

In *Bag Dancing*, the audience watch and participate in Imelda's stories of war, loss, drinking and homelessness and Neville's story of his mum's mental illness. In sharing these, both Imelda and Neville are able to come to terms with the difficult events their stories touch on and at the same time perhaps also change people's minds.

This idea of stories as redemptive is a main theme of *Bag Dancing* - one that is played out both personally, where the person telling the story is positively affected by sharing it, and universally, where those who hear the story, have the opportunity to develop new understandings and perspectives.

The following suggestions are designed to support further discussion to follow up this main thematic strand of the play.

Using current news stories

At the end of the play, Imelda and Neville start out on a new story together - one where they continue to tell their own stories but also persuade others to tell theirs to "*change the world*".

Identifying 'stories that change the world' is a clear way to open discussion with younger children. It may be useful to use current news stories as a way of identifying which recent news stories young people feel are important to tell and why? Are there any stories they feel don't make it to the news that should or that are hidden away in small print or at the bottom of a web page? Are there any recent stories have changed people's minds about a particular issue or event? How? What role does social media have in passing on stories? What kind of stories are shared through social media? Are they different from those we encounter as news? Which capture the attention of young people the most? Why?

Different points of view

In the play, Imelda challenged Neville to think of different titles for his story about his mum's illness. He originally called it: "*The story of how Neville made his mum go mad*". How do you think that made him feel? Recall some of the other titles suggested by the audience in the performance, how might these have changed the way he felt about what happened to his mum and his role in it? A good practical exercise that explores taking different perspectives in telling a story is to take a well known story that young people are familiar with and ask them to tell it from the points of view of the different characters involved. How does each telling differ and what effect does this have on the listener? Take a selection of stories that are currently in the news – from what perspective are these stories being told? Is there another point of view from which they could be told, and if so, how might that change the way the listener feels about the story?

Straight after the Play

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“All those people, all those stories silenced and shut up.”

At the end of the play Imelda says: *“Lots of people to persuade to tell their stories, Neville. Some people have been shut up for a long time. It’s not easy.”* Refer to Neville in the play – why did he find it so difficult to share the story of his mum’s mental illness? What lens had he put on his experiences and why? How had this affected his life? What impact did sharing his story have on him? Are there other people in similar situations? Who might they be? How visible are their stories? Why do you think this is? How might this be changed?

Practical activity

You may feel you want to extend your discussion into practical work, if so the following techniques from *Bag Dancing* may prove useful:

- Creating titles
- Storytelling (including from different points of view or different character positions)
- Still images/freeze frames
- Using shoes and costumes to represent people or to illustrate moments of storytelling
- Creating story bags containing objects relevant to a particular story or event or person’s life

A full resource pack for *Bag Dancing – A bag full of ideas*, is available on our website www.blahs.co.uk or request one by email from sarahjane@blahs.co.uk



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