

# THE WINTER'S TALE

## CONTENTS

Using a soundscape to set a scene 2

Exploring the impact of the trial on 4  
Hermione



Dominic Cooke's 2006 production of *The Winter's Tale* was a 'promenade' production – the seats were removed from the stalls area and the audience stands and moves around in this space. The play opened with a party in full swing. The audience were invited to dance with the actors in a wealthy world, where the characters were smart and relaxed, drinking champagne, enjoying a harmonious and happy time.

The exercises that follow are practical activities designed to enable your group to work as an ensemble. They can be used by you with your group in any large, clear space.

# USING A SOUNDSCAPE TO SET THE SCENE



Kate Fleetwood, who played Hermione in the 2006 production, underwent a shocking physical transformation between the opening of the play and her trial. By the trial there is no trace of glamour as she is brought to publicly answer her husband's accusations. Some past productions have chosen for Hermione to appear in prison clothes or rags. In this production she is wearing smart clothes, she is dignified. You could discuss with your pupils why Dominic Cooke, the director, and the actors chose this.

The trial happened in the open air: anyone could come to watch the queen on the stand. Again, consider with your pupils how making the trial a public event in this way affects the action and the characters.



Watch the extract that we have filmed here [www.rsc.org.uk/explore](http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore) , where Hermione speaks in her own defence as her husband threatens her with the death penalty. Hermione is allowed to speak at length by Leontes. There is the semblance of real justice being done: this is not simply just an exercise in humiliating Hermione, Leontes wants the trial to be transparent so the people can judge for themselves. However, Hermione knows that she is in the right. She is strong and dignified, with no need to show her emotions or over defend herself. She is articulate, she uses tactical argument to make her point.



Discuss with the players what they know of the contemporary justice system, and what sort of people might be present in court at a trial.

Ask for two volunteers to represent Leontes and Hermione, and decide where in the court they would be whilst he accuses her. Set up chairs and tables as the group decide.

Now divide the rest of the players evenly into four groups. The first group will be clerks of the court, the second group press, the third group the defence lawyers and the fourth group prosecution lawyers.

Ask each group to find a way of coming into the courtroom that will establish who they are, and using the lines below.

Now ask the group what other sounds might be heard in the courtroom: this could be vocal phrases e.g. "All rise!" or sounds e.g. a gavel on a wooden block, a bell.

Now sequence the action and sounds, with each group entering the courtroom and establishing themselves for the trial.

Leontes must enter at some point, and finally Hermione must be brought in. Who will deliver the indictment? Negotiating the circumstances of the scene in this way will encourage the players to consider whether the trial is a genuinely fair one, or a public event stage for political reasons.

# TEXT SCRAPS TO SUPPORT SOUNDSCAPE

Clerks: It is his highness' pleasure

Press: Read the indictment

Defence: Innocence shall make false accusation blush

Prosecution: Produce the prisoner

Indictment  
Hermione, queen to the worthy Leontes, King of Sicilia, thou art here accused of high treason, in committing adultery with Polixenes, King of Bohemia, and conspiring with Camillo to take away the life of our sovereign lord the king. Thou, Hermione, didst counsel and aid them to fly away by night.

# EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF THE TRIAL ON HERMIONE



- Ask for two volunteers to be Leontes and Hermione and keep them apart.
- Now ask the four groups of players to take a section of what Hermione says (on page 2).
- One person in each group will use the words as a narration of a scene, which the rest of the group creates.
- Another player in each group will represent Hermione.
- The rest of the players in each group must show clearly what had happened to Hermione since Leontes first accused her, and the effect it has had on her.
- The first group will show Hermione shunned by her husband. The second group will show her separated from her son, Mamillius. The third group will show her new baby taken away. The fourth group will show her being declared a strumpet throughout Sicily.
- The players can use action, sounds and modern English words to make what has happened to Hermione very clear, juxtaposed with the text as narration. Finally, the work that has been created is shown.
- Leontes and Hermione set themselves up, and the rest of the players surround them in their four groups.
- Everybody is frozen in position for the start of their scene. The two players who are Leontes and Hermione start the scene with the opening two lines, and then the scenes are performed around them, with each group starting when the previous group have finished, and returning to a freeze at the end of their scene. The action finishes with Hermione saying her last line. Now discuss with the group how Hermione feels during her trial.
- If you would like a writing outcome you can ask the players to write a letter in first person narrative as if they are Hermione writing to her father explaining what has happened to her, and telling him about her trial.

# TEXT SCRAPS FOR GROUP SCENES

**Leontes** Look for no less than death

**Hermione** Sir, spare your threats.

1 The bug which you would fright me with, I seek.  
The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,  
I do give lost, for I do feel it gone,  
But know not how it went.

2 My second joy,  
And first-fruits of my body, from his presence  
I am barred like one infectious.

3 My third comfort,  
The innocent milk in her most innocent mouth  
Haled out to murder.

4 Myself on every post  
Proclaimed a strumpet.