

thebushtheatre



FLIGHT PATH

by David Watson

Education Resource Pack

by Rebecca Pilbeam, Out of Joint Education
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All rehearsal photography by Graham Michael.

1. Introduction for Teachers

The resource materials in this pack are intended to enhance your students' enjoyment and understanding of *Flight Path*. The activities present creative, practical strategies for learning in a classroom setting. The resources are primarily aimed at students aged 16+ who are studying Drama or English at BTEC or A Level, as well as Citizenship. The activities can be adapted to suit younger pupils and older students, as well as other subject areas.

2. Synopsis

CHARACTERS:

JONATHAN, 18

DANIEL, 25, his brother, who has Down's syndrome

SEAN, their father, fifties

SUSAN, their mother, fifties

JOE, 18

LAUREN, 18

SETTING: The play takes place in London, between January and December, in 2007.

JANUARY

Jonathan goes to visit Sean at his new university office to tell him that Daniel is coming home. Sean recently left the family home and this is their first meeting since then. Sean is more interested in Jonathan's college work.

FEBRUARY

Jonathan arrives home after a night at the airport to find Daniel is back.

Daniel says how glad he is to be home and how much he hated school, except for the gardening. Daniel teases Jonathan, who gets frustrated and punches him. The brothers share their bitterness about Sean's departure and Daniel says he wants to be independent.

MARCH

Jonathan and Joe are in a playground near Heathrow early in the morning, waiting for Lauren. Both boys rant against the injustices of their lives. Joe asks Jonathan to go housebreaking with him and, although unsure at first, Jonathan agrees. Lauren arrives and bickers with Joe.

APRIL

It is Daniel's birthday and he is celebrating at home. Jonathan gives Daniel a bottle of champagne which he says he has stolen but Susan doesn't believe him. Jonathan gets angry about Sean's absence from the celebrations and the party disintegrates.

MAY

Jonathan and Joe break into a flat and find 50 grams of cocaine stashed under the bed. Jonathan feels he has got in over his head but Joe persuades him to sell the cocaine at school.

JUNE

The middle of the night, Jonathan comes to tell Daniel he's changed his dirty sheets but Daniel has his shoes on and is ready to leave. Jonathan admits he doesn't know what to do anymore.

JULY

Jonathan arrives at Joe's house to return the cocaine and tell him he doesn't want to sell it any more. He finds Lauren there instead. They start talking, Lauren tells Jonathan about her singing aspirations. They become more intimate and finally they kiss.

AUGUST

Jonathan and Joe meet in the park. Joe's face and hand are severely bruised. He is angry with Jonathan for not having been around and tells him he got the bruises when he was caught trying to burgle a house on his own. The two argue about Lauren. Joe loses his temper and hits Jonathan.

SEPTEMBER

Lauren pops round to see Jonathan but finds Susan instead. They make awkward small talk until Susan asks Lauren to tell her about Jonathan. They discuss how difficult families can be. Susan asks Lauren to sing for her.

OCTOBER

Joe and Daniel are in a pub drinking JDs and coke. They both complain about Jonathan. Daniel says he just wants to be himself. Joe suggests the two of them go away together and gives Daniel his number.

NOVEMBER

Daniel has gone missing. Jonathan suspects Joe is involved and blames himself. Sean refuses to worry which angers Susan and Jonathan. Jonathan tells Sean he can't be like him.

DECEMBER

Jonathan and Lauren bring Daniel to an allotment. Jonathan tells Daniel it is his Christmas present; Daniel thinks it is amazing. Jonathan jokes that Daniel could hire him as a gardener.

3. *Flight Path*: Surviving adolescence... ...becoming an adult

Jonathan faces all the usual causes of teenage stress: parental and academic pressure, troubled friendships, the temptation of drugs, questions about his future as well as the additional stress caused by the recent separation of his parents. Jonathan's problems are complicated by his brother Daniel, who has Down's syndrome. The extra responsibilities that Jonathan bears for Daniel, who is also struggling to take charge of his life, start to prove too much. In the year covered in the play we see Jonathan come to terms with the very adult responsibility of caring for his brother. In *Flight Path*, David Watson explores how we survive adolescence and how we cope with becoming an adult.

"A Levels. Four for the future"

Jonathan, Scene 3

In the first scene Jonathan visits his dad, a University lecturer, in his new office. Jonathan's greatest concern is Daniel and his imminent return; Sean is more interested in Jonathan's college work. Jonathan is under constant pressure to secure his "four for the future" and throughout the play Sean and Susan judge Jonathan on his academic achievement, or lack of it. In the face of his dad's insensitive reaction to his recent exam results, Jonathan at first agrees to turn the three As and one B into four As but he resents the pressure from his dad. With a bit of persuasion from Joe, he rejects the academic route and decides to go housebreaking. Academic achievement is a conventional symbol of success, particularly in the middle-class milieu of Jonathan's parents. Susan cannot understand why Lauren would not want to go to college but Lauren's answer is simple: "I don't want to." The play challenges assumptions about traditional routes to success, particularly those imposed on us by our parents. Daniel also rejects Sean and Susan's attempts to decide his future for him, either by sending him to a residential home or trying to enrol him at his local college.

Joe offers Jonathan access to another conventional symbol of success: money. Jonathan is initially seduced by the idea of housebreaking, mainly as an act of rebellion. The housebreaking allows Jonathan to offer Daniel an expensive bottle of champagne for his birthday but Daniel's less than impressed reaction shows the meaninglessness of the gesture. In the final showdown between Jonathan and Joe, Jonathan rejects Joe's "get rich quick" schemes as much as academic success and contradicts Joe's visions of his future as "Rich? Happy? Secure?" with his fears that Joe will end up "disappointed. And lonely." In a parallel of the birthday party, in the final scene Jonathan offers Daniel a far more appropriate present: an allotment. This present, chosen with care and thought, offers Daniel, Lauren and Jonathan a far more tangible symbol of success: that of seeing a garden grow.

“That’s families”

Lauren, Scene 9

Family relationships and the harm we deliberately or inadvertently inflict on our family members are central to the play; as Lauren remarks when she recalls banging her sister’s head on the skirting board and putting her in hospital: “That’s families.” Of course Jonathan also punches Daniel’s head almost “by accident” when provoked. Jonathan’s journey into adulthood involves him dealing with the problems and accepting the responsibilities of his own family life. What causes Jonathan so much grief is the inversion of normal family roles that has taken place in his family which forces him into the role of parent. Jonathan is the youngest, the baby of the family, but presumably Daniel has always been the one that needed the greatest care and attention. The situation at the beginning of the play is made worse by Sean and Susan’s separation. Jonathan has to remind Sean of his responsibilities as a parent but not only is Sean not receptive, Susan, who spends more time helping other people’s families, also charges Jonathan with looking after his brother at a time when Jonathan feels unable to cope with such responsibility. It is hard for Jonathan to accept his parents’ expectations of him when they fail to fulfil his own expectations of them.

Jonathan’s relationship with Daniel is equally turbulent, partly because he is forced into being a parent to Daniel, partly because of the frustration of not knowing what to do for the best for him. Daniel can be surly, ungrateful and demanding. Like Jonathan he is hurt by the separation of his parents and at first the two brothers, thrown together in the same bedroom, lash out at each other. Both feel their freedom is limited by having to live so closely but as Jonathan rejects both the conventional route encouraged by his parents and the illegal route offered by Joe he realises that the closeness of his relationship with Daniel could be a source of strength. By getting the allotment, Jonathan opens up a possible route to happiness for both himself and Daniel.

*“I just.....I just wanna make my own decisions.
(Beat) That’s all.”*

Daniel, Scene 2

Flight Path is also about the search for independence and the right not only to reject conventional routes through life but the right to be different. To a certain extent, Jonathan, Lauren and Daniel all adopt personas to make themselves fit in. Jonathan, the middle class boy, assumes the street language and attitude of the teenage criminal; Lauren plays her ‘rude girl’ character for all she’s worth and Daniel tries to style himself on Harry Potter. But Jonathan cannot hide the fact that he is bright nor Lauren that she is sweet, in a world which values the street-wise and hard. Daniel cannot endlessly watch Harry Potter. Each of them realises that it is by accepting themselves and learning that it is fine to be different that they can gain their independence.

Jonathan, Lauren and Daniel are all helped on their journeys by the fact that they have a guiding passion, most obviously Lauren is inspired by her dreams of being a singer. Although he has a bright career ahead of him, Jonathan is under pressure and unfocussed, but what at first seems like his greatest burden, looking after Daniel, becomes his driving force. In following his own selfless aim Jonathan indulges Daniel's passion for gardening. What distinguishes Joe is precisely his lack of a real vision to drive him beyond accumulating wealth. *Flight Path* encourages us to follow our passions, however unconventional they may be.

“Don't you wish it was 1987?”

Lauren, Scene 3

One final and curious aspect to the play, given its vivid contemporary setting, is the amount of nostalgia, particularly as expressed by the younger characters. In the opening scene Sean discusses a proposed thesis on the popular 80s movie *Back to the Future*. Lauren is very fond of the 80s and its music. She also remarks rather regretfully that Susan's home was once all fields, harking back to a time long before the 80s. In the pub with Daniel, Joe appeals to what he believes will be their shared knowledge of the children's tv show *Playdays*. Jonathan's nostalgia is more for his own past: Lauren's appearance in the year 6 play and his trips to the park or down to the Trocadero with Joe. The ending itself, with the allotment, speaks of an escape back to a simpler time and echoes Lauren's longings for the open fields.

It is perhaps because they are on the cusp of adulthood that Jonathan, Joe and Lauren are looking back to a time they feel is simple, familiar and comforting. As they are all experiencing, things become even more complicated when you enter adulthood. Just as Jonathan wistfully calls out to Joe as he leaves to suggest going to the Trocadero, so he equally wistfully suggests Daniel employ him as a gardener. If he knows that life will never be that simple for him, he perhaps succeeds in making life a bit simpler for Daniel.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Who do you relate to most in the play? Why?
2. What do you remember about your childhood? How does thinking about your childhood make you feel?
3. Who, if anyone, is responsible for what happens to Daniel?
4. How important is academic success?
5. What do you think of the language used in the play?
6. David Watson has said that *Flight Path* is not a play about disability but a play with disability in it. What do you think of the character of Daniel?

4. Interview with David Watson & Naomi Jones, the Writer & Director



David Watson in rehearsal

What interested you in *Flight Path*, why did you write it?

David: I suppose it all came from Jonathan. I'd had him kicking around in my head for quite a while. I wanted to put a character at the centre of a play who wasn't perhaps your typical central character. I wanted someone who was a bit introverted and who would go on a journey and would change but the change would be almost imperceptible. People talk about drama as being 'slice of life' but I wanted to do a genuine slice of life, where the drama is not at the mercy completely of the conventions of dramatic structure. As it stands the play's a bit cockeyed in terms of its structure, the big crisis happens towards the end, it doesn't happen in the middle so it's far from being a three act well-made play.

Naomi: And I suppose that's why I was interested in it because it's not typical. It's almost like tuning a radio, you capture little snippets of these scenes and you can imagine how these characters and these situations continue and we tune in and tune out. The most significant change between the first draft I received to the one we entered rehearsal with was the plot. We've eked out a plot that was quite obscure to begin with. It was written in a minor key.

David: The idea of class was always there in the background and I wanted to write a play which went into the middle class world as much as it did the working class.

Jonathan straddles both worlds doesn't he?

David: Yeah, and I hadn't really seen a character like that and that's what inner London is all about, the two worlds coinciding.

The play is very London-centric, how have you got that into rehearsals?

Naomi: We did some exploratory exercises early on that were about location and place and certainly we've identified where the family would live and which schools the boys would have gone to. It's a geographically specific play so when Jonathan visits his father's office it's like being in a different world, the east has a very different character to the north. Jonathan makes a deliberate decision for the three of them - Joe, Jonathan and Lauren - to go and work at the airport. It is a change of scenery, he says "I like it out here". I hope this sense of geography comes through, certainly David writes place quite specifically. In scene 5 Joe talks about the city boys who are paying a thousand pounds a week for a flat, this is of course why they choose this flat to break in to. There's a sort of underlying political scape to the play as well that is also in minor key. Susan and Sean are old lefties really, not that this comes directly into the play, but in their backstory they met at a march so they've obviously had a political backdrop but now life takes over, life takes over ideals. Susan's a social worker, she knows the kind of bureaucracy that you have to go through and yet can't marshal it in a way that is helpful for Daniel. There is an irony there, that she visit lots of families but can't help her own.

To go back to Jonathan, it's an unusual thing to see, your nice middle class white boy who's meant to go on and succeed very highly and take A levels and go to university and follow that particular path who then hits a rock and follows a completely different path. It's a kind of reassessment I suppose of what it means to be successful. Is academia the only path to success? And then you have Lauren who's a singer and maybe that's alright too.

What's distinctive about the play is the dialogue. People talk as we're talking now, they trail off. How do you approach writing this dialogue?

David: I suppose I hear it quite musically, almost like a score, it's written like a score with its dots and its beats. I suppose it does ask you absolutely to watch the punctuation as would a conventionally punctuated script. The difficulty happens because it comes in odd places.

It's the opposite way round to usual punctuation which tells you how dialogue should be said. This dialogue tries to capture real speech, what would have been said, and reflect that in the punctuation.

Naomi: Interestingly that's been the hardest thing to capture in rehearsals, particularly the lack of punctuation. Where there is a new thought but it doesn't have a pause between those thoughts. It's tricky because the actors are trying to play a new action but without stopping so it must be really challenging.

David: I mean it is a completely prescriptive way of writing and you can see potentially why actors might not take to it. But it's been quite heartening that they've gone for it in the way they have and when they really hit it then it pays off. The danger, as we've found, is that with some you get approximations of it, so their dots will come in where there aren't dots. The reason it works, or

hopefully it works, is that there's an architecture behind it. There's a reason for every hesitation so a general rendition of it robs it of its worth, it just becomes mannerism I suppose. With the five weeks of rehearsal, you get an insight into the actor's process, the dialogue is rhythmic and specific and they all take to it in different ways. I wonder if it's vindicated that kind of dialogue... I think you can see the pay-off.

Naomi: Does the production vindicate that dialogue? I don't know at the moment, it will do!

How does the dialogue work with actioning?

Naomi: I think it's really helpful but I would because I've made them sit round a table for two weeks and do it! But I think what David often writes is subtext and actually to ascribe an action to it finds the meaning. Often when we were actioning broken lines we had to finish the line and then put in the action. For example, when Susan says to Lauren, "Tell Jonathan that I'm... that I'm... that I'm a silly old woman" they have three separate actions because they're three separate thoughts, "That I'm still his mother/ That I'm here for him/ That I'm a silly old woman." I always think that because of the speed of the dialogue, it can pass in a haze.

David: Scene three [*the first conversation between Jonathan and Joe*] is a good example of that. When we did it in an early rehearsal, the actions weren't quite there and...

Naomi: It was just noise, white noise.

David: White noise, patter. But then when we unpacked it, it came together quite nicely. It's worthwhile saying how beneficial a full production is, rather than a reading. I've done hundreds of readings. But a full production means you're involved in the process that bit more and you do learn ten times more than you would from hearing it read. Like the design, it's actually quite a difficult play to design and it's just not something I ever considered. It's not one of those plays where you can do it without the set really because the texture of it is quite naturalistic. It is the writer's responsibility to put a well thought-out world on the stage and that's something that I've taken from this, to have more of an eye for design. We're always being told to be more theatrical with the form but it's not just about form it's about practical considerations as well.

I know it's not the point of your production but one of the aspects is that you have a learning disabled character. David, why did you write the character of Daniel?

David: I had the experience of working as a support worker [*for a young man with Down's syndrome*] and I suppose quite sub-consciously I must have taken a lot of stuff on board. It struck me that a brotherly relationship at the centre of the play was quite a good thing to have and I'd never seen a character with Down's syndrome on stage at that time, or on film, and that was something I wanted to explore.

Naomi, has it changed the way you work in rehearsals?

Naomi: I had no experience of directing anybody with any disability, learning or otherwise, before doing the play. I suppose I was a bit naïve I just thought it would be ok, not that I didn't think it would be a challenge, obviously I knew it would be different but I suppose I was a bit bullish about it, I thought, I'll just do it. When we spoke to the Down's Syndrome Association we were told it would take someone with Down's syndrome longer to learn lines but that they were absolutely capable and loved performing which is true but the commitments of this project are quite specific – a run in London followed by a four-week tour. I suppose I started realising it might be difficult during casting and we thought actually this is quite a tricky thing we're asking people to do and if you have no concept of what performing is then it must be a crazy thing to reconcile in your head. Scott's disability is not as restrictive as Down's syndrome, he seems to have a clearer idea of what performing entails although it does mean that he feels nerves and I'm not sure whether somebody with Down's syndrome would because they wouldn't recognise the occasion so much.¹ But Scott has been amazing and the company have rallied round him in a really heartening way. I made a decision that I wasn't going to treat him differently until treating him the same didn't work. I did actioning with him, I just thought I'd give him a go like with any actor. If it was not helping, I'd give it up. But he repeated an action back to me the other day, which is brilliant! He also did improvisations.

David: He took to that well. And also he talks very lucidly about the play.

Naomi: And his experience of growing up with a learning disability is crucial. He's very open about that and although he doesn't have Down's syndrome, the frustrations and the characterising speech of Danny's, "I want to make my own decisions, I'm not actually interested in Down's syndrome, I just want to be me that's all", he experienced that kind of frustration.

We have a stereotypical image of the happy loving person with Down's syndrome but Daniel's not like that.

David: There are elements of that but the character is his own person, he just happens to have Down's syndrome. The part was informed by a particular experience of Down's syndrome and that particular experience didn't wholly fit in with the stereotype. That was quite important to put on stage.

I love the ending but it's a bit weird, it suddenly shifts gear into the happy little idyll of the allotment.

David: It is a happy ending but I think it's a realistic ending as well, not everything is sewn up by any means. They're standing on the edge of adulthood and no-one's quite sure how it's going to work out but I think you can believe that they would end up there. It feels like the product of the year's toing and

¹ Scott has Warkany syndrome, a rare chromosomal abnormality. Down's syndrome is also a chromosomal disorder.

froing and 'slice of life'. You don't see enough happy endings. I think it's ok to have a happy ending.

Naomi: From scene eleven [*when Danny goes missing*] a bleak ending is perfectly possible and I hope it will be quite surprising that the action takes a left turn. You end the penultimate scene on crisis, I don't know what the audience will think. Maybe they'll think it's a funeral!

David: Yeah, because of the earth.

Naomi: Although, the shed might give it away! But I don't think the audience will expect the ending that turns up and that's quite nice.

How do you hope the audience will respond?

David: I hope they're uplifted by it, not in a mawkish way. I hope they buy into the ending, that it's plausible. Hopefully they feel for the characters, especially the two brothers, they are ultimately the focus. I hope they feel a bit enlightened on questions surrounding what it's like to have a disability and how you function as a member of society and how society has to accommodate these people.

Naomi: It's about people's responsibilities. What is your responsibility to your parents? What is your parents' responsibility to you? What responsibility do you have for your siblings? And how is that altered when they're disabled? And what responsibility should Daniel have for himself as well? I think that must be a constant question. You can't abandon them but on the other hand they do have to make their own decisions. Sean gives that lovely speech, about how Daniel can have a life, but it's got to be guided by those that care for him. But those that care for him have been a bit shit. So it's been hard, but they'll be better. They'll be good.



Naomi Jones in rehearsal

5. Interview with Polly Sullivan, the Designer

How did you approach the design for *Flight Path*? What research did you do?

Polly: Naomi and I have worked together before, and have found a way of working together that is more or less completely collaborative. I don't really believe in handing a design to a director which has had none of their input.

Obviously I began by reading the play, and learning about its journey. I normally read a play a few times. What became very clear to me was that the final scene has a very different feel to the rest of the play, as if the thing that everyone has been looking for has finally been discovered. It has a peaceful quality and sense of a new beginning. With that in mind, I felt we should try to find a way to



Model box: Lounge

completely transform the space that the characters had been inhabiting until that point. So really the allotment came first!

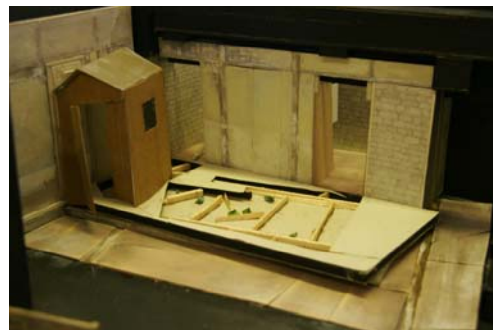
The Bush is tiny and there are lots of scenes, including outdoor and indoor locations, how did that affect your design?



The allotment

Polly: After that choice was made [*the transformation of the final allotment scene*], we needed to find a way to best make our world in the Bush space, which is - as you say - tiny. Coupled with this challenge was creating a place that could move from indoor to outdoor in a moment, and that reflected the very real, visceral writing style. No mean feat! In terms of the Bush, it seemed that the way to tackle it was to use

every inch we could! Upstage there are two openings which lead to another area, and we realised that revealing those created a further sense of space and depth, whereas closing them off gave us something more intimate. With that we found a simple effective language for outdoor and indoor. At that point we began looking at textures that were real and could inhabit Jonathan and Daniel's urban world.



The allotment revealed!

6. Interview with the Jason Maza (Joe)



Tell me about Joe.

Jason: Joe is someone who has a bit of a rough time. His mum died when he was very young, and it was just him and his dad.

Is that something you've decided is part of Joe's backstory?

Jason: Yes, there's no mention of his mum throughout the play so for me there had to be a reason why his mum wasn't there. I decided that she died and that was the reason why he was living with his dad. Joe didn't really get along well at school, he was always around trouble and getting in fights. With Jonathan, when they were in school, he would often stick up for him, because Jonathan was quite clever. So part of Joe's trouble was probably because he was trying to be nice and friendly towards Jonathan. I think Joe probably has got a good heart in there somewhere. But he's just unfortunate, maybe with his mum's death and because he hasn't had that really good family background. He's a bit of a destructive influence really.

So what do you think about what happens to Joe in the play?

Jason: I think it's very hurtful to Joe. Joe's one of those characters that instead of having lots and lots of friends, would maybe have a very small amount of friends, but they'd be very close and they'd always mean a lot to him. Jonathan and Lauren are that for Joe and when he loses both of them it's just absolutely horrible. Also, another part of the backstory you don't see is that Joe falls out with his dad in the last couple of months of the play and so he's really lonely by the end and really down on his luck. But he pushed Jonathan too far. You could say if he hadn't pushed him as much maybe they wouldn't have fallen out and maybe if he'd been a bit nicer to Lauren, a bit more generous, a bit more caring, then it all might not have happened.

Building a backstory seems to be very important to you, is that something you've done before?

Jason: It is something that, because I've done a lot of tv and film stuff, I think is important to do because you don't really get a lot of time when you're doing film, you might get just a couple of days' rehearsal. So to do that comes naturally to me I suppose. I did A level drama and that really helped but I've always been conscious in my work that I need to have a full character and it just gives the performance a little bit more credibility, and a realness, that's what acting is, to try and make it as real as possible. Naomi's very much for creating a backstory and we looked at it in quite a lot of detail, what schools they all went to - it's all fun as well.

What techniques did you find most useful in rehearsals?

Jason: I hadn't done actioning before, so that was really fun and really helpful. I didn't go to drama school so I haven't learnt necessarily lots of methods to use, I

just go a lot on instinct. It's great with Naomi when you get to focus. There can't really be many mistakes because you know the thought behind the line. It's good, instead of saying, "why am I saying that?", you know why you're saying that line, because you want to do this or you want to do that.

So how did you get into acting if you didn't go to drama school?

Jason: I was trouble when I was a kid, I had a lot of energy, I'm a hundred miles an hour as it is now! They didn't want to push me into sport - I don't know why, I mean I love football - so they put me into drama. Then it went from there. I did Saturday school, I literally kept on with that from when I was about eight until I was sixteen. Then I did my A levels and the last year of my A Levels I left and I was going to go to drama school but I was very lucky, I got an agent. I was with that agent for about a year, then reapplied to drama school, got a place at Central [*Central School of Speech and Drama*] and because I started getting a lot of work I just had to make a decision. Do I go to drama school for three years and come out and do the same sort of thing as I'm doing now or do I chance it and just think, let's just go for it? I chanced it and went for it and it's been brilliant ever since. I've been lucky.

So you've learnt on the job.

Jason: Different people have different routes, my brother may go the drama school route. But there's no right or wrong answer really. But you do learn so much on the job and if you do have three years of drama school you're not going to be able to come out and have the experience of camera work.

What's been the greatest challenge about playing Joe?

Jason: The biggest challenge for Joe's character is getting the difference between him being a very, very, horrible, nasty character and then trying to find the niceness in him. So the audience think, ah, he's got a good heart. The hardest thing for an actor is to try and make the audience love your character, even if they're horrible. You want the audience to think, well I can understand why he's done that even though he shouldn't have done it, and if I was in that position maybe I would have done that. He does come out with some really crude comments and some of the things he's done are horrible and he can be aggressive and he can be nasty and he can just turn. But he has those nice little moments where he has a joke. He's very three-dimensional, he's got a lot to him.

What do you think will happen to him after the play?

Jason: We've agreed that he goes to prison for a bit because he breaks his ASBO. I'd rather not he went to prison but he probably was heading that way because he was really down on his luck. Hopefully he'll come out and he'll keep his head up and he'll go back to work with his dad and be quite successful. Prison will either make him or break him. He could go into the plumbing world or the property world but if not, if he comes out and doesn't get taken under dad's wing, then it probably will be a life full of constant crime... but I hope not!

7. Rehearsal Diary

A new play by a promising young writer, an exciting young director, an unflinching yet moving family drama with a difference... rehearsals for *Flight Path* promised to be challenging but fascinating. I dropped in throughout the 5-week rehearsal period and the following are some of the most interesting moments.

- **Wednesday, 8th August**

As one of the main tasks for the first week of rehearsals, Naomi (Naomi Jones, director) sits down with David (David Watson, writer) and the actors to go through the text line by line, assigning an action to each thought: for example “threaten”, “persuade”, “console”. Although Naomi actions the script before rehearsals begin, the actions may well change in light of discussion with the writer and the actors. The usefulness of actioning lies in the thought process needed to assign the correct action. To decide whether a character intends to “threaten”, “persuade” or “console” requires an understanding of their aims and intentions, and of both the present nature and the history of their relationship with the other characters. It is a process which allows everyone to chart precisely the movements of thought and emotion that take place in the exchange between the characters and means that no line is lost.

After today’s actioning, Naomi then moved on to do some improvisation with the entire cast. The aim of this particular session was to establish the background to Jonathan’s family. For example, how long has Susan been a social worker?



Will Knightley & Cary Crankson

Did she work when Daniel was born? Where exactly has Daniel been to school, what kind of schools were they and what was Danny’s experience? Naomi also asked everyone to consider how the family would interact, how would they make decisions, in particular the decision to send Daniel away to Ravenscroft.

This discussion is moved into an improvisation of the meeting that everyone imagined the family must have had two years previously involving Will (Will Knightley, playing **Sean**), Mossie (Mossie Smith, playing **Susan**) and Cary (Cary Crankson, playing **Jonathan**). Each actor was given a playing card to denote their level of approval or disapproval in the discussion, with red cards against and black cards for sending Daniel away to school. In this improvisation all the characters agreed that Daniel should be sent away but were very tentative in expressing their opinions. Naomi then sent Scott (Scott Swadkins, playing **Daniel**) into the scene to announce that he didn’t want to leave. Mossie said that afterwards she could feel herself getting upset once Scott came in. Naomi

then asked the actors to improvise the scene again but to take on the attitude which they believed their character would have had. This was a very useful exercise as it showed how some of the tensions we see in *Flight Path* have arisen and established for the actors the solidarity between the brothers in comparison to the increasing isolation of the parents. As Naomi pointed out, it was also helpful to see how the family would function under normal circumstances and provides a point of comparison in the actors' heads for the family crisis that takes place in scene 11 of the play.

- **Friday 10th August**

Naomi continues actioning the text with the actors for scene 8 in the park between Jonathan and Joe. In this scene the actioning is focused on bringing out the subtext of the dialogue. When Joe says to Jonathan "Remember him?" what he actually means is "You've been away so long, and you don't seem to remember me". When Jonathan says "I'm sorry...for..." it was decided after discussion that what he is really sorry for is the fact that he and Joe are no longer friends. Finding the actions in this scene is about determining what is going through the characters' heads. This is a process that is particularly useful for David's text which so carefully matches the ellipses and trail-offs of real speech. Meaning is also often carried by tone not just vocabulary.

- **Thursday, 16th August**

In the second week Naomi starts to get the actors' on their feet and in this session she worked on scene 4, Daniel's birthday party, with Cary, Scott and Mossie. Before getting up on stage the actors read through the scene as both Naomi and David are keen to make some cuts. At the moment Susan has a phone conversation with her work, Mossie felt this held up the flow of the scene. Naomi felt the phone call was important because it was part of "locating" the family, helping the audience to identify their socio-cultural milieu i.e. Susan is a social worker. It was decided that the call would be cut and instead Susan would bring this piece of information in when explaining to Daniel why she would be unable to spend the following day with him.



Scott Swadkins & Cary Crankson

When moving the scene some movements are practical, for example where will Susan go to find the camera and where will she stand to take the picture, and some support the emotional trajectory of the scene, for example Naomi suggested Cary remain restless at first, checking his phone and checking the home phone for messages from his dad. Of course this nervous energy then bursts out

at the end of the scene. Naomi also directed Mossie to keep toing and froing for various things, again underlining her anxiety about the outcome of the party. Naomi reminded them that the history of the day was crucial to the scene; this had already been discussed by Naomi, David and the actors. It had been decided that because at the beginning of the day Jonathan had slept in, not getting up to help Susan as promised, he had then had a row with Daniel who was sent in to wake him up. They had all then been forced to cancel the planned excursion because of the rain. The party should therefore be doomed before it even starts by the build-up of tension amongst the three characters. Other elements of blocking and props also serve to underline and intensify the action of the scene. When Daniel brings in the plates for the birthday cake it was decided that he should bring in four, another unpleasant reminder for Susan of the absent Sean. When Daniel rejects his glass of champagne but refuses to give it to Jonathan, Naomi suggested that he deliberately place the glass by Jonathan's shoulder, in an act of wilful provocation.



Naomi and David were also keen to establish the emotional journey and the nature of the interactions between the characters. This seemed particularly important for Susan, as her objective is to make the party a success.

At the beginning of the scene, **Scott Swadkins & Cary Crankson** harried by the events of the

day, Susan is nonetheless struggling to maintain a semblance of family celebration. Initially Mossie had played Susan as being quite irritable with Jonathan and his attempts to sabotage the party with references to his dad but Naomi suggested that at the beginning of the scene Susan's main concern is Daniel, therefore her dialogue with Jonathan is dismissive rather than angry. It was decided that Susan should only become really angry when Daniel announces that Jonathan has been missing college to meet up with Joe. In the final moments of the scene, Naomi felt Susan's sadness should be clear, sadness that the day has failed and a sadness in the realisation that her sons are growing up and slipping away from her. David noted that there is something of a status change in this scene, Susan realises that Jonathan has told her a few home truths and he suggested that the action for Jonathan's final words to Susan should be "mocks".

- **Friday, 17th August**

Naomi started moving the first scene between Jonathan (Cary) and Joe (Jason Maza, playing Joe). The beginning of this scene involves the two characters

continually talking over each other so the first thing Naomi asked the actors to do was to read the scene hitting the overlaps. Naomi decided that it was important to start the scene on the right note so they began by discussing what had happened prior to the scene. Naomi made the two actors enter the rehearsal room from outside, sending them down the road so that by the time they came in they were already full-flow in their conversation. Naomi suggested that the actors think about their conversation as a battle; a “one-upmanship of bad lives”! The initial runs of the scene also involved quite a lot of amendments to the actions. For example, Joe’s comment that he would “knock one out on the strength of it” if he received a text from Lauren had originally been actioned as “entertains” Jonathan but it was felt that perhaps in light of the way Jason was developing the character and his relationship with Lauren that this should be saddens. It was felt that Joe should be able to evince some sympathy from the audience.

- **Thursday, 23rd August**

Paul Benzing, the fight director on *Flight Path*, came in to direct the stage fights. A fight director is always required for any kind of physical violence on stage from a slap to a full-blown fight. Paul came to work on the moment when Jonathan punches Daniel in scene 2 and Joe’s attack on Jonathan in scene 9. Directing a good stage fight means finding a compromise between what would happen in reality and what will be dramatically interesting and believable on stage. Naomi felt that Joe’s violence should almost feel as if it comes out of nowhere; Joe does not really want to beat up Jonathan but feels he needs to punish him. It was decided that the first punch should in fact be a jab, which would be hard enough to bring Jonathan to his knees. Paul showed Jason how to jab just to the right of Cary’s face (known as “the parrot punch”) whilst at the same time hitting his chest with his left hand to make the right sound. Paul explained that in reality a punch would be fired out directly but it is important when punching someone on stage to prepare the actor by gaining eye contact. The actors also have to ensure they are close, unnaturally close for actors, to ensure that when they punch they reach the face.

The second outbreak of violence it was decided should begin with a punch to the stomach. Paul told Jason that he had to have a big preparation for this and then stop when he hit the first layer of Cary’s costume. He asked Cary to react immediately and vocally to the punch which would mean there was no need to make a contact noise. He also suggested Cary bend his head down the left to “show the audience his pain”! He would then collapse to the floor winded where Jason would kick him in the stomach. Again, for safety, Paul asked Jason to wait until he had made eye contact with Cary before the kick so that both actors have time to prepare their action and reaction. Then Jason had to point his toe and kick with his laces into Cary’s stomach. For the final attack at the end of the scene everyone decided that Joe would go full out for the face. Paul suggest beginning the fight with a face slap, for this he placed Cary with his back to the audience as

this time Cary would provide the noise by clapping his hands. Naomi suggested Joe keep pacing backwards and forward in between moves to show his restlessness. The final face punch then goes to the face which, Paul explained, if delivered with full force would probably lay Jonathan out. Previously Paul had encouraged Jason to follow through on his punches with his body but suggested that this time he remain still to show he was in control. Before finishing the session Paul warned the actors about not allowing emotional content to override technical content for safety's sake. It is easy to get caught up in the moment and forget to take proper care, this is why making eye contact before each move and allowing preparation time is so important.

- **Tuesday, 28th August**

Naomi had called a rehearsal for the first scene in the park with Jonathan (Cary), Joe (Jason) and Lauren (Ashley Madekwe, playing **Lauren**) but rather than work in the rehearsal room, she took everybody outside to the local park and rehearsed the scene in the playground. Naomi explained that taking the actors outside helps give them a sense of place. There is a very different atmosphere when you are outside, there are different acoustics and a sense of having to fight against outside noise. There was also the practical consideration of staging. The set design for this scene includes a springrider on which the characters play; there is a springrider in the park which allowed Naomi and the actors to incorporate the springrider into the action. Once outside, Naomi asked Cary and Jason to think about the switch in the scene from the initial battle of noise, with neither listening to the other, to a proper conversation. She asked Cary and Jason to move about the park at the beginning, both coming to rest on the bench on “What are we doing here like?”, visually marking the shift in Jonathan and Joe's exchange.

- **Friday, 31st August**

Today Naomi was rehearsing the final scene. By this point, all the action has been blocked (though it can still be changed) and rehearsal is a means of honing the performance and the script. In this session Naomi and David were particularly



Naomi Jones

keen to capture the correct tone for the scene. Often this involved going back to the actions and rethinking what the characters intentions were. For example in the brief exchange between Jonathan and Lauren, originally “Do you think I'm alright?” had been actioned as ‘impresses’ but it was decided that it should be softer and more of an appeal to Lauren so the action was changed to ‘enlists’ and Lauren's response, ‘I think you're an idiot’ became ‘reassures’ rather than ‘teases’. Naomi

asked Ashley to imagine that she was actually saying 'I think you're brilliant' on this line, and played the scene once using this line instead. This helped Ashley to get the right warmth and gentle irony in her voice when she delivered "I think you're an idiot". Naomi also suggested that there should be a difference in tone between those moments when Jonathan and Lauren are alone and the moments when Daniel is with them. When the couple are talking to Daniel is it something of a performance as opposed to the intimate privacy they slip in to when he is not there.

Naomi also worked hard on the final moments of the scene, and therefore the play. She felt it was important that the ending be uplifting but not mawkish; the final scene must fit the rest of the play. It was therefore decided that Jonathan should be joking with Daniel when he asks him to employ him as a gardener, partly to amuse Lauren. Daniel's responses are rather abstract; he is more interested in gardening at this point. David felt it was important that Daniel retain some of his difficult nature, also to offset any false notions of "happy endings" so not only did David suggest that Scott make Daniel's response to Jonathan to do up his coat rather grumpy but also that he unresponsive to Jonathan at the end. Jonathan's final "Give me a bell" is therefore rather self-deprecating and leads into the final moments of the play when Jonathan contemplates the uncertainty that he is faced with.

8. Practical Exercises

a. ACTIONING

Naomi Jones uses Max Stafford-Clark's "actioning method", try it for yourself. Choose a favourite extract from the play, each take a part, and then read it aloud, listening carefully for the tones and dynamics of the scene. Then go through the scene line by line, and choose an appropriate transitive verb for each statement (a transitive verb must be something you can actively do to another character, e.g. I scare him, I befriend him, I amuse him, I sober him). Read each line aloud and see which verb you think is most appropriate. Then return to the beginning of the scene and read your lines, now stating your chosen action before you speak each line. Notice the shape of the scene, where the climaxes are, how the tone changes. You may want to change your actions to help the scene build effectively. For instance, in a speech where you intend to scare the other characters, you may begin with 'unsettles', 'sobers', 'unnerves', 'warns', 'grips' and then 'frightens', in order to allow the hostility to build up. Once you are happy with your actions, try performing the scene without reading them, but keeping them in mind. See how focused you can make your performance, and consider how the actions have helped.

b. STATUS GAMES

Naomi, like Max, is particularly interested in the balance of status between characters. Choose a scene from the play and allocate each character a suitable status level between 2 and 10 (2 being the lowest). You may choose to use playing cards to experiment with this, selecting a card randomly from the pack to designate your status. Attempt to play the scene, rigidly adhering to the allocated numbers, and then choose new numbers. Note how the dynamics of the scene can change completely depending on which character is "running the scene", i.e. has the highest status. Then consider giving your character a status shift within the scene. Perhaps, for instance, in scene 4, when Susan's status fluctuates as she is forced to accept a few home truths about her attempts at maintaining happy family life. Consider the whole relationship between Jonathan and Joe and how it shifts in status within the course of the play.

c. INTENTIONS

As a variation, using the same principle of the 2-10 scale, choose a scene and decide your character's objective, or intention (what they want from the action). Then select a playing card to decide the strength of your character's intention. For instance, on a scale of 2-10, how much does Lauren want to attract Jonathan in scene 3, and how much encouragement does Jonathan want to give her. In scene 9, what are Joe's objectives in threatening Jonathan, and how does the strength of these objectives change during the scene. You can also try deciding the strength of your character's intention yourself. This method can help you find interesting balances in the dynamics between characters. Note, as you experiment, whether the scenes are more powerful if the characters have similar levels of intention, or disparate.

d. BACK STORY & IMPROVISATION

One of the important tasks in the first week of rehearsal is to establish the backstory of each of the characters, what has happened to them before the action we see in the play and what happens to them in between scenes. Naomi asked all the actors to consider key moments in the characters' backstories and to write out a chronology of the year for their character. She then asked them to improvise the scenes the audience don't see as the actors imagined they might have happened. Try writing your chronology for each of the characters and then improvise scenes that you can imagine take place during the year. For example, Susan mentions in the play that Daniel is being difficult at home, improvise a difficult moment at home with Susan, Jonathan and Daniel. You might also find it interesting to write your own personal chronology, what would be the moments that you would include in a play covering a year in your life? Try and dramatise one scene from your chronology using the kind of realistic dialogue found in *Flight Path*.

9. Appendix (A)

What is Down's syndrome?

Human cells normally contain 23 pairs of chromosomes. Chromosomes are the parts of body cells that carry inherited information - the characteristics that are passed to you from your mother and father. A chromosomal disorder means there is a change in the normal number of chromosomes. This can mean that physical and mental development is impaired and can result in learning difficulties and health problems. Down's Syndrome is the most common chromosomal disorder and one of the most common causes of learning difficulties.

Named after the first person that described it, Dr J L Down, the condition affects one in every 1,000 people. Some are more severely affected than others. Around 600 babies with Down's Syndrome are born in the UK every year. It occurs in all ethnic groups and affects slightly more boys than girls.

From NHS Direct website: www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Downs-syndrome

Do people with Down's syndrome have a particular personality type?

No, people with Down's syndrome do not have a particular personality type. People with Down's syndrome are individuals. However, people with Down's syndrome are more likely to use certain coping strategies. For example, it is common for people with Down's syndrome to use routine, order and sameness as a way of rationalising and controlling their lives. Similarly, people with Down's syndrome may also use self-talk as a way of directing their behaviour, expressing their feelings and making sense of what is sometimes a very confusing world. Change can be very disorientating especially if you have a learning disability. In the past, people with Down's syndrome have sometimes been portrayed as being stubborn. Stubbornness and a refusal to co-operate may be a signal from the individual that they do not fully understand what is expected of them. Stubbornness can also be symptomatic of an individual trying to exert control over their lives. The best way to help someone is to try and find out from him or her what the problem is.

From the Down's Syndrome Association website: www.down's-syndrome.org.uk

Appendix (B)

“The yatty’s where it’s atty” - some vocabulary

shanks	makeshift knife
muggy	dull, daft, crap
mug someone off	take the piss out of
yat	female, a girl/woman
buzzin	really happy/stoned/high
reach	to be bothered
mish	abv: mission, something difficult
touch	stroke of luck
neekos	from neek - cross btw nerd and geek
what’s poppin	what’s up?
lick-shot	good piece of music
boy off	to be rude to/ignore/walk away from someone
batty hole	arse hole
floss it out	show something off/act flamboyantly
ute (“yoot”)	youth
blood-clart	blood clot
on the ones	alone, to be on one’s own
waste	useless, waste of space

For an extensive look at slang, see www.urbandictionary.com