

PRE-SHOW IN-THE-KNOW

TITLE

Top Girls by Caryl Churchill
Directed by Imara Savage

CURRICULUM LINKS

2015-2018:

HSC Drama Topic 8: Significant Plays of the 20th Century

2019-2012:

HSC Drama Topic 3: The Voice of Women in Theatre

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Top Girls opens at an impossible dinner party- women from different parts of history, literature, and myth meet to celebrate Marlene's promotion to Managing Director of the employment agency where she works. Each of these women have had an experience of adversity relating to their gender.

The following scene places Marlene at the agency, interviewing a young woman in order to help her pursue the career she wants. It is a naturalistic scene.

This is followed by Act 2, in which two girls, Angie and Kit are playing in Angie's backyard. Angie is older than Kit, but is immature for her years. Angie tells Kit she plans to kill her mother and go to London to visit her aunt.

Back at the employment agency, Marlene's female colleagues congratulate her on her promotion before Angie arrives unexpectedly to visit her aunt, Marlene. Marlene is surprised to see Angie who stays in the office for the rest of the day. Mrs Kidd arrives, she is the wife of the man Marlene was promoted above and has come to appeal to Marlene to step aside for her husband Howard to have the job, as she sees a senior position as more appropriate for a man. Marlene is strong in her refusal.

In Act 3 the action moves back a year in time. Marlene is visiting her sister Joyce and her niece Angie in the country. Angie is excited to have her aunt visiting, but the differences between the sisters show through as they argue. Marlene promotes the political ideology of Margaret Thatcher and Joyce expresses the challenges faced by the working class. The play closes with Angie waking from a bad dream.

CAST AND CHARACTERS

Paula Arundell - Patient Griselda/Nell/Jeanine
Kate Box - Isabella Bird/Joyce/Mrs Kidd
Michelle Lim Davidson - Lady Nijo/Win
Claire Lovering - Waitress/Kit/Shona
Heather Mitchell - Pope Joan/Louise
Helen Thomson - Marlene
Contessa Treffone - Dull Gret/Angie

STYLE

Magic Realism
Episodic Drama

RUNNING TIME

2 hours and 30 minutes, including interval

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

- How overlapping dialogue functions
- How time passes
- Movement between fantasy and reality
- If an actor plays two characters, are their characters connected in any way?

Top Girls is a feminist play concerned with social and political issues of the time it was written, especially those pertinent to women. Written in 1982, amidst second-wave feminist discourse, *Top Girls* questions liberal feminism and its central premise that women are responsible for their own equality. Through the character of Marlene, Churchill poses the question 'if women use the same ruthless tactics as men to gain power, are they creating positive change, or reinventing existing systems of oppression?'