

GCSE DRAMA PAPER 1 UNIT 2

THE WOMAN IN BLACK

A ghost play

Adapted by Stephen Mallatratt
From the book by Susan Hill



"The fear is not on a visual or a visceral level, but an imaginative one.
Imagination is everything."
Stephen Mallatratt

"I think that ghost stories have to have a point beyond frightening.
It's all very well to be frightened but there has to be a point"
Susan Hill

"Draw on your emotions, and on our imaginations"
Kipps in "The Woman in Black"

GHOST STORIES

There are important differences between a ghost story and a tale of terror or horror.

What is required is a real ghost. It's got to be something which is seen now, but is the image of somebody who is known to have existed and is known to have died. It may be a child, adult or animal; it may be seen or heard; but it is certainly more than just in someone's imagination.

When you see horror stories, particularly those about aliens, we know they couldn't exist, so ultimately they don't frighten us. Ghost stories, on the other hand, contain a core of credibility so that the reader feels that "this could happen". It could be our lives. Ghost stories happen in a normal context. It is, after all, a relatively normal context that a young man goes off to sort out someone's papers - it just happens to be a slightly spooky setting. He is a young cheerful fellow but the supernatural creeps into his ordinary life.

The *Woman in Black* forces audiences to confront quite basic feelings about fear. What does it mean to be frightened? How do we react? Do we all fear the same things? Does the supernatural still have the power to frighten us? If so, why?

Since I wrote the *Woman in Black* I've often been asked whether or not I believe in ghosts. I think the answer must be that I do. I have to. I have never seen one, and I don't know anyone who has and I think you can explain away 99% of the ghost stories that are told - they will, if carefully investigated, admit of a ready explanation. But the remaining 1%? That there are ghosts and haunted places, that people have seen and been in them occasionally I have no doubt. But how? Why? I don't know. Do you?

I think when young people go to the theatre now they want more than just fun and frolics, they want something meaty and they find that there is a lot to talk about with this show. What frightens us? Why does it frighten us? What is being frightened? Afterwards can you learn something from how frightened you have been? Either about yourself or whether there is a lesson to be learned about life, which I think in this instance there is. There is a lot of meat on it and that seems to satisfy people; that's why they go back.

Ghost stories....tell us about things that lie hidden within all of us, and which lurk outside all around us. They show human beings in the grip of the extremes of powerful emotions, at key moments and turning points in their lives. They also frighten delightfully, give shape, form and substance to our darkest and most primitive and child-like fears and imaginings, and perhaps most importantly of all, they entertain.

Do you believe in ghosts? Maybe not in broad daylight, but in that strange form of communal séance we call drama, I suspect you do.

Darkness is a powerful ally of terror, something glimpsed in a corner is far more frightening than if it's fully observed.

I quite like a story within a story: I've often used it. It's a good way of telling things. Things can get quite complicated but it helps retain some interest in the narrative. Ghost stories are always told by somebody; it is a very traditional way of doing it.

The Woman in black is not simply a scary story. The moral core is a crucial part of its attraction. There is definitely a point to it. Jennet Humfrye has a real reason for haunting : vengeance for the death of her child. She cannot forgive; she cannot move on; she has to remain in this terrible sort of hell, an endless recycling of the accident, the grief and the vengeance. She is caught in it forever. The moral point, I suppose, is that you have to let go...The grief and the blame *have* to stop. So it is quite a serious story. It is her tragedy really. She is in a time warp of endless grieving and the endless exaction of revenge.

One of the great things about the play is that it holds you in your seat – it rivets you – but when you come out, you think about it still. That's what all good theatre should do. It is not totally ephemeral, even if you only think about how frightened you were and how the process of making you frightened worked.

SUSAN HILL

THE WOMAN IN BLACK
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RESPONSE PHASE

INTRO : Storytelling lies at the core of the Woman in Black.

TASK ONE :

BRAINSTORM

- 1) WHEN AND WHERE STORIES ARE TOLD- eg bedtime, bible readings in church, novels, plays and poems, film and TV dramas, computer games, stand up comedy, gossip with friends, tv adverts, crimewatch etc
- 2) WHY ARE STORIES TOLD - eg to entertain, to divert, to frighten, to educate, to warn
- 3) LIST ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A GHOST STORY
" Essential elements of ghost stories - The ghost story must impart a strong sense of place, of mood , of the season, of the elements, and sp the traditional haunted elements - old isolated houses, lonely churchyards, castles and convents and empty, narrow streets at night - are heavily relied upon." Susan Hill

H/W : Copy of brainstorm

TASK TWO

OWNING THE STORY

Ask pupils to think of an incident from their childhood which they remember clearly - something which made a big impression on them because of some emotional reaction eg it frightened them/made them laugh/a moment of realisation/discovery.

Working in pairs, pupils tell their story to their partner, including as much detail as possible to help evoke the atmosphere and the emotion of the incident. Partners must listen carefully and be prepared to retell story to another pair as of story is their own.

Pairs join up and share 1 story per pair. Groups of 4 then choose 1 story and devise a method of performing it to an audience, using some form of narration. They can be as imaginative as they like in transforming it. The original teller of the story must not play himself, act as the narrator, or even be the director. Pupils must understand that they no longer own the story.

H/W 1 : Write up the what you were asked to do before you chose the story to role play. Write up the final role play you created, describing your response to the story and the character you created and the drama you devised. Also use of narrator and how

effective the drama became as a result of using narration. Make sure you refer to the explorative strategies – narration and role play.

H/W 2 : Consider some of the following questions and include some of the answers in your coursework

- What is the difference between telling your own story and seeing other people perform it?
- Which is the more effective presentation of the story – the performance, or the simple storytelling by a single speaker?
- How do you feel when you see people relating or dramatising your story?
- Is it annoying when they change things, forget details, or fail to understand significant factors, or does it help you to see your own memories in a different perspective?
- Do you have different priorities when telling your own story compared to when you are relating someone else's story?
- Is it justified to make use of other people's experiences for entertainment?
- What is it that makes 1 story compelling and another dull? Think about the way the story is told, the perspective of the storyteller, and the amount of detail included, as well as the content of the story.
- Does it make a difference whether the storyteller is relating a tale about themselves or about someone else?

TASK THREE :

THE BEGINNING OR THE END?

- Read the opening to the play and the ending
- **THE OPENING :**
It was 9.30 on Christmas Eve. As I opened my front door and stepped outside I smelled at once, and with a lightening heart, that there had been a change in the weather. All the previous week we had had thin chilling rain and a mist that lay low about the house and over the countryside. My spirits have for many years been excessively affected by the weather. But now the dampness and the fog has stolen away like thieves into the night, the sky was pricked over with stars and the full moon rimmed with a halo of frost. Upstairs, 3 children slept with stockings tied to their bedposts. There was something in the air that night. That my piece of mind was about to be disturbed, and memories awakened that I had thought forever dead, I had, naturally, no idea. That I should ever again renew my acquaintance with mortal dread and terror of spirit, would have seemed at that moment impossible.

- THE ENDING

Kipps (Prof actor) : *Our baby son had been thrown clear, clear against another tree. He lay crumpled on the grass below it, dead. And 10 months later, Stella too, died from her terrible injuries. (Pause) I had seen the ghost of Jennet Humphries and she had had her revenge. You asked for my story. I have told it. Enough.*

Silence. Then Kipps crosses and switches on the workers (lights on the stage). The Actor comes to him, and in silence shakes his hand.

Actor (Real Mr Kipps) : *Thank you*
Kipps : *Thank you. And is it done, d'you think? Will it now be laid to rest?*
Actor : *I pray it will. I thank you for your trouble – your enthusiasm – and your effort. Your emotion just now – it was as if I watched myself I imagined my own child.....*
Kipps : *Yes. (shudders involuntarily) I pray that when we show it to our audience, at last it will be done with.*
Actor : (quickly) *Who is she?*
Kipps : *Who is she?*
Actor : *I beg your pardon?*
Kipps : *Your surprise. She is remarkable. Where did you find her?*
Actor : *I'm afraid I don't understand.*
Kipps : *Your surprise, Mr Kipps – the surprise you found for me.*
Pause
Actor : *(puzzled) My surprise was that I'd learnt my words.*
Kipps : *Yes, yes, you learnt them expertly, but the woman you found – the actress. The woman in black. (Pause) You organised it as a complete surprise – you had her come here and go through her part and ... a young woman. With a wasted face – she.....*

Silence. The Actor is staring at him in horror

Actor : *A young woman?*

Kipps : *Is there anything the matter? You look unwell.*
Pause
Actor : *(at length) I did not see a young woman.*
As the lights fade we hear again the rhythmic bump,bump,pause.....
bump,bump, pause.....
Blackout

Choose either the opening or the ending and dramatise it in an original way using 2 explorative strategies – marking the moment and cross cutting.

H/W : Write up the what you were asked to do . Explain how you chose between the opening and the ending to dramatise. How effective was the drama created using the 2 explorative strategies? Describe your response to the story and the character you created and the drama you devised. Make sure you refer to the explorative strategies – marking the moment, cross cutting and role play.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK
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DEVELOPMENT PHASE

INTRO : Storytelling lies at the core of the *Woman in Black*. "I think that ghost stories have to have a point beyond frightening. It's all very well to be frightened, but there has to be a point and I never really write anything which hasn't got a point." Having seen the play, which of the elements of a traditional ghost story appear in the play? Are those conventions fully exploited in the play? Are any of the traditional ghost story elements given an original slant in the story? What was the point of the story?

TASK FOUR

ANOTHER ANGLE

Read pages 46-48 from Sam Daily "Jennet Humfrye gave up her child, the boy...." to Kipps "I do not doubt, Mr Daily."

Choose one of the characters from this section and tell the story from their point of view using at least 2 explorative strategies and 2 elements of drama.

H/W : Write up the what you were asked to do and the decisions you made. Write up the final drama you created, focusing on the character you created and the drama you developed. How effective and original was it? How did working on this piece of drama help your understanding of the play and the text?

TASK FIVE

A GHOST STORY

Having thought about the power of stories and the variety of storytelling techniques, come up with own adaptation of a classic short ghost story, or create your own. It should last for about 10 minutes.

H/W : Describe the drama you created. Include details of the characters created and the devices used to tell the story. How effective was your ghost story as a piece of drama? How did you develop your ideas? Which techniques from the *Woman in Black* did you use?

WRITTEN COURSEWORK

RESPONSE PHASE : EITHER 2 X A4 (BOTH SIDES) OR 2 X A3 (1 SIDE)

- **TASK ONE : STORYTELLING**
Copy of brainstorm
- **TASK TWO : OWNING THE STORY**
Write up what you were asked to do before you chose the story to role play. Write up the final role play you created, describing your response to the story and the character you created and the drama you devised. Also use of narrator and how effective the drama became as a result of using narration. Make sure you refer to the explorative strategies – narration and role play. Consider some of the questions and include some of the answers in your coursework
- **TASK THREE : THE BEGINNING OR THE END**
Write up the what you were asked to do. Explain how you chose between the opening and the ending to dramatise. How effective was the drama created using the 2 explorative strategies? Describe your response to the story and the character you created and the drama you devised. Make sure you refer to the explorative strategies – marking the moment, cross cutting and role play.

DEVELOPMENT PHASE : EITHER 2 X A4 (BOTH SIDES) OR 2 X A3 (1 SIDE)

- **TASK FOUR : ANOTHER ANGLE**
Write up what you were asked to do and the decisions you made. Write up the final drama you created, focusing on the character you created and the drama you developed. How effective and original was it? How did working on this piece of drama help your understanding of the play and the text?
- **TASK FIVE : YOUR GHOST STORY**
Describe the drama you created. Include details of the characters created and the devices used to tell the story. How effective was your ghost story as a piece of drama? How did you develop your ideas? Which techniques from the Woman in Black did you use?

EVALUATION PHASE : EITHER 2 X A4 (BOTH SIDES) OR 2 X A3 (1 SIDE)

- **YOUR REVIEW OF THE PLAY "THE WOMAN IN BLACK"**