

National  
Theatre



THE OCEAN  
AT THE END OF THE LANE

based on the novel by  
NEIL GAIMAN

adapted by  
JOEL HORWOOD

directed by  
KATY RUDD

UK & Ireland Tour  
Learning Resource Pack

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For more information visit: [OceanOnStage.com](http://OceanOnStage.com)

This learning resource is designed to support students and their teachers in responding to *The Ocean at the End of Lane* in various ways. The pack includes opportunities to engage with the production for the live production element of GCSE and/or A Level Drama & Theatre. This learning resource also provides information about the production, and ways in which it can inform and inspire devised or scripted work in schools and colleges.



Section 1

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# The Production

# Plot Synopsis

This synopsis relates to the script of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Joel Horwood. Statements in italics indicate stage directions from the text.



## Act One

The play opens with a funeral scene, with the Boy, now an adult (the Man), attending the funeral of his father.

In the next scene the Man returns to his childhood home, *beside a duck pond in rural Sussex in the winter dusk*. He sees Old Mrs Hempstock (OMH) who recognises him as the boy who used to play with Lettie, her granddaughter. They discuss the pond, which Lettie used to call an 'ocean'.

The Man begins to narrate his memories and the play then flashes back to 1983. The audience sees a car which contains the body of a man who has died by suicide. The car belongs to the Boy's father, but the man in the car is identified as a lodger who has been living with their family. The Boy's father (Dad) *is played by the actor who played the Man in the prologue*. It is the Boy's birthday, and his father retrieves his birthday present (a pair of boxing gloves) from the car. Lettie Hempstock then appears and offers to take the Boy to the Hempstock farmhouse, whilst Dad deals with the police.

Lettie has an uncanny way of knowing what the dead man's last movements and thoughts were. She introduces the Boy to her mother, Ginnie, who makes porridge for them. The food the Boy is served at the Hempstock farm is always warm and comforting. Introducing himself to OMH in the farmhouse, the Boy tells her about the stories that he likes to read, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Old Mrs Hempstock, like Lettie, is able to understand the events surrounding the lodger's death. The Lodger had promised to invest his friends' money but instead gambled it all away and then ended his life as he saw no other solution.

Lettie shows her new friend the 'ocean', telling him that "in there, everything is possible". They find a dead fish, which has swallowed a 50 pence piece. This confuses the Boy as the size of the coin seems too big for a fish to swallow.

The next morning, the Boy's sister (Sis) receives a letter informing her that she has won £25 on the Premium Bonds. The Boy is confused by the sudden appearance

of money, including another coin that he coughed up in his sleep the night before. Lettie is concerned that “something’s woken up all right, and it’s trying to give people money”.

Old Mrs Hempstock concludes that a female presence is trying to enter the Boy’s world. She describes this thing as “most likely...a flea” and Lettie is adamant that she wants to stop it crossing over into their world. She takes the Boy with her, to “find out its name, bind it, make sure it doesn’t cross over and send it back to sleep”. As the presence begins to make itself known, Lettie makes the Boy promise that he won’t let go of her hand. “A huge awkward thing” begins to make itself visible. It is Skarhatch who demands to be let in. Eventually Lettie is able to ‘bind’ Skarhatch to prevent her from crossing over.

The Boy describes his last birthday party which was organised by his mum, who has now passed away. As he does so he feels an odd sensation in his hand, but he dismisses it and doesn’t tell Lettie. Later, he takes a pair of tweezers and explores a small hole in his hand. He pulls out a pus-covered worm, which he flings into the bath’s plughole, but it does not disappear...

The next morning, Dad and Sis introduce the Boy to Ursula, their new lodger. Sis is already very keen on Ursula and describes her as “literally the best”. Ursula talks to the Boy about his favourite books, naming several of the books that we have previously heard him

talking about with Old Mrs Hempstock, and then gives him a shiny new pound coin.

Whilst Dad is out at work, Sis is keen to play the piano with Ursula. The Boy attempts to leave the house to go and read in peace and quiet but Ursula stops him and tells him to stay in the house. She tells him that she has “been inside” him and that she can hear his thoughts. He knows that Ursula is a sinister force, but Sis is completely taken in by her apparent kindness and interest in the family. Dad, a struggling single parent, is also deceived and is grateful to have her help in caring for the children. He becomes angry when the Boy refuses to eat the food Ursula has prepared and an argument ensues. In a fit of rage, Dad runs a cold bath and forces his son under the water. This aggression is completely out of character and the Boy knows Ursula has made Dad behave in this way. After the Boy manages to free himself, Ursula locks him in his bedroom.

Reciting from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to prevent Ursula ‘hearing’ his thoughts, the Boy escapes down the drainpipe outside his bedroom window. He sees his dad and Ursula kissing and undressing each other in a downstairs room. He runs towards Lettie’s farm but Ursula (Skarhatch) appears floating above him. Lettie appears and forces Ursula away. For now...





## Act Two

The Boy sits in a bathtub in the Hempstocks' farmhouse. Old Mrs Hempstock mends his dressing gown, which was torn in his escape. He is given warming soup and once again feels warm and safe with the Hempstock women. Knowing that Dad is on his way to collect the Boy from the farm, the women decide that they must work out a way to protect him from his father. Lettie suggests a 'snip and stitch' which will conceal some of the evening's events from Dad – making him form a new memory rather than remembering what really happened. OMH cuts a piece of fabric from the dressing gown and mends the fabric around it. Dad then appears and finds his reason for arriving is to drop off the Boy's toothbrush so that he can stay overnight.

Suddenly, the Boy howls in pain and the hole in his hand is revealed as being infected: it is the place in which Ursula has got inside him. It is a wormhole and the only person who can take out the worm is Ursula, as she is the one who made it. Ginnie and OMH both blame Lettie for allowing this to happen. OMH uses a rag and mysterious ointment to help ease the Boy's pain.

The Boy is given an old-fashioned nightshirt and cap to sleep in, and Lettie guides him to his bedroom for the night. The next morning, the Boy is dressed in some unusual, old-fashioned "Rumpelstiltskin" clothing and realises that there are no men on the farm. Ginnie tells him "Nothing a man could do on this farm that I can't do twice as fast and five times as well".

Lettie takes the Boy with her to collect a series of

objects with which to banish the Flea, which she describes as being like bait. She uses them to summon or encourage Hunger Birds, explaining, "All they do is eat...And anything they eat never has or ever will be, won't be spoken of or remembered, just gone." She warns the Boy that "they'll want to eat everything that's out of place" including the wormhole in the Boy's hand that leads to his heart, which is ultimately what Ursula wants. As long as the Boy holds Lettie's hand, she can stop this from happening.

Lettie confronts Ursula at the Boy's house and gives her one final chance to leave voluntarily. Ursula realises that Lettie has summoned the Hunger Birds. They swarm and destroy Ursula but still want the Boy too.

Lettie has a plan to save the Boy, and insists that he waits in the fairy ring in the garden, where he will be safe from the Hunger Birds until she returns. To give himself courage the Boy recites passages from *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He hears Ursula laughing at him but then sees Sis who asks what he is doing. She hangs around aimlessly and then mumbles that she is worried that something has happened to their dad. The Boy then realises that some of what she is saying is not what she would usually say. Lettie then arrives, but the Boy is suspicious that she is not who she says she is. Likewise, Dad comes into the garden, asking what he's doing here. The Boy challenges him to answer a question about his childhood nickname. Dad answers but eventually leaves him in the fairy ring. It is the Hunger Birds impersonating the people who are most important to him to lure him out of the safety of the fairy ring.



The Boy hears the voices of the people in his life as the Hunger Birds swarm, but eventually Lettie returns with a bucket, telling him “Couldn’t get you to the ocean, so we brought the ocean to you”. She walks confidently into the fairy ring and hugs the Boy tightly. It is the first genuine, tight hug that the Boy has had in this entire story. The Boy gets into the bucket, and swims into the ocean. He *performs amazing acrobatics, sees incredible things, learns everything there is to learn and enjoys it all*. Eventually Lettie pulls him out of the ocean, and they are back at the farm.

Shortly after they arrive, the Hunger Birds attempt to cross onto the farm’s property, still hoping to attack the Boy and destroy everything in his world. The Boy lets go of Lettie’s hand and runs towards the Hunger Birds but Lettie *rearranges reality, placing herself in*

*between the Boy and the deadly attack*. The Hunger Birds smother Lettie, ripping and tearing at her. Ginnie cradles Lettie’s lifeless body and places her into the ocean. A large wave takes Lettie away and Ginnie is left holding no one.

Old Mrs Hempstock and Ginnie explain to the Boy that Lettie is not dead – she is changed and he should not wait for her. The Boy is safe and the Hunger Birds won’t come for him. Ginnie tells Dad that Lettie has left for Australia in order to explain her sudden absence. Dad suggests to his son that they could go to London at the weekend to make up for his spoilt birthday. The Boy hugs his dad who, despite his initial awkwardness, then returns the hug and calls the Boy his “little book moth” – the Boy’s childhood nickname.

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## Epilogue

Back at the duck pond in present day, the Man is still with OMH. She tells him, “Remembering is no different from imagining....memories change along with the people remembering ‘em”. It becomes clear that this is not the first time that the Man has revisited the farm in his adult life. He now has his own children, and is divorced. He talks fondly of Lettie, and feels guilty that she died for him. He realises he must go back to the wake for his father as people will be expecting him. Old Mrs Hempstock tells him, “just speak from that broken heart of yours and you’ll be fine.”

The End.

# Characters

It is often necessary to alter characters when adapting novels into plays. Playwrights must decide how to focus the audience's attentions on a particular theme, idea or character, which is more difficult in a play script (usually about 90 pages) than in a novel (often 300+ pages).

Unusually, not all characters in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* have names. Whilst the Hempstocks have a surname, and each have a first name, the Boy, Dad and Sis are never named. This is the same as Neil Gaiman's novel. Both Neil Gaiman and Joel Horwood are keen for us, as the audience, to see these characters and name them for ourselves. Perhaps we are intended to recognise aspects of ourselves in those characters...

## The Man

The Man is the adult version of the Boy and is played by the actor who plays Dad. The play opens as the Man stands at a funeral. It is present day. Leaving the funeral early, he revisits the place where he grew up, and finds Old Mrs Hempstock there. At the end of the play, we return to present day and the Man must leave Old Mrs Hempstock and return to the funeral proceedings.

## Old Mrs Hempstock

Old Mrs Hempstock, though the Boy sees her as elderly, is a powerful and strong woman – emotionally as well as physically. She is a nature goddess. She is consistent and generous.

## The Boy

The Boy is the younger version of the Man. He embodies all of the themes of the play and it is his journey that we follow as the story progresses. He begins as a boy who is reserved and lives in his imagination (which is often a coping mechanism for dealing with difficult emotions or incidents) but by the end of the play inhabits the world completely. He runs to sacrifice himself to the Hunger Birds for Lettie.

## Dad

Throughout the play, Dad is striving to develop a relationship with his teenage children. Following the loss of his wife, Dad is struggling to cope as a single parent. He is grieving and he is lost. He fears that lack of money will lead him to the same outcome as the Lodger who died as an indirect result of financial problems.

Old Mrs Hempstock



The Boy





## Lodger

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At the beginning of the play, the Lodger dies by suicide. It is later revealed that he is in debt because of his reckless gambling with other people's money. It is his death which leads to the Boy meeting Lettie and her family. The Lodger also introduces the theme of money and capitalism: money is a concern for several of the characters in the play.

## Lettie Hempstock

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Lettie is fiercely loyal, and is perennially young. Despite Ginnie's reticence, Lettie suddenly finds herself able to take risks, and to demonstrate her own power and bravery.



## Ginnie Hempstock

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Ginnie finds Boy's arrival difficult. She is over protective of Lettie, and the Boy's arrival on the farm threatens the status quo. It is clear that Ginnie has been hurt in the past, and she strives to protect Lettie from any such hurt. Through her interactions with the Boy, and in the fight against Ursula Monkton, Ginnie shows us that Lettie is in grave danger.

## Sis

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Younger than her brother, Sis is keen to be liked and loved, particularly since the death of their mother. Sis immediately warms to Ursula, their new lodger, because she pays attention to her and provides some of the comforts (such as unburnt food) that have been lacking since their mother's death. Sis knows that something is broken – their circumstances do not feel right – but she is currently too young to know what it is, or how to fix it.

## Fleas

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'Flea' is a term that Old Mrs Hempstock uses to describe "anything that's stuck on The Edges" – anything that wants to cross over into this world from another one.

## Skarthatch of The Keep

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Skarthatch is one of the beings trying to cross over into this world. Lettie binds Skarthatch to prevent it crossing over, but it is able to enter the Boy's home as Ursula Monkton - their new lodger - through the wormhole in the Boy's hand.

## Ursula Monkton

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As the new lodger, Ursula is able to ingratiate herself with Dad and Sis, but the Boy is immediately suspicious of her motives. The Boy calls Ursula a flea, for which Dad punishes him - but the Boy recognises that Ursula is an unwanted presence in their house and in this world. She quickly reveals her true character, and she is determined to go to great lengths to remain in this world, rather than return to the hostile place she has come from.

## The Hunger Birds

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In the novel, the Hunger Birds appear late in the narrative. However, they are present right from the beginning of the play through the use of the ensemble. The ensemble play the mourners at the funeral and then later play the Hunger Birds.

Read Joel Horwood's article *Page to Stage* for more information about why this device was chosen.



# Themes

Both the book and the play versions of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* contain universal themes and emotions that students and teachers can explore in both English and Drama lessons.

## Bravery, fear and endurance

**‘You don’t pass or fail at being a person, love.’** *Old Mrs Hempstock*

Playwright Joel Horwood states that each character in the story is afraid of something. For Dad it is the fear of not having enough money. Even though she is an evil force, Ursula is merely trying to find refuge from another hostile environment. She just wants to survive. Ginnie is initially reluctant to interact with the Boy, because he represents a threat to Lettie’s happiness and safety. The play’s intention is to examine what people do, and the lengths we will go to, in order to protect ourselves when we’re afraid.

Bravery can be defined in a number of ways. The Boy is brave in standing up to Ursula and trusting his instinct that she is a sinister force. Lettie’s self-sacrifice with the Hunger Birds is a gesture of great bravery and selflessness. However, there are quieter forms of bravery, too. Dad is trying to continue raising his family despite the grief of losing his wife. Old Mrs Hempstock and Ginnie show bravery, dignity and endurance when Lettie is lost.

## Family

**‘So many things unsaid in your family.’**  
*Skarhatch*

In the novel, absent parents are a theme. In the adaptation, Joel Horwood has changed the reason for the absence of the Boy’s mother - she has died due to illness. This choice heightens the tensions between Dad and the Boy: both are trying to navigate the mother’s absence and the loss of a loved one. The play reveals the various complexities of family relationships, including siblings and the relationship between a father and his children. Dad is a recently single parent, and throughout the play there are references to things he doesn’t do well (for example, always letting the toast burn) - but he is working hard to try and make ends meet and to look after his two children. There are moments when the Boy’s mother is mentioned as someone who was a ‘better’ parent, who took the Boy to London to see things he’d enjoy. By the end of the play, the relationship between the Boy and Dad begins to heal when Dad makes the suggestion that they take a trip to London together.

The Hempstocks are an unusual family and the Boy notes the lack of male presence on their farm - Ginnie dismisses the need for any at all. They are a very matriarchal family, and extend a warm welcome to the Boy.



## Home and belonging

**‘I understand how valuable a home really is.’**  
*Ursula*

The amount of homely, nourishing food that the Hempstocks prepare for the Boy is a sign of how nurturing and generous they are. It provides a vital comfort to the Boy, who does not receive much love and affection in his own home. One of the reasons the Boy despises Ursula is the way in which she is persistent in her attempts to isolate him in his own home and make him feel that it is him who does not belong.

## Loss, bereavement and suicide

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**'You can never know how anyone else really feels.'**  
*Dad*

Both the play and novel explore the theme of loss - this is a version where the bereaved are unable to talk about that loss. The play begins at a funeral, immediately establishing loss and bereavement as one of its central themes. The death of the Lodger, the loss of Lettie and the death of the Boy's mother before the story starts reminds us of our mortality.



## Grief

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**'The hole. Slowly growing back but still a hole'**  
*Old Mrs Hempstock*

Throughout the play, we see various characters trying to navigate the path and experience of grief. It is clear that there is no 'right way' to grieve and that it is an entirely personal process. The Boy experiences a variety of feelings from fear to loneliness, and isolation to anger - all entirely natural responses to grief. Sis takes comfort in Ursula's arrival because she has a new female adult figure in her life.

Ginnie and Old Mrs Hempstock's response to grief is perhaps more spiritual. When Old Mrs Hempstock talks to the Boy at the end of the play it is clear that, whilst she still grieves for Lettie, she continues her own life with purpose and has been a source of comfort for the Boy at difficult points in his adult life. She has become part of the family that he craves and they are united in the loss of Lettie.

## Storytelling

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**'I like stories. I read a lot of stories.'**  
*The Boy*

The Boy finds great comfort and solace in reading. He can escape into the worlds of books, many of which are great classics such as *The Hobbit* and *Alice in Wonderland*. When trying to outwit Ursula, the Boy takes comfort and courage from the bravery of characters from those books. The Boy makes sense of the world around him by comparing it to what he has learnt from books: the power of reading is communicated through this aspect of the Boy's character. Reading, for many people, is an escape and a way of understanding the world around us.

## Friendship

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**'For her friend. Her best friend.'**  
*Ginnie*

The Boy's previous friendships have not been successful, and he has experienced the disappointment of poorly attended birthday parties. His friendship with Lettie is intense, but genuine. She teaches him to trust her, and the final events of the play demonstrate the true depth of their friendship when she gives her life to save him. By the end of the play, we hope that the Boy may develop a friendship of sorts with his father.



# Interview with Neil Gaiman



Neil Gaiman is a prolific writer, whose fan base includes young children, teenagers, and adults.

Neil's work includes novels, comics, and short stories, but he has also worked as a journalist and has directed two films. His most famous works include *Coraline*, *American Gods*, *Good Omens*, *Stardust*, *The Graveyard Book*, and *Sandman*, many of which have been adapted into films and/or TV series. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is the first major stage adaptation of Neil's work.

To explore more of Neil Gaiman's work, go to: [neilgaiman.com](http://neilgaiman.com)

**In many of your interviews, you talk about making mistakes. In one interview about *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, you said your first thought was 'I appear to have written a novel!' when you finished it. Why are mistakes important?**

*The Ocean at the End of the Lane* was meant to have been a short story. As far as I was concerned, I had a short story's worth of plot in my head. I was just going to begin and write my short story when the story wanted to keep going and I kept going with it. You have to be willing to swim into it and make mistakes. If what you were writing was perfect writing, it wouldn't be interesting.

Don't avoid making mistakes or be scared of it. My advice would be to make the thing you want to make anyway. There are two alternatives: One is to do the thing and make mistakes; the alternative is not to do the thing and then there are no mistakes. But it's not fixable if you don't do it. You'd hand in a blank piece of paper, and there's no examiner in the world who will look at a blank sheet of paper and give it full marks.

**What can you tell us about the setting of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*?**

I wrote the story for my wife. I wrote the story because I couldn't take her to Sussex and show her the places where I grew up. Many of the houses have been demolished now, and the places I grew up now have houses built on them. I also used a house halfway down the real lane for where the Hempstocks live but moved it to the end of the lane in my story because it felt better. However, I completely invented a lot of stuff in the story. I took a lot of places that I knew very well, but then added a lot of fictional detail. I wanted this to be a work of invention.

**Food features very heavily in this story. Can you tell us more about how you write about food, and why it's significant?**

Food can signal hospitality, and it can signal love. For me, if love through food is anywhere, it's at the Hempstock house. It's an idealised version of what I wished my grandmothers' houses could have been.

The burnt toast that the Boy eats every morning is well intentioned, but it's moving towards food as punishment rather than love. He then goes from his own house to the Hempstocks' house, where the food is fabulous. Kids respond to food in a more primal way than adults do. As an adult you have more power. If you are served awful food in a restaurant, you can say it's awful. No one is going to stand over you and say that you need to finish the food and you will stay there until you do. I remember nightmares of being forced to do that at school. Here is the Wednesday afternoon salad consisting of half an egg, a lettuce, a sad tomato with a thumb print in it and some sliced, pickled beetroot. I knew that I was not allowed to leave that table until all of that pickled beetroot was consumed. I eventually discovered that if you cut it up really small and you washed each bit of beetroot down with enough water that you couldn't really taste it. Just sort of swallowing it like pills. You could get it down.

Contrast this with something like my grandparents' house where you were welcomed: here is the soup, here is the cake. Here is what they're having for breakfast and the golden marmalade, and now they're going out into the garden picking blackberries, filling jam jars with blackberries – a layer of blackberry and a layer of sugar and a layer of blackberry and a layer of sugar – and then putting them aside. And then that is going to appear in various forms – then they'll strain it and you'll have this amazing blackberry juice. That's



food as love. It heightens the fact that when you are writing about children, for me you are writing about a lack of power. You're writing about the efforts to claim autonomy. *Ocean* is a story about how to survive.

**Do you think the way you write about food is influenced by other writers whose work you read as a child?**

Some writers, yes. In *The Wind in the Willows*, there's a list of food that Ratty packs to take on their journey, and there are lists of food that's eaten all the way through the story. I also feel that the food that's part of the plot in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is well written. For 70 years, children have been fooled into wanting Turkish Delight. Then they try it and can't understand why Edmund sold his soul to the devil. But the story is set in war time when there was food rationing, so it was probably more because of the sugar. A lot of people are disappointed when they taste Turkish Delight for themselves.

**In *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, you explore the tensions between children and adults. Can you explain more about that?**

Childhood is much too big to write a book about. But if you're writing a book about a moment of childhood it seems to me that you are also trying to write about what it was like living in that world.

I remember as a kid reading children's books that felt like they were written by people who had been mind-wiped – somebody is obviously writing a children's book and they appear to have no memory of what it was like to be a child, because I'm a child, and I know it's not like that! There was definitely a sort of promise to myself that I wouldn't forget.

I think there's a level on which, as I enter my sixth decade, I forget more about childhood and I'm sure that that will continue. But I did find it very interesting writing about childhood as I wrote *Ocean* and more of that time period felt like it was opening up.

The experience of writing *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* was much more like when you go back to somewhere that you haven't been for five years, and you realise that you don't actually remember where all the roads are and where they lead. Then, because you are back there, you start to remember because you just haven't used that stuff –and that was how writing *Ocean* felt. It felt like I was living partly in Florida in 2012 and partly in Sussex in 1967.

**In your writing, how do you balance realism with fantasy?**

It's always a matter of making things feel so real at the beginning that when you start letting the magic happen, the strangeness happen, the fantasy happen, the reader will go with you. You know you've said to the reader, hold my hand we're going to walk together and you can trust me. By the time they realise that they can't trust you and that you let go of their hand a long time ago, it's too late.

**How did Katy Rudd (Director) and Joel Horwood (Adaptor) pitch their idea to you for a production of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*?**

They didn't really have a pitch other than 'we love it and we want to make it into a play and we have this idea for Ursula as this huge puppet. We want to use a giant raggedy puppet that you can't really tell what the shape of it is.' So for the next three years, there were read throughs and I'd be in London and they'd have a

new draft of the script and I'd sit down and they'd read me the new draft of the script.

I really enjoyed reading them but I would always have a lot of notes. A lot of them were 'I think you've gone too far in this direction'. Or you know, a lot of the time the notes were 'This is working, don't change this'.

Old Mrs Hempstock was the first thing they got right. That was great, and I said, 'Don't change her, you've got her.'

The first draft was really big on boxing, putting the Boy in boxing gloves and stuff and now it's a little thing that happens on the stage: it's tiny, a breath. In the first draft, the boxing gloves seemed huge and the father's ambition for the son to be a boxer, it was just like 'Yeah, can we dial that way, way down because that one doesn't land for me'.

It was a process of giving notes and a process of really not knowing whether or not this thing was going to work and being okay with that. I had to be willing to let Joel and Katy get there on their own steam. And yes, I could give them notes; yes, I could guide them. But it was their journey.

### How do you feel about people coming to your work via adaptations, rather than reading your work first?

I don't think there's a wrong way to discover something that you love. I don't think there's a wrong path to come to things. I love P L Travers' *Mary Poppins* series. I think she was a genius and the stories are deeper, better and wiser than they are given credit for. I think the Disney movie does not catch the spirit of what makes the story so brilliant. I was taken to the Disney movie when I was three and loved it, and bought my copy of *Mary Poppins* when I was five or six because it had a photograph of Julie Andrews on the cover. There's no wrong way. It wasn't like I came to it the wrong way. If that film hadn't existed, I might never have heard of *Mary Poppins*.

### Do you have a favourite moment in the production?

I think my favourite moment in the theatre is probably the doors. It's Ursula and the doors. What I love about that is that it messes with my sense of what's real. It sort of undoes everything.

I hope it does to the person sitting in the audience what my prose does to them reading, that moment where you go, 'Oh, I am willing to believe this. If this can happen anything can happen.'





Section 2

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Staging  
*The Ocean at the  
End of the Lane*

# From Page to Stage

Throughout this pack, you will see that we refer to a 360° production. All elements of the production are vital and members of the creative team have to work together to ensure that they create a cohesive piece of theatre.



Katy Rudd, the show's director says, 'I love the story because it's epic in scope but it's also intimate because it's seen through a child's eyes. I was struck by the power of the story to challenge my grown-up memories of childhood. It reminded me of the powerlessness of being a child'. This is something that Neil Gaiman also mentions in his interview (see page 13) and which is emphasised throughout the production: Lettie and the Boy are both trying to negotiate an adult world, where some things just don't make sense.

**'I think the theatre is perfect medium to tell this story.'**

*Katy Rudd, Director*

When you watch the production, you will see Neil Gaiman's novel brought to life on stage, despite the fact that he thought much of the novel was unstageable. But Katy Rudd saw things differently: 'As I was reading the novel, I was struck by how theatrical it felt. Its locations are clear, and I have strong ideas about them. Juxtaposed with adventure is real darkness. It is important to me that we've captured both elements.'

Movement Director Steven Hoggett agreed, 'I think what Neil forgets is that he's such an evocative writer, where he creates the detail that he gives.' Whilst they didn't stick to every detail that's in the original novel, the team have brought Neil Gaiman's novel to life in

the most magical and imaginative of ways. There was a great sense of trust between Neil Gaiman and Joel Horwood, who adapted the novel for the stage. Gaiman gave the production team the blessing they needed to move away from the novel and to make the necessary changes.

In describing the play's relationship with the novel, Katy Rudd describes the play as 'its own piece of art. In workshops we found exciting ways to bring the story to life visually and at the same time, through great acting we also searched for a deeper truth. Good theatre enables the audience to experience deep connections to the characters.

'At each performance we go on a journey together; we are able to feel what the characters are feeling, because we are physically in the same room, breathing the same air. I was interested to explore the connections between comfort, the domestic, belonging, fear and dislocation.'

In the rehearsal room, it was a collaborative process from the very beginning. The production had benefitted from development time at the National Theatre's Studio, where teams are able to experiment and explore through the process of research and development (R&D). By the time the company met in the rehearsal room there was already a draft that Joel Horwood, Katy Rudd and the team were happy with.





‘Composer Jherek Bischoff and Sound Designer Ian Dickinson were in the room, responding to the actors, writing music and creating the sonic world of the play,’ Katy Rudd explains ‘Lighting Designer Paule Constable came in and we talked with our Designer Fly Davis about how light would be central to sculpting the world of the play.’

**‘The actors were also undoubtedly integral. This play is total theatre.’**

*Katy Rudd, Director*

One of the key relationships in this production is that of the Director and the Movement Director. Katy Rudd explains, ‘Working with a movement director is a privilege. Steven and I have worked together before and that has given us a shorthand for how to talk and work with each other. There are lots of crossovers in our roles and often if an actor is stuck in a scene, Steven can give a physical note that unlocks the actor. Steven had a lot of challenging scenes in the piece – the wand sequence is the first scene where the children go into imagination and the real world and the supernatural start to become blurred.

When Steven started working on this scene, I knew that we had found a language that could help deliver this play.’

Members of the audience are all likely to find something that engages their interest and fascination. For those who grew up in the 1980s, it might be the costume, whilst others might find that the scenes where adults and children are on different wavelengths are where the play most resonates. ‘I hope the audience members remember or realise how cool the 80s were’ says Katy Rudd. ‘I hope that they learn that you can’t pass or fail at being a person and that after grief you can heal – you can grow a new heart. Mostly I hope that they think, “I knew I liked theatre”.

When asked what she’s learnt from working on this production, Katy Rudd is very clear: ‘To be as brave as possible.’

**‘I hope audiences feel transported, breathless like they have been on an adventure. I hope they start to believe in nightmares and monsters, and it begins a love of Neil Gaiman’s beautiful body of work.’**

*Katy Rudd, Director*

## Adapting *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Joel Horwood

I first heard of Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* in 2016, when Ben Power (then Deputy Artistic Director of the National Theatre) e-mailed me. I read it in one sitting which, given I'm both dyslexic and lazy, is something I rarely manage to do with books. I was swept away by the book's action, mysteries and the riddle of reading a story being told by someone who is trying to remember it themselves. Had this boy really fought a being from another planet? Or was this a young boy's way of coping with his father's infidelity and the loss of a friend?

### A piece of theatre is a giant game of 'let's pretend'

These questions made the story ripe for adaptation. On stage, multiple realities can (and do) exist at the same time. Audiences can easily follow as an actor switches roles because it is obvious that they were only ever presenting a character in the first place. A play can show you a game of monsters and magic and you can do the same work that I did when reading the book – is this real? Is it all an untrustworthy memory? Does it matter whether it's real or not if the effect on the character is the same? On film, those answers are often handed to you on a plate, but perhaps a piece of theatre based on this story could be both ambiguous and satisfying. I couldn't wait to get started and e-mailed Ben back to say as much as soon as I finished reading the book.

I was invited to meet Director Katy Rudd, who had already brought Costume, Prop and Puppet Designer Samuel Wyr on board. After some initial discussions about themes and ideas for the adaptation, I began to write. For me, the first stage was to try to identify the middle. Once I had a point for the interval, I could begin to work on finding the right beginning for our version – the book offers a lot of options. From then, I went through the book lifting out the dialogue and essentialising the text between the lines into action; 'They walk to the duck pond' or 'He steps into the bucket', for example.

Once I had this rough (and very long) 'scriptment', I could begin to work identifying the themes that could focus the play. It became apparent very early on that if we had a narrator – someone very much alive and unscathed – telling us about all the high drama that they clearly lived through there would be no stakes. Whereas if we showed the action and drama rather than told it and ensured that the stakes weren't purely life and death, but concerned with lasting damage, perhaps we could make a show as compelling as the book. But, in order to deliver this version, we would need to create the monsters, oceans and magic before the audience's very eyes.

From that moment on, I was writing in collaboration with the people on the artistic team responsible for creating the stage language; everything audiences see and hear.



I knew I could write stage directions and trust Katy, Sam Wyer, Steven Hoggett (Movement Director), Jherek Bischoff (Composer) and Ian Dickinson (Sound Designer) to bring them to life. And because they are so good at what they do, often it would mean that we didn't need a speech or a section of dialogue that previously I had felt necessary; or we would hit on a brilliant visual or physical means of telling the story that needed a little dialogue to 'bed it into' the rest of the production. So there was a process of rewriting as we worked out our favourite way to present this story; with characters growing and changing, a giant 'flea' attacking our protagonists, the progression from mourners at a funeral to Hunger Birds destroying the universe.

I rewrote the play a great deal as we worked towards the final version. The book, as a piece of literature, uses tools that just would not work with our vision of the staged version. For example, the Hunger Birds appear in the book with very little set-up prior; the Boy's parents are 'non characters', conspicuous by their absence; the Hempstocks are an entirely harmonious triumvirate which felt dramatically dead to us. With work however, these challenges gradually presented opportunities for us to focus our themes. They meant we had to deviate from the book but, given we were changing the form, we had to trust our instincts here. So, the 'set-up' of the Hunger Birds was approached through dialogue but also by creating an ensemble whom we first meet as mourners and who go on to move or manipulate furniture, puppets and performers and who physically create worlds, nightmares and journeys for our protagonist. The umbrellas they use, for example, recur in one of Boy's nightmares and then form the basis of the theatrical language for the Hunger Birds.

Once we had begun to pull our framing device through the piece by identifying our ensemble in this way, it seemed right to thread a more active sense of grief and loss through the action. So, in our version, Boy's mum has died sometime before our play begins. This tangible absence and the apparent impossibility of it being openly discussed within the family began to fuel the action in Boy's home. And this friction, the idea of how a family copes with loss, indicated where we could take the Hempstocks. So, in our version, Ginnie is very much driven by her fear that she stands to lose Lettie. In this way, our themes of loss and family developed and deepened as we reworked our play.

*Ocean's journey was not just from page to stage. It was back and forth.*

The staging informed what would, or could, happen on the page as much as the other way around. I had the luxury of working in a way where I could hear and see rough versions of the play before it was ready. I could edit and change and focus and rewrite and expand the play as it came to life. The process felt as collaborative and fun as a really good – and pretty dark – game of 'let's pretend'.

**Joel Horwood, February 2022**

# Movement

## Interview with Steven Hoggett, Movement Director

### How much did you refer to the original novel, when creating the movement for the production?

The draft that Joel Horwood had done was a very smart adaptation that used an inherent theatricality on a book that was unstageable. As movement directors, what we try to do is hold the novel in the back of our mind, and every now and again it might solve a problem, but it's surprising how infrequent that is. Staging challenges are very rarely solved by going back to the book. There were occasional moments where we looked at the destruction of Skarhatch, for example, and there might be an adjective or a phrase or a line that guided us, but I would say the book is very rarely a touchstone for what you need to solve in a rehearsal.

### How have you worked with the other members of the team, particularly in terms of the Director, Puppet Director and Movement Director dynamic?

The Director Katy Rudd, is great at lining up departmental kinds of elements. That's where it gets easy. I've worked with the Puppet Director Finn Caldwell, on a few shows now. Finn and I can make things in isolation, but we actually do always feel like we get the best results working in the room together, and again it's where Katy will be there to nudge it and to shape it.

Katy does trust me to a point now where if I know that it's not right, I will walk away from it, I won't push. I think there's a lot to be said for Katy spinning a lot of plates. I think, of course, it's trust. It's also about supporting each other because there's lots of moments in the show where I would need the lighting department to solve something that I had going on, even the score: I've asked the Composer, Jherek Bischoff, to bring things up in tempo or down in tempo. I was always asking Finn for different angles and puppetry for us to be able to scoop performers underneath. A show like *Ocean* is really a testament to the power of the team. The show is based on the ensemble idea, that there are these characters that are supporting the narrative of the Boy and his life. In the same way, on a show like *Ocean* the team are mirroring that exactly, and that's when we start to make great work together, or work that feels good.



### Can you tell us a little more about how you have worked with the music on *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*?

Interestingly, the day that I received a draft of *Ocean* a friend of mine had sent me an album called *Cistern* by this friend of hers called Jherek Bischoff. I know this sounds like a cliché, but it's absolutely true. It was a Saturday morning and I put the album on, and I started reading the draft. At the end of it I just emailed Katy and said "I've had this thing just happen to me. I've been listening to this album and read the script at the same time, and I think this world is the same".

I listened to that album a lot, not just for work but for pleasure. I think *Cistern* is a beautiful album. In lots of ways things like that are great for me because I know every beat and every phrase on the album, so when it comes to being in the rehearsal room it feels like somebody's given me a map of how physicality might sit and I just line things up alongside this musical phrasing. In my position, you are given an absolute gift. *Cistern* is an extant album. It already existed, and we didn't use all existing music so then Jherek, of course, ended up on the show, came in and composed



some tracks and my dream was made real: I'm making sequences and Jherek is scoring them alongside my sequences. That was absolutely joyous.

**How do you run your first couple of days of rehearsal?**

On the first day we'll do lots of exercises to create the sense of an ensemble and that will also include the other performers as well. We'll do exercises where they really are working together as a huge team, using peripheral vision and creating lots of physical material. I also really like it in rehearsals where you know, there might be a section in the Hunger Birds, but it was created by the performer playing Old Mrs Hempstock because we all make material together, and then cross pollinate. You all learn each other's two-bar phrase. Everybody's creative juices and work is sewn into the fabric of the show. There's a chance you aren't performing our sequence at all, but you can see your work in there, because you are part of this creative team that came together. You create idiosyncratic performances out of that because it's only by virtue of those people being in the room that those sequences end up being made and looking the way they do.

In the first few days, it's very intense and we just make a tonne of material – some of it ends up in the show, some of it doesn't. We watch a Haka (see page 45 for background information on the Haka), we watch music videos, and we look at particular strands or elements in a music video and ask the cast to derive stuff from that. We'll use really simple instructions, for example, 'create an underwater creature that's not been found yet' to create these beautiful creatures and some of them are huge and some are tiny but really, it's things that everybody can achieve and make people move in ways

that they wouldn't have done in a rehearsal room.

I've always liked the idea that people come and see our performers in a show like this and their friends and family would never have seen them move in this way before.

**What influences your work on the production? Are there cultural references within the work that we might look for?**

Let's talk about Lettie's confrontation, which we call 'The Haka'. There's a very famous Haka when New Zealand played against France. It's on YouTube as 'the best Haka of all time' and as a group of people we just watched that, and we talked about the spirit of it and the defiance of it, but also the fact that there's this power. We don't do the facial stuff or the tongue stuff or try to frighten people in our version of The Haka. We then thought well, let's just imagine if this is from the back because, really when we see it, we only see the back of Lettie. Most of it is from the back so look how much power can you get from short, sharp moves. Then you can start to play with iconography, and there's the great feminist poster image with the woman with her arm up. So we asked "okay, how can you how you appropriate it? How can you put that in the middle of a Haka?" If it's a feminine stance, then you can refer to feminist iconography and you can just slip it in the sequence as well, it sits there. Powerful female imagery and Beyoncé Knowles is in there as well, but because of the framework of it, it doesn't scream out.

We made the Haka in groups of three to start with and we put them up against each other. You can then have a Haka-off against each other's teams. Then when you work down to the individual it's much more at the



essence of that performer and where they think Lettie is as a character. For Nia Towle, who played Lettie in the West End production, Lettie is very much of the earth. There's lots of things about grit and soil. The blowing came from a Destiny's Child video for 'Lose My Breath'. I refer to it quite a lot: it's Destiny's Child versus Destiny's Child and they're dancing off each other and they get dust blown into each other's face, so that's often referred to. It's about taking pop culture and then deep-rooted male power – the culture of opposition. Striking fear into their enemy's heart but using the most minimal, the most deep-rooted power in the small and compact being, which is exactly what Lettie is. That's something that I haven't used on anything else, it was just for *Ocean*.

It never ever fails to be a really exciting day in the rehearsal room. The room really kind of gets fired up and energised. It's also the piece in the show where I felt the harmony between Jherek, myself and Katy and this idea we had about a sequence. Jherek's music track absolutely empowers the performer to really get inside it. It's a great piece of music. It's one of the best in the show, I feel.

#### **Does the movement change when you have new cast members or is it completely set in stone?**

It does change. It's changed quite a lot in our various runs. It changes for other reasons than cast changes as well. We were in the round originally in the Dorfman theatre, and then we were end-on when we transferred to the West End. The stage space was smaller in some aspects. There are also these four performers called Mnemonics and they're the means by which the Boy's story unravels - he puts a story and narrative together and they create the environments around him. They tend to create environments, put him in jeopardy, or sometimes they save him. The idea – and it's such a distinct ensemble concept – is that four performers will require four completely different takes on it and so that changed more than anything else.

Their skill set was very different. The first set were very much like physical theatre performers and our second set were actors with really strong movement skills and of course, that changes everything. We also wanted to change everything within the context of things like sequences. So, the sequence with Lettie up against Skarhatch (The Haka) – that was completely redone for Nia because she was different physically and verbally, and we'll probably change it again for the tour. Things are quite idiosyncratic.

It is useful to let go of definitives when it comes to shows like this, particularly with performers who need to invest so heavily in it that you need to give them the opportunity to create and take on ownership of it. On *Ocean* we've made some idiosyncratic, physical work, with and on performers, and you move it across performers, and you can see where it's just been put on them. You can't see them finding their breath in it, or the blood in it, and you just have to just say, 'well, that's not a phrase for them. What else is here for them and where can we find it? What kind of territory are we in? What are they? What are their physical beings and then how do we fit it into what they do?' Some performers just don't work without that kind of investment so we're more than happy to do that.

#### **Is there another section that you think is particularly successful?**

There's a piece during the Ursula 'doors' section where Jherek brings in this bass frequency into the music and it's as the doors appear. The appearance of some doors shouldn't be terrifying but what Jherek does musically makes some doors seem genuinely frightening. For things like that we just create simple stage images and what he's done with the composition is extraordinary. Days like that are really exciting, then the design team get behind it and sound design get behind it and then before you know it what was great, is stunning.

#### **What advice would you give to students who find it difficult to hold their nerve in the devising process?**

It's about a sense of intention. Things can be scrappy as hell, and the first time we did the Hunger Bird sequence it looked awful; there was zero focusing, but the physical commitment and the articulation of performance was beautiful, unusual and unnerving. So, it's like, "okay, that's going to work, park it". It's great, the performers were really getting into the devising process, it just looked like a dog's dinner. You couldn't tell what was going on. There was no narrative structure to speak of, you didn't know where to look, but in essence the qualitative nature was good. The performers were committing to the process like mad, so we didn't worry about it. We could clean it. We could figure something out because the intention is there.

# Music and Sound Design

**Jherek Bischoff is an American composer, based in Los Angeles. Having played bass as a teenager and toured in bands for over ten years, Bischoff now composes his own albums and original scores.**

Jherek Bischoff says, 'You know, I joke sometimes I've been making the same music for years, but the context in which it's being presented has changed and it's perceived completely differently just by the audience. I consciously started putting more energy into theatre and film because I'm also an artist that really enjoys making all kinds of music and exploring different instruments, exploring different sounds, building instruments, learning about different cultures, just all aspects of the art.'

Throughout the production, music is used to create mood and atmosphere and it's an integral part of the style of the performance. Although you might be familiar with the synthesizer sounds in the show, you might be surprised to hear how some of the soundtrack was created. Bischoff explains more, 'There's not a whole lot of music when the Boy is in the real world but then when he goes into a world of imagination, when it starts getting kind of blurry, that's when the music is really serving the purpose and serving the show. I was looking for weird sounds to achieve that. One of the most exciting things is that I collaborated with Spitfire Audio in London who are primarily known as an orchestral library company. From their orchestral recordings you can enter MIDI information which is just like little dots into a computer programme, and then it triggers these orchestral samples that have the entire orchestra on every single note and every which way to play those notes. Then you can sit down at a piano and you are the BBC orchestra. It's amazing. They also have a series called 'Labs' where they collaborate with different artists and they just say, "hey, what do you want us to build for you? Do you have any sounds that you want to make into a little instrument that we'll put out for free into the world?" I was excited about this because I use a lot of their products.'

I was in Switzerland working and I was flipping through the channels: I don't speak German so I was looking for something that I could watch and turn my brain off for a minute and I happened across this nature documentary that was playing whale and dolphin sounds like you hear in *Ocean*. Katy wanted synthesisers, and whales sound almost like very cool synthesisers, so I quickly called up Spitfire and I said, "Make me a synthesiser made out of whales" and so they did exactly that.

Sound Designer Ian Dickinson also has an integral role to play in the way that the production uses music and sound in this '360° production'. Dickinson begins designing a production thinking about basic information for each scene. This can be as simple as identifying

the time of day, the location, the type of weather and the time of year. Meanwhile, the music that has been composed for the show does a lot of the storytelling, alongside Katy Rudd's direction of the actors. This production has a lot of underscoring and sound effects, and part of Ian Dickinson's job is to design the sound system that can deliver all of that to enhance the audience's experience. Ian Dickinson says, "It's important that within a design, the music and the sound give each other the room to breathe. It's a delicate balance.'

Ian Dickinson spent a lot of time in rehearsal, but didn't start fully developing ideas until towards the end of the process. He says, 'In a show like *Ocean*, there's a lot to do but you need to know where you are heading before you start. You have to collaborate with other members of the team, too. For example, the music needed to be loud and driven in some parts, but we still need the clarity of what's being said'. Dickinson describes the creative process as being 'all about compromise'. In fact, his advice to all members of a production team is to 'be nice to each other'.

The voice for Skarthatch is pre-recorded, which allows several different opportunities. The sense that the voice is detached from the 'being' is very effective, and the recording has been treated with various effects such as delay, reverb and distortion. Elsewhere, you can hear sound effects such as a car, the opening of a gate, the sound of rain and the sound of the Boy being sucked out of the window when he escapes. Even the tuning of the car horn as a car screeches past is carefully thought out and matched to the music.

At the beginning of the play, Ian Dickinson has used sounds which have specific connotations. For example, at the funeral we hear rooks and ravens – a sound often associated with death and with graveyards. This shorthand enables the storytelling to happen very quickly. Sound then plays an important role when the Boy steps into the bucket, and therefore into the ocean. There is what Ian Dickinson describes as a 'plunging wash of sound' before the music takes over. At this point, pre-recorded voices, the sound of water bubbles and air in pipes are all combined to give a sense of breathing underwater.

Both Jherek Bischoff and Ian Dickinson mention the importance of creating sounds. There are vast amounts of sounds available in sound libraries, but Ian Dickinson's advice is, 'if you can't find the sound you want, **you** have to create it.'

# Puppetry and Costume Design

The puppetry in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* combines the talents of Costume and Puppet Designer Sam Wyer and Puppetry Director Finn Caldwell. As you watch the production, take note of the strong relationship between the design of the various puppets, the costumes and set. The use of puppets in *Ocean* is another example of the 360° nature of the production.



When embarking on animating puppets, the ‘rules’ of puppetry usually guide us towards looking at a range of elements, including:

**Breath:** how and when does the puppet breathe?

**Focus:** where is the puppet looking, and what are they looking at?

**Weight:** the weight, size and relationship of the puppet creative to gravity must be clear in order to be convincing. Creatures that are about to pounce, for example, tend to bend before they jump, and then their weight shifts again when they land.

The design of Skarthatch presented a challenge to these rules, however. Finn Caldwell explains, ‘Sam, in his genius, was pushing towards something abstract. As a puppet director, I was a bit scared of that because, normally what I refer to first is breath and what the puppet is looking at, after understanding how the puppet moves. So with an alien body with no face, no eyes and no obvious way of taking in breath, it took away a lot of my safety blankets.’

## Skarthatch

The description of Skarthatch in the novel was the starting point for exploring how to create a puppet, but it quickly became clear that a faithful version of this description wasn’t going to be effective on stage. The sense of danger and threat needed to be much more immediate. Skarthatch needed to appear strange and familiar. Sam Wyer explains, ‘The puppet is made up of things that might be sort of lying around in a hedgerow – bits of detritus – and it also has the hose pipe wound into it from the car. We make a direct link between the car that has



woken her up. Skarthatch also looks a bit like a sort of dead animal, too.’ The design of the puppet is relatively straightforward in terms of having very few mechanisms or ‘tricks’, but the scale of the puppet means that the puppeteers are, unusually for a puppet, quite far away from each other. When creating Skarthatch, it was vital that Sam Wyer, Steven Hoggett, Katy Rudd and the performers created a shared physical language in which to manipulate the puppet.

Sam Wyer’s design is one that he hopes is the most unsettling version of what Skarthatch could be. ‘The success of the Skarthatch puppet relies on simple movement and articulation to create disconcerting and unsettling textures and shapes.’

When you’re watching the production, notice how you instinctively try to make sense of Skarthatch’s appearance. You will probably try to identify something that resembles a face, or a head, and try to see where the voice is coming from. As the creature is moved around the stage, notice how it seems to evolve into different shapes as it comes closer to Lettie and the Boy.

The process of creating Skarthatch is a good example of how determination pays off. Finn Caldwell notes, ‘It took us a long time to get to a place where we found something that could move with enough recognition from the audience as a living creature, and with enough intention for the audience to really believe in its existence – and be scared by it. When we were able to bring this thing alive without any reference to a particular animal, and without any eyes or mouth, it became really scary because it wasn’t human. It wasn’t using the things that humans or other animals use to communicate.’

The puppets in the production are made up of strips and rags. The pink and grey colours used on Skarthatch reflect the clothes worn by Ursula earlier in the play.’

Paule Constable’s lighting designs are also vital to creating the sense of danger and threat from Skarthatch and the Hunger Birds. The lighting directs the audience’s attention to particular aspects of the creatures. Shape, texture and scale are all enhanced by the lighting design. When working with very dark puppets (such as the Hunger Birds), it can be difficult to light them effectively because black soaks up colour rather than reflecting it. This is partly why the torn appearance of both Skarthatch and the Hunger Birds is helpful, giving space for light to pass through.

## The Hunger Birds

Look carefully at the shape of the Hunger Birds’ wings, notice the way in which they create sharp silhouettes. Think carefully about the opening scene, when the mourners have umbrellas as they stand at the graveside. Can you see the connection between the shape of an umbrella and the shapes of the wings of the Hunger Birds? This is one example of how the design concept is consistent and connected between the various characters and settings within the narrative.

‘There was a key to that design process that was given to us by Neil Gaiman and the first ever workshop we did, which was largely puppetry and script, sort of discovering how we make these fantastical creatures,’ explains Sam Wyer. ‘Having seen our work, Neil said, in response to seeing these sort of cardboard, recycled beanbag Hunger Birds that we’d been creating, he paused and thoughtfully said, “There’s something quite terrifying about a piece of shredded beanbag caught on a barbed wire fence, flicking and lapping in the wind”. This is the sense we’ve tried to continue to imbue in the puppets all the way along.’





## The Ocean

Any production that uses puppetry needs to create an 'agreement' early in the performance that the audience will suspend their disbelief and engage with the puppetry that occurs on stage. In act one, Skarhatch and the Hunger Birds form a visual language and because we see the puppets several times, the audience is able to enter this 'agreement' easily.

In act two, the Boy and Lettie enter the ocean. The two puppets that we see in this scene use puppetry language that the audience have not yet seen used anywhere else in the production. The puppets combine bunraku and rod-style puppetry, operated by the characters whom they are representing. This prevents this unfamiliar style of puppetry becoming jarring for the audience, and helps to communicate the vastness of the ocean in which the Boy and Lettie are swimming. The ocean itself is made of a type of polythene which is recyclable, so it's environmentally friendly and at the end of the production's run, it will be made into something else.

## Costume Design

Sam Wyr's costume designs take a lot of inspiration from the descriptions in the novel and, like the puppets, create a strong connection or contrast between different characters.

The Hempstocks' costumes are made from natural fabrics in warm and earthy colours such as brown, ochre and vivid greens. The natural textures and fabrics contrast with the greys and blues worn by the Boy's family before Ursula arrives. You'll notice that the rich colours worn by the Hempstocks are also echoed in the richness of the food around them, the candlelight and embroideries in their home.

Even the hair styles of the Hempstocks have significance. Each Hempstock woman wears a type of plait or braid. These were identified or chosen by the actors playing the roles, and in line with their ethnicity – a way of showing that these characters had come through time but wouldn't necessarily be through one heritage. In line with the casting of the different people playing the Hempstocks during the productions in London and on tour, the braiding has reflected African, Caribbean, Chinese, Japanese and Celtic (both Scottish and Irish) heritage. Braids are made from three strands, too, which is also significant for these three strong female characters.

You will notice that the Hempstocks' clothing is less specific to the 1980s setting than those worn by the Boy's family, and by the Mnemonics. By keeping a neutral colour palette and natural fabrics for the three women, Sam Wyr has emphasised the way in which the women have moved through history and have a much more secure relationship with the earth and world around them, whereas others are keen to fit in and follow a trend.





## The Family

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You will notice that the Boy's costume changes significantly the more he spends time with Lettie and the Hempstock women. His costume starts in pale colours, including a beige jacket, but he ends the play wearing a brightly coloured red and blue ensemble. The Boy wears a T-shirt which features a graphic – a subtle reference to a magazine called *Arrow*, a literary magazine that was popular in the 1980s. In this way, even the Boy's clothing reflects the relationship that he has with reading and with the stories that become a refuge for him.

Look at the photo above, which shows Ursula with Dad and Sis. Sam Wyer's design shows how Ursula starts to influence everyone except the Boy. Notice how the pink tones Ursula always wears are echoed in the dungarees and even hair extensions worn by Sis, and the shirt, tie and socks worn by Dad. Notice, too, that the pink begins to influence the lighting and set. The Boy must watch as everything around him – his entire reality – changes as a result of Ursula's presence.

## The Mnemonics

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The Mnemonics' costumes reflect the 1980s setting. Their costumes are textured in the same way as the set. They have splashes of reflective black texture veining that looks like branches, and water patterns which were screen printed onto the fabric of the costumes in both matt and gloss finishes. All of the costumes are individual to each performer and their build, as well as being contemporary to the 1980s setting.

The Mnemonics also appear in the first scene of the show, as mourners with umbrellas. Their clothing incorporates matt, gloss and vinyl; for example vinyl raincoats, flashes of gloss on the shoes, patterned belts etc. With these umbrellas, they then appear in the same costumes (but slightly modified) when the Boy is dreaming at the Hempstocks' house about a funeral and his father (which echoes the funeral that we see at the beginning of the play). In this scene, the Mnemonics have umbrellas again, but those umbrellas are broken and twisted and have holes in them. The next time we see that texture is with the Hunger Birds: the designs create a direct line between the mourners and the Hunger Birds.

## The Evolution of a Costume

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The outfit that the Hempstocks give the Boy is deliberately outdated, but the design in the production is very different to that described in the novel. This medieval-inspired costume is based on the colours of popular present-day superheroes, which share some of the same bright colours as the medieval references (such as Rufus the Red, who is mentioned in the novel and play). Sam Wyer explains, 'The Boy has to believe in his friendship with Lettie, and his inner strength. He is the hero of the story and takes on heroic qualities.'

You can see how the research and development of the Boy's costume has evolved into the final costume in the images below.

Inspiration for the Boy's costume



Sketches by Sam Wyer



Detail on the Boy's costume

# Set and Lighting Design

## Set Design

The set design offers a large playing space that allows for ensemble storytelling. The 'lane' is surrounded by branches which are placed stage right, stage left and at the outer edges of the upstage area. This helps to create a defined performance space, but also suggests unknown corners and shadows. There is a strong contrast between the natural materials that surround the stage and the man-made textiles and items that are found elsewhere in the play, such as the car or the furniture in the Boy's house. The Hempstocks' house incorporates more natural and timeless textures and materials than in the Boy's home.

*The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is a challenging play for a set designer. It requires:

- Multiple locations – both internal and external
- A combination of realistic and fantasy locations
- A car
- An ocean (and a bucket large enough for a boy to dive into)
- Space for an ensemble-based performance which includes physical theatre and puppetry on a large scale
- Quick transitions between scenes and locations
- Potential for the use of illusion and stagecraft to create suspense and even confusion.

In this production you will also see:

- Use of trapdoors
- Use of freestanding doors, often on casters
- Freestanding items such as a table and chairs which are moved by members of the ensemble. The Mnemonics play a key role in manipulating the space to create the Boy's narrative journey
- Flown in scenery, such as a window frame

**It's not just the physical structures on stage that provide important information to the audience about the locations. Compare and contrast the use of colour, material and set dressing in the two different kitchens in the photos below.**



# Lighting Design

Set design and lighting design works in tandem in *Ocean* to create a number of different locations. Rooms are often constructed by focused lighting which defines the size and shape of locations. Good examples of this in action are the graveside, the Boy's kitchen and the bathroom.

At other times, lighting is used specifically to create mood and atmosphere. This is particularly important during Lettie's confrontation with Skarhatch (the 'Haka' scene), the arrival of the Hunger Birds, and the scene in the ocean.

You will find more images of how lighting is used later in this pack.

## Writing about lighting for Live Production Analysis?

You might like to focus on:

- The opening scene, at the graveside. Look closely at the definition of space and the use of silhouette
- The creation of headlights for the car, which enters from upstage
- The construction of the kitchen/dining room in the Boy's house. This includes definition of the size and shape of the room, and the wash used to illuminate the performance space
- A scene in the Hempstock house. Contrast this with the colours used in the Boy's house, and how this creates a very different atmosphere and sense of comfort
- Scenes in which the Boy and Lettie encounter the Hunger Birds and/or Skarhatch
- The creation of the ocean. This includes a tight focus on the puppets, the use of the polythene to create and enhance the sense of water and movement, and a sense of fantasy that we have not seen elsewhere in the play.

### Key vocabulary when describing the lighting should include:

<b>WASH</b>	A general fill of light or colour across the stage, typically using softer lights
<b>FOCUS</b>	Moving the lens tube forwards or backwards to produce a sharper beam
<b>LED</b>	Light Emitting Diode. LED light produces light more efficiently and is used in many intelligent lighting fixtures
<b>SIDE LIGHT</b>	Where one side of an object or actor is lit and the other side is in shadow
<b>HIGH ANGLE</b>	Lighting someone straight down from above, creating a halo effect on their head and a shadow under the eyes
<b>CROSS LIGHTING</b>	The use of two lighting sources (natural lighting or artificial) that are aimed diagonally across from one another
<b>SPOTLIGHT</b>	A powerful beam of light, also known as a follow spot
<b>SPECIAL</b>	A light that is not used as part of the general wash. A special light is used for a specific purpose
<b>STROBE</b>	A rapid flashing or short burst of light
<b>CHASE</b>	A lighting effect where the lights flash in a sequence
<b>FILTER</b>	A piece of glass, gel or other transparent material which is placed over the lens or light to change the colour, density, or quality of light
<b>COLOUR</b>	The different types of colour in lighting; cool white, neutral white, warm white or RGB which combine red, blue and green to create different colours
<b>TUNGSTEN</b>	A type of light that uses tungsten-halogen bulbs to produce a warmer white colour
<b>BOOM</b>	A side light or cross light
<b>DEPTH</b>	Using multiple layers of lights from different angles to create a sense of depth

# Interview with Paule Constable

**Lighting Designer Paule Constable explains the concept behind the lighting in the production.**

## **How do you approach creating a lighting design for *Ocean*? Can you explain the process from being commissioned to getting to opening night?**

We knew *Ocean* was going to be super complex and reliant upon 'live' storytelling. While it looks simple and spontaneous, it needs a huge amount of planning. Katy Rudd, our director, was constantly looking to the team to ask 'how' for almost every moment. Creating the model process – i.e. Set Designer Fly Davis creating a world for the show – was almost the simple part: as illusion, lighting, puppetry and sound designers, we were going to create the journey within that world. The scenic design is actually very simple, but it creates the context for the whole production. We then create the moment-by-moment shifts within it, and this was where we needed to talk, plan, understand and work. Our Illusion Designer Jamie Harrison would create the idea for an illusion and we'd sit down and talk about what that might mean for lighting and how we would deliver those effects and those moments. In the end that means lots of time in rehearsals and lots of conversation. Nothing in *Ocean* is fixed, everything is trying to make something that will help the audience's collective imagination fly.

## **What are the main concepts behind the lighting design?**

In simple terms, the Boy's world is cold, austere, has hard edges, and modern light qualities (like the bathroom light) so we use cold LEDs.

The Hempstock world is warm, tungsten (a warm orange glow), comforting – like candlelight. It has soul and softness and is female. Ursula brings pink into the world; a harsh, medicinal pink that invades the Boy's world. The exterior spaces are big and open. The interiors are controlled and closed off.

## **What is lighting's role in creating mood and atmosphere in the production, and can you identify key moments where this is particularly important?**

If you think about the arrival of Skarhatch, the world up until then has been the Boy's world – cold, colourless, defined and controlled – then Lettie's – warm, tungsten, natural. The journey with the wand is all about light through the bush – shadows and cobwebs – like an early morning walk. Then, when they arrive on the edges of the universe, we see saturated colour for the first time: that pinky orange that brings Skarhatch on. It comes from deeper into the space than any other light we have seen so far, so it opens up a different dimension, and it is in a colour that I hope

reflects exactly what Neil Gaiman describes in the book. It creates a thick darkness below, so the Boy and Lettie are surrounded by darkness and are incredibly vulnerable to anything appearing from that dark space. It makes the dark a character in their journey.

## **Can you describe the basic rig for the show?**

Because we made the show in the Dorfman (one of three theatres at the National Theatre in London) we had designed the show for a studio space with the audience on three sides. Therefore, we couldn't particularly use low light or low angles, so the majority of the light comes from above. It's quite conventional in that way. As we shifted into an end-on space in other theatres we have added booms, which allow us to use low cross-lighting angles which are really useful in picking people out of the darkness. The main thing the light needs to do is control how the space breathes. We use it to create depth and illusion. It is pretty conventional in many ways.

## **What are the biggest challenges of lighting a show like *Ocean*?**

The scale of the task. It's a composite design so every moment is created by light. That's endless and a huge responsibility!

## **Do you have a favourite moment in the show?**

In the original production I loved the ocean, but that might not be something that we can repeat for the tour, so, we'll see!

## **How much research did you do before designing the show?**

Lots! I read the book but also found ways into the world watching Spielberg movies – *Super 8*, *ET* – and *Stranger Things*, of course. But it was also helpful to look at Arthur Rackham illustrations and Andy Goldsworthy sculptures.

## **The nature of the show means that puppets and physical theatre are particularly important parts of the production style. How does lighting support this and enhance it? What do you need to take into consideration that might be different, say, to a naturalistic production?**

It just means the show is conjured in front of you so light needs to participate in that and not sit back. Nothing is 'just' anything.

# Recording Your Ideas

Annotate each of the images below, using as much technical terminology as you can. Remember to consider how all of the design and performance elements work together.

Photographs by Manuel Harlan.



Notes:

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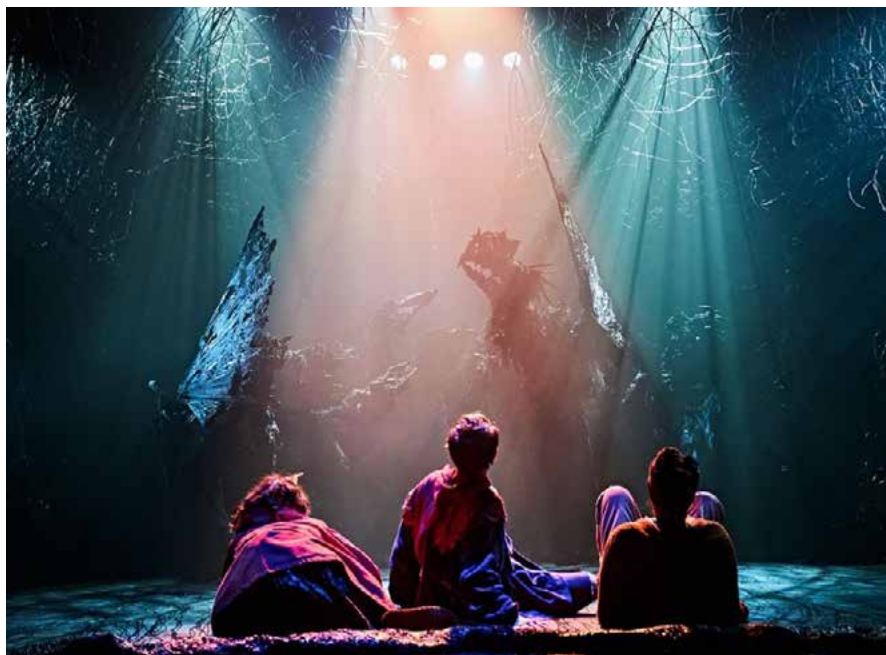
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# Live Production Checklist

If you are seeing the production and then writing about it, use the checklist below to assess your levels of confidence and knowledge about each of the production elements.

For each statement about the production elements, rate your knowledge and understanding as Green (I am fully confident), Amber (I am developing confidence) or Red (I need support). Then prioritise which areas of the production you need to explore further.

## The Production Concept

	Green	Amber	Red
I can explain the dramatic intentions of the production team in three sentences (max.)			
I can identify three key moments in the production that I can evaluate with these dramatic intentions in mind			
I can articulate what the production made me think and feel at key moments in the performance			

## Performance

	Green	Amber	Red
I can identify three key moments where lighting was used to create mood and atmosphere, and explain how this was achieved			
I can use technical terminology to describe how three lighting effects were achieved			
I can describe how lighting was used to create setting in at least two moments in the production			
I can explain and evaluate how lighting was used to create setting for three moments in the production			

## Costume Design

	Green	Amber	Red
I can describe and evaluate the costumes worn by the Boy and Lettie, and explain how the designs communicated character to the audience			
I can describe the costumes worn by Old Mrs Hempstock and Ginnie Hempstock and explain how and why they contrasted to Dad and Ursula's costumes			
I can describe how costume was used for the four 'Mnemonics' and how those costume designs supported their role within the production			

## Set Design

	Green	Amber	Red
I can describe the opening moments of the production, in which the audience sees the funeral of the Boy's father			
I can describe and evaluate the set design of the Boy's house, providing a personal response to it			
I can explain and evaluate how the contrast between the Boy's house and the Hempstock house was communicated through design choices			
I can explain and evaluate the way in which the ocean was created, using technical terminology to help my reader imagine it			
I can use technical terms to explain how the non-naturalistic set created mood, atmosphere and setting in at least two moments in the production			

## Sound Design & Music

	Green	Amber	Red
I can describe how music was used in at least two key moments, using the original soundtrack by Jherik Bischoff that is available on Spotify to help me			
I can explain and evaluate how live and/or recorded soundtracks were used to create mood and atmosphere			
I can use technical terminology (including echo, reverberation, and distortion) to describe and explain how sound was used to create the character of Skarhatch			

## Puppetry

	Green	Amber	Red
I can explain the size, shape, texture, and scale of the Skarhatch puppet			
I can evaluate how the ensemble used puppetry to create a sinister and intimidating character for the audience			
I can make connections between the physical theatre used by the ensemble and the operation of the puppets, and explore how they complemented each other			
I can explain the connections between the costumes worn at the beginning of the performance and the use of puppetry and ensemble movement later in the production			
I can explain and evaluate key differences between the Skarhatch and Hunger Bird puppets and the puppets used in the ocean scene later in the play			
I can explain and evaluate the way in which the ocean was created, using technical terminology to help my reader imagine it			
I can use technical terms to explain how the non-naturalistic set created mood, atmosphere and setting in at least two moments in the production			



Section 3

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# Inspiring Students' Work

Classroom and Studio Activities

# Classroom and Studio Activities

## The Haka

**In his interview, Steven Hoggett discusses the Haka and how it was a starting point for creating Lettie's confrontation with Skarhatch. Let's take that as a starting point for your own devising:**

Working in groups of three, create a sequence of ten movements that you think demonstrate power. Consider how you can use your feet, legs, hands, arms, shoulders, and heads. Try to restrict your movements to two steps either side of your starting point and focus on short, sharp movements. You can also move two steps backwards and/or forwards.

Once you are happy with the order of your movements, ensure that you are able to do each movement rhythmically and without hesitation by repeating it ten times without stopping.

Using the Spotify album of Jherek Bischoff's soundtrack for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, play the track 'The Binding Song'. Work through your sequence with the music playing. What effect does it have on you – and how might it affect an audience? Does the quality of your movements need to change? Do you feel the need to start travelling or adapting your moves to incorporate more use of levels, or different areas of the performance space? Make the required adjustments.

Once each group is ready, your teacher or group leader will match you up with another group. Playing the music again, both groups should face each other and perform their sequence of moves. You could even have a 'Haka-off', just like the *Ocean* company did in the rehearsal room.

## Costume Task

**In the original novel, the Boy describes the clothes that are given to him by the Hempstocks. Read the extract below:**

**'I examined the clothes... There was a white undershirt, with no buttons but with a long tail. There were brown trousers that stopped at the knees, long white stockings, and a chestnut-coloured jacket with a v cut into the back, like a swallow's tail...'**

*The Ocean at the End of the Lane,*  
by Neil Gaiman (chapter 10)

## Teachers' note:

The evolution of Haka at rugby games is depicted in this video from World Rugby which also makes reference to other nations who perform similar rituals. It is important to remember the cultural significance of the ritual, and so you may wish to set some rules and boundaries using this stimulus, as well as preparing your students with research tasks before this lesson to inform their work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lhgJXdrWCE>

You might also like to show this video and analyse how the French team respond to the New Zealand team. Look at the shape and proximity of the team. How might they be displaying their own power?

If you have enough people in the class, perform each pairing together and look for 'happy accidents' – moments that are so effective that it appears that the entire staging has been done cohesively, rather than in two different groups. Ask yourselves, 'Which group appear more powerful at the end? Why? What did the performers do to create that impression?'

Much of Lettie's confrontation is seen from the back: what happens if you move your audience behind you as you perform your Haka? How might that inform your choices of movement?

Sam Wyer's version of this costume is very different. Using Sam Wyer's designs and research as a starting point, design an alternative costume for the Boy at this moment. Use historical and popular culture references to support your design. You may wish to look at book illustrations, fairy stories, cartoons, films, and TV programmes.

Present your images on slides that you can then present to other people in your group to explain and justify your designs.

## Puppet Task

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Read the section of this pack on puppetry and costume design (page 24). Then consult a copy of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman, looking at chapters four and six in which Skarhatch and Ursula are described. What similarities do you notice between the two descriptions? What aspects of the description might be helpful to design a puppet for Skarhatch, and to show the link between Ursula and Skarhatch?

Using junk that you have collected, construct a puppet prototype which can be operated by two or three puppeteers. Finn Caldwell and Sam Wyer have described the challenges of creating a puppet for Skarhatch. Yours doesn't need to be full size, but should reflect the following:

- An unnatural and unsettling presence
- Difficulty in identifying a face or place from which the creature breathes and speaks
- The need for a movement language used by those operating the puppet. Even if the puppet is operated on a tabletop, for example, its movement should be carefully co-ordinated, and the intention of the creature should be clear. Does it want to frighten, threaten or attack, for example?

Use the three elements described earlier in this pack (breath, focus and weight) to guide your exploration of using a puppet.

## Soundtracking Task

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**The main action begins in 1983. Research the music that was popular at the time. Having identified popular artists and songs from the era, make a playlist for Dad that you think would be played in the car as he drives to and from work in his car.**

It is likely that you have found a lot of songs containing lyrics. Now consider how Jherek Bischoff has created underscoring for much of the play. What instrumental music can you find that you think might be appropriate? You may wish to explore synthesised music, in particular. You could listen to *Cistern* – Bischoff's album which inspired Steven Hoggett, and which led to Jherek Bischoff being commissioned to create the music for the show.

### CHALLENGE:

*With the support of your music department, you could create your own piece of synthesised music for a specific scene in the play.*

# Acting Task

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The final scene in the production is a demanding one for the two actors. It is important to maintain the solemn mood and atmosphere that has been created following Lettie's sacrifice, as well as making it clear to the audience that this scene completes the circular structure and links to the opening scene of the play. Finally, a number of key themes are communicated within the dialogue.

Use the script excerpt below and rehearse it for 20 minutes. Focus on facial, vocal and physical expression. After you have rehearsed, share it with another group, who will then share their own performance. After both groups have performed, share constructive feedback and discuss the key challenges of performing this scene. If you have design candidates working with you, you may wish to consider lighting and music and/or sound at this point.

## EPILOGUE

*...MAN, older now (played by the same actor portraying DAD), is left holding no one, breathless and dizzy beside the pond in Sussex, today-ish. OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK watches him recover.*

**MAN** Is it true?

**OMH** Probably. More or less. See, remembering is no different from imagining. Not really. So memories change along with the people remembering 'em and people... People roil and shift as much as oceans. No such thing as a true memory.

**MAN** But I didn't know, I only came here on a kind of impulse-

**OMH** Told you.

**GINNIE** [Appearing] You did.

*GINNIE sits on the bench beside MAN.*

**OMH** Every time, I said.

**MAN** 'Every time'?

**GINNIE** Every time, you say 'a kind of impulse'.

**MAN** But I haven't been here since-

**OMH** First time you came back, you were twenty-four. Had two young children to think of and all that future ahead of you. All at sea, you were.

**GINNIE** Thirty next time.

**OMH** Thirty and your girls were old enough to understand words like 'divorce'. You came here instead of going home, avoiding having the talk with 'em. Fed you a good meal then.

**GINNIE** Shepherd's / pie.

**OMH** / Shepherd's pie. You told us about the class you were teaching. The stories you told your pupils in their science lessons, all about black holes, dark matter... electrons. Not what you thought you'd be doing, not what you'd hoped at some point, but so special you will never know.

**MAN** She died for a no-one, a nobody-



**GINNIE** For her friend. Her best friend.

**MAN** But she must've thought I'd become someone more important or better-

**OMH** She did what she did for you. So's you could live. Now when you're lost, you've her story of when you were saved.

**MAN** But I'd forgotten.

**OMH** Details maybe. You just need a feeling, something in your bones, don't need details.

**GINNIE** Specially not when they involve having your heart torn out by Hunger Birds.

**MAN** But that didn't happen.

**GINNIE** Cos Lettie snipped and stitched it.

**OMH** With neither scissors nor thread. Never, in all time, have I seen the like.

**GINNIE** Brilliant, she was.

**OMH** As new-born stars. 'Spect she's happy to see you're growing a new heart anyway. Or the hole's healing, depending on how you remember it.

**MAN** Has she been here all along? Watching?

**OMH** In a manner of speaking.

**MAN** Can I speak with her?

**OMH** 'To', maybe, not 'with'.

**MAN** Let her look at me, then. I want to know if I've passed or not.

**OMH** You don't pass or fail at being a person, love.

*Beat.*

**OMH** Now, let's make all this a little easier, shall we?

**MAN** No, no, I want to remember, I should remember all of this-

**GINNIE** Well, now that's not what she'd want, is it? Ready?

**MAN** Wait, wait. Will I ever come back here?

**OMH** Not for you to know, ducks.

*MAN goes to the pond's edge.*

**MAN** Lettie... thank you for saving me.

*GINNIE and everything magical about this place disappear.*

*MAN is a bit embarrassed to find himself here. Discovers he is holding a cup of tea. Sips it, it's hot.*

**OMH** Got some scones fresh out of the oven, if you want to take 'em with you?

**MAN** Yeah, no, actually I should be-

**OMH** Cheese?

**MAN** No, thanks.

**OMH** Can't give it away.

**MAN** It's just I'm supposed to be at the thing with the sandwiches, tea... They'll want me to say things, I think.

**OMH** You just speak from that broken heart of yours and you'll be fine.

**MAN** P'raps, yeah. P'raps. It's funny, for a moment there I thought there were more you.

**OMH** It's just me. It's only ever just me.

**MAN** Course. Next time Lettie writes from where was it? America? Australia! Yes, send her my regards. And thank you, Mrs. Hempstock. You've been very kind.

**OMH** Nothing kind about it.

*MAN leaves.*

*OLD MRS. HEMPSTOCK lifts her arms as if conjuring something incredible...*

*...but then it turns into a yawn.*

***The Ocean at the End of the Lane, adapted by Joel Horwood***

# In the English Classroom

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The tasks below are designed to stimulate creative writing responses for your students. All of the tasks are informed by content from the novel and by Neil Gaiman's interview which you can find at the beginning of this pack.

## Food as hospitality, food as love

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In his interview, Neil Gaiman talks about how food can have an emotional significance for characters and readers.

Explore how food is described in *The Wind in the Willows* and in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. You might also explore how Charles Dickens writes about food in *A Christmas Carol*, or *Oliver Twist*, for example.

Now that you have explored those ideas, and of course how food is described in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, write two contrasting short pieces in which food is presented as a luxury or as punishment.

Whilst you're writing, consider the five senses, but also the connotations of certain foods. For example, turkey is often associated with Christmas, while peaches and strawberries are associated with summer. Some foods are considered quite exotic, while others are associated with specific cultures.

Before you start writing, think about when food is too hot, or too cold. What colours are considered positive? How does 'golden brown' contrast with 'charred', for example?

Share your writing with a partner, or with your class.

## Different Perspectives

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**'Adults rarely seemed to believe me when I told the truth anyway. Why would they believe me about something so unlikely?'**

*The Ocean at the End of the Lane* by Neil Gaiman (chapter 3)

In the play and the novel, there is a significant difference between the way in which children and adults deal with the same situation. The Boy's instinct tells him not to trust adults and he is initially cautious when he is introduced to various ideas by the Hempstocks, even though all of their actions are rooted in love.

Think of (or invent) a time when a child's experience might be described completely differently to an adult's. With a partner, write the two different versions of the same story, as told by a child and an adult.

For example:

- A child's first visit to the dentist. Think particularly of the noise, the smell and the different instruments and machines that the child might see and hear
- A visit to meet Father Christmas
- A day at the beach
- The breaking of a precious vase
- Playing with Lego™ and inventing a 'robot'

## Adaptation Task

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During the research and development phase of *Ocean*, Joel Horwood, Katy Rudd and the team would respond to challenges, and adjust the script and the staging. This collaborative process then continued in read throughs (often attended by Neil Gaiman) and into rehearsal. On this national tour, the process of collaboration has continued, making further adjustments for the challenges posed by performing in different venues.

Take a scene from your favourite book and write a drama script for one scene in the the story. Consider the following:

- How will you establish setting (time, place, period)?
- How many people are in the scene? Does everyone speak? Are there any characters who are not included in your adaptation? (The Boy's mother has been removed for the stage adaptation, for example)
- Why does an audience need to see this scene? Not every scene from *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is exactly the same as the novel, and some moments are not included
- Remember what you need to **show** vs what you need to **tell**. The audience doesn't need everything explaining to them when they can see much of it on stage through design
- Is there a point where you need the audience to engage their imagination and/or suspend their disbelief? How will you encourage them to do this?

Once you have created a first draft, work in a group to stage the scene using your script. What problems do you encounter? What is or is not clear? Are there any points in the dialogue that are not necessary? Do you need to expand other moments? Have you given everyone in the scene enough to do? Remember that even those who are not speaking need to have something to react to.

After you have explored this first draft, edit it and explore it again with your working group. What has changed and what has improved?

Share your writing with a partner, or with your class.

# Further Resources

## Movement and Puppetry:

In these short videos, Finn Caldwell (Puppetry Director) and Samuel Wyer (Costume and Puppet Designer) discuss the process of creating the puppets for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and how Neil Gaiman's storytelling inspired the designs.

**Video 1:** <https://youtu.be/MTLzShq8tRU>

**Video 2:** [https://youtu.be/B1wz5sEo\\_Mc](https://youtu.be/B1wz5sEo_Mc)

**Video 3:** <https://youtu.be/kRdHOq2sFe0>

## Music and Sound Design:

Jherek Bischoff (Composer) talks about creating the soundtrack for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

**Watch here:** <https://youtu.be/FqCWGvDIG50>

The soundtrack is available on Spotify

**Listen here:** <https://open.spotify.com/album/7p6TvPsvX6Xzab9KNPFaEz>

Jherek's album *Cistern* inspired Steven Hoggett (Movement Director) at the beginning of the process.

**Listen here:** <https://open.spotify.com/album/4F4csOdZhdgd4fXLnTyjV2>

## Adapting the Show for the West End:

In these videos Katy Rudd (Director), Finn Caldwell (Puppetry Director) and Sam Wyer (Costume and Puppet Designer) discuss adapting the production for the Duke of York's Theatre in the West End.

**Video 1:** <https://youtu.be/bo6fkSxllc8>

**Video 2:** <https://youtu.be/oSMPXikxM3Y>

## Neil Gaiman In Conversation with Lenny Henry:

Neil Gaiman (Author of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*) chats to Lenny Henry about his inspiration for the novel and working with Joel Horwood (Adaptor) and Katy Rudd (Director) to adapt it for the stage.

**Watch here:** <https://youtu.be/QfcEp34DvrE>

To explore more of Neil Gaiman's work, go to: [neilgaiman.com](http://neilgaiman.com)

### **With thanks to:**

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