



Education Work Pack

Presented by Eastern Angles Theatre Company

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East Anglian Psychos

Background

East Anglian Psychos is a fictional look at the lives and choices of 5 young people, Michaela, Matt, Denise, Luke and Sam, as they struggle with one big dilemma: Should I stay or should I go?

Every Christmas Eve, town centre bars and village pubs fill up with young people returning to their old haunts. Those who have moved away to jobs, college or loved ones meet up with those who have stayed, while those yet to decide on their future watch their peers act out the consequences of their decisions to stay or go.

Workshops on this theme with more than 40 groups of young people have helped writer Philip Michell create six characters: Michaela, Denise, Sam, Luke, Matt and Rebecca. Their story weaves in and out of the present, the region and their desire to plan their lives.

The Production

East Anglian Psychos was group-devised. There were 6 workshop leaders who spent 6 months talking to young people of all ages about what they thought of home and whether they wanted to stay or go. Initially, the focus of the piece was Christmas Eve. These workshops were taken by Philip Michell, the writer, who then fashioned a first draft of the play. After several redrafts, a completed script was finished for rehearsals to start in 2002.

Psychos premiered in a tour of nightclubs and arts centres in 2002, and then a revised version was performed in schools across East Anglia in 2003.

The play as a text employs many variations of writing, from monologue to direct audience address, and traditional dialogue scenes to use of multi-media elements such as video projection and live camera.

East Anglian Psychos provides an excellent springboard for drama work, including Assessment of a Live Performance, and also work on Citizenship and attitudes to home, family and friends. Questions about sense of place, self-esteem, and peer pressure, are all central to the play.

This pack outlines the central issues of the play and suggests a series of Drama and Citizenship-related activities based on the performance. There are activities for teachers to lead with students and for students to complete on their own.

Plot Summary

The play is split into 3 short Acts: Summer, Autumn, and Christmas.

In the play we meet five young people: **Michaela**, a hairdresser and 'a bit of a cow', who talks tough but can't stop the world around her changing; **Matt**, who fits double-glazing and who just wants to get the job done well; **Denise** who keeps everyone together at the expense of a life of her own; her brother **Luke**, a drifter always travelling to somewhere new; and **Sam** who has her own fair share of problems. We also hear about **Rebecca**, Michaela's so-called best friend, who is away at University.

SUMMER

Denise has persuaded Sam to come clubbing at JoJo's for Rebecca's birthday. Once there, Michaela picks a fight with the bouncers and surveys the competition. Luke, hitchhiking as usual, recalls the time he was still going out with Rebecca and remembers when he and Michaela got up close and personal. Meanwhile, still living in the place he was born, Matt agrees to restore an old Greenhouse as a favour to an old man called Jack.

AUTUMN

Denise is chatting to someone called Gizmo who she has met in an internet chatroom, while her brother Luke makes his way back to the parental home for a rare visit. After a blazing row with his mum, Luke talks to his sister about why he never wants to come home.

In JoJos, Sam asks Michaela why she always talks about how much she hates where she lives, but never gets around to leaving. Michaela retaliates viciously, and Sam is plunged back into self-loathing and despair.

Matt has completed his labour of love and the greenhouse is restored - complete with stained-glass panels like a church. Michaela apologises to Sam, who finally gets to meet Luke. While Denise receives news of a promotion that could see her moving away, her internet friendship with Gizmo flourishes. Meanwhile, Sam and Luke discover a mutual attraction.

Matt discovers that Jack has died, and his daughter is planning to knock down the greenhouse.

CHRISTMAS

As Christmas approaches, Denise rings round to get the old group back together again on Christmas Eve. Michaela rings Luke to tell him that Rebecca is going to be there.

When everyone arrives at JoJos, Denise is drunk and Gizmo turns out to be Matt. With Denise out of the picture, Michaela steps in, pretending to be Love Bunny and Matt takes her on his motorbike to the beach, and, despite the fact that this girl seems so different to the girl he spoke to on the Net, he decides to show her the greenhouse before it is knocked down for good. When he discovers that Michaela isn't Love Bunny, confusion turns to anger and violence rears its head.

Citizenship

For Teacher Led/Group Discussion

All the main characters in the play have made, or are about to make, choices in their lives. One of the key questions explored in the play is: ***Should I stay or should I go?***

During their time at school young people will have been given plenty of advice about what career they might choose, but have they thought about WHERE they are going to be in a few years time? It's a decision that could have a dramatic influence on their lives. People make their own decisions based on many things: their job, family, love, friends, social life.

How many of their friends have said that they can't wait to get out of their town or village, away from the family home, and start a new life in a new place? In East Anglia, where many young people live in isolated rural communities, the desire to 'get out' is often intensified. The nearby 'big town' or the even brighter lights of London or Manchester beckon. Yet, in these rural spaces as well as in more urban environments, some people are making the decision to stay. Again, for many reasons: family, friends, security.

Who are you? Are you a Stayer? A Goer? Or even someone who gets out but who still feels drawn to the place they used to call home.

Discussions around Choices

Discuss the choices made by the main characters in the play.

Did the characters always choose wisely?

Give 3 reasons for wanting to get out of your hometown.

Give 3 reasons for wanting to stay.

Themes to highlight

Choices, Friendship, Peer Pressure, Change, Bullying, Responsibility, Self-Esteem, Respecting other people, Your own role in society...

More activities

1. Write a postcard to a friend as if you were on holiday in your hometown. Include at least 3 reasons why it is a good place to go to.
2. Write another postcard, but this time include 3 reasons why it is not a great place to go to.
3. Write a dialogue between two characters arguing about the merits of their hometown. One character loves their hometown, while the other can't stand it.
4. Look at the themes explored in *East Anglian Psychos* and identify moments in the play when these are explored.
5. Write a short passage which describe the feelings you had when you watched the play for the first time.

Written work - Assessment of a Live Performance

Student Activity

Writing a Review

Whilst watching *East Anglian Psychos* you will be forming opinions and making judgements about the play and the production. The following outline will help you to structure your review.

1. Introduction

Title:

Writer (s):

Company:

Where and when you saw the play:

How you felt about seeing the play before it started:

2. The Play

Give a brief outline of the story and the main characters.

Did you find the story convincing?

Which parts worked best for you?

Were there any moments that stirred your emotions?

How did the audience react to the play?

What were the main themes of the play?

How did you feel about the characters? Which one did you respond to most and why?

3. The Set

How appropriate is this set to the play and to the space it is being performed in?

Did anything about the set particularly catch your eye? How did the actors use the set?

4. The Acting

How did you rate the actors?

Comment on voice, gesture and movement.

What things did they do to distinguish between the characters they played?

Who did you sympathise with?

5. Conclusion

Bring in anything that you thought was remarkably good or bad about the production.

On balance, was it a successful show?

Did it keep your interest and involve you with the characters?

Practical Work

Improvisation – scenarios to try

It is Christmas Eve. A group of friends from the same town or village have agreed to meet up for the first time since they left school. Some of the group have returned from being away at college or in jobs, others have stayed exactly where they were. Act out a scene when they meet again for the first time. It could be set in a fast-food restaurant, at somebody's house, at their favourite old haunt such as the local park or perhaps on the Market Square. Points of conflict could include old enemies meeting up, ex-girlfriends and boyfriends, or characters who are now very different to when they were at school.

The same scene, but set 3 years in the future - Christmas Eve 2009. More time has passed since they last met. How have the friends changed? What do the ones that stayed think of the ones that left? Have they changed? What are the possible conflicts within the group now?

Act out a scene where one person tells their best friend that they are moving away from home, leaving them behind.

A group should present a short advertisement for their home town, outlining it's best points, and using presentation skills to 'sell' their town or village.

A town meeting is being held to discuss the proposed demolition of your hometown. Representatives of the community should be called up to present the reasons for and against the proposal.

Post-Workshop Information & Further Resources

Following East Anglian Psychos workshops, the ideas for scenes and freeze-frames will be noted down and transferred to the East Anglian Psychos website: www.xmaseveproject.com. As the schools tour progresses, this collection of short scenes or moments will grow to reflect the differing responses across East Anglia.

In addition, schools will be given the videotape of any work presented by their pupils at the end of the workshop. This footage is not retained by Eastern Angles in any form, but is for the individual schools to use for further work in class.

Also available on the website will be production shots of the show and excerpts from the script to use in class.

All Production Photography by Mike Kwasniak.

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