

Study Guide: Students & Educators

HANGMEN

By Martin McDonagh
Directed by
Matthew Dunster



ATLANTIC ACTING SCHOOL

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Section I: The Play

Synopsis
Settings
Themes



SYNOPSIS

In his small pub in the northern English town of Oldham, Harry is something of a local celebrity. But what's the second-best hangman in England to do on the day they've abolished hanging? Amongst the cub reporters and pub regulars dying to hear Harry's reaction to the news, his old assistant Syd and the peculiar Mooney lurk with very different motives for their visit.

SETTING

Time: 1963 | Place: Oldham, England

THEMES

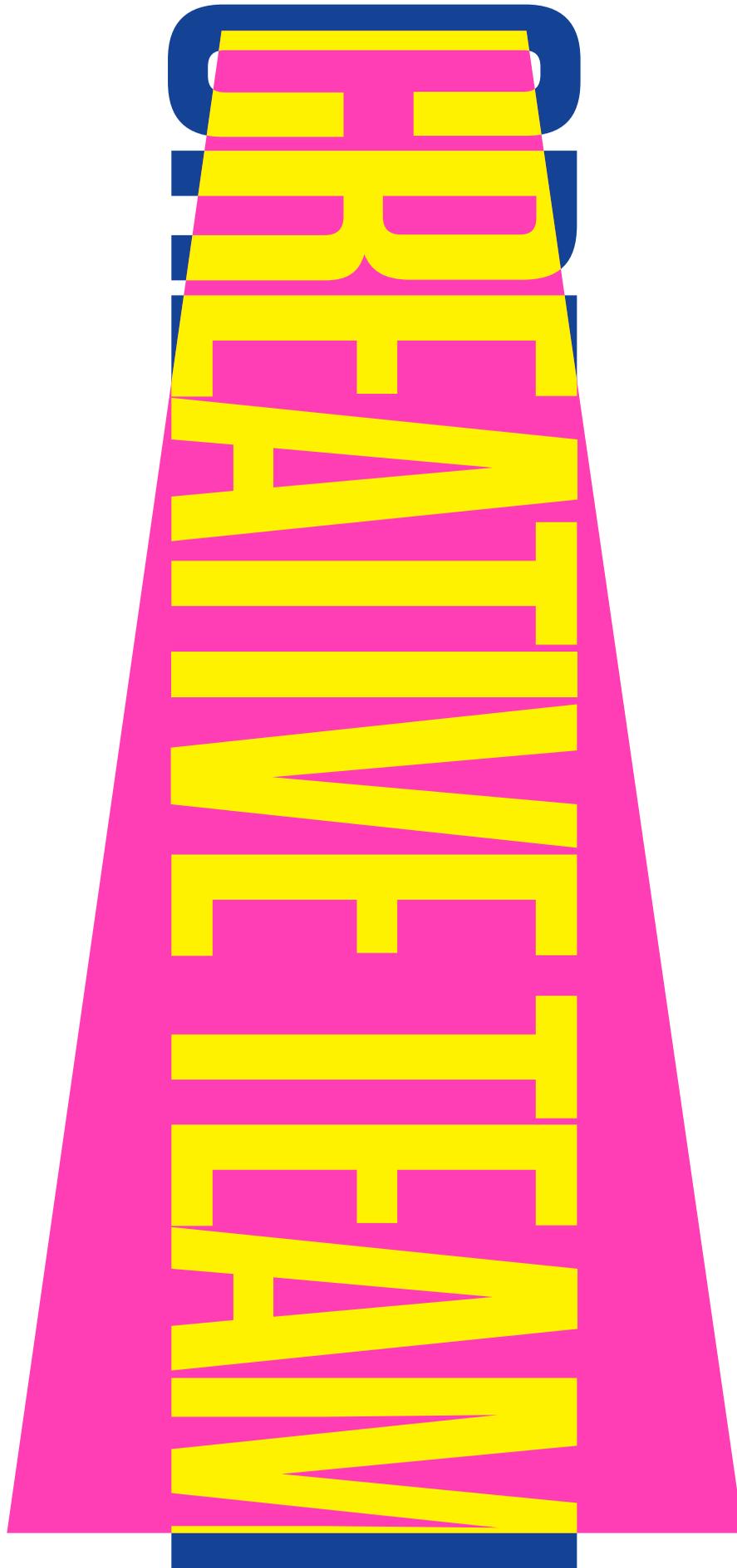
Death
Innocence
Morality
Old/New
Vanity
Ego vs Insecurity
Trust
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Impotence
Playing God
Accountability
Evil

**Section II:
Creative Team**

Playwright & Director

Biographies

Cast/Characters





MARTIN MCDONAGH (Playwright) is an award winning writer/director. His latest film is "Three Billboards Outside of Ebbing, Missouri." Plays: *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*; *A Skull in Connemara*; *The Lonesome West*; *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*; *The Cripple of Inishmaan*; *The Pillowman*; *A Behanding in Spokane*; *Hangmen*. Screenplays: "Barney Nenagh's Shotgun Circus"; "Suicide on Sixth Street". As writer/director: "Three Billboards Outside of Ebbing, Missouri"; "Seven Psychopaths"; "In Bruges"; "Six Shooter" (short film).



MATTHEW DUNSTER (Director) is an Olivier-nominated director, playwright and actor, and Associate Director at Shakespeare's Globe. His directing credits include: *The Secret Theatre*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Imogen*, *The Frontline*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Dr Faustus* and *The Lightning Child* (Shakespeare's Globe), *Hangmen* (Wyndham's Theatre & Royal Court), *Libertarian Girl* (Royal Court), *The Seagull*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Open Air Regent's Park), *Love's Sacrifice* (RSC), *The Love Girl & the Innocent*, *You Can Still Make a Killing* (Southwark Playhouse), *Mametz* (National Theatre Wales), *Before the Party* (Almeida), *A Sacred Flame* (English Touring), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Royal Exchange Manchester), *Mogadishu* (Royal Exchange Manchester and Lyric Hammersmith), *The Most Incredible Thing* (Sadler's Wells), and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Royal & Derngate, Northampton). As a writer his credits include: *Children's Children* (Almeida), *You Can See the Hills* (Royal Exchange Manchester/Young Vic), *A Tale of Two Cities* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre) and his re-imagining of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Most Incredible Thing* (Sadler's Wells).

CAST & CHARACTERS



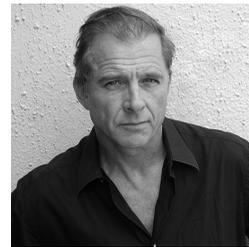
MARK ADDY (HARRY)
The central character of the play. A loyal gentleman. He and his wife run the pub where the action takes place. He's also a local celebrity, being the chief hangman on the day hanging is abolished. He is a bluff, blunt and proud Northerner.



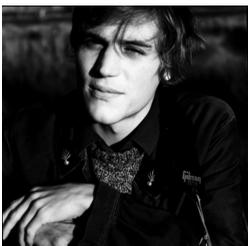
OWEN CAMPBELL (CLEGG)
A cub reporter who comes to interview Harry about his role as a hangman and his thoughts on the abolition of hanging.



BILLY CARTER (CHARLES)



MAXWELL CAULFIELD (ALBERT PIERREPOINT)
The foremost hangman in England.



JOHNNY FLYNN (PETER MOONEY)
A young man from London or thereabouts. He applies for a room in Alice's pub.



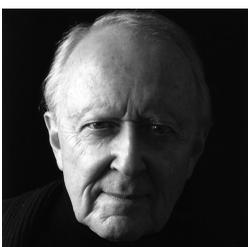
GABY FRENCH (SHIRLEY WADE)
The teenage daughter of Harry and Alice.



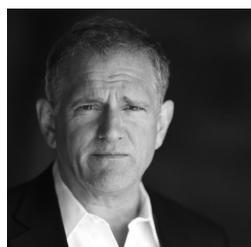
GILLES GEARY (JAMES HENNESSY)
A young man in jail waiting to be hanged. A young wheel-dealer who finds himself in a lot more trouble than he bargained for.



RICHARD HOLLIS (BILL)
The pub's innocent. Alcoholic.



JOHN HORTON (ARTHUR)
Dry, deadpan and tactless, Arthur is a regular at the bar.



DAVID LANSBURY (INSPECTOR FRY)
A physically intimidating police inspector. Loner.



SALLY ROGERS (ALICE WADE)
The landlady who runs the pub with her husband, Harry.



REECE SHEARSMITH (SYD ARMFIELD)
Harry's assistant.

THEATER VOCABULARY

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To be able to discuss theater through a common, shared vocabulary.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that the most effective way to discuss theater and new ideas is through a shared vocabulary.

ACTION

The events that move along the story of the play and which influence the characters within the play.

CHARACTERS

Individuals the audience learns about from their actions and reactions.

ENSEMBLE

A group of performers working together to create a complete production.

DIALOGUE

The exchange of speech between two characters which reveals the feelings of the character as well as the story of the play.

MONOLOGUE

A speech by one actor on stage which is intended to reveal the inner thoughts of the character the actor plays.

CHARACTER ARC

The change produced in a character by the events and other characters in the play.

MUSICAL THEATER

A twentieth century creation where writers and musicians collaborate to create a play which features song, dance and drama.

MOOD

The overall feeling the play evokes.

COSTUME

The clothes, boots, etc., worn by the actors based on their character.

PROP

Objects used by an actor to enhance their character. For example, wine glasses at a bar for drinks.

SET

The constructed environment of a play within which the action takes place.

SOUND

Noises and music used in the play.

VOCABULARY FROM *HANGMEN*

BRITISH SLANG TERMS:

DICKY-BOW: A bow tie

DEBENHAMS: A British retail store.

DAFT: Silly; foolish.

PILLOCK: A stupid person.

MOONING: Behaving or moving in a listless and aimless manner; Acting in a dreamily infatuated manner.

JACKDAW: A small grey-headed crow that typically nests in tall buildings and chimneys, noted for its inquisitiveness.

WARDER: A guard in a prison.

CHUFFED: Very pleased.

BOOKIE: A bookmaker (often in terms of betting).

BRYLCREEM: A cream used on men's hair to give it a smooth, shiny appearance.

BADMINTON: A game with rackets in which a shuttlecock is hit back and forth across a net.

CURMUDGEONLY: (especially of an old person) bad-tempered and negative.

BLANCMANGE: A sweet, opaque, gelatinous dessert made with flavored corn flour and milk.

A COON'S AGE: A long time.

CRONIES: Close friends or companions.

VOCAB WORDS:

BEDSTEAD: The framework of a bed on which the mattress and bedclothes are placed.

PRURIENT: Having or encouraging an excessive interest in sexual matters, especially the sexual activity of others.

GUILLOTINE: (French) A machine with a heavy blade sliding vertically in grooves, used for beheading people.

DEIGN: Do something that one considers to be beneath one's dignity; Condescend to give (something).

MOPE: Feel dejected and apathetic; Wander about listlessly and aimlessly because of unhappiness or boredom.

VOGAB CONTINUED ...

MELANCHOLY: A feeling of pensive sadness, typically with no obvious cause.

Lobotomy: A surgical operation involving incision into the prefrontal lobe of the brain, formerly used to treat mental illness.

SACROSANCT: (especially of a principle, place, or routine) regarded as too important or valuable to be interfered with.

MENACING: Suggesting the presence of danger; threatening.

CULPABLE: Deserving blame.

HANGMEN IN CONTEXT: ENGLAND 1963

Religious and political tension was at a height throughout the UK in 1963. In 1962, Britain had pulled slowly out of a recession, and socioeconomic divisions were widening. The major divide was between the North and the South. With this divide came presumptions about the people who lived in each place.

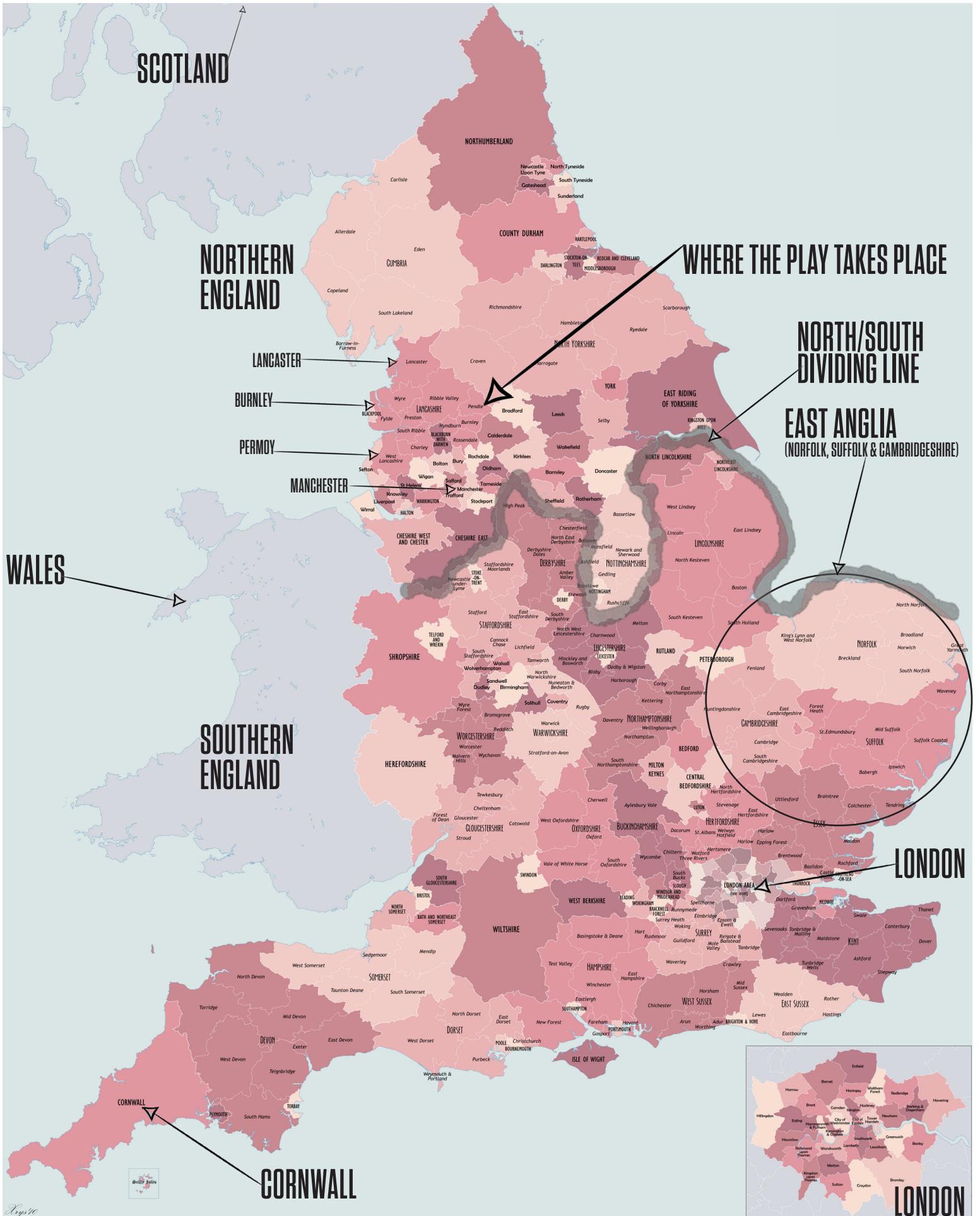
At the time in which *Hangmen* is happening, the South carries the connotations of rich, overcrowded, and educated. The North is considered to be poor, ex-industrial, and uneducated.

From The Economist:

The North's industrial economy had begun to crumble after the First World War; subsequent wars and government policy slowed the decline... Between 1918 and 1962 the proportion of the population living in England's three northern regions (the North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber) declined from 35% to 30%, reversing the northward migration of the 19th century.

Hangmen takes place in Oldham, which is on the dividing line between Northern and Southern England. During the play, you may note the differences in the characters' accents. What an American audience hears as a "British" accent is still widely varied regionally, just as regional dialects exist in the US and in all languages.

Another major point of contention across England, particularly in the 1960s, was religion. The Protestant Christian and Roman Catholic communities were sharply divided, resulting in significant political and social tension. The English Protestants notoriously loathed the Irish Catholics, and vice versa, but that didn't prevent some portions of England from remaining Catholic, especially in the North. These biases play a role in the way the characters in *Hangmen* consider capital punishment.



This map shows all of the locations that the play mentions, including Lancaster, Burnley, Formby, Manchester, East Anglia, Norfolk, and London. Hangmen takes place in the Northern half of England.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN ENGLAND:

The earliest record of hanging as a means of death penalty was in the 5th century. It was adopted as the principal form of execution when the United Kingdom was established as a state in 1707. *Hangmen* takes place at the cusp of The Abolition. The play is a fictional account of the last days of hanging. In 1963, there were only two or three documented hangings, followed by only two in 1964. 1964 marks a change from Conservative to Labour party rule, and within weeks the bill that would later become The Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Act was set into motion. The Labour party had been working towards this legislation for more than two decades. When it was introduced, the bill was passed in the House of Lords (the upper house of parliament in the UK, a legislative body that, at the time, also served a judiciary function) by 204 votes to 104. The Murder Act abolished hanging in Great Britain, and the death penalty altogether for those convicted of murder. The death penalty was still legal for cases of treason, and other non-civilian offenses (espionage, and other military offenses tried by court martial.) After the abolition, The House of Commons voted during each gathering of parliament after 1965 until 1997, to reinstate the death penalty as a form of punishment for murder. It was never legalized again. Additionally, no capital punishments were carried out for any of the exceptional offenses after the abolishment of capital punishment for murder. Regardless, because of its legal status for certain cases, working gallows remained in London until 1994, tested bi-annually.

In other parts of the Commonwealth, capital punishment was outlawed little by little, and via the House of Commons' ratification of parts of the European Convention on Human Rights and later the Human Rights Act of 1998, capital punishment was outlawed in the UK except in "times of war and imminent threat of war." This exception was reversed by "Protocol No. 13 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, concerning the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances" whereby member States of the Council of Europe finally and formally outlawed capital punishment under any circumstance. This was ratified by all but two member states, and thus formally enacted in the UK in 2003.

FROM THE GUARDIAN:

The argument that capital punishment is a deterrent against people committing murder is one of the most stubborn myths about the death penalty. Global research by the United Nations and numerous academics has repeatedly shown this to be untrue. It's also very hard to square a belief in the "deterrence effect" with the fact that in the US, for example, death penalty-using states such as Texas have significantly higher homicide rates than states where the death penalty has been abolished.

The reign of the death penalty is over in Britain. It's now a relic of a more violent age, a time when wrongdoers were whipped, put in the stocks or transported to distant countries for penal servitude. We now live in an era where the majority of people in Britain don't want the death penalty and don't really think much about it except, perhaps, when they read about a horrific botched execution in the US.

Twenty or 30 years ago it was still fairly common for leading politicians to issue calls for hanging to be "brought back". No longer.

ALBERT PIERREPOINT:



Albert Pierrepoint was born on March 30th, 1905 in West Riding of Yorkshire to Harry Pierrepoint, who'd been an executioner (hangman) for 10 years. He was only nine years old when he developed the ambition to become an executioner. When he was twelve, he and his mother moved to Manchester where he spent time working in the mills. In 1931, when he was 26, Pierrepoint interviewed to at Strangeways Prison and was accepted as an assistant executioner.

Tom Pierrepoint, Albert's uncle, had been a hangman for forty some years, and was chief hangman at the time of Albert's assistantship. The first and second executions Albert worked were at the side of his uncle. In 1940, Albert was asked to take a head executioner position. From then on, he began his climb to doing "fifteen or twenty" hangings a day. In the obituary posted to the Telegraph in July, 1992, it is said that "He always maintained that there was no glamour in taking the lives of others, and he abhorred all

publicity, so he was displeased when when General Sir Bernard Montgomery announced from his headquarters in Germany that Pierrepoint was to hang the convicted staff of Belsen."

The Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was originally established as a prisoner of war camp, or an "exchange camp" where Jewish hostages were held with the intention of exchange for German war prisoners being held overseas. From 1941-1945, almost 20,000 Soviet prisoners of war and another unidentified 50,000 inmates died there. The camp was liberated on April 15th, 1945 by the British. The combination of the horrors of this camp and the fact that it was one of the camps using photo documentation made the name "Belsen" emblematic of Nazi crimes in general for the public opinion in many countries post-liberation.

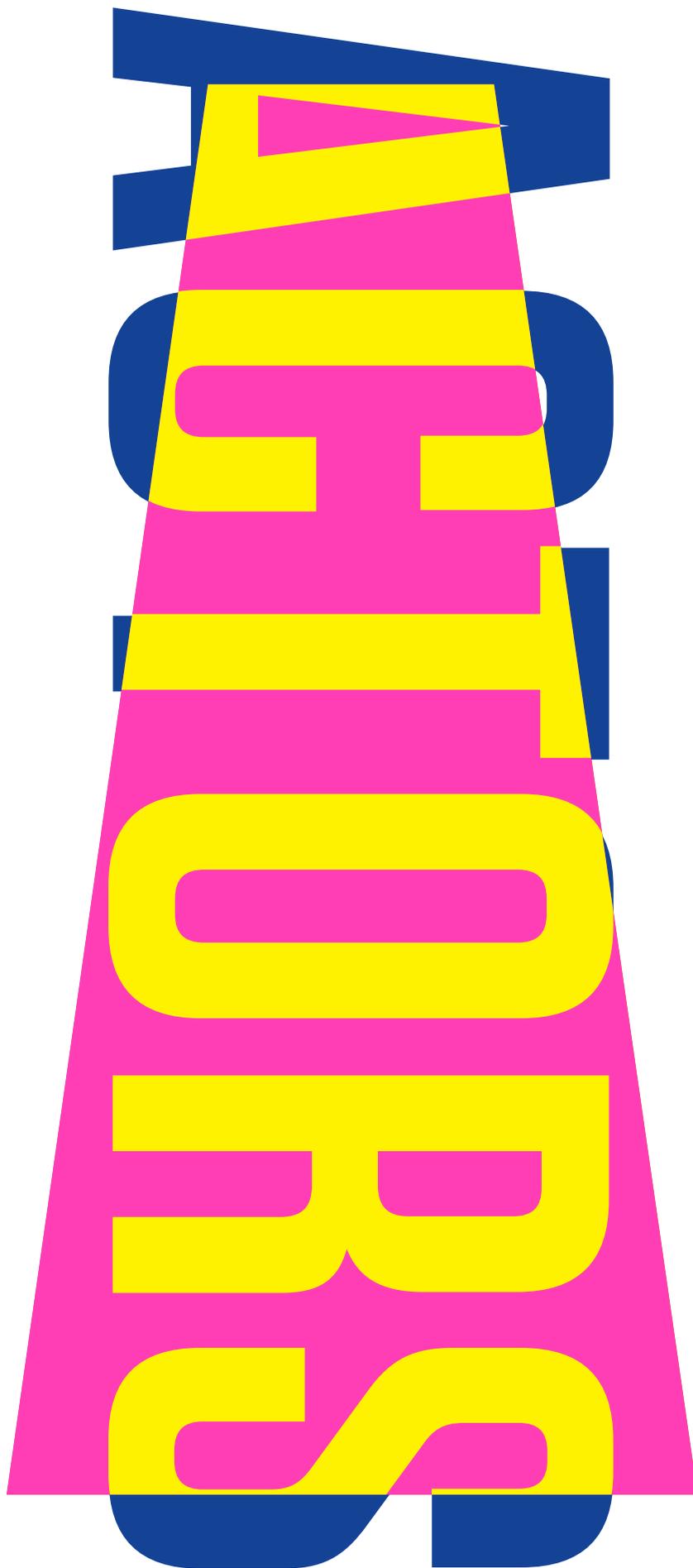
Pierrepoint was appointed an honorary lieutenant-colonel for the hangings, and on Friday December 13, 1945 in Germany, he hanged 13 people before lunch. At the end of WWII, Pierrepoint became a publican (a fancy word for pub-owner). His pub attracted all kinds of attention, but he "denied press reports that he ever discussed 't'other job' with his customers." In 1954, Pierrepoint was 'sentenced to death' by the IRA for his execution of a terrorist in Dublin in 1944. He resigned, settled down as landlord of another pub called the Rose and Crown, but people kept bothering him. So, he moved once more to a small farm, and lived there until he passed away at age 87.

Section IV: Your Students As Actors

Reading a Scene for
Understanding
Practical Aesthetics Exercise
Mini-Lesson Vocabulary
Scene Analysis Worksheet

The following activities are designed to assist your students in understanding the actor's "job." Like every job, even acting has its "tools."

The Practical Aesthetics acting technique was developed by David Mamet, William H. Macy, and the founding members of the Atlantic Theater Company. This technique offers the actor a set of analytical tools to understand the playwright's intentions and what the characters want. This process of script analysis helps define the actor's job on stage.



"Actors should remain truthful to the story and their character."

- David Mamet, American playwright & noted actor, William H. Macy, founders of Atlantic Theater Company

READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To introduce the Practical Aesthetics “tools” for breaking down a scene. To understand the character and the story of the scene by relating the character’s actions to the student’s own life.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that an important part of creating a simple, honest character involves knowing what that character wants.

MATERIALS

Pens, pencils, copies of the following scene from *Hangmen*, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS EXERCISE

STEP ONE

Divide the students in pairs. Ask the students to select which character they want to portray.

STEP TWO

Allow the students time to read the scene silently to themselves.

STEP THREE

Ask the students to read the Introduction to the Practical Aesthetic Acting Technique sheet and have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet.

NOTE: The four questions and the students’ answers to them form the basis for the Practical Aesthetics scene analysis; and enables the actor to create a simple, honest character they’re simply being honest to their own experiences!

STEP FOUR

After the students have completed the question worksheet, ask each pair of actors to read the scene in the front of the class room for an audience. The students should incorporate the ideas from the worksheet as they read the scene.

A SCENE FROM *HANGMEN*

CLEGG: JAMES HENNESSY?

HARRY: HENNESSY WEREN'T A MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE. I READ UP ON HENNESSY AFTER. HE WERE YOUR CLASSIC WOMAN--HATING PSYCHOPATH AND I DON'T USUALLY LIKE COMMENTING ON THE PEOPLE I'VE HANGED BUT IN HIS CASE SOD HIM, BAD RUBBISH, GOOD RIDDANCE.

CLEGG: HE DIED PROTESTING HIS INNOCENCE, THEY SAY.

HARRY: HE WERE JUST SCARED, LAD. THEY'RE ALL JUST SCARED. SOME SHOW IT, SOME DON'T. MOSTLY WHAT I REMEMBER ABOUT HENNESSY, HE WERE VERY ANTI--NORTHERN, AND I DON'T LIKE THAT. IT'S PREJUDICE.

CLEGG: THERE WAS ANOTHER WOMAN ATTACKED IN NORFOLK LAST YEAR, OUT LOWESTOFT WAY, THE POLICE ARE SAYING, BORE A LOT OF THE HALLMARKS OF THE HENNESSY KILLING...

HARRY: THERE'LL ALWAYS BE WOMEN ATTACKED, LAD. IT'S JUST THE NATURE OF MEN, INT IT? IN LOWESTOFT ESPECIALLY, THERE'S NOWT ELSE TO DO. YOU SOON GET BORED OF MINIATURE GOLF!

CLEGG: SO ARE YOU SAYING, THEN, THAT THE DEATH PENALTY NEVER WORKED AS A DETERRENT, HARRY?

HARRY: AHA! GOOD ONE, YA LITTLE BASTARD. I'LL TELL YA THIS, ANY ROADM HENNESSY NEVER KILLED ANYBODY AFTER I GOT AHOLD OF HIM. YOU CAN BE SURE OF THAT.

CLEGG: MAYBE HE NEVER KILLED ANYBODY BEFORE YOU GOT AHOLD OF HIM?

HARRY: AND MAYBE WE'LL NEVER KNOW. BOO HOO. ANOTHER PINT, LAD?

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS INTRODUCTION

ANALYSIS: Script analysis is the process of breaking down a beat within a scene. We ask four questions in order to do this.

1. What is the character literally doing?
2. What does the character want?
3. What is the essential ACTION?
4. What is that action like to me? It is AS-IF...

LITERAL: In this step, the actor determines what the character he or she is playing is literally doing according to the text.

PURPOSE: An actor has to travel far—think of this preparation as the road map.

WANT: In this step, the actor identifies the goal of the character in the scene, specifically what the character wants from the other character/s in the scene. The given circumstances of the story inform the WANT.

PURPOSE: To focus the actor on the characters' interaction.

ACTION: Playing an ACTION is the physical pursuit of a goal. Defining the ACTION of the scene allows the actor to determine what result or CAP he or she is looking for from the other actor/s in the scene.

EXAMPLES:

- Put someone in their place.
- Beg someone for forgiveness.
- Get a favor.
- Get someone to let me off the hook.
- Force someone to face the facts.
- Inspire someone to greatness.
- Get someone to see the light.

PURPOSE: Using an action gives the actor a task and a specific point of view. The Atlantic Theater Company teaches that the Action creates character.

AS-IF: In this step, the actor personalizes the action by finding a real-life situation in which they would behave according to the action they have chosen for the scene. **Example:** Get a favor.

It's AS-IF I forgot to do my science homework and I'm asking my teacher for an extra day to hand it in.

PURPOSE: To gain personal insight and urgency to the scene or beat.

TACTICS & TOOLS: Different ways an actor goes about getting his action. **EXAMPLE:** Plead, flirt, demand, inspire, challenge, level, threaten.

LIVING IN THE MOMENT: Reacting impulsively to what the other actor in the scene is doing, from the point of view of the chosen action.

SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

	IF YOU'RE PLAYING HARRY...	IF YOU'RE PLAYING CLEGG...
What is my character literally doing?	Harry is literally telling Clegg that his hanging of James Hennessy was not an injustice.	Clegg is asking Harry about the hanging of James Hennessy, a man who died claiming his innocence.
What does my character want?	Harry wants Clegg to realize that executing James Hennessy was a necessary action and meant Hennessy could never kill anyone again.	Clegg wants to force Harry to admit his wrong doings from the past
What is the action I'm going to play?	To get the credit I deserve	To get someone to surrender.
The As-If...	It's as if I'm trying to convince my teacher to give me a better grade on my english test.	It's as if I'm trying to get my brother to admit he took my cell phone.

MINI-LESSON VOCABULARY

KEY VOCABULARY

LITERAL: The process of accessing the basic story-line of the characters in a particular scene or beat.

WANT: The process of identifying the goal of the character in a scene or beat.

ACTION: The actor's physical pursuit of a specific goal.

AS-IF: A way to determine what this action means to me.

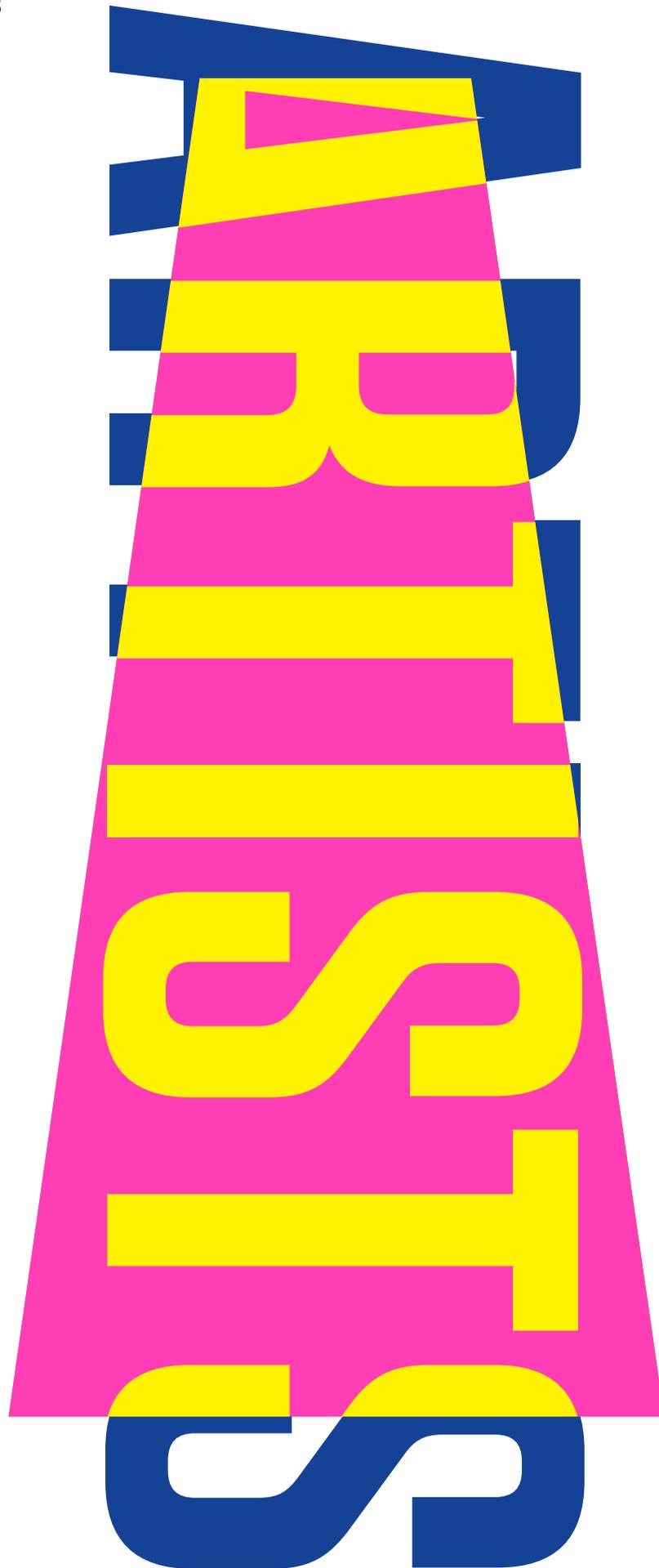
HANDY TOOL KIT FOR THE ACTOR

Acting Tactics & Tools
To Use in The As-If Step

- Laughing to get what you want
- Teasing to get what you want
- Testing to get what you want
- Threatening to get what you want
- Pleading to get what you want
- Flirting to get what you want
- Bartering to get what you want
- Bribing to get what you want
- Begging to get what you want
- Crying to get what you want
- Demanding to get what you want
- Leveling to get what you want
- Inspiring to get what you want
- Challenging to get what you want

Section V: Your Students As Artists

Post Theater Creative Response
Activity
Common Core & DOE Theater
Blueprint



COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING STRAND BENCHMARKS

Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices. For example: Playing God, Innocence, Morality, Culpability, Good vs. Bad, and Mistrust.

Theater conveys the meaning behind an individual's struggle to have his or her life choices validated by family, friends and community.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Do the direction and staging reinforce the theme of “bleak morality” which is prevalent in Hangmen?

Do you accept the concept put forward in Hangmen that “struggle between right and wrong” can be both empowering and destructive?

Strand Benchmarks

THEATER MAKING: ACTING

Benchmark: Students increase their ability as imaginative actors while continuing to participate as collaborative ensemble members. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on and think critically about their own work.

THEATER MAKING: PLAYWRITING/PLAY MAKING

Benchmark: Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.

DEVELOPING THEATER LITERACY

Benchmark: Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.

MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THEATER

Benchmark: Students demonstrate a capacity for deep personal connection to theater and a realization of the meaning and messages of theater.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Benchmark: Students invigorate and broaden their understanding of theater through collaborative partnerships with theater professionals.

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Section VI: The Atlantic Legacy

Atlantic Theater Company &
Atlantic Acting School

Inspired by the Group Theater, Stanislavsky, and a passion for ensemble acting, David Mamet and William H. Macy formed the Atlantic Theater Company with a select group of New York University Undergraduate drama students. Since its inception in 1985, Atlantic has produced more than 100 plays and garnered numerous awards, including: 12 Tony Awards, 15 Lucille Lortel Awards, 16 OBIE Awards, six Outer Critics Circle Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, three Drama League Awards, three New York Drama Critics Circle Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Noted productions include: *Spring Awakening*, *Port Authority*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Boy's Life*, and *American Buffalo*. The Atlantic Theater Company's mission is to produce plays simply and truthfully, utilizing an artistic ensemble. Atlantic believes that the story of the play and the intent of its playwright are at the core of a successful theatrical production.

The Atlantic Acting School fosters new generations of actors by passing on the tools learned from Mamet and Macy and by preparing students for all aspects of a career in film, television and theater. The Atlantic offers studies through New York University, a full-time conservatory program, part-time programs and summer workshops. Atlantic for Kids offers acting classes in an after school setting as well as summer programs for children ages 4 to 18.

Linda Gross Theater
336 West 20th Street
New York, NY, 10011

Atlantic Stage 2
330 West 16th Street
New York, NY, 10011

ATLANTIC ACTING SCHOOL