

***The Blind One and The Mad One*, by Cláudia Barral
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Education Pack**

THEMES:

ABLEISM & NEUROTYPICALITY
LONELINESS & OLD AGE
SIBLINGHOOD & MASCULINITIES

GENRE: Fantastic / Magic Realism

AGE RESTRICTION: 13+ (strong language and drug use)

NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 2 (2M)

CHARACTER LIST:

NESTOR: An Old Blind Man (Presumed 60+)

LÁZARO: A Younger Man in his Fifties (50+)

SYNOPSIS:

“Rottenness is manifest in every human being. Without exception. You should be thankful for your smelly feet. There are people with rotten souls and it takes more than a shower to clean a soul.” p.21

The Blind One and The Mad One brings us the story of two brothers, weakling civil servant Lázaro and his haranguing older brother Nestor, who is a former artist, now blind. Whilst waiting for a female neighbour to visit, they reminisce about their lives and settle old scores. Can their neighbour be heard over their intense argument? Will she ever come? Their fight comes to a head with a sad revelation for both men where, engulfed in their memories, they must come to terms with their concept of reality and what can actually be seen.

This play was originally written in Brazilian Portuguese. (2000)

KEY MOMENTS:

pp. 15-20 (2M)

Dialogue: Lázaro and Nestor sit down to eat and discuss their views on blindness and health.

pp. 20-21 & 21-22 (2M)

Monologue: Not a monologue per se, but Nestor's asides to the audience about his brother's smelly feet and how he was as a child.

pp. 27-28 (2M)

Climax: After a heated discussion as to what is holding their neighbour back to come visit them, and Lázaro's "dutch courage" tirade, Nestor reminisces over the day where he lost all hope. This is the last bet between the two characters, and the radio reveals who is the true Blind and Mad one.

STEP ONE: ASK

What philosophical questions come to the students' minds when they read key 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 is an example:

- What does blindness and madness represent in Nestor's and Lázaro's life? What is so unique about Nestor's description of his condition? Consider these questions across disabilities and neurologically atypical individuals' representation and explore similarities/differences in how they are portrayed in this text.

STEP TWO: EXPLORE

Exercise 1:

Blindness is one of the main issues dealt with by the play. After reading the play, split the group into pairs and give them blindfolds, one per pair. For 10 minutes, the person blindfolded will be guided through the space by the other person in the pair. Allow them to choose how they will guide the blindfolded person; for larger groups, verbal forms of guiding can become confusing, in that case ask them to keep their guiding non-verbal, through touch, etc... Ask them to explore levels and different speeds. If time allows, ask them to swap so both in the pair can have the experience of “going blind”. Allow them to have fun and explore, and at the end, check-in with them what their impressions were.

Exercise 2:

At the opening moment (pp.9-11) we are introduced to Nestor and Lázaro’s quirky habits and how they navigate the space and each other, how they walk, and how competitive they are. This exercise will work their take on age issues and challenges.

Initially, ask them to explore individually how age would affect their body, the way they walk, the way they breathe, the speed in which they perform tasks. Ask them to draw inspiration in the elderly people they are immediately in contact with (grandparents, neighbours, school staff and teachers...) and to avoid obvious stereotypes.

Once they are comfortable with their findings, split them in pairs and ask them to work on the habitual companionship giving them simple tasks to perform – making a cup of coffee, opening a pack of biscuits, putting their shopping away in the cupboards. Let them do once collaborating with one another, and then ask them to repeat their action now competing against each other. How different were the tasks performed? Have they managed to keep their movements and effects of aging over their bodies during the competition? Is it different to age for men and women?

Exercise 3:

At the end of the dinner scene (pp.19-22), Lázaro is startled by Nestor's announcement that Lucia is about to arrive. This reveals Lázaro's deepest insecurity – the stench of his feet. This exercise will work their sense of urgency, self-esteem and their relationship with text.

First, ask them individually to think of something that is part of their physical characteristics and that they feel slightly self-conscious about. Emphasise that it has to be something they cannot change immediately.

Then, propose that they are expecting a very important visitor, who they want to impress and present their best selves. They have 10 seconds to hide or minimise the said characteristic. Each of them stand in, and a buzzer sounds (could be a doorbell or any noise agreed within the group) – they will then have ten seconds to go from neutral to ready to open the door.

Once they all have a go and experience the sense of urgency in presenting their best-self, split them in pairs to go through this moment of the text. They can have scripts in hand, but they must get the scene on its feet. If time permits ask them to swap characters, and discuss how different it felt playing either character. Are they the same person? Is the entire play happening in Lázaro's mind? How can they relate to how self-conscious Lázaro is?

STEP THREE: FEEDBACK

Discuss what came up for the students. Can they relate with the characters? What was the most interesting thing they learned? What was their favourite part of the play and why? Assign them characters to explore physicality and ask them to think what is different about playing an imaginary character. Does it modify how they study their own character? Which of the two is imaginary?