

## HOW TO BE A KID

by Sarah McDonald-Hughes

Teacher Resource Pack



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## INTRODUCTION

HOW TO BE A KID is a new play by playwright Sarah McDonald-Hughes, produced by Paines Plough, Theatr Clwyd and Orange Tree Theatre. The play follows the character of Molly, a 12-year-old girl who finds herself having to take on the role of parent to her younger brother Joe when her mum becomes unwell. Moved into temporary care whilst her mum gets the help she needs, Molly's reality is turned on its head. Once she makes her way home it's difficult to put everything back in its place.

An honest, fun and thoughtful look at what it is to be a kid when the world is forcing you to grow up fast; McDonald-Hughes shows us what it is to be a kid through the eyes of a 12 year old. Bringing parenthood and childhood into sharp focus, the play explores how tightly both parents' and children's development are inextricably tied to one another.

The show seeks to open up conversation around important issues that young people are regularly having to deal with. Growing up is hard, whether we're children or adults we are always faced with situations that challenge or hurt us – whether it's depression or going into care.

Relationships, actions and circumstances can dramatically affect our lives, but it is the way we handle them and the support we give to one another that helps us through difficult times. As Molly learns that actions have consequences, we see that it's not necessarily just children who this applies to in the play, and ultimately in life.

The classroom activities we've designed to support and build on your students' experience of the play are there to help you, as their teacher, pull out and explore the themes in a fun and imaginative class room setting. These activities have all been made with the National Curriculum in mind:

*'All pupils should be enabled to participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama. Pupil should be able to adopt, create and sustain a range of roles, responding appropriately to others in role. They should have opportunities to improvise, devise and script drama for one another and a range of audience, as well as to rehearse, refine, share and respond thoughtfully to drama and theatre performances.'* National Curriculum

Through drama games and creative exercises based around HOW TO BE A KID, this resource pack aims to deepen students' social awareness and understanding. With activities that enable students to empathise with the different characters within the play, their situations and emotions, this resource pack seeks to explore and deepen students' relationship with theatre in a creative and educative approach.

Molly is 12 years old, and she's the narrator of her own story; her adventure, which we're invited to join her on. The story weaves in and out of present and past experiences, with our narrator guiding us through them.

We join Molly on a Saturday afternoon, when Molly is returning home, having been staying at Riverside children's care for the last five weeks. Reunited with her Mum and her younger brother Joe, Molly can't help but feel like things have changed in her house. Mum's thrilled to have her two kids back where they belong, Joe's just happy there's cake, but Molly's got that wriggly, squirming feeling in her tummy, a kind of worry feeling that won't go away.

Unable to fall asleep, Molly's thoughts drift back to Riverside, of her first day there and the first time she met Taylor. They become best friends instantly, thick-as-thieves as Taylor introduces Molly to her new, temporary, home, giving her all the tips she'll need to become comfortable in her new surroundings.

Waking up, Molly's back in present day with the smell of pancakes wafting up from the kitchen downstairs. She hasn't had much luck at fitting back into her home routine, and sadly school isn't much different – not helped by the fact she's kept Riverside a secret from her friends, worried that they won't understand.

Attempting to get back into their routine, it becomes clear that Mum is finding it difficult, with Molly taking on the responsibilities she was doing before she was taken off to Riverside. That feeling of worry continues to worm its way around Molly's stomach. This feeling and the responsibilities continue until one day when Mum buys their little family a present: a washing machine. Met with uncertainty from Molly and Joe, we soon discover the reason why Molly went to Riverside and Joe went to stay with his Dad. Molly's Nan got sick, and after being submitted to hospital, she passed away. Mum became very sad, and found it hard to do all the things that Mum's do, things like making dinner, making sure the kids had their bath, doing the laundry. Happy to help, Molly a.k.a. Mum's Supergirl, stepped in. Doing all the chores she could to help her Mum, and make her feel better again. But Molly didn't know that that washing machines need to be cleaned, de-fluffed, and so the build up of fluff caused a fire...which caused the social workers to come round...which cause Molly to go to Riverside and Joe to go to his Dad's.

## INTERVIEW WITH SARAH (Writer) and JAMES (Director):

### What made you want to write Molly's story?

**Sarah:** From the moment I started thinking about the play, Molly popped into my head almost fully-formed – she is an ordinary girl who is capable of extraordinary things, with an incredible imagination – a girl who doesn't think she is special but who really is. I hope that people like Molly and see something of themselves in her.

When I started writing *How to be a Kid*, I had an image in my head of a girl standing outside her house clutching a bag of her things, waiting to see her mum again after a long time. Although the play has changed a lot since I first wrote a draft of it, this is still the beginning, and what the play is about, at its heart: a girl who comes home to her mum, and how they learn to live together again after everything that's happened to them.

I wanted to write a play that explores how children cope when they are in extremely difficult situations, but I wanted the play to also celebrate the power of imagination, friendship and brothers and sisters to help us navigate the most difficult times in our lives.

### Why do you think Molly's story matters?

**James:** Approximately 1 in 4 adults in the UK experience a mental health problem each year. Many young people, like Molly, have parents who experience common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Mental health problems can be exacerbated by major life upheaval such as bereavement, so many children will have experienced sharing the loss of a loved one with a parent who is suffering from a mental health issue, like Molly's mum.

Mental health can be very difficult to talk about, particularly to children and young people. We hope the play will help people of all ages to better understand how children and their parents might be feeling when faced with bereavement, and when trying to manage mental health problems. We hope Molly's openness and honesty about how she is feeling as the protagonist in the play might help other people articulate their feelings and feel more confident in seeking the help they need.

Molly shoulders a lot of responsibility in looking after her little brother Joe, and her Mum. Around 75,000 children aged 10-14 are carers in the UK. Their stories are rarely told. Molly's story is important because it represents the experiences of so many children who rarely see themselves on stage.

Molly goes on a journey of discovery and finds support in her friendships, love in her family, escape in her imagination and delight in dancing to Taylor Swift, so her story is also important because it shows that even when life is hard, there is plenty of fun to be found in childhood, and joy in life.

**Sarah:** Like James says, Molly's story is important because it's a story we don't often hear, but an experience that is shared by many children and families across the country.

Molly goes into care because her Mum is too unwell to look after her, and there she meets Taylor, who is a truly exceptional and special person. I wanted to tell a story that explored the lives of young people in care because again, these are voices and characters we don't come across often enough in the theatre.

I also wanted to tell the story of what happens when Molly comes home, and how she copes with her mum's illness and looking after her brother when their Nan isn't there anymore. I hope that the play explores some of these important questions, about how difficult it can be to be a kid when the world is full of difficult obstacles like loss, and illness, and feeling like you've got to hide how you really feel inside.

**What do you think are the main themes in the story?**

**James:** Family, friendship, the joy of childhood and the thrill of adventure.

We meet Molly at a momentous point in her life, the tipping point between childhood and her teenage years. She has to learn how to balance being a kid with her increasingly grown-up responsibilities. The play is full of fun, games, dancing, stories, imagination - all the things we associate with childhood – and all things Molly loves. She learns that even though it can be hard to be a kid in an adult world, she doesn't have to stop being a kid altogether. That being a kid is a wonderful antidote to the difficulties, concerns and worries that are attendant to impending adulthood.

Taylor helps Molly realise the value of friends and family. Taylor is a good friend to her, inducting her to Riverside, looking after her when she is upset, helping her to remember her Nan. In a time of need, it's wonderful to have a friend to talk to. Molly hopes she can be a good friend to Taylor as Taylor has been to her. And now she has seen first-hand the value of friendship, she realises she might not have been a brilliant friend to Abi, and she wants to rekindle that friendship.

Taylor also helps Molly realise the enduring value of her family. She helps her to keep Nan's memory alive, and to appreciate how lucky she is to have a

Mum to go home to. Taylor has no-one. Even extremely annoying little brothers should be cherished as playmates, partners in adventure, friends and confidantes.

Molly comes to understand that it won't all be alright all the time. Mum will feel sad sometimes, Joe will be annoying, she will miss Nan, she will fall out with Abi, she will wish she was with Taylor, but by sticking together and caring for each other and helping each other have fun and excitement and adventure, she will find joy in life even in the tough times.

**Sarah:** Love, loss, family and friendship. The play is about the power of Molly's feelings for her family, and for Taylor, and how difficult she finds it when she's separated from them and when things aren't going well. As James says, Molly's journey is about her learning that it's ok to be a kid, even though she's growing up, and that although things may not always be easy, she has people around to help her – and, importantly, that as a 12 year old, she isn't responsible when things go wrong.

I hope that the play celebrates the specialness in the ordinary, too. All of the characters in the play think they're very ordinary when actually, there's something special and extraordinary about each of them. I think that's true of people in real life, too.

### How will you make the show? What is your creative process?

**James:** We will spend some time reading the play, reading it again, asking questions, reading it again. We'll try to get to know Molly, Mum, Joe and Taylor as well as we possibly can. We'll talk about their backstories and how they got to where they are when the play starts.

A play should always take place at the most extraordinary moment in the lives of the characters. So to understand why this is an extraordinary time for Molly, we'll try to work out what is ordinary. What was a normal day for Molly before Nan died. Understanding that will help us understand how dramatically Molly's world has changed.

We'll divide the play into sections and give each section a title. So one section might be called 'Taylor shows Molly around Riverside'. This will break the play down into sections so we can rehearse it moment by moment.

Then we'll get on our feet and try to be as playful as Molly and Joe. We'll play lots of games and dance around to Taylor Swift and pretend to be dinosaurs and try to capture the unguarded, unbridled joy of being a kid. I won't ask the actors to impersonate kids, but I do want them to rediscover what it feels like to be 6 or 12-years-old.

We're going to have a lot of fun with lights and sound, creating a technicolour world to match the scope of Molly's brilliant imagination.

## THEATRE 'IN-THE-ROUND'

We thought we'd tell you a little bit about in-the-round theatre. In this section you'll find information on the history of in-the-round theatre and how we approach in-the-round theatre in 2017!

### History:

Normally when we see a play the audience are all sat in rows facing the stage. This is called end-on theatre. Most traditional theatres are built like this. When the audience are sat all around the stage this is called in-the-round. Theatre in-the-round is actually the first way that plays were performed, going all the way back to Ancient Greece. In Ancient Greece most cities had a large, circular, open-air theatres built on hillsides. Some of them could seat more than 15,000 people! That's as many as a small football ground. A great historical example of an in-the-round space is the coliseum in Rome! Can you think of any more?

However, after the Greeks and the Romans, theatre in-the-round became less popular and never caught on in Britain. Until the 1950's when young British theatre-maker decided it was time for Britain to embrace theatre in-the-round. He was called Stephen Joseph. He thought that performing theatre in the round would make it more exciting and convince people that the theatre was even more exciting than staying at home watching TV.

People loved going to see his plays and more in-the-round theatres began to spring up around the UK. There are in-the-round theatres at the Royal Exchange in Manchester, the Orange Tree in London and The Dukes Theatre in Lancaster. Not to mention the original Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough.



Is there an in-the-round theatre near you?



### Why do we love in-the-round so much?

Why in-the-round? Well, it's one of the most exhilarating ways to watch a play – a true 3D experience. As [playwright and Paines Plough trustee Simon Stephens](#) says, "there's no theatrical architecture that challenges or interrogates what it is to be a human being more than theatre in-the-round". With only five permanent in-the-round venues in the UK, few audience members will have sat encircling a play. We hope Roundabout will create a sense of event, and attract audiences like [imax cinemas attract filmgoers](#).

One of the main things we love about in-round-theatre is that there are no bad seats! This is especially true in Roundabout where you can see the stage clearly wherever you sit. You're never more than 2 metres from the action.

Staging a play in-the-round can be tricky though. You have to consider that the audience are sat in front of you and behind you no matter which way you face! This makes it important that actors keep moving when acting in-the-round. If someone is in one place for too long, the audience behind them will get frustrated that they can't see their face. This also means that big pieces of set can be difficult to use because they can easily block the actors from the view of the audience.

We think these challenges are worth over-coming. There's nothing more exciting than sitting close to the action at a brilliant play.



## MEET THE CAST

*All the characters in this play are played by three actors. Multi-role playing is an exciting and imaginative form of telling stories which have lots of characters.*

MOLLY

played by KATIE ELIN-SALT



JOE & ALL MALE ROLES

played by HASAN DIXON



MUM & TAYLOR

played by SALLY MESSHAM



## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

This series of activities looks at the story of what happened to Molly and her family, and how certain events within the story may affect the characters.

### Stage 1

**Strategies:** Traffic Lights , still image, children-in-role, scene work in groups, improvisation, thought tracking.

- Warm up. Play a game of TRAFFIC LIGHTS. Traffic Lights is another version of musical statues. Ask the children to walk around the room – aware of the space and each other, making sure they don't bump into one another. Instruct them that the rules of the game are the following: When you shout GREEN that means go (if they're already moving, they carry on doing so). When you shout AMBER that means one of two things 1. Slow down if you're already moving 2. If you're not moving, get ready to move. Finally RED, means stop (if they're not moving then they continue to stay still). Students are knocked out of the game by following the wrong command or doing the wrong thing – sometimes add in different colours to catch them out.

### **Opening discussion**

'What is it like being a kid?' Ask your students this, writing up all their responses on paper and pin them around the room. These written responses will serve as a visual reminders of the overall theme of the production over the follow lessons.

### **Story Whoosh**

Using the Story Whoosh in your resource pack, ask your students to sit in a circle. Read through the Story Whoosh, allowing time for the students to come up in groups and make an ensemble still image. As you read each line, pick 1-3 students quickly at random to form a still image. Multiple images can be made for each section of the Story Whoosh, moving through different students.

### **Group scenes**

Looking at the scenes you will have just gone through, put them into groups of 3 and ask them to think about the characters in those scenes and how they might have been feeling. Ask them to pick one of the scenes and to recreate a short performance of it. Give each group 10 minutes to work on a person, and then ask each of them to perform theirs to the rest of the class.

### Stage 2 Scene work / Creating Characters

#### **Warm up**

HYPNOSIS – Ask your students to get into pairs. Partner A holds their hand out in front of Partner B. Partner A then moves their hand around slowly, and it is the aim of Partner B to keep their face in front of their hand for as long as possible whilst it's moved.

### **Opening Discussion**

In the lesson we're going to look at actions and their implications on feelings. For the opening discussion, focus on a specific part of Molly's story: the first time Molly has to go to the children's home and is taken away from her own home. Ask some of the following questions to the students.

- *How might Molly be feeling?*
- *What would Molly pack?*
- *How would you feel in Molly's situation?*
- *What questions might Molly be thinking?*
- *Why do we think Molly had to leave?*

### **Arriving at the Care Home**

With all of what you've discussed in mind, ask the children to create 2 short scenes (splitting them into groups of 4). Each scene should imagine what Molly's arrival at the Care Home would be like. One scene should explore what the best way to welcome someone into their new home is, i.e. how to be caring, thoughtful and considerate. Whilst the second scene should explore what the worst way to welcome someone into their new home is. After each group performs their scene, ask the rest of the class what was nice and what was not nice about the characters' behaviour towards Molly. Were they welcoming? Were they rude, and, if so, why?

### **Stage 3 Creative writing / Improvisation / Hot Seating / Physical performance**

#### **Warm Up**

ZIP ZAP BOING. Ask all the students to stand in a circle. ZIP ZAP BOING is a quick fire, concentration game which requires students to be fast on their toes and focussed. Each student holds their hands in front like a lazer – the aim is the game is a shoot out. Zips can only be shot to players on their immediate left and right. Zaps can only be shot across the circle. Boings are bounce backs i.e. if someone zaps and the person zapped says 'BOING' the zap transfers back to the zapper and they must shoot again. You are knocked out of the game if you hesitate. Last pair standing must stand with their backs to each other, the teacher picks a category i.e. Biscuits. Any time the teacher says a type of biscuit they step forward one pace – when the teacher says something that isn't a biscuit i.e. tiger – the first to turn and zap wins the game.

### **Opening Discussion**

In this lesson we're going to look at relationships, and the efforts our loved ones go to in order to take care of us, and similarly what we do for them in return. What chores does Molly take one to help her Mum? How many things do your own parents/ /guardians take on to help you?

### This is not a hairbrush

'This is not a hairbrush' is an improvising game – which for the purpose of this lesson we will theme around 'Looking after each other'. The rules of the game are simple; one person stands in a circle and mimes brushing their teeth with a toothbrush. Using their image, another person comes into the circle, saying FREEZE and turns the original image into something else i.e. brushing your hair becomes pushing a boulder up a hill, etc. Let the students do whatever comes to mind, for the first five minutes and then focus the second half around the activities discussed in the opening discussion.

### Hot Seating

If it's useful for this exercise, use the Story Overview resource to recap over the events that happened in the play before going into Hot Seating. First though, ask the students to see if they can recap the play themselves as a group, using the resource to fill in any missing plot that they may have forgotten.

Hot Seating is a way of developing characters stories beyond that which we see in the play, asking students to imagine the lives of the characters past the pages of the script. For hot seating we're going to ask the students to become Mum, Molly or Joe. Before students assume the role and are asked questions, give each student some paper and a pen and ask them to put down everything they know about that character – these are all the things that we've learn from watching the play, e.g. Mum is sad because her own mum died in hospital. Mum looks after Molly and Joe on her own. Once they've done this, ask them to build the character more, thinking about how they behave in the play e.g. Mum likes tea. Mum's favourite thing to watch on telly is Animal Hospital. Mum's not very good at cooking cakes but she really enjoys it. Ask them to be as in depth as possible, considering how all of this information makes them behave and therefore how they would then perform that character physically. Once they've done this for a further 5-10 minutes, put a seat at the front of the room and ask the students to sit in it one at a time assuming the role of the character that they've been developing and have the other student ask them questions e.g. Mum: Were you worried when Molly ran away? Molly: What did it feel like to have to leave your Mum and brother? Joe: Did you enjoy staying with your dad?

## TEACHER RESOURCES

### Story Whoosh

Molly says goodbye to her friend Taylor and is taken from Riverside, her care home, back to her real home where she is reunited with her mum and little brother Joe.

At home Molly sees her nan's old car in the driveway and remembers how Taylor taught her to drive in a car park one night while she was in care.

That night Molly can't sleep, she goes to check on her mum and finds that she's watching TV and seems alright, so goes back to bed.

Molly remembers when she first met Taylor, how she helped her settle in to care and how they discovered their shared love of Taylor Swift.

In the morning Molly's mum makes them an amazing pancake breakfast, but when Molly and Joe get home from school they find their mum hasn't got dressed and hasn't made them any tea so they have to eat beans on crackers.

That night Molly and Joe go and check on their mum. They find her watching TV again but this time she is crying.

Molly and Joe tell us the story of how their nan got very sick and died. Afterwards their mum got very sad and couldn't do anything so Molly had to become Supergirl and do everything herself.

Molly didn't know you had to clean the fluff out of the washing machine so it got bigger and bigger until the washing machine exploded and burnt Joe's hand so he had to go to hospital.

When they got back from hospital a woman called Michelle was there and told them their mum was sick so Molly had to go in to care and Joe had to go live with his dad until their mum got better.

Molly and Joe come up with a plan to start doing everything themselves again to make their mum happy. They have a meeting with Michelle but pretend that everything is fine.

Molly and Joe try to make the best dinner ever for their mum but they end up making a huge mess which makes her angry and she shouts at them.

Molly is upset so steals the key to her nan's car and starts driving towards her old care home. She soon realises that Joe has been hiding in the back seat. She tries to make him get out but he refuses to stay home without Molly.

When they arrive at Molly's old care home, Molly goes to find Taylor while Joe sleeps in the back seat. Taylor tells Molly that she is lucky that she has a mum that wants her and that she should go home and talk to her.

When Molly gets back to the car she finds her nan in the driving seat. Molly and Joe sleep in the back seats while their nan drives them home.

When they get back their mum is really worried, but she thinks they have just been hiding in the car and were in the driveway the whole time. Molly explains that they've been feeling worried about her and have been trying to help. Their mum explains that it's not their job to look after her and that even though she might be sad at times, she is still the parent and will look after them.

Molly, Joe and their mum all dance to Taylor Swift together.