

barbican



Photo © Ben Westwood from Vivienne Westwood, V&A Publications 2004

The School For Scandal

By Richard Brinsley Sheridan

Teaching Resource

Contents	Page
Introduction	2
The Author: Richard Brinsley Sheridan's life and works	3
The Production: <i>The School for Scandal</i>	4
Context: 18th Century England	6
– Politics	
– The role of women	
– Theatre	
Interview with the Director: Deborah Warner	8
Assistant Director's Rehearsal Diary	9
Cast interviews: Leo Bill and Gary Sefton	10
Practical exercises	12
Bibliography & further reading & useful links	14
Planning your visit	15

Introduction

This teaching resource is intended as an introduction and follow up to seeing the Barbican's production of *The School for Scandal*. We have included background material on the play and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, information on the creative process and production and interviews with the cast and creative team. We hope that it is used as a resource to give insight to some of the ideas and approaches central to this production. There are questions and exercises throughout to stimulate discussion and practical work of your own.

Aisling Zambon (writer)

About Creative Learning

The Barbican are working together with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama to create the international arts and learning centre of tomorrow. There are opportunities for you to get more involved with our world-class exhibitions, performances and events, whatever your age or previous experience.

For more information, visit www.barbican.org.uk or email creative.learning@barbican.org.uk



Rehearsal image © Anthony Luvera

Cast from the left to right: Christopher Logan, Leo Bill, Miles Yekinni, Gary Sefton, Joseph Kloska, Will Irvine and Jonathan Delaney Tynan

The Author: Richard Brinsley Sheridan's Life and Works

Early life

Dramatist and statesman Richard Brinsley Sheridan was born in Dublin in 1751. His father was an actor, and his mother a playwright. He was educated in Dublin, and at Harrow; after which he became a student of the Middle Temple.

The family moved to Bath in 1770-1771 where Sheridan met 16 year old Elizabeth Ann Linley, a successful singer. The pair eloped to France and married secretly in 1772, and on their return Sheridan fought two duels with one of her persistent admirers. Initially Sheridan's father in law did not approve of him, but they later ended up working closely together.

The playwright

Much of his life in Bath can be found in his first comedy, *The Rivals*, a satire produced at the Covent Garden Theatre on 17th January, 1775. Although its premiere was a failure, after rewriting, its subsequent performances met with great acclaim. The play mocked the pretensions of Bath society and includes Mrs. Malaprop, possibly his most famous character. The next few years of Sheridan's dramatic career were marked with success. His second play, *St. Patrick's Day, or the Scheming Lieutenant*, in May 1775, was a short lively farce. This was followed in November by the extremely successful comic opera *The Duenna*. This was a family affair; produced with his father, brother and brother in law, and his first son was born around this time. A year later, Sheridan became manager of one of the country's Royal theatres, by purchasing his share of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. This was a great achievement and financial responsibility. In February 1777 he produced his adaptation of Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, under the title of *A Trip to Scarborough*, which was not very well received.

The School for Scandal premiered on the 8th of May 1777 and was a huge success. Initially the Lord Chamberlain refused to license the play, but changed his decision on the basis of his personal friendship with Sheridan. The Drury Lane's leading actress Mrs. Abington, who had played Miss Hoyden in *A Trip to Scarborough* and Lydia Languish in *The Rivals*, played Lady Teazle. Up to the very last moment before the first performance Sheridan was rewriting the play; 'As the ink of the last full stop dried, he wrote underneath, 'Finished at last, thank God, RB Sheridan', to which the Prompter appended his own heart felt 'Amen, W. Hopkins' (A Portrait of Sheridan, by Stanley Ayling).

The play represented a new modern emerging culture; one of social climbing, the importance of reputation and appearance in urban city life. This comedy of manners explored themes of hypocrisy and false sentiment, revealing corruption.

The critic Horace Walpole wrote: 'To my great astonishment, there were more parts performed admirably...than I almost ever saw in any play...It seemed a marvelous resurrection of the stage.' (A Portrait of Sheridan, by Stanley Ayling). It has since been universally regarded as a master piece. Until the end of the century it was performed more than any other play in London. Despite its popularity Sheridan did not allow it to be printed during his life time.

By the late 1770's Sheridan had become regarded as one of the leading playwrights of his day. At this time Sheridan turned his attention to politics, he wrote one more play *The Critic*, a short farce produced in October 1779. *The School for Scandal* continued to attract larger audiences than any other play every time it was performed. His only other completed play during the next 36 years of his life was *Pizarro*, an adaptation of a German melodrama, in 1799. This was a tragedy about the Spanish conquest of Peru, which perhaps appealed to audiences at a time when Britain was threatened with invasion by France.

Member of Parliament

In 1776 Sheridan met Charles Fox, the leader of the Radical Whigs in the House of Commons. He entered Parliament for Stafford in 1780 and the next 32 years of his career were spent in politics rather than the theatre. He did however remain involved with the management of the Drury Lane, since MP's had no salary at that time, and this was where most of his income came from.

His first speech in parliament was to defend himself against the charge of bribery, it was well received and he soon became distinguished as a powerful speaker on the side of opposition. When Lord Rockingham became Prime Minister in 1782, Sheridan was made one of the Under-Secretaries for Foreign Affairs; and in the following coalition ministry, headed by William Pitt, was appointed Secretary to the Treasury.

Sheridan's speeches during the trial and impeachment of Warren Hastings (Governor-General of India) during 1777-1778, were acknowledged by his contemporaries as among the greatest delivered in that generation. In 1794 Sheridan defended the French Revolution against its critics in the House of Commons.

When the Whig Party came into power in 1806, Sheridan became the Treasurer of the Navy; but seated on the opposition side of the house, he had much less influence and power. After the death of Charles James Fox, who was one of the most prominent Whig politicians and who was at that time British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and a very close colleague, Sheridan succeeded his chief in the representation of Westminster. When the Prince of Wales became regent in 1811 Sheridan defended the Prince against his political enemies, whilst at the same time maintaining his independence as he hoped to take power after the Prince ascended the throne. At the general election of 1807 he stood again for Westminster and was defeated, he accepted the offer from The Prince of Wales to be member of Ilchester, which was considered a corrupt and rather lower status position.

Sheridan had a prominent and distinguished career in politics as a Whig, a Liberal and supporter of freedoms and rights. Most of his period as a Whig was spent in opposition and he refused to accept positions for money which would compromise his independence. He spoke in favour of the abolition of the slave trade and was active in Irish affairs, supporting the rights of Catholics. He retired from parliament some time before his death.

After the loss of his first wife in 1792, he married again in 1795 in his early forties to 19 year old Esther Ogle, daughter of the Dean of Winchester.

Sheridan's last years were harassed by debt and poverty. He died on the 7th of July, 1816 and was buried with great ceremony in Poets Corner in Westminster Abbey.

The Production: The School for Scandal

Cast

Lady Sneerwell **Matilda Ziegler**
Snake/Sir Harry **Gary Sefton**
Joseph Surface **Aidan McArdle**
Maria **Cara Horgan**
Mrs Candour **Vicki Pepperdine**
Crabtree **Stephen Kennedy**
Sir Benjamin Backbite **Harry Melling**
Sir Peter Teazle **Alan Howard**
Rowley **John McEnery**
Lady Teazle **Katherine Parkinson**
Sir Oliver Surface **John Shrapnel**
Moses **Adam Gillen**
Trip **Christopher Logan**
Charles Surface **Leo Bill**
Careless **Joseph Kloska**

Lady Sneerwell's Servant **Anthony Mark Barrow**
Sir Peter's Servant **Miles Yekinni**
Joseph's Servant **Jonathan Delaney Tynan**
Lady Teazle's Maid **Laura Caldwell**
Gentleman **Will Joseph Irvine**
Understudy – Sir Peter Teazle **John Peters**

Creative Team

Directed by **Deborah Warner**
Design **Jeremy Herbert**
Lighting Design **Jean Kalman**
Music **Mel Mercier**
Sound Design **Christopher Shutt**
Costume Design **Kandis Cook**
Company Movement **Joyce Henderson**
Assistant Director **Sophie Motley**
Associate Lighting Designer
Mike Gunning
Casting **Joyce Nettles**

Production Manager **Simon Bourne**
Costume Supervisor **Binnie Bowerman**
Video Creation **Steven Williams**
Props Supervisors **Chris Marcus and Jonathan Hall for Marcus Hall Props Ltd**
Wig Supervisor **Darren Ware**
Assistant Wig Supervisor **Pav Stalmach**
Voice **Emma Woodvine**
Songwriter **Duke Special**
Rehearsal Photography **Anthony Luvera**
Production Photography **Neil Libbert**

Themes:

Truth & Lies
Authenticity
Sex
Marriage
Money
Death
Scandal & Reputation
Gossip
Sentiment



Anthony Mark Barrow

Questions

- Identify the conflicts in the play. This will reveal the themes which bind the story together.
- Identify the themes within the story and for each theme find a scene from the play which most illustrates it.
- *The School for Scandal* is a comedy of manners, satirizing the social values, virtues, and vices of its time. Is there an equivalent in today's world to Lady Sneerwell's School for Scandal?
- In the play marriage and money are connected – how do you think social values have changed since the 18th century?
- Consider the money lending in the play. What are the relationships between debtor and creditor? What point do you think is being made about money lending?
- In small groups discuss what a contemporary comedy of manners would look like? What aspects of today's values would you choose to satirize? Where would the play take place? What would the characters be named?

The world of the play

In our production there are three distinct worlds: Sir Peter Teazle and his family, Lady Sneerwell and the gossips and Charles Surface and his party boys. We have had fun in rehearsals exploring all these worlds, working with the text and doing improvisations. For example when the actors and director were creating the world of Charles Surface; they imagined him to be a trendy, promiscuous young guy, living in a squat in East London, taking drugs and partying. The actors improvised a party scene at Charles flat, to help them imagine the type of world Charles was part of.

Activities

- Make a collage of images taken from magazines and newspapers which create a picture of the world of the play – current gossip, celebrity, lifestyle and fashion
- Draw up a list of the prominent attitudes and values within the play, and compare these with the values of our own society today.

Language

Plays are written to be performed. Sheridan's use of wit has been highly and widely praised by audiences and critics. In the 18th century 'wit' meant verbal brilliance, which was often used to reveal truths. In *The School for Scandal* the characters own words reveal their true natures. Mrs Candour always claims to be wishing; to "think the best" whilst she actually relishes the worst: "By the by, I hope tis not true that your brother is absolutely ruined?" (act 1, scene 1).

The language of repartee is also used through out the play, particularly in the arguments between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle.

The actors in our production have had the challenge of bringing alive an 18th century play in the 21st century. The actors and director have worked to 'open' up the text and allow it to breathe, so that a modern audience who may have never seen or read the play will be engaged and entertained by it and able to relate to the characters and their various predicaments .

Glossary:

Bate

hold back

Diffidence

doubt

Policy

skill in managing affairs, pragmatism

Deep

extravagant

Genius

nature

Beaux

young man of fashion

Quean

a boisterous, impudent woman/ harlot or hussy

Importunity

an urgent, often immoral, request

Libertine

an immoral, extravagant person

Modish

fashionable

Penurious

stingy; poor

Traduce

misrepresent; spread malicious misinformation about someone, slande

Coquette

flirtatious woman

Coxcomb

conceited showoff

An exercise from the rehearsal room to explore the language of the play:

1. This exercise uses 18th Century expressions from the text and takes the form of the game 'Zip, Zap, Boing,' which the actors know well.
2. The group stands in a circle and passes the word "Pshaw" around the circle to the right.
3. The actors are encouraged to really enjoy using the word in as many different expressions as possible – slow, fast, languorous, anything but in an 18th Century manner.
4. Then the word "Egad" is added, which blocks a 'Pshaw' and forces the person who sent 'Pshaw' to send it back the other way around the circle. Again the actors are encouraged to experiment using the word "Egad" in any way they want.
5. Once the game has been established, the phrase "What the plague" is used to pass to someone across the circle.
6. Then the word "Zounds" is added, which can only be used in response to "Pshaw" (never to "What the plague"), which causes the person receiving it to duck, sending it over by one.

Questions

- Make a list of all the characters names in *The School for Scandal*. What assumptions do you make about these people on the basis of their names?
- Discuss the use of witty language through out the play. How are words and dialogue used for comic effect?
- How does the use of double meanings in the 'screen scene', Act 4, Scene 3, add to the comedy?

Context: 18th Century England

Politics

Sheridan lived through politically turbulent times, Britain was at war from the time of 1776, when he first had success as a playwright with *The Rivals*, to the end of his life. For much of that time he was in Parliament trying to gain or maintain political power.

Sheridan declared he wanted to “*Keep politics out of the theatre*” (from a letter he wrote in 1815). In a speech Sheridan made in the House of Commons in December 1795 he was reported to have stated:

“For his own part, he deemed a theatre no fit place for politics, nor would he think much of the man who should wish to introduce them into stage representation.” (The School for Scandal York Notes Advanced)

Sheridan wrote about the middle and upper classes, highlighting the follies of society. All his characters appear to be affluent and their concerns are of fashion, public reputation, marriage, love and romance.

London was expanding rapidly as the industrial revolution gathered momentum and trade increased to the expanding British Empire. In the play *Sir Oliver* made his fortune as ‘nabob’ in India (derived from the Urdu word for ruler). India at this time was largely under the control of the East India Company, which effectively governed the country. There is no mention in the play of the questionable origins of *Sir Oliver*’s fortune, though Sheridan himself was involved in the impeachment of Warren Hastings for abusing his power over the Indian population.

The Whigs were a British parliamentary party who contested power with the rival Tories from the 1680s

to the 1850s. The Whigs’ origin lay in constitutional monarchism and opposition to absolute rule. Charles James Fox stood as leader in 1784, competing against the governing party of the new Tories under William Pitt. By the middle of the 18th century, the Whig Party had to sustain charges of corruption and elitism. This last was perhaps the more serious of the two for a party that had modeled itself as the voice of the people.

Sheridan, a very close ally of Charles James Fox, was an influential Whig politician. At this time new ideas about freedom were gaining ground through out Europe and America. The French Revolution of 1789-1799 was a crucial influence on British intellectual, philosophical, and political life. Sheridan largely supported the desire of the American colonies for independence. He also argued that the French people had the right to form their own form of government without outside interference. He was also involved in gaining rights for Catholics, which was not a popular position at the time, and was a strong supporter of an uncensored press and argued against attempts to use the libel laws to prevent criticism of the government.



Above, cast from the left to right: Will Irvine, Alan Howard and Katherine Parkinson

The Role of Women

In our production of *The School for Scandal*, women are portrayed as modern, sexually open and without obvious restrictions on their sexuality. The world the characters inhabit is one of relative freedom due to their class, status, wealth and lifestyle.

However, for ordinary women in the 18th century there was little progression. The majority of women were literally the property of their families or husbands. Upon marriage, a woman automatically became the property of her husband, as did everything she owned and earned. Under the terms of the marriage contract a husband promised to support and protect his wife, in return for her promise to serve and obey him. Marriage gave a woman her status and identity and was often a woman's only way of having a recognised position in society. The convention of marriages arranged by parents was still widely accepted.

The expectation of a woman's sexual behaviour was to be modest and controlled. Sex outside of marriage, and therefore without the intention of procreation, was looked down upon. Unlike today, there were no easily accessible secure methods of birth control, so women had much less sexual freedom than they do now.

There were very few jobs that were accessible for women, which gave very few choices in life other than marriage, as being unmarried would generally mean low social and economic status.

As they had little access to the professions, education was generally considered unimportant for women, who were expected to learn the tasks involved in bringing up children and house keeping, but aspirations to study academic or intellectual subjects were dismissed. Girls from well off families went to school but it was felt important for them to learn 'accomplishments' like embroidery and music rather than academic subjects.

In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft's influential book *A Vindication Of the Rights of Women*, demanding equal

rights with men was published. Her book argued that middle class women were being encouraged to seek 'pleasure as the main purpose of existence' to the detriment of their intellect and freedom.

The School for Scandal as a comedy of manners gives us a view into the behaviours of society of that time, revealing attitudes towards youth, old age and women, particularly in regards to their intelligence, independence, and sexuality.

In 1896 George Bernard Shaw reviewed a production of *The School for Scandal* criticising: '*The women in the play are set apart and regarded as absolutely outside the region of free judgment in which men act.*' He continued '*The School for Scandal dates almost as badly as The Taming of the Shrew*'

(*School for Scandal*, York Notes Advanced)

However, the women in Sheridan's play are written as importantly as the male characters, but their roles and restrictions reflect society's moral codes and values at the time.

Our production is not intended to examine the role of 18th century women, but to bring all the characters alive today. It is important for our production to appeal and relate to a modern audience and translate the characters' lifestyles to those that they could be in 2011.

Theatre

Audiences

By today's standards eighteenth century theatre audiences were large and of mixed class.

Theatres were noisy and unruly; the audience expressed their reactions by hissing, laughing and crying and audience discontent could even become violent. Drury Lane was ruined by riots five times between 1743 and 1776.

Critics in Sheridan's time noticed similarities with English restoration drama and French satiric dramatists such as Molière. Sheridan's satire invites the audience to laugh at characteristics and vices they would have recognised in their own society, and actors would have worn similar costumes to the audience's own clothes. Audiences were less accepting of lax moral standards, which perhaps explains Sheridan's avoidance of explicit sexual misconduct in *The School for Scandal*. Although this is implied when Lady Teazle visits Joseph alone in his library act 1v scene 3.

Comedy of Manners

Sheridan was writing in a tradition known as the comedy of manners, which had previously flourished during the Restoration period. Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*, 1773) wrote plays that revived and renewed the comedy of manners genre.

This genre deals with the relationships and interests of characters in an upper class society, and a lot of its comic effect relies on the wit of the dialogue. Marriage is a frequent subject and there is little depth of characterization, but the use of stock character types. Sheridan uses elements of burlesque, including the identification of character types such as Lady Sneerwell, Backbite and Candour.

The origins of the comedy of manners can be traced back to Molière's seventeenth-century French comedies and to the 'humours' comedy of Ben Jonson, and certain characteristics can be found as far back as

ancient Greek plays. The comedy of manners lapsed after Sheridan's time until it was revived at the end of the 19th century by Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, both, like Sheridan, Irish by birth.

Interview with the Director: Deborah Warner

What inspired you to direct *The School for Scandal*? I was looking for a play that would present me with an entirely new set of challenges and prompt me to make a new piece of work. I've never tackled a play from the Restoration period before. To some degree this is quite a neglected area of drama and I thought it might be both exciting and challenging (it is!) to try to bring this masterpiece to a whole new audience.

What do you hope the audience will experience? An exciting and engaging evening of theatre. I believe theatre makers have an obligation to make theatre exciting.

How do you go about creating an ensemble in the rehearsal room? I spend the first week or two working with the whole company, experiencing multiple readings of the play and working together as a group. I work together with Joyce Henderson – a movement specialist - on various exercises and theatre games. We mess about and we play hard and we learn as much as we can about each other and the play.

What challenges has working on this play presented? The actors have found the language very difficult. To be honest I was not expecting this, as on the page it does not seem as difficult as, say, Shakespeare or the Jacobean writers. Unlike Shakespeare there are probably only a handful of words you might need to look up in a dictionary, but the syntax is alien and challenging. The cast have found it very hard to learn and it is very difficult to rehearse the play without the fluency that memory allows.

How have you worked with the actors and text to open up the language of the play? We have worked hard on the meaning and in keeping the energy terrifically high. This is a society of people who lived and died by their wit and their words. They are brilliant wordsmiths and their humour is of language.

In rehearsal you have identified three distinct worlds in the play – how have you explored these worlds with the actors?

The three worlds are Sir Peter Teazle and his family, Lady Sneerwell and the gossips and Charles and his party boys. Sir Peter's world is "old-school" with old values and old money – tasteful, a bit dusty and perhaps a little old-fashioned. The gossips are almost a bit brassy, certainly glittery and rather more contemporary in their fashion, tastes and appetites. Charles is a modern boy – almost living in a squat and partying hard with loud music.

What do you see as the central themes of the play? It deals with authenticity versus inauthenticity; lies versus truth; shallowness versus depth, and sex, money and death.



Above from the left to right: Harry Melling and Deborah Warner

Post show questions for discussion:

- What were your expectations of the play before you saw it?
- How did you feel at the end of the play?
- Which character did you have most empathy for and why?

Assistant Director's Rehearsal Diary

Exercises taken from the workshops run by Joyce Henderson

Overview of the early rehearsal period

During the first half of the rehearsal period, we did a lot of exercises specifically designed to allow actors to 'open up'; to communicate and engage with each other openly and begin to work as an ensemble company. Other exercises focused on text work and helping the actors get to grips with the particular language of the play.

We also did thought and sense memory exercises, exploring the primary ideas and themes behind the production. Two of the major themes in the play we have worked on are: the master/servant relationship and the notion of a society obsessed with fashion, gossip and wit.

Exercises from the rehearsal room

Warm-up: The morning rehearsal session started with some movement based games: 'Dodge Ball,' and 'Tag'. We then did a group activity, where we stood in a circle and each person massaged the neck and shoulders of the person in front.

Exercise exploring the relationship between the master and the servant:

1. The actors get into pairs. One takes on the role of 'Master', the other of 'Servant'. Servant carries a chair behind Master, and whenever the Master stops and begins to sit, the servant places the chair for them.

2. In the next stage of this exercise everyone in the room playing Masters sit down and begin talking to each other. Servants are not allowed to speak or interact with each other.
3. Following this, the Servant continues to follow the Master around the room. The Master orders the Servant to do something. The Servant says "yes" but does not complete the task.
4. This continues for a few minutes, then the director asks the Servants to allow themselves to explode; expressing all their frustration for being asked to do the task, and then to do it. After a little while of this, the Servant is asked to hold all the frustration inside, not demonstrating it at all, but still do the task they have been ordered to do.

Exercise to explore the theme of fashion:

This exercise helped with exploring the world of Lady Sneerwell and the scandal school.

We wanted to look specifically at haute couture fashion, and how a show off or 'peacock' behaves on stage in front of an audience.

1. The actors were all asked to bring in a piece of fashion that they considered wonderful (it didn't actually have to be).
2. They were asked to take a piece of another actor's fashion, and play the game 'Grandmother's footsteps' at the same time as trying to get their own piece of fashion back.
3. This generated into the 'Grandmother' being able to ask the players what they were wearing and the more fabulous they made their fashionable garment sound, the more likely they were to stay in the game, because if 'Grandmother' did not like their garment, they are sent back to the starting line.



Alan Howard and Katherine Parkinson

Cast Interviews: Leo Bill & Gary Sefton

Leo Bill (*Charles Surface*)

How have you found rehearsals so far?

Deborah's way of working is quite different to what I'm used to. Usually I do a lot of research and a lot of background history stuff, and then start work practically. Whereas Deborah does it the other way round, whereby you get on your feet, explore and find things, and fill in the gaps as you go along. It is a much more spontaneous process.

Tell us about Charles' and his world in *The School for Scandal*, specifically in our production?

Ok, story wise; Charles lives in this family house that he's taken from his brother, and at the moment in rehearsals it's basically a party house with raucous drinking. They've lost everything, so the house is incredibly sparse, and he has a sort of selective group of people that still party with him, but the party's are becoming pretty rubbish. The world we've created for Charles feels like a weird universe, where it is 18th century, but the way we party feels very modern.

His is very different to the other worlds in our production, of Sir Peter Teazle and Lady Sneerwell. When he enters these other worlds and scenes in the play, it feels like he is going into another time and makes them seem old fashioned. To him, everyone seems so stuck, where as he is free and easy. He has troubles, but feels he may as well just enjoy life.

What ideas have you been exploring in rehearsals? Deep down I think Charles is still a child that didn't have a family. In his world it's like a kids' birthday party every day, but there are drugs and alcohol involved. It's still very light, very fun. When we were trying out ideas, we did go down that Pete Doherty route, but we've since decided his world is fun rather than life threatening.

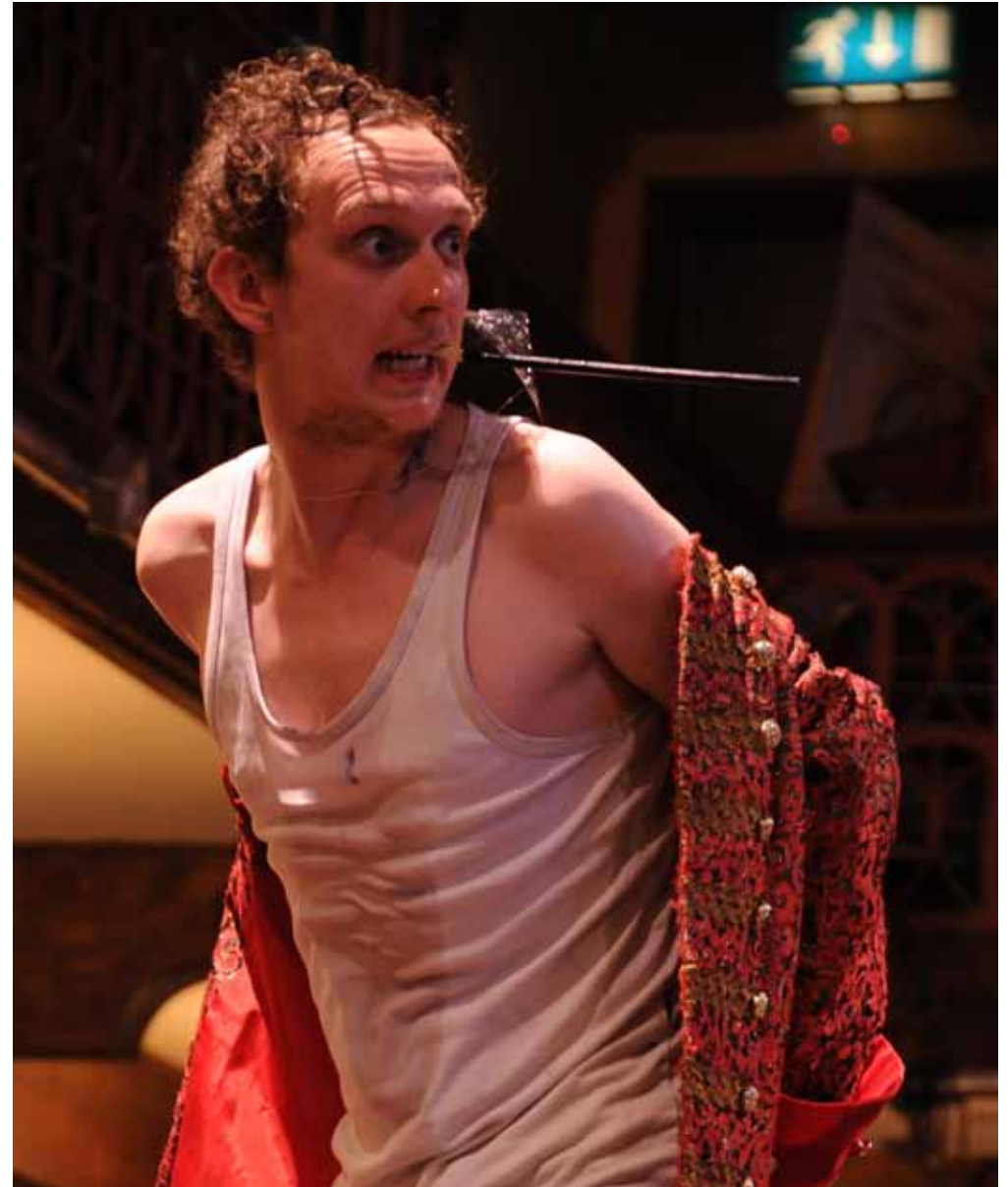
What do you think drives Charles? What drives him is having a good time and having parties, yet that is coming from a place of distress and avoidance. His problems propel him into the opposite room. It is also very important to him that everyone is happy, that's a big driving point; to please people.

Is there anything specific you have done to help you find your character? Working with Deborah to find Charles has meant being very open and receptive to what is happening in the rehearsal room, rather than going away and working out what Charles is like as a character on my own. It's been trial and error, exploring using props and responding to what other characters are doing.

I started using a long cigarette holder that has somehow become a character tool – its now almost like a child's dummy. Using music in rehearsals has been quite useful, whether we've gone with dirty sexy rock, or electro pop, or recently we've moved onto stuff by *The Pogues*. I put together a playlist of tunes for Charles, which are all quite boisterous and wild. Then the other day, I listened to the wrong playlist on my ipod; they were really sad piano tunes, that suddenly reminded me that Charles' boisterous playfulness comes from a place of sadness. So music has been a huge thing to help me find Charles' character.

What does he learn throughout the play?

If anything he learns that the hypocrisy he thought existed does actually exist. And I guess he learns very slowly that there might be more to life than just getting drunk and partying all the time and that maybe there's a period coming up where he is about to grow up. There are glimmers that he may be able to take the leap from being a child into being a man.



Leo Bill

Gary Sefton (*Snake and Sir Toby*)

How would describe Snake? Driven, ruthless, at times naïve, he thinks he knows everything but doesn't always. He's also ambitious and lonely. He bookends the play; he starts the scandal in motion.

What kind of work have you done to create the company ensemble?

We started off working with Joyce (the movement director) doing games that force you to work together as a unit. Games that you might even play in a playground, I think they're unashamedly childish some of them. It sounds a bit pretentious, but you almost learn to breathe and move together as a company.

The ensemble work we've done is starting to pay off in some of the bigger scenes. It's given me a better awareness of what's going on around me and helped me to serve the scene. Which is my next stage; I've done all the invention, now I've got to serve the scene.

Today in rehearsals I've started to feel things falling into place, I'm starting to sense the bigger picture. Ensemble exercises help you to create a map of the work.

How have you found the language of the play?

I find the language really difficult, I'll be totally honest. I've had to go right back to basics. For my scenes, I've actually spent a whole day literally looking up the meaning of every other word, even if I think I know what it means, I've looked it up so I can get a better understanding. My character's language is all about scandals, affairs and contracts. So you kind of stub your toe on it at first because you think you know what it means until you find out more.

Like Shakespearean language you have to be muscular with it, I don't think I'm anywhere near it, but I think I have an idea of what energy it requires. We've talked about it in rehearsals. Usually with text there's one interesting word at the end of the sentence, with this there's like five words right at the beginning of the sentence, which is quite unusual. It's not something I'm expert at, I'm learning, I can get it; I can hear it when it pings.

When I've properly looked closely at the language I suddenly realise how brilliant the words are.

Is there an exercise you have found particularly helpful in unlocking the language? The whole rehearsal process has been an unlocking process. You have to be pretty brave

Have you made all your decisions about how you will play your characters by this point?

No, after five weeks of rehearsal I feel like I've just scratched the surface. There's so much to take in. You can be really seduced by thinking you've got it, but Deborah challenges us to be really specific.

As a modern actor, you've got to do simple things like take really big breaths so you can get the thought through the line. I'm going back to basics, trying to do 15 minutes of voice work everyday and I've been running, to get my breathing going, so I've got the mechanics in place to be able to do it, as the Barbican's stage is a big old space. You can't be a gymnast without training.



Gary Sefton

Questions:

Exits and entrances

- Why do you think Sheridan delays Charles' arrival on stage until half way through the play? (Act 3, Scene 3)
- How was the pace of the action varied in Act 5 Scene 2? The scandal school arrive at Sir Peter's house to find out the truth about the events in Josephs' library. Consider the characters exits and entrances.

The characters

- How do your feelings towards the brothers, Charles and Joseph develop and change through out the play?
- How do you respond to Sir Peter on his first appearance?
- In Act 2, Scene 1, Sir Peter and Lady Teazle argue about her extravagance. Whom do you sympathise more with and why?
- Near the end of play, Snake says:
"...I live by the badness of my character—I have nothing but my infamy to depend on! and, if it were once known that I had been betrayed into an honest action, I should lose every friend I have in the world."

How does this statement reflect the morals of Lady Sneerwell's circle?

Practical Exercises

Ensemble Games

This is a ball

1. The group stands in a circle and the leader holds up an imaginary ball and says "this is a red ball" and explains she will throw it to someone across the circle that will catch it and say "this is a red ball" before throwing to another person in the circle, and so on.
2. When the group is working well with the red ball, the leader introduces another coloured ball; the group must continue to pass both the coloured balls.
3. The leader can add as many different coloured balls as the group can manage. At the end of the game the leader identifies where each ball is and asks for them to be thrown back to her.

Quick pics

1. The group divides into smaller groups of 3-6 and creates still pictures – 'photographs', using their bodies.
2. The leader calls out simple titles relating to the play, such as "the fashion show", or "the party". This can be a non verbal exercise and/or competitive, where groups can be given points for the quickest and most dynamic pictures.
3. Once they have the hang of it the leader can ask them to create photos relating to a particular topic.

Overview of the play

1. Working as a whole group; use your bodies to create a still image for each scene in the play, which sums up what that scene is about and includes the characters present in each scene.
2. Make up a title or 'headline' for each image and select a key line to speak for each character from that scene.
3. Now run through each image, title and lines for each scene in sequence. This should give everyone a clear overview of the entire play.

Status improvisation

1. The whole group discuss status levels in society and how status changes.
2. A group of people will often respond to each other in a manner dictated by their perceived status.
3. To demonstrate this; the group divides; half are the actors and half the audience.
4. Each actor is given a numbered playing card between 1-10; 10 being the highest possible status and 1 the lowest.
5. The actors hold the cards to their foreheads, so they do not know the value of their own card, but everyone else does.
6. Improvise a scene, such as a party, in which each actor treats the others as though they have the status of their card's value. For example, if they have a low number, they might be ignored and if they have a high number they should be treated with respect.
7. After the improvisation, the actors have to guess their own status.

Status game

1. Discuss how status is defined and how it affects our relationships.
2. Look at Act 2, Scene 1, lines 1 - 29. In groups of 4, two people are the actors' playing Lady Teazle and Sir Peter and the other two people have playing cards, numbered 1-10. Two people play the scene and the other two people, allocated to a character each, adjust the character's status by showing the actors different playing cards. As above, 10 being the highest possible status and 1 the lowest.
3. Make sure you allow time for the actors to develop their work on each status before changing the cards.
4. How does status affect the scene and your characterisations?

Modernise the story

1. In small groups, look at Act 2, Scene 2, lines 1 – 76 (where Lady Teazle is entertaining the scandal school to tea and cards).
2. Discuss what is happening in this scene.
3. What conflicts arise in this scene?
4. Discuss the characters' personalities.
5. During the scene; what does each of them want and how do they try to get what they want?
6. Now devise your own modern version of this scene which incorporates all of the elements above of the original story. Have fun with it!

Rehearsal plan

Imagine you are the director; write a plan for a first day of rehearsal for

The School for Scandal:

- What are your overall aims for the day?
- What do you want to have explored and discovered by the end of the day?
- Will you use the script on the first day? How?
- Consider using physical and vocal warm up exercises. Also introduction games, ice breaker and focus games.
- How can you use improvisations to explore the characters, world of the play and story?
- What kinds of research can you ask the company to do?
- How will you round up and finish the day?

Analysing the text

In pairs, spend some time reading through the scene between Joseph Surface and Lady Teazle; Act 4, Scene 3, lines 19 -100.

- What happened in this scene?
- What does it tell us about Lady Teazle and Joseph Surface's relationship?
- Who has the higher status in the scene and why?
- What does Joseph want in this scene?
- What does Lady Teazle want in this scene?
- What effect does the use of Joseph Surface's *asides* have on the audience?
- What evidence is there in the text that this is not the first time Lady Teazle has visited Joseph?

Breaking down the text

Breaking down a text can be called 'uniting'. A 'unit' is a sectioned piece of play text, which identifies an over-riding theme or subject. Within this the characters have 'objectives' (goals); an objective describes what a character wants from another character and tries to attain. When the subject or objective changes, this indicates a new unit.

1. Working in pairs or small groups, read through Act 4, Scene 3, lines 360 - 446: Joseph has just been called away and Sir Peter tells Charles about the 'French milliner' he believes is hiding behind the screen. Charles knocks down the screen to reveal Lady Teazle. Joseph enters, Charles leaves and Lady Teazle confesses to her husband she was going to betray him.
2. Spend some time reading through the script and break it down into sections of action. The objectives within them dominate each unit and once the objective is reached, the unit ends.
3. Draw a clear dash or line at the beginning and end of each action, and number each unit for clarity.

Character relationships

1. Working as a whole group, each person choose a character from the play and take up a physical position; creating a still picture representing their character.
2. Each person in turn places themselves in the middle of the room in position as their character.
3. The rest of the group, in role as the other characters in the play, think about how your character feels towards this character and place yourself somewhere in the space in relation to the central character. What position you adopt, direction you face and what distance you place your self, should express how you feel towards the character in the middle.

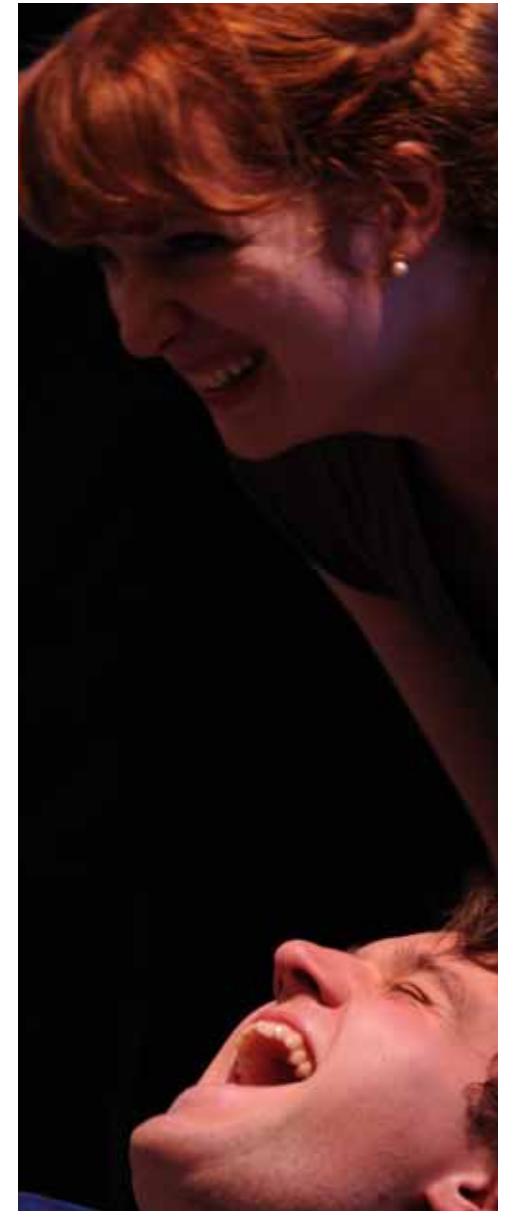
Physicalise the scene

1. In pairs read through Act 2, Scene 2, lines 183 – 205, where Joseph professes his love for Maria.
2. Get on your feet and run through the scene a couple of times; exploring the characters' relationship and identifying their objectives.
3. Now put the script down and run through the scene again, this time without any words, still playing the characters objectives. Physicalise the characters' feelings and what each is doing to the other character. For example when Maria says: "Why will you distress me by renewing this subject?", you could try literally pushing Joseph back and turning away from him, or you could try shaking him and shouting at him.
4. Read through the scene once more with words and see how the scene has been affected?

Write a review

Write a half page review on our production of *The School for Scandal*.

- **What was the play about?** ... Consider the themes, characters, story, beginning and ending.
- **What do you think about it?** ... What worked and what did not work and why?
- **How did it make you feel?** ... Happy, bored, excited, angry, uplifted, sad, inspired, detached?
- **What image or sound has stayed in your mind and why?** ... Consider: the light, sound and music, costume, set and props, colours, words, rhythms of the text, the atmosphere and style of the production.



Right from top to bottom: Katherine Parkinson and Harry Mellings

Bibliography & further reading

Sheridan, Richard B (2007) *The School for Scandal*, York Notes Advanced, Longman.

O'Toole, Fintan (1998) *A Traitor's Kiss, the Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, Granta Books.

Foss, Kenelm (1973) *Here Lies Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, Folcroft Library Editions

Ayling, Stanley (1985) *A Portrait of Sheridan*, Constable

Morwood, James (1985) *The Life and Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, Scottish Academic Press

Vickery, Amanda (2010) *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, Yale University Press

Useful links

http://www.theatredatabase.com/18th_century/richard_brinsley_sheridan_001.html

<http://www.theatrehistory.com>

Planning your visit

Barbican Theatre
Barbican Centre
Silk St, London EC2Y 8DS

For all group bookings and general enquiries please call Groups Booking Line on 020 7382 7211, (booking line is open 10am–5pm, Monday to Friday) fax 020 7382 7270 or email groups@barbican.org.uk

How To Find Us

Nearest tube stations:
Barbican, Moorgate, St Paul's, Liverpool Street

Nearest train stations: Liverpool St, Farringdon, City Thameslink, Barbican, Moorgate

Coach: there is a setting down and picking up point in Silk St. Parking is limited to the metered bays in Silk St and Fore St. For further information contact 020 7606 3030, asking for Parking Services.

Disabled Visitors

For full Access information please visit barbican.org.uk/visitor-information/disability-access. You can also call or email the Barbican Access Manager on access@barbican.org.uk 020 7382 7348.

Cloakrooms

There is a free cloakroom on Level -1



Cafes / Packed Lunches

If you have brought packed lunches you can eat in the Stalls Floor Foyer (Level -1) the Main Foyer (Level G) or outside on the Lakeside where there are plenty of picnic benches and tables.

Barbican Foodhall, just off the Foyer on Level G, offers full meals as well as sandwiches, drinks and also children's meals. It is not suitable for large groups.

Further Information

There is medical assistance available on site at all times.

Full evacuation staff are available at all times.

Barbican Creative Learning has a full CRB child protection policy.

If you would like to see the full policy please contact Barbican Creative Learning on 020 7382 2333.

Please also contact Barbican Creative Learning if you would like risk assessment information.

Top Tips for Planning your Visit Beforehand

Book your visit via our dedicated Groups Booking Line – 020 7382 7211.

See barbican.org.uk/education for information about other Creative Learning events.

Contact

We would welcome feedback on this teachers' resource and the performance. Please send your feedback to Education Administrator Barbican Education, Barbican Centre Silk St London EC2Y 8DS

T: 020 7382 2333 F: 020 7382 7037
E: creative.learning@barbican.org.uk

Credits

Written by Aisling Zambon
Edited by Jenny Byne and Natalie Levitt
Barbican Creative Learning

Barbican Creative Learning

Barbican Centre
Silk St
London EC2Y 8DS
T: 020 7382 2333
F: 020 7382 7037
E: creative.learning@barbican.org.uk



The Barbican is provided by the City of London Corporation as part of its contribution to the cultural life of London and the nation