



# Idle Motion's

## 'Borges and I'

### Education Pack

Idle Motion have been creating highly visual theatre since 2007. The company met at secondary school, and began to take work up to the Edinburgh Fringe whilst attending university, developing into a professional company in 2009 with their show *The Vanishing Horizon* which they have gone on to tour both nationally and internationally. They work collaboratively to devise their productions using play, workshops and improvisation to form their ideas and pieces. Their commitment to watching and sharing theatre is essential to their work, as is the sense of enthusiasm and fun that remains a

constant in their rehearsals.

They are based in London, working as Associate Artists at the New Diorama and The Oxford Playhouse. They are a growing company with big ideas and a huge passion for creating exciting and beautiful new work.

## 'Borges and I'

'Borges and I' is Idle Motion's second play. It was originally devised in 2009, when it was taken to the Edinburgh Fringe and nominated for 'Best Emerging Company' Total Theatre Award. It was re-devised in May and June 2012 over a 4 week period in association with the New Diorama Theatre and The Greenwich Theatre.

#### Activity:

- Discuss Idle Motion's style.
- List 3 other theatre practitioners or theatre companies who have a similar style.

Prompts:

- Devised, visual, physical theatre.
- Complicite, DV8, Gecko, Frantic Assembly .

Activity

List three images that are created using books.

Prompts

Young Borges puppet, war imagery, Buenos Aires skyline.

Ideas behind 'Borges and I'

Jorge Louis Borges

Jorge Louis Borges (1899 - 1986) is one of the greatest Argentinean writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He wrote in a variety of forms and particularly well known for his poetry and short stories, mainly in the style of magic realism. He was also renowned for being an avid reader and explored in his writing what it meant to be a reader and writer and how this transfer of knowledge is the driving force behind the progression of ideas.

Not only was he a remarkable writer but he also led a very interesting life. He suffered sight loss in his early thirties which eventually led to complete blindness in his later life. The story of his life, his work and the tragedy of such a gifted writer and avid reader going blind were the main reasons we were drawn to Borges and these elements became the foundation of 'Borges and I'.

Activity

How is the character of Borges differentiated from the character of Jim?

Prompts

Costume, voice, physicality.

Activity

What is the effect of the use of Borges' words as a voice over?

Prompts

Surreal , 'outside' normal narrative structure.

In the show we use several extracts from Jorge Borges' writing; this is one which we use early on in the play from Borges' book 'Dream Tigers'.

The Tiger

In my childhood I was a fervent worshiper of the tiger, the striped Asian breed that can be faced only by men of war, in a castle atop an elephant....

.....My childhood outgrown, the tigers and my passion for them faded, but they are still in my dreams....

At those moments, I often think: This is a dream, a pure diversion of my will; and since I have unlimited power, I am going to bring forth a tiger. Oh, incompetence! My dreams never seem to engender the creature I so hunger for. The tiger does appear, but it is all dried up, or it's flimsy looking, or it has impure vagaries of shape or it is an unacceptable size, or it's altogether too ephemeral.

Activity

- List the different themes that are explored within the piece of writing 'The Tiger'
- How do this link with the overall themes of the play?

Prompts

- Your imagination as a child compared with as an adult, memory.

### Our relationship with Books

Our first activity in the process of 'Borges and I' was sharing with each other our favourite book as a child. We wanted our relationship with books, and how this develops and changes throughout our lives, to be at the heart of the play. Whilst Borges' words explore these ideas in a philosophical and metaphorical way we felt that they needed to be grounded and accessible. To do this we created the device of the book group and in particular the characters of Nick and Sophie. This technique of using modern storylines is effective as it gives the audience a contextual lens, through which they can more easily relate to the more complex ideas and historical events being discussed in the play. We have used this same device in more of our work since creating 'Borges and I'.

Whilst we were re-devising the show public sector cuts meant that many public libraries were being forced to close. This prompted a discussion about our local libraries and why they are important to us and the community. From this we decided to set Alice's interview in a library to draw attention to the nature of these institutions and their importance.

### The Book Group and The Couple

Reading is often an intimate experience that taps into personal thoughts, thoughts that you might only share with a loved one; or no one at all. But it can often be something that we share with other people, for example in a book group. These two sides of reading - the personal and the shared - is something that we were keen to explore in 'Borges and I'.

#### Activity

In what ways was the narrative of the love story portrayed by Idle Motion?

#### Prompts

Acting: eye contact, visually: use of clothes 'puppets', movement.

## Blindness

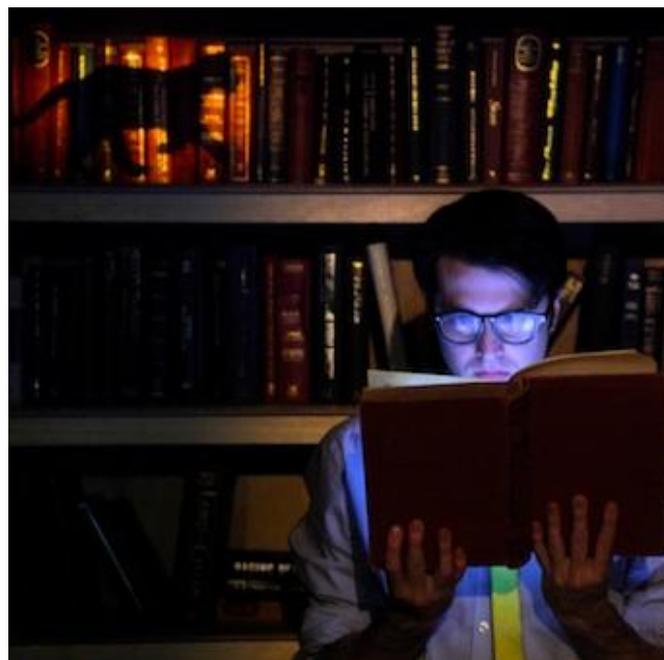
We also wanted to explore the effect that blindness can have on someone who is an avid reader. Sophie's loss of sight and Borges' blindness affects their relationship with books differently - in the play Sophie is just coming to terms with her blindness and feels that reading is something she is losing because of this. Borges on the other hand lost his sight and as a result developed an amazing memory for his books and own writing, paying different people to read to him in his house in Argentina. He felt that his loss of sight gave him clarity in his writing by blocking out the outside world. In this show we explore the different coping mechanisms that people adopt when faced with one of their greatest fears.

### Activity

List different images you saw in the show which represented the loss of sight. What effect did these images have?

### Prompts

Falling books, use of small lights, solid objects moving away from Sophie, the bridge of books.



### The Process

One week of workshopping and play: A lot of the initial visual ideas were created at this stage. We tend not to think of a structure or in-depth narrative at this stage but play around with themes and ideas.

Three weeks of rehearsal: We looked at what we had achieved in our workshopping weeks- but were more precise with this. We developed the story line a lot more. The couple and book groups were developed through improvisation and the narration was written collectively. Often we would go away and write narration for certain scenes, come back together and edit them all together. We also paid closer attention to structure at this stage. When structuring the play we looked at the scenes we had created and wrote the title of each scene on a piece of paper, we then physically arranged them- looking at different combinations of the scenes within the structure.

### Re-devising the Show

After 3 years away from the show, we came back to it and spent 6 weeks re-devising it. Here there was great focus on character development, a closer study and appreciation for Borges writing within the group. Though visually we were happy with the vast majority of the show there were some scenes that could be improved upon both visually and in terms of narrative development so we mainly focused on these. We also introduced the use of projection and two large bookshelves, which aesthetically altered the show. We also re-made all of the props so they were able to endure touring!

### Storytelling Exercise

- Get into pairs
- Label yourselves A and B
- A think about your favourite book as a child. What was it about? What did you like about it? How do you feel about it when you think about it now?
- B needs to be blindfolded and A lead B really slowly around the room on a journey, not just in circles but using levels and obstacles. However, instead of leading with their hand A must lead B with their voice, telling them about their book as they go.
- Swap over so that B now tells A about their child hood book.
- Come together as a whole class, share your partners story and discuss the exercise

### Prompts

How did being blindfolded alter the experience?

Did you find anything in story that could be developed for a narrative?

Did you notice anything about how the narration was told and the use and quality of the narrators voice to tell certain parts of the story?

### Waiting Room Exercise

- Pick 4 gestures or small movements which symbolize waiting.
- Start to practise repeating those cyclically so that you go through each one after the other.
- Now start to play around with the speeds of them, perform on cycle of gestures slowly and speed the other up.
- Start looking at getting 'stuck' in one gesture, and repeating this before you move on to the next gesture.
- Perform your 'cycles' together, get one person to stand out and see if there are links within the cycles- whether certain moments or speed match up and work together.
- Develop a scene from these cycles which involves a waiting from, people coming in at different times. Look at adding, times where movement are slowed down, speeded up, repeated, mirrored. Also think about eye-contact and eye-focus.

## A Writing Scheme for 'Borges and I'

### The Context

What did you watch, who was it by, where and when did you see it? What type of theatre did you see it in? What defines Idle Motion's style? What did this add to the actor and audience relationship? What narratives did the play follow? How were these stories linked to each other and linked to a theme of the play? What was the effect of having an actor talk directly to the audience?

### Analysing the tones created by the piece

Describe **two contrasting** moments in the play. How was it engaging? Was it a comic moment? If so, how did they create the comedy? A touching moment ... how did they make it touching? Or a sad moment... how did they make it sad? What images were powerful? How were these created? How did the actors respond to each other? How did they hold themselves physically? What was the emotional tone of their voice? Was there any subtext? Did they use a pause or silence? What was their eye contact doing?

### Analysing the Acting

Which one of the actors impressed you the most? How did they show emotion? What did their character add to the narrative? What did they do physically and vocally? Did you empathise with them? Did they change character? How did they telegraph this to the audience? Were they funny? Awkward? Did you feel sorry for them? How did they do this? How did the actors work together as an ensemble? Explain an ensemble moment which really impressed you? How did they create tension in their voice? What did you read in their body language? Was there subtext used in the scene?

### Analysing the Lighting and Sound

How was lighting used to establish different places and locations? Was it warm or cold? Clinical or intimate? Describe how the lighting with small torches was used by the actors through-out the play (e.g. the scene about Borges as a young child, the tiger, book shadow puppets). What effect did this have? What sound effects did the play use? What effect did this have?

### Analysing the Set and props

How were the different books used throughout the play? How were the book shelves used? How were different locations created, for example a book shop, a train? What was the significance of the use of books as the prop?

### Final Thoughts

What were your overall impressions of the play? What was it that engaged or did not engage you?

## Idle Motion Workshops

Idle Motion offer exciting workshops that use exercises we utilise in our creative process to help students explore imaginative and playful routes into the devising process. These work particularly well with students who have seen our work as it gives an insight into how we created the piece and a chance to see where the exercises can lead, encouraging them to be more confident and creative theatre makers. In our workshops we draw on skills such as storytelling using verbatim text, puppetry, object manipulation and physical characterisation. We prefer not to work on a 'one workshop fits all' basis and therefore are happy to tailor around the current syllabus and the needs of the school or community groups we work with.

For more information please contact our Education Co-ordinator Sophie Cullen at [sophie@idleemotion.co.uk](mailto:sophie@idleemotion.co.uk).

*'This was a truly inspirational day. The students really enjoyed the workshop and have had their eyes opened to the creative possibilities at their fingertips. Our classes following the day with Idle Motion have bubbled with possibility and ideas. The imagination and freedom of the workshop was a true eye-opener. I would highly recommend Idle Motion to everyone and hope to work with them again.'*

**Tim Fessler, ex Head of Drama at St Thomas More Catholic School**

*'Idle Motion's workshops were extremely well received by our students, who were stretched both creatively and technically by the work. The workshops were also superbly well delivered – purposeful, fun, engaging and inspiring. But above all, there is a clear understanding of what it is like to be a student. The workshop leaders are genuinely passionate about teaching and making theatre with young people.'*

**Gavin Henry, Drama teacher at Sevenoaks School, Kent**

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