

Adaptation and Scriptwriting

'Gangsta Granny' is a book that has been adapted into a stage play. Think about what happens when you are reading a book; the author paints pictures in your imagination. Anything is possible. Action can shift instantly from place to place. Settings and atmospheres can be described in intricate detail; readers can see inside the head of a character and know what he or she is thinking.

The challenge for someone adapting a book for the stage is how to write a script that will take the audience on a journey, using real actors, in a matter of two of hours. The scriptwriter has to consider how to stage the action in the scenes, how to convey characters' thoughts and ideas and what elements of the story to keep in or miss out.

Neal Foster, the Adaptor and Director of 'Gangsta Granny', describes the process like this:

The great thing about Gangsta Granny is that the author comes from a theatrical background so his writing is full of drama and exciting scenes. It then becomes my job is to take them off the page and give them a setting that can work on stage. It hasn't been necessary to change any of the situations and David has been very helpful in guiding me towards exploring and expanding different elements of the story. The important thing in any play is to keep the drama moving towards a climax at the end of the first and second halves. I am always looking to create a surprise on every page of the script - and to create memorable moments of staging that will astonish the audience. I've hugely enjoyed exploring the relationship between Granny and Ben which is at the core of the story. It has been a joy to write and together we have captured the important elements of the book while taking advantage of all the special effects we can bring to the stage to create a truly spectacular show. The adapter also has the chance to expand on the fun of the book, so there are great new moments between the characters.

Script writing

With any script, it is important for the actors that it is laid out in a form that can be clearly understood.

The story is divided into scenes – just like chapters in a book. A new scene usually indicates a change of setting or time.

The scriptwriter has to give the actors enough information to know what they have to do, without making it over complicated and leaving space for their own ideas and those of the director.

A character's name is always on the left hand side of the page – and the words they are to speak are to the right of it.

Any actions are usually written clearly underneath a character's lines in a different typeface or colour.

Sometimes stage and lighting effects are also written onto the script, again in a different typeface or colour, so the stage team know when changes happen.

Below is an extract from the 'Gangsta Granny' script

SPOTLIGHT ON BEN

BEN (TO AUDIENCE) It's the end of the week at last. I thought it would never come. Friday night is here and I'm going to see my Granny. My favourite person in the whole wide world.

DAD ENTERS

DAD You can't stay with Granny tonight.

BEN Why not?

DAD I've got some bad news, Ben.

BEN What is it?

DAD Granny is in hospital. We're going to see her now.

LIGHTS COME UP ON HOSPITAL SETTING

GRANNY IS LYING IN BED

MUM, DAD AND BEN APPROACH THE BED

DAD Hello, Mum

GRANNY Hello, dears.

DAD How are you feeling, Mum?

GRANNY Not too clever. I had a fall.

Activity 1

Below is an extract from David Walliams' 'Gangsta Granny' book.

Have a go at adapting it into a script.

Think about different techniques you could employ: e.g. narration, mime, freeze frame, extra dialogue.

Are there any sound or lighting effects you would like to include?

Try to imagine the setting in your head and write a short description of it at the beginning of your script.

Think about where the actors enter and exit from.

Do you need to indicate how the character is feeling when he/ she speaks?

The next morning the air was thick with silence. *"Another boiled egg?"* said Granny, as they sat in her rundown little kitchen.

Ben didn't like boiled eggs and hadn't finished his first one yet. Granny could even ruin food this simple. The egg would always come out all watery, and the soldiers were always burnt to a cinder. When the old lady wasn't looking, Ben would flick the egg gloop out of the window with his spoon, and hide the soldiers behind the radiator. There must be a whole platoon of them back there by now.

"No thanks, Granny. I'm completely full," replied Ben. *"Delicious boiled egg, thank you,"* he added.

"Mummm...." murmured the old lady, unconvinced. *"It's a bit nippy. I'm just going to put another cardigan on,"* she said, even though she was already wearing two. Granny trundled out of the room, quacking as she went.

Ben flicked the rest of his egg out of the window, and then tried to find something else to eat. He knew that Granny had a secret stash of chocolate biscuits that she kept on a top shelf in the kitchen. Granny would give Ben one on his birthday. Ben would also help himself to one from time to time, when his granny's cabbage-based delicacies left him as hungry as a wolf.

So he quickly slid his chair over to the cupboard and stood on it to reach the biscuits.

He lifted the biscuit tin. It was a big Silver Jubilee assortment tin from 1977 that featured a scratched and faded portrait of a much younger Queen Elizabeth II on the lid. It felt really heavy. Much heavier than usual.

Strange.

Ben shook the tin a little. It didn't feel or sound like it had biscuits inside. It was like it had stones or marbles in it.

Even stranger.

Ben unscrewed the lid

He stared.

And then he stared some more.

He couldn't believe what was inside.

Diamonds! Rings! bracelets, necklaces, earrings, all with great big sparkling diamonds.

Diamonds, diamonds and more diamonds.

(Gangsta Granny by David Walliams. Pub: Harper Collins 2011)

Activity 2

In groups of three, try acting out some of these adapted scenes.

One person is the Director of each scene and the other two are the actors.

Share one of your scenes with the rest of the class.

Discuss the different interpretations of the text.

Were there any techniques that worked particularly well to bring the scene to life?

Stages of Life



No matter how we fight against it, we are ageing every day. As we move through life, our bodies change, and therefore so too do our abilities.

Shakespeare defines our entire lifespan as having seven distinct ages:

'At first the infant, mewling and puking in the nurse's arms....'

'Then, the whining schoolboy, with his satchel and shining morning face.'

'And then the lover, sighing like furnace....'

'Then a soldier, full of strange oaths, and bearded....'

'And then the Justice....with eyes severe and beard of formal cut...'

'The sixth age shifts into the lean and slipper'd pantaloan....'

'Last scene of all is second childishness and mere oblivion..'

An actor rehearsing a role always has to consider how the age of the character will affect how he or she appears physically onstage. For example, how will the character stand, or sit, how fast might he or she be able to move. As we get older our muscles get less flexible making our movements stiffer. Age will affect the character's voice as well – a young child usually has a high voice, whereas the pitch tends to drop as we get older.

Activity

1. Make a series of statues showing the following ages:

- Baby/ very young child
- Toddler
- Child
- Teenager
- Grown up
- Middle aged
- Old

Try and find the differences in body shape.

Try moving rapidly from one statue to the next.

2. Starting from a statue, at a given signal, make the age statues come to life and begin to move around the room.

- Notice how body shape affects the way you walk.

3. Now try changing your voice to match the age of the character. You could try using this line:

- *One man in his time plays many parts*

4. Divide the group in half

- Group one individually choose which age they will try and portray
- They then move round the room silently, in character while group two observe.
- At a given signal, group one freeze and say their line in character all at once.
- Working together, group two must decide what age each person is showing, and put them into groups accordingly.
- When they are finished, group one members reveal if they are rightly or wrongly grouped.
- Try again reversing the groups.

Group Drama: **The Island**

Divide into groups of five or six. Each person imagines themselves to be different age.

Scenario: You are all stranded on a desert island. You don't know each other, but were all travelling on a cruise ship when it ran against rocks and sank. You all somehow survived and have washed up on the beach. You are the only humans on the island and have to try and find a way to survive until you are rescued. What jobs would be best suited to each person, bearing in mind their age? As a group, decide what needs to be done, and who should do it.

Later, call a meeting. One of you has sighted a ship approaching. What ideas can you come up with to get the sailor's attention? Decide on which plan is likely to be the most successful, and put it into action.

Writing Activity

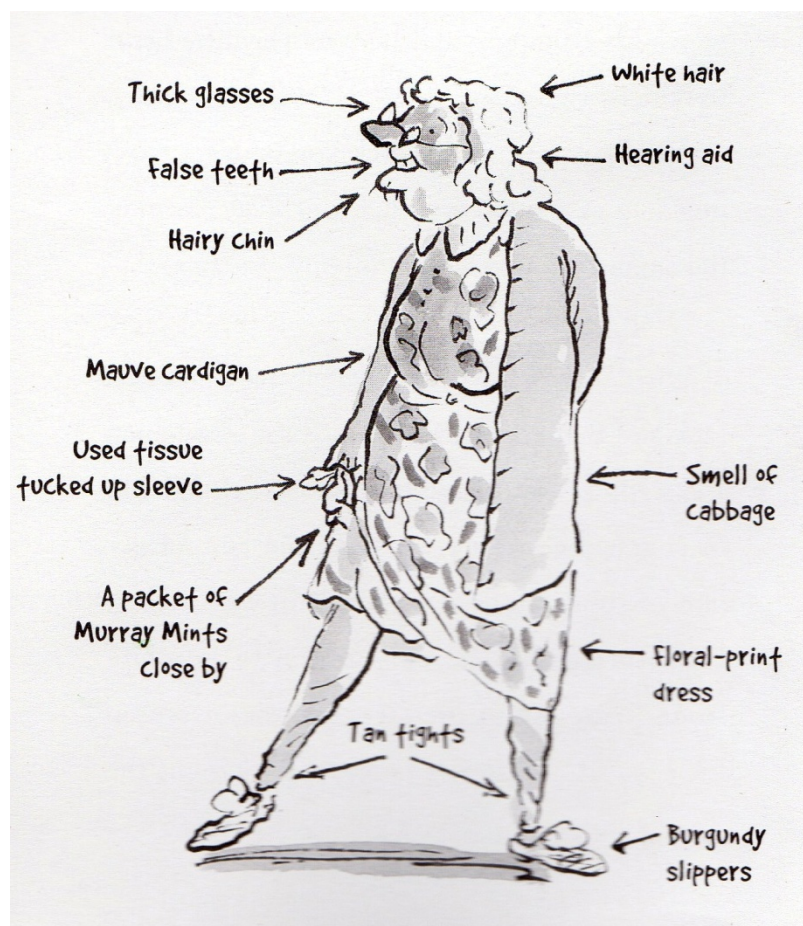
Write a diary entry from one of your earliest days on the desert island. (If your character is very young, you could be looking back at that time) What are you doing to help the group survive? How do you feel about it? Who have you made friends with within the group? What do you think the chances are of you being rescued?

Map

Draw a map of your desert island. Show any significant places on it: EG where you sleep, where you get water from, any dangerous places. Etc.

Judging by Appearances

'All old people are boring' cries Ben at the start of 'Gangsta Granny' when he is reminded that it is Friday night and time for his regular visit to his Grandma's. He sees her as a 'textbook' granny: 'white hair, false teeth, floral print dress, thick glasses, a hearing aid,' and of course, smelling of cabbage. 'Her TV doesn't work and all we do is play scrabble'.



It is very easy to assume that we know what people we meet are like, just from how they look. Yet if we get to know them, we often find that our initial assumptions are proved to be inaccurate or just plain wrong!

Activity

Look at the picture of the man below. What are your initial thoughts? Write down a few sentences describing what you think of him judging by his appearance.



This photograph appeared in a National newspaper. It is actually a picture of a famous actor, Sir Ian McKellen, who was taking a break from rehearsals for a play, and had gone outside to get some fresh air. As he sat there he was ignored by most people, and one or two put coins in his hat, without saying a word. All very different from his real life, for as the star of many films and plays, he would be instantly recognised and surrounded by fans.



Sir Ian McKellen in real life.

Secret Lives



Ben is amazed when he hears about his Grandma's secret life as 'The *Black cat* – the most wanted jewel thief in the world'. The more stories she tells him about her exploits, the more impressed he is.

Activity

1. Look at the photograph of the people below.



Choose one person and write a short character description of them. Include:

- Name
- Age
- Occupation
- Where they live
- Family details
- Hobbies / interests

2. Now imagine that the character you have created has a secret life. Maybe they are a master criminal? , a super hero? an alien from another planet?

Write a description of their secret life.

- What does it involve?
- Do they wear a costume?
- When do they become this other person?
- Do they have a particular mission?
- Does anyone else know about this secret life?

3. In pairs, look at each others' character descriptions – Both the real and secret characters.

- Mould your partners' body into statues of the real and secret characters.
- Present all four statues to the rest of the class – whilst reading out the character descriptions.

E.g.: *'By day, Dave is a builder working as a brick layer on a site in Central London. He is 42, married with two sons and enjoys playing scrabble and watching horse racing.*

'By night, Dave is 'The Red Tiger' who uses his super sharp claws to snare escaping criminals. He wears a red mask and a tiger striped suit and can leap higher than a double decker bus.'

4. As a class, imagine you are journalists writing a report for a magazine about the inner lives of some of your town's inhabitants. Interview three or four contrasting characters by 'hot seating' them.

- Ask them about issues that affect your town
- How do their actions affect the quality of life for everyone?
- Write a magazine article about one of the interviewees.

5. Grandma the Rapper

Once Ben has discovered his Grandma's secret identity, his view of her completely changes. He no longer dismisses her as a boring old person, now he sees her as a 'cool Gangsta Granny'. On stage, this becomes a rap:

Hey there gran, you're a real cool nan,
I love your stories, I'm your biggest fan
You're a master thief, you love to steal
Granny ain't messin, she's the real deal
She's my gangsta granny with the cool white hair

GRANNY Some people think that I'm not all there

BEN Diamonds, gems and rubies too

GRANNY I only ever stop when I need the loo

BEN Granny ain't messin, she's in real deep

GRANNY I love cabbage soup and an afternoon sleep

BEN My granny's the queen, yo, she's all that

GRANNY Don't call me granny, I'm called the Black Cat

GRANNY STARTS HUMANBEATBOXING

BEN Yo granny - go granny - gangsta granny

Yo granny - go granny - gangsta granny

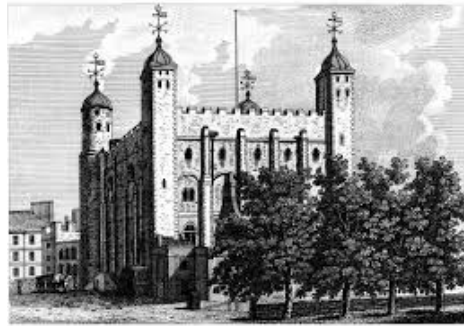
GRANNY This Black Cat is hitting town

Yo, come and watch this cat get down!

Activity

- Speak Ben's rap out loud – what do you notice about how it's written?
- Taking your 'Secret life' character, write a short rap about what he or she does.
- Look at the rhymes in Ben's rap - try and make your lines rhyme in the same way, in twos.
- A definite rhythm is important – try to keep the beat even
- Speak your rap out loud- move your body to the beat to keep in time.

The Tower of London and the Crown Jewels



Situated on the north bank of the river Thames, the Tower is one of London's most famous buildings. The first part, the White Tower, was built around 1066 by the Normans as a palace and castle to control access to the river.

Over the centuries it has had other uses such as a prison, an arsenal, a mint and a jewel house and many other towers and buildings have been added to the original keep. The moat was even used as allotments for growing vegetables during the Second World War.

Tower Green was the execution site for many famous people (including three of King Henry V's wives,) whose severed heads were put on spikes around the castle grounds as a warning to others. Even today examples of grisly torture equipment can be seen in one of the towers.

Beefeaters

Since Tudor times, the Tower of London has been looked after by the Yeomen Warders.



They are more commonly known as 'Beefeaters', a name that is said to come from a French word 'Buffetier', - who were responsible for guarding the food in the French Palace.



Ravens

Historically, the Tower has also been home to flocks of Ravens. It is not known when they first came, but their presence is surrounded by myth. It is said that if they leave, the White Tower will crumble and a great disaster will befall England. Although there is no proof that this is true, the present occupants have their wings clipped – as a precaution!

The Crown Jewels



The Crown Jewels have been kept in the Tower of London since the eleventh century. By the fourteenth century, secret jewel chambers had been constructed under St John's Chapel in the White Tower. Following victory in the English Civil War in 1649, they were seized by Parliament and melted down. Following the restoration of the Monarchy, King Charles the Second, commissioned new 'regalia' to be made for his coronation, some of which still exist today.

Since 1967, the current crown jewels have been kept in the Jewel House in the Waterloo Barracks and have proved to be a very popular tourist attraction. The regalia is made up of several crowns, swords, orbs, rings, spurs and bracelets as well as other pieces.

The oldest piece is the **Anointing Spoon** – used to anoint the Sovereign with holy oil at the Coronation.



This is thought to be the only piece to survive after the Civil War.

The main piece is **St. Edward's Crown**, which is used by the Archbishop of Canterbury to crown the Monarch at the coronation.



St. Edward's Crown.

The most famous piece is the **Imperial State Crown**. This is worn at the end of the coronation and at the state opening of Parliament.



Imperial State Crown

This was made in 1937 for the coronation of King George the Sixth, the current Queen's father, and contains many famous gems. These include:



- The Second Star of Africa cut from the famous Cullinan diamond in 1905 which is the biggest diamond ever found.



- The Black Prince's Ruby which dates from the fourteenth century and is said to be cursed as many of the previous owners have suffered misfortune. (Although not for the past 300 years!)



- The Stuart Sapphire which originally belonged to the Kings of Scotland.

The First star of Africa, the largest, flawless cut diamond in the world, is mounted on the top of the **Sovereign's Sceptre**, used at the coronation.



The **Sovereign's Orb** Is also used at the Coronation



One of the most recent pieces is the **Platinum Crown of Queen Elizabeth**.



This was made for the present Queen's Mother, and features the 'Koh-i- noor' (mountain of light) diamond from India. It is said that this crown can only be worn by a woman as the diamond will bring bad luck to any man who wears it.

Activity

Royal Crown Maker

Imagine you are a Royal crown maker. You have been asked to submit a design for a new crown to be worn at a state occasion.

- Decide who the crown would be made for.
- Decide what the occasion is.
- Draw a picture of your design labelling any significant gems
- Write your sales pitch for your crown describing what gems you have decided to use and why they are significant.

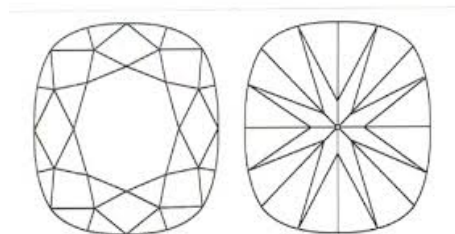


The curse of the diamond

One of the gems in your crown is of particular significance. It dates back hundreds of years. Write a short description of its history. Include:

- Where did it come from ?
- Who was its first owner?
- Who did it subsequently belong to?
- How did it come to be part of the modern Crown jewels?

The Black Prince's Ruby is said to be cursed. Imagine there is a curse on your gem. What form does it take? What are its consequences ?



Stealing the Crown Jewels

Many attempts have been made to steal the Crown Jewels but in reality, only one has been even semi- successful.

Thomas Blood



In 167, a man named Thomas Blood, who called himself 'Colonel Blood', concocted an elaborate plan, which nearly worked.

In the spring of that year, he visited the Tower, disguised as a parson. He brought a lady with him, who pretended to be his wife.

At that time the Crown Jewels were kept in a jewel chamber, under the White Tower. They were guarded by the Jewel Keeper who was happy to show them to visitors, for a fee.

Blood and his accomplice paid the Keeper and were taken down into the chamber to view the jewels. During the visit, the lady pretended to suffer a stomach ache, and was taken upstairs to the Keepers house to recover.

A few days later, Blood re- visited the Keeper and his wife to thank them for their kindness. Over the next weeks he visited them several times building up a friendship with them and gaining their trust. It was during one of these visits that Blood mentioned a (fictitious) nephew, whom he suggested might make a good husband for the Keepers daughter.

Not long afterwards, he visited again, this time with some friends, one of whom was supposed to be his nephew. While the Keepers wife was cooking them supper, Blood persuaded the Keeper to take them to see the Crown jewels.

The unsuspecting keeper, lead them down to the basement. One of Blood's accomplices stayed outside, supposedly as a guard, while the others were taken through the door and into the jewel house. As soon as the door was

slammed shut, a cloak was thrown over the Keeper; he was hit with a mallet and tied up.

Blood then grabbed St Edward's crown and used the mallet to flatten it so he could hide it under his priests' robes. An accomplice grabbed the sceptre and filed it in half so it would fit into his bag while a third man snatched the sovereign's orb and stuffed it down his trousers.

Meanwhile, upstairs, the Keeper's son had returned to the apartment unexpectedly. The 'Guard' had alerted Blood and his men and they began to make their escape, running for their horses that they had left at St Catherine's gate.

However, the Keeper had regained consciousness and began to struggle. He cried out: 'Treason, murder, the Crown is stolen'. This alerted his son who raised the alarm, and the Tower warders began to give chase.

Blood and his men ran over the drawbridge and along Tower Wharf, calling out alarms as they went in an effort to confuse the warders.

They were finally chased down and caught by the Iron Gate. By this time the crown had fallen from Blood's cloak, one half of the sceptre had been dropped and presumably, the man with the orb in his trousers was having difficulty running!

After his capture, Blood refused to answer to anyone except the King himself. He was taken to the Palace in chains, but surprisingly, he was pardoned and also received a pension of £500 a year!

Nobody quite knows why the King took this course of action. Possibly he was amused by a scoundrel such as Blood, maybe he was swayed by Blood's claim that he was 'in awe of Majesty'. There was even a suggestion that the King had masterminded the plot in order to secretly sell the Jewels to boost the Royal coffers.

Whatever the reason, Blood became a colourful celebrity. His reputation for deceit was such that when he passed away, his body was exhumed to convince the public that he was actually dead.

Activity

1. Picture Story

- In groups of five or six, discuss what you consider to be the four most significant events of Thomas Blood's story
- Assign each person to a character and design four frozen pictures to illustrate the main points.
- Add one or two sentences to each picture to explain what is happening.
- Imagine you are in a Courtroom and present the pictures to the rest of the class as a record of the events.
- Write a short account of the story from your character's point of view.
- Present your side of the story to the Court.

2. Blood meets the King

- In pairs, discuss possible reasons why the King might choose not to punish Thomas Blood.
- Imagine you are Thomas Blood and the King at the Palace
- Improvise the discussion between the two characters. How much does Blood have to plead to get his freedom? Is the King persuaded? Does he want to punish Blood in some other way? Was this all part of a secret plan – in which case, how should it be presented to the public?
- The King : write a Royal proclamation explaining what you have decided
- Thomas Blood: write a short letter to your Mother telling her of the outcome of the meeting and how you feel about it.

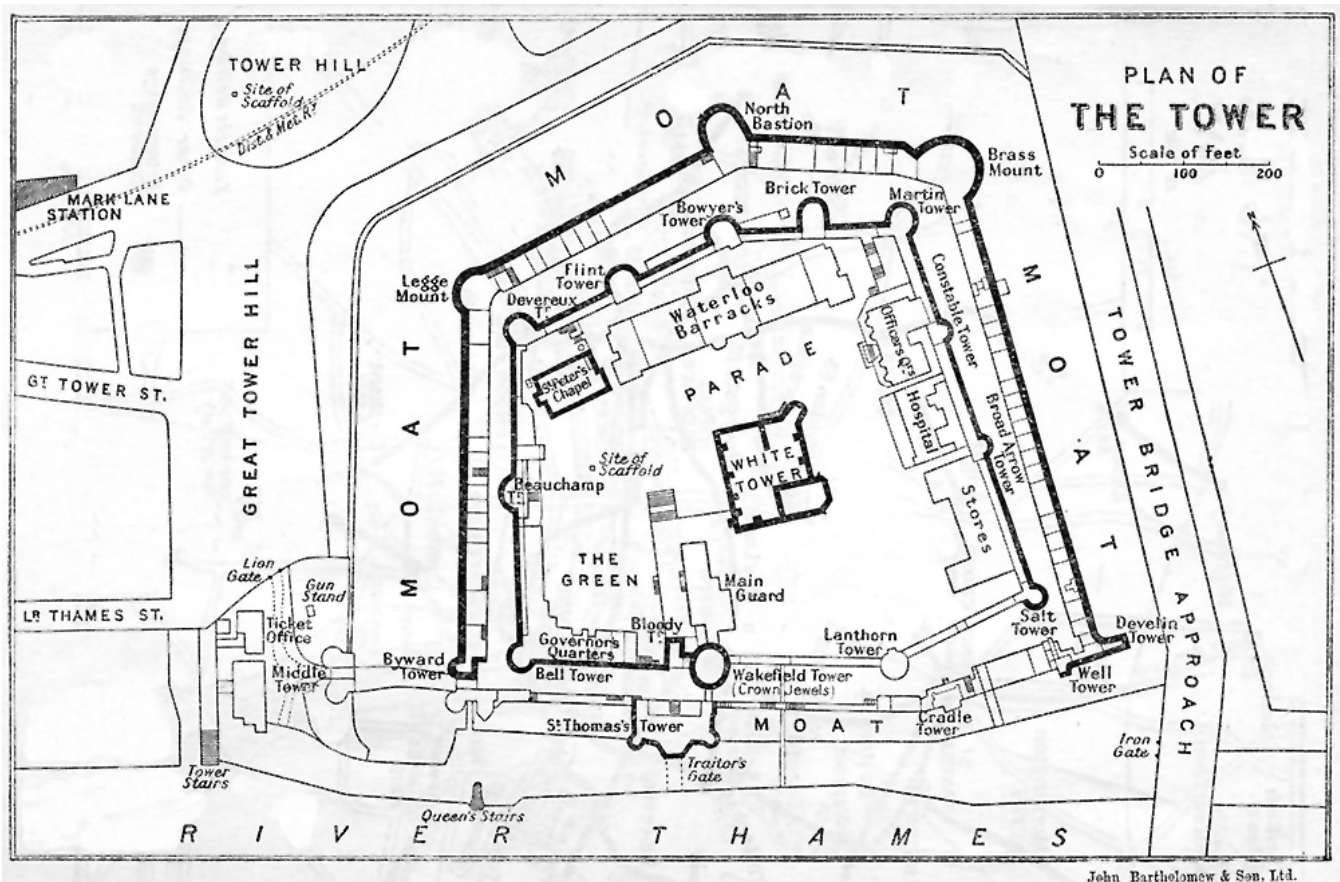
3. Granny's Plan

In 'Gangsta granny', Ben and his Grandma concoct an elaborate plot to break into the Tower of London and steal the Crown Jewels.

This involves them swimming across the Thames River and into a sewerage pipe which leads them into an old toilet right inside the Tower walls. From there they are able to creep past the Guards unnoticed, thanks to the sleeping tonic chocolate cake Granny had given them earlier. They go straight to the Jewel House, and enter by drilling through the heavy metal door. Once inside, Ben's plan is to blow up the tough security glass surrounding the jewels using special chemicals stuck

on with blue tack, and Granny's pink wool as a fuse. When that fails, Granny prepares to smash the glass with her handbag.

- In pairs, imagine you are preparing to try and steal the Crown Jewels.
- You and your partner will lead the heist and the rest of the class will act as your accomplices.
- The plan below shows the layout of the Tower



- The Crown Jewels are kept in the Waterloo Barracks.
- Decide on your plan to steal them
- Consider the following:
- How will you enter? How will you get past the Warders? How will you deal with any electronic security devices? What method will you use to break the security glass? How will you get the Jewels away from the Tower? What will you do if something goes wrong?
- Write a detailed account of your plan and present it to the rest of your class.

Creative Ways into Storytelling



People Furniture (Inanimate Objects):

Basic idea

Ask the class to think of everything that can be found in a room in the house, e.g. a bedroom. As each object is mentioned, ask someone to create the object using their body. Continue until a whole bedroom has been created. Then put two characters (two children) into the room. While the teacher narrates a story of what they do in the room, using some of the objects and furniture, the two characters mime the action. *Can also be done in small groups: each group creates an object; mode of transport; piece of furniture; power tool, etc Good for exploring settings.*

Yes and

In pairs, A. comes up with one sentence initiating an activity

B. responds with yes – they both act out the activity

B. then develops the activity by adding another saying ‘and ...

A. replies ‘yes’ they act it out

Then A adds another saying ‘and ... etc etc etc

Diary/Storytelling Exercise

Players are in pairs – A. and B.

A tells B. a simple story of her/ his morning. B. must listen carefully.

B's then move around and find a new A. to tell the story he has just heard to, but adding some more details and exaggerating a bit. A. listens carefully.

A's then find a new B and retell the story they have just heard adding even more details etc

Continue until the stories have grown sufficiently.

One of the new pair then narrates the story while their partner acts it out.

One Sentence Story

Sitting in a circle the whole group tell the same story using only one sentence each.

Once they have the hang of it – try telling a story using only one word each.

Good for speaking and listening and group cohesion

First line improvisation –KS1

Children form groups of up to 6 (Two is a good number to start with)

Give each group a card with a sentence on it. This sentence will be the first line of a play.

Together the children decide what the story could be and they choose a role in this story.

The groups are given ten minutes to practise performing the play/story. They then perform to the whole class. Each play must begin with the line written on the card.

Last line improvisation- KS2 and KS3

As above but the play *ends* with the line written on the card.