

## **ON THE ROAD**

Learning pack created to accompany Claybody Theatre's production of **The D Road** by Deborah McAndrew.

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### **About this pack**

The first section of this pack is for students and teachers who saw our production of the play. It contains information about the production: process, cast and creatives.

The second section contains generic resources for drama and creative writing which can also be used by students and teachers who did not see the production.

The material in this section is designed for Key Stages 4 & 5, but may be differentiated for use at earlier key stages.

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## INTRODUCTION

**Claybody Theatre** is a company dedicated to presenting live drama in non-theatre spaces, inspired by the people and stories of North Staffordshire.

**The D Road** was our 5<sup>th</sup> full production, and was performed in October 2019, in a pop-up theatre created inside an empty industrial space in the former Spode Works Pottery, Stoke-on-Trent.

The A500 - known locally as the 'D' road - is a major dual carriageway in Staffordshire and Cheshire. It connects Nantwich, and junctions 16 and 15 of the M6 motorway, with the city of Stoke-on-Trent.

The road was constructed in several stages, beginning in 1962. Many homes and businesses were demolished to make way for it, and the final section, completed in 1977, cut a brutal pathway through the town of Stoke itself.

The road has been modified many times since fully opening in 1977, and there are works being undertaken at the present time. It features on every traffic report and is, without doubt, a significant cultural and economic landmark for people living in Stoke-on-Trent and the surrounding area.

The narrative of this play is specific to local experience, but its themes of intergenerational relationships, roads and journeys, and the loss of community are universal. And, as Lois says: *Everything is built on top of something else.*



## SECTION ONE

### OUR PLAY

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### CHARACTERS



#### **Liam**

Works in a pizza place, nearly 30 but still lives with his Nana.



#### **Pamela**

Liam's Nana. Likes jigsaws, nifty on the internet, obsessively tidy, has a peculiar phobia.



#### **Lois**

Liam's girlfriend. Works at a local petrol station. Wants to get out of Stoke.



#### **Marcus**

An enigmatic stranger...



## THE D ROAD

### Plot Synopsis

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#### The set up

A house stands marooned on a forgotten island of land somewhere between the railway, the Trent and Mersey Canal, and the A500 (D Road). It's where Liam lives with his Nana, Pam.

Liam and his girlfriend, Lois, dream of the bright lights of Manchester, but how can they leave Nana, with her very peculiar phobia?



The time is summer 2019, and the whole play takes place in the back room of the house - overlooking the rear garden and the D Road beyond...

## The story

### Scene 1

It's late at night and Pam has fallen asleep over her latest jigsaw - Munch's 'The Scream' - while waiting up for Liam to come in from his Saturday night shift.

As she sleeps, she dreams her bed is stuck in a traffic jam on the A500. Characters and cars from the past 40 years swirl around her in a surreal musical number.



Within this dream is a man that Pam keeps seeing in the street outside. She is convinced this stranger is watching her house, though neither Liam nor his girlfriend, Lois, has seen him.

Liam comes in late from work and finds Pam slumped over the jigsaw. She wakes suddenly, paranoid about the man, and also about a letter Liam has received with a Manchester postmark. Liam confesses that it's about a job offer. The pizza place where he works have another restaurant in Withington, and they've offered him a transfer. It's a great opportunity, with the potential for management training within the company, but he hasn't accepted yet.

Nevertheless, Pam is troubled by this. It's apparent that there would be a problem for her if Liam left as, for some reason, she has issues with leaving the house. That very day she has broken a tooth on a scotch egg, though she won't go to the dentist as the practice has moved to the other side of the D Road - which she refuses to cross. While they discuss all this, Pam suddenly sees the strange man in the back garden. Liam goes and grabs him and brings him in.



The stranger is Professor Marcus Baldy - an historian and archaeologist, with a long list of unlikely temporary jobs, including Living History performance.

Marcus is very sorry that his odd behaviour has caused alarm. He's only interested in the history of the house.

While Pam makes a drink, Liam explains why she never leaves the house. She's afraid of roads (dromophobia). Marcus acknowledges that this is a significant problem.

Professor Marcus is an odd but very charismatic person, who dazzles Pam and Liam with tales of various treasure hoards that have been found in Staffordshire.

He convinces them that he has studied the area closely and believes there to be a 'significant find' somewhere in the vicinity of their house - and the most promising place to dig would be the bottom of their garden.



## Scene 2

A couple of days later, Lois has popped in with some 'yellow stickered' food for Pam from the petrol station where she works. Pam's pristine parlour is now an archaeological finds room, and Lois can't believe that Pam is putting up with the mess. Liam is excited at the prospect of a valuable find.

Lois puts pressure on Liam to take the job in Manchester, but he's hedging his bets. Nana is living on cuppa soup due to the pain in her broken tooth, and all the mess Marcus is making is stressing her even more.



Lois is instinctively suspicious of Marcus. She notices that he wears eyeliner (something Liam has missed) and when Pam and Liam confirm that he isn't using a metal detector to find the treasure it's clear that Professor Baldy has some questions to answer.



However, this line of enquiry is brought to an abrupt halt when Marcus comes in from the garden in great excitement. He has found evidence of early occupation in the form of animal bones - bones that are soon identified by Pam as the remains of a family pet dog, Mungo, who was buried deep by her father at the Millennium.



Pam's distress is even greater now, and she has to have a lie down. Liam demands that Marcus pack up and go.

The Professor then has a sudden brainwave about how to cure Pam of her dromophobia, and help Liam and Lois move on with their lives. His experience 'working' in mental health has taught him a method called 'flooding' - sudden and overwhelming exposure to the thing that is feared.

Liam can't see how Pamela can be suddenly exposed to a road when she won't even leave the house, but it seems Marcus isn't going anywhere just yet.

### **Scene 3**

A day or so later, and heavy rain has halted the archaeological dig. Marcus is somewhere in the house, preparing for one of his seemingly numerous alternative jobs. Mungo is still to be reburied, as Marcus has discovered a hobnail from a Roman sandal and is very excited about continuing with his excavation. Pam has pretty much had enough of the mess and the pain in her tooth; her mouth is now full of cotton wool and clove oil. She and Liam conclude that she must tell Marcus to pack up and go.

The decision made, they hear Marcus coming - but he arrives fantastically dressed as an authentic Roman Centurion.



Marcus is going to a living history gig as his Roman alter ego Marcus Caecilius Calvus.

Liam and Pam are once again thrown by Marcus, but then Lois arrives unexpectedly. She's been sacked from her job at the petrol station for hiding short date food at the back of the fridge so it would get 'yellow stickered' and she could buy it cheap. Lois is upset, but this has made up her mind for her - she's going to Manchester, and Liam must come with her.

A row blows up, and when Pam appeals to 'Professor' Marcus for arbitration, Lois turns her fury on him. She can't believe that Pam let Marcus in her house without googling him.



He's not a professor at all – expelled in disgrace from the archaeological fraternity due to having faked a find in order to secure the continuation of a dig.

Marcus defends himself, but he's under pressure now. The other questions start to rise about his authenticity and his motives - specifically, why he isn't using a metal detector. Marcus is then

obliged to admit that the thing he's looking for isn't metal. Pam and Liam are baffled. If it isn't treasure, what is it?

Finally, Marcus reveals what he's looking for. It's a road. According to his research, the route of the Roman road, Rykeneld Street ran right through Pam's house, intersecting with the D Road at the bottom of their garden - forming a ghostly crossroads in time and space.



Without leaving the house, Pamela now finds herself right in the middle of a road. Marcus has succeeded in his plan to suddenly expose Pam to her greatest fear. She has a complete meltdown, and all the grief of the loss of her community comes pouring out. She has felt trapped all her life - increasingly penned in by roads on all sides - and now it turns out there was even one underneath! Pamela now clings to the edges of the room, and won't step out into the centre. She has to move house!

Marcus is pleased with the efficacy of the 'flooding' exercise, but Pamela has a surge of strength and fury and casts the Roman Centurion from the house for good.

Lois and Liam, alone, examine their predicament. Lois is determined to go to Manchester, but there is no way Liam can leave Pamela now. Lois leaves, and it seems their relationship is at an end.

Pam returns and now it's Liam's turn to vent all his frustration at the limitations of his life, and the burden of his grandmother's memories of a city that no longer exists. Both their experiences are real and legitimate, but incompatible. Something has to give. Liam makes Pam an appointment at the dentist. She consents, but it seems impossible for her.

Then, as Liam exits to make a cuppa she stops him, and asks him to help her across...

Gently, Liam takes Pam's arm helps her across the room – across the road. They continue to cross back and forth, as Pam begins the long journey of overcoming her fear - and the sound of the traffic on **The D Road** rumbles in the distance.





## SECTION TWO

### **Drama and Creative Writing**

**The D Road** has many themes, but all are focused around the idea of roads – and the many things they can mean for us. They represent the journeys we take, or those we don't.

For Pam, the road is a thing to be feared. It represents the many changes that have taken place in her life. The world she knew has gone, and she feels left behind, with nothing but roads on all sides. For Pam roads are barriers – monsters even.

For Liam, roads are simply a fact of life. He doesn't drive, but uses them and he isn't afraid. He would take them for granted were it not for the fact that his Nana's phobia keeps him trapped with her.

For Lois, roads are a way out of Stoke. For her, all roads lead to Manchester.

For Marcus, roads are mythological and mysterious. The old Roman road is a treasure he wants to find.

More broadly, the play presents roads as human constructs. We imagine them, we build them, and we can tear them down and even bury them.



## To get us thinking...

In groups consider the theme of **Roads**. Here are some hints to help you.

**Different kinds of roads:** *residential, high street shopping, motorway / bypass, racing tracks, posh / poor, town / country...*

**What happens on roads:** *travel, commerce, living, play, death...*

## TV shows and films based on roads

- *Coronation Street*
- *Eastenders*
- *Brookside*
- *Sesame Street*
- *Road movies: Thelma and Louise; Planes, Trains and Automobiles, Speed*

Can you think of some more?

## Roads in music and song

- *Streets of London*
- *Road to Hell*
- *Driving home for Christmas*
- *Dancing in the Street*
- *King of the Road*

Can you think of some more?

## Roads in religion, myth and legend

- *The road to Damascus*
- *The devil at the crossroads*
- *Oedipus*

Can you think of some more?

Roads are used as metaphor in common sayings. Consider and discuss the meaning of the following uses of roads as metaphor. How do they relate to human experience?

- *The fork in the road*
- *The end of the road*
- *Crossing the road*
- *The sunny side of the street*
- *Easy Street*
- *Wrong side of the tracks*

Can you think of some more?

Discuss your ideas

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Now we have generated some ideas, let's do some **DRAMA...**

### **IMPROVISATION**

- Consider the road as a metaphor.
- In pairs or groups, create a specific example around one of the usages of a road as metaphor.
  - Eg – at the 'Fork in the road' you might improvise a scene around a difficult life choice.

### **PAIRED DRAMATURGY**

- Pair up with another group and share your improvised scenes.
- Each group then give notes to each other, and work the scenes to improve them.

### **GROUP SHOWBACK**

- Each group now performs their scene for the whole group.

Now we've generated some material, we can work with it.

### **SINGLE VOICE NARRATIVE**

- Each person in the scene now tells the story on their own and from their particular view point.
- Consider:
  - What happens when a story is told from a single narrative perspective?
  - What are the advantages/disadvantages of telling a dramatic story in this way?
  - How could each of these single voice narratives be improved?

At the moment your single voice narratives would probably be described as a 'speech' or a 'soliloquy'. What would you have to do to turn them into a dramatic monologue? Discuss.

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Now we have created characters and story through drama and improvisation, let's do some **WRITING...**

### **DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE**

Expand the story you have into a monologue. Here are some questions to get you develop your material:

- Who is speaking?
- What's their situation?
  - How did they get there?
- To whom are they speaking?
  - Why are they telling this story to this person?
- What's their problem?
  - What do they want?
- What do they know about their situation?
  - What don't they know?

You don't have to know all the answers to every question at first, and you can develop your monologue

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When you have a first draft, it's time to return to **DRAMA** to help you improve your work.

Give your monologue to someone else in your group. They are now your actor, and will read your script aloud.

Now is the time to consider your monologue as a BLUEPRINT for performance. A kind of instruction manual for an actor.

Try to think clearly and critically about the text you have written. Here are some questions to ask...

- Is it the story clear?
- Does the character come through in the choice of words and the rhythms of the speech?
- Can your 'actor' read it as you want it to be read?
  - Is your punctuation clear?
  - Are the pauses where you want them?
  - Where do new thoughts happen for your character?
  - Are there ways you can make these moments clearer for the actor in the way you present the text on the page?

Now you have some notes for improving your work, redraft.

Don't be put off by the fact that there is still work to do.

When redrafting it's useful to have some questions to ask of the work, to help you improve it.

Monologues are mostly structured just like any other story or drama.

If you're stuck, you will find that doing a structural exercise can be a great way to move forward.

Here are some thoughts on structure to help you...

### 3 Act structure

Can you identify the beginning, middle, and end of your monologue?

You can think of each section in the following way:

- Set it up.
  - Establishing character(s); setting; introducing the problem.
- Shake it up
  - Turning the dial on the 'problem' into a transformative crisis.
- Sort it out
  - Show how the crisis has changed the protagonist.

For a more detailed analysis – try mapping your monologue onto the following **5 Act Structure**.

- Exposition
  - the situation (status quo)
  - defining the problem(s)
  - introducing the challenge
- Rising action
  - constructing the crisis
- Crisis
  - problem meets ultimate challenge
- Falling action
  - fall out – or result of crisis
- Resolution
  - the new situation

There are no rules as to the length of each Act. This is just a practical way of analysing your writing to see if it's working, and what might be missing. And remember...



**Writing is rewriting.**

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## Credits

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