

LEARNING SUPPORT PACK

HELVER'S NIGHT



'I declare that there is disorder here! Things can't go on like this, can't go on...You must have some training. You must learn everything.'

Ingmar Villqist's *Helver's Night* is a thrilling and gut-wrenching play that charts the relationship between Carla and her young charge, Helver.

Helver is fascinated by fascism – not by the ideology, which he is unable to grasp, but by the bravura of the movement. As a violent occupying army rampage through his town, will Helver become a victim of this fascination?

From the winners of the Young Angels Award 2014, director Hal Chambers' and designer Zoe Squire's bold creative vision thrusts the audience into the heart of the conflict.

Helver's Night is ideal for Key Stage 4 and 5 pupils studying a range of subjects including History, Politics, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, European Studies, Theatre Studies and Drama. We believe strongly in the value of pupils experiencing live, challenging and inspirational theatre. These visits can inspire learning and discussion long after the event. *Helver's Night* will act as a spring board for many curriculum-linked topics. This pack aims to support teachers with suggestions for classroom provocations and follow-on work.

Index

Page 3 – DETAILED SYNOPSIS

Page 5 – NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

Page 6 – IMAGES FROM THE DESIGNER

Page 7 – WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITY (PRE-SHOW)

Page 8 – POINTS FOR DISCUSSION (POST-SHOW)

Page 9 – FURTHER READING

SYNOPSIS SCENE-BY-SCENE

- Early evening. An industrial town in Europe. Carla waits for Helver to return home. She cooks dinner for him in the kitchen of her small apartment. Outside the sounds of soldiers marching, dogs barking and glass smashing can be heard. These noises continue throughout the play. She is uneasy.
- Helver, dressed in military uniform and with a banner in hand, returns home. He is very excited about the large amount of soldiers outside. Despite Carla's protestations he won't eat any dinner. Instead he tells her about how he had met Gilbert and his soldiers. Together they had shared pea soup and schnapps. It is clear that Helver has been very impressed by these soldiers, especially by the act of burning down the local shop. He goes on to report the beatings and murders he had witnessed with zeal, seemingly unaware of the seriousness of the incidents.
- Helver's excitement grows and he tells Carla how he was trained by Gilbert. He insists that Carla must learn too and so begins a brutal training regime. Carla is forced to do press ups, march, hide under the table and stand to attention. Helver revels in his dominance as the game of role-play becomes more menacing.
- Carla, now exhausted, attempts to escape but Helver stops her. His mind seems confused as he starts talking to her as though *he* was Carla and they were preparing to visit a doctor. She dutifully plays along with the new role-play. Helver then puts on the voice of a doctor and asks Carla questions. He begins to lose his trail of thought until he is gripped with terror and the role-play ends. He hugs her.
- After a brief respite Helver then turns on the radio. A military march bursts from it and Helver dances around the apartment, bashing pots and pans around the room. She turns the radio off but Helver turns it back on again. A moody, emotional waltz plays and he forces her to dance together.
- The song reminds Carla of her ex-husband. Helver talks about the photograph he has seen of Carla's wedding day.
- Carla flies into a fit of rage when she thinks that Helver has been looking through her old photographs. She frantically searches for her little box full of her old memories. Gripped by a notion that Helver has thrown them away she screams at him in rage, threatening to take him to the clinic and leave him there forever.
- Helver reveals that he has kept all of the photos and memorabilia and gives them back to Carla. He just took the little box for the soldiers.

- Helver politely asks Carla about her ex-husband. She reveals the truth about their separation. She and her husband had a disabled baby daughter (which she affectionately calls her 'little monkey') but her husband didn't want her so Carla took her away to an institution and left her there. Afterwards her husband left Carla and the people of the town shunned her. She regretted giving the child away and searched all over the country for her but to no avail. A doctor in an institution in Ellmit revealed that the little girl had died. As Carla was leaving the institution she met Helver, who was much younger then, and asked the doctor if he could come home with her. She would look after him back at her apartment and they have lived together ever since.
- Just as she is finishing her story, rocks are thrown through their window and land in the kitchen. Then there is a hammering on the door. Terrified that the occupying soldiers will come in and take them away, she moves the table in front of the door.
- Carla prepares Helver for escape. She dresses him in his full military uniform (so he will blend in with the other soldiers) and tells him to run to the train station and get a train to Ellmit where he can return to the institution. Upon leaving he tries to say how much he loves Carla, although he struggles to find the words. Helver leaves.
- Carla is left alone in the apartment. At first she starts packing a suitcase but as the noises outside become more and more distressing she decides to give up. She can hear a figure approaching the door outside. Just as the door opens the electricity fails and the lights go out.
- Helver has returned. He was recognised on his way to the station and badly beaten by the other soldiers and thrown into the back of a truck full of mentally disabled people from the town. Helver bravely escaped from the truck (that was probably en route to a death camp) and ran home to Carla.
- Realising that they only have a few minutes before the soldiers track Helver down Carla decides to take fate into her own hands. She sets up a game of 'building blocks' with Helver's pills. Under Carla's instruction he makes many different arrangements with the pills before swallowing a fatal amount. As he gently passes out of consciousness he calls Carla 'mummy'. He dies.
- Carla desperately laments his death.
- There is a heavy knocking at the door and more stones are thrown through the window. Carla knows that this is the end. As the door flies open Carla steps beyond the world of the play and stares at the audience. The sound of her murder can be heard although we do not see it. The sound of the waltz fills the stage. It plays on as the audience leaves the theatre, in the foyer, in the theatre cloakrooms and even outside the theatre.

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR, HAL CHAMBERS

Helver's Night is a play by Polish writer Ingmar Villqist set within one small apartment as an occupying army rages outside in the town. It is an intense play that takes place in real-time and features two characters, Carla and Helver. A terrifying fascist army has recently occupied the town and appears to be rounding up any non-conformers or undesirables. We have been researching the occupation and subsequent clearing or 'cleansing' of Polish towns during the Nazi invasions as a reference point. Here are some of my notes on how I plan to stage the show:

CHOICE - audiences will be invited into the theatre and offered the chance to wear a beret - this choice may influence the way they watch and react to the story as it progresses. How will they reflect on that choice at the end of the play? Have they been unsuspecting co-conspirators?

3D EXPERIENCE - before entering the set, the audience will walk through a section of a backstreet outside of the apartment - where they can hear marching, beatings, gunshots, barking dogs and trucks.

SENSES - to illuminate the claustrophobic and tense atmosphere the designer, Zoe Squire, and I are creating a rich and dynamic theatrical world that requires the audience to use all of their senses - we want to bring them into the heart of the action and not let them off the hook. Upon entering the space they will smell burning rubber and smoke. They will then enter through the apartment's front door. They will smell the musky interior, Carla's perfume and soup being cooked.

IN-YER-FACE! – bringing the audience close to the action and immersing them in the world. The audience sits close to the actors in Carla's dingy apartment surrounded by four walls.

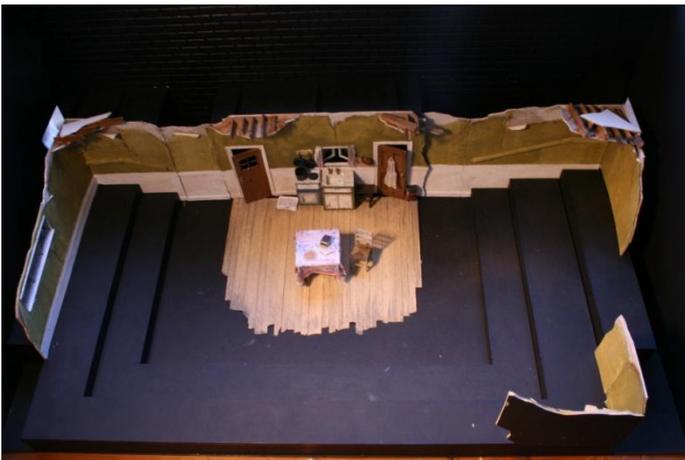
SOUND - composer, Benjamin Hudson, will be creating a 3D soundscape so it will feel like the rampaging soldiers are surrounding the audience. We will place hidden speakers in and around the set to create a truly immersive experience. Some audience members may here some things that others won't, depending on where they sit.

HIDDEN PERFORMERS - the secret use of an ensemble, two actors will create some of the soundscape live. They will be running up and down outside the apartment, throwing things in through the window and hammering on doors. These actors will be selected from drama students at the University of York.

IMAGES FROM THE DESIGNER, ZOE SQUIRE

Reference images: please visit Zoe's Pinterest Board <http://goo.gl/pJQXe2>

Model Box



Costume



PRE-SHOW WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITY

Read attached extract of the first few pages of the play, when Helver first returns home to Carla after meeting the invading troops in his home town.

Questions to trigger debate/activity:

- *What is going on outside in the town? Make a list of all of the descriptions mentioned in the script and debate what is happening.*
- *Discuss the relationship between HE and SHE.*
- *How does each character use language and rhythm differently to express themselves?*
- *The writer describes the setting very creatively. If you were designing the play, how would approach it?*
- *If you were the composer, how would you use sound to create tension in this section?*

POST-SHOW POINTS FOR DISCUSSION BY SUBJECT

Drama & Theatre Studies

How could you stage Helver's Night in order to create the maximum amount of tension?

If you could stage Helver's Night in a non-theatrical setting where would you choose to place it and why?

Imagine you are casting professional actors in the roles of Helver and Carla. What attributes would you be looking for in each performer and why?

Sound is a very important element in this production of Helver's Night. If you were the composer for the play how would you approach the soundtrack and why?

History

What kind of event do you think is unfolding outside the apartment? Find evidence in the text and draw up a theory.

Does it make you think of any real events in history?

Politics & Sociology

Which elements of the fascist soldier's behaviour influence Helver during the play?

How do the events outside of the apartment influence the events unfolding inside?

What is the social standing of women within the world of the play? Use the evidence in the play to try and understand their role.

Philosophy

What is the role of faith or religion in the play?

Psychology

Study Helver's behaviour and the way Carla interacts with him. How does their relationship operate?

What was the attitude to mentally disabled people in Poland/Eastern Europe in the 1930s/1940s?

European Studies

How can you link the 20th century history of Poland to events that unfold in Helver's Night?

Could Helver's story happen today?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING/WATCHING

Books

ORDINARY MEN by Christopher Browning
THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT TIME by Mark Haddon*
EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE by Jonathan Safran Foer
SCHINDLER'S ARK by Thomas Keneally*
THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS by John Boyne*
T4: A NOVEL IN VERSE by Ann Clare Lezotte
THE THIRD REICH 1919-1938 by Andrew Rawson
WHAT IS MADNESS by Darian Leader
OF MICE AND MEN by John Steinbeck*

Plays

GHOSTS by Henrik Ibsen
THE SEAGULL by Anton Chekhov
PIRANHA HEIGHTS by Philip Ridley
CHILDREN OF THE SUN by Maxim Gorky
THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT TIME by Mark Haddon, adapted for the stage by Simon Stephens

Documentaries

on the following fascist regimes:
Nazi Party/Adolf Hitler
Benito Mussolini (Italian dictatorship)
Francisco Franco (Spanish dictatorship)
Darwinism (Survival of the fittest)

Films

OF MICE AND MEN
SCHINDLER'S LIST
THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS

**Also appears as play and/or film*