



**hampstead**theatre



# KING OF HEARTS

by Alistair Beaton

## **Education Resource Pack**

by Rebecca Pilbeam, Out of Joint Education

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*With thanks to Hampstead Theatre Education*

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# 1. Introduction for Teachers

The resource materials in this pack are intended to enhance your students' enjoyment and understanding of *King of Hearts*. 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

NICK, Prime Minister

STEPHEN, Leader of the Opposition

PRINCE RICHARD, heir to the throne

PRINCE ARTHUR, Richard's younger brother

ANNIE, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister

TOBY, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister

MARCUS, Archbishop of Canterbury

NASREEN, Deputy Director of an Islamic Cultural Centre

SIR TERENCE PITCH, Private Secretary to the King

HARRY HOLBROOK, Head of Royal Protection Squad

### SETTING:

The main drawing room in the Royal Residence at Sandringham.

### ACT I:

Richard catches Nasreen alone after his visit to the Islamic Cultural Centre. He gives her his mobile number. She refuses to give Richard her number but says she might text him.

At Sandringham, Nick and Stephen await the Princes' arrival as they want to "switch off" the King who has been in a coma for three months. Holbrook has bad news: Richard has been secretly meeting a Muslim girl. Nick asks Holbrook to do a complete profile of Nasreen and her family. Richard arrives and announces he intends to marry Nasreen.

Can Richard marry Nasreen? Marcus explains that Richard, who is only 23, cannot marry without his father's permission until he is 25. Nick and Stephen decide the King must be kept alive!

Holbrook announces a possible terrorist attack. The "terrorist attack" turns out to be the arrival of Nasreen.

Arthur crashes in drunk. Sir Terence announces the King has had a massive stroke and will live only a few more hours.

## **ACT II:**

Nick discusses Richard's intentions first with Terence, who believes Richard should be allowed to do as he pleases and then Marcus who believes the Church of England should be disestablished to allow Richard to do as he pleases without defying the Church.

Nick has a private word with Richard and Nasreen. Richard makes it clear he intends to marry Nasreen and be king. He also announces that he intends to convert to Islam.

Holbrook has been unable to find any dirt on Nasreen's family but on Nick's suggestion will investigate her brother Anwar.

That night, Toby creeps from the garden wearing only his underpants. Holbrook enters looking for an intruder; Toby hides and Holbrook leaves. Still out of sight, Toby overhears Richard, Nasreen and Stephen discussing a plan. Nasreen and Richard will insist on getting married, Nick will therefore resign, there will be a general election and Stephen will campaign as the King's party. Everyone leaves except for Stephen. Toby emerges semi-naked and invites Stephen to have a drink.

The following morning, Holbrook informs Nick that he has been unable to find any incriminating evidence on Anwar except that he attends the same mosque as some suspected terrorists. Toby tells Nick about Stephen's double-dealing and shows him a compromising phone video clip of Stephen. Stephen arrives with Richard and Nasreen and who announce they intend to fight Nick. Toby produces the video clip, forcing Stephen to withdraw his support but shocked by the video, Marcus accidentally deletes it. Stephen promptly reinstates his support.

Nick tells Holbrook to arrest Anwar under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Nasreen understands from his veiled threats to

her brother's safety that she is being blackmailed: she can only marry Richard and protect her brother if she and Richard agree to give up the throne.

Sir Terence enters and announces the King is dead. Richard abdicates and he and Nasreen leave to pay their last respects. Arthur also tries to abdicate and the scene descends into chaos.

In an epilogue each of the characters announces their fate in turn. We learn that Richard and Nasreen did get married and that Arthur became a reluctant playboy king.

### 3. The Play: *King of Hearts* as Political Satire

- **What is political satire?**

“... an artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to bring about improvement.”

Encyclopaedia Britannica Online

There is some debate as to what exactly satire means. What is its purpose and its power? These are questions to which the playwright, Alistair Beaton, has given a lot of thought:

“Anger and outrage are at the heart of good satire, but it has to be coupled with a desire to entertain and a desire to laugh.”

*The Independent*, 20 October 2006 <sup>1</sup>

“Any play that parodies or satirises recent events has to tap into a national mood. It is hard for a topical play to create new perceptions; what it can do is focus and define what people are already feeling ... an outlet for an anger not yet fully expressed.”

*The Guardian*, 25 June 2003

It has also been argued that the point of satire is not be entertaining or funny but vicious and frightening; a satirist should be dangerous, not an entertainer.

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<sup>1</sup> © Alistair Beaton. First published in *The Independent*.

- **What are the key elements of political satire?**

### *Reality*

Satire targets real people and events. It refers to a world shared and therefore understood by the writer and their audience.

### *Humour*

Though this has not always been the case, political satire is increasingly perceived as being defined by a humour that is ironic, scornful and sarcastic.

### *Anger*

The desire to ridicule through satire comes from an anger at elements of contemporary society and a need to express dissent and criticism.

### *Criticism*

Treating reality with cynical or ironic humour inevitably involves criticism. The criticism is expressed by exaggerating to an absurd extent that which is being criticised. Although humour is a defining characteristic of satire, its main aim is social or political criticism.

### ***THE RESULT?...***

Political satire does not tell people what to think but reflects the audience's own views. It gives a voice to society's misgivings about its leaders and can become a communal expression of discontent.

In a world where people often feel powerless to influence the channels of power, the use of satire can create a means of expression within the public sphere and a sense of "being heard". It is to be hoped that by voicing such disapproval publicly, the victim may be shamed into action or change.

- **What are the different forms of political satire?**

### **NEWSPAPER & PRINT MEDIA**

The first widely available source of political satire was the political cartoon, copies of which became popular when they were displayed in the print shops of eighteenth century London. Political cartoonists such as William Hogarth, James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson were given exceptional freedom to mock the monarchy and the Church. The leading satirical magazine, *Punch*, was founded in 1841 and by 1870 had a weekly circulation of 40,000.

The magazine continued to be popular in the nineteenth century but by the beginning of the twentieth century had become the voice of the Establishment. Despite a brief revival in the 1960s, coinciding with a boom in television satire, the magazine gradually lost its readership and was finally closed in 2002. Although *Punch* has vanished it has been replaced by the satirical magazine *Private Eye*, founded in the 1960s. The magazine, like *Punch*, is very famous for its satirical cartoons. *Private Eye* is sued for libel on a regular basis.

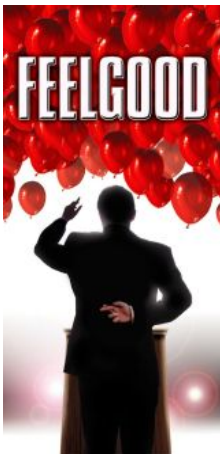
Political cartoons are now recognised as an art form in their own right and the satire of the leading political cartoonists of the daily newspapers, such as Steve Bell and Martin Rowson at the *Guardian* and Morten Morland at the *Times*, are hugely popular. In 2005 Morland won the award for best political cartoon with an image satirising the attitude of commuters to fellow Muslim travellers following the Kings Cross bombings in 2005. The image showed white commuters cowering away as far as possible from a Muslim in a tube carriage. At the bottom Morland wrote: Mind the Gap.

**You can see this and other political cartoons on the Political Cartoon Society website: [www.politicalcartoon.co.uk](http://www.politicalcartoon.co.uk).**

## THEATRE

Political satire in the theatre is scarce. The vogue for satire reflected in the popularity of political cartoons in the eighteenth century was also manifest in the satirical content of the early Restoration comedies. The first of these was the hugely successful musical play *The Beggar's Opera* (1721) by John Gay. Gay linked Prime Minister Robert Walpole with the notorious mobster Jonathan Wild and opened the door for political satire on the London stage. A number of plays went on to attack Walpole in more vicious terms. Walpole responded to the keenly felt personal attack with a show of official power and in 1737 their output was curbed by Walpole's Licensing Act, a landmark act of censorship on the British stage. Whether the works truly posed a threat is perhaps less important than the fact that Walpole and the government clearly believed they did.

Political satire reappeared at its most biting and most funny in the political and frequently farcical satires of the Italian playwright Dario Fo. Like Gay, Fo's work was seen as having real influence. He and his wife and collaborator Franca Rame were both physically and personally attacked and their home firebombed. For years, Fo was forced to reserve seats in his theatre for police agents, placed there to ensure that he did not stray from the script submitted for official approval. But if Fo has been one of the world's most performed playwrights for three decades this is because his plays are not only politically committed but hilariously funny. Like Beaton, Fo used farce as a vehicle to express his political and moral outrage.



Alistair Beaton first brought political farce to the London stage with his 2001 hit *Feelgood*. The play satirised the politics of spin and featured a bullying press secretary quite clearly modelled on Tony Blair's then director of communications and "king of spin" Alastair Campbell.

## TELEVISION

Most political satire in the last fifty years has originated on television. The trend started in the 1960s with *Beyond the Fringe* and *That Was the Week That Was*. *That Was the Week That Was* was greeted with both outrage and delight and the future conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath blamed it for “the death of deference”. A damning criticism from Heath, but many saw this as a reason to praise the show. Like the satirical Restoration plays, the success was short-lived. The BBC pulled it from the schedules, nervous that it would appear inappropriate in an election year. The show was nonetheless considered instrumental in securing the 1964 Labour victory.

Television satire in the 1970s was more surreal than political, best exemplified by *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, and when political comedy returned in the 1980s the satire was increasingly vicious and crude. *Spitting Image*, in effect an animated political cartoon, attacked the personalities rather than criticising the political activities of its victims. Moreover, appearing as a puppet on the



show became something of a badge of honour. Political satire on television had become an established form of entertainment and the most famous political satire of the 1980s *Yes Minister* was a favourite of both the public and politicians. Famously, Margaret Thatcher liked the show so much she wrote a sketch which she performed with the cast.

Recently, much television satire has looked at the media rather than politics although the recent Armando Iannucci show *In the Thick of It* pitched itself as a modern version of *Yes Minister*. Alistair Beaton, who wrote for *Spitting Image*, has also written a number of one-off political satires for television including recently *The Trial of Tony Blair* and notably *A Very Social Secretary*, a humorous take on David Blunkett's affair with Kimberly Quinn. Blunkett threatened Beaton with legal action and referenced the satire in his resignation speech.

- **What is satire trying to achieve? How effective is it?**

*“Can you change things as a satirist? You never know, but at least you are giving heart to people who share your outrage and hopefully here and there getting up the noses of the powerful?”*

Alistair Beaton, *The Independent*, 20 October 2006 <sup>2</sup>

Does satire ever do anything more than “get up the noses of the powerful”? Does it ever aim to achieve more? Some of the examples of satire discussed above evidently caused great concern to their victims, which suggests that they could potentially have had damaging effects. The risk was considered enough for Walpole to issue the Licensing Act, for the Italian Government to insist on policing Dario Fo’s theatre and for the BBC to pull *That Was The Week That Was*.

Yet satire is always reactive; it represents society’s response to a person’s actions or a set of events. If a writer, or an artist, accurately captures public opinion then the resulting satire is effective in that it provides a forum for expressing that opinion. The fact that the opinion is aired communally in the public arena also means that there is greater potential for influencing the actions of those against whom the satire is directed. This is however very hard to measure.

It is also possible that in fact political satire diffuses the anger of the public precisely because it provides an “outlet”. In his recent book looking at satire in eighteenth-century Britain<sup>3</sup>, Vic Gatrell argued that satire acted as a substitute for revolution rather than a summons to it. If satire has always been tolerated in Britain, as it has in most democratic countries which guarantee the right of free speech, this is perhaps because those in power are aware that people need the opportunity to vent their anger.

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<sup>2</sup> © Alistair Beaton. First published in *The Independent*.

<sup>3</sup> Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex & Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (Atlantic Books: London, 2006).

## Satire: some questions for discussion...

1. What is the difference between presenting an argument or an opinion realistically and expressing an argument or opinion satirically? Which do you think would be more effective?
2. Do you think satire should be funny? What difference does this make?
3. Which do you think is the most effective medium for satire, print, theatre or television? Why?
3. *King of Hearts* satirises various leading British figures or types, can you identify them? What impact, if any, do you think the play might have on the Government or the Royal Family?
4. Does satire act as a “substitute for revolution”?

## **4. Interview with the Writer: Alistair Beaton**

### **Why is humour and entertainment so important to you?**

Farce is the only thing I know how to do! I object to being lectured at by left-wing playwrights, it bores me. Personally I like the sound of laughter in a theatre and I enjoy the feeling of being able to entertain people. I use comedy to throw in serious ideas; it is not a choice between serious and empty. Comedy is inherent to satire, it can be reassuring or it can be very dark.

### **You changed the script in rehearsal - what do you gain from working with the directors and actors?**

One of the painful joys of working with Max Stafford-Clark is being encouraged to test every line to destruction. No line is kept that is not justified. If the spirit of the rehearsal room is open, as a writer I can discover lots of ways of making the script better, but it's hard work! The most interesting thing was working with two directors and it was amazing the production accommodated two such vast egos. I was worried that it wouldn't work at the beginning but it has been great. Only Max Stafford-Clark allows disagreement in front of everyone but this becomes debate rather than disagreement.

### **How would you hope the audience might respond?**

I hope they feel they have had a pleasurable evening in the theatre. I'm not peddling one particular point of view. I want the audience to be entertained and challenged. The question that everyone asks is, does satire change anything? Nobody knows, and I think you can be speaking to a group of people who agree with you, "preaching to the converted". Outrage is at the heart of satire and it can vindicate the audience's own sense of outrage; it can give heart to people.

### **One of the most interesting ideas in the play is the possibility of separating the Church from the State, what is your view on this?**

I am in favour of a secular state, and it is increasingly ridiculous that the Church has such a central connection. I don't want anyone telling me what to do for religious reasons.

## 5. Focus on the Directors: Max Stafford-Clark & Ramin Gray

### What interested you in the play?

*Max:* The decision came before the play, it was a commissioned play. There have been various successive drafts and we're still not finished and the final scene only arrived on Monday of this week so you're taking a decision based on hope as well as on what's actually in front of you.

*Ramin:* I came to it much later. I wanted to do it for two reasons, one was to work with Max and the second reason was because it's not the type of play that anyone's ever asked me to do. Quite a formally conventional satirical comedy, I thought that would be great fun to direct.

### How has co-directing worked?

*Ramin:* It's gone very well so far, touch wood.

*Max:* It's worked fine. Co-directing is a strange beast. I've only ever done it once before, years ago with Bill Gaskill when I was very much the junior partner, but I learnt a lot from it and I think in retrospect he learnt a bit from me too because we came from such different backgrounds. This is a more pragmatic decision because of my illness [*Max had a stroke in July 2006*] but it's a great privilege to work with other directors because whereas actors always see each others' work, and writers go to see each others' work, directors are always thrown into a position of rivalry and never work together so seeing another director work and taking energy from that is stimulating. I've enjoyed it enormously.

*Ramin:* Yeah, I'd echo that. Because I've worked at the Royal Court I've worked in an environment that was partly shaped by Max through all the years he was there so things like actioning etcetera that's sort of what I know. But it's one thing to know about it and another to see it actually happen in practice so I've learnt an enormous amount there from Max. All these things that I've read about in books, it's great to see them happen, because it's one thing to see something, but it's entirely different when somebody does

something. You have fresh new thoughts about how that thing is actually achieved. Actually an enormous amount of it is to do with the personality of the person running the thing. Max creates a very open but sort of combative environment, rather like one of those game shows, there's a slightly competitive edge to the exercise but it's always fun and that spirit is something that you might not be aware of when you read about an exercise. You might think, "Oh, an improvisation should be a very warm and supportive environment" but if there's a competitive, challenging element to it, like a game show, then it's larky but you can somehow use that larky energy to really get somewhere. People rise to it.

*Max:* Plays aren't known as plays for nothing, there should be an element of playfulness in rehearsal.

### **What is the purpose and power of political satire?**

*Max:* Entertainment is by definition bland, whereas art is by definition provocative and this is both entertaining and provocative. It's part of a debate about Islam and politics that is conducted largely in newspapers or on television so it's very good to annex some of that territory for the theatre.

*Ramin:* I suppose if you had to say what he's satirising, he's using the figure of the bogeyman in Islamic threat and he's using that to satirise the liberal establishment and how they deal with it, and react to it and respond to it. Of course it feels very contemporary because it's about issues that are with us at the moment, every day.

### **How would you like the audience to respond?**

*Max:* Well I think we'd be very upset if they didn't laugh. I hope that there's also enough stimulus to make them think, what's interesting to me is that I didn't spot before rehearsal that Alistair's stance was so libertarian. Libertarianism is a philosophy that involves you saying what you want to say and nobody censoring.

*Ramin:* I hope also there'll be moments where there's that sort of slightly stunned silence when people hear things begin said on stage that they thought secretly but haven't ever dared to say out loud.

*Max:* That's what you always hope. A play is not a medium for conversion. Sometimes you can go to a play and think, "Oh yes, I've

been thinking that all along”, and the play encapsulates or articulates something that’s the crest of a wave.

*Ramin:* When you’re directing it you’re just trying to get it right. You can’t predict whatsoever how people will respond to anything.

*Max:* What I’ve learnt from Ramin is how much of a director’s time is spent simply clarifying and making clear the text that’s there. People say casting is 80% of the job, I would say casting is 30% of the job but that 70% of the job is making the script clear.

### **Does finding the backstory help make the script clear?**

*Ramin:* Yes, that’s very interesting because we have very different takes on that. Max will often, when there’s a problem, open up what’s behind it and go into the character or the biographical background and I never really do that I just stick with the actual thing that’s there and just try to make that clear.

*Max:* I think it’s always interesting to find out the backstory of the characters and I wish we had time to do a bit more of that. For example, Blair is on the verge of converting to Catholicism, Alistair believes, and certainly has scruples, morality and religious belief. Does the character who shadows him in the play, Nick, have that? Where do they come from? There are dangers for directors and actors. There’s no point making up a backstory that the character has been abused as a child and bugged by their stepfather if it doesn’t come into the text. You’ve got to work with both what’s above the waterline and then construct something below the waterline that supports that. There’s absolutely no point in constructing something if you can’t use it.

### **What did you enjoy most about the experience?**

*Ramin:* The hysterical moments when we all fall about laughing.

*Max:* I can honestly say I’ve enjoyed most working with another director. It’s a very lonely job being a director. You are placed in competition with other directors. It’s very stimulating to talk with other directors but actually to work with someone is both provocative and a learning and acquisitive experience.

## 6. Rehearsal Diary

A new play by a well-known satirist, an explosive topic, two directors... rehearsals for *King of Hearts* 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.

- **Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> January**

A read-through of Act II. At Out of Joint the writer is an active contributor to rehearsals and the first week is often when the writer can work with the cast and the director(s) to hone the script. Act II lacked the clear narrative of the first act and the intention of the read-through was to identify where improvements could be made. After the read-through everyone was invited to express their thoughts or concerns.

The Directors asked the actors to do a 3-minute run through of Act II in which they all had to achieve their objectives. This involved much running about and lots of noise – and the actors got nowhere near the end! A second run-through was equally chaotic but these whirlwind performances allowed everyone to see the two main plot lines and to identify where the important interactions occur – these being the ones that have to get done in the three minutes.

- **Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> January**

Ben Righton (Prince Richard) and Christian Brassington (Prince Arthur) had been asked to study a televised interview with William and Harry and they recreated the interview for the cast, copying the speech and mannerisms of the princes and analysed what this revealed about the relationship between William and Harry. The weight of future expectation clearly informed the princes' behaviour, their manner of interacting with each other and the rest of the world. Christian felt Harry was clearly cowed by William, the relative status of the two was made very clear.

Max then returned to actioning the text, a process which involves taking each line and giving it an 'action'<sup>4</sup>: for example "scorns", "persuades", "consoles". The actors read the action then their lines. This encourages analysis of their characters' conduct and motivation and allows the writer to examine his text. It is a process that leads to debate about a character's state of mind and the nature of their relationship with other characters. For example, in Act 2, scene 1, when Nick tells Richard that he will shortly be Head of the State, the Armed Forces and the Church of England, Nasreen responds: "If he wants to be". Deciding her action depends on her meaning. Is it based on knowledge of Richard's plans or is she more naively asserting that Richard should be free to do as he pleases. Is she being ignorant or radical? It was decided that Nasreen, privy to Richard's plan, is being radical. The action is therefore "stuns".

- **Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> January**

Ramin worked alone with Ben Righton (Richard). Ramin likes to "take things away" from actors, to clean up their performance. Ben had watched Prince William for inspiration and Ramin felt his "Williamisms" needed to be erased. Richard has to be incisive, and his proposals taken seriously. Ramin wanted to raise Richard's status and to find the character's strength: to make Richard "front-footed".

They read the scene in which Richard is received by Nick and Stephen. Ramin felt Ben's Richard needed to have clearer intentions. They discussed how Richard might be feeling at this point, irritated at being detained from his father's bedside, or perhaps relieved that he could finally be open about his relationship. They read the scene again and Richard was more in control but unnecessarily confrontational and defensive. A third reading suggested Richard needed to come out of his corner more, to "fight the fight and enjoy the fight". Ramin was concerned that Richard's energy was too low. He used the rather useful analogy of a cricket player, when Richard spoke both the actor and the audience should feel similarly to the batsman who hits the cricket ball perfectly; there should be resonance

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<sup>4</sup> See section (8) *Practical Exercises*, for description of actioning, p. 26.

and drive. In the fourth reading, Richard was stronger and more confident. A fifth reading proved a little rushed and Ramin emphasised the audience's need to feel the strength of Richard's love for Nasreen and the pleasure he takes in talking about her. Ramin asked Ben to play Richard "on the front foot" in every sense. They did a final reading in which Ben's performance was more nuanced and much clearer. Richard emerged as a strong character capable of driving the action. Ramin explained that in his exchange with Nick, Richard has to match the PM's verbal parries blow for blow, for the dramatic tension to be maintained the two characters have to be balanced. This session enabled Ben to find and express the source of the character's strength and power.

- **Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> January**

Both directors and the writer were present to rehearse the opening scene. It was important to hit the right balance of the relationship between Justin (Nick) and Jeff (Stephen). One of the main sources of humour and satire is the consensual politics of Nick and Stephen. We are also given glimpses into the very real opposition between them, not in political policies but in their struggle for power. The company found several ways of suggesting this close yet fragile relationship. Initially Jeff's (Stephen) praise for Justin's (Nick's) televised speech was rather insincere however when performed with sincerity it instantly created a bond between the two men. Also by delivering his praise as an equal, Jeff was able to establish Stephen's potential challenge. The directors suggested that the two men play in cahoots against the bossy direction of Annie. The two actors started to subconsciously mirror each other's body language, which was encouraged. This closeness created a particularly nice moment when Annie exited leaving the two men alone for the first time and both Justin and Jeff stood up, stretched and relaxed, as if let out of school. This moment of privacy also revealed the essential conflict at the heart of their relationship. Nick's reaction is frosty when Stephen jokily refers to becoming Prime Minister; from sitting side by side, they moved to individual seats, mirroring each other's body language but turning away rather than towards each other. There was some debate as to how Stephen should respond to Nick's

attempt to put him in his place and to maintain the balance of the relationship it was decided that Stephen should not be unnerved by Nick's harangue. The sense of equality maintained between the characters allows the actors to play both complicity and rivalry.

- **Tuesday, 23<sup>th</sup> January**

Ramin and Naomi (the assistant director) worked on the two princes' scene at the beginning of Act 2. Ramin began by asking Ben (Richard) and Christian (Arthur) to play badminton while saying their lines. They were only allowed to deliver a line when they struck the shuttlecock and had to match the rhythm of the lines with their strikes. At one point, Christian delivered a line very forcefully and smashed the shuttlecock making it impossible for Ben to return. This illustrated how not to play conflict. Although the characters are in conflict the actors are not, they must work together. Christian smashing the shuttlecock destroyed the play, both of badminton and of the actors.

Ramin then asked Ben and Christian to deliver their lines standing behind a chair and pointing directly at the other person on each line. This ensures the actors get behind each of their points, the physical delivery, the act of pointing should match the emotional delivery and the commitment of the actor to what they're saying. The exercise encouraged the actors to be simple and to let the text speak for itself.

Ben and Christian started to rehearse the scene, with detailed discussion of the intention for each line. This often involved going back to the original actions. For example, on Prince Richard's question to Arthur: "Are you drinking?", should Richard sound concerned, disapproving or angry? The assigned action was "focuses", then "lectures" which suggested that Richard is concerned but not angry. He is keen to help and educate his younger brother and this was the way the actors decided to play the scene.

- **Wednesday, 31<sup>st</sup> January**

They rehearsed the scene in which Holbrook tells Nick, Stephen and Annie about Richard's clandestine meetings with Nasreen. By this

point, there is a strong focus on blocking and positioning the actors. With only one setting and frequently the same actors on stage there is a danger of the staging becoming static. As well as being visually stimulating the staging must reflect the characters' positions relative to each other and the action. As before, everyone worked on making the politicians feel like a team. So for example, when Nick, Stephen and Annie bark orders at Holbrook the three of them stand addressing each other while Holbrook sits on the sofa between them taking notes like a secretary. Holbrook's ostracism was reinforced in the scene where Nasreen arrives and he holds her at gunpoint. Ramin suggested that Nasreen's withering "Don't be so silly" should express the feelings of all the group and that Nick, Stephen and Annie should back away disapprovingly from Holbrook at this point.

In the afternoon a first run-through of Act I was followed by notes from the directors and the writer intended to hone the performances so that they hit exactly the right note. This can mean making an aspect of a character or relationship more explicit, for example, Ramin liked the level of mirroring between Justin (Nick) and Jeff (Stephen) but suggested Jeff start to wear a jacket and tie in rehearsals, as Justin had been doing, and mirror some of his physical tics and preening. Fine-tuning can also mean altering the nuance of a performance to make implicit what is too explicit. It was felt that Sir Terence was too openly cold during his first scene in the play. Whilst everyone agreed that that coldness was no doubt present, Sir Terence's job and station would have enabled him to create a professional and courteous veneer to mask his rawer emotions.

Finally Alistair had a final addition, a topical reference to the disgraced Big Brother contestant Jade Goody. To keep the topicality of the play fresh Alistair made clear that this joke could change during the run. There was disagreement as to whether it should be included and the actors ran the scene with the new line several times to allow everyone to hear. Ramin was against the addition as initially was Max, however the line got a laugh so, for the moment, it has been included. It remains to be seen whether the joke survives to the first performance...

## 7. Reflecting and Reviewing

This section is intended to help you reflect on your visit to the theatre. There is no set format to organising your thoughts and opinions and the following prompts are only a guide.

### a. Individual Work: Review writing/ Structuring Notes

#### General Overview:

- Give a brief introduction to the review, stating the title, author, date of production and venue. You may also wish to include cast and creative team members.
- Summarise the plot in 3 - 5 sentences. Where and when is the play set? Who are the main characters? What happens to them?
- What was your overall response to the production? Did you find it an enjoyable experience? Why? Did it make you think? About what and why?
- What did you learn about modern theatre practices? What theatrical devices and conventions were used? Describe in detail the style of the play.

#### Direction:

- What do you think were the directors' intentions? How were these conveyed in the design, staging, and acting style? How successful were the directors' choices?

#### Acting:

- How would you describe the acting style? How suited was the style of acting to the production? Who gave the most notable performance and why?

#### Design:

- Describe the set, lighting and costumes. How did the design contribute to the production's meanings?

## **Audience:**

- What was the profile of the audience – age range, social/ethnic composition? How did the audience respond to the production? How did the audience response affect the overall experience of the play?

## **b. Group Work: Suggested Activities**

### **Shared Recall:**

For this exercise you will need large sheets of paper and pens.

- Work in pairs or small groups. Allocate each group a different area of focus of the production. For example: Acting, Set Design, Lighting and Sound, Costume, Directorial intention, Themes.
- Work together to brainstorm around your area of focus and record your ideas.
- After 2 minutes pass your sheet on to another group. Allow each group 2 minutes to read the notes and add their own ideas.
- Repeat this process until everyone has contributed something to each sheet.
- Photocopy each sheet so that everyone has a copy to take away with them.

### **Creating Tableaux of Key Moments:**

- In small groups think of 3 or 4 key moments in the play that you found particularly memorable, or thought significant.
- Find a way to show these moments in a series of frozen pictures or tableaux. Pay particular attention to use of space, facial expression and body language.
- Share your work with the rest of the group. Identify the moments that have been chosen and attempt to put them in order. Discuss the images that have been created. Has each group chosen the same key moments? What do these images tell us about the play?

## 8. Practical Exercises

### a. ACTIONING

Try Max Stafford-Clark's "actioning method" 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 pin 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

Max Stafford-Clark 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 1 and 10 (1 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 Act 2, scene 1 Nick's status fluctuates when he realises that Sir Terence

already knew about the liaison between Richard and Nasreen and then discovers that Marcus is in favour of allowing the young lovers to marry and disestablishing the Church of England. Consider the whole relationship between Nick and Richard and how it shifts in status within the course of the play.

### **c. INTENTIONS**

As a variation, using the same principle of the 1-10 scale, choose a scene and decide your character's objective, or intention (what they want from the action). Then use the number system to decide the strength of your character's intention. For instance, on a scale of 1-10, how much does Nick want to persuade Sir Terence and Marcus not to turn off the King's life support system at the end of Act 1? How angry and sincere is Arthur when talking to Richard in Act 2, scene 2? 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. DEVISE YOUR OWN SATIRE**

In small groups, create your own satire. The subject of your satire can be political, cultural or social and can take any aspect of contemporary modern life, for example, the media, the world of sports or the fashion industry. Find an aspect of your chosen subject that makes you angry and that you want to criticise. In your groups, devise a short satirical scene presenting your point of view. It should be clear to your audience who or what is being satirised. Experiment with your satire using the 1-10 scale, 1 being slightly satirical and mildly exaggerated, 10 being extremely satirical and exaggerated to the point of absurdity. What is the difference between your satire when it is performed at level 3 or at level 10? At what point do you think it is most effective?