

The Distance We Have Travelled



A Drama Teaching Resource

Simon Longman, Sam Kalubowila

School of Drama & Screen Studies/Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre

The University of Manchester

The Distance We Have Travelled

Notes for the script

Scene One

The play opens with a scene that is set within the country of the refugee's origin. It is an unnamed country so as not to focus the drama within a specific time period or particular conflict, but to demonstrate that the actions depicted would be anywhere and could happen to anyone. It is a set that enables the focus to be on the lines and actors and one that can be created in any school environment, be it a theatre, classroom or other learning space. In this way, the ease of performance is emphasised with little time spent deciding on setting, allowing for more time to be spent on rehearsing the scene.

The characters in the scene are either soldiers or refugees, all of whom are unnamed to maintain the point of anonymity and freedom of setting. The lines are assigned to no specific character, only to either a soldier, or a refugee. This enables the students to decide who says the lines, creating a greater sense of the pupils' ownership of the drama. Furthermore, the unassigned lines enable students who do not want a large part to take as many lines as they feel comfortable with. The casting for this scene only requires the teacher, or the pupils, to decide on who plays the soldiers, and who plays the refugees.

The action of the scene is relatively straight forward, with no parts of the action requiring drama experience to perform. The script gives guidelines for performance as loosely as it can allow, enabling students to improvise and fill in the actions that are unscripted. The only parts worth noting that require some explanation are:

The soldier ordering the refugees to get down

With this part, a certain amount of physical contact is required to demonstrate the attitude and violence of the soldiers. The level of aggression is unspecified and it is for the teacher to oversee how much or little physical contact is required. Cultural sensitivities regarding physical contact should be taken into account, as well as any physical disabilities in the class.

The freeze after the explosion

The freeze frame neatly ends the scene which requires all the actors to freeze in a position that emphasises the explosion. If students are not familiar with 'freeze frame,' the lines can still be said in a way that the students can devise themselves. The freeze is only suggested.

The discussion questions allow time for reflection and the other students to prepare for scene two.

Scene two

This scene is concerned with the refugees' journey to another country. It takes place inside a lorry which could be which could be easily represented by using desks and chairs to represent the walls of the lorry. Again, all the characters are unnamed, but for this scene, all parts are refugees.

The scene has a gentler tone compared to scene one, with more concentration placed on the ambiguity of the destination, and less on the specifics of the situation. In this way, the refugees are people that could be anyone and anywhere, enforcing the point of loss of identity that reflects the refugee experience.

A noteworthy part of this scene occurs when one character tries to take all the money off another refugee. This event is included to demonstrate the desperation of the situation that the characters are in. It is a small display of one refugee's determination and hopelessness of trying to find some salvation in their abandoned life. This part may require a student that has confidence at acting to try and create a convincing performance. However, this can be decided by the teacher, or the students. Again, the framework of the script is only present to loosely control the performance; all other decisions belong to the students.

The scene's discussion enables individual thoughts on the isolation that characters feel before moving to the last scene of the play.

Scene three

The last stage of the play is split into two subsequent parts, a bus stop, and a school. By doing this, students are encouraged to employ directorial decisions in order to create the scenes for the last two settings. For example, when the bus stop sequence ends, the characters at the bus stop become school children and use chairs to create a mock-classroom, or some may be sitting in an improvised classroom while some act out the bus stop scene; the direction is left to the students.

In terms of characters, one refugee is required, and the remainder of the actors play by-standers at the bus-stop, and in the classroom, as pupils. In this way, ensemble acting is employed to create a sense of the refugee being alone in a new country. It essentially concentrates on the feelings of citizens towards refugees. The people at the bus stop are similar to the school pupils in that they either mock, or help the refugee. Although it may seem harsh, the script enables two sides of interpretation, the feelings of oppression, and the feelings of welcoming. This emphasises the refugees' nervousness and sense of isolation when entering an alien situation. Again, the lines are all unassigned at the bus stop and classroom. The refugee's lines are relatively simple to work out and are left unnamed so that one student could play a refugee at the bus stop, and another one in the classroom. None of the roles are gender specific either; they are all suitable for males and females.

The scene comes without any discussion topics as, hopefully, the last line of the play; "I don't know," suggests that this lost sense of identity, which could be a starting point for discussion. Questions regarding the nature of acceptance, happiness, identity, and morality can be discussed as follow-up to the performance. The ending is left ambiguous so as to create the largest possible grounds for discussion.

Overall

What this script essentially aims to achieve is to present a series of events that could occur to any refugee across the globe. The scene's settings are all familiar and synonymous with any geographical location, thus creating a performance that is focussed more on emotion and feeling, than dealing with a specific historical event.

Furthermore, the inclusion of a large number of questions in the script that the characters say enables greater scope for discussion within the class. As many, or as few of these questions can be highlighted for discussion at the end of the scene. The discussion topics at the end of each scene are only included as ideas and guidelines that can be used, it is designed for the students to decide the specifics.

Lastly, the play tries to be as impartial and unbiased as possible. The feelings and events in the play are based on testimonies taken from the 'Distance We Have Travelled' teaching pack, which was developed using interviews with refugees in Manchester. This play is written to demonstrate feelings, not to convey history, thus allowing students to explore drama to understand, and hopefully appreciate some of the struggles faced by refugees all over the world, struggling to rebuild their lives.

Refugees are just ordinary people, but with extraordinary stories.

The Distance We Have Travelled

Scene One

Two crowds of people, one a group of civilians, another, a couple of soldiers. Confusion on stage, shouting from all sides.

Where have you been? It's all gone?

What is?

Our homes! Our families! Can you not see the flames behind us?

They burned our village, killed our men and took our children.

Why are they doing this?

I saw my wife die. She was shot by the soldiers.

They said they had come to make things better, they said they were fighting to better our country.

But now it is just another war.

Another few soldiers enter the scene and move toward the crowd. Some people fall, others run. The following dialogue occurs whilst the crowd is in a state of confusion. Shouting and jeering, women crying loudly.

Move! Move!

Do not force us to shoot you!

How much money did you take?

All of it! There was a stash. The eldest child was trying to guard it, he is dead now. They do not understand that this is for their country.

Listen! The bombs will not stop tonight. If you don't leave you will die.

YOU! GET DOWN! GET ON THE FLOOR! GET ON THE FLOOR OR I WILL SHOOT!

Go ahead! You killed all my family! I care for nothing now, I have nothing left. There is nothing you can do to me that will make me hurt any more.

GET DOWN!

One soldier pushes the civilian to the ground. Another civilian comforts them.

All of you, on the floor. NOW!

We want no trouble with you, I only want to find my children. Please let me find my children!

Your children are no longer. Now get down or you will join them.

The scene gradually quietens, the civilians rounded up on the floor, the soldiers standing guard.

What can we do?

Nothing. I heard they are coming to take over.

Politics? All this murder for politics?

Can they not see that we mean them no harm?

I don't know. Just keep your head down and stay quiet. They will move on soon.

They will move on. And burn another village and kill more of our people. But we have nothing to our names, and nowhere to go.

Where are we going to go? Everything I owned has been stolen or destroyed. Are we lost?

We are going to have to find somewhere else. We are in danger here.

The soldiers move around the huddle of civilians.

You have nothing left here. You will be killed if you stay.

The roads are open to you if you want to leave the country, If you stay, as we have said, you will die. We are fighting for a new democracy and do not want you here to get in the way.

Where will we go?

Anywhere that will have you. You are not wanted here. Get out and don't come back.

If you try anything, you will be killed. Just save yourselves and leave. There is nothing you can do to stop this. Democracy will prevail and it doesn't need you.

Move on without any-

LOOK OUT! INCOMING!

The action freezes as a rocket propelled grenade explodes nearby. The following lines are delivered in a frozen position.

I saw my father killed in front of me.

I have nothing but my dress and my shoes.

I have nowhere to go.

I don't know if I'll see my family, friends, or my home again.

At this point the scene ends. The teacher can then discuss the action with the class. The last four lines can be used as a starting point for discussions. The first is representative of the pain of war. The second deals with the poverty forced upon refugees. The third is about the sense of rootlessness and lack of a place to call 'home.' The fourth and final line establishes the sense of isolation that is explored in greater detail in scene two...

scene two

crowd huddled together. The mood is sombre. The scene unfolds inside a lorry.

How long has it been?

What? Inside this lorry? Or since we fled home?

Inside this one?

I don't know.

I've been in a here for a week, maybe. Others have come and gone.

I'm so cold, freezing. I miss my family.

Where are they?

We don't know. Our parents are dead. We sold what we had left to pay the man to take us to a safe place.

Where?

I don't know.

I am also trying to get to safety. Do you think we will be happy?

We will find out. After all of what has happened, it will be hard to find happiness anywhere.

Don't say that. Somewhere, we will be accepted.

Doubt it. We are the living unwanted. If our own country doesn't want us, why would anywhere else?

Think what you want. I know I will be OK.

Does anyone know what it is like? Europe? England?

Several voices all speak at once

I don't know.

I hope it will be safe for us.

And we are accepted.

But I can't stop thinking about my own country.

Silence

We are slowing down, I can feel it.

Are we here? I am so cold? Please tell me we are here?

The lorry's doors open and a man enters. Everyone in the lorry stares.

Get out. This is as far as I can take you. You figure out the rest for yourselves.

All exit from the lorry. The refugees line up together, some form small groups around the stage.

It's so cold here.

Where do we go now?

Anywhere you want, and anywhere that will have you. You are on the North coast of France. Stay here, go to Germany, Belgium, Holland or wherever. I have done all I can. You will have to find another lorry driver to take you if you wish to get to the UK.

I am going this way, I have family in Germany. I will try to find them.

I will come with you.

I haven't enough money for another journey.

Here, I have some. It is not much, but it's all I have.

He/She offers some money to the other refugee, who tries to grab it all.

What are you doing?

Give it to me! I need it!

Leave it. Stop!

Please, give it to me!

Let go!

The refugee who was trying to get the money falls to their knees and begins to cry.

Please, I need it. I'm lost, alone. I don't know what to do anymore. I'm so sorry, I just wish things were like they were before we had to leave. I miss my family.
Is this what we have come to? Are we really so alone? How much will we have to go through to have peace in our lives again?

The refugee that left earlier comes back, hurrying.

Lorry! A lorry! Over there, offering passage to the UK! Hurry or it will go.

All refugees leave but one.

Is this all there is? Why do we have to travel thousands of miles to be accepted?

With this line, the scene closes. The opportunity to discuss the refugees' state of mind present itself.

How would you feel in this situation?

Could you imagine life away from all the things you hold dear?

How do you think the refugees will adapt to life in the UK?

How do you think they are feeling? Lonely? Safe? Scared? Homesick?

Scene three

This scene takes place at a bus stop. There are a number of people waiting. Two of the refugees are among the crowd.

Excuse me...

...

Sorry, I don't know which bus to get on.

Read the timetable then, that's what it's there for.

I don't know these place names. And there are so many different numbers.

Not my problem *(turns back on refugee)*

Please. I just want to go to town centre.

Look. Just read the timetable OK? They are over there. I am sure you can read it, it's not hard. *(laughs)*

Why do you talk to people like that? What's your problem?

What??

You. Someone just asked you for help.

So what. He doesn't care. We don't care. You help him yourself if you are so offended.

Where do you need to go to?

Town centre. I need to get to my school.

You need the number 37, it should be here soon. I'm getting it too, you can follow me.

Thank you, you are very kind.

...

How long have you been here?

Me? One week. I have never travelled on a bus here before.

Where did you come from?

A place where there is war and fighting.

Same as me. I have been here for two years. You will get used to it.

I feel so lost and lonely.

So do I, even after all this time.

The scene moves from a school to a school corridor. Actors playing the by-standers at the bus stop become school children.

Excuse me, where is class 4G?

Oi! Watch out, look where you are going!

Hello, please help – where is this classroom? *(points to sheet of paper in hand)*
What?

Class 4G, where is it? Please?

What are you talking about? Speak English!

Sorry, my English is not very good. Please help me to find the class.

I can't understand you, leave me alone. Go away!

Pupils start to file into a classroom, there is a great deal of movement and confusion on stage.

Please help? Can you tell me where this class is please? *(points to sheet)*

What? Look, I'm late, I don't have time for this.

Please, I'm new.

OK, OK, down the corridor, on the left hand side.

The scene becomes a classroom, everyone is seated except for the refugee child.

(laughing)

Who's that?

Dunno, they look a bit weird!

Haha! Yeah, this will be funny, watch this. Oi! Got a seat here for you! Come on!

Thank you.

Refugee pupil goes over to seat.

Oh no, sorry. I thought you were someone else. This seat is reserved... for my feet!

Stretches out and puts feet on chair. Laughs with friends.

Oh shut up! Why do you have to act like such an idiot?

Oooooohhh, what are you gonna do about it?

Takes refugees arm and leads them to a seat next to their own.

Sorry about them. Ignore them, they are stupid. There's a spare seat next to me, come and sit with me.

Thank you

What's your name?

My name is ...

You're not from around here are you? Where are you from?

I don't know anymore.

