

***The Djinn*s of Eidgah, by Abhishek Majumdar**

Education Pack

THEMES:

WAR & CONFLICT
POWER & CONTROL
FEAR & SURVIVAL

GENRE: Political Theatre, Magical Realism

AGE RESTRICTION: 12+

NUMBER OF CHARACTERS: 10 (2F, 8M)

CHARACTER LIST:

BILAL, 18 years old, a young Muslim footballer from Kashmir with great promise. He wishes to flee his country in search of a better life for himself and his younger sister Ashrafi.

ASHRAFI, 12 year old younger sister of Bilal. Having been present when her father died in a bus bomb, she requires continual psychiatric care and is dependent on her brother.

KHALED, Bilal's friend of a similar age, also a footballer from Kashmir.

DR BAIG, a senior psychiatric doctor whose son was radicalised and killed in the conflict, and who is vehemently opposed to violence.

DR WANI, one of Dr Baig's students, now a grown woman with a child of her own.

SOLDIER 1, 40s, an Indian soldier stationed in Kashmir.

SOLDIER 2, 20s, an Indian soldier stationed in Kashmir.

DJINN, a spirit who appears to the various characters as their deceased loved ones.

MUSHTAQ, A senior player on the Kashmiri football team, more a mentor than a coach for Bilal and Khaled. He is only slightly older than them.

ABBAJAAN, Bilal and Ashrafi's father, 40s.

SYNOPSIS:

Set against the backdrop of the on-going Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir, the play explores the cost of absolutist political ideology. Particularly the control asserted over people's everyday lives, dreams and aspirations.

Ashrafi and Bilal are orphaned siblings stranded and defined by the troubles in Kashmir. Eighteen year old Bilal is the pride of the region, part of a teenage football team set for great heights, and pushed to the limits by the violence around them. Haunted by hope, his sister is traumatised by an incident from the past, and Bilal is torn between escaping the myths of war and getting caught up in the cycles of resistance.

Meanwhile, Dr. Baig and Dr. Wani are desperately trying to deal with the psychological wounds inflicted by war and, in spite of their mutual respect, find themselves diverging in their opinions of the increasingly fraught humanitarian disaster in which they live and work.

Interweaving true stories and testimonies with Islamic storytelling, the play paints a magical portrait of a generation of radicalised kids, and a beautiful landscape lost to conflict.

The play was written in the English language in 2011 and premiered at the Royal Court in London in 2013.

KEY MOMENTS:

Scene 8 (1F, 1M)

Dr. Wani attempts to justify to Dr. Baig her decision to join the resistance movement against the occupation of Kashmir by the Indian military. They argue about the meaning of freedom, and whether violent means are ever justified.

Scene 11 (1F, 2M)

Bilal and Ashrafi are in the mortuary looking for Khaled's corpse, who was killed by soldiers along with other protesters, including women. Ashrafi tries to make sense of the tragedy by invoking the Djinn and other characters from the story we hear her father telling as a child in Scene 1. Bilal tells Ashrafi that he is tired of looking after her, and asks her to leave as he prepares to confront the Indian soldiers.

Scene 10 (1F, 2M)

An encounter between Dr. Baig and the Djinn. We learn that Dr. Baig's son, Junaid had become radicalized and adopted the new name, Preen, before he was tortured and killed. We also learn that Dr. Baig disowned his son when he became radicalized, and that he continues to be haunted by his disapproval of the choices his son made.

STEP ONE: ASK

Refer to Dr. Baig's speech on p. 51 (Scene 8).

What philosophical questions come to the students' minds when they read this speech? In groups, ask them to come up with questions based on this monologue which have no easy answers. Think about the themes raised, and

perhaps try to combine more than one concept in one question to broaden it out. For example:

- Is freedom a concept based on reason (learned through nurture) or is it a human instinct (set in our nature)?

Vote to select one of the questions and discuss it, keeping the fruits of your conversations (themes, further questions, provocations, points of discomfort...etc) alive as you go through the exercises below.

STEP TWO: EXPLORE

Exercise 1:

If the themes above were statues what would they look like? As a whole group ask students to personify and take on the shape of War, Conflict, Power, Control...etc

Next, ask them to select one of the themes they embodied, find someone else in the room, and assume their statues as pairs. As a group, look at each pair – ask the students: What story is emerging out of each pair?

Exercise 2:

While this play is set in Kashmir, the themes it tackles are universal and can be experienced to varying degrees in different contexts. The following lines are scripted in the play, but could be heard anywhere and in a variety of different contexts.

In small groups, start an improvisation with any of the lines below and see where it might take the students within the context of the UK. They might ask themselves ‘Who in the UK might be speaking these lines today?’.

‘They take everything from you and still... it still doesn’t make you angry enough’

[Act 1, Scene 7 (p. 46): Khaled addresses Bilal about what he perceives as his friend's cowardly surrender. Bilal seeks a better life for himself and his younger sister elsewhere, away from the fighting in Kashmir.]

'What is going on outside is so brutal that I don't understand my role within the safety of these walls anymore'

[Act 1, Scene 8 (p. 48): Dr. Wani attempts to justify to Dr. Baig her decision to join the resistance movement against the occupation of Kashmir by the Indian military]

'The day they changed your name, they changed your soul. And left you here. Here. With nothing, in between, as dust...'

[Act 1, Scene 10 (p. 61): An encounter between Dr. Baig and the Djinn where we learn that Dr. Baig's son, Junaid had become radicalized and adopted a name, Pareen, before he was tortured and killed.]

Exercise 3:

The playwright is explicit in recommending that emptiness be maximized in the space and that a few set-pieces be used which are 'transient' in nature. Discuss what 'transient' means, how objects could be transient, and why the playwright might have recommended transience. Discuss how it relates to other themes in the play.

Refer to scene 11 (described in the 'Key Scenes' section above).

Task 1 - In groups, ask the students to make a list of the different objects or set pieces required in the scene. If you don't have a required object/set piece, use something else to replace it – e.g. what might be used to represent the corpses?

Task 2 - Give students time to agree on how to arrange the set-pieces so that the idea of transience comes through. They may or may not reach a consensus.

Task 3 - Groups share their staging with the rest of the class and provide their reasoning on how and why their choice of staging can be helpful in getting the theme of transience across.

STEP THREE: FEEDBACK

Discuss what came up for the students. What are they still wondering about? What was the most interesting thing they learned? What was their least favourite part and why?