

***One Green Bottle*, by Hideki Noda**
English Translation adapted by Will Sharpe
Education Pack

THEMES:

GENDER ROLES

CONFLICT OF GENERATIONS

FAMILIAL BONDS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

GENRE: Neo-absurdist/clowning

AGE RESTRICTION: 12+ (strong language)

NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 3 + 2 unseen voice-over characters (2F, 2M)

CHARACTER LIST:

BO (MALE): Family Patriarch (60s)

BOO (FEMALE): Bo's wife (60s)

PICKLE (FEMALE): Bo's and Boo's daughter (20s)

VOICE (MALE) – a voice-over character that calls the intercom at the family apartment. (Age not specified)

CHILD – voice that sings from the shining light at their door at the end of the play. (Age and gender not specified)

SYNOPSIS:

Set in a family apartment in urban Japan, *One Green Bottle* presents a recognisable domestic scene that descends into absurdism. Family patriarch Bo is going out for the evening leaving his wife, Boo, and daughter, Pickle, to look after their heavily

pregnant dog, Princess. However, Book and Pickle also have appointments and are just as determined to leave the house. They all offer increasingly ridiculous and bizarre reasons why they should be the person to leave.

The play was first written in Japanese and premiered in Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre (2010). Writer, Hideki Noda, directed and performed as Boo in all productions. This English translation had its world premiere in Japan in 2017 and had its UK premiere in 2018 at the Soho Theatre. Both productions subverted the character genders (Bo was played by a female actor, Boo and Pickle by male actors). The age of the characters was also subverted with Pickle being performed by a middle-aged actor.

The play is divided into two acts:

- Act I – The family finds out they all have plans to go out in the evening but someone has to stay home and take care of their heavily pregnant dog, Princess. We find out the real reasons for them all wanting to go out before a blackout causes complete chaos amongst the three of them.
- Act II – The family deals with the aftermath of the blackout. Princess finally gives birth to her litter of six puppies; however, she does not survive the labour. The family comes clean with all their mysteries and, finally together for the first time as a family, face their destiny.

KEY MOMENTS:

pp. 7-15 (2F, 1M)

Dialogue: Opening - Bo and Boo's discussion over going out.

pp. 52-54 (2F, 1M)

Monologue: Not a monologue per se but Pickle's sped up speech over the future generation which she belongs to.

pp. 68-77 (Act II) (2F, 1M)

Climax: The family comes to term with their destiny.

STEP ONE: ASK

What questions come to the students' minds when they read the above moments? In groups, ask them to come up with questions based on the play, and which have no easy answers. Think about the themes raised above and try to combine more than one concept in each question. Here are some examples:

- What brings a family together? What can cause conflicts?
- Are there assigned roles for the mum, dad, child within the household? What are those? Have they changed with time?
- Younger generations tend to clash with their elders to what they think the future holds out for them. How do you see yourselves at the age your parents are now? What will have changed?

Consider these questions across gender roles, conflict of generations, familial bonds and responsibilities, and explore if students can relate to the issues portrayed in this text.

STEP TWO: EXPLORE

Exercise 1:

An important element for actors is to be able to maintain focus and control. The Suzuki technique for acting, created by theatre director Tadashi Suzuki, is a great exercise to improve one's physical precision and strength. This method is extremely intense and unique. It's definitely a workout! These exercises are a nice and simple way to introduce your students to Japanese actor training, and are usually accompanied by percussive sounds; flutes and drums are used most often, and played at a slow pace.

STOMPING - Start by standing against a wall in neutral position, bend your knees slightly with your hands relaxed by your side, preferably in a loose fist. As the percussion music plays, begin by stomping your legs to the rhythm, always moving forward - it's important you keep your stomping in time. Every time you change direction, turn your whole body and focus on what's in front of you. Nothing should distract you.

Stomping usually goes for about 3-5 minutes, you will start to feel the burn in your legs so try to keep your body relaxed with a straight posture, and the challenge is not to stop until the music stops. This is a great warm up and can be used throughout rehearsals.

Exercise 2:

At the end of act II, chaos is ensued amongst the family, they all hyperventilate, and Pickle starts to bang her head on the wall repeatedly (pp. 64-67). There is another Suzuki exercise that can be helpful to allow students to reach the despair levels necessary for the scene, keeping the control and focus necessary for the Noh and Kabuki theatre training.

BALANCE - Start by asking your students to crouch on their tiptoes with their hands hanging down from their chest. Now, to do this correctly they will need you to clap or find something with a clear strong beat. The aim is to change positions without thinking about what you'll do whenever there's a clap or beat change, simply do whatever your body feels like doing in that moment. Make sure your position is controlled and still. When there's another clap you go back to your crouched position and repeat.

They can also do this activity on the ground, instead of balancing on their toes they can balance on their tailbone; now if they have a weak core, this can be challenging. Start by asking them to tuck their knees into their chest and hug their legs, and make sure their toes are off the ground. This is their first position, whenever a clap/beat change occurs their aim is to change into a position without thinking about what they're going to do. Their focus should be to maintain a still position and make sure they're changing into a new position every time they hear a clap/beat change.

This exercise can follow up the stomping exercise immediately and that will add the extra layer of learning to control their breathing after physical exhaustion.

Exercise 3:

As gender roles and clowning are aspects explored throughout the entire play, this is an adaptation of a beginners exercise in clowning for them to explore the portrayal of genders:

IMITATION and EXAGGERATION: Split them into two groups, one for those students who identify as male, the other for students identifying as female. Students from one group walk around as their characters, if they were already assigned; if not, just ask them to pick a character to explore from the gender they identify as. As the characters walk around the space, students from the other group pair up where each student walking as a character is followed by another student from the opposite gender. The student following follows closely but does not touch the character in front. The student following must observe the character in front of them and begin to imitate them. During the exercise, you should ask the students following to increase their exaggeration level by 2, then 4, then 6, then 10. Then, students who are being followed should spin around and repeat the process, now as the followers. How does this affect the actor who was following? Have they found a specific physicality for the opposite gender character? For the ones being followed, has being followed modified the way they portrayed the characters they had chosen?

STEP THREE: FEEDBACK

Discuss what came up for the students. Can they relate with their characters' plight? What was the most interesting thing they learned? What was the least interesting? Bring students to return to the text and analyse its anarchic approach to language and stereotypes.