



**Empire Theatres Pty. Ltd presents**

# April's Fool

**Performance Notes for Educators**



# Performance Notes for Educators

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## Introduction

### About Empire Theatres Pty. Ltd.

The Empire Theatre is Australia's largest regional theatre boasting a magnificent 1500 seat art deco auditorium, Studio space, Church Theatre and function rooms. Renovated from a historic cinema, it has been in operation since 1997 as a live theatre venue but has a 100 year history of serving the cultural needs of Toowoomba and surrounds.

In 2010, the Empire Theatre with assistance of Regional Stages funding, produced and performed April's Fool and toured it locally to 5 locations in Queensland.

**Mission:** To strengthen and broaden the community's connection to the performing arts.

### About the Show

*A true story of love, family, strength and the choices we make.*

In April 2009, two weeks short of his nineteenth birthday Toowoomba teenager Kristjan Terauds died due to complications from illicit drug use.

Inspired by 'April's Fool', an account of his son's death by Kristjan's father, the Empire Theatre commissioned award-winning playwright, David Burton to bring this story to the stage.

Using the words of Kristjan's friends and family interviewed over many months the result is a powerful mix of sadness, loss, and ultimately love, laced with humour.

*April's Fool* promises to be a thought-provoking and ultimately optimistic reflection on how we all live our lives.

Young people, parents, teachers, youth workers and theatre critics universally praised *April's Fool* for its ability to engage them in this story, gently sharing with its audience and at no time to seeking to lecture or preach.

The result is a theatre experience that reflects Kristjan himself – loving, warm, generous, open, honourable, gentle, complex and provocative.

**Time:** 1hr and 20 minutes – no interval

**Language:** Suitable for patrons aged 12+, mild course language.

**Themes explored:** A range of themes relevant to adolescents, parenting, health and drug use and decision making.

**Writer:** David Burton

**Director:** Lewis Jones

**Designer:** Josh McIntosh

**Lighting Designer:** Timothy Panitz

**Composer & Sound Designer:** Brett Collery

**AV Designer:** Craig Wilkinson

The materials in this pack are designed to assist in students' understanding and appreciation of the play *April's Fool* by David Burton and the issues it raises. The activities have been designed for a classroom setting and can be carried out within the workshops facilitated by the Empire Theatre or as separate activities. The activities are broken into two sections; the pre-show activities explore Verbatim Theatre while the post-show section provides activities and material to explore the issues, including substance abuse, that arises from the production.

## Verbatim theatre

*“Verbatim theatre is created from interviews with real people on a particular topic. After the interviews are completed, the playwright weaves together the different interviews to build a dramatic script. This form of theatre brings together different stories that create a dialogue that is personal and powerful. The intimacy which verbatim theatre creates allows the audience to experience the characters as if they are speaking directly to them.”<sup>1</sup>*

The performance of verbatim pieces can differ to traditional pieces of theatre with actors often taking on numerous characters in a more presentational performance.

## Activities

### Exploring the form

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/creativearts/assets/drama/pdf/verbatim.pdf>

The link above provides detailed explanation of the form, process and performance style of verbatim theatre, particularly pages 5-8.

<http://www.thedramateacher.com/documentary-drama-for-the-classroom/>

Read the article *Documentary Drama for the Classroom* found at the link above and then answer the following questions

- 1) Why is Australia experiencing such an increase in verbatim and documentary drama?
- 2) Why is this form relevant in current political and social climates?
- 3) What is the power of verbatim theatre?
- 4) Would you go and see other verbatim plays? Why or why not?

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<sup>1</sup> Definition found at- <http://www.usq.edu.au/artsworx/schoolresources/terrorists/verbatim>

## Examples of Verbatim plays

### **The Laramie Project**

*The Laramie Project* is a play by Moises Kauffman and members of the Tectonic Theatre Project. The play is based on the reaction to the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming. The murder was considered to be a homophobic hate crime and the play explores the community's reaction to the crime and the media circus which ensued.

The links below explore the play and process of its creation-

<http://www.tectonictheaterproject.org/Tectonic.html>

<http://www.enotes.com/laramie-project>

<http://www.time.com/time/classroom/laramie/pdfs/teachers.pdf> - teacher's notes

<http://www.time.com/time/classroom/laramie/pdfs/student.pdf> - student's notes

### **Talking to Terrorists**

Playwright Robin Soans wrote *Talking to Terrorists* which was first performed in 2005. The play discusses the importance of resolving terrorism with out violence or confrontation but peaceful discussions<sup>2</sup>.

The following links explore the play in more depth:

<http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/talkingterrorists->

<http://www.culturewars.org.uk/2005->

[01/terrorists.htm](http://www.usq.edu.au/artsworx/schoolresources/terrorists)<http://www.usq.edu.au/artsworx/schoolresources/terrorists>

### **Aftershocks**

*Aftershocks* is a verbatim play based on the effects of the 1989 earthquake that struck Newcastle NSW. Read the first couple of pages to gain an understanding of the play and why a verbatim form was an appropriate choice.

<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/5377/1/5377.pdf>

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talking\\_to\\_Terrorists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talking_to_Terrorists)

## April's Fool

To process of creating *April's Fool* was driven by the journal that Kristjan Terauds' father, David, kept while Kristjan was in hospital and after his death. Playwright, David Burton then carried out interviews with Kristjan's friends and family members who volunteered to be a part of the process.

David Burton then used this verbatim material to weave together the play that explores the consequences of Kristjan's decisions and the aftermath of his death.

## Create a piece of Verbatim Theatre

As part of the pre- show workshop, students will develop a short piece of verbatim theatre based on interviews, reports and remarks from the BP Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The following are pieces drawn from the media coverage of the oil spill

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**This shows excerpts of the Obama Oil Spill address on the 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2010.**

**Full transcript can be found here:**

<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/06/15/transcript.obama.speech/index.html>

**Obama:** Good evening. As we speak, our nation faces a multitude of challenges....

And tonight, I've returned from a trip to the Gulf Coast to speak with you about the battle we're waging against an oil spill that is assaulting our shores and our citizens.

On April 20, an explosion ripped through BP Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, about 40 miles off the coast of Louisiana. Eleven workers lost their lives. Seventeen others were injured. And soon, nearly a mile beneath the surface of the ocean, oil began spewing into the water.

Because there's never been a leak this size at this depth, stopping it has tested the limits of human technology. That's why, just after the rig sank, I assembled a team of our nation's best scientists and engineers to tackle this challenge.....

Already, this oil spill is the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced. And unlike an earthquake or a hurricane, it's not a single event that does its damage in a matter of minutes or days. The millions of gallons of oil that have spilled into the Gulf of Mexico are more like an epidemic, one that we will be fighting for months and even years.

But make no mistake: We will fight this spill with everything we've got for as long it takes. We will make BP pay for the damage their company has caused. And we will do whatever's necessary to help the Gulf Coast and its people recover from this tragedy.

Tonight, I'd like to lay out for you what our battle plan is going forward.....

First, the cleanup.

From the very beginning of this crisis, the federal government has been in charge of the largest environmental cleanup effort in our nation's history,..... We now have nearly 30,000 personnel who are working across four states to contain and clean up the oil.

Because of our efforts, millions of gallons of oil have already been removed from the water through burning, skimming and other collection methods. Over 5.5 million feet of boom has been laid across the water to block and absorb the approaching oil.....

But we have to recognize that, despite our best efforts, oil has already caused damage to our coastline and its wildlife. And sadly, no matter how effective our response is, there will be more oil and more damage before this siege is done.

That's why the second thing we're focused on is the recovery and restoration of the Gulf Coast.

You know, for generations, men and women who call this region home have made their living from the water. That living is now in jeopardy. I've talked to shrimpers and fishermen who don't know how they're going to support their families this year. I've seen empty docks and restaurants with fewer customers, even in areas where the beaches are not yet affected.

I've talked to owners of shops and hotels who wonder when the tourists might start coming back. The sadness and the anger they feel is not just about the money they've lost; it's about a wrenching anxiety that their way of life may be lost.

I refuse to let that happen. Tomorrow, I will meet with the chairman of BP and inform him that he is to set aside whatever resources are required to compensate the workers and business owners who have been harmed as a result of his company's recklessness.....

I make that commitment tonight.....

The third part of our response plan is the steps we're taking to ensure that a disaster like this does not happen again.

A few months ago, I approved a proposal to consider new, limited offshore drilling under the assurance that it would be absolutely safe, that the proper technology would be in place and the necessary precautions would be taken.

That obviously was not the case in the Deepwater Horizon rig, and I want to know why. The American people deserve to know why. The families I met with last week who lost their loved ones in the explosion, these families deserve to know why.

.... oil is a finite resource. We consume more than 20 percent of the world's oil, but have less than 2 percent of the world's oil reserves. And that's part of the reason oil companies are drilling a mile beneath the surface of the ocean: because we're running out of places to drill on land and in shallow water.....

.....The tragedy unfolding on our coast is the most painful and powerful reminder yet that the time to embrace a clean-energy future is now. Now is the moment for this generation to embark on a national mission to unleash America's innovation and seize control of our own destiny.....

The oil spill is not the last crisis America will face. This nation has known hard times before, and we will surely know them again. What sees us through -- what has always seen us through -- is our strength, our resilience, and our unyielding faith that something better awaits us if we summon the courage to reach for it.

Tonight, we pray for that courage, we pray for the people of the Gulf, and we pray that a hand may guide us through the storm towards a brighter day.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

## **Transcript of interview with charter boat fisherman Dwayne Price from Barataria Bay Louisiana.**

Video can be found at:

<http://video.aol.com/video-detail/gulf-fisherman-its-heartbreaking-/36028814239976077>

**Dwayne:** It looks like fresh oil's been in the grass- black, that's black crude right there. In the last couple of days it's started getting bad up here and this is unbelievable. It's just heart breaking, that it's gotten to this. This is going to die; all, everything you see, this brown, is going to die. We saw this spot on the bank a while ago where the bank's already starting to fall away where the grass is dead. It's gone, once it's gone, it, you can't get it back, it don't just grow back. And boom\*, this, it's already been absorbed, it can't hold no more, it's just sitting in the water.

It's just eerie- like a deep fog, it's real quiet, it's real calm. You don't hear the birds. You don't hear the shrimp pop in the water, you'd hear that that little splash. You'd hear the red fish rolling in a pot in minnows, mullet jumping. You don't hear that.

We need help. I mean if it's an excuse that we don't have enough people to do it, let's get some more people down here. We don't have enough equipment? Then let's get some equipment. But to let it get to this, it's reaching in and pulling everything out of my heart. This is where I live. This is where I make a living. This is how I feed my family.

\*A **containment boom** is a "temporary floating barrier used to contain an oil spill Booms are used to reduce the possibility of polluting shorelines and other resources, and to help make recovery easier. Booms help to concentrate oil in thicker surface layers so that skimmers, vacuums, or other collection methods can be used more effectively. They come in many shapes and sizes, with various levels of effectiveness in different types of water conditions. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boom\\_\(containment\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boom_(containment))

### **BP chief Tony Hayward's speech 17<sup>th</sup> June 2010 – Excerpts**

Full transcript can be found at –

<http://www.ndtv.com/news/world/full-text-of-bp-chief-tony-haywards-speech-32351.php>

Tony: Chairman Stupak, Ranking Member Burgess, members of the Subcommittee. I am Tony Hayward, Chief Executive of BP plc.

The explosion and fire aboard the Deepwater Horizon and the resulting oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico never should have happened – and I am deeply sorry that they did. None of us yet knows why it happened. But whatever the cause, we at BP will do what we can to make certain that an incident like this does not happen again.

Since April 20, I have spent a great deal of my time in the Gulf Coast region and in the incident command center in Houston, and let there be no mistake - I understand how serious this situation is. This is a tragedy: people lost their lives; others were injured; and the Gulf Coast environment and communities are suffering. This is unacceptable, I understand that, and let me be very clear: I fully grasp the terrible reality of the situation.

When I learned that eleven men had lost their lives in the explosion and fire on the Deepwater Horizon, I was personally devastated. Three weeks ago, I attended a memorial service for those men,

and it was a shattering moment. I want to offer my sincere condolences to their friends and families - I can only imagine their sorrow.

My sadness has only grown as the disaster continues. I want to speak directly to the people who live and work in the Gulf region: I know that this incident has profoundly impacted lives and caused turmoil, and I deeply regret that.....

I want to acknowledge the questions that you and the public are rightly asking. How could this happen? How damaging is the spill to the environment? Why is it taking so long to stop the flow of oil and gas into the Gulf?

We don't yet have answers to all these important questions. But I hear the concerns, fears, frustrations - and anger - being voiced across the country. I understand it, and I know that these sentiments will continue until the leak is stopped, and until we prove through our actions that we will do the right thing. Our actions will mean more than words, and we know that, in the end, we will be judged by the quality of our response. Until this happens, no words will be satisfying.

Nonetheless, I am here today because I have a responsibility to the American people to do my best to explain what BP has done, is doing, and will do in the future to respond to this terrible incident. And while we can't undo these tragic events, I give you my word that we will do the right thing. We will not rest until the well is under control, and we will meet all our obligations to clean up the spill and address its environmental and economic impacts.

From the moment I learned of the explosion and fire, I committed the global resources of BP to the response efforts. To be sure, neither I nor the company is perfect. But we are unwavering in our commitment to fulfill all our responsibilities.....

Some of the best minds and the deepest expertise are being brought to bear. With the possible exception of the space program in the 1960s, it is difficult to imagine the gathering of a larger, more technically proficient team in one place in peacetime. And including BP, industry and government resources, more than 27,000 personnel are now engaged in the response in various activities such as booming, skimming, surveying, clean-up operations, wildlife protection and rehabilitation and claims support. In addition, we are helping to train and organize the more than 19,000 citizen volunteers who have come forward to offer their services. The outpouring of support from government, industry, businesses and private citizens has truly been both humbling and inspiring.....

From the beginning, we have been committed to a transparent response. We know the public wants as much information as possible about this unprecedented event, and we continue to do our best to provide it so the public can understand the incident and its impacts.

Our first priority is to stop the flow of oil and secure the well.

....Our efforts to stop the well from the seabed included a number of interventions to the failed BOP, and the 'top kill' procedure. We understand the public's frustration that these approaches did not stop the flow of oil. We, too, were disappointed.....

....We will not rest with our containment efforts until the well is permanently killed. ...

....BP is a "responsible party" under the Oil Pollution Act. This means that federal law requires BP, as one of the working interest owners of Mississippi Canyon 252, to pay to clean up the spill and to compensate for the economic and environmental impacts of the spill. Let me be clear: BP has accepted this responsibility and will fulfill this obligation. We have spent nearly \$1.5 billion so far, and we will not stop until the job is done.....

....The BP claims process is integral to our commitment to do the right thing. To date, BP has already paid out over \$90 million on the more than 56,000 claims that have been submitted. While the initial focus has been on individuals, we are now moving funds on an expedited basis to business owners with nearly \$16 million to be paid out this week to businesses alone....

The question we all want answered is "What caused this tragic accident"?....

.....I understand people want a simple answer about why this happened and who is to blame. The

truth, however, is that this is a complex accident, caused by an unprecedented combination of failures. A number of companies are involved, including BP, and it is simply too early to understand the cause. There is still extensive work to do.....

...We understand the seriousness of the situation. We know the world is watching us. No one will forget the 11 men who lost their lives in the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon. We hear and understand the concerns, frustrations, and fears that have been and will continue to be voiced. I understand that only actions and results, and not mere words, ultimately can give you the confidence you seek. We will be, and deserve to be, judged by our response....

I give my pledge as leader of BP that we will not rest until we stop this well, mitigate the environmental impact of the spill and address economic claims in a responsible manner. No resource available to this company will be spared. We and the entire industry will learn from this terrible event and emerge from it stronger, smarter and safer.

### **Philippe Cousteau dives into the Gulf oil spill**

*This text below is a phonetic transcript of a radio story broadcast by PRI's THE WORLD.*

<http://www.theworld.org/2010/05/27/philippe-cousteau-dives-into-the-gulf-oil-spill/>

**MARCO WERMAN:** I'm Marco Werman, this is The World. Mixed news on the oil disaster in the Gulf, federal officials say BP's so-called top kill plan to plug the gushing well seems to be working. Still, they caution that it's too early to declare the effort a success. Meanwhile, President Obama once again vowed to hold BP accountable for the full cost of the disaster and the clean up and he made it clear that the company is not the one calling the shots in the Gulf.

**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA:** The American people should know that from the moment this disaster began, the federal government has been in charge of the response effort.

**WERMAN:** Whoever is in charge, the disaster in the Gulf looks like it will go down as one of the worst in U.S. History. This week environmentalist Philippe Cousteau, grandson of the legendary Jacques Cousteau, went to the Gulf with a team of divers for a close up look. They dove right into the spill.

**PHILIPPE COUSTEAU:** When we got into the water our worst fears were realized. One of the concerns has been what is happening in the Gulf with the application of these chemical dispersants into the oil and indeed, the oil was not confined to the surface, which was the original goal of applying chemical dispersants. It had permeated the water column down 15, 20 feet and would was over us in these billowing waves, clouds of this red toxic soup in which we found dead fish and we could see dead jellyfish floating through it. It was really a terrible sight. You know, often times it's out of sight, out of mind and no one had done this before. No one had seen what this looks like and what the condition of the water would be. And while we know very little about the effects of these chemicals and the oil in the water, what we do know is that we have put 800,000 gallons of a very toxic chemical into the water column and that it's likely these plumes of dispersed oil and this toxic soup is now distributed from the surface to the bottom and will be spread throughout the Gulf of Mexico and potentially through the Gulf Stream, down the Florida Keys and all the way into the Atlantic.

**WERMAN:** How toxic are those chemical dispersants, just on their own?

**COUSTEAU:** Quite toxic. It attacks red blood cells, it causes nervous system damage and of course the oil itself has other volatile organic compounds and benzene and other things in it that are very toxic to humans and to really any living creature. Long term exposure can cause permanent, really permanent serious damage, which is why we had to take such precautions and we have full hazmat suits when we were diving.

**WERMAN:** You know in 1969 there was a huge oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, although much smaller than the one in the Gulf of Mexico and that environmental disaster helped push then-President Nixon to create the Environmental Protection Agency. Today, there's way more

drilling in the world, spills are much more common and the whole planet is affected. So what is your advice to leaders around the globe about what to do?

**COUSTEAU:** I think at the end of the day what we need to realize is that while there's no way we can get off oil tomorrow, we need to understand that this is a crisis not only because of climate change or ocean acidification which also doesn't get enough attention, but because of these immediate crises that happen from oil, we need to get off oil. That's the bottom line. It's not good for us. Whether you agree or believe in climate change or not, oil has terrible consequences in the health of our environment and in the health of people and our economy. And the lives, in this case, the thousands of lives that rely on the Gulf of Mexico for their livelihood.

**WERMEN:** Do you think that one of the challenges, Philippe Cousteau, of off shore oil spills, and you kind of evoked this earlier, the fact that they are out of sight, out of mind for the vast majority of people on the planet. The affects of them are also out of sight, out of mind, at least in the short term.

**COUSTEAU:** Well, they are. I was down with scientists in Grand Isle, Louisiana two days ago who are so concerned because we don't know how this is going to affect the biological systems in the Gulf of Mexico. This is the time of year when fish larvae are spawning and as these tiny microscopic organisms are floating through the water column, they encounter these toxic chemicals that most likely kill them relatively quickly. And there's grave concern because it's pervasive. It stays in the environment for a very, very long time. We saw oil going into mangroves already, making it into the wetlands, so it is in these coastal habitats, regardless of the chemical dispersant. And once it gets into all these reeds and these grasses and these mangroves, there's no getting it out. It will be there for a very, very long time. I saw tar washing up on the beaches. I dipped my hand into it just to feel it and my hand is still yellow, days later despite all the washing and the soap that I've put onto it because this oil just doesn't go away.

**WERMEN:** Philippe Cousteau, explorer and CEO of Earth Echo International, thank you very much.

**COUSTEAU:** Thank you.

### **Timeline: Gulf of Mexico oil spill -Tue Jun 1, 2010 1:33pm EDT**

Below is a timeline of the spill and its impact:

(Reporting by [Erwin Seba](#) and RosKrasny: Additional writing and editing by David Cutler, London Editorial Reference Unit)

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6503IJ20100601>

**April 20, 2010** - Explosion and fire on Transocean Ltd's drilling rig Deepwater Horizon licensed to BP; 11 workers are killed. The rig was drilling in BP's Macondo project 42 miles southeast of Venice, Louisiana, beneath about 5,000 feet of water and 13,000 feet under the seabed.

**April 22** - The Deepwater Horizon rig, valued at more than \$560 million, sinks and a five mile long oil slick is seen.

**April 25** - The Coast Guard says remote underwater cameras detect the well is leaking 1,000 barrels of crude oil per day. It approves a plan to have remote underwater vehicles activate a blowout preventer and stop leak. Efforts to activate the blowout preventer fail.

**April 28** - The Coast Guard says the flow of oil is 5,000 barrels per day (bpd) (210,000 gallons/795,000 liters) -- five times greater than first estimated. A controlled burn is held on the giant oil slick.

**April 29** - Obama pledges "every single available resource," including the U.S. military, to contain the spreading spill.-- Obama also says BP is responsible for the cleanup. Louisiana declares state of emergency due to the threat to the state's natural resources.

**April 30** - An Obama aide says no drilling will be allowed in new areas, as the president had recently

proposed, until the cause of the Deepwater Horizon accident is known.-- BP Chairman Tony Hayward says the company takes full responsibility for the spill and would pay all legitimate claims and the cost of the clean-up.

**May 2** - Obama visits the Gulf Coast to see clean-up efforts first hand. U.S. officials close areas affected by the spill to fishing for an initial period of 10 days. BP starts to drill a relief well alongside the failed well, a process that could take two to three months to complete.

**May 5** - A barge begins towing a 98-ton containment chamber to the site of the leak. BP says one of the three leaks has been shut off by capping a valve, but that would not cut the amount of oil gushing out.

**May 6** - Oil washes ashore on the Chandeleur Islands off the Louisiana coast, uninhabited barrier islands that are part of the Breton National Wildlife Refuge.

**May 7** - BP tries to lower a containment dome over the leak, but the 100-tonne device was rendered useless by a slush of frozen hydrocarbons that clogged it. -- A fishing ban for federal waters off the Gulf is modified, expanded and extended to May 17.

**May 9** - BP says it might try to plug the undersea leak by pumping materials such as shredded up tires and golf balls into the well at high pressure, a method called a "junk shot."

**May 11/12** - Executives from BP, Transocean and Halliburton appear at congressional hearings in Washington. Senate Energy committee chairman Jeff Bingaman says that it appeared that the explosion on the rig was due to a "cascade of errors, technical, human and regulatory. The executives blame each other's companies.

**May 14** - Obama slams companies involved in the spill, criticizing them for a "ridiculous spectacle" of publicly trading blame over the accident in his sternest comments yet.

**May 16** - BP succeeds in inserting a tube into the leaking well and capturing some oil and gas.

**May 18** - The U.S. nearly doubles a no-fishing zone in waters affected by the oil, extending it to 19 percent of U.S. waters in the Gulf.

**May 19** - The first heavy oil from the spill sloshes ashore in fragile Louisiana marshlands and part of the mess enters a powerful current that could carry it to Florida and beyond.

**May 26** - A "top kill" manoeuvre starts involving pumping heavy fluids and other material into the well shaft to stifle the flow, then sealing it with cement.

**May 28** - Obama tours the Louisiana Gulf coast on his second visit - "I am the president and the buck stops with me," he said.-- BP CEO Tony Hayward flies over the Gulf. BP says that the cost of the disaster so far is \$930 million. May 29 - BP says the complex "top kill" manoeuvre to plug the well has failed, crushing hopes for a quick end to the largest oil spill in U.S. history already in its 40th day.

**May 31** - The U.S. government and BP are warning that the blown-out oil well may not be stopped until August as the company prepares a new attempt to capture leaking crude. **June 1** - BP shares plunge 17 percent in London trading, wiping \$23 billion off its market value, on news its latest attempt to plug the well has failed.

## Using the stimulus

In groups of 4 or 5 students the students will create a scene based on the stimulus material about the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The scene will explore the issue by using dialogue taken directly from the text. The scene will be presentational in style, where the audience can be directly addressed. The scene can take on the form of a monologue with accompanying freeze frames or can it can include lines from various characters. The scene needs to be about 3-5 minutes in length.

It is important to discuss that while verbatim theatre is a good way of exploring social issues as the form gives voice to those involved in a particular situation, the meaning of the verbatim material can be altered by the way it is used to communicate the story. The playwright can manipulate the material that may change the context and meaning

completely. This raises the issue of the need for cultural sensitivity and empathy when privileged with the task of communicating the words of others.

The groups need to follow the these steps to create their scene

- 1) As a group, read the stimulus material and highlight any lines, statements or moments that stand out
- 2) Decide if there is a particular perspective they would like to focus on e.g.: the struggle of the victims of the oils spill; the environmental impact; the government's reaction; who is to blame?; How to avoid a situation like this in the future.
- 3) The group then needs to consider the following questions to help them form the piece
  - a. What is the purpose of the piece
  - b. What do I want it to say?
  - c. How would I like the audience to respond?
  - d. How will the audience actually respond?
  - e. What are my biases on this topic according to my values, beliefs, gender, age etc.?
- 4) From the stimulus material, draw out the key lines from the various speeches that will be effective in achieving the purpose identified in the previous step.
- 5) These lines now need to be weaved together to create a scene with a clear structure that an audience can follow. You can choose to create a monologue or establish some characters who represent the key people involved. Limit the number of characters to the number in your group.
- 6) Once you have established the structure and script of the scene, work on its presentation. Freeze frames and movement pieces can accompany the dialogue to communicate the key themes, issues and images.

## Example Scene

*The stage is empty. The narrator enters, followed by the actors who create a freeze frame that represents a feeling of despair, with each new character, one of the actors leaves the freeze frame until all the characters are standing at the front of stage.*

**Narrator:** Millions of gallons (liters) of oil have poured into the Gulf of Mexico since an April 20 blast on the Deepwater Horizon rig triggered a huge spill, soiling 100 miles of coastline, threatening some of the United States' richest fisheries and endangering a fragile ecosystem.

**Dwayne:** This is going to die; all, everything you see, this brown, is going to die.

**Obama:** Good evening. As we speak, our nation faces a multitude of challenges...And tonight, I've returned from a trip to the Gulf Coast to speak with you about the battle we're waging against an oil spill that is assaulting our shores and our citizens.

- Dwayne:** In the last couple of days it's started getting bad up here and this is unbelievable. It's just heart breaking, that it's gotten to this.
- Obama:** Already, this oil spill is the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced...
- Dwayne:** It's just eerie- like a deep fog, it's real quiet, it's real calm. You don't hear the birds. You don't hear the shrimp pop in the water, you'd hear that that little splash. You'd hear the red fish rolling in a pot in minnows, mullet jumping. You don't hear that.
- Obama:** But make no mistake: We will fight this spill with everything we've got for as long it takes. We will make BP pay for the damage their company has caused.
- Hayward:** I am Tony Hayward, Chief Executive of BP plc... None of us yet knows why it happened. But I hear the concerns, fears, frustrations - and anger - being voiced across the country. I understand it, and I know that these sentiments will continue until the leak is stopped, and until we prove through our actions that we will do the right thing. Our actions will mean more than words, and we know that, in the end, we will be judged by the quality of our response.
- Dwayne:** We need help. I mean if it's an excuse that we don't have enough people to do it, let's get some more people down here. We don't have enough equipment? Then let's get some equipment.
- Obama:** And we will do whatever's necessary to help the Gulf Coast and its people recover from this tragedy.
- Dwayne:** But to let it get to this, it's reaching in and pulling everything out of my heart. This is where I live. This is where I make a living. This is how I feed my family.

### **Post show**

*April's Fool* raises many issues including substance abuse, peer pressure, grief, family relationships, friendship and the consequences of the decision we make. The post-show workshops and activities are aimed to assist students in processing their reactions and understanding of the issues raised.

### **Boal's Forum Theatre**

It is important that students are able to explore their reactions to the issues and events of the play in a proactive way to allow them to be able to decide how they would handle

themselves when faced with any of the challenges presented in the play and in the broader perspective of their daily lives. In the post-show workshops, a version of Augusto Boal's Forum theatre will be used to allow students to explore options in scenarios inspired by events in *April's Fool*.

Forum theatre developed as a part of Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" where the audience members or 'spec-actors' can stop the action and suggest alternative actions to resolve an issue in the scene or can replace an actor in the scene. The form was originally developed to look for alternatives in oppressive situations. The form is an effective way to develop empathy as the students learn from each other's perspectives.

You can find more about Forum theatre:

<http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org/en/index.php?useFlash=1>

Or in Augusto Boal's books:  
*Games for Actors and Non-Actors*  
*Theatre of the Oppressed*

## **Activities**

If you are not having a post-show workshop there are activities that you can do with your students.

### **Warm up activities**

#### **Name and Gesture-**

In a circle, each person says their name with an accompanying action. The rest of the circle then repeats the name and action before moving onto the next person

#### **Bomb and Shield-**

The group spreads out around the room. Each person then chooses two people, without the others knowing, in different areas of the room, one becomes the bomb and the other the shield. The group then begins moving around the room with the aim being to always keep the shield in between you and the bomb.

#### **Columbian Hypnosis-**

In pairs, one person becomes the leader and holds their hand or finger about 20cm away from the follower face. The follower then must move as directed without losing the 20cm gap. The pair then swap roles.

## Discussion and Forum Theatre

The scenes used for forum theatre activities can be drawn from issues brought up in discussion. The scenes are not to be taken from the play directly but rather be inspired by or linked through context or theme, here are some suggestions:

- A friend tells you something important that they want to keep to yourself but you are concerned about them and wonder if you should tell someone
- You can see a friend is about to make a decision that could end up hurting them or others, what would you do?
- Things are difficult at home, you're arguing with friends and you're not sure how to deal with things

In small groups, the scenes are improvised and prepared. When the group shows the rest of the class, other members of the class can stop the action to suggest changes or perform the scene differently. The facilitator becomes the 'joker' who helps negotiate the changes.

### Post Show Verbatim activities

In small groups the students can interview each other about their reaction to the play. They can ask questions such as;

- What did you like about the play?
- How did it affect you?
- What would you say was the most powerful bit?
- Did you learn anything or has it altered the way you think about yourself/others/drugs etc?
- If you ever see a situation like this happening in yours or a friend's life, what would you do?

Then using the responses to these answers and the process from the pre-show workshop, the students can then devise a scene that explores their reaction. This again promotes empathy as they may have to present opinions that are different from their own.

## Information on Substance Abuse

Further information on the effects of illicit substances can be found here

[http://www.health.qld.gov.au/atod/drug\\_info/illicit\\_drugs.asp](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/atod/drug_info/illicit_drugs.asp)

<http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/drugs>

or at your GP, ATOD centre, school guidance counsellor.

## Where to find help

There are numerous services available to help with overcoming illicit drug use as well as where to go to talk about any issues troubling you

<http://au.reachout.com/find/getting-help/who-can-help-you>

<http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/>



Left to Right: Kathryn Marquet, Barbara Lowing, Jessica Harm, Allen Laverty and Sam Clark.

Photo: Focalpoint Photography, Hardy Althaus