

NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

SKELLIG

BY DAVID ALMOND

INSIGHT PACK

TEACHER'S NOTE:

This Insight Pack has been created for KS2 & 3, however many of the activities can be adapted for all ages.

**Nottingham
Playhouse**

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INTRODUCTION

Moving house has been hard for 12-year-old Michael, and now that his baby sister is ill in hospital, it seems his whole world has been turned upside down.

Exploring the crumbling garage of his new home one afternoon, he makes an extraordinary discovery. A strange, decrepit creature, Skellig, is hidden amongst the dust, dead insects and junk.

Together with his new friend Mina, Michael decides to help Skellig. But can the mysterious Skellig help Michael in return?

Winner of the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year and Carnegie Medal, this modern classic has been adapted for the theatre by its author.

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INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR, LISA BLAIR

What made you want to direct *Skellig*?

My younger brother read *Skellig* at primary school when he was eight years old. It instantly became his favourite book. He asked me to read it and so lent me his copy and I, too, was transported to the magical world that Michael finds himself in. I remember us having many chats about who and what we thought *Skellig* was. I thought he was a bird. My brother thought he was an angel. David Almond's story is a tale of hope and friendship but most of all, it is an exploration of grief. To be directing such an iconic novel that has been translated into over 30 languages and which is still igniting the imaginations of children and adults all over the world, is a great honour.

The writer David Almond won a Whitbread Children's Book of the Year Award and Carnegie Medal for the original novel. Why do you think the story is so popular and do you have any connections to the story?

The lives of Michael and Mina are touched for eternity by their direct and indirect contact with *Skellig*. Through Michael's contact with him, he learns how to work through his grief and is guided through the most worrying experience of his life. The popularity of the novel is multi-faceted because its exploration of suffering and distress is bold and unflinching.



Photography by Marc Brenner

What are you most excited about in this production and what do you hope audiences will get from seeing it?

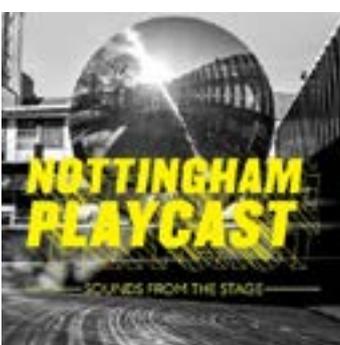
Without giving too much away (!), the story has several magical moments that we have needed to create onstage. We are hoping that the work that has gone into achieving them gives the audience a glimpse into *Skellig's* phenomenal world. I would love to think that the audiences leave thinking they might have seen the real *Skellig*.



Skellig Rehearsal Trailer



Interview with David Almond



Playcast is Nottingham Playhouse's monthly podcast. In this episode you can hear from director of *Skellig* Lisa Blair.



Click the logo to listen via Stitcher



Click the logo to listen via iTunes

INSIDE THE REHEARSAL ROOM

A unique glimpse inside the rehearsal room with Assistant Director, Katie Brailsford.

Tell us about your role as Assistant Director:

I am very fortunate to have been selected to do the Regional Theatre Young Director scheme at Nottingham Playhouse.

My role as Assistant Director on this production is to help create a smooth rehearsal process and gain experience and confidence in the directing process which will help me put it into practice when I myself work as a theatre director.

As Assistant Director on Skellig I have had the opportunity to observe the rehearsal process from the director's point of view. I watch and listen closely to how the director manages the actors on stage and the creative decisions that she makes to bring the stage performance alive. The director can ask my opinion on a specific idea and ask me to research an idea that is relevant to the production. I have attended production meetings and auditions. I also assist the actors with line learning, prompting and reading in for absent actors.



What have been your highlights of the rehearsal process so far?

We are now starting the third week of rehearsals and my highlight so far has been witnessing how Lisa the Director has developed the role of the Narrator throughout the production.

The Narrator serves several purposes in this play. In this production of Skellig the role of the Narrator has been split between 8

of the 10 actors. The role of the Narrator is very practical and drives the story forward, explains passages of time, how the characters are feeling and their inner thoughts.

The Narrators in Skellig have helped determine the unique performance language of this production and they work as an ensemble.



For example the Narrators describe the journey that Michael and Mina take to the danger house but physically create a pathway of light with torches like they are street lamps. The Narrators also help the audience focus on the main action on stage by watching the action themselves.

The Narrators are also responsible for operating three of the puppets and sometimes they directly interact with the characters in a scene.

I am really looking forward to the technical week of rehearsals when the actors get to fly on the stage and see all elements of the production come together like magic!

How do you think this production of Skellig will be different to the novel and the film?

The script that this production is using is an adaptation of the iconic novel Skellig written by David Almond. David Almond adapted the script directly from the novel and there are various elements of the novel that are not included in both the film and the play. As with any theatre production as opposed to a film or novel the main difference is that every stage performance is unique due to the live theatrical experience, the response of the audience and performances given by the actors.

Let's take the flying scene as an example. In the novel for the flying scene Michael narrates the story from his point of view. The reader can create their own picture of this action in their imagination.

In the film, the flying looks very realistic and Skellig carries Michael whilst he flies full speed across the countryside. This was achieved by special computerised film effects.

In this stage production the narrators describe the action and the actors will fly with the use of flying harnesses. This will be very exciting for the audience as a live experience and although not realistic like the film, the live action will create a sense of magic and wonder.

You could say that the novel Skellig has specific elements that work well on both the stage and in the film and that they have been adapted and incorporated accordingly.



TRY OUT A REHEARSAL ROOM TECHNIQUE

Hot Seating

In the rehearsal room the actors have been asked to 'Hot Seat' before a scene, to help them explore their characters and relationships in the play.

To do your own Hot Seating, one at a time ask pupils to sit on a chair and choose a character that they would like to explore. The pupil will become that character and answer questions and respond how they think that character might – remaining in role throughout.

You might want to ask where they have come from, where they are going, what they think of other characters and whatever you think would be helpful when exploring a character.

What do I say and what do others say about me?

One common process directors use to get inside the world of a play is to comb through the script, either individually as a group, looking for anything that each character says about themselves, and then anything that others say about that same character. It's a simple and effective way of learning about relationships and characters in the play – essential for a story like Skellig.

Find a Friend

Another great way to explore character and story is to write a Lonely Hearts advert for each character. You can only use up to 20 words, and within that limited space, say as much as possible about the character and the sort of friends they might like. For example: Young, shy boy with love of family and exploring seeks companion to share jokes, adventures and stories. Must enjoy playing.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Describing Skellig, David Almond says...

“...his origins and what he is are never revealed to the audience. This is left for you as the audience member to decide. Michael finds Skellig in his garage cold, dirty and a bit dishevelled...”

Discussion (large group)

How do you think Skellig has come to be in Michael's garage?

As a class or in small groups discuss your ideas about where Skellig had been before being discovered and how he had made his way to Michael's garage.

Some people believe Skellig is an angel, an owl man or a mythical creature. What do you think?

Try writing your own short story explaining where Skellig has come from, leading up to being discovered by Michael. You could try this in the 'first person' as if you are Skellig.

Newspaper Faces (small groups)

Select pictures from magazines and newspapers containing people, actions, expressions, and/or gestures that feel in some way connected to the themes, characters or story of Skellig. Lay them out across the floor.

On a piece of flip chart paper arrange the images to tell the story of Skellig – or perhaps an alternative version of the story. (Placing the images in a different order might suggest a different story. Think about the emotions within the images and try a few different orders). Once you are happy with the order of the images and story, stick the images in place and annotate with further details, words and drawings.

In your groups take either the whole story or an element of it and create a short performance that tells this story. This can be in the form of freeze frame, dialogue, movement with or without a narrator, or a fully realised scene.

Character and Set Designs (individual)

Design your own visual interpretation of Skellig, starting perhaps by looking at the novel, stage and TV adaptations. Who and what is Skellig?

Have a read of the interview on the next page with Designer Frankie Bradshaw, and then have a go at designing your own set for a production of Skellig.

YOU WILL NEED:

- Magazine
- Newspapers
- Flip Chart Paper
- Pens
- Glue Sticks
- Music
- Speaker



THE SET - INTERVIEW WITH DESIGNER FRANKIE BRADSHAW

Can you talk us through your vision for the set design?

I was very interested in the birdlike quality of Skellig, and also in the fairytale, magical quality of the writing, and the frequent references to nature, so combining these three ideas was how we came up with the image of the life sized birds' nest. It's a human sized nest, which embeds all the worlds of the dilapidated house, the garage and the attic, all within its branches.

What have been the biggest challenges when looking at the design for Skellig?

It's a piece which flits very quickly from one location to the next so the biggest challenge was to create a space that wasn't specific to one location, but representative and illustrative of all of the different ones, combined into one big exciting playground for the actors to really get stuck into.

What have your highlights of the process been so far?

I have loved working with the truly outstanding production staff at Nottingham playhouse - the making departments, from set building and prop making to scenic painting and costume making are all fantastic and so very invested in the project. It's felt very collaborative. It's also been a real treat to meet and discuss the design with David Almond, the writer of the piece.



Sketches by Frankie Bradshaw



Model of the **Skellig** set