

King Maty

by **Stephen Greenhorn**
adapted from the book by Janusz Korczak



TEACHER'S RESOURCES



King Matt

Welcome to the teachers' resources to accompany TAG's production of *King Matt* at The London International Festival of Theatre. Here are some ideas for exercises on *King Matt* which will help young people get the most out of TAG's performance. The resources are divided into 2 sections, for pre and post performance work.

TAG's production of *King Matt* was adapted for the stage by Stephen Greenhorn from the original story written by Janusz Korczak, a Polish Jew who ran an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Nazi occupation. For more information and ideas for studying the remarkable educator, paediatrician, writer, storyteller and broadcaster, please see our resources for our production of *Dr. Korczak's Example* which are also available to download from the TAG website.

We are always aiming to provide the most effective and beneficial resources to teachers and so please feel free to offer any comments you have on this pack. We appreciate and welcome all feedback.

I hope you find these ideas useful and enjoyable.
Best wishes

Emily Ballard
Education Officer, TAG

The Story

King Matt tells the story of an 11 year old boy who inherits a kingdom upon the death of his father. Once king, Matt embarks on an amazing adventure in which he discovers a lot about the outside world and himself, and initiates a programme of reform to place children in the limelight and adults in their place. He travels the world fighting in his own army, argues with his Chancellor of the Exchequer and the rest of his cabinet, and decides to implement a radical programme of reform in an effort to improve his kingdom so that children are more fairly treated. However, King Matt discovers there is a high economic and political price to pay if he wants to implement these idealistic but expensive reforms. In the end, overwhelmed by misinformation from his adult advisers, hostility from neighbouring countries and with his country on the brink of a revolution, King Matt's reforms and his kingdom are in tatters.

Before the Performance

DISCUSSION: What do you think it would be like to be a King or a Queen?
What would be good about it?
What might be bad about it?

DRAMA EXERCISE: SERVANTS AND ROYALTY

In pairs, one person labels themselves A, the other B.
Person A is the servant of B – how might A show everyone that s/he is a servant?
How might A feel towards B and how might that be shown physically?
What might they say to B?

With A remaining in role, B has just become King or Queen.
A must dress B – starting with a heavy crown – how does it feel for B?
A then puts long robe on B – how might that affect how you stand?
A then puts uncomfortable shoes on B – how might B walk?

Then A and B must continue in role. The Servant must do anything the King or Queen requests.

However, the Servants can get their revenge as everything changes over! Repeat with A as the King or Queen and B as the Servant.

After a few minutes, ask the pairs to sit down where they are.

- How did it feel to be the King or Queen?
- Did the Kings and Queens think their Servants did a good job for them?
- How did it feel to be the Servant?
- Did the Servants feel they were treated fairly?
- How would the Servants have liked to have been treated by the King or Queen?

DISCUSSION: If you were King or Queen, decide on one law you would create.
Have a vote in the group – who would agree with the new laws?

DRAMA EXERCISE: LEADERS

Ask the class to walk quickly around the room. As quickly as they can, they must get into groups of 5.
In groups of 5 each group must build a square, using every member of the group.
Then they must build a triangle, a star etc.

Once they have got used to the game, each group must build an object, e.g. a boat, a monster etc. in complete silence!

All sit down. Ask the questions:

- Was it easier to build shapes when you could speak, or when it was silent?
- Why?
- Did you find that one person took responsibility for organising the group – did someone become the leader?
- What other groups do you belong to, e.g. football team, brownies etc.?
- Who leads these groups?

Work though who leads the class, who leads the school, who leads the education department, who leads the council, who leads the constituency, up to the Prime Minister.

Explain that we have a Queen and a Prime Minister in this country.

- Who leads who?

DRAMA EXERCISE: PERSUADING PEOPLE

Explain that in Parliament, MPs (or MSPs) discuss different viewpoints about how the country should be run. If you have an idea – a motion - you have to argue why you think it should happen. Others will probably argue against you.

To explore this idea, in pairs (A & B), ask the young people to decide on a useless object, e.g. a chocolate teapot. A has to convince B that it would be a good idea to buy the useless object. A has to argue why it would be a bad idea! Change over, choosing a new object.

DRAMA EXERCISE: WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS?

Quite often children are consulted about various issues which affect them. Of course, there is always room for more initiatives which allow children to have a say!

Ask the questions:

- Do you think grown-ups are qualified to rule children?
- Why?
- What do you know about that adults don't?
- As the group to propose some ideas that they think would improve life for children – what do you think adults would think of them?

Divide the class into groups of 4 with 2 people in role as adults (parents, teachers etc.) and 2 people as themselves. The children have to propose one of these ideas to the adults – what do the adults make of it? The children must try to convince the adults why it would be a good idea. The adults can argue against it if they disagree.

Ask the question:

- What kinds of decisions do adults make that affect children?

Change over – this time the adults must propose one of these ideas and try to convince children that their ideas are good. Similarly, the children are free to argue if they disagree!

DRAMA EXERCISE: PASSING A MOTION

Remind the group that it is important to consider all the people who might be affected by a decision passed by a leader.

Introduce the idea of the school day starting at 7am and finishing at 1pm. Ask the group what they think about that and take a vote immediately. Then ask the group who would be affected by this decision, e.g. pupils, teachers, parents, school crossing patrol, janitors etc.

Then split the group into 6 groups and give each group a role from these categories. Half the class must be *for* the motion and half the class *against* it. The teacher in role chairs the debate.

After the debate has taken place, take a new vote to see if anyone has changed their minds. Remind the young people that it is OK to change your mind about things; opinions can change when you look carefully at something and really think about it.

DISCUSSION: What rights do you think children should have regarding decisions which affect them?
 How much responsibility should children have?
 How much power should adults have?

Having considered the roles, rights and responsibilities of leaders and the people they lead, young people should be well-equipped to engage with the story of *King Matt*. There follows some ideas for follow-up work on *King Matt* after the performance.

Following the Performance

DRAMA EXERCISE: KING MATT TABLEAUX

In groups of 4 or 5, ask the young people to show 3 of their favourite parts of the play through 3 tableaux (a tableau is an image made by performers, without movement or speech – special attention should be paid to facial and body expression and group positioning to allow the audience to “read” the image).

As the rest of the group look at each image, encourage the young people to recall that part of the play and how those moments fitted into the story.

DRAMA EXERCISE: ROLE ON THE WALL

1. KING MATT

Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5. Each group should have a large (flip chart size) piece of paper and 2 pens (of different colours). Ask them to draw an outline representing King Matt. This does not have to be desperately accurate!

Thinking about Matt at the start of the play, when he is first crowned king, ask the groups to write statements about:

- a) How Matt is feeling inside, his internal emotions.

These statements or words should be written **INSIDE** the outline of the body.

Once they have done this for a few minutes ask them to also write statements about:

- b) What other people think of Matt.

These statements should be written **OUTSIDE** the outline.

Then ask the group to repeat both a) and b), using the other coloured pen, thinking about Matt at the end of the play.

- How has Matt changed?
- What kinds of new experiences has he had to deal with?
- How do people see him now?

2. THE JOURNALIST

Repeat the *role on the wall* exercise for the Journalist at the end of the play.

Once the group have a good idea of a) how the Journalist feels and b) what other people think of him, they are in a good position to try the next exercise.

HOT SEATING

Ask for 5 or 6 volunteers. These young people sit on chairs in a tight semicircle. The rest of the group should sit in a bigger semicircle facing the volunteers. In the space between the two groups, place an empty chair with an overcoat or a hat on it. This chair faces towards the larger semicircle and is a physical representation of the volunteer group's character.

The class can ask questions of the character. The volunteers can all speak when they choose and they should all speak in role as the Journalist. This is known as *hot seating* and is a good way of exploring the character and imaginatively examining their motivation for what they do in the play.

This could be repeated for other characters in *King Matt*.

VARIATION: INTERVIEWS

As a variation on this idea, in pairs, young people can conduct interviews – one in role as the interviewer and another in role as a character from *King Matt*. The outcomes of these interviews can be fed back to the class. They can then write an article about how the character responded to the events in the play.

DRAMA EXERCISE: GOOD & BAD DECISIONS

Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5. Give each group a character: Matt, Felek, the Ministers or the Journalist. Thought-storm the good and the bad decisions these characters make.

Ask each group to pick a bad decision made by their character and re-create the scene:

- What are the consequences of this bad decision?
- What should they have done?

Each group must then run the scene again, this time ensuring that their character makes (what the group considers to be) the right decision:

- How does this transform the scene?

Remind the group of the importance of thinking possible consequences through very carefully before making decisions.

DRAMA EXERCISE: THINK FOR YOURSELF!

Remind the pupils of the following section in the play:

MATT: What are you doing here?

JOURNALIST: Me? I'm just a rat about to leave a sinking ship. But not by train it seems. I must say, wandering through the city, you must be very pleased with your handiwork.

MATT: Pleased? D'you know what I saw? A train crash where people were dying because there was no hospital to take them to cause the doctors were all back in the classroom!

THE JOURNALIST laughs.

JOURNALIST: Yes, one of my better ideas that.

FELEK suddenly starts to realise.

FELEK: You're right. That was your idea. You were always making suggestions, weren't you? Giving me advice. And I listened. What an idiot I am! You were trying to wreck everything!

JOURNALIST: Me? All I've done is supported you! I didn't pass any laws. You and the children did that all by yourselves.

FELEK: But it was you who told me to send the grown-ups back to school.

JOURNALIST: And it was you who were stupid enough to do it. That's not my fault is it?

- What message is this extract giving out?
- How do you feel about the Journalist here?
- What do you think about Felek and Matt?
- Does this extract make you think of any familiar situations?

Reiterate the importance of thinking for yourself rather than being led by what people tell you. In groups of 4 or 5, ask the pupils to create scenes where a similar thing happens – where one person is encouraged to do something by another person with disastrous consequences.

- How could these situations end differently?

DRAMA EXERCISE: KINGDOMS

Ask the group if they can name the different kings (apart from Matt) in the play:

- The Old King and his son, the Prince.
- The Poor King
- The Bored King

Ask the question:

- Which king was your favourite and why?

Divide the group into 3 groups, giving each group one kingdom to consider. Ask each group to think about what it would be like to live in that kingdom.

Each group must then create a short scene showing one of the following:

- A day in the life of the subjects of The Old King
- A day in the life of the subjects of The Poor King
- A day in the life of the subjects of The Bored King

Ask the audience to respond to the scenes:

- Which kingdom would you prefer to live in and why?
- If you were a king, how would you make your subjects happy?

DRAMA EXERCISE: MATT'S RIGHTS

Remind the class that some bad things happen to Matt. Can they think of any examples? (Going to war, having to work very long hours, the Journalist sabotaging the parliament, the Ministers surrendering on Matt's behalf).

Matt should have been protected by rights. Remind that class that they are protected by rights. Ask if they can identify any.

For resources see UNICEF's website on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: www.therightssite.org.uk

In order to illustrate these rights, divide the class into groups of 3. Each group is given a right which they are going to represent, e.g. the right to an education. Each group must create a tableau which represents this, with the title: "Every child has the right to....."

Once they have done this, they must then create the opposite tableau: "No child has the right to"

The rest of the class must guess which right is being presented and why they think that. Then on the count of 3, the group must move into the negative version. Repeat with the other groups.

Ask the questions:

- What were you feeling in the positive image?
- What was the effect of the denial of that right in the negative image?
- How would you feel not being allowed that right?
- What would be the long term effect of being denied that right?

- Why are these rights so important?

- What kinds of citizens are created from children who are given these rights?

- Have you ever felt that you have been denied your rights?
- How did you feel/what did you do?

Responsibilities

Ensure that you emphasize the need for the group to recognise their responsibilities to one another. If you want these rights, you have the responsibility to ensure other people's rights are not infringed. There must be a balance between what we are given and what we give.

DISCUSSION: FINAL QUESTIONS

To finish, lead a discussion with the group on the ending of the play.

- What do you think happened at the end?

*So is this the end for our hero King Matt
Does he die all alone in defeat?
Are there chapters to come about what happens next
Or is the story now closed and complete?*

*Does Felek come back to Matt's rescue once more
Cause he cannot abandon his friend?
Does the firing squad fail or the Prince change his mind?
Or is this the ultimate end?*

- How did you feel about not being given the ending?
- What do you think about Matt?

*Was Matt a fool or an ambitious boy?
Was he dreaming of personal glory?
Could his ideas have worked if they'd been given half a chance?
Ah well that's your part of the story...*