

EDUCATION PACK

A woman with short grey hair, wearing a red velvet off-the-shoulder dress and multiple strands of pearls, is looking upwards and to the right. She is standing in front of a large window with white curtains. The background outside the window shows a green landscape.

THE SEAGULL

By **ANTON CHEKHOV** Adapted By **MIKE POULTON**
Directed By **JAMES BRINING**

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh are delighted to present this Education Pack to accompany the production of *The Seagull*. Working closely with the cast and creatives involved in the production, we have curated a variety of visual and written material which we hope will support teachers and students in their explorations and reflections on the production.

We have also included information on our Season 25/26 Schools Workshop programme which details further ways in which our Creative Learning Department can enrich student experience of the production and support studies.



NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to The Lyceum and thank you for being here for *The Seagull*. It's a special production for me – my first as Artistic Director – and it feels fitting to begin with one of theatre's great classics. Despite being first performed 130 years ago, Chekhov's play feels fresh and alive. The characters long for love, for success, for connection – and yet they stumble, get stuck, and sometimes get in the way of the very happiness they're chasing. It's funny, heartbreaking, and painfully human, often all at once.

For me, working on *The Seagull* with our wonderful cast of actors has been all about exploring that mix of hope and disappointment, beauty and awkwardness. Answers are illusive, hard to pin down, and I have loved assembling and seeing some of Scotland's finest artists being stretched and challenged by such rich material.



Of course, *The Seagull* is also a play about theatre itself – about the urge to create something new and meaningful – which feels like a great question to ask as I start my journey at The Lyceum: what kind of work can we make together, and why does it matter? That question is at the heart of my ambition for The Lyceum. I want this wonderful theatre to be a place where we take risks, strive to create exceptional shows, and where we make work that speaks to the world around us but is rooted in human experience with all its messy and wonderful contradictions and challenges.

It's been a real pleasure to work with Mike Poulton on his fresh and lively adaptation, and with the wonderful Caroline Quentin as Arkadina. Together with a brilliant cast of Scottish actors, they've brought warmth, wit, and spirit to every rehearsal – and I can't wait for you to see them bring this story to life. I'm delighted to share *The Seagull* with you tonight, and even more excited for what lies ahead. Thank you for joining us at the beginning of this new chapter.

JAMES BRINING
Artistic Director

CAST

CAROLINE QUENTIN

Irina Arkadina



IRENE ALLAN

Polina



LORN MACDONALD

Konstantin



DYFAN DWYFOR

Trigorin



MICHAEL DYLAN

Medvendenko



HARMONY ROSE-BREMNER

Nina



STEVEN MCNICOLL

Shamrayev



JOHN BETT

Sorin



FORBES MASSON

Dr Dorn



KRISTIAN LUSTRE

Yakov



TALLULAH GREIVE

Masha



CREATIVE TEAM

PLAYWRIGHT

Anton Chekhov

ADAPTED BY

Mike Poulton

DIRECTOR

James Brining

COSTUME DESIGNER

Madeleine Boyd

SET DESIGNER

Colin Richmond

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Lizzie Powell

**ASSOCIATE
COSTUME DESIGNER**

Anna Kelsey

**CO-SET
DESIGNER**

Anna Kelsey

**SOUND
DESIGNER &
COMPOSER**

Michael John
McCarthy

**MOVEMENT &
INTIMACY
DIRECTOR**

EJ Boyle

THE SEAGULL

First performed in 1896, Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* explores the complexities of love, art, and human ambition. Set on a country estate in late 19th-century Russia, the story centres around a group of artists and intellectuals, each struggling with unfulfilled dreams and emotional longing.

At the heart of the play is Konstantin, a young playwright desperate to create new, meaningful forms of theatre and win the love of Nina, an aspiring actress. His mother, Irina, a fading but self-absorbed actress, dismisses his artistic efforts and remains focused on her relationship with Trigorin, a famous but emotionally detached writer. Nina becomes infatuated with Trigorin, leaving Konstantin devastated.

As romantic and artistic desires collide, nearly every character faces unrequited love, disappointment, and self-doubt. The symbol of the seagull, killed and presented by Konstantin to Nina represents innocence destroyed by cruelty and ambition.

The Seagull offers a reflection on the bittersweet human experience of hope mingled with despair. Portraying both the quiet tragedy and ironic humour of everyday life and remains a poignant exploration of creativity, love, and the quest for meaning.

ACTIVITY: WRITE A REVIEW

This task is designed to be completed before delving into group discussions activities after seeing the performance to empower them to explore their own thoughts, ideas and feelings about the performance without influence.

After seeing the performance, invite students to write a review. Encourage them to give their honest opinion without reading any published reviews and, if possible, without discussing the performance with one another in too much depth.

Explain to students that, while there may be mixed opinions on the performance, all are valid and part of this activity is to identify why they came to their opinion.

Reviews should be between 200-300 words long and should take into consideration:

- What happened in the play
- How it happened (through acting or design concepts)
- Why it was done
- The audience response/reaction

Students can also provide a star rating for the performance between 1-5.

Once students have written their reviews, they can read each other's to compare opinions, or use the professional reviews listed in the next section of this pack to compare writing styles.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION EXERCISE – RADIO INTERVIEW

The purpose of this exercise is to help students articulate the reasons behind the opinions they formed in the writing exercise. Work with the class as a whole to create 3-5 questions about the review they have written. For example:

- How did you come to that opinion?
- How would you have shown that differently?
- Would you recommend the production? Why/why not?

Split the class into pairs and provide them with a way of recording their voice (eg iPad, phone or voice recorder). Avoid the use video recordings as this can distract from focusing on verbal communication skills.

In turns, students take the role of interviewer and interviewee asking each other the prepared questions. Ask students to complete the interview as if it were live on the radio, trying to avoid stopping and starting. Interviewers should be encouraged to ask follow-up questions or challenge answers to draw out the ideas being expressed.

Once both interviews are completed students should listen back to each of the interviews and consider:

- Vocabulary – is it repetitive, does it paint a picture in the listeners mind?
- Articulation – is it clear and concise?
- Accuracy – do they feel they accurately communicated what they wanted? If not, why might this be?

Students can also swap recordings with another pair and feedback on how it was received from someone external to the interview process.



ADAPTORS' NOTE

Translating a great Chekhov play is in some ways tricky and in others very easy. To begin with what is easy. Chekhov made his name as a writer of short stories – an astute observer of human behaviour. I think of him as a nineteenth century David Attenborough observing Russian society. His study is of a community of human beings rather than, say, a school of killer whales, or an extended family of chimpanzees.

There is little that we would recognise as a plot in the daily life of a chimpanzee family but there is intense interaction by the different characters in the group. And nothing is ever resolved. Every Chekhov story or play is a masterpiece of character observation. He shows us ourselves and makes us cry at misfortunes common to all of us and laugh at the absurd behaviour of which we are all capable. We can't help loving Chekhov.

It's a quality he shares with Shakespeare. We come out of an Ibsen or a Schiller classic sadder and wiser. But I hope we come out of a Chekhov play feeling that we love him and his characters for all their adversities, pitiful ambitions, and foibles. Chekhov is easy to translate because human nature never changes and his focus on humanity is so sharp and truthful.

What is sometimes tricky for a translator of Chekhov is coming to terms with what is now the historical setting of the stories and plays. Russia's past is an undiscovered country for some modern audiences. Consequently, some translators and directors feel the need to expound and explain. Worse, some others feel the need to put their mark on greatness. Like dogs peeing on a lamp post. Such tempting territorial urges are to be resisted at all costs. My own approach is to trust Chekhov and make no unwise attempt to 'modernise' his settings in a pointless and fatuous attempt to make his plays 'relevant'. Chekhov is more than relevant. He shows us the truth about ourselves.

All he requires is an excellent cast of actors who talk to each other and make you, the audience, believe they believe what they are saying. I leave it to them to reveal Chekhov's meaning. This may sound simplistic. But these plays are full of blinding and sometimes harrowing insights into human nature. They are also full of laughs. In Chekhov's world there are no heroes and no villains – just the sort of complex people we meet every day, dumped into the middle of some self-inflicted crisis. I believe it is the duty of a translator to give you the spirit of the original. For me, mumbling into microphones, mobile phones, flashing neon signs, swigging cans of lager, and slurred diction are death to the clarity classic plays deserve. In a Chekhov play truth comes gently to break your heart.

I made this new translation of *The Seagull* because I wanted to work with Caroline Quentin, James Brining, and a cast I admire, in the Lyceum. I am certain it is a theatre, and a company Chekhov would have loved.



THE LYCEUM AT 60

60
YEARS OF

Chekhov



The Cherry Orchard, 1977




Edith MacArthur in The Cherry Orchard, 1989



The Cherry Orchard, 1977

CHARACTER OVERVIEW


KONSTANTIN

A young man with wavy brown hair and a light complexion is seated in a dark wooden chair. He is wearing a dark blazer over a light blue and white striped shirt, and brown trousers. He has a white pocket square in his blazer. He is gesturing with both hands, palms up, as if in the middle of a conversation or explanation. The background is a warm, textured wall with vertical lines, possibly wood or stone, in shades of orange and brown. The lighting is soft and warm, highlighting his face and hands.

A young, idealistic writer and the son of Irina Arkadina. Konstantin longs to create new forms of art that break away from tradition. He is emotionally intense, insecure, and deeply in love with Nina. Rejected by both his mother and Nina, he struggles with self-worth, artistic failure, and depression. His tragic arc ends in suicide.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

IRINA ARKADINA

A woman with red hair styled in an updo, wearing a white long-sleeved blouse and a green skirt, holds a large, light-colored parasol. She is smiling and looking to the right. The background is a warm, golden field of tall grass.

A famous, aging actress and Konstantin's mother. She is vain, self-centred, and fiercely protective of her career and her younger lover, Trigorin. Arkadina often belittles Konstantin, failing to understand his artistic struggles or emotional needs. Though intelligent and charming, she is emotionally manipulative and resistant to change.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

NINA

A young, naive woman from a wealthy family who dreams of becoming an actress. She is captivated by the glamour of fame and idealizes Trigorin. Her romantic and artistic ambitions lead to heartbreak and disillusionment. By the end of the play, Nina is emotionally hardened but still determined to continue pursuing her dreams.


CHARACTER OVERVIEW

TRIGORIN

A well-known writer and Arkadina's lover. Trigorin is outwardly modest but internally restless and self-absorbed. Though he speaks of the burdens of fame, he enjoys its privileges. He becomes involved with Nina but ultimately returns to Arkadina, leaving Nina emotionally shattered. He represents traditional, established art and the moral compromises of success.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

MASHA

A woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a black, high-collared, long-sleeved dress with a ruffled bodice, is seated on a patterned rug. She holds a small glass of water in her right hand and looks upwards with a contemplative or sad expression. In the background, another woman with long dark hair, wearing a white dress, is seated and looking down at something in her hands. The setting appears to be an indoor space with warm, golden lighting and a textured wall.

The daughter of the estate manager, Shamrayev. She is bitter, cynical, and in love with Konstantin, who does not return her affection. To numb her feelings, she wears black, claiming to mourn her life. Masha marries the schoolteacher Medvedenko despite not loving him, hoping it might offer some form of stability.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

MEDVENDENKO



A poor schoolteacher who is hopelessly in love with Masha. He is practical and earnest, constantly worrying about money. His love is unreturned, and his life is filled with quiet frustration.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

SORIN



Arkadina's kind, aging brother and the owner of the country estate. He is gentle and idealistic, having spent his life in government service instead of following his dreams. Sorin serves as a symbol of unfulfilled potential and lost opportunities.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW


SHAMRAYEV



The estate manager and Masha's father. He is coarse, opinionated, and often oversteps social boundaries. He clashes frequently with Arkadina and others due to his arrogance and lack of tact.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

POLINA

A woman with light brown hair, wearing a long, light-colored dress with a square neckline and a blue pendant necklace, stands in a field of tall, dry grass. She is looking upwards with a concerned expression. The background is a dark, textured wall with some vertical lines. A wooden chair is visible in the bottom right corner.

Shamrayev's wife and Masha's mother. She is worn down by her unhappy marriage and is in love with Dr. Dorn. Her quiet suffering reflects the emotional stagnation of many characters in the play.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

DR. DORN



A worldly and compassionate doctor who serves as an observer to much of the action. He is wise, empathetic, and something of a confidant to others. Dorn is aware of the pain around him but remains detached, offering a calm and rational presence amid emotional turmoil.

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

YAKOV



A labourer or stagehand who assists with tasks around the estate, reflecting the background presence of the working class in Chekhov's world.

ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION POINTS

Some useful discussion points to use with students after seeing the production are below; these could be discussed in groups or as a whole class.

- What do you think they play/performance about?
- How was this communicated through the design elements (Lighting/Sound/Costume/Set)
- What key moments or characters stood out and why?
- What was the journey of a particular character throughout the performance and how was this communicated?
- What relevance does the play hold to today and our local culture/society? You may want to encourage students to consider social, political and cultural issues that can be related to the performance
- What (if anything) did you learn through the performance?
- Was there anything about the performance you did not like, or feel did not fit within the wider production? If so, why?
- Is there anything students would have done differently in the performance? If so, how would they have done this and why?





Q&A WITH THE DESIGNER: COLIN RICHMOND AND ANNA KELSEY

What drew you to designing *The Seagull*?

Colin Richmond: I first worked with James Brining back when he was at Dundee Rep Theatre with Dominic Hill and then throughout his time at The Leeds Playhouse. James' energy has always inspired really satisfying collaborations. So, whenever James asks me to join a project, I know it will be something special. Add to that the fact it's *The Seagull*, with an incredible cast and creative team and co-creatives and designers, and at the beautiful Lyceum — it was an easy yes. It's such a layered, fascinating play, and we knew we could really enjoy digging into it together.

Anna Kelsey: I've not designed a Chekhov play before, but I have seen many and am drawn to the recurring themes in his work. Unfulfilled dreams and lost potential, love, loneliness and the clash between old and new.

I knew collaborating with Colin would lead to creating a hauntingly beautiful design that reflects the depth and enduring power of Chekhov's work. I've not worked at The Lyceum before, so it was a great opportunity to get to know the venue and the fantastic team at the theatre.

What were your sources of inspiration/references when designing the show?

CR: The play moves through four locations: a makeshift theatre beside a lake, a lawn or clearing near the house, the dining room, and finally a makeshift drawing room. With each shift, the space seems to shrink — it's as if the world closes in, becoming more suffocating with each act. James was keen for the design to reflect that idea of Russian dolls, or boxes within boxes.

Although the settings are domestic, we wanted them to feel heightened and theatrical too. Light plays a big role: the moonlit glow of the opening,

bright sunshine in the second act, the dusty beams of summer in the third, and the heavy, shuttered gloom of the fourth. We also looked closely at old houses, decaying interiors, and the way nature reclaims spaces — that tension between beauty and ruin really informed the design.

AK: We wanted the environment we created to give a slight nod to Scotland. A lot of the images we looked at of grand old houses were reminiscent of rural Scottish estates. It was important that the space we created felt remote and isolated; really on the edge of things.

Have there been any challenges or surprises in designing this production?

CR: The production heads to Chichester after Edinburgh, which brings a very different stage orientation. So alongside creating The Lyceum version, we've been considering how to reconfigure the design to fit Chichester's space — essentially designing with two theatres in mind at once.

AK: We have a couple of large transitions between the 4 acts that have required careful staging. Scenery and furniture is moved by a combination of actors and stage crew. These transitions often happen at the same time as costume changes, so working out who is available and has time to move props, plus ensuring the transitions look smooth and beautiful has been a really enjoyable challenge.

The Lyceum has much bigger wing space on Stage Left than on Stage Right, so most of the large scenery and furniture has to live in the Stage left wing - so that's been a fun jigsaw puzzle!

What do you think good design adds to the art of storytelling?

CR: For me, design is visual dramaturgy — it's another way of telling the story. When the design looks, sounds, or feels like the play, or adds an extra layer of energy or meaning, that's when it works best.

With a play like *The Seagull*, it's about supporting the action rather than upstaging it.

A lot of the process of design is instinctive and emotional, but detail and historical accuracy also come into play — though sometimes it's right to bend those rules. Someone once told me that good design should go unnoticed. I don't entirely agree — I think design can absolutely be noticed, but it should never be the only thing noticed. It should amplify the story, not overpower it. I started designing sets and costume because I loved storytelling through theatre, so for me the play always comes first, and the design is there to serve it.

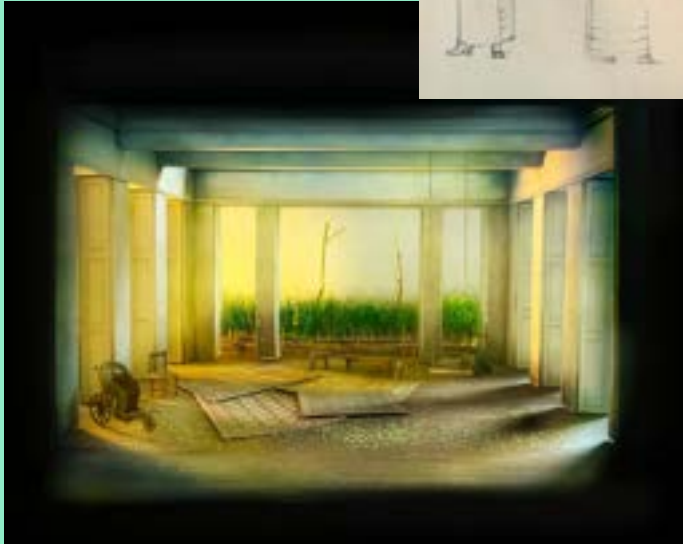
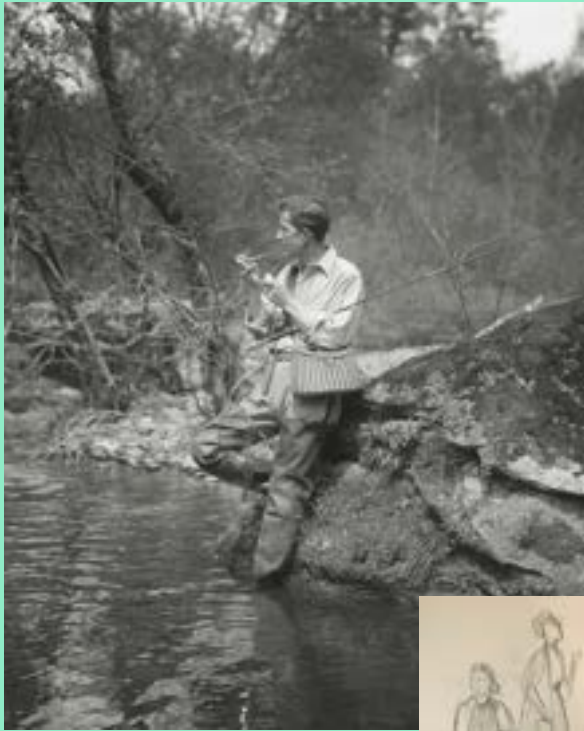
AK: I agree with everything Colin has said about design amplifying the story. I love it when sets and costumes have a journey or a transition. It's exciting for audiences and can move the story onwards in time, space and meaning.

What is your favourite thing about *The Seagull*?

CR: It's simply a stunning piece of writing — visceral, layered, and timeless. We're lucky to be working on a text that has endured for so long and still resonates so deeply. It also feels right at home in The Lyceum, especially in this adaptation. And on a personal note, it's been a real joy to design for The Lyceum again.

AK: At the read through on the first day of rehearsals I was reminded that this play is filled with humour alongside heartbreak. *The Seagull* captures both the comedy and tragedy of everyday existence.

I have loved seeing the show develop throughout rehearsals and how our incredibly talented cast have brought these flawed, vulnerable, wonderfully written characters to life.



EXPLORING THEMES

Throughout the play several themes are explored including, but not limited to:

Art and the Nature of Theatre

- One of the central themes is the clash between old and new forms of art.
- Konstantin Treplev wants to create innovative, symbolic theatre, while his mother Irina, a traditional actress, represents the established, conventional form.
- The play questions what makes art meaningful and whether it's better to innovate or perfect tradition.

Unrequited Love and Emotional Longing

- Nearly every major character is entangled in some form of unrequited love:
 - Konstantin loves Nina.
 - Nina loves Trigorin.
 - Masha loves Konstantin.
 - Medvedenko loves Masha.
- This web of one-sided affection highlights the pain of unfulfilled desires and how love often goes unreturned or unnoticed.

The Search for Meaning and Identity

- Characters struggle with self-worth, purpose, and identity – especially in their personal and artistic lives.
- Konstantin seeks validation as a writer and as a son.
- Nina seeks fame and artistic fulfilment but suffers personal disillusionment.
- These internal struggles reveal the emptiness behind ambition and the fragility of human aspiration.

Disillusionment and the Passage of Time

- Many characters become disillusioned – with love, art, success, or themselves.
- The passage of time between Acts 3 and 4 emphasises how dreams fade, and people settle into bitterness, regret, or resignation.
- The play avoids dramatic climaxes and instead shows slow emotional decay, typical of Chekhov's style.

Family and Generational Conflict

- The strained relationship between Konstantin and Irina reflects generational tension.
- Irina's ego, vanity, and neglect of her son contrast with Konstantin's desperate need for maternal affection and artistic recognition.
- This tension shows how family dynamics can stifle growth and deepen personal wounds.



ACTIVITY: PERFORMING THEMES

This activity enables students to practically explore how themes can be explored and communicated through performance and production mediums.

Materials Needed

- Script excerpts for example:
 - Irina & Konstantin's confrontation (mother vs son: ambition & jealousy)
 - Nina's monologue (dreams vs reality)
 - Trigorin, Nina & Konstantin (romantic & creative tensions)
- Space to rehearse in groups and perform back.
- Basic set, props and costume items optional (chairs, tables, scarves, hats, etc).
- Actors – How can present and perform internal conflict (tone, gesture, body-language).
- Designers – How might you enhance the presentation of the themes through costume/ set / lighting / sound.
- Groups should keep in mind that their performance should have a clear beginning, middle and end.

Step 1 – Exploring the text (15 – 20 mins)

- Divide class into small groups; assign each group one extract.
- Ask groups to read through their extract, discussing:
 - What theme(s) are most evident in this scene?
 - Were there any additional themes you identified?
 - What choices did The Lyceum production make (in set, costume, lighting, performance, staging, pacing) to emphasise the theme(s).
- Each group should pick one theme that they find especially powerful or relevant to the section of text they have been given.

Step 2 - Scene Work in Small Groups (20 – 25 mins)

- Each group rehearses a short staging of the extract,
- Students can take on different roles – Actor/Director/Designer etc. depending on the size of the group. (All could be actors if this feels more appropriate for the group)
- In these roles the group should work together to stage the performance considering:
 - Directors - Where to place emphasis on theme via physical staging, pause/silence etc.

Step 3 - Performance & Peer Feedback (up to 5 mins per group)

- Each group performs their extract to the rest of the class.
- After each group, the audience should constructively consider:
 - Which theme(s) came strongly?
 - What specific staging / actor choices made this theme choice clear?
 - What worked well and what could be better?



REVIEWS

Here is a selection of professional reviews of the production that ran between 21 Oct – 1 Nov at Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh production.



The Herald, 15 October 2025, by Neil Cooper.
[Read here.](#)



Arts Reviews, 15 October 2025, by Tom King.
[Read here.](#)



The Guardian, 16 October 2025, by Mark Fisher.
[Read here.](#)





LYCEUM EDUCATION PROGRAMME 2025/26

As part of our Creative Learning programme, we offer a range of opportunities for schools and teachers to engage with our work and season shows. Designed for Primary, Secondary and Higher levels, our workshops, tours and education packs support the Curriculum for Excellence and offer creative ways to support and enhance your existing curriculum.

A brief summary of our key offers are below, or you can find out more at <https://lyceum.org.uk/take-part/young-people/schools>

Workshops

Specifically designed to support Higher and Advanced Higher Drama studies, these workshops will give your pupils the opportunity to delve deeper into our productions. All workshops are delivered by one of our experienced facilitators and come with a Lyceum production resource pack.

- **Development of Characters**
- **Design Concepts**
- **Collaboration and Dramatic Impact**

We also offer custom-designed workshops for both Primary and Secondary classes on request. These aim to support studies across the curriculum and can cover anything from general performance skills to a more in-depth topic or subject you are studying. They can be designed on a one-off basis, or as a programme across several weeks.

Visit [our website](https://lyceum.org.uk/take-part/young-people/schools) to find out more.

Backstage tours

So much happens behind the scenes at the Lyceum and we'd love to give you special access! Our tours allow you to get up close to our work by exploring spaces not usually open to members of the public. Tours of the Theatre or our Production workshop at Roseburn can be arranged.

CLPL

Our CLPL sessions aim to support teachers and educators in using drama in the classroom by developing confidence and equipping them with a range of drama techniques so that this form of teaching and learning can be embedded within their day-to-day practice. CLPL sessions can be tailored to any learning area.



GET IN TOUCH

If you have questions about the production or how to use this pack, or would like to make an enquiry about booking a workshop or tour, get in touch with our Creative Learning Department at

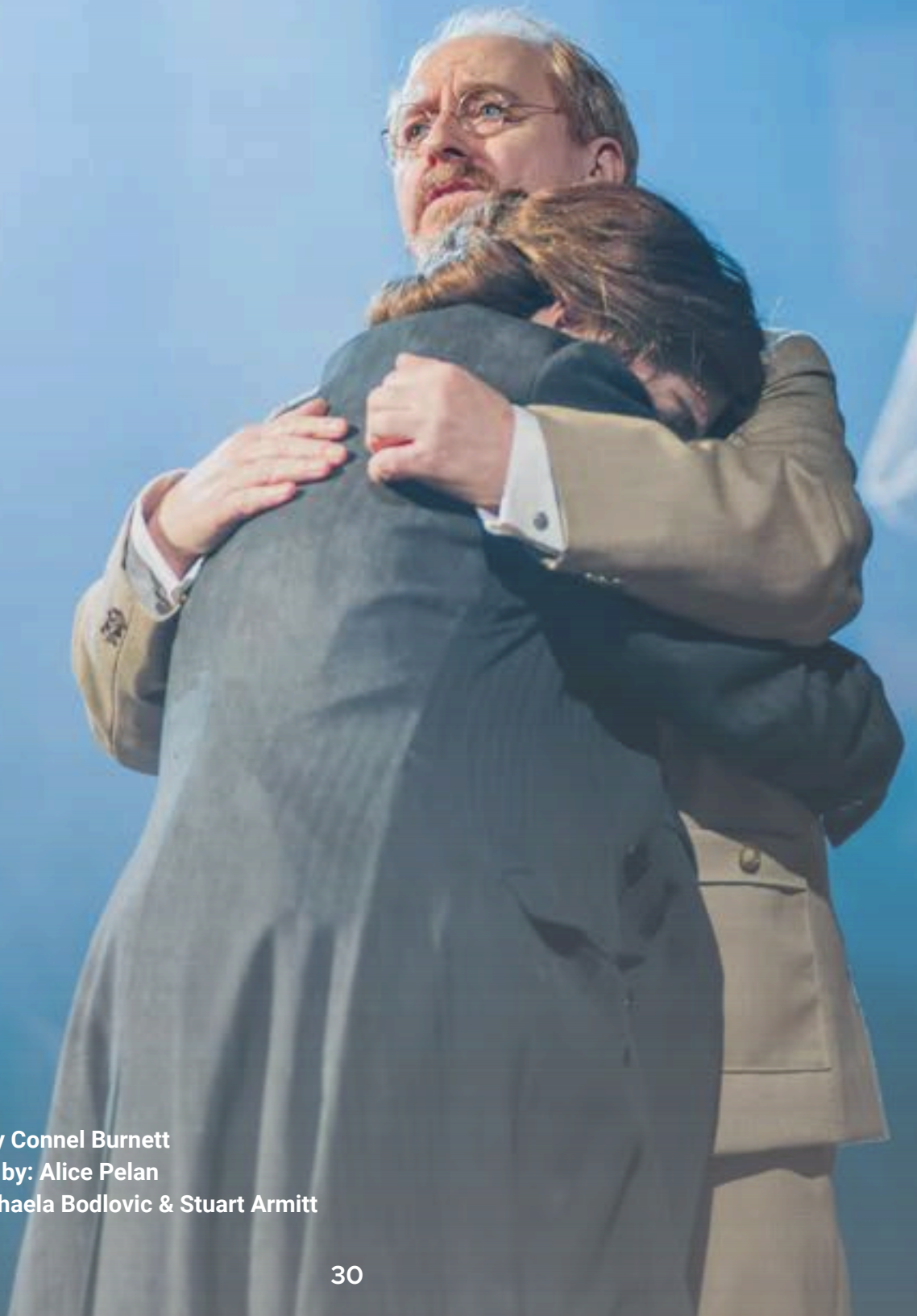
learning@lyceum.org.uk

Lyceum Creative Learning Team

Interim Director Creative Learning: Zinnie Harris

Producer: Connel Burnett

Senior Creative Learning Officer: Leila Price



Resource Written by Connel Burnett

Resource Designed by: Alice Pelan

Photography by: Mihaela Bodlovic & Stuart Armitt