



Basmati Basmati by Jonathan Hall

Director's Notes

Focus:

Biodiversity - why it's important to grow a variety of crops to avoid crop failure.

Learning outcomes:

- I know what biodiversity is.
- I understand how supply and demand works.
- I understand the effects climate change and population can have on the food I eat.

Big questions learners will explore

- What is the impact of biodiversity on my everyday life?
- Who is responsible for the diet and lifestyle choices that we make on a daily basis?
- What are the effects of climate change and population growth on food production?

Synopsis / Story Version

The story version in italics below has been created by Jonathan Hall a Primary Deputy Head Teacher for you to read out loud to your class either on the day or some time before to introduce your class to the play.

Generally speaking, the more people want something- the more of that something is produced. For example, of there was a certain sort of pencil case that proved really popular- the factory would make sure they made more and more of that pencil case. It makes sense. This is known as demand- and demand plays a big part in this story- and we find out that if too much of something is demanded and grown- well, this can have unexpected results.

Our story takes place on the plains of northern India- here life is (and has been for generation after generation) about growing rice. All different types of rice- (A quick word about rice... Before this I saw rice as all the same- white. Maybe brown, but that wasn't as nice. You'd be amazed, as I was at huge numbers of different types of rice- and the different colours of those types of rice. Look them up- like I say- you'll be amazed.)

So- back to the plains of Northern India, where there are two villages growing many varieties of rice- as they've always done; tilling the soil and sowing the seed year in and year out. However, this particular year their peaceful existence is disrupted by the arrival of Supermarket buyers- all talking very loudly and very quickly into their mobile phones. When they come off their phones they have disturbing news. They say that actually only want to buy one type of rice - Basmati!

The villagers are puzzled- why just Basmati?

The buyers demonstrate what they mean by showing the villagers different scenarios – children in England sitting down to eat tea, parents shopping in the supermarket- people eating out in a curry house. The scenarios have one thing in common- in each scene the people want one type of rice, and one only- Basmati. They've no interest whatsoever in wanting to try the many many varied and different types and colours of rice India can grow. So that is the only type of rice the supermarket buyers want to buy. Plain white Basmati.

The two villagers are faced with a dilemma- what to do?

*One village, thinking of the economic benefits (food! Bicycles! Education!) decides to agree to the demands and change how things are done- planting only Basmati rice. The **other village** however decides to stay firm to tradition and grows the many different types of rice- as they've always done.*

The villagers are visited by Food Scientists who warn them- talking about the hazards of only growing one type of rice. One type of rice means it only takes one type of rice blight to decimate the crop...

This warning is graphically demonstrated when rice blight does indeed strike, killing all the basmati rice. And whereas the village growing different types of rice still has crops unaffected by the blight- the other village loses its entire crop of basmati rice. Fortunately, their kind hearted neighbours are on hand to help- but the warning is clear- it's dangerous to rely on only one type of crop.

This warning is made wider at the end of the story when the food scientists tell us that as a planet we rely on a massive 60% of our entire calorific intake from only three basic crops, wheat, corn and rice.

The challenge is obvious- and it extends way beyond northern India.

We can't rely on just a few foodstuffs to feed us.

What are we to do?

Top Tips for putting on your Play in a Day.

Before you start:

1. Read and familiarise yourself with the play and decide on roles prior to the day. You know your students better than anyone; who will want speaking parts? Who can take a leadership role in a group movement piece? Who works well with who? You may want to pre-prepare the lines printed on card for students to hold. I suggest numbering/naming these cards so they know when to say their line.
2. Decide how you want to stage the play; where will it be performed? Where will you position your audience? Do you need to put the students somewhere when they are off stage? (*see staging configurations for ideas*)
3. Look at the requirements of the script in terms of costume and props so you are prepared on the day. Props and scenery could be made in advance as part of a cross- curricular approach.
4. You can always use students for roles other than acting. For example, someone could be in charge of costume and props, another could be responsible for the music or sound effects.

On the day:

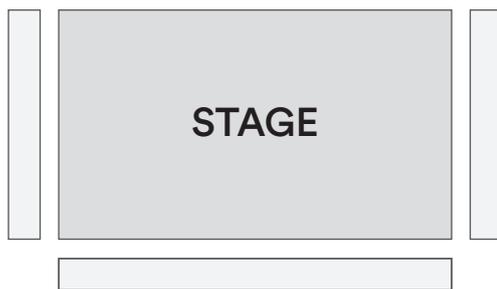
1. Use the warm ups to get students ready for the day. Explain what the play is about and how we can teach others through theatre. Get them excited by the project.
2. Assign roles quickly and make sure everyone always has something to work on, whether that's their section of the play or helping create a prop or piece of costume.
3. Set out where the audience will be when rehearsing so the students are aware of their performance space and how it will be performed.

4. If you have extra help in the room (TA's) use them to create the movement sequences whilst you work with students with speaking parts or vice versa. The videos for movement are really useful and students can learn straight from the video.
5. Make the play your own, be creative and take ideas and suggestions from your students too. Enjoy it!

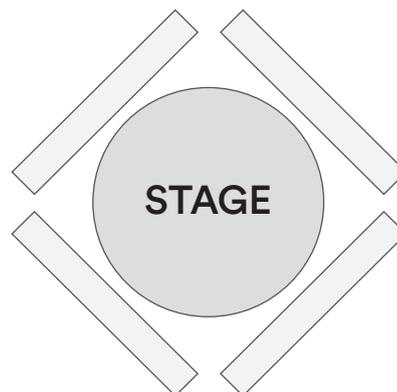
Staging Ideas

You may have a stage in your school hall which is great but don't feel you must use it. There are many ways you could stage your play. The audience could be sat on the stage with the students performing on the hall floor for example. Below are a few examples of ways you could stage the performance. You will need to consider what is available to you and what you need from a performance space- do you need a hidden off stage area for example.

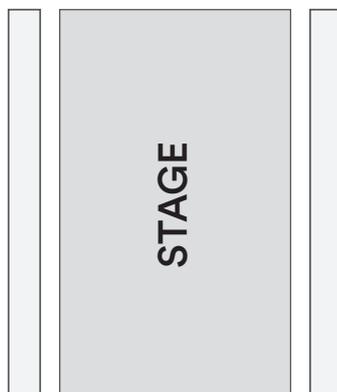
Thrust



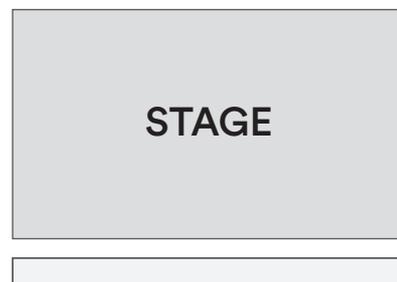
In the Round



Traverse



End on





Rehearsals

Starter Games / Activities

Stage Directions Game

Great for: Warming up the students and creating an understanding of stage directions.

All students gather in the middle of the space. Explain to them this is centre stage. We always say the actor is the most important person on the stage, therefore the stage directions are their left and their right as they face the audience. Upstage is behind them (usually the furthest away from the 'audience') and downstage is in front of them (closest to the 'audience'). Call out each stage direction one by one, the students have to run to that location as quick as possible, last one there is out. This student can then call out the next instruction to keep them involved. This should familiarise students with the stage directions on the stage and help you later on with blocking the play. There are some fun instructions to add in too. Round of applause: Clapping round in a circular motion or turning around as they clap. Scrub the stage: Bending down the mime scrubbing the stage floor. Hang a light: reaching up to adjust a light. Take a Bow: over the top bowing and curtsying. You can create your own call and response instructions to add in. e.g. You say "Romeo, Romeo" the students reply "Wherefore art thou Romeo?". This can be a really useful tool to gather students in a particular area of the space at any time throughout the day hopefully make your job a lot easier!

Runner Beans (and other beans!)

Great for: Warming up students.

Students find a space in the room, walk around the space being careful not to bump into anyone else. Teacher to call out instructions. Runner Bean: students run on the spot. Baked Bean: students curl up in a ball on the floor. Jumping Bean: students jump up and down. Broad Bean: students stretch their legs and arms out as wide as they can. Coffee Beans: students imitate coughing.

Agreement Line Activity

Great for: Getting students thinking and sparking discussion and debate.

Ask your students to stand in the centre of the space.

Explain that there is an imaginary line running down the centre of the space, one end of the line represents 'Agree' and the opposite end of the line represents 'Disagree'. The middle of the line is 'Don't Know'.

Explain that you are going to read out a series of statements. If they agree with the statement, they should go and stand at the end of the line that is 'Agree'. If they disagree they should go and stand at the end of the line that is 'Disagree'. If they are not sure or don't know what they think they should stay in the middle.

After they have taken up their positions, ask your students to explain why they have chosen their position. After hearing from several students, give your group the opportunity to change their position if they have changed their mind following what others have shared.

Repeat the process for each statement.



Agreement Line statements

- It doesn't matter how my food is made as long as it tastes good
- I know exactly where my food comes from and how it is made
- It is important to buy locally grown produce when you can
- There will always be enough food, we don't need to worry
- I should know more about the food that I eat

Tip: This activity can also be used to measure learning. Ask the students how much they think they know about the topic of the play you've chosen. e.g. How much do you know about Food Security? Encourage students to be as honest as possible. Take a photo of the students on the agreement line prior to working on the play and revisit the question afterwards. This can create a before and after photo sequence and show a change in the understanding of the chosen topic.

Curriculum Links

This play would work well as part of topics on Food, Farming, or India. It would work really well as a harvest assembly.

English Spoken Language

- All pupils should be enabled to participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama.
- Pupils should be able to adopt, create and sustain a range of roles, responding appropriately to others in role.
- They should have opportunities to improvise, devise and script drama for one another and a range of audiences, as well as to rehearse, refine, share and respond thoughtfully to drama and theatre performances.

Science

Pupils should

- Explore examples of human impact (both positive and negative) on environments and the negative effects of population, development and deforestation.

Geography

- Teaching should equip pupils with knowledge about diverse places, people, resources and natural and human environments, together with a deep understanding of the Earth's key physical and human processes.



Locational knowledge

- Locate the world's countries, using maps concentrating on their environmental regions, key physical and human characteristics, and major cities
- identify the position and significance of latitude, longitude, Equator, Northern Hemisphere, Southern Hemisphere, the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, Arctic and Antarctic Circle, the Prime/Greenwich Meridian and time zones (including day and night)

Place knowledge

- Pupils should understand geographical similarities and differences through the study of human and physical geography of a region outside the United Kingdom

Human geography

- Pupils should describe and understand key aspects of: human geography, including: types of settlement and land use, economic activity including trade links, and the distribution of natural resources including energy, food, minerals and water

PHSCE links: World food supply, Third World issues, Diet and Nutrition, Caring for the Planet, the work of charities such as Oxfam and Christian Aid.

Topic in more detail - Biodiversity

Jonathan Hall's play looks at biodiversity in rice in India and what happens when only one type of rice is grown and that crop fails. Currently only twelve plant species provide approximately 75% of our total food supply and only fifteen mammal and bird species make up more than 90% of global domestic livestock production. Therefore, the pressure and demand for these is very high. 'Basmati Basmati' demonstrates what could happen if we continue to not be diverse in our food production.

Genetic diversity in crops reduces the odds of crop failure and protects against the spread of plant diseases and attack by plant pests. As agriculture continues to rely on fewer and fewer species and varieties of crops and livestock, we need to preserve the genetic diversity of crops and domestic animals.

Biodiversity is essential for food security and nutrition, with the decrease of biodiversity, we lose the potential to adapt ecosystems to new challenges such as population growth and climate change.

This play gives just one example of how our demand for food affects the supplier and how the need for biodiversity can prevent lack of food.



Further Reading and Useful Sources

- World Health Organisation (www.who.int) - particularly the pages on nutrition and diet, physical activity and health, climate change, food safety.
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (www.nice.org.uk) - particularly the lifestyle and wellbeing section

The Future of Food: Population Health - Professor Angela McFarlane

<http://youtu.be/BAvetS9nnOQ>

In this presentation Professor Angela McFarlane, CEO of The College of Teachers talks about biodiversity, and the Irish Potato famine. This presentation inspired Jonathan Hall to write his play.