

Introduction to MvS Teacher's Pack'

For copyright reasons it has not been possible to offer access to all elements of the Teachers' Pack for *Messerschmitt v Spitfire*.

The contents available are as follows:

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Walter Benjamin's critique of the *Angel of History* can be found at http://www.barglow.com/angel_of_history.htm

Further information about the Koblenz evacuation in 2011 and the disarming of the bomb can be found online.



This teachers' pack is to accompany performances of
 "Messerschmitt vs. Spitfire – a love story"

The themes and links focused on are suggestions aimed at kick-starting follow up work and inspiring discussion and debate around the civilian experience of WWII. Facts and accounts of wartime experience as well as an insight into our working process in creating the piece make for an accessible resource for teachers of all subjects.



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Messerschmitt v Spitfire – a love story

From an original collaboration between the Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah (Leeds) and the Theaterhaus Ensemble (Frankfurt)

The story

German artist Lotte Schäffer is coming over to England to set up an exhibition called 'Families, Art and War' in an art gallery. The exhibition was informed by the childhood memories of the bombings that her and her sister Ruth experienced during the Second World War and which they had never really spoken about until recently. But now she wants to talk about it with young people in England by showing them her art, which is often personal and involves stories about her family. She says she was inspired by a recent visit from her great niece Kate from England who arrived in Frankfurt on the day that the city was being evacuated following the discovery of an old 1.8 tonne bomb dropped by the British in WWII. This story is also part of the exhibition. Lotte plans to include her sister Ruth's graphic memories of the firestorms but she is not sure if she should, so she has come in to school to ask the young people what they think.

A story told in English and German; this is our shared history.

The play is focused on young British and German people's perceptions of the past and war in the 20th Century. It kicks off a search for the past that is relevant for young people, very much involving the student audiences in a lively interaction. Against a background of memories of WWII stirred up by the recently discovered unexploded bomb, the play shows the healing of old wounds, the interactions

between generations and the influence of the past on the future.

The history of the play

The Blahs and the Theaterhaus Ensemble began exploring the theme of WWII armed with Ian Serallier's novel for children, 'The Silver Sword'; an article about the recent evacuation of a large German city due to the emergence of an unexploded British WWII bomb in the Rhein river; and all the individual inherited stories and artifacts from our parents and grandparents.

Possible themes and links

History as a shared experience – two different perspectives; understanding between the generations; the relevance of history for the future.

Suggested linked subjects

German language, History, Ethics, Politics and Economics, Philosophy, Drama, Theatre-making

"Beneath the ground it is still full of bombs, but as long as no one disturbs them, they're not dangerous"

Horst Lenz, Bomb-Disposal Expert, Koblenz

Eight important props in the show

The Bomb It is real, it is seventy years old but can still cause chaos. And 68,000 of these particular 'Blockbuster' bombs were dropped on Germany. It is a metaphor for our past, we can ignore our past and put it behind us but our past will emerge whether we like it or not.

The telephone We have seen it used to give us the voices of the people in the city but we have other ideas for phones, especially the ones that Kate and Lukas have, for a start they also take pictures as well as allow us to hear their mums and dads ringing them up.

The Angel of History inspired by Walter Benjamin's Thesis on History, this will be present throughout the story and our intention is that the audience will complete the statue by showing us what the angel is looking at. It also gives us the opportunity to ask the young people whether it is right to look back at the past or whether we should look to the future.

The model airplane Kate brings one as a gift for Lukas when they get back to Lotte's flat. It reminds them all of the last time Kate and Lukas met when they were both nine years old. Back then Kate gave him a model of a Spitfire fighter plane. They had a race - she had the Spitfire, he had the Messerschmitt. He thought he was going to win of course, but he lost and had a tantrum. The rest is history.

The Love Letter This is a letter that Lotte wrote to Jan when she was twenty two and he was twenty seven. She asks him to go on an adventure with her for the rest of their lives. He never replies and then Kate brings the letter with her from England to give back to Lotte. Kate had found the letter in an old photo album and she has questions. Why didn't

Lotte have children? Maybe we share these questions with the audience. Is the world too hard a place to bring up children?



Jan's Ashes It allows us to have Jan on stage. He is a really interesting character who took Lukas under his wing not long after that episode with the race. He teaches him about animals. There will be a lot about people taking others under their wings. We never find out what happened to Jan early on in his life. Maybe this is something that the audience can decide for themselves.

The feather duster This belongs to Ruth, she is always clearing up the debris and there is a lot in an artist's studio, there was a lot at the end of the war as well. Don't get in the way of the duster - 'beware the Trümmerfrauen'.

Coffee Cups Coffee? It was so important after the war to create a place of rest and beauty. Trümmerfrauen (women who cleared up the rubble and debris of the destroyed cities) would set up a table and chairs to serve coffee surrounded by the rubble. It helps Lotte and Ruth to avoid blowing up at each other.

Scene – Der Feuersturm

Ruth Denkt bloß nicht, dass ich das hier wegfege. Das werde ich nicht, ich werde nicht hinter Euch her putzen. Auch hinter dir nicht, Lotte, oder irgendjemand sonst. Ihr könnt meinetwegen in dem Dreck hier leben, mir doch egal. Wisst ihr, wie viele Eimer voll Asche ich im Krieg aufgefeigt habe? Wie viele Eimer mit verkohlten Leichen ich gesehen habe? Leichen von Erwachsenen, die in der enormen Hitze des Feuersturms auf die Größe von Puppen zusammengeschrumpft waren. Ja, das kommt alles wieder raus, seht Ihr, ob ich will oder nicht. Wahrscheinlich will ich es einfach nicht mit mir nehmen, egal wohin ich gehe. Ich dachte, ich hätte es gut begraben. Ich wollte euch die Erinnerungen nicht aufhalsen. Ich dachte, Ihr braucht das nicht unbedingt zu wissen. Aber vielleicht hat Lotte ja Recht. Vielleicht muss ich einfach erzählen, was ich weiß und was Ihr dann damit macht, tja,...keine Ahnung!
Hundertdreißig große und kleine deutsche Städte wurden im Krieg durch Feuerstürme vernichtet. Habt ihr das gewusst? (zu Lukas und Kate)

Lukas Nein.

Ruth Wisst ihr, was ein Feuersturm ist? (zum Publikum)

Optionen: Wenn die Zuschauer ja sagen, dann kann Ruth sie bitten, zu erzählen, was sie davon wissen und auf den so gewonnenen Informationen aufbauen. Wenn das Publikum nicht reagiert, dann sagt sie:

Eine Bombe allein kann keine Stadt zerstören. Eine Bombe allein zerstört vielleicht ein paar Häuser und tötet vielleicht auch einige Menschen. Aber eine ganze Stadt zerstören, das kann nur ein Feuersturm. Ich habe den Feuersturm hier miterlebt, ich habe es



gesehen, ich habe es gehört, ich hab es gerochen, ich habe den Geruch von Verbranntem noch in der Nase.

Lotte Wenn viele einzelne Brände sich miteinander verbinden, entsteht ein Großbrand, der alles in seiner Nähe entzündet. Die extrem stark erhitzte Luft steigt auf, schießt wie durch einen gigantischen Kamin 6 km hoch in den Himmel. Dadurch entsteht ein unglaublicher Sog, der Frischluft aus den umliegenden Straßen und Gebäuden ansaugt. Ein Feuersturm, der mit 270 km/h über den Boden und durch die brennenden Gebäude rast. Dann fängt alles und jeder in der Stadt Feuer und aller Sauerstoff ist weg.

Ruth Ja, der Sauerstoff. Ich habe Menschen auf der Straße liegen gesehen mit dem Gesicht am Boden, um Luft zu bekommen. Wir haben versucht, zu ihnen zu kommen und haben uns nasse Decken übergelegt. Einmal hörte ich neben mir ein Mädchen um Hilfe rufen. Sie steckte mit ihren Füßen im Asphalt fest, weil die Straße geschmolzen war. Wenn Lotte und ich nicht weiter gerannt wären, wäre uns das gleiche passiert. Und der Sog des Feuersturms... Ich konnte Lotte gerade noch festhalten, beinahe wäre sie mir aus den Händen gerutscht. Aber ich habe eine Frau gesehen, der ihr Kinderwagen entglitten war.

Sie rannte hinter ihm her in die Flammen hinein. Der Sturm hat alles mit sich gerissen.

Lotte Wie kriert man einen Feuersturm, um Städte komplett zerstören zu können? Die Kriegswissenschaftler haben dazu ein ausgeklügeltes System entwickelt.

Phase 1: Wo befindet sich eigentlich das leicht brennbare Material, das man für ein Feuer braucht, wie Holz, Baumwolle, Papier...? Im Inneren der Häuser. Zuerst wurden solche Luftminen, große Sprengbomben abgeworfen. Bei der Explosion entstehen Schockwellen, die die Gebäude so stark erzittern lassen, dass Dächer und Fußböden einbrechen und der Zugang zum Inneren der Häuser für die Brandbomben frei ist.



Diese wurden dann in der 2. Phase der Bombardierung abgeworfen. Millionen von Brandstäben, ungefähr so lang (ca. 70cm), fielen auf die Stadt.

Phase 3 sah dann wieder Sprengbomben vor. Einige von denen hatten aber gehärtete Spitzen, mit denen sie sich durch den Straßenbelag bohrten und die Wasserrohre sowie die Feuerwehrezuleitungen zu den Häusern zerstörten, so dass die Feuerwehr

nicht mehr in der Lage war, die Feuer zu löschen. Und wenn die Feuerwehrleute in die Nähe der brennenden Häuser kamen, liefen sie Gefahr, von einer Bombe mit Zeitzünder getötet zu werden. Die Zeitzünder waren unterschiedlich eingestellt: auf 24 Stunden, 36 Stunden, 72 Stunden... 70 Jahre...

Ruth Ich glaube, Lotte und ich haben nur überlebt, weil wir nicht im Schutzraum geblieben sind. Wir sind einfach durch die Flammen gelaufen. Am nächsten Tag wollten wir unsere Mutter suchen, die dort geblieben war, aber wir konnten den Weg nicht finden, denn es gab keine Straßen mehr. Es gab nur noch Schutt und Asche. In einem Hauseingang saßen zwei Männer. Der eine hatte den Arm um den anderen gelegt. Sie waren verkohlt. Überall waren verkohlte Stücke. Nur manchmal konnte man etwas Menschliches erkennen, einen Finger oder ein Ohr. An einer Stelle kamen zwei Männer aus einem Loch im Schutt und da erkannte ich den Schutzraum wieder. Ich wollte hinein, um meine Mutter zu holen. Sie wollten mich nicht lassen, aber ich bin einfach gegangen. Sie sind mir mit den Fackeln nachgegangen. Das erste was ich sah, waren 2 Reihen Schuhe, die einander gegenüber standen. Als ich weiterging, sah ich sie dann da sitzen, oben auf den Betten, einer neben dem anderen, hauptsächlich alte Frauen und Kinder. Ich hatte bis dahin nicht gewusst, dass, wenn man an Kohlenmonoxyd Vergiftung stirbt, die Haut kirschrot wird.

English translation....

Ruth Don't expect me to clear that up. I'm not going to clear up after you two, or you, Lotte or anybody. You can live in your mess for all I care. Do you know how many ashes I swept up in the war? How many buckets I saw filled with charred bodies. Bodies of adults shrunk to the size of babies by the intense heat. There, you see, it's all coming out whether I like it or not. I thought I had buried it and I certainly didn't want to fill your heads with these pictures. I thought you didn't need to know. Maybe your right Lotte maybe I should share what I know. I have no idea what you will do with it. One hundred and thirty German cities and towns were destroyed in the war by fire storms. Did you know that? (To *Lukas* and *Kate*)

Lukas No.

Ruth (to audience) Have you ever heard of Fire Storms?

Options: If audience say yes then Ruth can ask them to describe what they know and build on that information. If audience don't respond then she says:

Bombs dropping from the sky and exploding on the ground do not destroy a city. They obliterate buildings and kill people in the blast but they do not destroy a city. There's only one thing that can destroy a city and that is a fire storm. I know, I was there when it happened, I saw it, felt it, heard it and I can still smell the burning even now.

Lotte When many single fires combine you get a major blaze heating up everything nearby. The superheated air shoots upwards into the sky 6 km like through a giant chimney. That way an unbelievable suction develops sucking fresh air through the surrounding streets and buildings. A firestorm blowing at

270km per hour over the ground and through the burning buildings. No one can keep himself on their feet anymore. Everything and everyone is on fire and oxygen is running out.

Ruth I saw people lying on the street, faces to the ground, trying to get air. Once, I heard someone calling for help. A girl whose feet had got stuck in the melted tarmac of the street. And the backdraft of the fire storm pulling her... I nearly lost grip of Lotte. I saw a pram that had slipped out of a mother's hands being sucked into the fire and the mother running straight after it. The storm took everything.

Lotte How to create a firestorm to destroy a city completely. The war scientists developed an elaborate system for that purpose. Phase one: where is the good flammable material you need for a fire, such as wood, cotton, paper? It's inside of the houses. First these blockbusters, big explosive bombs, were dropped. The explosion created a shock wave shaking the buildings with such strong vibrations that the roofs and ceilings fell into the buildings and so the way into the houses was clear for the incendiary bombs.

They were dropped in stage two, millions of sticks about this length, 27" fell on the city. Stage three was explosive bombs again but some had heavy noses which drilled through the roads blowing up water pipes which would make it difficult for fire fighters to put the fire out. And when fire fighters came near to burning houses they were in danger of being killed by a bomb with time delay fuse. The bombs had different time delays: twenty four hours, thirty six hours, seventy two hours, seventy years....

Ruth I think the only reason Lotte and I survived is because we didn't stay in the shelter. We just ran through the flames. The

next day we went looking for our mother who had stayed in the shelter. But we couldn't find our way. The streets had disappeared under the rubble.

We walked past two people sitting on a doorstep, one with their arm around the other, they were perfectly preserved charred bodies. Most of the dead didn't look like human beings; they were shriveled up black packages. But sometimes you could see something resembling 'human'. A finger or an ear.

At one point two men came out of a hole in the rubble and I recognized the shelter.

I wanted to go in to find my mother but the men didn't want me to. I just pushed past them, and they followed me in with torches. The first thing I saw were two rows of shoes facing each other. And as I moved on I saw them, the people all sitting next to each other mostly elderly women and children sitting on benches against the wall. A lot had their mouths wide open and their eyes closed. Their hair looked wild, almost standing on end. I didn't know until this moment that people who die of carbon monoxide gas have cherry red faces.

Questions to the characters in the play

Ruth

Was it difficult to carry on bringing up Lotte and Jan?

Would you do anything differently?

What gave you hope during the war?

Have people started to forget what happened during the war? What did the firestorm sound like?

How did it feel to be so young, but have to take on such a mature role of carer and teacher?

What gave you the most hope during the war years?

Bomb Disposal Man

How scared of your life were you when disposing bombs?

Do you see yourself as a hero?

How much pressure did you feel under?

Has a bomb ever exploded near you? And would you feel guilty if a bomb exploded in Frankfurt and you hadn't found it and disposed of it?

How did you keep your nerve?

How do you defuse UXB's safely?

Jan

I want to learn more about you. Why didn't you get on with Kate's dad?

Did you ever have prejudices against the English (considering you were involved with an English woman)? Why (not)?

What happened after WW2 and between the present?

What would you have thought of the events in Lotte's home after the discovery of the bomb?

How do you feel about being adopted?

Were you in love with Lotte?

How did it feel to be neglected?

Did you properly feel like a member of the family?

Kate

What did you think of your time in Germany?

How did discovering how bad WW2 was in Germany affect you?

Do you like Lukas as a friend?

What happened when Lukas visited you later in England?

Food for thought...

This is about the memorial that was unveiled last year in London for Bomber Command which dropped all the bombs on Germany. Up until now we have not commemorated them. Should we?

(Anthony Haddon, director of the play)

“Time Capsule

During the Second World War, the 125,000 volunteers of Bomber Command were willing to give everything to defeat Nazi oppression. In fact 55,573 of these young men paid the ultimate price with their lives. The Bomber Command Time Capsule is our chance to say thank you to ensure they are remembered forever.

The Bomber Command Time Capsule will contain the name, rank and number of all 125,000 aircrew who were a part of RAF Bomber Command. Importantly though, it will also contain the messages and photographs sent in by those who wish to make special mention of particular veterans.

When the RAF Bomber Command Memorial is completed, The Bomber Command Time Capsule will be sunk into the foundations of the Memorial and will remain safely embedded in it for thousands of years to come, ensuring that the names of these legends endure and they are never forgotten. It is anticipated that this ceremony will take place at Remembrance Weekend, November 2012.

All the money raised by the Bomber Command Time capsule will go to the RAF Bomber Command Memorial Fund. This Fund has been created to ensure the completion of the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park, London. We are still fundraising for the long term maintenance and upkeep of the Memorial and for the Dedication and Unveiling of the Memorial in June. So please upload your personal message to the Time Capsule or simply make a donation.

Your support is greatly appreciated and it will ensure that the names and stories of these legends live on forever. We have had many, many messages already posted; all very moving. Please visit www.bombercommand.com/timecapsule.”