



Adapted by Patrick Barlow
From an original concept by Simon Corble and
Nobby Dimon

A Teaching Resource Pack

Devised and written by Dick Johns to support the 2006-7 production at
the Criterion Theatre

Commissioned and produced by The Mousetrap Foundation



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Introduction

This pack has been produced to support learning for students who either have seen or are about to see the production of *The 39 Steps* at the Cort Theatre on Broadway. It includes background notes on the production itself, details on plot and on the writers, and interviews with a key player in the creative process. It also contains materials for work related to the show in the classroom or Drama Studio.

This pack is commissioned and produced by The Mousetrap Foundation, which is committed to increasing access for young people to the best of live theatre in London and to enabling them to engage creatively with that experience. For more information go to www.mousetrap.org.uk

Production Notes

This particular production has had a long and fairly complex gestation prior to arriving with great success on the West End stage. Back in 1995 two writers based in the North of England, Nobby Dimon and Simon Corble came up with a version of *The 39 Steps* which toured with great success to small venues (village halls and small theatres). This version was based both on John Buchan's book and on the highly reputed 1935 Alfred Hitchcock film version. An element fixed at this point was the idea of just 4 actors playing all the parts: 3 men and a woman.

Edward Snape of production company Fiery Angel then asked Patrick Barlow to adapt the script. Patrick decided that his adaptation would be based on the film rather than the book, as the film is more inherently dramatic. After a tour the show came to the Tricycle Theatre in London in August 2006 and was so successful it gained an immediate transfer to the West End, where it is still running. The current Broadway production is directed by Maria Aitken.

The show is very characteristic of the work of Patrick Barlow, who is greatly respected in theatre for his work since 1980 with his own company, The

National Theatre of Brent. The brilliance of these shows is often in the creation of a lot from very little, so that with minimal set or costume (or indeed cast), complex or even epic stories can be both hilariously and movingly told. This is achieved through fearless engagement with the audience, and a full embracing of theatricality. (Often things go deliberately wrong; actors come out of role momentarily to give the audience or another performer a look.) This is a knowing, self-reflexive approach to theatre that says "look, we know we're in a theatre, and we know you're there, so let's just have a good time shall we?" This has strong roots in the theatrical tradition, from the comic asides of pantomime, Victorian melodrama and Elizabethan drama, through to the recent success of the staged version of the TV skit *Acorn Antiques*, penned by Victoria Wood. In this last production the audience were complicit in a complex joke about bad TV.

Synopsis of the Production

What we get is an incredibly fast-paced romp through the story of Hitchcock's film. It is a pastiche, an affectionate and very funny transposition of the film on to the stage. The film contains set pieces that are iconic: the train top chase, the Forth Bridge escape, Mr Memory at the Palladium. Much of the joy in the show is in seeing these moments recreated through the physicality and vocal talent of the 4 performers.

It is also an evocative tribute to a 1930s Britain of cold mists (dry ice is liberally utilized); steam engines and a clearly demarcated social system where people know their place. And at its center, juxtaposed with the comedy, is a love story.

Synopsis of the Plot (Courtesy Wikipedia)

There have been three major film versions of the book; Hitchcock's original has been the most acclaimed, and remains so today: In 1999 it came 4th in a BFI poll of British films, while in 2004 *Total Film* named it the 21st greatest British movie of all time.

The story is a classic portrayal of one man's flight from wrong accusation through a series of improbable adventures as he is pursued by the authorities. Romance comes from him being handcuffed to a woman, with whom he ultimately falls in love. Finally the true villains are exposed and our hero is vindicated.

Plot



Richard Hannay is at a London theatre, attending a demonstration of the remarkable powers of "Mr. Memory", a man with a photographic memory, when a fight breaks out and shots are fired. In the ensuing panic, he finds himself holding a frightened Annabella Schmitt, who talks him into taking her back to his

flat. There, she tells him that she is a spy, being chased by assassins out to kill her. She claims to have uncovered a plot to steal vital British military secrets, implemented by a man with the top joint missing from one of his fingers, head of an espionage organization called the "39 Steps".

The next day, Hannay wakes up to find her dead, stabbed with his bread knife. He sneaks out of the flat disguised as a milkman and takes a train to Scotland, where she had told him she was going to find the man. On the train, he sees the police on his trail. In desperation, he enters a compartment and kisses the sole occupant, the attractive Pamela, in an attempt to escape detection. She however manages to free herself from his unwanted embrace and betrays him to the law. He jumps from the train onto the Forth Rail Bridge and escapes.

He stays the night with a poor older farmer and his young wife who flirts with Hannay. The next morning, he leaves in the farmer's Sunday coat, and calls at the house the woman had told him of. There he finds the man with the missing finger-joint, the seemingly respectable Professor Jordan, who shoots him after

a brief conversation and leaves him for dead. Luckily, the bullet fails to penetrate the farmer's prayer-book, left in a coat pocket, and Hannay flees once more.

He goes to the police, but they refuse to accept his story, since they know Jordan well. Hannay jumps through a window and escapes into the crowd. He tries to hide himself in a political meeting, but is mistaken for the keynote speaker; he gives a rousing impromptu speech (without knowing a thing about the candidate he is introducing), but is recognized by Pamela, who gives him up once more. They are handcuffed together and taken away by "policemen". Hannay eventually realizes they are agents of the conspiracy when they bypass the nearest police station. When the car is forced to stop, he escapes, dragging an unwilling Pamela along.



They travel cross country, and stay the night at an inn, the girl still not believing Hannay's story. While he sleeps, she slips out of the handcuffs, but then eavesdrops on one of the fake policemen on the telephone downstairs; the conversation confirms Hannay's assertions. She returns to the room

and sleeps on the floor. Next morning, she tells him what she heard, and is sent to London to pass it on to the police. No secrets have been reported missing however, so they do nothing to help. Instead, they follow her to get to Hannay.

She leads them to Mr. Memory's show at the London Palladium, where the police close in on the fugitive. When the performer is introduced, Hannay recognizes his theme music - it's the annoyingly catchy tune he hasn't been able to forget for days. Hannay puts two and two together and realizes that Mr. Memory is how the spies are smuggling the secrets out: he has them memorized. As the police take him into custody, he shouts out a question about the 39 Steps. When Mr. Memory compulsively begins to answer, Jordan shoots him and tries to flee, but is apprehended. The dying Mr. Memory recites the information stored in his brain, a design for silent aircraft, and Hannay and the girl stroll off, hand in hand.



Profile-John Buchan

The writer John Buchan was born the son of a clergyman in Perth, Scotland in 1875. He attended Glasgow and Oxford Universities, and started to publish his fiction whilst there. His career was as a barrister and later a very successful Civil Servant in the diplomatic corps. He ended up living in Canada as Governor-General and was honored with the title Baron Tweedsmuir. He wrote his stories primarily for his own entertainment, and *The 39 Steps* was begun during an illness in 1914 and completed 1915. Richard Hannay, hero of *The 39 Steps*, went on to feature in many later novels.

During WW1, and therefore at the time of this novel's genesis, Buchan was a skilled propagandist for the British government. He will have been acutely aware of the atmosphere of mistrust and double-crossing pervasive during the period. The spy novel is the perfect way to express such fears of infiltration by the enemy, a key tool in the propagandist armory. In this context, one where the old world order is collapsing, and where central Europe is fighting the Allied powers, the novel *The 39 Steps* can be seen as a straightforward battle between good (the allies as represented by Hannay) and Evil (Germany and the Ottoman Empire as represented by professor Jordan).

For more information on WW1 go to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/world-war-one>.

For more on spy fiction go to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/spy-fiction>.



Profile - Alfred Hitchcock

Alfred Hitchcock was and remains the consummate director of the thriller genre. His films (*The Birds*, *Dial M for Murder*, *Vertigo*, *Rear Window*, *Psycho*) are enduring classics of world cinema. His career spanned from the inception of talking pictures in the late '20s to the golden age of stars and studios in the 50s and 60s. His rotund, thick lipped appearance became as iconic an image as the films themselves, in which he often made a cameo appearance. It is in tribute to this

that he appears in silhouette as a puppet in the current production. He was born in East London in 1899, and died in LA in 1980. He was in his lifetime generally known as "The Master of Suspense".

For more information on the Spy Film genre and its lineage from Hitchcock through to the modern James Bond, go to:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/spy-films>

Interviews with a Key Player

The following interview was conducted on 18th December 2006, giving an overview of some of the creative processes involved in producing a piece of theatre of this type. As well as the insight into the making of the production it is anticipated that these transcripts might provide a useful précis of what it is to work in the theatre as a writer/adaptor. There is clearly a PSHE (careers) application here. One unanimous observation volunteered by all participants was that this show is well received by young people (regardless of their familiarity with the play or otherwise with the texts that inform it). It will be particularly useful to refer to these materials when conducting the lesson plans in the latter part of this pack. For ease of copying, I've started each on a new page.



PATRICK BARLOW - Writer/adaptor

Were you adapting the film or the book in this piece?

It's the film. That was decided before I'd say yes to doing it. Definitely the film. It's the film and me and a tiny bit from the opening of the book.

Do you have any comments to make about genre with regard to the piece?

Well the film is comedy thriller I suppose.

Talk us through the adaptation process from film to stage version.

Well there is no published screenplay so I watched the film lots of times and scribbled it down. That was a blueprint but I gave myself lots of liberty to change. So I just took the film and then added things that make me laugh. So the stockings scene is the same but I added in the sandwich, and the kind of mad argument between them. Because that relationship fascinated me, between Pamela and Hannay. The repression of it. Repression is very interesting for a writer to look at. It's very like *Brief Encounter*, it's that world. The Hitchcock film treats the relationship quite lightly, so I added a lot to it.

And what are the things you add to make it funny or to make it pastiche?

Well doing things really fast seems to work, so the dialogue in the train with the underwear salesmen would not be funny at normal pace, but really fast it works.

And is it easier to write from scratch or to adapt?

If it's just you involved, adapting is a joy. But generally there are others involved, producers etc., who may differ from you, and that can be miserable. Writing your own stuff from the heart is a joy, so I guess it is easier. I mean, for anyone who wants to know about the nightmares for a writer of adaptation, there is a great book called *Adventures in the Screen Trade* by William Goldman, which says it all.

So is this pastiche?

It is pastiche, but it is very important that there is a real story going on. It's about a man who is lonely and lost in his heart ... really a powerful story. And emotionally there is a journey- otherwise I wouldn't be interested in doing it. I mean for Pamela, too, as well as Hannay. She's very uptight, repressed.

Any comments on how the audience receive it.

It's been fantastic. They get into the spirit. I couldn't ask for more. Kids love it. They haven't seen the film or read the book ... even a seven year old; they just know it's funny.

Does anything get lost in the laughter?

Sometimes some of the love story goes, but that is to do with the actors driving it for laughs, which they have to do.

Any comments on linguistic choices you make in the piece... how the language of the early 20th century differs to our own?

'Crumbs', 'crikey', 'golly', 'absolutely beastly'. You had to be really careful... all the language has to be of the period and of the genre. In fact there is a line near the end I noticed the other day. Hannay says, "Hang on, this is a hymn book"... and that 'hang on' just isn't quite right. It's more recent.

Why do we like pastiche/spoof?

I don't know, but there's clearly a lot of it. It's like when French and Saunders do their things. I have no idea.

Practical Work

Note: All of the following material is designed specifically for use in the classroom or Drama Studio to support the production seen on Broadway. It is designed to support the Drama and English curricula in particular, but there are opportunities for learning across the wider curriculum, and I have pointed these out where I can. I am sure you will identify more. I have very deliberately written each area of follow-up work into a format that works in roughly a one-hour session, since this is what most of us deal with most of the time.

There are six separate lesson plans here, but for Drama particularly the work could well be utilized over two sessions, with practical presentations included. Most sessions could happily be completed either before or subsequent to seeing the production itself. (With the exception of Session 3.)

Before I saw the show I would certainly have recommended that pre-work should include a whole-group viewing of the DVD or video of the Hitchcock movie (1935), but this is not actually a prerequisite. It is however certainly a good idea to watch it at some point, especially for the session on sources and text. If time is an issue then the key scenes to have a look at are the Mr Memory stuff at the Palladium, the train top pursuit and the Forth Rail Bridge escape. Also the Scottish B & B with the stockings scene.

Session One Changing Language

Resources: Dictionaries, or ideally for the first section, access to the internet. Also enough copies for one each of the Patrick Barlow interview (pages 11 and 12 in this pack).

1. In pairs: Ask for 2 lists: 1. Examples of words that no-one uses any more e.g. ration book. 2. Examples of words that are so new that no-one used them even 20 years ago (lots of these will be technology - based, but there will also be slang words that are very current for them).
2. Share these words back in the larger group, scribed on board or chart. Two Lists: one headed 'obsolete', one headed 'current'. Encourage students to talk about why some words fall out of use and why new ones develop.
3. Talk about the language in *The 39 Steps*. Scribe words they recall that are less used nowadays. Use the following examples if none are forthcoming "Gosh, golly, crikey, blimey"
4. Give students the following list of words/phrases to research in Google or wikipedia or a plain old dictionary: spoof, derring-do, dry ice, steam engine, yarn, burlesque, deadpan, clowning. All these words come from the Time Out review of the show (August 06 www.timeout.com). What do they tell us about the show?
5. Writers have to pay enormous attention to the words they choose in a piece, especially if it is set in the past. Read with the class the interview with the adapter Patrick Barlow (Pages 9 and 10 of this pack). He points out in this interview that his one regret in the current show is that someone says "Hang on" near the end, and that this is not how people spoke in the '30s.
6. TASK: In 4's: Write a 5 minute script for a thriller (like *The 39 Steps*) that uses language that means it can only be set in 2007. Use the basic plot of the story, about a person falsely accused of a crime and forced to flee. OPTION: Repeat but choose another decade ('80s, '50s). Clear cross-curricular connection for History here.
7. For Drama these pieces can be rehearsed and performed. For English ditto, or perhaps read out in class.

Session Two Genre

Resources: Fifteen or so randomly chosen books/DVDs of differing genre: Horror, Crime Fiction, Fantasy, Children, Action, Spy, Kung Fu, Comic, Romance, Teenage angst, Historical, War, Celebrity Biography, Autobiography etc.

1. Write 'Genre' on the board and brainstorm a spidergram of as many genres as you can with the students.
2. In groups of four get the students to identify, from a pile you give them of DVD covers and novels, which genre they fit into. Encourage debate around this. Also ask them to identify specific features that allow them to work out the genre... is it the cover of the book/DVD? Is it the language contained therein?
3. Students present their findings back to the whole group. Again encourage them to challenge each other around any grey areas. Make the point that writers have to make specific language choices to evoke genre.
4. Now get students, again in fours, to pick out any two books/DVDs and write down all the words and phrases that mark them out as being specific to a genre.
5. ENGLISH: Each student to choose a genre and write their own genre-specific piece for a new work. It can either be the first page of a novel or the blurb for a new-release DVD.

OR

5. DRAMA: Students to script the first scene of a movie, very genre-specific. They rehearse and perform and the rest of group has to identify genre.

Suggested extension activity: look at adaptation. Students take a film they all know very well and discuss how they would stage some of the memorable moments. Encourage them to think inventively, rather than to rely on expensive sets, etc. In pair/groups students write and perform one scene adapted from the film to the stage.

Session Three How Do We Speak?

1. Write the following names on the board: Preston, Chantelle, Arctic Monkeys, Kevin Pietersen, Leona, Prince Harry, Zara Phillips, Ricky Gervais, Chris Moyles, Didier Drogba, JK Rowling (or any such readily identifiable selection, the only important feature of the list being diversity of accent).
2. Go through the names one by one and get the students to tell you how these people speak. It is likely there will be disagreement, possibly vehement. Write the words they use (posh, scum, whatever) on the board. At the end ask whether or not we make judgements about people from the way they speak. If so, what are those judgements based on?
3. In pairs get them to chat to each other in their normal voices. (Half a minute each to tell the other what they had for breakfast this morning and where they were when they ate it). The subject matter is irrelevant, just get them to listen to how they speak, particularly their accents.
4. Ask students to think about the production of *The 39 Steps*. How did the characters speak? What did you find out about their background from the way they spoke? How was Britain in the 1930s different to today?
5. Read the interviews with the Creative Team (in this pack pages 10-14). Get comments on the idea expounded by Rupert about there being three accents in 1930s Britain. Do people still try to 'speak posh' in order to sound upper class? Or has that gone now?
6. Get students to look again at the list you scribed at the outset. Could such a list have existed in the 1930s? If not, why not? Is it possible that our more diverse nation has led to a decrease in focus on accents as a signifier of class? Or is that wishful thinking?
7. DRAMA: IN PAIRS: ask students to practise 3 different accents with each other, at least one of which must be 'upper class'. Ask them to observe any changes in the physicality of their partner as they swap accents. They might look for increased tension in the neck and face, shape of lips, or different posture. Get them to feed these observations back to the whole group. In 4's spend time developing comic scenes set in a mobile phone shop using these 3 accents. Show.
8. ENGLISH: An essay question around the debate in point 6.

NB Cross -Curricular references here to History, PSHE, Religious Studies (diversity).

Session Four Pastiche

STARTER: Either for homework as prep for this lesson or as a starter activity if access is easy. Students should look at examples of pastiche on Youtube.com A good one to look at is the French and Saunders Baywatch sketch.

1. Write up on the board the following WIKTIONARY definition of Pastiche. "A work of drama, literature or music that imitates the work of a previous artist, often satirically". Get the students to copy it.
2. Have a discussion about pastiche and where it is to be found. This can be spidergrammed. One would expect at least the following outcomes: talk about sampling in music, singers covering the songs of other artists; comedians like the Mighty Boosh doing Boy's Own adventure stuff. French and Saunders doing film skits. The Artroom at school being full of pastiche Picasso etc; the remaking of tired TV formats in a pastiche way so that they seem suddenly vibrant (*Come Dancing* becomes *Strictly Come Dancing*; *Dr Who* in the '70s and now). So is it good to be the subject of pastiche?
3. Read the interview with Patrick Barlow in this pack with the students. He has no idea why we like pastiche. Do they? (Is it to do with recognition?)
4. Ways to make Pastiche 1
 - (A) Ask the students in pairs to come up with a short scene where there is some conflict, e.g. a person complaining to a waiter in a restaurant, or taking a faulty toaster back to a shop.
 - (B) Now ask them to practise the scene again but when they feel like it, and before they say their next line, their character can clap. This clap freezes the action. The character now turns to the audience and tells them what they are really thinking. They then clap and the scene resumes with them saying their actual line. Three or four such interjections in a one minute scene often have great comic effect. This is a game actors sometimes play in rehearsals. It is called the Clapping Game. So for example we might get a waiter saying 'God I hate this woman' to the audience before clapping and turning back to her with great politeness to say 'I'm ever so sorry Madam'. Let them practise these and then show them.

5. Ways to make Pastiche 2

Using similar scenes to those in exercise 1, and again in pairs, let them play with speeding up dialogue. So try it in an incremental way: X2, then X5, then X10 normal speed. What are the effects produced here? Again, rehearse, show and discuss.

6. Now get the students to script a 5-minute pastiche of either a film or a play of their choosing. Ideally this should be done in pairs. Rehearse and perform.

7. *If students have seen the play and the film:* Do they feel the play is a good pastiche? If so, what elements make it so? Get them to think about linguistic choices, the use of dry ice, the music, the way the actors created the world of the 1930s.

Session Five Intertextuality

RESOURCES: Access to the internet for the opening part.

1. Discuss sources. What is a source in creative writing terms? Does everything have a source? Or are some things genuinely original?
2. Ask students to identify all the source material for the following: Romeo and Juliet, the Criterion production of *The 39 Steps*, the Disney film *The Jungle Book*. This can involve internet or just text-based research.
3. If things are adapted and changed, does that matter, or should people be allowed to do what they want?
4. Ask students to consider whether or not John Buchan would care that there were 3 film versions of his book, were he alive. Apparently he was big fan of the Hitchcock film, but this may have been coloured by the fact he made money from selling the rights to it.
5. Ask students to research copyright, which protects the rights of writers to be identified as the creators of their work. There is good information on this at www.patent.gov.uk/copy
6. DRAMA: A Five minute piece using a page or two of John Buchan's book as a source text
7. ENGLISH: A short story based on any one incident from the Buchan novel, maybe focussing on a minor character and inventing a more detailed life for them and looking at an event in it.
8. Students will, like those who worked on *The 39 Steps*, have produced their own work from a source text.

Session Six General Physical Work.

This Session is designed specifically to engage the students with some of the processes involved in the creation of physical theatre, and is ideal follow up for Drama, after seeing the show.

Get students with shoes off if possible, and in a safe drama studio-type environment.

1. Ask students to walk around the room at a normal pace, and not to make eye contact with anyone else. Ask them to empty their minds and just focus on the way they move around the room. Which bit of their foot hits the ground first? Do they lean forward or back? Do they swing their arms? Is their chin up or down? Do not provide answers, let them feel it for themselves. Then get them to start exaggerating whatever their natural tendency is. So if they walk leading with the crotch, let them exaggerate that. Ditto the head, or the chest. They will be self conscious about this, but stay with it.
2. End the exercise and discuss in circle. How did it feel? Was it in any way comic? Explain to them that in just a walk you have the foundation of great physical comedy. Pick a couple of brave volunteers to show their funny walks.
3. Now get them back on their feet. Get them walking again and this time tell them you will shout out the names of characters from the show, and you want them to walk like that character. SO: Hannay, Pamela, Mr Memory, the policemen, the milkman, the evil Professor Jordan, the couple at the B&B.
4. Get them in groups of 4 and ask them to come up with a frozen picture or tableau featuring any four of the characters. The objective is to make these instantly recognisable. Show these tableaux and let the audience identify characters. Discuss where these characters lead from when they move, where their physical 'centre' is. This idea is vital to physical actors and clowns.
5. Bring the tableaux to life (clap and they start moving) Observe the physical distinction between Characters.
6. Back in the circle explain that in a show with 150 characters and 4 actors, the type of physical work just done is fundamental.

Extension activity:

Students need a coat each, and a hat, if possible. In pairs, students work on two distinct characters each, with very different physicality and accents. The idea here is to mirror one of the techniques used in the production where performers switch very quickly between characters with minimal use of costume.

One pair of characters wears coats and hats, the other set don't. Each pair works on a scene involving an every day activity (catching a train, booking a hotel room, etc.) involving the first set of characters. Allow time for the scenes to get going for a couple of minutes, and then clap. On the clap students don their coats etc., become the other characters and continue the scene until your next clap when they remove the items again and continue in the original characters. Carry on for a few claps, encouraging the change between characters to become smoother and swifter each time. If everyone is into the activity, try joining the pairs into groups of four and continuing to see what happens.

Websites useful in the compilation of this pack were the following:

www.wikipedia.com

www.timeout.com

www.screenonline.co.uk

www.youtube.com

www.patent.gov.uk

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The King's English by Kingsley Amis (HarperCollins 1998)

IMPRO Improvisation and the Theatre by Keith Johnstone (Methuen 1979)

Adventures in the Screen Trade by William Goldman (various 1983)

FILM FOR CROSS-REFERENCE

Brief Encounter (David Lean 1945)

PHYSICAL THEATRE PRACTITIONERS FOR CROSS-REFERENCE

Theatre de Complicité (www.complicite.org)

Trestle (www.trestle.co.uk)

Zygmunt Molik

