

gest

TEACHER'S RESOURCE PACK

TO BE USED WITH THE THEATRE PRODUCTION

EVERY BRILLIANT THING

by Duncan Macmillan
with Jonny Donahoe



Hello!

We hope that this Resource Pack will help you and the students to prepare for your theatre visit and to further explore what you have experienced by watching EVERY BRILLIANT THING at Gothenburg English Studio Theatre.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,
the GEST team

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ABOUT EVERY BRILLIANT THING

The narrator takes us on a journey through his life from the age of 7, when he starts to write a list of everything that's worth living for as a present for his suicidal mother. As he throughout his life continues with the list, it helps him profess his love for his student crush; it keeps him going through depression; and it's how he articulates his changing emotions. The audience plays an important part in the show, both taking on the roles of important people in the narrator's life, and reading out entries from the list of brilliant things.

Told with humour and warmth, Every Brilliant Thing is a wise and witty examination of depression, including the effect it can have on family members, and charts the lengths we go to for those we love.

ABOUT GEST

GEST (Gothenburg English Studio Theatre) was founded in 2005 with the aim of providing quality, contemporary and award-winning theatre in the English language. GEST is the only professional English speaking theatre in Western Sweden. Celebrated by audience and critics alike, GEST brings the very best of contemporary drama from the rest of the World to Scandinavia and invites actors and directors from the UK and Ireland to work with a Swedish/English production team. We aim to produce theatre of the highest standard and often present Scandinavian premieres.

The Gothenburg English Studio Theatre is an intimate 90-seater, situated close to Chapmans Torg, in the heart of Majorna, Gothenburg. GEST also tours around Sweden, performing in schools and at places such as Kulturhuset Stadsteatern Stockholm and Borås Stadsteater.

GEST always collaborate closely with schools, colleges and universities, offering specially reduced prices, drama workshops in schools and after-show discussions with the actors.

Playwright: Duncan Macmillian with Jonny Donahoe

Director: Kristina Brändén Whitaker

Performer: Gary Whitaker

Rehearsal Assistant: Måns Thornberg, R.T.C

Set and Light Design: Max Mitle

Sound Design: Karl Wassholm

Technician: Diblik Rabia, Tatiana Madrid, Yosef Madar

Photos and promotional trailer: Lina Ikse

Production Manager: Sarah Johansson

Production Assistant: Annie Simlund

Artistic Directors: Kristina Brändén Whitaker, Gary Whitaker

ABOUT DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time, and affects your everyday life.

In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirits. It doesn't stop you leading your normal life but makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening because it can make you feel suicidal or simply give up the will to live.

Suicide is the act of intentionally taking your own life. Suicidal feelings can range from being preoccupied by abstract thoughts about ending your life, or feeling that people would be better off without you, to thinking about methods of suicide, or making clear plans to take your own life.

If you are feeling suicidal, you might be scared or confused by these feelings. But you are not alone.

If you or someone you know are feeling depressed or suicidal:

- Support them to get help
- Be open about depression
- Offer emotional and practical support
- Help them to think of ideas for self help
- Help them to make a support plan
- Remember yourself. It can be emotionally draining to help someone who is not feeling well. Make sure you get the support you need too, to be able to continue to support your friend.

Source and more information: www.mind.org.uk,
www.samaritans.org

Do not hesitate to ask for help if you think you or a friend needs it. Here is a list of organisations that offer support and information:

- **112**
- **90101**
www.mind.se/
- **1177**
www.1177.se
- **SPES (Riksförbundet för SuicidPrevention och Efterlevandes Stöd)**
08-34 58 73
www.spes.se
- **Nationella hjälplinjen**
0771-22 00 60,
www.hjalplinjen.se
- **Ungdoms-mottagningen**
www.umo.se
- **BRIS (Barnens Rätt I Samhället)**
116 111,
www.bris.se
- **Jourhavande medmänniska**
08-702 16 80,
www.jourhavande-medmanniska.se

THEATRE STAGING AND AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Throughout history, many ways of making theatre have been used for different reasons to gain different results. Ancient Greek plays, like *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes and *Medea* by Euripides, were originally performed in amphitheatres. Augusto Boal used forum theatre, or 'Theatre of the Oppressed' in South America during the second half of the 1900s to teach people how to change their world, by staging problems or situations where oppression is visible, and then letting the audience give suggestions on how to solve the problem or the situation.

For a long time, one of the most common types of theatre staging has been a 'proscenium', where the stage has three walls, and the auditorium (where the audience is seated) is located where the fourth wall would have been, had the stage been a normal room. This imagined 'fourth wall' can be kept, letting the audience be only spectators of whom the actors are not aware, therefore retaining the illusion that what happens on the stage is real. However that illusion can be broken if the actors directly refer to the audience, to the play as a play or the characters as fictional ('breaking the fourth wall'). All these are tools that directors and creative teams use to enhance the meanings and topics of their productions.

Every Brilliant Thing is staged in 'thrust', which means that the audience is seated on three sides of the stage. Furthermore, the auditorium is always lit, making the audience as visible as the actor, and since the actor moves not only on the obvious stage but also in and around the audience's seats, the divide between stage and auditorium, spectators and participants, has been obscured.

The play is written for one actor, but is in no way a one-person-show. The audience plays an important part as different characters in the narrator's life, and help call out a number of different list entries.

•Why do you think the playwright and the creative team at GEST decided to write and stage the play in this way?

•What goals are met through the active textual, directorial and staging choices in the play you have experienced?

VOCABULARY

Finality - The fact or feeling of something being final and irreversible.

Infinity - The concept of something continuing forever without end.

Pentobarbital - A drug used in veterinary medicine to cause a sick animal to die without pain.

Respiratory system - The process by which oxygen is moved round the body.

Sustain - To cause something to continue for a long time.

School Counsellor - A staff member whose role is to help and advise students in difficult situations.

Self-Righteous - Certainty that one is absolutely correct or morally superior

Inventive - The ability to create new things or think originally.

Life-Affirming - Having an emotionally or spiritually uplifting effect.

Jangle - To cause to make a ringing, metallic sound.

Skinny Dipping - To swim naked.

Mesmerizing - Capturing the attention completely, often mysteriously.

Precis - A summary of a text or speech.

Contagion - A disease spread by close contact.

Protagonist - The leading character in a play/film/novel etc.

Guidelines - General rules or advice.

Sensationalist - Presenting stories in a way that provokes public interest or excitement.

Mortified - To feel very embarrassed or ashamed.

Hardwired - Naturally determined or inclined towards certain behaviour.

Gatefold - An oversized page that needs to be folded out in order to be read.

Sleevenotes - An article printed on CD or record packaging, giving information about the music.

Incomprehension - Failure to understand something.

Mortgage - A long-term bank loan used to buy property.

Morose - Sad, sullen or bad-tempered.

The Samaritans – A charity organisation in the UK, providing 24 hour a day emotional support, and raising awareness on mental health issues and suicide.

Wallowing - For a person to indulge in an often unhealthy pleasure.

Unbeknownst (to X) - happening or existing without the knowledge of someone specified ("X").

EXERCISES

1. MEMORY ROUND

Discussion exercise

Since it might have been a couple of days since you saw the performance and you might have different experiences and memories of the play it is a great idea to start with an exercise like a memory round.

Divide into smaller groups, and describe to each other what happened in the play. Start from when you entered the theatre. This is not a review exercise, so try to avoid valuing what you saw, just describe it. Use sentences like:

‘When I entered the theatre I saw...’

‘The actor told us about...’

‘The stage was set out...’

Or questions like:

- When and how did the play start?
- How was the stage set out?
- How would you describe the narrator?
- What relations did the characters have to one another?
- What were the turning points in the story?
- How did the play end?

Using these sentences and questions, describe to each other what you saw.

2. MEMORY SCENES

Drama exercise

When you have finished the memory round, chose two scenes from the play and arrange still pictures representing the scenes. Below are some suggestions that you can choose from, or choose any scenes that you liked from the play.

- Sam proposing
- The family singing in the kitchen
- The narrator breakdancing
- Dad speaking at the wedding

3. EVERY BRILLIANT THING

Writing exercise

- A. Write your own list of ten brilliant things.
- B. Write a list of ten brilliant things, as you think you would have when you were seven years old.
- C. Write a list of ten brilliant things, as you think you will when you are 40 years old.

Compare your lists with a friend, and try to find at least one thing in each list that match. Why do you think they match, or if you couldn't find anything, why do you think you couldn't?

4. ALTERNATIVE SCENES

Drama exercise

In pairs, choose one of the scenes listed below, and improvise your own version of what might have happened or what might have been said. You are free to use your own imagination of what might have happened. Things like age and gender doesn't matter, anyone can play any character.

Talking on the phone with Mrs Patterson and the sock dog

The narrator calls his now retired school librarian in the middle of the night. Some things that might be helpful to ask yourselves:

What happens just before the narrator calls Mrs Patterson?
What makes him decide to call her? How does he feel calling his now retired school librarian? What does Mrs Patterson think about receiving a phone call in the middle of the night from an old student? Does she remember him? Does she want to help, and why in that case? How do they both feel after the phone call?

Sitting in the car with Dad

Dad is late picking the narrator up from school and tries to explain that Mum is in hospital because she hurt herself.

Some things that might be helpful to ask yourselves:

How is Dad feeling – is he sad/angry/afraid/anxious? When and what makes the narrator realise something is wrong? What does Dad want to tell the narrator, and what does he actually say? What does the narrator want to say to Dad, and what does he actually say? more scenes on the next page

Dinner after the second attempt

The family is having dinner the night Mum has come home from the hospital. Some things that might be helpful to ask yourselves:

What is the family talking about at the dinner table? How does Mum feel, coming back home to her husband and son after her second attempt at suicide? What is the narrator thinking? What is Mum thinking? What is Dad thinking? What do they say to each other?

Talking to Sam for the first time

After having sat opposite each other without speaking for weeks, they finally start talking. Some things that might be helpful to ask yourselves:

Who takes the first step to make contact? What is that person feeling just before they make contact? When does the other person notice that someone is approaching them, and what does that make them feel? What are the first words they say to each other?

Meeting the support group and telling them about the list for the first time

Sam has left the narrator and he joins a support group. He tells them about the list, and why it has helped him through different times in his life. Some things that might be helpful to ask yourselves:

What makes the narrator decide to tell the group about the list? Why? How does he describe the support or help the list has been to him through difficult times in his life? What does the others in the group think? What questions do they ask about the narrator and about the list?

5. IMPORTANT MUSIC

Writing and discussion exercise

Music plays a huge role in the narrator's life.

Make a list of the five songs that are most important to you right now. Split into groups of four. Share one of the songs with your group and describe why you chose it.

Discuss why many feel that music can help them through different stages or situations in life. Why do you think this is? Do you agree?

6. THEATRE REVIEW

Writing exercise

Write a review of the play. Below are some guidelines of how to write a theatre review.

1. Introduction

Tell your reader what you saw, where and when. Describe in detail what kind of play this was (drama, comedy, Shakespeare history play, farce – be as specific as possible). Tell your reader what your general response to the production was. Did you find it an enjoyable experience? Why exactly? Did it give you food for thought? About what and why? What did you learn about modern theatre practices?

2. The Direction

The director is the person who, in the end, is responsible for what you see on stage. What meanings in this play were emphasised? How did the design, staging, and character and acting style choices draw attention to these? Were these choices successful in creating the impact on the audience you thought the director and creative team intended? Did the theatre itself and the playing area suit the production? Why or why not? Was there an interesting and varied use of stage space? was the focus generally where it should be?

3. The Acting

Discuss the acting. Was it of a particular kind? Stylised in some way, very physical, very melodramatic, realistic or 'fourth wall' (these are only a few of the possibilities). What can you say about the kind of acting in this production compared with the kind of work you've seen in other productions? Was the style of acting appropriate to the kind of play and style of production? Why or why not? What part of the performance did you particularly enjoy? Be very specific in saying why.

4. The Design

How did the design contribute to the production's meanings? Describe the sets, lights and costumes. What kind of a statement did each of these make?

5. Conclusion

You might want to elaborate on your production. What did you particularly like about the production? How did it illuminate your understanding of life?

On the next page you'll find two reviews for another production of *Every Brilliant Thing*. Use these as an inspiration for writing your own.

From: The Evening Standard, Wednesday 20 August 2014 14:04

Written by: Fiona Mountford

<https://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/edinburgh-festival-every-brilliant-thing-roundabout-at-summerhall-theatre-review-9680956.html>

Edinburgh Festival: Every Brilliant Thing, Roundabout at Summerhall - theatre review

All aboard the spaceship for Duncan Macmillan's uplifting show of a child's fierce, flawed attempt to make sense of adult unhappiness

Something strange and delightful has landed at Summerhall this Fringe. It's Paines Plough's new portable Roundabout auditorium, a colourful, comfortable, spaceship-like venue that, delightfully, can be assembled in each new place it visits using only an Allen key. Paines Plough is presenting four plays in it in Edinburgh, the stand-out of which is this one-man piece from the increasingly accomplished Duncan Macmillan.

The immensely likeable adult actor Jonny Donahoe plays an unnamed seven-year-old whose mother is in hospital having hurt herself "because she's sad". Determined to cheer her up when she returns home, he concocts a list of "every brilliant thing in the world" to put on her pillow. Surely no one can stay miserable when they're reminded of ice cream and "things with stripes"?

What Macmillan offers, with great sensitivity behind the abundant laughs, is a child's fierce, flawed attempt to make sense of adult unhappiness and a meditation on the shadow that a loved one's depression casts over the lives of a family. As the boy grows, so does his list, a vital reminder of the anchor of happiness small things can provide. Much audience interaction is demanded and Donahoe, drawing on his background as a comedy performer, displays an admirable facility for it in George Perrin's production, making us feel warmly included. So included was your reviewer that Donahoe started to read from her notebook. Fortunately, all he came across were words of praise.

From: The Independent, Friday 15 August 2014, 10:26

Written by: Holly Williams

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/edinburgh-festival/every-brilliant-thing-summerhall-review-one-of-the-most-uplifting-plays-at-the-fringe-9671134.html>

Every Brilliant Thing, Summerhall, review: 'One of the most uplifting plays at the Fringe'

Edinburgh Festival 2014: A perfect balance between conveying the struggles of life and celebrating all that is sweet in it.

Duncan Macmillan's one-man play may be about a seven-year-old boy's mother attempting to commit suicide, and his own subsequent struggles with depression, but it's hardly gloomy - this must be one of the most uplifting plays at the Fringe.

The boy tackles the problem of his mum's sadness with childlike simplicity: he starts making a list of all the good things in the world. Waterfights. Balloons. Chocolate. The colour yellow.

Slips of paper with entries from the numbered list have been handed out to the audience; guided by Jonny Donahoe - who plays the boy with beaming openness - they read out this litany of loveliness. Voices come from all over Paines Plough's in-the-round stage (which looks like a spaceship crossed with a kids TV studio), and with gently handled audience interaction, a few punters also become key characters in the boy's life as he grows up.

If George Perrin's production sounds overly whimsical, it's not: early on Donahoe declares with deceptive lightness, "if you got all the way through life without ever being heart crushingly depressed, you probably haven't been paying attention." The list of brilliant things becomes a crutch, a way to counter his mum's attacks, but it can never really help her. It's doubtful it can even help his own depression, whose slow and sad creeping impact on his romantic relationships will be recognisable to anyone who's been depressed or loved someone who is. But the list keeps growing - and with each suggestion, so too does our anticipation, and our smiling confirmation, of Macmillan's nicely observed everyday joys: the smell of old books, really good oranges, hairdressers who listen to what you want. The way Ray Charles sings 'you', having a piano in the kitchen, hearing a vinyl record for the first time... and the show is lovingly soundtracked with soul records, which fit its dual interest in joy and sorrow. Every Brilliant Thing finds a perfect balance between conveying the struggles of life, and celebrating all that is sweet in it. Warmly recommended.