

Education, Education, Education: audio introduction

Welcome to this introduction to Trafalgar Studios' audio-described performance of **Education, Education, Education**, created by the Wardrobe Ensemble and co-directed by Jesse Jones and Helena Middleton. This introduction will take about 12 minutes to listen to. The audio described performance is on Monday 17 June at 7.30 pm, with a touch tour at 6.00 pm. It takes place in the larger of the two studios, Studio 1. The performance runs for approximately 70 minutes with no interval. Your describer is Roz Chalmers.

Touch tours are completely free and last about 20 minutes. They give you an opportunity to explore the set and handle some of the props. There will also be an opportunity to meet some of the people who bring the play to the stage. If you're coming to the tour on your own, we can arrange for a member of staff to accompany you. Guide dogs are welcome at Trafalgar Studios and are allowed in the auditorium, if they do not obstruct an aisle. Staff will be happy to take care of your dog during the performance if required. If you are bringing a dog, please could you let the theatre know if you have not already done so. Please call the Access bookings line on 0800 912 6971.

Please join us in the foyer at 5.45 in time for the 6.00 pm touch tour.

If you have any other queries about your visit, please call the Theatre Manager, Martin Scorer or the Deputy Theatre Manager, Christina Horsepool, on 020 7321 5400.

The play takes place on 2nd May 1997, the morning after the General Election. The Labour Party has just ended an 18-year spell in opposition and won a landslide victory. In his manifesto speech Tony Blair has declared that 'Education, education, education' will be the top three priorities of a Labour government. In Wordsworth School, a rundown comprehensive, the teachers are reacting to the news while preparing for 'muck-up day' - the riotous last day of school life for the Year 11s. There's going to be a Leaver's Assembly complete with personalised achievement messages and a bouncy castle.

In the printed programme the directors, Jesse Jones and Helena Middleton, explain that the show is a reflection from the generation that benefited from the millions of pounds and myriad resources which were poured into the British education system at the time.

In researching the show the company spoke to teachers who had worked in the 90's. They were struck by the excitement they described in going into work the day after the Blair election, how they felt their profession was valued. After the first work-in progress showing of the play to a group of teachers, one reflected on how children had now become statistics, that teachers' value lay only in the grades they could produce, not the passions that they held. These opposing views are encapsulated in the characters of the teachers in the play. They all want the best for their students, but they have different views of what 'the best' means.

The story is told in rapidly changing scenes, taking us from the staffroom to a classroom to a conversation in a corridor in the blink of an eye. Teachers and students break into energetic synchronised dance, or drift in slow motion to the accompaniment of a loud soundtrack of 90's tunes from The Spice Girls, Take That, Black Box, D:Ream and many others.

The stage is a six-metre square standing about a metre high, edged with white, its surface made up of large tiles. At the beginning of the play the surface is a vibrant hot pink, while in the centre is a map of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in a deep indigo blue. The image is smudged and incomplete, like a bad lino print, with patches of the map missing, allowing the base colour of pink to seep through. When the play begins, and lights snap to the more naturalistic setting of the schoolrooms, the floor is revealed to be scarlet, and the map, black. Above hangs a suspended ceiling made of large ceiling tiles. They once may have been white, but now they're stained and grubby and several are missing, with the theatre's lights peeping through. At the rear is a mottled blue wall split into five panels. The 1st, 3rd and 5th panels are used as noticeboards with dozens of school notices pasted onto them.

The only other pieces of set are two free-standing doors that stand about two metres in front of the rear wall. At the beginning the overhead lights flood them in indigo, but in the stark light of the school day they're a deep grey with their frames slightly lighter. The two doors are mounted on wheels so they can be moved around the space, allowing characters to step through from classroom to classroom with only a change of light, dreamy pink for religious studies, verdant green for geography, brilliant yellow for chemistry, warm red for the arts.

Occasionally a couple of grey plastic chairs and white tables on wheels zoom in from the left, to indicate a classroom.

There's an all-white company of seven, four men and three women in their late twenties and thirties, who between them play some of the staff and pupils of Wordsworth School. We meet the teachers in the staff room, clutching mugs of tea or coffee, and in their work with students.

We're introduced to the school and the new era of Cool Britannia through the perspective of **Tobias**. A young German, Tobias has joined the languages department as a teaching assistant. He's a dry, impassive young man, delivering his impressions in flawless English with a German accent, occasionally speaking directly to members of the audience. Tobias has wavy dark brown hair, cut short and neat. His blue-green eyes are serious and his mouth unsmiling. He's dressed in a grey long-sleeved shirt and dark grey tie, worn with black jeans. A chunky silver chain is attached to his belt loop to secure his wallet in his back pocket. He stands looking out at us calmly.

The headmaster and geography teacher, **Hugh Mills**, is a mild, compassionate soul, always on the lookout for the best in his pupils. His thick dark-brown hair is swept over from a parting and he has a bushy beard and moustache. Hugh wears a pale brown tweed suit of the slightly ill-fitting type that has defined geography teachers for decades, over a white shirt with a fine red and brown check with a red biro in the top pocket. Hugh's tie is red, and his trousers are slightly too short, revealing mustard socks and tan loafers. He carries a clipboard to keep track of briefing notes for his staff.

Head of school discipline is the formidable **Louise Turner**, a tough, snarling, reactionary, tough on rule-breaking and *really* tough on those who break her rules. Her long honey-blonde hair is pulled up tightly into a ponytail with a black claw clip, and her brilliant blue eyes are narrow and fierce. Louise's approach to discipline is characterised by a mimed loading of a sawn-off shotgun or hurling down an imaginary grenade. She's dressed in red, white and blue – a red jacket over white V-necked shirt and narrow navy-blue trousers. Louise's shoes are viciously sharp black stilettos.

Paul McIntyre teaches history and has his own ideas on discipline. He's tall and slim with wispy ginger hair and beard, blue eyes and a pale complexion. Paul wears a pale blue open-necked shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows, and light brown chinos worn with brown leather trainers with white laces. His tie is navy blue. Paul has a bit of a macho swagger in the staff room and a keen eye for frailty in his colleagues.

The PE teacher is **Tim Pashley**, a stocky, hesitant man who lingers on the edges of conversations, eager to connect. Tim's brown hair is beginning to recede, and his beard is a little scrubby. He wears large, black framed glasses. He's always dressed for PE in a zip-up top in a combination of navy blue and white stripes and flashes of turquoise and mauve over a grey polo shirt. Tim's navy-blue PE shorts are startlingly short and tight, worn with knee-high navy socks and grey trainers with a yellow flash. He wears a whistle hanging on a chain around his neck.

The Head of the departing Year 11 students is **Sue-Belltop-Doyle**. She's a mousy little thing with a lank dish-water-blonde bob and anxious blue eyes. She bustles around, beaming determinedly, intent on spreading positive vibrations. Sue wears a cream V-necked sleeveless blouse with a calf-length button through skirt in a purple and mauve print. On her feet are flat fawn shoes with a single strap.

We also meet **Donna**, the school receptionist. She wears her dark brown hair straight, hanging to her shoulders. Donna is sharp-eared and sharp-eyed, keen to

know all the goings-on in the school. She's dressed in a sleeveless white shirt and a black skirt crisscrossed with wide stripes in yellow, blue, green and red.

The same actor plays **Emily Greenslade**, a fifteen-year-old Year 10 student in the school. She's a slender girl, who stands clenched and tensely wired, not yet broken, but damaged. Her hair is caught up in a high ponytail, and her face is washed-out with tired, downcast brown eyes. Emily's dressed in the school uniform – a dark blue jumper over a white polo shirt worn with the collar up, and a pleated grey skirt.

The white school logo on the jumper shows a shield with an upper section of crossed maces interspersed with three roses and a lower half of a fleur de lys. The words 'Wordsworth' and 'School' are embroidered at the top and bottom of the logo.

Emily's shoes are non-regulation black Reebok trainers worn without socks. She has black headphones draped around her neck, her Walkman clipped onto her belt, and sometimes loses herself in her music.

The rest of the company also play students, pulling on the navy-blue jumpers. The men keep their own trousers, but the women wear grey pleated skirts or trousers. One boy wears a yellow baseball cap. The students are named with the real names of the actors who play them. They're often tasked with pushing the doors around to take us to the different places in the school. At one point in an English class they perform a section of Arthurian romance, with Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere in tabards, cloaks and crowns, the men armed with hockey sticks and tennis racquets. When the students appear, school photographs of the actors' younger selves are projected onto the centre of the blue back wall. They smile cheerfully out at us, neat and well-scrubbed, their whole lives in front of them.

Cast and production credits

The German assistant Tobias is played by James Newton

The Headmaster, Hugh Mills, by Tom England

Head of School Discipline, Louise Turner, is played by Kerry Lovell

History teacher Paul McIntyre is played by Tom Brennan

PE teacher Tim Pashley is played by Ben Vardy

The Head of Year 11, Sue Belltop-Doyle is played by Jesse Meadows

The Year 10 student, Emily Greenslade is played by Emily Greenslade, who also plays the receptionist, Donna.

Set and costume design is by Lucy Sierra,

The lighting designer is Katharine Williams and the sound designer Benjamin Grant

The co-directors are Jesse Jones and Helena Middleton

Our next audio described performance will be **Equus**, the critically acclaimed production from English Touring Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East. Peter Shaffer's award-winning play transfers to the Trafalgar Studios for a strictly limited season.

When teenager Alan Strang's pathological fascination leads him to blind six horses in a Hampshire stable, a psychiatrist, Dr Martin Dysart, is asked to uncover the motive behind the boy's actions. As Dysart delves into Alan's world of twisted spirituality, passion and sexuality, he begins to question his own sanity and motivations..

The audio described performance of Equus will take place on Thursday 25th July 2019 at 7.30 pm in Studio 1.

That's the end of this audio introduction. The information has been written and recorded by Roz Chalmers, for eyewitness.

