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Introduction

Welcome to this REP Insight Pack, uncovering the magical and adventurous world of our brand new adaptation of ***Peter Pan***. Whether you are a teacher looking for a dynamic learning resource, a student studying the play or a theatregoer wanting to explore further, this will help you delve into the creative process behind this unique production; full of classroom exercises and exploratory activities for Key Stage 1, 2 and pupils. These resources contain background information on the play, illustrations from the designer, interviews with the director and activities for students that are perfect before or after a visit to the theatre. We hope you find them useful.



What is Peter Pan about? In the words of Director, Liam Steel

All the most successful stories that have endured the test of time have done so because they can be interpreted in a number of ways. *Peter Pan* is no different, and there have been endless interpretations and analyses into the true meaning of the story about the “Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up.” For me the story embodies two major themes, and it is those themes that we are primarily exploring in this adaptation. GROWING UP, and MOTHERHOOD / PARENTHOOD.

The character of Peter embodies the central idea of childhood and growing up. J.M. Barrie uses the narrative to demonstrate the natural conflict between childhood freedom, and adult responsibility. In refusing to grow up, Peter continues to have adventures and live a life of freedom and imagination. However, Peter’s choice means he also misses out on parental love.

The theme of Motherhood runs throughout the story. Peter who wants not to need one, the Lost Children who want simply to know one, Wendy who is forced to become one, and even Hook and the Pirates, who long for one to take care of them.

Peter distrusts mothers because he believes that his own mother betrayed him. This idea for me has formed the context for our adaptation of Barrie’s story. In our version, Wendy too has been let down by adults, and when we meet her and her brothers, she has been placed in a foster home with a single parent. Because of her past, and her resulting distrust of adults, Wendy believes that adults will only let her down and so will not accept the love and guidance of her foster mum. Wendy’s journey to Neverland is about her grappling with these two ideas and ultimately coming to terms with the idea that she is ‘allowed’ to be a child and be taken care of.



Interview with the Director Liam Steel

How are you staging this version of Peter Pan and why?

SETTING

The original story of *Peter Pan* is set in Edwardian England in an expensive area of London called Bloomsbury. The family is a “conventional” one, made up of a mother, father, and three children. They have a servant, and a pet dog who also doubles as the children's nanny. The father works as a clerk in the city and the mother does not work. Whilst J.M. Barrie was writing from the perspective of a world that he knew well, and was very much a part of, it struck me that it was a world that very few children, indeed very few adults, could relate directly to today. I therefore wanted to create a new adaptation of the story that the audience would have more of a relationship with, and that reflected much more the world of today. As such, the beginning and end of this version of *Peter Pan* are set in Birmingham in the present day. Wendy and her brothers are being fostered by a single working woman who lives on a housing estate. Neverland is still a colourful world of imagination and fantasy, but the children having this adventure are everyday kids from a working class background. Children like this are very rarely at the heart of fantasy stories, so it was important for me that the children in the audience are able to see themselves reflected in the characters onstage, and so in consequence are able to live through the adventure with those characters.

DESIGN

At the centre of our new version of Peter Pan, are children who feel that they have been let down by adults. Over the past year I have become fascinated and inspired by the worldwide social movement led by young people calling for governments around the world to take action on climate change and its effect on the environment. On a global level adults have let down, and are continuing to let down a whole generation of young people, and children are becoming the ‘responsible adults’ in making a political stand. As the designer and I talked about the themes of the show, and the fact that we were both passionate that the materials and objects in the production should also be as sustainably resourced and constructed as possible, the crossover between all these subjects became very apparent, and the ideas for the design of the set arose.

We start the piece in a contemporary setting and we wanted Neverland to be born out of that world. A fantastically imagined, colourful world of fantasy is then created almost completely out of trash and recycled materials. This works on two levels - it reminds us we live in a world of mounting plastic that has been left for the children of today to exist in, but it is also a world of hope, where the children have re-constituted, re-imagined and re-used



those objects to create a world of beauty. As a child can re-imagine a cardboard box into a thousand things, this is a world that taps into a child's imagination, whilst also reflecting their environmental concerns. It's a world where nothing is wasted, and the things we throw away can become things of value and beauty.

What are the challenges of telling the story of Peter Pan?

The immediate challenges are how to achieve the numerous technical requirements of being able to tell the story physically onstage. How do you make someone fly? How do you create a giant crocodile that eats a human? How do we show mermaids swimming underwater in a lagoon? However, the bigger challenge is how to re-interpret a much loved and known story and make it fresh and relevant, whilst still holding on to all the magic and charm that has made it so enduringly popular for generations. If they haven't read the book, most people's experience of the story will be through the Disney cartoon or a pantomime version. The challenge for me is allow them to see the story afresh. If it is the first time they have encountered the story, I want them to feel this was how the characters were originally written, and if they know the story well, then I want them to experience it with the joy of re-discovery, as though they are hearing it for the very first time all over again.

Why are you excited to direct Peter Pan?

I have directed a version of the piece once before, for the Open Air Theatre in Regents Park, and it is lovely to be able to revisit the story and approach it from a whole new angle and discover new depths contained within it. I am particularly excited to make a version crafted specifically for Birmingham audiences. Updating it and setting it in Birmingham allows the story to have a whole new relevance and relatability for the people coming to see it.

What can audiences expect in this show?

The audience can expect a very visual and physical piece of storytelling that goes right back to the heart of the original story. Without giving too much away, we will have spectacular flying done in a way that will not have been seen before. Incredible sets on a huge scale conjuring the fantasy world of Neverland, a Pirate Ship, A Mermaid's Lagoon, the Lost Children's Home Underground, and of course a giant crocodile. Not to mention of course all the beloved characters from the original story. (Albeit with some surprise twists in the casting).



However, the audience can also expect to see the characters going on an emotional journey of self-discovery. A journey on which the audience can travel with them, and discover things about themselves through the actions and decisions of the characters on stage.

Why do you think it's important to tell the story of Wendy?

For me, *Peter Pan* is Wendy's story and we have taken this idea to underpin the concept of the whole production.

In this adaptation Wendy is a troubled young teenager who has an answer for everything. Feisty. Strong. Argumentative. Angry. Defiant. Mouthy. The definition of a tearaway. Adults have let her down throughout her life, and they are often too frightened or frustrated by her to see how vulnerable she really is. And yet, she is still a child - a child who has been forced into the position of being a carer, and who cares deeply for her brothers. A child who, up to this point has had no real say in anything to do with her life. A young girl desperately trying not to disappear.

In most fairytales children have to be removed and taken to another place so that they can combat something that they are fighting in their day to day lives. Peter Pan arrives because Wendy is in the middle of a battle. A battle with herself, between youth and adulthood, between needing to be taken care of, and independence, between being desperate to be loved and terrified to let someone in. Ultimately Peter IS Wendy. A split self. Wendy has conjured up Peter from the Neverland in her mind to be the personification of her fighting spirit and her youth and to take on the fight for her. Let down and forgotten by his own mother, he subsequently hates all mothers, indeed all adults.

Where the story of Peter Pan is often a story of Wendy learning to be a grown-up, (in the original it is very much through the reinforcement of gender stereotyping as she cooks and cleans and becomes a 'mother' to the Lost Boys) I wanted this version to somehow be the reverse of that journey. Because of the circumstances of her home life, we have a child who has been forced to become an adult and take on responsibilities way beyond her years. Her journey to Neverland is a journey to recapture her youth, and to realise that she too needs to be taken care of. That she needs, and deserves to be loved.

What would you like audiences to take away after seeing Peter Pan?

I want them to laugh, to cry, to sit in awe at the spectacle in front of them and basically be thoroughly entertained. However, I also hope that the piece is more than that, in that it raises fundamental questions about the world around us - specifically in our relationship to young people. Ideas surrounding what constitutes a modern family? That families can come in all



shapes, and love in many guises. About children we label as being 'trouble', without ever truly understanding what lies beneath. About loss of innocence. About our fundamental need to be loved and feel safe. Ultimately, I want everyone, young or old, to leave the theatre looking at the world in a slightly different way.

Interview with Designer Michael Pavelka

In your words, what is the story of Peter Pan about?

The story is about change: how we change as people, why we change and how we feel about that. The story relates to all ages, because nobody stops changing all the way through a lifetime. It's also, then, about memories - about remembering about how change affected us in our past and about our hopes and fears about what changes await us, whether physical, social or emotional.

How are you designing this version of Peter Pan and why?

I have worked very closely with Liam Steel, the director, to build a world in which the story can live and breathe. Sometimes that means creating a space that is not convenient to the action - it's often useful for the characters to be pushing against their circumstances: challenging and escaping from them as Wendy does and many of the other characters do in their own way. For the most people in the audience to recognise the journeys that the characters in Peter Pan have, we have dreamt and designed a world that anyone could see ten minutes' walk from The Rep and then invented Neverland as an imaginary alternative version of that - a parallel universe. The design transforms familiar places into fantastic ones and these changes mirror the character's adventures.

What can audiences expect in this show from your design?

The show is very physical and the design has to help that part of it. If you have ever really thought about what it's like to fly, the thrill and danger involved, the heights and changes of view, the scenery has to make that all come true before your eyes. It's an epic yarn and the design reflects its scale.

What would you like audiences to take away after seeing the design of Peter Pan?

Well, of course, we would like the audience to have an exciting evening at The REP, but beyond that, to see magic in the everyday. By this I mean what at first glance may be bland



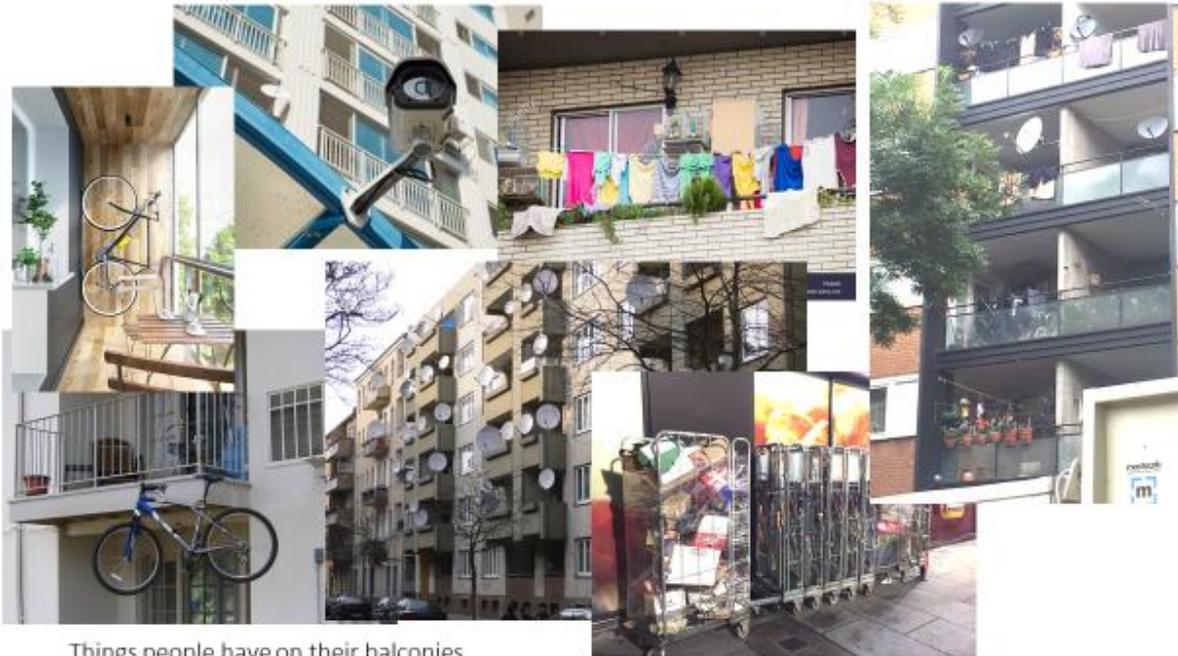
or even ugly has the potential to be fascinating and beautiful. That not only applies to things, it especially applies to people: so that the characters, and the circumstances in the story that shape them, are not only heroes and villains in a fairy tale but are also complicated human beings dealing imaginatively with their reality.

How does your design reflect the world we live in now?

Many of us live in urban surroundings that are increasingly less humane - its surfaces, complexity and enormity can make us feel increasingly less significant, vulnerable and without a story to tell, I hope this show puts people 'centre stage'. We are also passionate about how the materials and objects in the production have been as sustainably resourced and constructed as possible, so we hope the audience will leave seeing their environment in a slightly different way.

Set Designs and Inspiration

The REP is a producing theatre, which means we make most of the things that you see on our stages. The costumes are created here, the set is created here, all the props etc. Below are photos of the set designs by Michael Pavelka the designer for our production of *Peter Pan*.

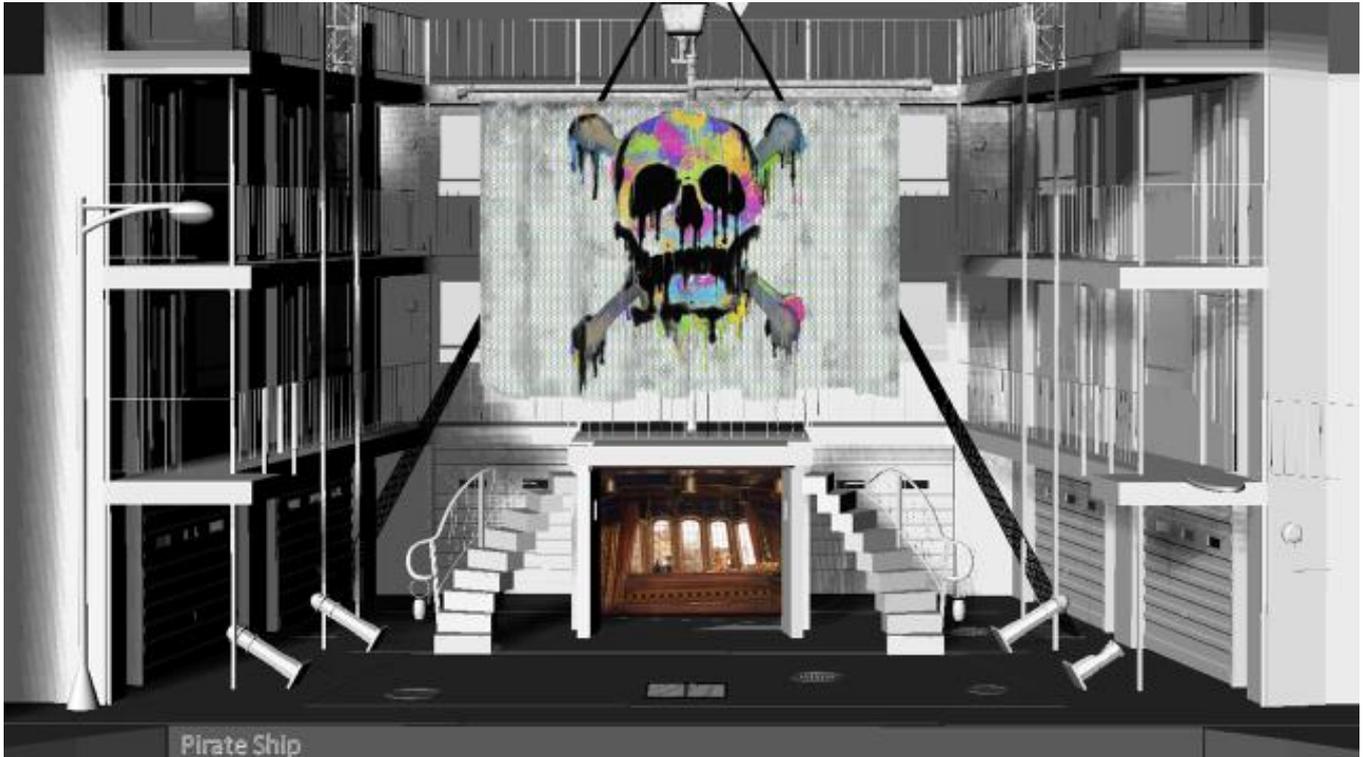


Things people have on their balconies

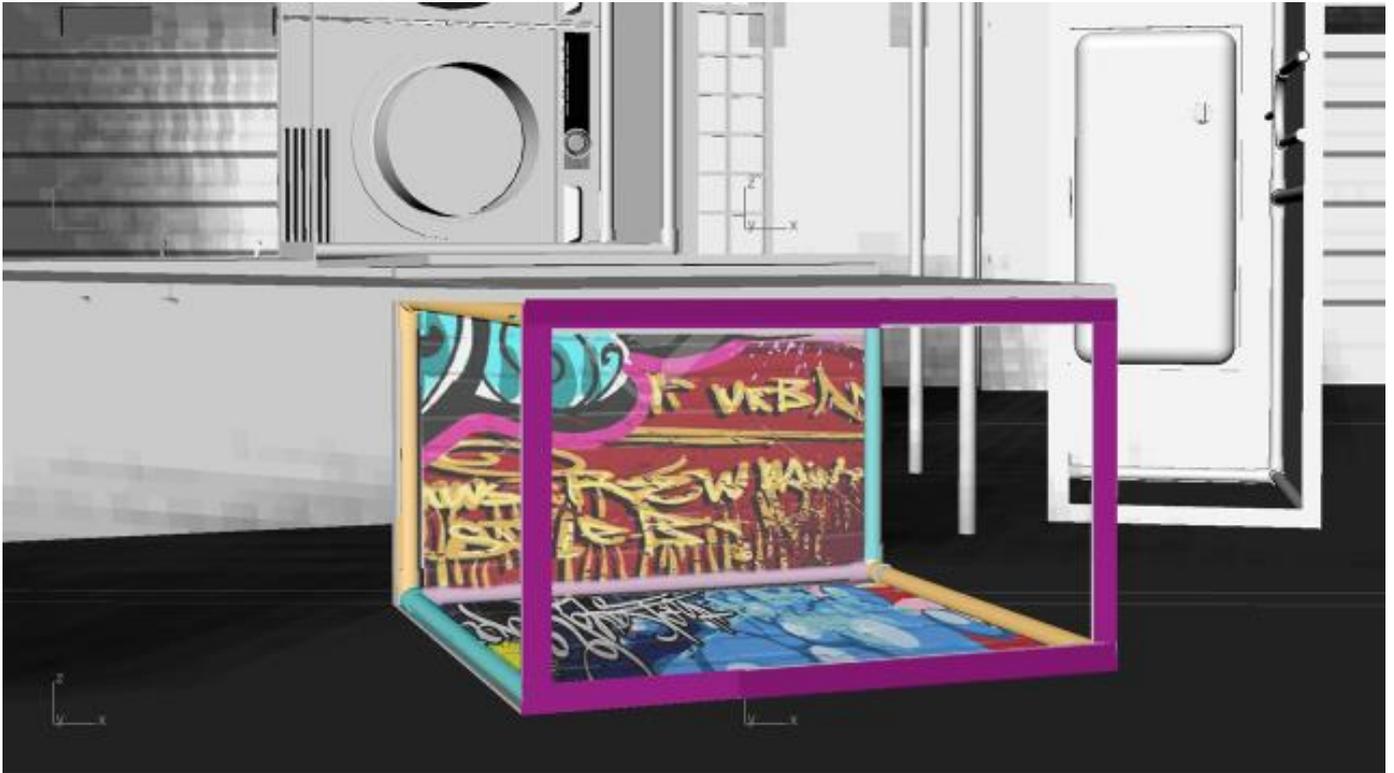
The inspiration comes from an urban environment of blocks of flats.



A world of colourful graffiti art that informs the colour palette and style of all visual elements.



In our world, plastic creations explode from bins to create beautiful backdrops and creatures.





The Synopsis of the Original J.M. Barrie Story

Our adaptation of the novel is a contemporary reimaging of Barrie's original

J.M. Barrie (1860-1937) created Peter Pan in stories he told to the sons of his friend Mrs. Sylvia Llewelyn Davies. When Mrs. Llewelyn Davies died, Barrie became the co-guardian of her sons (their father had died previously) and he unofficially adopted them.

The character's name comes from two sources: Peter Llewelyn Davies, one of the boys, and Pan, the mischievous Greek god of the woodlands. It has also been suggested that the inspiration for the character was Barrie's elder brother David, whose death in a skating accident at the age of thirteen deeply affected their mother. According to Andrew Birkin, author of *J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys*, the death was "a catastrophe beyond belief, and one from which she never fully recovered... Barrie drew inspiration from Margaret Ogilvy taking a measure of comfort from the notion that David, in dying a child, would remain a boy for ever."

In the original novel, Peter often visits the "real world" of Kensington, England to listen in on bedtime stories told by Mrs. Mary Darling to her children. One night, Peter is spotted and, while trying to escape, he loses his shadow. On returning to claim his shadow, Peter wakes Mary's daughter, Wendy Darling. When Wendy succeeds in re-attaching his shadow to him, Peter takes a fancy to her and invites her to Neverland to be a mother to his gang of Lost Boys, the children who are lost in Kensington Gardens. Wendy agrees, and along with her brothers John and Michael they begin the great dangerous and magical flight to Neverland.

The children are blown out of the air by a cannon and Wendy is nearly killed by the Lost Boy Tootles. Peter and the Lost Boys build a little house for Wendy to live in while she recuperates (a structure that, to this day, is called a Wendy House.)

Soon John and Michael adopt the ways of the Lost Boys, while Wendy plays the role of mothering them, all the while provoking the jealousy of Tinker Bell, Tiger Lily, and the mermaids. Peter is often oblivious, concentrating on real and make-believe adventures and on taunting the pirate Captain Hook.

Later follow adventures at the Mermaids' Lagoon, the near deaths of Tinker Bell and Peter, a violent pirate/Indian massacre, and a climactic confrontation with Peter's nemesis, the pirate Captain Hook of the pirate ship the *Jolly Roger*.

In the end, Wendy decides that her place is at home, much to the joy of her heartsick mother. Wendy then brings all the boys back to London. Peter remains in Neverland, but promises to return to visit Wendy.



Themes

Eternal Youth

"All children, except for one, grow up." This is the opening line of both the book and the play. The main theme of the story is the conflict between wanting to remain a child, but knowing that one has to become an adult. Peter Pan is the living and breathing manifestation of the desire to remain a child forever, without responsibility or cares. He makes decisions based on his desire to remain a child forever, even giving up Wendy and the companionship of the Lost Boys, so that he can stay young and continue to go on wild adventures. Peter represents the desire never to get older and never to mature as a person, but to remain immersed in one's imagination and sense of play.

Motherhood

Both Mrs. Darling and Wendy are portrayed as very maternal, and it is suggested that their role in life should be to nurture children. This is a stereotypical depiction of the role of women in society. There is even a suggestion that Wendy is falling in love with Peter, but he tells her he thinks of her more as a mother figure. Part of Peter's arrested development, his desire to be a child forever, is also wrapped up in a Freudian conundrum in which he can only see the females in his life as potential mothers. Indeed, it is hinted that his primary trauma, what sent him to Never Land in the first place, was being abandoned by his mother. He fled his pram as a child, and when he returned to his nursery, his mother had closed the window and no longer expected him to come home. Peter's "mommy issues" are, therefore, at the centre of his character and why he has become so reckless.

Good Triumphant Over Evil

A central and rather simple theme in the play is that of the triumph of good over evil. Captain Hook is a bona fide "baddie" and his deeds are evil and intended to cause harm. He kidnaps Tiger Lily and also attempts to murder Peter by poisoning him. After Peter has come to rescue the Lost Boys and the Darling children, Hook also attempts to kill him again. He gets his comeuppance when Peter kicks him into the open jaws of the crocodile. Peter, the adventurous boy who will never grow up, represents good, while Hook represents evil. The play suggests that good always triumphs over evil.

Family

The first time we see a portrayal of a close family relationship, Mrs. and Mr. Darling are preparing to go out to dinner, as they interact lovingly with their three children. They are adoring parents who think highly of their children, and their quarrels are always loving and affectionate. When Peter asks Wendy to accompany him to Never Land, she brings along her brothers, Michael and John. Then, in Never Land, she meets the Lost Boys, orphans whom Peter had discovered in Kensington Gardens. Wendy immediately acts as a mother to the boys, and they create a makeshift family where there never was one.



Finally, at the end of the story, Wendy begins to miss her parents horribly, and decides to go home, bringing the Lost Boys with her. When her mother hears about the Lost Boys, she offers to adopt them, providing them with a mother and a family.

Adventure

A defining characteristic of Peter Pan is his insatiable thirst for adventure. More than family, romance, or stability, Peter loves a good challenge. He loves to find adventures and he loves a fair fight. The plot of the play is made up of a series of adventures, usually led by the spritely Peter, and always ending in triumph. Adventure becomes one of the most exhilarating elements and defining characteristics of his curious eternal childhood. While adults must grow up, get educations, pursue careers, and leave spontaneity behind, children have the privilege of going on any number of adventures and living always in the moment.

Belief

The play is filled with instances of magic and a harnessing of that which the adult world deems "impossible"—the children fly, Never Land is populated by a wide array of storybook characters, and fairies abound. Belief in the impossible and faith in the power of the mind is what keeps these magical events occurring throughout the play. When Peter first teaches the Darling children to fly, he advises them to think happy thoughts, and it is this joy that lifts them off the ground. He also explains that new fairies come into existence every time a baby laughs, and die when anyone says they do not believe in fairies. When Tinker Bell almost dies after drinking the poison, the clapping of the audience—a vocal expression of belief in fairies—that brings her back to life. Belief and the imagination have an uncanny ability to make the impossible possible throughout the play.

Adult Responsibility

A major reason Peter does not want to grow up is because he does not want to assume adult responsibilities, but instead wants to stay a child and have fun. In the beginning of the play, we meet Mr. Darling, a character who is rather comical precisely because he has to assume so many adult responsibilities as the breadwinner of the family. Barrie describes Mr. Darling in terms of his adult responsibility as a working man: "He is really a good man as breadwinners go, and it is hard luck for him to be propelled into the room now, when if we had brought him in a few minutes earlier or later he might have made a fairer impression. In the city where he sits on a stool all day, as fixed as a postage stamp, he is so like all the others on stools that you recognise him not by his face but by his stool, but at home the way to gratify him is to say that he has a distinct personality."



Drama Activities for Students

Activity 1 – Devising in Pairs

In pairs ask student to label themselves as Peter Pan and Pater Pan’s Shadow and create bits of movement to explore the two characters using the followings exercises.

Exercise 1 Round – By – Through: Ask young people to find a way to travel around their partner using three movements; a movement where they go through round each other, a movement where they go by or along each other, and a movement where they go through each other. Ask them to think about how they move in the space making sure their actions are identical for each of the three movements. Then develop this activity for people to move as their characters and explore their character’s movement more.

Exercise 2 Mirroring: Ask young people to begin my mirroring their partner around the room, they can interact with things in the room, interact with other pairs, but eventually they need to choose the leader the character of either Peter Pan or his shadow, every time you (the facilitator) shouts switch, so that the leadership in the mirroring changes, but also the character they both represent changes.

Exercise 3 One, Two, Three: Ask young people to count to three between them. They say one number each, and restart after three, it should always be rotating between each partner so they both would be saying 1, 2, or 3 at some point. After a little practice, replace 1 with an action to resemble Peter Pan. Again after a little practice, replace 2 with a phrase that could be said by Peter Pan. Lastly replace 3 with a movement that the shadow might make.

Activity 2 – Peter Pan’s Diary

As the facilitator ask everyone in the room to find their own space with a sheet of paper and a pen. Play some music and ask the participants to free-write continuously for 2 minutes.

Their task is a letter to write a diary entry about Peter Pan’s day. What could have happened? What amazing adventure did he go on? Why does he not want to become an adult?

Once people have wrote diary entries, if people are comfortable these can be read aloud and people can discuss how some of these stories might be put on stage or brought to life. To make young people comfortable the teacher/facilitator may also take part in this activity and share their story to the group.



Activity 3 – Performance Poetry

Ask young people to think of the world HOME.

Explain the five senses to them

SEE//HEAR//TOUCH//TASTE//SMELL

Now ask young people to finish the following sentences:

Home looks like a place where....

Home sounds like....

Home feels like....

Home tastes like...

Home smells like.

An example would be the below:

Home looks like a summer garden, with flowers blooming. Home sounds like the tv on, the kettle boiling and my brother playing on his Playstation. Home feels like a warm blanket on a cold evening. Home tastes like mum's homemade casserole. Home smells like Febreze and coffee.

Then get young people to think of actions they can do for each section to create their own small short performance.

Activity 4 – Post-Performance Character Breakdown

Ask the pupils to pick a character from the play that they found interesting. Ask them to list three things that they admired about them and why, e.g. their personality, their behaviour, their ambitions, their motivations, etc. Likewise, if they disliked anything about their attributes, ask them to list up to three things. Pick pupils to share their thoughts and reasons for admiring or disliking their selected character. They can use the below template to help.



Character Name: _____

Character's Job: _____

List 5 Words that describe the character for you

Sketch Your Character

What was your initial impression of the character?

What journey does the character's story go on? What do they want? What's the problem that comes in the way? Does the character get what they want and how?
