogg.
- **1989:** The play opens at the Royal Court in London on 23 February, directed by Michael Attenborough.
- **1989:** French premiere of the play at the Gaité Montparnasse in Paris on 12 September, directed by Michel Fagadou.
- **1989:** The Swedish premiere of the play opens in September.
- **1990:** My Mother Said I Never Should premieres in Holland, Singapore, Norway and the USA. It is also translated into Czech.
- **1991-1992:** The play premieres in Denmark, Finland, Australia and Germany.
- **1993:** The play premieres in Australia, Israel and Iceland.
- **1993:** My Mother Said I Never Should is designated a set text by UK examination boards for GCSE and A Level Theatre studies.
- **1994:** The play premieres in Italy, Spain, Norway and Greece.
- **1995-1996:** The play premieres in Prague and on Czech television.
- **1997:** My Mother Said I Never Should is toured by Oxford Stage Company and through produced at the Young Vic in London, directed by Dominic Cooke.
- **1999:** The play premieres in New Zealand, Poland, Ireland, and translated into Welsh, Georgian, Hebrew and Japanese.
- **2000:** The play is first toured by London Classic Theatre, directed by Michael Cabot.
- **2000:** The National Theatre named it as one of the Significant Plays of the Twentieth Century. It is studied at GCSE, A Level, Universities and Drama Schools.
- **2004-2005:** The play premieres in Japan.
- **2009:** The play is produced by Watford Palace Theatre, again directed by Brigid Larmour.
- **2016:** The play is performed at the St James' Theatre, directed by Paul Robinson.
- **2018:** London Classic Theatre revives My Mother Said I Never Should for a second national tour, again directed by Michael Cabot.

My Mother Said I Never Should is the most widely performed play ever written by a woman, having now been translated or produced in 31 countries from Japan to Peru.

Genesis of the Play

I wrote this play in 1985 when I was twenty-five. I had been making musical plays and performance art as an actor, director and designer for about four years. I had watched about 250 plays a year as a theatre critic - new and classic plays - in Britain and Europe. I had acted all sorts of parts, mostly waitresses, waifish daughters or disturbed children - the range of roles available to a small woman like myself. I had sat in dressing rooms thinking how there were a great many kinds of women who I had not seen in contemporary plays, so I decided I had better write the kind of play I would enjoy watching or acting in.

I wrote it for four women because there are so few plays for women, compared to centuries worth of plays for men to act. It is traditional to see men onstage, like Hamlet, who are supposed to represent us all. In this play it is women who represent us all, and the massive social changes of the twentieth century. I wanted to show how hugely dramatic the 'ordinary' lives of women have been. The men are just offstage, as the women are in so many other plays.

It's hard to say how long it takes to write a play. I wrote this play in about three weeks, and spent three years rewriting it. For five years I had been living in Manchester and Leeds, listening to the way women talk, women whose lives were very different from my own. I was wondering what I would do with my life and aware that I had many more choices than women in previous generations. I wanted to write a play which laid out four different lives, neither better nor worse, to find out what is possible for today. If I was writing this play now, I would do the same.

I split the century into four generations. I deliberately made Jackie and Rosie a little older and a little younger than me, because I didn't want to write from my own point of view. I connected the women as mother and daughter because I feel this relationship of love and jealousy most influences the choices a daughter makes. I also wanted to acknowledge the debt which my generation owes to previous ones. I made Jackie give away Rosie because I wanted to break the biggest taboo; a mother disowning her child.



Initially I wrote **My Mother Said I Never Should** fast and intuitively. Then I entered a process when I would stop and go over a piece of text, analysing, checking words, trying lines aloud, cutting whole scenes, adding new ones. This process continued through two readings and two productions, until I felt I had done my job. Every word in the finished text is there because it has been found useful in performance.

I felt as excited as being in love when I wrote the first draft. For a year the play was rejected by theatres, many of whom told me it was not a play because of its structure. Debbie Seymour directed a rehearsed reading with Paines Plough in London in March 1986. Ironically this fell on Mothering Sunday, so hardly anyone came. I also sent the play to Contact Theatre. Manchester. Brigid Larmour, then Associate Director, read it:

When you showed me the first draft of My Mother Said I Never Should it immediately answered something inside me. I could absorb it into my blood as it were very quickly: the characters, structure and use of time.

We worked on the play through a reading at Northwest Playwrights' Workshop, and I listened to the audience's reactions. I re-wrote Act Two through the winter, typing in a sleeping bag because my cottage was so cold. Brigid used to bring me take-out curries and read through every line with me.

Brigid Larmour directed the premiere at Contact Theatre in February 1987. Rehearsing a new play is a process of negotiation. I had a strong sense of the vision of the play I was trying to make, which is vital, otherwise a playwright can be persuaded to change his or her play into one the actors or director would rather produce. It was extremely important to me that the first production should be directed by a woman, because of the intuitive understanding Brigid and I shared, relating to the details of female experience which cannot necessarily be explained in words. Some of these are unconscious. Brigid Larmour:

As director of a new play you have to do something slightly paranormal - you have to get into the head of the writer and understand what they intend. You have to develop and push that before you can query it, criticise or make cuts. Otherwise you're pulling the play off its centre. Then, once you understand the playwright's intention you can add your own vision.

The play was scheduled for nine performance, and shared a set with two other productions, because of the financial risk of staging new plays. We had to extend the run. I remember seeing people queuing from the box office out into the street, and the following day, hearing two women discuss the play in a doctor's surgery in Gorton. They hadn't been to the theatre before.

Two years later the play was staged at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in February 1989. Michael Attenborough, Director of the Royal Court production:

Second productions are, in my experience, important events in the lives of both plays and playwrights. Naturally the first production tends to be the most formative in terms of the text itself

but a second allows the writer to return to the script with a greater degree of objectivity, benefitting also from the input of a director coming fresh to the play.

In this second production, I learned how the play text could be directed by a man. I think that that by the time the playwright has worked over the text, and through a first production, the play is like a map. I have made this play as accurate and detailed as possible so that anyone can take it and find its territory. Michael chose to cut the last child scene, whereas Charles Towers, in a Boston, USA, production, found it essential. Directors will make decision based on their personality and gender. The female unconscious and magic of this play will appear in performance because it is in the play, whether or not it is in the director.

Eleven years after writing this play, I had my own daughter. Soon after, following a divorce, I became a single parent - the one scenario you don't see in the play! Happily I brought up my daughter on my own, kept relations going with her father and his family, and created a 'family' for my daughter out of my dear friends. It's been unpredictable, adventurous and defined as we go along. She and I have an openness and honesty I never had with my own mother. I think this reflects the past 25 years: a time when family and marriage has not 'broken down' as some say, but has been re-invented, to include more people in a family unit than the traditional husband-wife-children. That unit suited the industrial society of the past 200 years, but also greatly restricted both women and men, in roles at work and at home. Now we are in a phase of social revolution.

This play continues to be performed throughout the UK, and across the world. Over the years it has been translated into 31 languages, which I never imagined happening. I receive emails and letters from people in Japan, Peru, Australia, Russia and Egypt among many other countries, telling me how much the play expresses what they are feeling and what they are going through. One was from a female Japanese student, another from a 90 year old man in Boston, another from a 16 year-old-boy in a strict Muslim family in France. I imagine that the themes in this play, of wanting to find love and independence, occur in families all around the world.

Charlotte Keatley

The Languages of Playwriting

Imagery

I started making scenes by thinking of the image which would sum up the scene. Margaret standing holding a tea towel while Jackie sprawls face down on the grass in her hippy clothes, with her transistor blaring, 'All You Need Is Love', tells the audience what is at stake in this scene, as well as the time, place and status of the characters. Every scene in the play starts with a particular image like this and ends with a contrasting one. There are also some key images during the scenes, for example in Act Two where Doris is sitting looking at her face in the salver while Rosie smooths away her wrinkles.



**Maureen Lipman as Doris and Serena Manteghi as Rosie
St James Theatre, London (2016) - Photograph ©Alex Harvey-Brown**

We remember the images of a play long after we have forgotten the words, so I began this play by trying to find an image for each scene which would sum up its meaning. I also feel that theatre works most effectively at this unconscious level, rather like dreams, where one image holds several meanings simultaneously, some of which can never be explained in words.

The end-images of scenes are more surreal, or non-naturalistic. For example, Doris dropping the basket of washing as the thunder breaks at the end of Act One, Scene Seven. These end-images are intended to float beyond the time of the scene, like images from the unconscious of the woman who stands there. For example, Jackie cradling a bundle of Rosie's clothes at the end of Act One, Scene Six, changes to an image of Margaret cradling a white bundle, and comforting it as a baby who is both Rosie and Jackie. This then becomes Margaret shaking out a sheet she is folding on summer's day, before she is even married.

In performance terms, these images need to be choreographed as carefully as the words are rehearsed. They indicate that the play is not entirely naturalistic. I didn't think about style at the time, but I suppose the play is expressionistic in its selective and heightened use of reality. This signals to the designer that if set design is cluttered, the images won't have the same impact. In my mind's eye the images glow against the dark in colour and shape, like icons of women's lives across the century.

The images are not described by stage directions, but by dialogue which leads characters into certain gestures or actions. In the process of rehearsal such images are discovered.

Costume

All clothes are a costume through which we announce a character. Some costumes are written into the play because they represent the energy or behaviour of a person. The reappearance of old clothes brings onstage a sense of a character's past behaviour. Worn by a different woman in the present, the costume creates dramatic irony. Costumes are also part of the myth-making of the play; the ski-pants in Act Two suggest different past versions of Margaret to herself, Doris and Rosie, in the present.

Women's fashion changes every half decade or so, therefore costume is a useful device to locate the time of a scene. However, I was most interested in how costume is integral to the theme of expectations: society's notion of feminine behaviour is reflected in the shape and fabric of women's clothes. Children's clothes dictate a type of girl. This is useful to the actor, because the costumes describe a body shape and way of moving which helps the actor radically change her attitude, as well as age and appearance from scene to scene.

Certain costumes are written into the play because they are necessary for the meaning of a scene. The ski-pants, for example, evoke sex, America, the fifties or mid-eighties, masculine energy and a desire to be modern - contrasted with Doris' beige skirt. All the costumes specified in the stage directions are part of the symbolic language of the play. Other costumes are decided by the costume designer, according to the style of the production.

Structure

I began writing the play by inventing the structure of non-chronological time, spliced with five scenes where the characters meet in a place outside all chronology. I had to begin with the structure, because for me it explains the intention of the play.

By structure I mean *how* the story is told; the order of scenes, the length of scenes, of acts, and of the play. This includes who we see first and last, where the monologues come, where there is a silence, or a key image. Structure fascinates me; the decisions about what to show onstage, and what to leave out, are what makes my play distinct from the way someone else might tell the same story. In this way, I feel that the structure tells the audience what a play means, far more than the dialogue within the structure, which is where we often look for meaning.

If I wrote the story of the four women and their family in chronological order then it would be a history play. I jumbled time and childhood because this is not a play about the past, but about how the past continually interrupts the present and informs our present-day decisions. I wanted to write a play which questions why certain life-changing decisions are made, rather than simply showing what happens in the story of four lives.

We read order of sequence to be order of importance. The order and amount of time given to one character or another suggests who is most important in a play, and who it belongs to. Stage time in **My Mother Said I Never Should** is structured to belong equally to four characters. When I was writing the play, I visualised it as a dance for four women.

The structure gives a play meaning even before a character speaks. The first image of the play is four girls who enter together. By showing the characters first as children, we see their potential to be equals, before they are separated, with different status, into generations of mother and daughter. If I started the play with Act One, Scene Two, the play would first belong to Doris; our first impressions of Margaret or Jackie would be that they are children, and we would not even know that Rosie existed.

The first scene also announces the conventions of this play to an audience; that actors will be playing ages very far from their own age; and that different times and generations may be put onstage simultaneously.

The rhythms and pace of the play are created by the structure, not the plot. I think of playwriting as close to music, and three acts, like three movements in a symphony, provide three overall approaches to the same themes. Act One is a jigsaw puzzle of time and information, the pace coming from the juxtaposition of different times and places.

Act Two offers a calmer unity of continuous time, and it is deliberately the only place where all four women consciously meet. The energy comes out of the clash of attitudes of the four generations.

There is a complicated internal structure of tiny scenes in Act Two, woven out of the four voices moving in and out of the room and sometimes coming together to create a crescendo.

Act Three covers a much shorter time period than Act One - six months instead of fifty years. Accelerated time creates a sense of urgency. The last two child scenes appear in this Act, bringing to a conclusion the story being told at an unconscious level in the adult characters' lives. The last scene, because it is unexpected, lifts the energy curve at the end of the play, without using a conventional happy ending.

I thought of the women as four musical instruments. If one scene is a duet, the next will be for three voices. It is easy to write a string of two person scenes, but this makes a dull rhythm and the energy of the play drops.



**Marianne O'Connor as Jackie and Paula Jennings as Rosie
London Classic Theatre Tour (2000) - Photograph ©Sheila Burnett**

The Child Scenes

The child scenes explore sex, death, gender, courtship, destiny and loneliness.

The language and body language of children is more dramatic than that of adults; and more entertaining. This does not mean the scenes should be performed as *childish*. I wanted to show how, inside the adult, the child is shouting what the adult may refuse to hear.

In my mind's eye, when I was writing the play, the child characters were huge. This happens in performance, because the children are not played by child actors, but by adults. I wanted to show older faces and bodies becoming children again to dramatise how the child is still alive inside the mother, or grandmother. As played by adults, the child scenes are part of the way I am trying to challenge our preconceptions about people. If children played the child scenes, the irony would be lost.

The Wasteground is an uncompromisingly real place, and a magic place where things can happen. The children have this ability to deal with the real and unreal together because they are not self-conscious. I set the Wasteground well away from the adult world, and from boys, to show that girls are not born good.

Each child scene sets up a major theme of the play. The only chronological storytelling runs through the five child scenes. A thematic cycle is set in motion in this way by each child scene. As it is completed, the next taboo is raised.

The emotional inheritance of women is introduced in the first child scene in two opening rhymes, and the desire to change this follows with the line, "Let's kill our Mummy". The question of how to be a woman is a continuous thread through all the scenes, changing colour between child and adult scenes, but passing unbroken from one character to another. Every scene in the play begins and ends with a line which bounces off the one before, and the child scenes are part of this ironic structure.

For example in the second scene when Doris wants to play at babies, Rosie warns her 'You have to get married first.' The scene changes and we see Margaret as a flustered mother, embarrassed and horrified by her teenage daughter's sexual adventures. Jackie sprawls on the grass, a flagrant rebel. The taboos and fears about becoming a mother, let loose by Doris and Rosie in Scene Three, run through the next four adult scenes. The warning of Rosie's line 'You have to get married first', comes home to roost in Scene Six, where we see Jackie struggling as a single mother, and Margaret unable to accept the situation.

The third child scene plays with betrayal in relationships. Jackie and Rosie play games about secrets, lies and the promises made - and broken - by girls and boys. Scene Nine follows with how the adults deal with this; the arrival of baby Rosie is masked by a telephone call conducted in the adult language of fibs and banalities. The secret festers through Act Two and into Act Three, until the outburst between Jackie and Margaret in the office, over who Rosie belongs to.

The fourth child scene, Act Three, Scene Three, stares into the cauldron of mortality. Jackie says 'You can't make someone's life go backwards.' Adult Jackie hasn't learned, or will not hear, what child Jackie knows. The juxtaposition of the child with the adult heightens the tragedy of lost relationships, lost communication.

The fifth child scene looks over the edge of death. The voice of the child goes on asking questions, inside the head of her daughter.

In structural terms the child scenes are built into the play at five points when a change of energy and pace are needed. They provide a bolder level of humour and horror, which releases the emotional tension of the adult scenes - both for the actors and for the audience. We can react more freely to the child scenes, just as the characters react more freely to events.

While the child scenes operate as the unconscious of the play, the child characters are the core material of the adults. Their ages correspond to the amount of obligation they carry; Doris is the baby, Margaret and Jackie both nine, Rosie eight.

Doris is never quite sure what is happening, and goes along with the others' decisions. Likewise, as an adult of that generation, she is the most naïve in the play. Her life choices were limited in comparison to those of Margaret and Jackie, so she never understands some of the pressures they experience. The very old and very young are often excused of responsibility in the same way. In the child scenes Doris is shooed away as a nuisance, which is what I imagine Jackie and Margaret would like to do to Doris at the beginning of Act Two. In this way the child scenes act out the subtextual desires of the play.

Rosie wants to experiment; with sex, death and birth. She is interested in touching blood, bodies, the voodoo sticks and sweet papers. She plunges into the sensory experience, where Jackie is aware of the spiritual force. As adults we see how Rosie is not afraid of expressing her feelings, while Jackie is anxious about what people will think of her. Rosie's uninhibited reactions are partly what helps her survive the great shocks she had as a teenager. Jackie's child carries responsibility for the others and for decisions, much as she does later for the family in the adult scenes. She doesn't express fear until left alone.

Margaret's child is anxious, hovering around the voodoo, interested, but afraid to try things. Margaret and Jackie are both the same age as children; the oldest and most serious.

In the last child scene, after adult Margaret has died, Jackie thinks she has lost everyone:

'The others won't play with me any more.'

Margaret has crossed the golden river - the line of death, among other things. She invites Jackie to her secret hide. But Jackie chooses to go back - an act of separation from her mother's wishes which she has so far never achieved in the play.

Margaret's death has released Jackie, but Margaret has not abandoned her. If I wrote the scene between their adult selves, it would have to be naturalistic; I could not show people who are both dead and alive. The scene would have to either be a farewell or a reconciliation, it couldn't be both. I felt this would be sentimental or contrived. Children use language full of symbols and poetry with a lightness that we hardly ever regain; it is not self-conscious.

Feminist or Not?

It is mostly men who ask me whether this play is feminist or not. Scott McCormish who ran the pizza joint next to the theatre in Boston where the 1992 American premiere was launched, told me the audience reactions as they came in to eat every night:

The women can't talk about the play enough, and the men who understand it love it, and the men who don't understand it are fearful of it.

When I wrote **My Mother Said I Never Should** I didn't think about whether it was feminist or not. I thought it was a play about life. Men have been visibly writing plays since Greek times, whilst plays by women have been extremely scarce. It is only since the 1960s that women have been visibly writing plays in substantial numbers. Some men confuse art and politics, and assume that all these plays by women must also be feminist. Charles Spencer, reviewing the 1987 Royal Court production in the Telegraph:

For reasons that are no doubt impeccably feminist, Miss Keatley has banished all the male characters from her stage. Fathers and husbands are talked about but never seen, creating a curiously lopsided impression. It is though she is favouring her audience with only one half of the story.

Surely such classic as Beckett's **Waiting for Godot**, Pinter's **No Man's Land**, Griffiths' **Comedians** and Mamet's **Glengarry Glen Ross** should also be labelled as 'lopsided impressions' of life because only men appear in these plays?

I kept the men offstage in this play because I wanted female language and silence, humour, sexiness and violence, to walk onstage in a way which doesn't happen if men are present. Some men understand this perfectly, Alan Hulme, in his Manchester Evening News review of the 1987 premiere:

Ms Keatley refuses to preach about a woman's nature and her place in the world, letting action and character speak for themselves... In this world men are banished off stage, out of sight, to cut the grass, but are rarely out of mind.

Women are used to seeing plays where men's lives are the metaphor for all people. Shakespeare wrote over thirty-five plays which, we are taught at school, cover all human experience. In fact, there is no Shakespeare play about a mother and daughter relationship. From reading classics, I understood that plays are metaphors; so I didn't write a play about four women to be read as for and about women. I saw the mother-daughter relationships as a *lens* through which to look at huge themes which concern all people.

In his Evening Standard review of the 1989 Royal Court production, Milton Shulman decided otherwise:

Ms Keatley manages to cram in a clutch of trendy and sentimental dilemmas that intrigue and bother the contemporary British female... the broken marriage, the generation gap, the single parent, the faithless husband, nursery games, family, guilt, precocious intolerance and mother love.

Some men are so used to centuries of plays written by men, that they seem unable to accept that women can write proper plays, or plays about serious subjects which concern men too. I was told by the literary director of the Royal Exchange Theatre and a BBC producer in 1985 that my play was not a play, because of its structure, and also that it wasn't about anything. Interestingly, no female director or critic has dismissed the play on these grounds. When the directors, actors, literary managers and critics of theatres have been male, for centuries, some work by women may be so far beyond the boundaries of their experience that they condemn the experiment, before it is even staged. I think the label feminist may be used for a play which breaks with tradition. That could even be a play by a man.

Why have there been so few women playwrights until now? Partly it's due to their invisibility: if they're not published, it is very difficult to rediscover them. But also, I think, it is because women are educated not to raise their voice or opinions in public. Watch, in a classroom, at a conference, in a television debate, or at a family meal, whether it is the women or men who speak first, and who tells the longest stories or jokes. Writing a play is daring to provoke a public reaction. Since the 1960s, women have taken on a public voice as journalists, politicians and playwrights. I am proud to be called feminist if it means raising a voice that has not been heard, and therefore trying to redress a balance which has been a loss to men, as well as women. After the 1992 American premiere in Boston, one man came up to me and gripped my hands:

I'm seventy-four years old, I've learned more tonight than in my whole life so far, and my marriage matured tonight.

Another man was growling to his wife. He growled into my face:

He should be locked up! The playwright, HE should be locked up!

I am a playwright because it is the best way I can respond to trying to live, now.

Charlotte Keatley

Landmarks for Women 1900-2018

1903 The Women's Social and Political Union is founded in Manchester by Emmeline Pankhurst, her daughters Christabel and Sylvia, and Annie Kearney.

1906 The National Federation of Women Workers is set up by Mary MacArthur.

1918 Women over 30 are granted the right to vote in Britain. The Parliamentary Qualification of Women Act is passed, enabling women to stand as MPs.

1920 The Sex Discrimination Removal Act allows women access to the legal profession and accountancy.

1922 The Law of Property Act allows both husband and wife to inherit property equally.

1923 The Matrimonial Causes Act makes grounds for divorce the same for women and men.

1928 All women in Britain gain equal voting rights with men.

1941 The National Service Act is passed introducing conscription for women.

1956 In Britain, legal reforms say that women teachers and civil servants should receive equal pay.

1964 The Married Women's Property Act entitles a woman to keep half of any savings she has made from the allowance she is given by her husband.

1965 Barbara Castle is appointed Minister of Transport, becoming the first female minister of state.

1967 The Abortion Act is passed, decriminalizing abortion in Britain on certain grounds. The contraceptive pill becomes available through Family Planning Clinics.

1974 Contraception for women becomes available through the NHS.

1975 The Sex Discrimination Act makes it illegal to discriminate against women in work, education and training. The Employment Protection Act introduces statutory maternity provision and makes it illegal to sack a woman because she is pregnant.

1977 International Women's Day is formalized as an annual event by the UN General Assembly.

1979 Margaret Thatcher becomes Britain's first female prime minister.

- 1980** Women can apply for a loan or credit in their own names.
- 1981** Baroness Young becomes the first woman leader of the House of Lords.
- 1983** Lady Mary Donaldson becomes the first woman Lord Mayor of London.
- 1985** The Equal Pay Act allows women to be paid the same as men for work of equal value.
- 1987** Diane Abbot becomes the first black woman member of the Westminster Parliament.
- 1990** Independent taxation for women is introduced. For the first time, married women are taxed separately from their husbands.
- 1992** Betty Boothroyd becomes the first female Speaker in the House of Commons.
- 1994** The UK starts its first 'Take Our Daughters to Work' Day.
- 1994** Rape in marriage is made a crime after 15 years of serious campaigning by women's organisations. A House of Lords ruling gives equal rights to part-time workers.
- 1997** The general election sees 101 Labour women MPs elected.
- 1998** The European Union passes the Human Rights Act, guaranteeing basic principles of life for everyone.
- 2002** Parliament passes measures allowing lesbian and unmarried couples to adopt children.
- 2008** For the first time, more women than men set up businesses in the UK.
- 2014** Shared parental leave is introduced.
- 2017** Research suggests women in the UK are more likely to start their own business than their male counterparts.
- 2018** UK companies with employees of over 250 have to declare the gender pay gap between men and women.

Before the start of rehearsals, we asked our cast for some insights about the journey ahead.

How do you prepare to play a character whose age changes a lot across the play?

Kathryn Ritchie (Jackie): *I will read the script over and over again, building myself a picture of the person she is as a girl and the woman she becomes. I find out as much information as I can about my character at those different stages of her life (her behaviour, mannerisms, views, relationships with the other characters) and then write myself a 'timeline' for her, which I can use as a starting point. The hardest part is playing the character at a radically different age to you, so you have to find a way to tap into that authentically. For the Wasteground scenes, it's actually been quite useful to watch the way my 10-year-old step-daughter interacts with her school friends - the way she talks and postures with them, the way she attempts to emulate adults - it's fascinating.*

Connie Walker (Margaret): *I try to work out as full a back history as possible with as much detail as I can imagine. I just write it down, then leave it. But hopefully it stays there and gives you a much rounded character and experience when walking on stage. I find this exercise especially useful when doing small parts, especially if not much is said about your character in the text - every part deserves the same attention. I also look for what people say about you, what they think of you, what you say about yourself. What you think and feel about yourself and others is important. This play is fantastic in the amount of detail already given for your character. And of course, there is something quite wonderful in finding the essence of a child. I really hope I can capture it - it will be fun finding out I'm sure.*

What research do you do as an actor?

Felicity Houlbrooke (Rosie): *I research the setting of the play and how that might influence the character. I watch a lot of documentaries and videos. Also: the political climate. For Rosie, and all the characters in the play, politics and society, and the enormous changes they undergo, are hugely influential so it is important to have a solid understanding of the character's attitude to aspects of the world in which they live.*

CW: *The play is so specific with our ages and in what decade, the writer has given us a gift for research. For instance I can take 1940 when I am 9 and look at history, pictures, styles, icons, music and influences of that time and feed it into my character. In 1951 I am 20, so I will look at the influences on a young woman at that time, opportunities, if any, family and society expectations, so many things we take for granted now, even oral contraception was not available then. Even for a married woman! Every decade informs how as a woman you may hold yourself, your behaviour, etiquette, dress or even style of hair for that period - obviously as the plays jumps back and forward in time it's not possible to have a 'Beehive' hairstyle and then pigtails ten minutes later but I find visual research very helpful in feeding my character and hopefully making the right choices for her.*

How does the play compare with your own family?

KR: *My gran lived to the grand old age of 91 and was a strong, stoic Scottish women, who lived through the Second World War. She was very much expected to fulfil the role of mother while my grandfather was the man who went out to work. My mum went to University and had a good career. However, when she had me and my three siblings, she had to put her career on hold while she raised her children. My father was, again, the breadwinner, often working away abroad for months at a time. When my youngest brother started school, my mum was finally able to start working again, part-time. I had a baby daughter just last year and I'm in a much more fortunate position - I have the full support of my husband to take on this job and he will do the bulk of the childcare while I am away. It will be hard being away from my daughter for days at a time, especially when I spent just about every waking moment of the first year with her, but I love my job and I'll go home as often as possible.*

CW: *I was brought up in Rochdale and Oldham, so I'm basically Lancashire working class like Doris. My aunts 'made good' in the respect that they lived through the war and were expected to marry early, have children, be a housewife. One married early but moved to Hyde in Manchester - a huge leap, much like Doris moving from Oldham to Cheadle Hulme. My wonderful Aunt Edna married late in life, her and my Uncle Roy bought paper shops, created a booming business and travelled the world many times! My Uncle will tell you to this day that she was the driving force, the business woman, she had the acumen, she had seen what women did in the war and wanted a different life for herself as a married woman. She has passed recently but still very much an inspiration to me!*

What is it which most appeals to you about the character you are playing?

FH: *I love her frankness and how she expresses exactly what she's thinking and feeling without restraint. She has enormous passion and heart. I'm also drawn to the sense of possibility fizzing within her.*

KR: *I really feel for Jackie in that she is sometimes looked on as the 'villain' of the piece because she gives her baby away. Her situation is so much more complex than that and I admire her strength to keep going and work hard despite the fact her entire life is defined by that moment. I look at my own daughter and it would break my heart to have to make that decision. Jackie does what she believes is the best for Rosie in the circumstances presented to her at the time and spends the next fifteen years yearning for her daughter.*

Why is this a good play to stage now?

FH: *Women's position in society is constantly shifting and evolving. No one generation has the same experience as the other and the play captures this beautifully. It showcases the tenacity of the women, adapting to these societal changes and challenges, but also highlights how their options and choices have expanded with time. That said, it being written in the 80s, taking a stark look at it today perhaps also serves to highlight what has not changed, and how much still has the potential to change for future generations.*

London Classic Theatre

London Classic Theatre is based in Kenley, Surrey. The company is run by Artistic Director Michael Cabot and Producer Kathryn Cabot.

Originally founded in 1993, London Classic Theatre initially produced European Classics on the London Fringe, establishing an excellent reputation and quickly coming to the attention of the national press. In 2000, London Classic Theatre was launched as a touring company, our production of David Mamet's **Oleanna** opening in the 130-seat studio at Harrow Arts Centre.

It has been a fascinating journey. Since that first appearance, we have performed to over 500,000 people at more than 250 theatres and arts centres around the UK and Ireland. The aim, expressed in our original mission statement, has always been to produce challenging, accessible drama for audiences in London and the regions. To offer our work to venues of all scales and sizes, from arts centres and studio spaces to Number One and repertory theatres. To build and maintain relationships with these venues, and most importantly, to produce theatre of the highest quality.

Recent productions include: Noel Coward's **Private Lives**, Terry Johnson's **Hysteria**, Harold Pinter's **The Birthday Party**, Samuel Beckett's **Waiting for Godot**, Alan Ayckbourn's **Absent Friends**, Joe Orton's **Entertaining Mr Sloane**, Oscar Wilde's **The Importance of Being Earnest** and Peter Shaffer's iconic **Equus**. We have also staged new translations of two 18th Century comedies, **The Game of Love and Chance** and **The Double Inconstancy** by Marivaux, as well as two UK premières, Hugh Leonard's **Love in the Title** and Joanna Murray-Smith's **Nightfall**.



Paul Sandys as Victor Prynne, Helen Keeley as Amanda Prynne
Private Lives by Noël Coward - National Tour 2018
Photograph ©Sheila Burnett

The Director's Perspective

In conversation with Artistic Director Michael Cabot.

You first directed the play eighteen years ago. What made you want to revisit it with a new cast?

It's always intriguing to go back and look at a play again, especially when there have been changes in your own life. When I first directed the play, I was in my early thirties and as an only child, had a very particular perspective on what family meant to me. Now, with three children of my own, the play resonates with me in a very different way. Revisiting a play you have directed before is like opening up a box full of keepsakes you've hidden away in an attic. As you go through the contents, you remember moments and decisions you'd completely forgotten, but as soon as they are in front of you again, their importance and value are immediately apparent.

When directing a play with a 'kaleidoscopic' time structure such as this, how do you approach that in rehearsals?

I've always planned to rehearse the child scenes first, then basically work through the play chronologically. I think it's really important to understand the children before examining the women they eventually become. More than anything, it is vital to examine the context of each scene before working on the scene itself. What has happened in the character's life in the days or months leading up to the scene? How might they have changed or grown since the last time we encountered them? What do they avoid saying or keep to themselves as well as what they actually say? It's a question of filling in the gaps and trying to give the actors as much to work with as possible, but mostly asking a lot of questions!

The cast of My Mother Said I Never Should have all worked with you before - will that affect the way you work in the rehearsal room?

As a director, I think you develop a particular shorthand with actors you know. Each of the four women in My Mother Said I Never Should have played contrasting roles for me before, so this promises to be a very different journey. None of them have worked with each other though, so part of the process will be establishing some common ground, finding out as much as we can about any experiences we have had relevant to the play and encouraging them to work closely together to feel comfortable in each other's company. I think actors who feel relaxed in the rehearsal room always produce better work. There is always pressure building towards an opening night, so it's very much my role to try and minimise the impact of that.

Michael Cabot - July 2018

Designing the play by Bek Palmer

What challenges does this play present to a designer?

The play begins in and periodically returns to a location that exists outside of naturalistic time where the women in the play all meet as children. This is a fantastical place, outside of reality. The other scenes in the play are set in realistic spaces and times from the women's lives. My challenge was to create a space that can accommodate these different scenes. There were many options to consider, such as dividing the performance space into different areas, having complete scene changes or having scenery that can be used in different ways to suggest different locations. Another challenge is that while the actors each play one character, but we meet them at various different stages in their lives. This is a challenge for costume to help the audience see what age the character is meant to be and at what period of history they appear, in each different scene.

Is it difficult to design a set for this play which can also tour?

Touring shows go to a variety of spaces with different dimensions and dynamics. You can't always achieve the same aesthetic in every space, so there needs to be a degree of flexibility involved. While the majority of theatres we will visit are traditional proscenium arch spaces, the production will also play in the round, so my set needed to accommodate this fairly significant change. It was important to me that the space I created was self-sufficient, so that everything the actors need is within their grasp, so even though the actors are in a different building from one week to the next, the world they inhabit on stage essentially remains the same. I also wanted to allow the lighting designer to have scope to really influence the shape and tone of each scene and this inevitable changes in each venue we go to.



My Mother Said I Never Should - Set Model 1:25

Suggested Activities

The following suggestions are a guide to stimulate discussion for students before and after seeing the production.

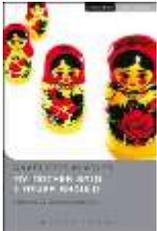
Before seeing this production

- In groups, read through the *Significant Landmarks for Women* and discuss how life as a woman was different for each character depending on their generation and the era in which they grew up.
- Look at Act Two of the play and examine how these generational differences cause conflict between the characters. How does Charlotte Keatley dramatise the conflict? Think about structure, language and costume. Refer back to Charlotte's commentary and analysis for help. Discuss the themes of relationships and jealousy between mother and daughter.
- Discuss the themes of motherhood and the 'working mother' - how do the generational differences affect the paths each of the characters follow? Does any character achieve both a career and motherhood or is there always a sense of compromise or sacrifice? Give examples from the text.
- Look at the Wasteground scenes - choose one character and discuss the differences and similarities between the 'child' and the 'adult version'. Analyse the text and discuss how language is used to convey this.
- If Rosie were to have a daughter, she might have been born at the turn of the new century. Discuss how a child of your generation might look back on the lives of Doris, Margaret, Jackie and Rosie and what new challenges does the 21st Century offer to women?

After seeing this production

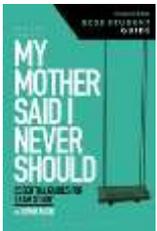
- Discuss the set and costume in the production - how were these used to emphasise the core themes of the play?
- Choose one character and discuss whether seeing the play performed has changed your opinion of them. How is the language on the page affected by an actor's reading of it?
- Were there any surprises seeing the play in live performance? Discuss if you think the characters lived up to your expectations of them?
- If you were asked to direct the play, what would your concept be for **My Mother Said I Never Should**? Which particular aspects of the London Classic Theatre production did you especially like and which do you think you could improve upon?

Further Reading



My Mother Said I Never Should, with commentary and notes by Charlotte Keatley, is published by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.
ISBN: 978-0-413-68470-7

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/my-mother-said-i-never-should-9781350010222/>



My Mother Said I Never Should - GCSE Student Guide with notes by Sophie Bush is also published by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
ISBN: 978-1-474-25166-2

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/my-mother-said-i-never-should-gcse-student-guide-9781474251662/>

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