



Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Australian Theatre for Young People present

TUSK TUSK

By Polly Stenham



Photo: Grant Sparkes-Carroll

PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

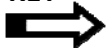
- About Sydney Theatre Company 2
- About STC Ed 2
- About ATYP 2
- About the playwright 3
- Creative Team and Cast 4
- Themes 4
- Synopsis 5 – 6
- Historical and social background 7

PRE-PRODUCTION EXERCISES

- Stenham in the spotlight 8
- Smile for the camera 9 – 10
- Listen to the language 11 – 14

Education Resources compiled by Education manager **Naomi Edwards**, Education Coordinator **Toni Murphy**, Editor **Lucy Goleby**, Contributors **Jeffrey Dawson**, **Michael Mitchell** and **Elizabeth Surbey**

KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

TUSK TUSK

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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

www.atyp.com.au/index.php/about-us/mission-and-vision

ATYP is a Sydney-based theatre company exclusively devoted to young people. We are driven by the idea that the arts can inspire creative, courageous and confident young people wherever they are and whatever they want to be. We believe that the arts have the power to transform lives, enrich communities and ultimately impact upon the future of our nation. Our work is motivated by the need to improve access for all young Australians to share their stories and participate in the arts regardless of economic or geographical barriers.

At the heart of our company lies collaboration between professional artists and young people. For over 40 years ATYP has forged pathways for young people to learn and create alongside the best national and international theatre artists, reaching over 6,000 young Australians each year through a diverse program of workshops and productions. Working together we create inspiring theatre that engages with contemporary social issues and provides a space for young people to celebrate their creativity and Rise Up and Act!



POLLY STENHAM'S CAREER TIMELINE

- 2005** Joins the Royal Court London's young writers programme and starts her debut play, *That Face*.
- 2006** Leaves university to concentrate on playwriting.
- 2007** The Royal Court stages *That Face* to critical acclaim, earning Stenham several awards.
- 2008** *That Face* transfers to the West End and Stenham is commissioned to adapt it into a film.
- 2009** *Tusk Tusk* is performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

“

MAGGIE

Being a girl
is a fucking mission.

”

Act One, Scene One
Tusk Tusk

Polly Stenham pocketed the word precocious when *That Face* opened at the Royal Court in 2007. Her portrait of a family in Freudian meltdown was hailed as an astonishing, groundbreaking debut. The multi award-winning production, starring Lindsay Duncan as an alcoholic, addled mother, transferred to the West End for another sell-out run. Her follow-up play, *Tusk Tusk*, opened at the Royal Court in May, 2009.

“ **POLLY STENHAM**

The expectation was mammoth. I was in rehearsals all day, writing all night, and by the end I was this shaky little wreck. The Royal Court had to put me to bed at one point.

”

Stenham dedicated *That Face* to her dad, and credits him with instilling in her a love of theatre. However, she always wanted to write novels, not plays, and so commenced a degree at UCL in English. Writing *That Face* when she was accepted on a Royal Court writers' programme meant she 'fell' into playwriting. She says, “and I feel so lucky I did. It makes sense of the world. And even if it didn't, it just makes me so happy.”

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CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Shannon Murphy

Set Designer – Jacob Nash

Costume Designer – Bruce McKinven

Lighting Designer – Verity Hampson

Composer/Sound Designer – Steve Francis

CAST

Krew Boylan

Airlie-Jane Dodds

Marta Dusseldorp

Kai Lewins

Miles Szanto

Zac Ynfante



THEMES

Friendship, family, solidarity, solitude, isolation, childhood, responsibility, independence, survival, mental illness, black comedy, coping mechanisms, the verge of adolescence, parenting, absenteeism, themes and issues that are equalising across the social classes, rejection, fear, denial, confrontation.

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15-year-old Eliot, 13-year-old Maggie and their younger brother Finn have been left alone at their new home, surrounded by unpacked boxes. It soon becomes clear that this is not the first time. Their father is dead, and their mentally ill mother seems to make a habit of disappearing. The children have mobile phones, which they check anxiously and constantly. Maggie and Eliot try to keep Finn happy, calm, and quiet, aware that if anybody realises they are without parental supervision, they will be taken into care and the three of them will be separated.

As **Act One** opens, Maggie has discovered £200 in the packing boxes. She and Eliot chatter nervously, reassuring each other their situation is temporary. The children sleep through the day. As the sun sets, Finn wakes up ready to play, and Eliot returns with Chinese takeaway for breakfast. Eliot tries to convince Finn to eat, while Maggie tries dialling their mother's phone again...and again. As Maggie begins to look for their mother's phone charger, she sees Finn has used blue paint to cover the walls, and their mother's clothes.

Act One, Scene Two hears the neighbour from upstairs, demanding through the door to speak to their mother about Finn's habit of peeing on his bushes. Maggie and Eliot force him to leave. Later, Maggie finds the charger: proof that their mother has disappeared, rather than plan an absence. She and Eliot discuss calling an adult. Maggie gets upset, but Eliot convinces her they should view their unsupervised state as a holiday in their new home. They have almost agreed to wait until Eliot's birthday when he gets a text message from a girl he met the night before. He leaves Maggie to look after the sleeping Finn while he goes out to have sex "while it's still illegal". Hours later, Eliot and his new girlfriend, Cassie, arrive home, waking Maggie, who is furious at the imposition of somebody new. The shouting wakes Finn up. He and Maggie play until Finn falls from the table and splits his head open. Cassie and Maggie are determined to take him to the hospital, but Eliot refuses, reminding them they will be split up if the authorities discover the absence of their mother. As Maggie and Eliot soothe Finn, Cassie quietly leaves. Maggie sings to Finn as the first act closes.

Act Two is eight days later and the children have unpacked enough to make the flat appear semi-domesticated. The three of them sit in front of a birthday cake wearing party hats. There is a knock at the door, but to the children's disappointment, it is not their mother, but Cassie, with a birthday present for Eliot. The children play musical statues, and Eliot sends Maggie and Finn into the basement as their punishment for moving. As Maggie and Finn cry to be let out, it turns midnight, and Eliot realises their mother is not coming home for his birthday. Cassie tries to release Maggie and Finn, but Eliot is drunk and becoming angry. Eventually, Cassie leaves.

Ten minutes later, a furious Maggie is berating Eliot for locking them in the basement, showing him that a terrified Finn has wet himself. Finn's fear and Eliot's denial further enrage Maggie, who breaks their taboo to talk about their mother's mental illness, drug addiction and terrible parenting. Maggie tries to call somebody, anybody, to take control of their situation, but Eliot breaks both of their phones to stop her and then leaves.

The next morning Eliot returns. Finn reveals that he snuck out the back door while Eliot was out and Maggie was asleep, and went to beg food from the corner shop. Eliot refuses to believe Finn, and hits him. He turns on Maggie, who has applied their mother's lipstick and perfume. The three of them discuss their future, and their mother's suicidal past, until Maggie reveals her true fear: that Eliot will leave just like their mother. A phone rings: their mother's phone, which Finn had discovered in a packing box. They listen to the voicemail from Katie, a friend of their mother's, announcing her intention to visit that afternoon.

Scene Eight heralds the arrival of Katie and her husband Roland, who are greeted by a hungry but silent Finn. Eliot emerges from the basement, and attempts to convince the adults that Maggie and their mother are shopping. Katie notices the badly healing cut on Finn's head, and takes him to the car for first-aid. Roland probes Eliot until Maggie emerges, bleeding, from the basement. Katie re-enters, concerned about the children after talking to Finn. Against Eliot's warnings, Maggie reveals the truth about their missing mother. Eliot turns on Roland, accusing him of playing a role in their mother's disappearance. Horrifying secrets spill forth from Roland and Maggie, until Katie takes control. She and Roland go to the car to collect Finn, who enters alone. As the sounds of Katie and Roland's arguments float into the flat, Eliot steals Roland's wallet and convinces Maggie that the three of them should run.

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

“

ELIOT

If some kids came in with a
bleeding seven year old
without a parent in sight
I'd ask bloody questions.

”

Act One, Scene Four
Tusk Tusk

22-year-old playwright Polly Stenham says the idea for *Tusk Tusk* arose directly out of her first play. Stenham wrote *That Face* when she was only 19. The production transferred from the Royal Court to the Duke of York's Theatre, making Stenham the youngest playwright in the West End since Christopher Hampton in 1966.

Tusk Tusk is almost a companion piece to Stenham's debut play, *That Face*. In the first play, there was also a mad mother and two teenage children, but eventually

the father comes returns from Hong Kong and rescues the children. The situation of the children in *Tusk Tusk* is worse: there are no parents at all. Stenham says the idea from *Tusk Tusk* came from *That Face*.

“

...I was very struck by the last image being a brother and sister alone in a flat, and I was very interested in siblings, that was the thing. I just think it's the most incredible relationship because it can be anything, the most important person in your life, or nothing. So I wanted to put a blowtorch on it and see what it could take.

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/mar/22/polly-stenham-interview

”

Stenham says her interest in pursuing the themes of *That Face* stemmed from the reactions of audience members to *That Face*.

“

I saw a grown man standing outside in the West End crying his eyes out. A silver-haired man in a suit, just crying and crying, and I watched him from across the road. It was a really weird feeling – like shooting a bullet and it going all the way round the theatre and then you're seeing it hit someone and thinking, 'Oh God. It's so much more common than people realise, manic depression, but it's taboo.'

”

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AIM: To learn more about the young playwright behind *Tusk Tusk*.

Polly Stenham's parents divorced when she was about 13. Polly and her sister Daisy were brought up by their tycoon businessman father, Cob. Stenham attended Wycombe Abbey and Rugby public: both expensive English boarding schools. Stenham had an excellent relationship with her father, but her mother, Anne O'Rawe, a painter, is a different matter. Polly has said that she has not seen her mother for years.

One review of the Royal Court's production of *Tusk Tusk* writes,

“ Polly Stenham ... makes us wonder what writing material there was in the lives of her generation from boarding school — children from wealthy but deeply dysfunctional families, adults who were off the rails with drink, drugs, divorce and mental health issues. ”

www.curtainup.com/tusktusk.html



Read the Guardian's interview with Polly Stenham.

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/mar/22/polly-stenham-interview



Imagine you have been asked to write a play for a professional theatre company.

List the themes you would want to write about.

Discuss

1. Would you share much of yourself and your life in your writing?
2. Is theatre a successful medium for getting stories across to an audience?
3. Is theatre is a good forum for discussing intimate or taboo themes?
4. What makes theatre accessible?
5. What makes theatre intimidating?

“ **POLLY STENHAM**

Because the theatre is very extreme. If it's crap, it's so crap but if it's good, it's the best way of telling a story ever, because it's live in front of you and it touches you in a way that I don't think the flatness of a cinema screen or the distance of a book perhaps can. ”

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/mar/22/polly-stenham-interview



AIM: To investigate the publicity image used for marketing *Tusk Tusk* to Australian audiences.

Sydney Theatre Company: *Tusk Tusk*



Photo: Grant Sparkes-Carroll
<http://sydneytheatre.com.au/2010/next-stage/tusk-tusk>

WHO ARE THESE KIDS?

This photograph of a young boy besmirched with blue paint in front of a birthday cake is the publicity image used by the Sydney Theatre Company to market *Tusk Tusk*.

The image below of a young boy swinging from a chandelier was used by The Royal Court to market their premiere production of *Tusk Tusk* in London.

Compare the two promotional images.

Discuss

1. Which image do you prefer? Why?
2. What kind of play would you expect to see, if the only information you had was the STC image?
3. Would you expect to see a similar or different play if you only saw the Royal Court image?
4. What themes and issues do the different images provoke?
5. What do you think may have been the reasons of the two different marketing teams for choosing their respective images?

The Royal Court: *Tusk Tusk*



www.royalcourttheatre.com/whatson01.asp?play=5401

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PUBLICITY SHOOT

Imagine you are one of the subjects of one of the above images

Write a diary entry about your experience of the photo shoot.

Start with a date and place to give your diary entry context.

Reflect on your thoughts and feelings on getting 'into character' for the photos.

Describe the physical action of the shoot.

Consider whether you are satisfied with the final photo as a representation of your character.

Interpret this diary entry as a scene for performance.



MODEL ME

Watch this clip from Australia's Next Top Model Season 2 Photoshoot 4

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYkkC92yUO8&feature=related

Discuss

1. What are the difficulties the models face in trying to get the best shot?
2. What are the differences between an actor taking publicity shots in character and a fashion model photoshoot?
3. Which do you think is harder? Why?

Find a publicity photo of an actor in character, advertising a film or play.



WORK IT

Choose one of your favourite plays.

Research the main themes of the play.

Decide how you would interpret and stage the play.

Identify the personality traits of the character that you want to exhibit in the photo.

Set up your own publicity photoshoot, where you will pose as one of the characters.

Ensure that your final photo is a good representation of your character.

Provide your potential audience with a clear insight into the themes of the play.

Demonstrate your artistic vision in relation to how, where and when you intend to set the play.

Remember this photo will be used as a publicity image, so it needs to have a defined message.



AIM: To uncover the way actors and playwrights create and vary meaning in dialogue.



Every time we speak, we are not only conveying a message in through what we say, but also in the way we say it and the choice of words we use to convey our meaning. Our tone changes when we express different emotions. A sentence can have different meaning based on how it is said.



SAY IT AGAIN

Take the following sentence: “I’m fine. Thanks for asking”.

Speak this statement in as many varied ways as possible.

Imagine that you are talking to a friend every time you say it.

List ten potential meanings for the sentence depending on the different ways you say it.

Change the person you are imagining you are speaking with to someone further removed.

For example, someone who is angry at you, your best friend’s mum or a sporting coach.

Speak the line with the intention to convey the same message.

Discuss

1. What changes did you make in tone, speed of speech or volume when you were changing the meaning of the sentence?
2. What changes did you make in tone, speed of speech or volume when you changed the person you were speaking to?
3. Which method of speaking seemed the most authentic to you? Why?





REWORK A CONVERSATION

Record a normal conversation with a small group or a partner.

Improvise and be as natural as possible.



Be patient: when you first press the record button your conversation will be a little bit awkward and forced, but eventually something you are interested in will become the topic of conversation and your fear of being recorded will disappear as you relax

Write a transcript of the best (and most natural sounding) 45-60 seconds of the conversation.

Title each member of your group with a letter, instead of using names, so that the group that gets your transcript doesn't know who spoke which part.

Rehearse a reading of your transcript and present it to the group.

Discuss the way the conversation was presented in the live reading.

Then

Listen to the recording.

Identify words or phrases that were presented with a different emotion in the live presentation and the recording.

Discuss

1. Did the meaning or motivation behind any of the lines change from the recording to the live read?
2. How did the changes affect the overall meaning of the piece?
3. Was there a similarity amongst the group when comparing the recordings to the readings?

“

MAGGIE

I'm in a bad Enid Blyton novel.

Act One, Scene Two
Tusk Tusk

”



VOICEMAIL

Select one of the following scenarios:

Scenario 1: You have been caught shoplifting and you are at the police station being charged. You have to work at your part-time job in half an hour, but you are being held at the police station.

OR

Scenario 2: You have been caught cheating in an exam. Your punishment is that you are no longer allowed to represent your school in your chosen sport.

Imagine that you are either in the police station or in the principal's office.

You have been left alone in the office to make some phone calls to your parent/guardian, your boss or coach (depending on which scenario you have chosen) and your best friend.

Unfortunately no one is answering.

Record a voicemail to explain your situation.

Try to do this in one take. (After all you only get one chance in real life).

Consider

1. How would you feel in this situation?
2. How would you want to make each of the people you call feel?
3. How might the person's opinion of you change once they hear the message?
4. What do you think their various reactions might be?

Then

Write a transcript of this recording.

Outline your artistic vision for an actor performing the voicemail, and what you would hope their character could achieve from this voicemail in a few sentences.

Add stage directions regarding your own characterisations.

Include suggestions on how you think the person on the other end will react.

Then

Swap transcripts with a partner.

Read your partner's transcript in a way that meets their artistic vision.

Try to meet your partner's objective for a few reads.

Read it again, changing your interpretation to shift the relationship or status between the characters.

Change the emotion behind the voicemail.

For example, if your partner was sorry for what they'd done, you might make them scared or defiant.

Decide on your preferred interpretation of the transcript as your character.

Share this presentation with your partner.

Seek their feedback on your interpretation.

Discuss

1. What do you think these activities have to do with the nature of acting?
2. What do you learn from activities like these that make them important training tools?
3. What did you learn from this activity?
4. How it will influence your acting in the future?

WRITE A SCENE

“ **ELIOT** Come on troops. This isn't the spirit. Let's take check.

Finn Bar, slightly ruffled but still in fighting form,

Maggie could do with a proper night's sleep but otherwise,

we're ok, aren't we? We've still got some money. ”



Use the above quote from *Tusk Tusk* as the starting point for a written or devised scene.

Write or perform your scene in two contrasting genres.

For example, gothic, crime fiction, horror story or soap opera.





AIM: To investigate the build-up of tension and suspense through the slow release of information and fact.

In a review of a Melbourne production of Stenham's first play, *That Face*, Alison Croggon wrote,

“ Stenham appears to be that rarest of beasts, a natural dramatist. ”

The Australian, Monday, May 17, 2010

This assertion would also appear to be true of *Tusk Tusk*, as Polly Stenham cleverly builds suspense and tension by slowly revealing pertinent plot details to the audience.



Read the excerpt below from the opening scene of *Tusk Tusk*.

Discuss



1. What feelings do the setting details evoke in you, both as written stage directions, and when watching STC's/ATYP's production?
2. What atmosphere is Stenham establishing by opening the play with the image of a young girl standing on a table, clutching a stack of money?
3. How is this image contradicted when Maggie starts screaming, ostensibly at seeing a mouse?
4. How do these strong, conflicting images preface the story that is to unfold?
5. Is there one clear point when the audience realise the severity of the children's situation?
6. How does Stenham create such a searing representation of mental illness without the children's dysfunctional, drug addicted mother ever being seen on stage?
7. In Act One Scene Four, Maggie and Eliot speak of their mother's old boyfriend 'Posho Rollo' (Roland) and "what he did to her". How do you interpret this conversation once you discovered more information at the end of the play?
8. Can you think of other examples of information that is gradually revealed?
9. How does Stenham balance the slow trickle of detail needed to build tension with the possibility of boring or losing her audience?



The following is a list of some of the props as they emerge chronologically in the play.



- a dead mouse
- a mobile phone
- two hundred pounds
- a Twix
- Chinese takeaway
- a gun
- a mobile phone charger
- blue paint
- a small lamp
- an envelope
- a crown
- cider
- cigarettes
- shattered china
- a cheap strobe
- a multi pack of crisps [chips]
- a comic and a sandwich – gifts from Eliot to Finn
- a backpack

“

ELIOT Drop it. Drop it right now. I don't like it.

MAGGIE Fine. Keep sleepwalking Bambi.

”

Act One, Scene Three
Tusk Tusk

Discuss

1. How do each of the props above drive the narrative further?
2. How do the props represent or reflect the children's situation and state of mind?



Choose two props from the list above.

Devise a scene that culminates with the revelation of one of the chosen props.

Then

Place all of the props in a box at the front of the stage.

Select two players to improvise a scene.

On a verbal cue from a separate player, the players onstage must take it in turns to grab a random prop from the box and justify its inclusion into the scene.

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2

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**ACT ONE
SCENE ONE**

Setting: Early morning. Present day. The open plan living room of a flat in London. The front door leads directly into the room, as is the custom with town houses that have been divided into two living spaces. There is a kitchen area and a trap door that leads down into the basement. Closed floor length curtains mask a large window leading out to the garden. A further door leads on to adjoining bedrooms. The inhabitants have only just moved in. White moving boxes take the place of all furniture and furnishings with the exception of a large wooden table, a sofa and a dirty light fixture hanging from the ceiling. There is one mobile phone on the table.

The stage is dark. MAGGIE lets out a piercing scream. The lights go up.

We see MAGGIE a girl of fourteen standing petrified on the table. She is clutching a sheaf of money. As ELIOT enters she stuffs it into her pocket.

ELIOT charges in ruffled from sleep. At fifteen he is still more of a boy than a young man, but only just.

ELIOT What is it? What happened?

MAGGIE I saw/

ELIOT What?

MAGGIE A mouse

ELIOT Is that it? Is that all?

MAGGIE Well it could have been a rat

ELIOT I thought someone had broken in or/

MAGGIE I swear it looked at me

ELIOT Shut up

MAGGIE Right at me with its beady little eyes. Ugh.

ELIOT Don't be such a girl



AIM: To explore alternative endings for *Tusk Tusk*, and the possible future for Eliot, Maggie and Finn.



PLAY BUILDING

Create the world of the characters with some simple but effective props.

Improvise a different final scene for each of the following options

1. The three children choose to stay.
2. Maggie stays, and Eliot and Finn leave.
3. Maggie and Finn stay, and Eliot leaves.



Consider

1. Who says or does what to convince the others?
2. What is the reasoning the characters give to justify the different outcomes?
3. Do the children make a decision, or does an external circumstance interfere?
4. What is the reaction of those left behind (including Katie and Roland)?

Then

Storyboard a scene set in the future of Eliot, Maggie and Finn.

Assume the play did end as it is written, with the children leaving together.

Decide how long after the conclusion of the play you are setting your scene: One week, one month, one year, ten years later.

Ensure you are maintaining the characters and plot lines established in *Tusk Tusk*.

Develop your scene for performance.



In a review of a Melbourne production of Stenham’s first play, *That Face*, Alison Croggon writes of her belief that performers and directors of *That Face* need to have an understanding of the pathologies the play explores. Does this sentiment apply to *Tusk Tusk*?





CONTAINS SOME COARSE LANGUAGE



Tusk Tusk contains some coarse language, which perhaps gives an audience greater insight into the past, present and future of Maggie, Eliot and Finn. The crude and perhaps age-inappropriate language also provokes an audience's appreciation for the children's combined and individual outlook on the life they have been dealt.

Discuss

1. Were you offended by any of the language in the play?
2. Do you think there were some audience members who would have been offended by some of the language?
3. Would your reaction have been different if the characters were your own age or older?
4. How would you define 'swearing'?
5. Why do we swear in our own lives?
6. Why do you think Maggie and Eliot swear?
7. Why do you think some people find swearing offensive?



Find a play that has a scene with swearing in it.

Conduct a reading of the scene.



Discuss

1. Are the swear words in the scene nouns, verbs, adjectives or pronouns?
2. Do they change or enhance what the character is saying?
3. Do they help to convey emotion?
4. Are there any characters that don't swear?
5. What does this say about them?

Then

Remove the swear words.

Read the scene again.

Discuss

1. How did the lack of swearing change the scene?
2. Were the characters' intention and emotions heightened or lessened?



DEBATE IT

TUSK TUSK

2

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Break into groups of four.

Prepare an argument either for or against one of the following debate topics.

Ensure there will be a team arguing both sides of each topic.

Set yourselves a time limit.

Each speaker must include discussion of *Tusk Tusk* and at least one other play to support their argument.

Adjudicate the debate as a group.

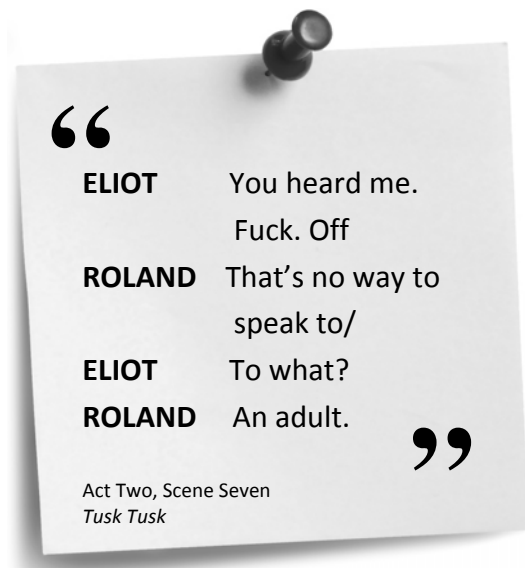
Topics

“There is a time and place for swearing, but the theatre isn’t it.”

“*Tusk Tusk* should be seen by people of all ages.”

“Swearing is only written into plays to shock or offend. It serves no other purpose.”

“Contemporary plays that do not contain swearing are not a true representation of the real world or modern society.”



SHOW IT



Come up with a one-sentence viewpoint of how the group feels about swearing in the theatre, based on the information and opinions raised in the debates.



Use your sentence as a foundation to explore the nature of swearing in the theatre and how it affects the presentation of a play.

Write a mini-essay using twitter or facebook status updates.

OR

Create a visual representation through comic strip, installation artwork, public art, billboard, collage, photo essay, performance piece.

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AIM: To discuss *Tusk Tusk* through the lens of fairytales and nursery rhymes.

FAIRYTALES FOR ADULTS

It has been suggested that *Tusk Tusk* is something of a fairytale for adults. Fairytales, as well as myths and legends, were (and still are!) often used by parents to teach their children morals and life lessons, as well as a convenient 'scare' tactic to ensure good behaviour.

Brainstorm the origins and evolution of fairytales.

Choose one popular fairytale.

Research the original version.

For example, Grimm's story, or perhaps a legend told by an indigenous people.

Compare the original to a contemporary interpretation.

For example, a Disney film or television animation.

Create a photo essay, cartoon, mobile phone film or other visual representation of the role of fairytales in teaching children.

Discuss

1. What do we know of the original purpose or moral of your chosen fairytale?
2. How do fairytales deliver a message or lesson on how to live?
3. How did fairytales become stories suitable for children?
4. What difference does a 'happy' ending make to an audience's interpretation of the fairytale?
5. How do you interpret the ending of *Tusk Tusk*?
6. Do you believe the children leaving together is a happy or sad ending? Why?

“

MAGGIE It's like a ghost story without a ghost.

ELIOT It's your imagination.
Rein it back. Rein it back.

”

Act Two, Scene Seven
Tusk Tusk





Read *Classic Fairy Tales Are Good for Children* by Dr. Larry Taylor, 2007.

www.goodreads.com/story/show/9002-classic-fairy-tales-are-good-for-children

“ When children hear stories about the trials, tribulations, successes, and failures encountered by the heroes of fairy tales, they are better prepared for the trials, tribulations, successes and failures that they will encounter in ‘real life’...

...Because fairy stories are set in times long ago and involve circumstances unlike real life, every child immediately recognizes that these are fantasies. Moreover, they are psychologically honest and helpful fantasies that allow the child to deal with inner struggles that would be far too frightening to admit consciously...

...Far from causing fears, phobias, or nightmares, the gruesome stuff in the stories speaks to a child’s sense of justice, and along with the invariable happy ending, assures the child that good will ultimately triumph over evil, and she will never ultimately be alone...

www.goodreads.com/story/show/9002-classic-fairy-tales-are-good-for-children ”

Discuss



1. Do you agree with Dr Taylor’s assertion that fairytales are good for children?
2. Why or why not?
3. Do you believe children can recognise the difference between fantasy and reality?
4. How do Maggie, Eliot and Finn realise their situation is real?
5. What children’s films or books have you seen/read that you thought were inappropriate for children?
6. Do you believe form, content, characterisation or underpinning moral has a bigger influence on what is considered appropriate?



Research the legislation surrounding classification in Australia.

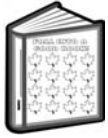
www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Classificationpolicy_Classificationlegislation

Assign a classification to the production of *Tusk Tusk*.





Write your own version of a well-known fairytale that contains a message or moral for adults.



Consider

Peter Pan



Peter Pan Trailer (2003)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TongJJMgBeY

1. Can you think of people with a 'Peter Pan' outlook on life?
2. How are those people 'enabled' to avoid adulthood by those around them?
3. How does the broader society support or ostracise those with a 'Peter Pan' outlook?
4. Can you ever really stay young and avoid growing up?
5. How are we forced to leave childhood behind?

Hansel & Gretel



World's Greatest Fairy Tales: Hansel & Gretel

www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqfOb8Yrqr0&feature=related

1. Who sent them away, and why?
2. What are the parallels between *Hansel & Gretel* and *Tusk Tusk*?
3. What would have happened if Gretel didn't eventually push the witch into the oven?
4. Is this a tale about stranger danger or the dangers we find at home?

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs



Fairy Tales - Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9APL5LeQnyY

1. Can you think of anybody in contemporary society persecuted for their beauty?
2. How hard is it to stay innocent and 'good' in a situation like Snow White's?
3. Who does the fairytale Prince Charming represent in reality?
4. What are the parallels between *Snow White* and the reality TV show, *Beauty and the Geek*?

Beauty and the Geek (UK) - Opening Credits



www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsZIVwLxfe8

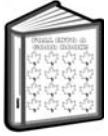


NURSERY RHYMES AND GAMES



Where the Wild Things Are

Maggie and Eliot try to create a fun imaginative word for Finn by treating him as Max, the protagonist of *Where the Wild Things Are*.



Watch the trailer for the film *Where the Wild Things Are*, directed by Spike Jonze 2009, based on the children's picture book by American writer and illustrator Maurice Sendak, 1963.

Where the Wild Things Are - trailer

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsZXKLtDb-k



“

ELIOT I was modernising the story.

MAGGIE I'm sure Sendak will be delighted. What next? Max the terrorist? 'Where the crack dealers are'

”

Act One, Scene Two
Tusk Tusk

List other games or rhymes played or referenced in *Tusk Tusk*.

For example, “Let the wild rumpus start” says Eliot in Act Two, Scene Eight.

Consider the excerpt from *Tusk Tusk*, Act Two, Scene Five (below)

British theatre critic Michael Coveney wrote in a review for *The Independent* that the title, *Tusk Tusk*, is “an oblique reference to the nursery rhyme in which Nellie the Elephant packs her trunk and trundles off to the circus.” www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/first-night-tusk-tusk-jerwood-theatre-upstairs-royal-court-london-1660124.html



Discuss

1. Why do you think Stenham used *Where the Wild Things Are* as the basis for the game between the children?
2. How do the refrains of nursery rhymes and children's books create atmosphere?
3. How does the Nellie the Elephant nursery rhyme compare with the role of the absent mother in the play?
4. Do you agree that Polly Stenham used the title *Tusk Tusk* to refer to Nellie the Elephant?
5. Could you argue the title is intended as example of parental or adult disapproval, as an onomatopoeic “Tsk Tsk”?

TUSK TUSK

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ACT TWO

SCENE FIVE

...

ELIOT (*sing song*) Ellie the elephant packed his trunk

CASSIE I can hear them, they're trying to get out/

ELIOT and said good bye to the circus

CASSIE let them out/

ELIOT Off he went with a trumpety trump

ELIOT Did your Mum ever sing that to you? Or Dad. You have a Dad don't you.
A dad an a half....

CASSIE Where's your Dad Eliot?

ELIOT Barely remember him. Cancer. Fucking cliché.

CASSIE And your Mum?

ELIOT It should be Nellie the elephant. I only worked that out at school. It was a sad day that. I thought the song was about me.

Beat

Nellie the elephant. Ellie the animal. Trapped in your hot car.

...



AIM: To explore Australian plays and novels about kids in similar situations.



MEET THE KIDS

Map a profile of one of the children in *Tusk Tusk*.

Compile three quotes said **by** your chosen character, about themselves – their state of mind, or personality.

Choose three quotes said **by** your character that reflects their perspective on the situation.

Include three quotes said **about** your character, to gain an understanding of their role in family dynamic.



COMPARATIVE TEXTS

***The Kid* – Australian play by Michael Gow**

The Kid is a classic Australian text that follows the stories of a motley group of teenagers who leave their country town for a vague notion of a 'better' life in the city. The struggles of the characters demonstrate parallels with the children in *Tusk Tusk*, perhaps prefacing the future for Eliot, Maggie and Finn.



***Tomorrow When the War Began* – Australian novel by John Marsden**

This novel began a popular series that focused on a group of young people learning to survive on meagre supplies and intuition in a dangerous and isolated environment. The particular parallels with *Tusk Tusk* include the fear of the unknown, the credibility of the incredible happening, and a pseudo family trying to stay together.

***Lord of the Flies* – novel by William Golding.**

Lord of the Flies discusses how culture created by man fails, using a group of British schoolboys stuck on a deserted island who try to govern themselves, with disastrous results.



Watch The Simpsons episode based on *Lord of the Flies*

www.wtso.net/movie/11-The_Simpsons_914_Das_Bus.html

TUSK TUSK

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“

ELIOT

If some kids came in with a
bleeding seven year old
without a parent in sight
I'd ask bloody questions.

”

Act One, Scene Four
Tusk Tusk





Use *The Kid*, *Tomorrow When the War Began*, *Lord of the Flies* or another comparative text.

Come up with a list of similar characteristics between *Tusk Tusk* and your chosen text.

For example, lack of an authoritative figure, isolation, youth.

Outline various scenarios that you could use to frame these characteristics.

Write a short story or scene between characters that find themselves in different circumstances, but with similar concerns to those on your list.

Consider

1. How did they come to be in their predicament?
2. What obstacles are placed in their way?
3. What is it that interests an audience in stories like these?
4. Where would you draw the line between 'incredible' and 'not believable'?

CLASS

In a review of an Australian production of Polly Stenham's first play, *That Face*, Alison Croggon writes,

“

The [class difference] resonance simply doesn't translate to Australia: yes, we have class in our society, but it's quite a different deal here. We might even have colonial imitations of the British class system, but they don't function in the same ways or with the same codes.

<http://theatre-notes.blogspot.com/2010/05/review-that-face.html>

”

Discuss

1. With its focus on the psychodrama of a middle class family, do you think *Tusk Tusk* could be set in suburban Sydney and played with Australian accents?
2. Does the British context of *Tusk Tusk* resonate with Australian audiences? Consider the allusions to Harry Potter, Enid Blyton novels, *Lord of the Flies*, Eliot telling Maggie she looks like, and is named after, Margaret Thatcher, Eliot's own namesake, the poet T.S. Eliot.
3. How do expressions such as “wench” or “arrows tipped in wit” translate?
4. Can you imagine an Aussie teenage girl exclaiming, “There's an armada in my head”?
5. How do you interpret the references in the play to American popular culture such as *Rambo*, Bruce Springsteen's song 'I'm on Fire' and the film *Forest Gump*?



MAJORITY RULES

Tusk Tusk is a play about children forced to grow up long before their time. In the play, there is no parental influence or direction to help, guide or restrict Maggie, Eliot and Finn.



Imagine that you have been left alone in the house for a day with \$100 to spend as you please.

1. **Compose** a shopping list with a budget that outlines roughly how much each item costs.
2. **Draw** up a basic schedule that outlines how you would pass the time.

Then

Imagine that you have been left alone with \$100 to last you a week.

3. **Compose** a shopping list with a budget that outlines roughly how much each item costs.
4. **Draw** up a basic schedule that outlines how you would pass the time.

Then

Imagine that you have been left alone with \$100 to last you a month.

5. **Compose** a shopping list with a budget that outlines roughly how much each item costs.
6. **Draw** up a basic schedule that outlines how you would pass the time.

Then

Form teams of three.

Now imagine the \$100 has to be spent between the three of you.

Use the information on your individual lists to make a new list that represents the values of the entire group.

Justify your opinion of how the money must be spent.

Agree on how the money would be spent in a day/week/month.

Then

Each team presents their ideas to the whole group.

Decide on a final definitive shopping list that reflects what every member of the group wants to do with the money.

Note: the group must reach a consensus and a conclusion without any outside influence.

Come up with some rules for the proceedings to follow so that no one is disadvantaged.



Discuss

1. Did the various teams come up with similar or different ideas?
2. If you were to write your own list, how similar would it be to your team's, and your group's?
3. How did you resolve any disagreements in your team?
4. What were any poor choices you felt the team made?
5. How did you respond to anyone in your team making you particularly angry or frustrated?
6. How was order maintained in your team?
7. How did the dynamic shift when you were discussing as a larger group?
8. Was one process more democratic than the other? Why or why not?
9. Where else could an activity like this be used?

In *Tusk Tusk*, Maggie represents the need for order and logical thinking whereas Eliot is more reckless and self-centred.

1. Were there more Eliots or Maggies involved in your decision-making?
2. How did this affect the outcome?

“

MAGGIE It's bill money, Eliot.
It's not for crap.
It's for emergencies.

ELIOT Well, we don't have any
bills to pay, do we. We only just
got here.

”

Act One, Scene One
Tusk Tusk