



A GHOST STORY

Learning Resource Pack

Contents

Section One: The Production

- The Plot
- The Characters
- Themes in *2:22 A Ghost Story*
- Interview with Writer Danny Robins

Section Two: Staging *2:22 A Ghost Story*

- Set
- Lighting
- Wardrobe

Section Three: Activities

Section 1:

The Production

The Plot

Jenny believes her home is haunted, but her husband Sam refuses to believe it. What begins as a pleasant dinner party with Sam's old friend Lauren and her new partner Ben turns into a fear-filled nightmare as the group counts down to 2:22 a.m. with the aim of discovering if Jenny's ghost is real.

Act One:

The play begins with Jenny on a step ladder, painting while the clock above her displays 2:19 a.m. She finishes for the night and heads upstairs. On the living room table, a baby monitor picks up the sound of a bedroom door opening and a baby whimpering in its sleep. Jenny's soothing voice can be heard as she attends to her child. Suddenly, at 2:22 a.m., Jenny screams. The next scene takes place a few days later at 20:36 p.m. We see Lauren wandering in the kitchen, shortly followed by Jenny, Ben, and finally Sam, who just put his daughter Phoebe to bed. As the two couples sit down for dinner, Jenny reveals that she thinks their house is haunted and that her daughter is visited by a ghost every night at 2:22 a.m. Throughout the evening, Jenny tries to convince the others of the existence of ghosts, and Ben, who already believes in the supernatural, is easily convinced. They decide to stay up until 2:22 a.m. to see if Jenny's ghost really exists.

Act Two:

As act two commences at 00:05 a.m., the group sets their sights on making it to 2:22 a.m. to test their theory. To pass the time, they engage in drinking games, quizzes and debates about the possible reasons for a ghost's existence or return. However, things take a scary turn when Phoebe's teddy bear is discovered drenched in white spirit. Jenny, with the help of Ben, attempts to communicate with Frank, the previous tenant's spirit, after this incident. As strange events begin to occur, the group realises that all is not as it seems.

The Characters



Jenny:

Jenny is convinced that her new house is haunted and fears for the safety of her baby daughter Phoebe. During the dinner party, it becomes evident that Jenny intends for Lauren and Ben to be witnesses to the house's strange events with the hopes it will convince her husband Sam of supernatural activity. Jenny is characterised by her introspective and thoughtful nature as she is led by her emotion and fear. Jenny's emotional journey is a central focus of the play. As the haunting intensifies, her emotional turmoil becomes more evident, leading her to question her sanity and the reality of the supernatural occurrences. Her fear and confusion are palpable, but so too is her determination to understand and confront the truth no matter the cost.

Lauren:

Lauren and Sam have been the closest friends since university. She and her new boyfriend Ben join Jenny and Sam for dinner and quickly realise something is wrong. She is a character ruled by logic and she uses her knowledge as a psychiatrist to support Ben's alternative explanations to the haunting. Beneath her rational exterior, Lauren carries emotional complexities that slowly unravel as the play progresses. The haunting events force her to confront her own fears and vulnerabilities, challenging the very foundation of her scepticism and pushing her to question her understanding of reality and relationships. Lauren plays a crucial role in the play as one sceptic among the characters. Her analytical approach provides a counterbalance to the more emotional and fearful responses of others. Her journey involves a transformation from scepticism to acceptance, as she grapples with the inexplicable and the limitations of her rationality. Lauren's character symbolises the struggle between reason and emotion.



Ben:



Ben is Lauren's new boyfriend, a builder who exudes a mix of charm, confidence, and vulnerability. He has a rugged handsomeness and a magnetic charm that draws people towards him. Ben possesses a confident and outgoing personality, often the life of the party or the centre of attention in social gatherings. He is witty and has a knack for making others feel at ease in his presence. Beneath his confident exterior, however, there is an underlying vulnerability, hinting at a depth of emotions and experiences. Sam and Ben have opposing personalities which often leads to conflict between them. As the play goes on it is uncovered that Ben has inherited his mum's belief in the supernatural. He is a firm believer in ghosts and the spiritual realm and supports Jenny in her quest to convince the others.

Sam:

Sam, Jenny's husband, is an astronomer and know-it-all who believes there is an answer to everything. His defining trait is his unyielding rationalism, pragmatism and analytical nature. He approaches the haunting events with scepticism and a logical mindset. He is composed and level-headed, and his logical nature often brings a sense of stability to the chaotic events of the play. As a rationalist, Sam plays a significant role in challenging the other characters' beliefs and confronting their fears. His unwavering nature acts as a counterbalance to the more emotional responses of those around him. He becomes the voice of reason, encouraging others to consider logical possibilities before embracing the supernatural. Sam's rationalism sometimes creates tension in his relationships with the other characters, particularly those who have embraced the supernatural elements of the haunting. However, his scepticism can be seen as dismissive or insensitive to their experiences.



Themes in 2:22 A Ghost Story

The group's discussions and questions surrounding the existence of ghosts explore a wide range of universal themes. The following section identifies some of those themes and explores how they relate to the plot and the characters.

Fear

Fear is the main driving force of the play. The elements of suspense and mystery create a frightening atmosphere for both the characters and the audience. The events of the play explore the depths of human anxieties and the haunting power of the past. Fear is an ever-present emotion that shapes the characters' actions and relationships.

Fear of the Unknown:

The play establishes an atmosphere of uncertainty right from the start, as characters find themselves trapped in a mysterious and eerie situation. The fear of the unknown grips them as they struggle to comprehend the supernatural events happening around them. Each character deals with this fear in different ways, Sam for example, constantly fights to provide a rational and scientific answer.

Fear of the Past:

The characters in the play are haunted not only by ghostly apparitions but also by their own past. As the story unfolds, the haunting forces them to acknowledge their past and their unresolved emotional baggage. For example, Jenny battles with her deeply religious past and Lauren is haunted by her unrequited love for Sam.

Fear of Death:

The presence of ghosts and the paranormal reminds the characters of their mortality and evokes a fear of death, as it removes the distractions of everyday life that make you forget "death is final". The idea that the deceased may still have a presence in the world of the living, raises questions about what awaits them after their time on Earth is over and the reasons why someone might wish to return..

Time

The notion of time permeates the entire narrative. Time is not just a mere backdrop; it is a character in its own right, shaping the experiences and emotions of the characters. Through the motif of time, the play explores the complexities of existence, memory, and the lingering effects of past events.

Time as a Ghostly Connection:

The time 2:22 a.m. serves as a supernatural link between the characters and the ghosts. The recurrence of this specific hour represents a temporal limbo, a moment suspended between the living and the dead, blurring the boundaries between past and present.

Time as a Healing Force:

Despite the haunting nature of the play, time also presents opportunities for healing and redemption. As the characters are confronted with their past traumas and regrets, they are given a chance to confront and resolve their issues. The passing of time allows for reflection, as per Lauren and Sam's relationship, enabling the characters to come to terms with their past and find closure.

Time as a Prison:

The recurrent time loop of 2:22 AM becomes a metaphorical prison for the characters. It intensifies their fear and anxiety, as they grapple with the feeling that they are powerless against the ticking of the clock. The ever-present countdown creates a sense of urgency, heightening the suspense in the play.

Truth

As the characters grapple with supernatural occurrences and their own internal conflicts, the search for truth becomes another central theme.

Truth as a Hidden Entity:

The play begins with an air of mystery and ambiguity, where the truth is elusive and veiled. As the story unfolds, the characters' search for truth becomes a journey of self-discovery; they uncover hidden aspects of themselves and confront long-buried secrets.

Truth as Subjective and Intertwined:

Throughout the play, the concept of truth is depicted as multifaceted and subjective. Different characters have their versions of events, memories, and perceptions. The play explores how the truth can be influenced by individual biases and interpretations: complex and open to multiple viewpoints.

Rational vs Irrational

A recurring image in the play is this battle between the rational “monkey brain” and the irrational “lizard brain” which symbolises the characters struggles between rationality and irrationality

Rationality in Denial:

At the beginning of the play, the characters of Sam and Lauren attempt to rationalise the inexplicable occurrences at 2:22 AM. They dismiss the haunting as mere coincidences, tricks of the mind, or products of stress and fatigue. This denial of the supernatural is an attempt to hold onto rational explanations, as they are unwilling to confront the possibility of ghosts or paranormal forces.

Irrationality in Fear:

As the supernatural events escalate and become more prominent, the characters' fears start to override their rational thinking. They are gripped by a sense of terror that defies logical explanations.

Rationality as a Coping Mechanism:

Amid the chaos of the haunting, some characters cling to their rationality as a coping mechanism. Sam for example, seek scientific or psychological explanations to make sense of the inexplicable, hoping that his rationality will provide a sense of control and security in the face of the unknown.

The Blurred Line Between Rational and Irrational:

Throughout the play, the distinction between what is rational and what is irrational becomes increasingly blurred. The supernatural events challenge the characters' perceptions of reality, making them question the very nature of truth and sanity. The play invites the audience to ponder whether the rational world can fully explain the complexities of human experiences and emotions.

A discussion with Danny Robins, writer of *2:22 A Ghost Story*

We live in an age well attuned to the incendiary power of words, but there's one word that has more power to divide than most – 'ghost'. In our jaded been-there, done-that, unshockable world, the statement "I have seen a ghost" still has the power to silence a room and forever change the way you see someone, or how people see you.

If you're a sceptic, how would you react to your partner claiming the house is haunted? If you're a believer, how would it feel to be told by someone you love that the ghost you saw doesn't exist? I've been fascinated by ghosts since I was a child. I think it had something to do with growing up in a devout atheist family, wondering if there was some other realm where magic existed, if only I believed enough. Some people might have found God, but I found spooks. Fuelled by horror movies, a scream-filled trip to see *The Woman in Black* and the now-legendary Usborne book, *World of the Unknown: Ghosts* – certain pages too frightening to look at even in a well-lit school library – my interest grew and, as an adult, it became entwined with a realisation of my own mortality.

The idea that death was not the end seemed attractive, but did I actually believe? No... well, maybe... but ghosts remained an abstract to be enjoyed in books and films, until a good friend of mine told me she had seen one. I found her account simultaneously impossible and yet totally convincing. It struck me that a ghost sighting is a detective story, where both the witness and ghost are suspects.

It lays our relationship with the teller bare. Do we trust them as they reveal this life-changing moment of profound fear? What are the implications if we cannot? And so the idea for the play was born...

Talking ghouls and hauntings, I've spent a lot of the past few years interviewing people who are convinced that they've seen ghosts. It began as research for *2:22 – A Ghost Story*, but the stories I collected soon took on a life of their own, spawning several podcast series, *Haunted* and then *The Battersea Poltergeist* and *Uncanny* for the BBC. I am now sent a steady stream of emails from people who believe they've had paranormal experiences. In some cases, the sender hasn't told anyone before, for fear of being mocked or having their sanity questioned. Being haunted has become a taboo.

The stories can be powerful, terrifying, and sometimes deeply moving. Many of the experiences can, I think, be explained, but there are a healthy minority that defy easy answers. These are the ones that set my pulse racing.

So, do ghosts actually exist? Paranormal experiences have followed certain patterns throughout history. Reports of poltergeists haven't changed since Roman times – they thump on walls and throw objects across rooms. Believers cite this as a body of evidence, whilst sceptics see it as the contagion of belief. What I think it proves more than anything though is how much humans need ghosts; how deeply rooted and hard to shift they are in our psyche; the supernatural equivalent of

Japanese knotweed. There's a reason that, despite all our advances in science, we haven't ever consigned ghosts to the scrapheap of redundant superstition along with elves and unicorns.

Moments in time

Supernatural belief goes through boom periods. After both world wars, there was a mass fascination with seances and spiritualism as society struggled to process the chaos and loss of life. Now, our own uncertain, death-filled times are breeding a new paranormal renaissance. Horror is hugely popular in film and TV, there's a vogue for spooky podcasts like mine and the ghost story is again an admired literary form. In the real world, there's also a worrying resurgence in exorcisms in both the Christian and Islamic faiths.

A sceptic might see this as a sign of the times: irrationality and naked belief triumphing over science and rationalism, but it's possible to read it in a different way; not a symptom of chaos but our response to it; a collective longing for

magic and hope in a world that feels bleak and cruel, because this is the paradox of ghost belief – something so redolent with death is also deeply comforting.

Ghost stories, by exposing us to the exhilaration of terror in a contained way, reinforce the security of our own existence. They're our defence against humankind's greatest enemy, death; a way of processing the horrible thought that one day we and all we love will simply cease, our grand achievements rendered meaningless.

Perhaps sceptics need to be careful what they wish for in wanting to dissolve spooky shadows under the powerful floodlights of reason. Whether we believe in them or not, ghosts are society's buffer between life and death, and a world without them, with every corner, nook and cranny illuminated leaving nowhere for the dead to hide, or for us to hide from death – that is a truly frightening idea. Perhaps the question is not "Do ghosts exist?", but "Can we exist without ghosts?"

Section 2:

Staging 2:22 *A Ghost* *Story*

Set Design

The play is set in a home that should be familiar to a lot of people. It's a Victorian terraced house that a young couple have moved into and started to make their own. The previous owners lived in the house for over 40 years and although they might not have changed it much during that time, it's a very loved and looked-after home – but coming from a totally different era when people had different ideas about modern living. Now you've got this new young couple who are putting in all the things we want to have now, like open-plan kitchens and big doors to the outside. So the space you see on stage is this big open-plan kitchen/dining area that has tall glass doors to the garden, and you get a sense of the outdoor space and the house as it goes up the stairs.

Tension Between the Old and the Modern

The play aims to show how people go into an older home and look at it from a contemporary point of view. Jenny and Sam think 'this is all horrible and old, we're going to rip it all out, make it amazing and inject new life into it.' But there's an arrogance in ignoring the love and care of the previous owners. The set slightly highlights the aggressive act of going in and ripping things out; how in a way it's vandalising someone's way of life. What's left of this other couple is really important and Jenny has a strong sensitivity towards that, and a kind of responsibility, while her partner doesn't. She talks about the importance of being kind to the house and respecting all the memories that have been made there while Sam laughs and ridicules it. This tension between the old and the modern is extremely important as the ghost story really starts here: in this space between the old and new worlds.

This tension is often described as layers by various characters in the play. Layers become a recurring motif in the play and the set incorporates the fascination with the layers of history in things and the traces that we leave behind. If we think about our houses and the people who lived there before us, then the deeper you dig into the layers, the spookier it gets because they are still there and we can't stop ourselves from asking what these people were like. Were they good people? Bad people? Was a crime committed here? As a set designer, Anna Fleischle set off this thought process by leaving traces of other people on the walls so that the audience starts to think about the layers that make up the place and the souls that have been left behind.

The Sets of



2:22 A Ghost Story



Creating Suspense Through Set Design

The set is vital in creating and adding to the tension of the plot. Suspense is created through lots of different little things. For example, the angle you look at something from is always important. The whole set is angled very slightly, just enough so when you look at it, it feels slightly weird. It's really all about discovering those little things we find unsettling in our everyday lives, for instance, when it's dark behind a door and the light comes on unexpectedly. It's about reflecting the spookiness in everyday life.

The Importance of Details

For the story to really work, you have to believe this could be your house. The set shouldn't look like a theatrical space, it should look like your own kitchen. Hopefully, you'll go home after seeing the show and think, 'Oh my god, that could be my kitchen!' This illusion is created through the details which are added to the set. The details make the space feel more natural and lives-in. There are actually quite a few things on stage that belong to the set designer, like the children's bibs and old aprons. But a lot of the clutter developed naturally in rehearsals when the actors started moving things around and using the space.

All aspects of the set have been meticulously planned from the way something is hung, to the items in the fridge. These choices were made through the lens of the characters and are meant to reflect their personality. For example, there are the items chosen to imitate Sam's choices which are quite masculine, quite contemporary, and, as Jenny would say, quite cold. And then there are the little things she's done which are really sweet for her daughter such as embroidering her daughter's name on a bib to show the places where Jenny has been very warm and personal.

The Costumes

The process of costuming *2:22* begins when production informs the wardrobe department of who's been cast for each character. The designer, Cindy, often then looks at the actors themselves, their personal style, and taste, to see how that might influence her ideas of what Ben, Sam, Jenny or Lauren might wear. It's an incredibly collaborative process, and as a costume team, we really listen to how the performers intend to add their own spin onto their portrayal of the character, and how they might want to take them in a different direction than before. Everything about how the character acts and speaks onstage influences their costume design. It's our job to make sure that not only do our performers look great, but that they feel their costume helps them to find their character.

One aspect of *2:22 A Ghost Story* which is exciting for the wardrobe department is that the cast is always evolving, meaning new costumes are always needed. Whilst the general feel of the costumes is similar, the differences in the costumes between casts reflect the slight variations in the way the characters are played. These differences between each actor's portrayal of the characters leads to a lot of variety between the different casts of *2:22 A Ghost Story*. For example, there has been a lot of variation in the costumes for Lauren.

It is then the costume supervisor Charlotte's job to buy all the options for costume fittings, handle the budget, and organise all items ready for it to go onstage. Usually, the actors will meet with the team for 3 fittings during the rehearsal process. During this time the actors are presented with various costumes options. For example, for one actor we might buy 5 pairs of shoes, 6 different suits, 3 watches, 10 dresses, a heap of jewellery and much more. There is then a discussion about how they feel, how it makes them look, and whether it works for the character and says what Cindy is looking for the costume to say about the character. Once we find good options, these are reviewed by our directors and then the performers can use shoes, rings, and items of costume in their rehearsals to help them get into character.

The costumes often need alterations, to give a more tailored fit. The fit of the clothes is very important. You want the actor to look natural in the clothes so that it doesn't draw the audience out of the action. We may even use processes to make new items look old and worn if we need to, although *2:22* is quite crisp and clean overall.

The final thing to consider is what it looks like onstage. Once onstage, the team considers how the costume looks under the strong stage lights, how the actors feel wearing it for 12 hours a day, and how they might choreograph any costume quick changes. It's a whole group effort, fast-paced and very fun!

The Costumes of



2:22 A Ghost Story



Section 3:

Activities

Sound Activity

Sound plays a vital role in *2:22 A Ghost Story*. Various sound effects and songs are used as a tool in which to build suspense, scare, inform, and even drive the plot. By thinking about the various ways sound is used throughout the play, design your own atmospheric soundscape that would accompany a tense scene between the couples as they discuss their ghost.

Think about what atmosphere you want to create for your audience and what information can be hidden in the music for your audience to realise later. Think about how the sound will be produced. Will you use something in the set like the baby monitor, the radio, or the tv? Consider who is able to hear the sounds. Will the audience be the only ones to hear it or will the characters react to it?

Set Activity

One useful tool set designers use is a Model Box. A Model Box is a scaled-down 3D model representing what the stage and set will look like. These will first be designed using white card before they are constructed into a Model Box. Thinking about how *2:22 A Ghost Story* utilised the set to aid in creating suspense and a spooky atmosphere, design your own model box based on the following description of another ghost story. Begin by designing your set on white card before constructing it as a 3D model.

John - Annie Baker:

Is it or isn't it a ghost story? That simple question is one of the many things which makes Annie Baker's *John*, which played at the National Theatre in 2018 after a run in New York, such a blast to watch. A couple arrive for their vacation at an overstuffed Gettysburg bed & breakfast crammed with hundreds of China dolls and kitsch toys. But are their little eyes the only thing watching the pair as they bicker? Whereas *Nine Night* has a spirit but isn't a ghost story, *John* maybe has a spirit (or several) but definitely has all the feelings and trappings of a ghost story.

Costume Activity

The costumes in *2:22 A Ghost Story* help the audience to have a deeper understanding of the characters and provide information to an audience who finds themselves dropped in the middle of the action. Choose one of the characters and design a costume.

Think carefully about the setting and what aspects of their personality can be reflected in their clothes. Annotate your design with brief descriptions of the decisions you made and what they add to the production. Also, consider how the costumes would interact with the set. The clothes must and the set must feel a part of the same world in order for the audience to suspend their disbelief.

Writing Activity

The plot of 2:22 *A Ghost Story* takes the audience on a journey into the unknown before shocking the audience with the ending. Create your own alternative final scene for the play.

Who will be right, the believers or the sceptics and what would this mean for the relationships between characters? What will be revealed and how will they be revealed? When dealing with the subject of the supernatural the plot does not have to be completely based on reality yet, to maintain the audience's attention the ending still needs to feel realistic within the world the play has created.

Writing Activity

Try writing your own short ghost story.

Whilst the story can be set anywhere, think carefully about the setting and how your characters interact with it. Will they be in a familiar setting or arriving somewhere strange? Also, think carefully about your character's response to the supernatural occurrences. Will they be a believer or sceptic? How will the different character's beliefs affect their relationship with each other?

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A GHOST STORY