

WORKSHEET by Andrew Milne-Skinner for 'On the Brink' by Sean Aita

Agenda

A - APPROACHING: For teachers and student teachers/ For students

B - LEADING IN: Author's Note/ Characters in the play/ Title of the play

C - WORKING OUT: Prologue/ Scene 1/ Scene 2/ Scene 3/ Scene 4/ Scene 5/ Scene 6/
Scene 7/ Scene 8/ Scene 9/ Scene 10/ Plot Summary/ Contextualizing/ The 4 'Ws'/
Characterizing/ Drama terms/ Structure

D - LIVING THROUGH: Drama activities/ Dramatizing a speech/ Role-on-the-wall/ In the
Spotlight ('Hot-seating')/ Role-play/ Acting the play script/ Making a tableau/ Discussing
critically/ Staging the play

E - FOLLOWING UP: Writing a review/ Ancient Greek Drama/ Sophocles/ Versions of
Antigone

A - APPROACHING

For teachers and student teachers....

Please regard the various tasks, questions and activities as an *à la carte* menu, not as a fixed buffet! Choice will depend on which parts of the Worksheets will work best with *your* class, the class only *you* know!

As you can see from the section below 'For students', we encourage students to engage with the play, using some – if not all 'Multiple' – Intelligences.

We as teachers can help students to engage by offering 'scaffolding':

- Arousing attention, generating interest, stimulating desire (to work on...), and encouraging action (eg. role-reading, role-acting) (cf. the 'AIDA' formula from advertising. After all, our job as teachers is to market learning!)
- Facilitating the process of engaging with the personal conflicts and moral dilemmas in the play
- Pausing and predicting; retelling and summarizing
- Responding and reflecting critically
- Exploring feelings and issues beyond the play

For students....

Personal conflicts and moral dilemmas can engage us emotionally and intellectually. The characters in 'On the Brink' experience such conflicts and dilemmas. In reading the play we may empathize, sympathize or even identify with the characters. In studying the play, we undergo a 'living through' experience. We may well relate our own subjective life experience with the objective fictional situation in the play; we may compare our possible solutions to a dilemma with the ones a character chooses. We may even 'become' the character.

In Alan Bennett's play 'The History Boys', the broad-minded, inspirational teacher Hector says to a pupil:

"The best moments in *reading* are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things – which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met. ... And it is as if a hand has come out, and taken yours."

In 'On the Brink' the author Sean Aita takes us by the hand on a journey, the journey the characters experience in the play. Some of the thoughts and feelings may well resonate with you yourself.

But rather than simply *reading* the play, try engaging with the play personally by grappling with the conflicts and dilemmas presented. Take possession of the play. Make it *your* play.

The tasks, questions and activities are here to help you engage with the play. Try *tackling* them. After all,

"I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I *do* and I come to understand." (attributed to Confucius)

Do experience the play, engage with the tasks and activities, hopefully in an enjoyable way!

You might like to read the Author's Note first *before* working on the play itself. Alternatively, you could study his comments *afterwards*.

B - LEADING IN

Author's Note

1. Find out more about the 2019 'Shutdown London' protest.
2. 'Climate change is ... the key political and social issue of our time.'
To what extent do you agree with Sean Aita's statement?
absolutely.....totally.....largely.....partly.....scarcely.....not at all
3. What is the most eco-friendly way to source (a) one's food, and (b) the clothing one wears?
4. Do you think that the outbreak of Covid-19 will have an impact on how we see environmental issues? If so, to what extent, and how?
5. Which aspect of the conflict in Sophocles' original drama appeals to Sean Aita?

6. Find out about the central conflict in Sophocles' 'Antigone'.

Characters in the play

7. Draw a simple sociogram (diagram of the social relationships) of the characters. This can help you to focus on how the characters interact in the play.

8. Characterizing

Be prepared to analyse the characters in the play. Analyzing characters depends on what we read in the text and then see and hear later on the stage.

You might like to consider the following features ('FRAISER'-technique):

- F Function: the purpose of the character in the plot
- R Role: the relationship with other characters
- A Actions: what a character does and their behaviour
- I Interactions: how other characters relate to them, and vice versa
- S Speech: what they say, how they say it, key speeches
- E Emotion: what they feel and how they show it
- R Response: how we the audience are encouraged to relate to the character

9. Keep a character profile for each character. Do they change in the course of the play? If so, how?

Title of the play

10. 'On the brink'... of what? How might we expect this phrase to continue? Which words could follow?
11. Drama is always about conflict of some sort. This is what makes it 'drama', 'dramatic'. Looking at the list of characters, which conflicts might you expect? What could happen? What could 'on the brink' mean now?

C - WORKING OUT

Prologue

12. Try reading aloud Tiggy's lines. Think of tempo, pause, growing tension, crescendo, slowing down, and then relaxation....

Scene 1

13. How does Creon Nanrod deal with the TV journalist's questions?
14. How does he defend Nanrod Transnational?
15. Which initiative does the company launch, with Tiggy's support?

Scene 2

16. Why does Liana say Tiggy should be ashamed?
17. Summarize the pros and cons of (a) using wind power, and (b) storing electricity in batteries.
18. How effective are protests on the streets, do you think?
19. What is Theo really concerned about?

Scene 3

20. What does Liana accuse Creon of?

21. How does Creon defend his company?
22. What does Liana feel about Creon's idea of compromise?
23. Why is the meeting broken off?
24. What is most important for Creon in the sudden emergency?

Scene 4

25. Why does Liana hate the Nanrods?

Scene 5

26. What does Tiggy accuse her uncle of?
27. How does he defend his company policy?

Scene 6

28. What does Tiggy intend to do?
29. What does she now realize?
30. What has made her change her attitude?

Scene 7

31. Summarize what the media report says about the protest march.

Scene 8

32. Explain Tiggy's new idealistic commitment.
33. What might 'something bigger and more extreme' mean?

Scene 9

34. Who could the suspect be?

Scene 10

35. Re-tell, explain and discuss the story of the lazy Bollworm.
36. Will the end always justify the means? Discuss.
37. How does Creon 'wake up' Tiggy?
38. What does Creon wish from Tiggy?
39. What is Tiggy really against?
40. 'The clock is ticking....' For whom, do you think?
41. Try reading Tiggy's lines again, out loud. Now that you've read (and studied?) the play as a tragedy, how might your reading be different from when you first read it aloud at the start of the play? Again, think of tempo, pause, growing tension, crescendo, slowing down, and then relaxation. How might your tone of voice be different from the early reading?

Plot summary

Re-arrange these statements (1 to 11) to form a clear, coherent summary of the action in the play.

- a. Theo explains to Tiggy why Liana hates the Nanrods.
- b. The story of the lazy Bollworm.

- c. Creon receives Theo and Liana at his company.
- d. Tiggy decides to join the protest demonstration.
- e. Creon defends Nanrod Transnational in a TV interview.
- f. The media report on the protest march.
- g. Liana challenges Tiggy about her commitment to conserving the environment.
- h. Creon visits Tiggy in prison.
- i. Tiggy believes in the real potential of her own generation.
- j. Tiggy challenges her uncle about his company's policies.
- k. Sudden emergency: massive oil leak.

Contextualizing

Look closely at each of these quotations from the play. Who said this, to whom, and when? What are they talking about? (Apart from the first one, the quotations are in jumbled order, different from how they appear in the play!)

A "Nanrod Transnational is doing its level best to operate ethically and responsibly."

B "You have the money to control government policy."

C "Human potential is astonishing."

D "The clock is ticking."

E "My uncle is just as concerned about the state of the world as you are."

F "All protest movements end up hurting people."

G "He's in a wheelchair. Can't walk, can't care for his family."

H "How are the next generations going to survive, if we destroy the earth?"

I "I'm against stagnation, I'm against inaction,..."

J "These things are always more complex than they appear."

K "There is no point in doing something, unless you can be sure it genuinely has the outcome you claim for it."

The Four 'Ws'

Ask yourself the four 'Ws': When? Where? Why? What?

When is the play set? How long does the action last (not the play itself)?

Where is it set? In which country? Real or imaginary?

Why do the characters behave as they do? What are their roles?

What is the play really about? What are the themes and ideas behind the surface action?

Characterizing

Fill in the chart below. Some adjectives may apply to more than one character. Some adjectives may not be appropriate at all. Add any other appropriate adjective you can think of.

List of adjectives:

arrogant authoritarian cold controlling corrupt
critical egoistic ethically responsible headstrong
 honest hypocritical idealistically committed impulsive
independent ingratiating insensitive insistent
intense manipulative merciless obstinate
passionate pragmatic proud ruthless self-
assertive self-reliant sincere stubborn uncompromising
 unfeeling unscrupulous wilful

<i>Character</i>	<i>Corresponding adjectives</i>	<i><u>My</u> adjective</i>
Creon
Tiggy
Theo
Liana

1. Review critically your **sociogram** that shows the interrelationships between the various characters.
2. Sympathy or Antipathy? Which characters do you like or dislike in the play? Why? Do your sympathies change as you see more of these characters?
3. Personality profile
 - a In which ways does a character's personality change? (e.g. Tiggy gradually becoming politically aware)

- b. Draw a graph that represents the change that each character undergoes. The horizontal axis documents the scene-by-scene development, while the vertical axis can show the key turning points marking each change.

Drama terms

Choose the correct definition from the list (A–K) for each drama term (1-9). There is one extra definition that you should not use. Write the letter of the definition next to the corresponding drama term. The first one (0) is given and serves as an example.

0	Climax	<i>A</i>
1	Conflict	
2	Dénouement	
3	Dramatic irony	
4	Exposition	
5	Falling action	
6	Foreshadowing	
7	Motif	
8	Rising action	
9	Turning point	



A	Highest point of tension of play
B	A character does not perceive what his fate holds in store, but the audience knows better
C	Point when an important change takes place (crisis)
D	Action following the climax
E	Struggle between opposing forces or characters
F	Action after the exposition, leading to the climax
G	Introduction, setting the action going, suggesting the theme, introducing the main characters, sketching the setting, arousing suspense
H	Last part after climax, in which the conflict is resolved (resolution)
I	Verbal and dramatic hints suggesting what is to come later
J	A single element (phrase, image, device, incident) frequently repeated to emphasize some aspect of the theme
K	an appendix (usually a concluding address) to a play

Structure

The play reflects a classic structure: rising action – turning point – falling action. Draw a graph showing the rise/fall movement. Mark the various turning points.

D - LIVING THROUGH

1. Drama activities

You might like to try and adapt some of these activities experiencing and working with *On the Brink*.

A session can involve the following stages: a physical warm-up; building self-confidence and mutual trust; a vocal warm-up; imaging characters; projecting beyond a scene by improvising; rehearsal.

2. Dramatizing a speech

Choose one crucial speech to study at home. (e.g.: Liana's speech in which she challenges Creon's idea of compromise, pp.17/18)

- Why is this speech important to the play as a whole?
- How have various events in the play led up to this speech?
- What would an actor have to consider before delivering this speech well?

In class, several readers stand up and give their rendition of their speech.

The class discuss the various readings and interpret the significance of the speech, as well as the motives of the character who delivered it.

Role-on-the-wall: on paper, a large or life-size outline of a character's body; students add comments and 'post-its' about the feelings and attitudes of the character. (This is a collaborative way of generating information and ideas about a character through written contributions to the drawing.)

In the Spotlight: 'hot-seating' a character in the centre of a circle and posing questions about their beliefs and motives.

Role-play: Students act out small scenes using role cards they have produced based on a close reading of the text.

Acting the play script, with the following phases: presentation, discussion and interpretation, rehearsal, performance, evaluation

Making a tableau: students take up different positions and 'freeze' in a chosen scene, forming a still image. Teacher uses 'thought-tracking': by tapping the character on the shoulder: 'What are you thinking about at this moment?', 'How did you get to this thought?' They then unfreeze the tableau, interpret the snapshot, and bring it to life by continuing the scene with improvised dialogue. After trying this out, they then compare their improvisation with the original playscript.

3. Discussing critically

- Identify the main conflicts in the play. Create a mind-map showing the various dimensions to the main conflicts.
- Analyze how dramatic tension is achieved in *On the Brink*.

- How does political power operate in the play?
- How does the conflict lead to a direct confrontation?
- How is dramatic irony used (where we the audience know something that a character on stage does not)?
- How is pressure, and even threat, used?
- Summarize the positive and negative sides of (a) Antigone's argument, and (b) Creon's argument.
- Discuss critically Creon's statement 'The end will always justify the means'. Really?
- How central to the play is the theme of Absolutism vs. Compromise?
- How is it possible that social idealists like Antigone can be seen as political terrorists?
- The Oedipus story: A fable? A parable? A metaphor? How valid and convincing do you find the story?
- Identify examples of ironic humour in the play.

4. Staging the play

- Types of stage:
- Proscenium: stage at end of a hall, with a curtain
- Arena: with the audience sitting in a circle all around it
- Thrust: with the audience on three sides
- Which kind of stage would be most useful for 'On the Brink'? Why?

E - FOLLOWING UP

Write a **review of the play** for the actors and director at Vienna's English Theatre. Whether you have enjoyed the performance in the theatre or not, try to identify what it was that influenced your reaction.

How did it make you feel? Was there a particular part of the production that affected you the most?

Ancient Greek Drama

Tragedy is a classical genre of drama that originated with the ancient Greeks. It focuses on themes of human suffering and man's place in the universe: big themes, then! There is usually a conflict between the main character and some kind of superior force: human power, destiny or the gods. Typically, the main character has a tragic flaw that brings about their downfall, which in turn arouses the audience's, fear and pity: our fear and pity.

In his *Poetics* Aristotle identifies 'character' and 'action' as the essential elements in a story. Character must be revealed through action. Often a character commits the sin of *hubris*, of excess or strong pride.

Aristotle identifies three key elements in a plot:

- *Hamartia*, a sin or fault, a fatal flaw of character that is revealed by a tragic error in action

- *Anagnorisis*, the moment of recognition when the character realizes his or her own tragic mistake

- *Peripeteia*, the turn-about or reversal of fortune

- Try and identify how these concepts might appear in *On the Brink*.

Although tragedy brings suffering and ends with death, we the audience may find the experience moving, but not depressing.

- Why might we leave the theatre not in a sad frame of mind, but with an uplifting feeling?

Aristotle said that tragedy first aroused feelings of pity in the audience, but then – by the end - they felt relieved. He called this *catharsis*, the act of being relieved, or purged, of those early feelings.

He identified three unities of drama: the unity of place, the unity of time, and the unity of action.

- How are these three unities observed in *On the Brink*?

Ref.: Aristoteles, *Poetik* (Griechisch/ Deutsch), Reclam 1982 (ISBN 3-15-007828-8)

Sophocles (496 – 406 B.C.)

Wrote some 120 plays, including *Antigone* in 441 B.C. In contrast to tragedies by Aeschylus, where the gods play an important role,

“the course of Sophocles’ dramas is determined by the characters of the protagonists, the influences they undergo, the penalties they suffer, not by external incidents.”

(The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, ed. Sir Paul Harvey, 1962, pp. 401-2)

In the Introduction to the Penguin English translation of *Antigone*, E.F. Watling writes:

“We are concerned with a single conflict. A king, in full and sincere consciousness of his responsibility for the integrity of the state, has – as an example against treason – made an order of ruthless punishment on a traitor and rebel – an order denying the barest rites of burial of his body, and therefore a solace to his soul. A woman, for whom political expediency takes second place (by a long way) to compassion and piety, has defied the order and is condemned to death.”

Creon: Did you know the order forbidding such an act?

Antigone: I knew it, naturally. It was plain enough.

Creon: And yet you dared to contravene it?

Antigone: Yes. That order did not come from God. Justice, that dwells with the gods below, knows no such law.

Chorus: She shows her father’s stubborn spirit: foolish not to give way when everything’s against her.

Creon: Ah, but you’ll see. The over-obstinate spirit is soonest broken. This girl’s proud spirit was first in evidence when she broke the law.

In Sophocles' original play, the Chorus comments and summarizes the conflict at certain points. The Chorus even offers a resolution at the end:

Of happiness the crown/ And chiefest part/ Is wisdom, and to hold/ The gods in awe./ This is the law/ That, seeing the stricken heart/ Of pride brought down,/ We learn when we are old.

Traditional Cambridge classical scholars saw ancient Greek tragedy as a form of ritual. They identified six stages:

Agon or contest . Pathos or disaster . Messenger Lamentation

Discovery or recognition Epiphany

Our play, *On the Brink*, is a modern adaptation of the original Greek tragedy *Antigone*, but still follows some of the stages above.

- Which of the six stages above do you think *On the Brink* follows?
- Compare and contrast *On the Brink* with *Antigone*. List the similarities and differences.

Versions of 'Antigone'

In 'The Theban Plays', by Sophocles, translated by E.F. Watling (Penguin Classics, originally 1947, since reprinted several times)

'Antigone', Sophokles, Uebersetzung, Anmerkungen und Nachwort von Kurt Steinmann (Reclam, 2018) (ISBN 978-3-15-019075-3)

'Antigone', by Jean Anouilh (1946), in French, available in the red series of Reclam Fremdsprachentexte, edited by Dieter Meier (ISBN 978-3-15-009227-9). Has an excellent 'Nachwort'. From the text:

Antigone: Je vous fais peur. C'est pour cela que vous essayez de me sauver. Vous êtes trop sensible pour faire un bon tyran, voilà tout. Mais vous allez tout de même me faire mourir tout à l'heure, vous le savez, et c'est pour cela que vous avez peur.

Créon (*sourdement*): Eh bien, oui, j'ai peur d'être obligé de te faire tuer si tu t'obstines. Et je ne le voudrais pas.

Brecht's version of Sophocles' tragedy (1947), based on the translation by Hölderlin: Brecht deliberately avoids the tragic by destroying all possible sympathy for Creon. Brecht turns the King into a caricature of Hitler.

'Antigonae', Carl Orff (Salzburger Festspiele, 1949)

Hörspiel von Helmut Peschina nach Sophokles (ORF, 2020), broadcast on OE1 Saturday July 25, 2020

'antigone. ein requiem', by Thomas Köck. Directed by Lars-Ole Walburg at the Tiroler Landestheater, Innsbruck, from September 2020.