



Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Queensland Theatre Company present

No Man's Land

By Harold Pinter



PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

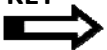
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Education Resource written by Kerreen Ely-Harper and compiled by Education Coordinator Toni Murphy

KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

NO MAN'S LAND

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ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Michael Gow

Designer – Robert Kemp

Lighting Designer – Nick Schlieper

Composer & Sound Designer – Tony Brumpton

CAST

Hirst – John Gaden

Spooner – Peter Carroll

Briggs – Andrew Buchanan

Forster – Steven Rooke



THEMES

Black Comedy

Belonging

Memory & Aging

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Act One Summer, Night

Hirst, a wealthy and successful essayist and critic has invited a poet, Spooner to his apartment in Hampstead Heath, having picked him up in a public bar. Hirst offers Spooner a drink. Spooner accepts and thanks Hirst for offering him a safe haven. Spooner discusses the demise of the English language, tells Hirst he's no longer interested in sex and recalls mutual acquaintances and relationships of the past.

Do the two men know each other? Maybe, possibly.

It becomes apparent that Spooner is a failed writer acknowledging that he now works as an attendant in a pub. Hirst, having drunk too much, is put to bed by his two servant-bodyguards, Foster and Briggs.

Spooner, is left alone-with the door locked.

Act Two Morning

Soon night becomes the morning after.

Spooner is served a breakfast of eggs and champagne. Hirst with renewed energy greets Spooner as a long lost Oxford school friend. They share memories of the past, Spooner describes a painting he never painted and Hirst recounts his drowning dreams. Spooner plays along, hoping that he will be able to win Hirst's confidence for personal gain. He tries to undermine Foster and Briggs offering himself up as an alternative carer. Finally Hirst, declares Spooner an imposter "This is outrageous! Who are you? What are you doing in my house?"

Spooner asks can he live with Hirst and be his secretary offering to rejuvenate Hirst's literary career. Hirst dismisses him asking 'to change the subject'.

Spooner retreats to silence.

Hirst feels the cold of winter coming and orders the curtains drawn, before he finally slips into 'the icy and silent' no man's land – the metaphysical halfway place between life and death.

Consider

Truth in drama is forever elusive.

Pinter, 'Art Truth and Politics'
Nobel Prize Lecture, 2005

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

Harold Pinter was a playwright, poet, screenwriter and political activist. He created a unique dramatic style in the thirty or so plays he wrote. He was mostly concerned with metaphysical questions of human existence, notions of truth and death and the dramatization of uncertainty, of the unknown and unknowable.

Pinter was influenced by Shakespeare, Ernest Hemingway, Franz Kafka and American gangster films. Although regarded as part of the absurdist movement, he described his theatre as realist. Playwright's Samuel Beckett and David Storey were Pinter's peers both sharing his absence of literal meaning, underlying menace and use of alienation techniques.

Pinter's work has been compared to the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, in his representation of a seemingly realistic setting on the surface with speech evasions marked by silences and pauses that mask deeper conflicts and anxieties of the human condition.

Pinter's second wife, the historian and biographer Lady Antonia Fraser, described the pause as "the curse of Pinter." Pinter often complained that his pauses were misunderstood. After attending a rehearsal for a production of "The Homecoming" he thought ran an hour too long: "They took my word 'pause' literally," he said. "It was an extremely tedious enterprise."

Key features of his drama writing style include:

- minimalism, few characters, economic staging;
- everyday situations gradually become menacing or strange;
- unexplained character motivations, no background information;
- highly constructed dialogue where silence (and the pause) is integral;
- constant sense of foreboding;
- uncertainty of time, of place.

'Pinteresque', 'Pinterism', 'Pinterian', 'Pinterishness' have become common adjectives with which to describe the work of Pinter in the wake of his popularity and the cloning of his techniques by other dramatists.

In 2005 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

References

Harold Pinter, 1930- 2008, New Theatre Quarterly, 2009 *Harold Pinter: Demolition Man*, John Lahr, The New Yorker, December 2007
<http://www.johnlahr.com/pinter.html>

On Pinter

Harold's plays are like most men's poems

Peter Hall

In Pinter's world, people are always vying for territory – asserting their right to invade another's boundary and slyly threatening to subordinate them to their will.

Charles Marowitz

Pinter's plays, offer 'no exhortations, no admonitions, no solutions, no common ground among people'.

John Lahr

Every syllable, every inflection, the succession of long and short sounds, words and sentences, is calculated to nicety. And precisely the repetitiousness, the discontinuity, the circularity of ordinary vernacular speech are here used as formal elements with which the poet can compose his linguistic ballet.

Martin Eslin



Additional Resources

Pinter's website
www.haroldpinter.org

Biography
<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/hpinter.htm>

Antonia Fraser, *Must You Go?* 2010

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An Overview of Harold Pinter's Career, Elyse Sommer, 2008

<http://www.curtainup.com/pinter.html>

No Man's Land Television Adaptation 1978



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-pmsk8g1s8>

Pinter's Nobel Lecture 'Art, Truth and Politics' 2005

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY2Z27Y-HJE>

Critical Reference Works

Conversations With Pinter, Mel Gussow, 1994

Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre, D Keith Peacock, 1997

Reviews of Previous Productions

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2008/oct/08/pinter>

Pinter as Poet

Pinter In Verse: a selection of his poetry The Guardian, 2008

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2008/dec/26/pinter-poetry>

Performance of Pinter's Poem 'A Celebration' by Colin Firth



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yApYA3WUcdg>

Pinter as Political Activist

David Edgar, *The Guardian*, 2008

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/dec/29/harold-pinter-politics>

Oliver Kamm, *The Times*, 2008

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article5398006.ece>

Harold Pinter's politics: a silence beyond echo, Charles Grimes, 2005



AIM: To understand and apply key features of Pinter’s drama and literary techniques and devices.

The Pause: Pinter’s Curse

The author has decreed where the pauses are. It’s our job to find out why they’re there.

Peter Hall

“One pause is quite unlike another pause,” Pinter said suddenly as we were talking, then stopped. “There, I just paused. That didn’t take me very long. A pause can be a breath. What it has to do with is thought: what has just been said and how to respond to what has been said. Pauses are not musical devices. They should be natural.”

John Lahr



“

SPOONER

What a remarkably pleasant room. I feel at peace here.

Safe from all danger.

Act 1
No Man’s Land

”



Discuss these statements with reference to your understanding of the dramatic function of Pinter’s use of the pause.

How do you play a Pinter pause?

How do you make sure you don’t pause for too long, or not long enough?



The Pause Exercise

Read the scene extract aloud and ignore the pauses.

Act 1

HIRST: What was he drinking?

SPOONER: Pernod.

Pause

I was impressed, more or less at that point, by an intuition that he possessed a measure of serenity the like of which I had never encountered.

HIRST: What did he say?

SPOONER *stares at him.*

SPOONER: You expect me to remember what he said?

HIRST: No.

NO MAN’S LAND



Pause

SPOONER: What he said...all those years ago...is neither here nor there. It was not what he said but possibly the way he sat which has remained with me all my life and has, I am quite sure, made me what I am.

Pause

And I met you at the same pub tonight, although at a different table.

Pause

And I wonder at you, now, as once I wondered at him. But will I wonder at you tomorrow, I wonder, as I still wonder at him today?

HIRST: I cannot say.

SPOONER: It cannot be said.

Pause



Re-read and incorporate the pauses as scripted.

Re-read and pause as scripted, but this time wait until you feel you want to speak.

Notice when you most feel the desire to break the silence.

Compare & Discuss the differences between the three approaches to performing the pause.

Reflection

What other literary devices does Pinter utilize in the scene to create mood and dramatic tension?

Consider

Punctuation

Word usage – word play

Assonance – repetition of a vowel sound

Alliteration – repetition of the same sound at the beginning of words

A,B,C

I always start a play by calling the characters A, B and C.

Pinter

Pinter often started with a 'neutral script' which was a map or template for a dramatic script. Gradually he would add more information as the characters and relationships between characters became clearer.

There is no correct way to perform a neutral script and no two scenes will ever be the same. The advantage of working with a neutral script is you are free to interpret and create your character's background, motivation and situation.

Truth & Surprise

Create your own 'given circumstances'.



Given Circumstances are a blueprint for developing a character.

- Who? Who are the characters? Names, ages, gender, occupation etc?
- What? What is happening in the scene? What does your character want?
- When? When is the scene set? Time of day? Night? Season? Past, present, future?
- Where? Where is the scene set? Place, environment, inside, outside?
- How? How do your characters respond to each other? How will you stage the scene? How will your choice of style affect the scene – melodrama, absurdist, gangster?
- Why? Why do the characters say what they say? Do what they do?

#1 Scene

A: Hello
B: Hello
A: How are you?
B: Fine
A: You're late
B: Am I?

Use silences and pauses as often as you like

Explore Pinter's concept of truth in drama as being 'elusive'

B is telling the truth
B is lying
Does A believe B? Or not?
How does B respond?

Add an optional line

#2 Scene

A: Hello
B: Hello
A: Have you been here long?
B: I have to go
A: Optional line
B: Optional line

- +
- Extension
Using Scene #1 and #2 as templates (OR write your own neutral script)
- Add** a third character C
 - Add** optional lines
 - Add** a non-verbal action
 - Add** an action - kiss, fall, sneeze, some-one singing, a scream or shout, a laugh, a cry
 - Add** locations, roles and relationships:
 - A & B are father and son (or mother and daughter)
 - A is deceiving B
 - C is a doctor
 - It's set in a retirement home
 - Add** a fourth character D (with reference to *No Man's Land's* schema)
 - A & B are two writers
 - A is rich and famous
 - B is poor and unsuccessful
 - A is lonely
 - B is looking for a home
 - C & D are A's carers
 - It's set in A's living room

Performance Reflection

How do the actors play the pauses in the STC production? Too long, too short, just right?

What is your favourite moment of silence in the production?

References

Chris Thompson *A Neutral Script*

<http://australianplays.org/script/ASC-605/extract>

Anne Bogart *Viewpoints*



AIM: To understand and examine Pinter's underlying tone of menace through his use of narrative dislocation.

No man's land. The name given to the area between hostile lines of entrenchments or to any space contested by both sides and belonging to neither.

Brewer's Dictionary Of Phrase & Fable



Research the saying 'No Man's Land'

Find 3 images depicting 'No Man's Land'

Find/Create 3 images depicting your interpretation of a contemporary 'No Man's Land'

Write a creative response entitled 'No Man's Land'



Two Places At Once

Improvisation where two separate stories overlap.

Avoid blocking by accepting the offers made by the other character without giving up your given circumstances.

A is waiting at a bus stop.

B enters and believes the space is a living room.

A is sunbathing at the beach

B enters and believes the space is a busy traffic intersection

A is painting a mural in a city laneway

B enters and believes the space is a hospital emergency ward

A is on a boat

B enters and believes the space is a space-ship

A is in the outback
B is enters and believes the space is a television studio



Menace

Repeat the 'Two Places At Once' scenarios (Or create new ones)

Add a tone of menace by creating a mood of uncertainty in the characters.

Use silences and pauses as often as you like.

Give the characters a secret motivation that is not revealed to the other character.

For example:

A is waiting at a bus stop.

B enters and believes the space is a living room.

A is a gangster on the run

B is an alcoholic

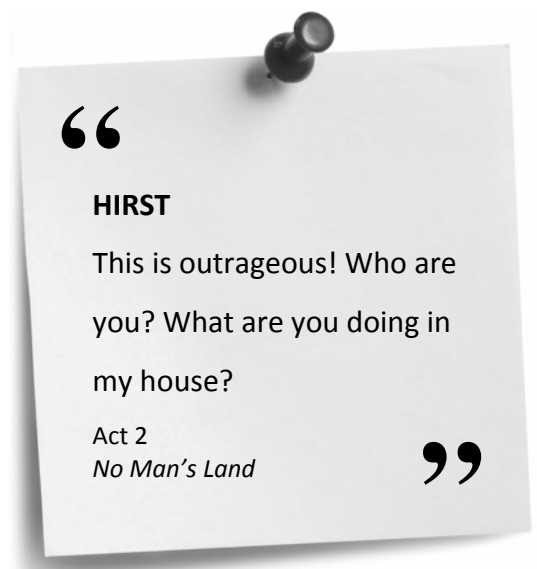
A is sunbathing at the beach

B enters and believes the space is a busy traffic
intersection

A is an undercover detective

B is dying of cancer

Compare & Contrast the initial scenes with the added unspoken secrets.



+

Extension

Begin the scene with A speaking Hirst's line 'This is outrageous! Who are you? What are you doing in my house?'

Reflection

How successful were the actors in maintaining uncertainty and playing comedy with menace? What skills are required to maintain a tone of menace and not let an absurd dramatic situation just become conventional comedy?

Reference: *Brewer's Dictionary Of Phrase & Fable*

Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre, Keith Johnstone

Performance Reflection

Why is the play entitled 'No Man's Land'?

How do the two stories of Spooner and Hirst overlap?



AIM: To explore and respond to *No Man's Land's* themes of aging, memory, isolation and dislocation.

Pinter is the champion of tolerance and compassion in the brutal jungle of life, the seeker after clarity in the confusions of memory.

Peter Hall

British Director, Peter Hall directed the original production of *No Man's Land* at the National Theatre in 1976.

Discuss his description of Pinter's works with reference to the themes in *No Man's Land*.

Social Life



Watch Pinter's interview with American TV Host, Charlie Rose
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXwdCZoQ7S8>



Discuss Pinter's interest in 'social life' with reference to his representation of life as uncertain and truth as unknowable.

Take a small notebook (like the one Pinter shows us in his interview with Charlie Rose)

Record overheard conversations and sounds in public and social places.

Note key words, phrases, vocal tones and speech patterns, emotions and feelings, silences, pauses, the different and similar ways people speak depending on their age, gender, social and cultural background, and how environment and place can effect conversations.

Write a short creative piece based on these overheard conversations.

Share & Present your work to the class for feedback and discussion.

“

BRIGGS

I've seen you before

Act 1

No Man's Land

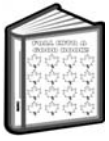
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Reflection

What observations can you make about Australian social life?

What do you notice about the way people talk? What they say? What they don't?

Brutal Jungle of Life



Research the phrase and concept 'The Tree Of Life'

Draw a timeline of your life journey to date – list significant dates, events, milestones.

Add to your timeline obstacles and challenges you have faced.

Note your successes and failures.

Reflection

What has been your most important life experience so far?

What has been your greatest learning?

What do you want to know more about in life?

Discuss the jungle as a metaphor for lifes' uncertainties.

Brainstorm ideas of how to represent Pinter's world as a 'brutal jungle'

Make a collage entitled "The Brutal Jungle of Life", incorporating quotes from *No Man's Land*, Pinter's other plays, poems, Noble Speech etc.

OR

Create Group Physical Body Sculptures/Tableaus depicting life's journey as a jungle.



+

Extension

Discuss & Incorporate into your Jungles of Life, the challenges and obstacles faced by older and aging members of Australian society.

Performance Reflection

What vision of English social life does Pinter represent in *No Man's Land*?



AIM: To evaluate how the production elements contribute to an audience's appreciation and understanding of how a play is interpreted by a director and production team.

'The world in *No Man's Land* is a halfway house between life and death'.



Discuss this statement with reference to how the STC and QUT production elements contribute and combine to represent the metaphysical world of *No Man's Land*.

Consider the design, staging, costume, sound, lighting, acting style, and directorial approach.



How do we get a sense of a specific place and time through the production design?

List three elements that create a sense of place.

List three elements that create a sense of time.



How do the physical elements of the production effect the behaviour of the characters?

How do they effect the choices made by the actors and director?

Consider

Texture

Staging & Space

Sound & Silence

Colour

Style

Light & Dark

Set & Props

Image

What historical period is being represented in the play?

How does it effect the values and behaviours of the characters?

Smashing The Mirror

When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror - for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us.

INSERT PLAY TITLE HERE

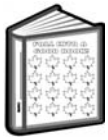
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Discuss this statement by Pinter in his Nobel Prize Lecture (2009) on the role and responsibility of the writer to ‘smash the mirror’ in pursuing the truth.

Who is telling the truth in *No Man’s Land*? Who is not?

How does the way an actor speaks generate a sense of character?

How does language create a sense of character?



Compare and Contrast Spooner and Hirst, Hirst and Briggs, Spooner and Foster, Briggs and Foster.

Consider

1. Physical traits – age, physique, body type, vocal characteristics, unusual marks, qualities, behaviors.
2. Social traits – manner of relating to other characters, intensity (or lack of) in relationships between the characters.
3. Psychological traits – how does the character think? Simple or complex, fast or slow, insightful or shallow, telling the truth or not?
4. Moral traits – is the character good or evil?



Extension:

How different and similar are Spooner and Hirst’s needs and wants?

Post-Performance Reflection

By journeying into another world we can learn about our own.

List three things you learnt about the world portrayed in the play.

What does the director want you to think about?

“

SPOONER

May I say how very kind it was of you to ask me in?

Act 1
No Man’s Land

”



AIM: To explore and evaluate how Pinter creates a dramatic memory landscape through language and imagery.

The Physical Climate & the Psychological Climate

The characters of *No Man's Land* are marooned in a no-man's land "which remains forever, icy and silent".



Discuss Pinter's reference to the physical climate as a metaphor for the psychological world represented in the play.



Make a collage that expresses the external physical climate in the play – the transitions from night to morning, from summer to winter. Use drawings, fabric, wood, metal, paper, pictures from magazines, newspapers etc.

“ **HIRST**

There are places in my heart...where no living soul...has...or can ever...trespass.

Act 2
No Man's Land

”

Consider the effect of the play's physical world on the characters' behavior and values.

Make a collage that expresses the character's inner psychological landscape.

+ Extension:
How does the characters' social class effect the way they behave towards each other?

Living Memory

To appreciate Pinter's choice of words to describe the unreliability of memory

Read this excerpt from the play.

HIRST

But I hear sounds of birds. Don't you hear them? Sounds I never heard before.

NO MAN'S LAND

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I hear them as they must have sounded then, when I was young, although I never heard them then, although they sounded about us then.

Pause

Yes. It is true. I am walking towards a lake. Someone is following me, through the trees. I lose him, easily. I see a body in the water, floating. I am excited. I look closer and see I was mistaken. There is nothing in the water. I say to myself, I saw a body, drowning. But I am mistaken. There is nothing there.



Note Pinter's use of past and present tense.

Describe the effect of the shifting tenses. What is Pinter saying about memory? About Hirst?

Paraphrase by translating Hirst's words into your own.

Try to capture as much of the meaning and quality of the original text.

Be aware of what is lost in your translation.

Sing It! Dance It!



To experience the rhythmic and tonal qualities of Pinter's use of language.

What are the dominant sounds? Rhythms?

Sing & Dance a musical version of Hirst's speech.

Try to reflect the specific qualities you have identified in the text.

Avoid generalizing by using an operatic or comedy style indiscriminately.

+

Extension:

Compare & Contrast Hirst and Foster's use of tone and rhythm.

FOSTER

(To Spooner) Listen. Keep it tidy. You follow? You've just laid your hands on a rich and powerful man. It's not what you're used to, scout. How can I make it clear? This is another class. It's another realm of operation. It's a world of silk. It's a world of organdie. It's a world of flower arrangements. It's a world of eighteenth century cookery books. It's nothing to do with

toffeeapples and a packet of crisps. It's a packet of crisps. It's milk in the bath. It's the cloth bellpull. It's organization.

Imagery & Sensory Association

To heighten your response to the imagery and sensory associations of the selected text excerpts.



Express your text as a collage: what materials, textures, colours and composition will capture the life of the character/s speech in visual form?

Ref: Robert Benedetti *The Director At Work*