



Teacher Resource Pack for Pijin | Pigeon SPRING 2023

ABOUT THE SHOW

A Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru and Theatr Iolo production, in association with Pontio

Based on the novel *Pigeon* by Alys Conran

Adapted for the stage by Bethan Marlow

Pigeon is one in a million. At least that's what his best friend Lola thinks. Brave, funny and a bit dangerous, there's no one else she'd rather spend time with. But life is far from sweet.

Pigeon is desperate to escape the life that awaits him at home every night. Imagination, stories and words are the only ways he can survive. But one day, words are no longer enough. His walls come crashing down and life changes forever.

Set in the shadow of the north Wales slate quarries in the early '90s, this is a gripping tale about growing up, the power of words, friendship and just how far people will go for love.

Based on the best-selling novel *Pigeon* by author Alys Conran, and adapted for the stage by Bethan Marlow. Welsh and English are subtly woven together, and every performance will use integrated captioning in both Welsh and English.

Age Guidance: 13+ (Contains strong language and themes of domestic violence)

INTRODUCTION

This resource is designed for teachers bringing young people to see **Pijin | Pigeon** in spring 2023 at venues across Wales.

Pijin | Pigeon is aimed at teenagers aged 13+ and adults. The pack has been created to help teachers explore the themes of the production before or after their visit.

CURRICULUM LINKS

To make it easier for you to identify what activities fit with the new Curriculum for Wales, we have stated the **Key Areas of Learning and Experience** for each, along with the relevant **Statements of What Matters**.

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INFO ABOUT THEATR GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

Creating exceptional Welsh-language theatre for all . . .

Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru creates and presents theatre productions that aim to entertain, excite, and captivate our audiences and fuel their imaginations.

We also provide development opportunities that will nurture and inspire the next generation of Welsh theatre artists and provide creative opportunities for people across Wales to experience the transformative impact of the arts.

Founded in 2003, the company will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2023.

INFO ABOUT THEATR IOLO

Theatr Iolo strives to enrich the lives of children through memorable experiences that challenge the mind and stir the imagination.

Theatr Iolo has been at the forefront of creating theatre for children in Wales for over thirty-five years. We are passionate about nurturing and igniting the imagination and creativity of young minds, to help children make sense of the world around them and to find their place within it.

We work with the best artists, writers and creatives to create memorable and bold live theatre, workshops and activities in both English and Welsh. Our work for babies, children, and teenagers is toured across Wales, the UK and internationally.

SYNOPSIS

The story begins when Pigeon and lola are 9 years old. Living in a small village in rural north-west Wales, the best friends distract themselves from the difficulties they encounter in life by playing truant, making up stories that aren't true and generally causing trouble.

At the start of the play, we learn that Pijin's Mam's partner is both physically and emotionally abusive, whilst lola lives with her older sister and has no other family.

Gwyn, the local ice-cream man, becomes the victim of Pigeon's storytelling, and what begins as a made-up story quickly escalates. Pigeon and lola's antics result in an accident with the ice-cream van, in which Cher (Mam's partner's daughter) is seriously and permanently injured. Shortly afterwards Pigeon and lola set fire to Gwyn's house.

As the story moves forward, Pigeon is blamed for Cher's accident and Mam's partner becomes extremely abusive. During an argument at home, in which both Pijin and lola are present, he is shot dead.

Pigeon is accused of his murder and is sent to a Borstal type institution in Liverpool. He is beaten by his peers for speaking Welsh and taught English by those educating him. He gradually loses his mother tongue. Meanwhile, back in north Wales, lola and Cher try to continue with their lives as best they can. In Pigeon's absence, they become friends.

Years later, Pigeon returns. He won't speak to lola in Welsh and at first they struggle to reconnect. Pigeon is furious that Cher is still living with his Mam, whilst his Mam is struggling with her mental health.

Pigeon and lola attempt to come to terms with what happened all those years ago. They are forced to face up to the consequences of their actions, as well as what really happened when Mam's partner was killed.

At the end of the play, they both begin to find peace. lola talks of going away to university. Pigeon finds a new job building stone walls and starts to reclaim his language. There is hope for a better future.

MAIN CHARACTERS

PIGEON

Pigeon is a boy from a small village in the Dyffryn Ogwen area of north-west Wales. He lives with his Mam and her new partner. Also living with them is his Mam's partner's daughter, Cher. Pigeon's best friend is Iola.

At the start of the play Pigeon is 9 and when it ends he is 16. Welsh is Pigeon's first language. Pigeon is brave, funny and a bit dangerous: he uses his imagination and his passion for words and language to manage the stresses of a difficult home life.

IOLA

Iola is 9 years of age. She is from the same small slate-quarrying village in the Dyffryn Ogwen area of north-west Wales. She is 16 years old when the play ends. Welsh is her first language.

Iola is being raised by her older sister, Efa, with no other family present. Iola is a loyal and trusting friend to Pigeon and is mesmerised by him and his strange stories. She is clever and diligent, but easily led and is drawn to Pigeon's adventure.

CHER

Cher is the same age as Pigeon and Iola. She is originally from south Wales and does not speak Welsh. Cher has recently moved to live in Pigeon's house in rural north Wales with her father, who is Pigeon's Mam's new partner.

Cher is an outsider who wants to belong. She is eager to befriend Pijin and Iola and will do anything to try to fit in.

GWYN

Gwyn is a single man in his 40s, of Italian descent. He owns the local ice-cream van and is well-known by the children in the area. He lives alone in a house he used to share with his mother before she died.

MAM

Pigeon's Mam is in her 30s when the play begins. She is a victim of domestic abuse and, although she tries to be strong for Pigeon, she is extremely vulnerable and mentally scarred by the abuse she experiences.

HIM

He is Pigeon's Mam's partner. He, along with his daughter Cher, come to live with Pigeon and his Mam. He is verbally and physically abusive to Cher, Pigeon and his Mam.

BACKGROUND

Pijin | Pigeon uses the languages of Welsh and English to explore themes of identity and belonging. At the beginning of the play, Pigeon and Lola primarily speak Welsh to each other, but once Pigeon returns following his time in England, he initially speaks to her only in English.

ACTIVITY 1:

Class discussion to explore how languages contribute to an individual's sense of identity and belonging.

Here are some ideas for questions you can ask the members of your class. Each class will be different, so we would encourage you to adapt the questions using the knowledge you have of the individuals in your class.

- *Apart from English / Welsh, are there any other languages you speak at home?*
- *Do any members of your family speak a language that hasn't been passed down to you? How does this make you feel?*
- *Do you feel proud of the languages you speak? Or do you sometimes feel embarrassed?*
- *Have you ever visited somewhere where a different language was spoken? How did this make you feel? Did the language feel part of the culture of the country you were visiting?*

Additional questions you can ask after your class has seen Pijin | Pigeon:

- *How do you think Pigeon feels when he is moved to England where no one speaks Welsh?*
- *How does Pigeon's use of language change whilst he's away?*
- *When Pigeon returns to Wales, why do you think he stops speaking Welsh to Lola?*

KEY LINKS TO AREAS OF LEARNING AND WHAT MATTERS

Languages, Literacy and Communication

- Languages connect us.
- Understanding languages is key to understanding the world around us.
- Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication.

Health and Well-being

- How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being.

BACKGROUND

Cher, Pijin's step-sister, comes from south Wales and doesn't speak Welsh. She finds it difficult when Pijin and Lola speak Welsh to each other.

ACTIVITY

Following the class discussion, split the pupils into small groups, provide a large sheet of paper and pens, and ask them to imagine the following situation:

You and your family move to another country where no one speaks Welsh or English. You have to go to a new school and learn the language that they speak.

Split your page into four areas and answer the following:

- *How would moving to a place where no one spoke your language/s make you feel?*
- *How do you think those in your new school would treat you?*
- *What things would you do to help you learn the language of the new country?*
- *How do you think you would feel about the languages you spoke (both your first language and additional languages) if you moved home?*

We would ask you to consider the fact that some children will have lived experience of this scenario. You may wish to adapt the activity so that it's inclusive for children with these experiences.

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Health and Well-being

- How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being.
- Our decision-making impacts on the quality of our lives and the lives of others.
- Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being.

BACKGROUND

Pigeon loves words. He loves the sound of them and what it feels like to say them. Words are an important part of how Pigeon tells stories and makes them sound exciting and enticing to Lola. It's also one of the things that makes him dangerous.

ACTIVITY

Have a discussion as a class about your favourite words! What makes them interesting to you? Here are some things you could discuss . . .

- *How many syllables do they have? Are longer words more interesting?*
- *Does your favourite word sound soft or hard?*
- *Is the way the word sounds associated with their meaning? (Onomatopoeia)*
- *Is it a common word or something more unusual?*
- *Why are some words powerful?*
- *What is the point of swear words and why are they named as such?*
- *Are there any words you don't like the sound of?*

Explore different words and / or word combinations and read them out loud as a class to see how they feel to say.

Once you've had a discussion, write a short poem about your favourite word (or any of the words suggested by your class) about why it's amazing and why you love how it sounds. Alternatively, you could write a poem about a word you really dislike!

KEY LINKS TO AREAS OF LEARNING AND WHAT MATTERS

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BACKGROUND

Pigeon's relationships with the other characters in the play, both as a child and a teenager, take us on an emotional journey as audience members. From his friendship with Lola, to his love for his Mam and hatred for her partner, we get to see the complexity of feelings and emotions experienced by Pigeon during his young life. We also get to see different sides to his character as he navigates the transition from child to young adult.

Activity

Following a class discussion on the relationships of the characters in the play, split into small groups and give them some stones, pebbles and sticks collected from outside. Provide your class with examples of different moments in the play and ask them to pick a stone, pebble or stick for every character in that scene that resembles the character best. For example, a stone with smoother sides could be chosen for Lola, as a metaphor for her innocence, where a stone with sharp sides could be Pijin to reflect his dangerous side. Then ask them to place the pebbles, stones and sticks on the table in relation to the characters' closeness to each other within the scene. Once they have done that, they can present their thoughts behind the placing of the pebbles, stones and sticks and explain why they chose those particular materials to represent the characters to the class.

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Humanities

- Events and human experiences are complex, and are perceived, interpreted and represented in different ways.
- Our natural world is diverse and dynamic, influenced by processes and human actions.
- Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs.

BACKGROUND:

An important and enjoyable part of seeing a performance is talking about it afterwards! What bits did you like most? Which characters were your favourite . . . or which ones did you dislike? What were the costumes and set like? Is there anything that could have been better?

Before people go to the theatre, they often read a review to help them make up their mind about whether or not to buy a ticket.

Following the performance, invite your class to write a review of Pijin | Pigeon. Before you do this, you may want to read some reviews of other shows online to get a feel for the style in which they are written and what key information they include.

Here's a list of things you may wish to think about:

- An intriguing opening sentence that makes the reader want to read more.
- A headline that summarises your review.
- Information.
- Thoughtful inclusion (or exclusion) of any key moment . . . don't give any spoilers away!

KEY LINKS TO AREAS OF LEARNING AND WHAT MATTERS**Expressive Arts**

- Exploring the expressive arts is essential to developing artistic skills and knowledge and it enables learners to become curious and creative individuals.
- Responding and reflecting, both as artist and audience, is a fundamental part of learning in the expressive arts.

Languages, Literacy and Communication

- Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication.

WORKSHOPS

If you'd like to explore **Pijin | Pigeon** further, we can offer bespoke workshops for your school or university group.

Please contact Sian Elin Williams (Participation Coordinator at Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru) for more information and to book: sian.elin@theatr.com

Script Workshop – From Page to Stage

Age guide: KS4 +

We will tailor the workshop depending on age.

A great opportunity for pupils and students to explore the script and enjoy a creative workshop with the author of the stage adaptation, Bethan Marlow. This workshop can take place at your school/university, or at the performance venue, or online, depending on availability.

Production Workshops

Age guide - KS4 +

We will tailor the workshop depending on age.

An opportunity to enjoy a bespoke workshop with artists from the creative team including the Director, Set and Costume Designer, Light, Sound and Stage Management alongside members of Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru and Theatr Iolo. We can also facilitate a set trip, subject to availability. This is a great opportunity to experience theatre work - from the green room to the stage. Come and get a taste of behind the scenes.