Introduction

Welcome to the education resources for Equus by Peter Shaffer.

In the following pages you will find information relating to the play, interviews with Laura O’Toole (Jill) and Rachel Russell (Director), suggestions for practical ways to explore the themes and issues raised by the play and links to other resources.

We hope you find it useful.
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Background Information

‘Equus’ was first performed at The National Theatre in July 1973. Directed by John Dexter, with Alan McCowan in the role of Dr. Dysart and Peter Firth in the role of Alan Strang, the show received great critical acclaim and caused quite a stir in the world of theatre.

The story centres on the actions of Alan Strang, a 17 year old stable lad who is in a psychiatric hospital after one night blinding six horses with a metal hoof pick. No one knows why he did it but it is the job of Dr. Dysart, psychiatrist at the hospital, to find out. During his sessions with Strang, Dysart often finds himself the subject of questioning, not only by Strang but by his own mind struggling with his growing self doubts.

When the play was first staged it was original in its style with the cast visible to the audience at all times by remaining on stage throughout. The horses were portrayed by actors and the set was a versatile wooden arena in and around which the action took place. Actors were also used as a chorus, creating a humming sound (the noise of Equus) when required.

The action jumped back and forth in time with only the monologues of Dr. Dysart being in the present. Reflecting throughout the play on his interactions with Alan and others involved in his remarkable story, Dysart used direct address to reveal his inner thoughts to the audience.

In this 2007/8 production of ‘Equus’ the actors are no longer on stage all the time and the script has been updated to make it more relevant to today’s audience. John Napiers designs have been largely adhered to but the horses heads have been re-made using lighter materials.
Synopsis of the Play

The play begins with the psychiatrist Dr Martin Dysart reflecting back on the case of young man called Alan Strang and his interactions with a horse called Nugget. Nugget is one of six horses that Alan blinds with a hoof pick and it is Martin’s job to find out why. In this opening monologue, Dysart reveals an inner turmoil stirred up by the extremity of Alan’s case. He shares his long felt doubts about his profession and himself, and likens his state of mind to that he supposes of the horse Nugget.

Magistrate Hesther Salamon, is the woman responsible for bringing Alan Strang to Dysart. She arrives in scene two when the action flips back in time to the moment when Strang is introduced. Hester is in quite a state when she arrives in Martins office. Her sole aim is to convince Dysart into taking Alan on. Having just saved the boy from life imprisonment she is anxious that he be treated by someone who can handle him and she believes that person is Martin.

In their first meeting Dysart fails to hold any kind of conversation with Strang who responds to the doctors questions by singing advertising jingles. Their interaction is brief and Strang is quickly shown to his room.

With each subsequent session however Dysart manages to find out a little more about Strang and his obsession with horses. In their second meeting he finds out from Alan that, as a young boy, he had an encounter with a horse that had quite an effect on him, an effect which he later details on an audio tape that he eventually gives to Dysart.

After visiting the boy’s parents it becomes clear to the doctor that Alan’s mother is a deeply religious whilst his father is an atheist who disapproves of his wife’s indoctrination of his son. In return Alan’s mother disapproves of her husbands ban on television. He doesn’t allow Alan to watch it and makes his wife return the set that she brings home. Alan’s mother, Dora, lets Alan go to a neighbours house to watch television without his father knowing.
It emerges that Frank, Alan’s Dad, was one night so enraged by his son’s interest in God that he destroyed the picture of Christ that Alan had chosen to hang in his bedroom. A few days later he replaced this picture with that of a horse.

Dysart discovers from Frank that Alan was seen kneeling in front of the picture one night, chanting a made up genealogy of horses ending with ‘Equus’, the latin name for horse. Whilst he is doing this Alan flagellates himself using a coat hanger. Alan, he realizes, worships the horse in the picture that is in place of the picture of Christ.

In order to find out more about Alan’s motives, Dysart meets with the stable owner, Mr. Dalton whose six horses were maimed in the attack. Dalton reveals that whilst Strang was working for him he was diligent and reliable and committed to looking after the horses. Alan was introduced to the stables by Jill Mason, a girl who came into the electrical store looking for blades for horse clippers and she is the one to show Alan the ropes. She introduces him to a horse called Nugget who Strang soon becomes fixated with. He takes Nugget out on midnight rides and straddles him naked enjoying the feel of the horse’s powerful bare back under him. Strang derives great sexual pleasure from riding the horses in this way.

Jill is the only distraction to Alan’s obsession when she one night suggests that they go and see a dirty film together. Whilst in the cinema, Alan’s dad walks in and hauls Alan out. In an attempt to cover his being there, Frank makes up a story about business but both Alan and Jill know that this is a cover up. For Alan this is a revelation, his Dad is not the man he professes to be with his airs and graces.

After this encounter Alan goes to walk Jill home, but Jill entices Alan into going to the stables for sex. He can’t commit such an act within the sight of the horses though and he fails to go any further than lying naked and kissing. Jill leaves the stable after Strang shouts at her to do so and then, believing the horses to be laughing at him having seen all that has happened, he takes a hoof pick and slashes at their eyes.
Throughout the play Dysart reflects on his sessions with Strang and his dealings with the boy’s parents through monologues revealing his inner thoughts. He voices his concerns in his conversations with Hesther.

Throughout the story of Alan, Dysart examines himself acutely. He envies the boys passion, a passion which he feels he has not himself experienced. He is left questioning his role in helping Strang and he appears more tormented than ever by his own mind.
Cast & Characters

Dr. Martin Dysart (Simon Callow)

Psychiatrist, unhappily married, suffering a crisis of confidence in himself and his profession. The Case of Strang brings all his doubts to the fore and leaves him more unsettled than ever about his vocation and integrity.

Alan Strang (Alfie Allen)

17 year old boy who blinds six horses with a hoof pick. Strang is obsessed with horses, worshipping them as if they were gods and deriving sexual pleasure from contact with them.
Frank Strang (Colin Hurley)

Alan’s father, an atheist and strict disciplinarian, Frank disapproves of Alan’s religious interests and forbids him from watching television believing it to be a drug.

Dora Strang (Helen Anderson)

Alan’s mother, deeply religious, nervous woman. Disagrees with husband Frank about Alan watching television and lets him sneak round to a neighbours house to watch.
Jill Mason (Laura O’Toole)

Flirty, confident young woman who encourages Alan to go and watch a dirty film with her. She later entices Alan to the stables for sex but he cannot go through with it, after their encounter Alan blinds six horses.

Hesther Salamon (Linda Thorsen)

Magistrate, colleague and friend of Dysart. She is the person Dysart shares his doubts and concerns with regarding Strang’s case and his own abilities.
Mr. Dalton (Andrew McDonald)

Owner of the stables and the six blinded horses. He believes that Alan should’ve been locked up, not sent to a hospital at the tax payers expense.
Interview with Rachel Russell

(Director)

I think first of all when we re-visited the production in the West End, Peter (writer) and myself and Thea Sharrock (original director) wanted to update the script and make it relevant for a modern day audience. I think the arguments and the characters are still relevant today. It is difficult trying to make the mother and father characters (who are of a particular type) work in today’s society really in terms of class and so what we’ve talked about is making them slightly older. We’ve got scenes within scenes so we have to ensure clarity on stage to make that work. We often have two scenes running simultaneously so we have to think about where the audiences focus is. We have to set up that convention from the start. We also have the idea that Dysart is talking to us the audience and at times also the character of Hesther so we have to have clarity.

How does this production differ from the 1973 production?

Originally all the actors were on stage all the time – this is still a very ensemble piece but the actors come in and out. We’ve tried to stay as true as we could to what Peter wanted with the horses and John Napiers designs (designer of 1973 production).

What is this play really about?

Passion, how one gains passion, if one can experience passion without pain. I think it’s about sexuality and what that means and what that is for someone when they’re growing up. It’s about what happens to you when you lack something in your life, like Dysart says he feels like he hasn’t experienced real passion because he hasn’t opened himself up to the worship that Alan has seen.

What reaction are you hoping for from young audiences?

I think it’s such a great piece for young people to see because I think most teenagers can relate to what Alan is going through. I think that to a certain extent all young people go through such an experience
with their parents, obviously not to the extreme of Alan. I hope that they go away and can understand the questions raised in the piece and that they can take something from Alan’s character.
Staging of the Play
Interview with Laura O'Toole

(Jill Mason)

Tell me about the character of Jill and how you prepare for the role.

Jill is in her early twenties and she works full time at a stable about a mile away from her house. Her father abandoned herself and her mother when Jill was very young.

For me to prepare for this part, you have to look at the whole story and Jill’s part in it. I understudied the part in the west end so I got a chance to observe how the other actress played it and I spent some time at a stable to see what the working day is like. I’ve had to figure out how Jill is different to Alan and how she might be attractive to him and attracted to him as well.

Do you think you’ve made the part your own?

Yes, I do. Because I’ve decided for myself why the character has made certain decisions. Why Jill asks Alan out and why she works at the stable and then I’ve applied my own personal experiences. It’s great with a new cast because people bring new things to it.

Why is Jill attracted to Alan?

I think Jill is quite an independent person. Alan is very different, he keeps himself to himself and is kind of quiet, he works in a hardware shop during the week and he’s not the typical kind of guy that she might go for but when he comes to the stable he is kind of mystified by the horses. We were talking about it yesterday…when you do something everyday it becomes the norm and when somebody else comes in and they adore it and kind of see all the magic in it and you begin to remember what is so amazing about it and that is very attractive because they’re reminding you of what you love. Also, she’s curious about him because he’s odd, he doesn’t share much I don’t think.

What do you want teenage girls to think of Jill?
I guess because people might think badly of Jill because they might think that if she’d left him alone, he’d have been alright. I don’t want people to think that she is just putting herself out there to get her way…no-one…well very few people are that one sided. I want people to not be judgemental of her in that way. I guess, you have to admire her strength and her warmth and friendliness. I think Jill is one of the few people who talks straight to Alan. I don’t think Alan has previously been opened up to a sense of humour and honesty and in that way I think she's quite refreshing and warm. She’s also quite determined. If girls come away thinking that there are more then one or two facets to her character then that will be great.
Themes of the Play

Equus is a disturbing story which explores many themes and issues. The obvious ones are religion, sexual repression and mental illness but there are many more that could be explored.

The following is intended to provide you with supporting information to help you explore these themes further with your students. Suggestions for activities related to the themes can be found on later pages.

Religion

Alan Strang’s mother Dora is a deeply religious woman who reads the bible to her son from an early age. At the age of twelve Alan’s father Frank, disapproving of his sons interest in religion, destroys the painting of Christ that hangs in Alan’s bedroom and replaces it with a picture of a horse.

The picture Frank destroys is of Jesus Christ on his way to Cavalry. This picture depicts Jesus wearing a crown of thorns, as he struggles to carry the cross that he is later crucified on.

Christianity is the world's biggest religion, with about 2.1 billion followers worldwide. It is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ who Christians believed lived in the Holy Land 2,000 years ago. They believe he is the son of God, sent to fulfill God's law and to save mankind from sin and death. Christians believe in only one God, God the father, son and Holy Spirit. Some confuse this and think that Christians believe in three separate gods, they don't.

Christians believe that God took human form as Jesus Christ and that God is present today through the work of the Holy Spirit. They also believe in life after death. After Jesus was crucified on the cross, he was believed to have risen again before ascending into the kingdom of heaven. They believe that Jesus died on the Cross so that those who believed in him would be forgiven of all their sins.
At various points throughout the play, Alan refers to the bible and the teachings of his mother in reference to horses that he worships; he believes they are the son of God, like Jesus Christ.

The following passage is taken from the gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16.

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*

And this passage is taken from 'Equus', Act 1, Scene 14, said by Alan.

*‘Behold – I give you Equus, my only begotten son!’*

In addition to this, Alan’s mother tells Dysart about a time when she told Alan a story about when the Christian cavalry first appeared in the New World. She tells him that the pagans thought horse and rider was one person. That they thought it must be a god. When Alan rides Nugget late at night, naked, he talks of being one with the horse. Are his mother’s religious teachings responsible for his behaviour?

**Sexual Repression**

Sexual repression features strongly as a theme in the play ‘Equus’. Alan’s mother, the deeply religious, Dora, refers to sex as a spiritual thing that Alan shall experience if it is God’s will for him to fall in love. This view suggests that she views sex as something that Alan should only experience if it is God’s will, casting something of an immoral tone on the act. In contrast, his father Frank secretly attends screenings of pornographic films at a local picture house, unbeknown to his wife Dora. His furtiveness about his film viewing suggests that his wife would not approve and leads us to believe that Dora is averse to sex.

It is the theories of Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud concerning sexual repression that can be easily attached to the story of Alan Strang.
Freud believed that sexual repression was the chief psychological problem of mankind. He surmised that repression and constriction of sexual behavior in youth would become manifest in adulthood.

In Alan’s first encounter with a horse, he has sexual feelings. Riding on a horse on the beach with a stranger gives him great pleasure. His parents, however, are angered by the actions of the rider who has taken Alan off on the horse without their knowing. The encounter ends with Frank shouting angrily at the rider and Alan angry at his father. Is it possible that as a six year old boy Alan could’ve confused the reason for these reactions and made an association between sexual pleasure and doing something wrong? Could it be that combined with his mother’s teachings from the bible, Alan believed sex to be in some way sinful too?

‘It was sexy….That’s what you want to know, isn’t it? All right: it was. I’m talking about the beach. That time when I was a kid. What I told you about….I was pushed forward on the horse. There was sweat on my legs from his neck. The fellow hold me tight, and let me turn the horse which way I wanted. All that power going any way you wanted….His sides were all warm, and the smell…. Then suddenly I was on the ground, where Dad pulled me. I could have bashed him…’

Alan talking to Dysart, Act 1 Scene 14.

**Mental Illness**

Alan Strang is saved from going to prison by Hesther Salamon. She believes that the boy is suffering from some kind of mental illness, and persuades Dysart him to give him psychiatric treatment. But what constitutes a mental illness? A widely recognised definition is

‘A *health condition that changes a person’s thinking, feelings, or behavior (or all three) and that causes the person distress and difficulty in functioning*’ National Institute of Mental Health
In this case, it is difficult to argue that Strang is not in some way mentally ill. The reason for his attack on the horses is strongly tied up in his belief that horses are god – a belief that strongly suggests he is suffering delusions.

An interesting point is raised by Dysart however when he refers to treatment of Alan in his final monologue,

‘Hopefully, he’ll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. I doubt, however, with much passion!... Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created.’

Act 2 Scene 35

He raises a question about the effects of treatment for someone who is mentally ill. The word passion is commonly known to mean a great enthusiasm or strong emotion, but it can also mean however the sufferings of Christ on the cross. To which meaning Dysart’s words refer is not clear but either way he is talking of ridding Alan of his current behaviour and emotions. His final comment about doctors not being able to create passion, suggests that he doesn’t necessarily think this treatment a good thing.

Mental illness affects one in four people in Britain and the range of treatments are varied and depend upon the individual. The comments made by Dysart echo the feelings of many sufferers of Bi – Polar disorder (manic depression), a condition which causes sufferers to experience extreme ‘highs’ and extreme ‘lows’. Sufferers often refer to their ‘highs’ as being their creative moments, or periods when they achieve great things. Treatment can reduce or level out these ‘highs’ and some sufferers have reported missing their ‘mania’ because of the things they achieved whilst in that state. Of course, the danger for bi-polar sufferers is that during a manic period they might do something that they later regret. But what this highlights is the complexity of dealing with mental illness. Unlike a broken bone, we cannot x-ray our minds to find out what the problem is and therefore causes of mental illness are difficult to pinpoint. Likewise, the correct treatment is not easy to prescribe. Is it this lack of understanding and control over the mind which leads to the stigma associated with
mental illness? Despite it being a widespread condition it is still something of a ‘taboo’.

As Hesther says of Dysarts colleagues Bennett & Thoroughgood,

‘Oh, they’ll be cool and exact. And underneath they’ll be revolted and immovably English. Just like my bench.’

Act 1 Scene 2
Activities

The following activities are suggestions for ways in which you can engage your students with the themes and characters in the play.

The first three activities can be done prior to reading the play or seeing the show, the last three are designed to be used as follow up.

In order to help you find the right activities for your class please refer to the overview below.

‘On the Case’

The students are presented with a box of artifacts and are asked to consider why they think Alan Strang committed the crime he did.

‘Debating Den’

The students are asked to arrange their classroom for a debating session. They need to elect a chair to manage the debate and a panel of experts who need to carry out research to support their argument. The rest of the students form the audience who can be asked for their input. A list of suggestions for debate is provided.

‘Classroom Courtroom’

The students set up the classroom as a courtroom and take on the roles of ‘The Accused’, ‘The Prosecutor’, ‘The Judge’, ‘The Jury’, ‘Witnesses’ etc. The students can then trial the case of Alan Strang. What would they have done with him? A list of other crimes from plays is provided for further courtroom drama.

‘Consequences, Consequences’

The students take on the roles of the characters that have been affected by the actions of Alan Strang (including horses if they wish). Each character places them self as close or as far away from Alan as they see fit according to how affected that individual is.

‘Who’s, Who?’
The students are given a series of quotes form the play. They have to match the quotes to the character and write a detailed character study.

‘Examining Equus’

The students are given a series of questions to answer about the production of ‘Equus’ which will help them to write their own review of it.
‘On the Case’

For this activity you will need an empty box such as a shoe box or plastic container. In the box you need to put the following,

4 Pieces of sacking (about the size of a dinner plate)

A picture of a Jesus Christ wearing a crown of thorns

Newspaper Report of Crime (see next page)

Quotes from the play (see next page)

Introducing the task & putting the students in role.

Divide the students into four groups. Tell the students that they are going to take on the role of criminal investigators. They do not need to start ‘acting’ in this role, merely thinking as an investigator might. Ask them what their job might entail and what sort of skills they might need for it. Explain that you are going to look at a particular crime which has just occurred and that their task is to try and determine why it happened. Tell the students that the box contains evidence that will need to be examined.

Examining the Artifacts & Giving an Opinion

Give each group an item from the box, ask them to discuss it and consider what significance it might have. Rotate the objects so that all the groups get to look at all the artifacts. When all the items have been viewed ask the groups for their verdict on why the crime has taken place. Obviously at this point, they can only guess so the importance is placed on their justification for their view.

Extension Activity – Other Viewpoints

Once the students have given their opinions, ask them to consider the people who are connected to this crime and make a list of names. Using this list of names, the students can create the various viewpoints of those people. These viewpoints or stories can be
shared in any format, interview, newspaper report, diary, journal or letter.

THE DAILY CHRONICLE
21st January 2007

Stable Lad Becomes Stabbing Lad

Last night a brutal attack by a seventeen year old boy left six horses blind. Alan Strang who works at the Dalton stables where a large number of horses are kept, for some unknown reason, began stabbing at the horses with a hoof pick around midnight. He had been in the barn with an unnamed girl and then shortly after she left he carried out the attack. The stable owner Mr. Dalton commented on the event saying ‘I found him in the barn, shrieking and naked. He should be locked up’. According to Mr. Dalton Alan Strang had been up until this point, a conscientious and hard working employee. The reason for his violent crime is something of a mystery. His case is to be heard in court later this week.
Quotes from the play

‘Religion is the opium of the people’

‘Equus my only begotten son’

‘Sandals of majesty...Made of sack’
‘Debating Den’

This activity is designed to get your students debating issues raised by the themes of ‘Equus’.

The following list of issues can be discussed prior to reading the play or seeing the show or after.

- **Nature versus Nurture** – Are we born with our behavioural traits (nature) or are they shaped by our personal experiences (nurture)?

- **Genetics** – If it was possible to detect the gene for mental illness would we want to? What implications might this have?

- **Mental Illness** – What do we really think of people who are mentally ill and how they should be treated?

- **Medicine** – Do we medicate too often? Alfie Allen who plays Alan Strang in ‘Equus’ was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder when he was at school, he was put on Ritalin and hated it, his mother hated it too. The reason they hated it was because Alfie was no longer Alfie. What does this mean?

**Setting up the Debate**

It is important to give the students the responsibility for setting up the room as they wish it to be. This will give them ownership of the debating den and encourage them to engage. Once the room is organized, introduce the topic for debate.

**Assigning the Roles**
Ask the students to volunteer to take on the various roles needed to hold a debate – chairperson/presenter, audience, experts. It is important to stress at this point that you will need people to take on opposing points of view in order to make the debate fair. Asking the students to do this will encourage them to consider other points of view and will help keep them engaged. Remember to make it clear to all students that they are in role so some people may be expressing views that are not their own. All students will need to carry out some research into the area for debate, especially those who are taking on the role of expert.

Let the Debate Begin

Try as best you can to allow the students to manage their own debate but be on hand if it gets personal! Again, be clear when the debate is over and make sure that everyone comes out of role. Add to your list of issues for debate after you have seen the show.
'Classroom Courtroom'

For this activity you will need to move tables and chairs in your classroom to resemble a courtroom. Ask the students to complete this task in order to give them ownership of their courtroom. This activity is designed to explore the case of Alan Strang but you can use it to explore other crimes from plays and therefore you can do it either prior to or after reading or seeing the show. The object is to determine punishment rather than guilty status.

Suggestions for other cases are,

- Lady Macbeth from ‘Macbeth’
- Fagin from ‘Oliver Twist’
- Hamlet from ‘Hamlet’ (see this article for further information)

http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/theatre/2007/03/shakespeares_great_dane_in_the.html

Introducing the Case

Explain to the class that they are going to conduct a trial. Introduce the particular case that they are going to trial and ask for volunteers to take on the various role required – judges, jury, witnesses etc. Make it clear that the students will be working in role and as such may need to do some research into their character or role.

The Hearing

Once the students have prepared for their roles, ask them to take up their places in the courtroom and let the trial begin. It would be wise to take on a role yourself in order to ensure the smooth running of proceedings – this role can be decided by you.

The Verdict

The court must come to a conclusion and decision about punishment and be prepared to say why they have reached this decision. Remember to get everyone to de-role after the trial.
‘Consequences, Consequences’

This activity is designed to encourage the students to consider the consequences of the actions of Alan Strang. It can be used to explore the thoughts and feeling of characters involved in his crime but it can also be applied to other events in the story.

The following is a list of events which could be explored,

- Alan’s stabbing of the horses
- Frank’s reaction to Alan with the horse on the beach
- Frank’s destruction of Alan’s painting of Christ
- Dora’s slapping of Alan at the hospital

Introducing the Consequences Circle

Ask the students to consider who is involved in any one of the events that you choose, create a list of names. Ask for volunteers to take on these roles. Explain to the students that you are going to explore the consequences of a particular characters action by looking at the effect it had on the other people. Tell the students that you are going to begin this by imagining that there is a target on the floor, like a dartboard with rings running round it and at the centre of the dartboard is the character that has done something. Around the rest of the dartboard are the characters that have been affected by this characters action. The distance between the main character and the others is to be decided by the student taking on each role and is dependant upon how much they feel that person has been affected. If they are close to the main character then they have been very affected, further away, less so.

Taking on the Roles

Make it clear to the students that if they take on a role they will need to be able to speak as if they are that character and give their point of view.

The Ripple Effect
Ask the students taking on roles to take up their positions according to where they feel that character should stand. Starting at the centre of the circle with the main character, ask him/her what they did and why. Then proceed to the next nearest character and ask them how they have been affected and what they think of the main character. Continue going around the circle getting the thoughts, feelings and viewpoints of everyone involved. You may return to the main character to ask how the comments of the other characters make them feel. This exercise gives the students a great opportunity to consider the perspective of all involved.

**Extension Activity – Diaries, Letters, Journals**

The students could use their experience of playing a particular role to help them in writing a diary, letter or journal for that character. It could be an account of the event from their point of view or a letter to someone telling them how they feel.
‘Who’s, Who?’

This activity is to help students identify with the characters and their journey through the play. It can be used to build up a character profile and can aid further writing and study of the play. The following quotes from the play can be used for this task (remember to remove the character names!),

**Dysart**

‘I’m wearing that horse’s head myself’

‘Do you know what it’s like for two people to live in the same house as if they were in different parts of the world?’

‘There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out.’

**Alan**

‘Equus the Godslave. Faithful and true.’

‘He’d seen everything. I could hear him. He was laughing’.

**Dora**

‘…I don’t believe in interfering too much with children, so I said nothing’

‘If you added up everything we ever did to him, form his first day on this earth to this, you wouldn’t find out why he did this terrible thing – because that’s just him: not just all of our things added up.

**Frank**

‘He’s always been a weird lad, I have to be honest’.
‘She thinks she married beneath her. I dare say she did’.

**Hesther**

‘There’s something very special about him’

‘The boy’s in pain, Martin. That’s all I see. In the end…I’m sorry’

**Jill**

‘We keep saying old people are square. Then when they suddenly aren’t – we don’t like it!’

‘…I’m your friend – Alan’

**Dalton**

‘He’s a loony isn’t he?’

‘I tell you, this thing has shaken me so bad, I’m liable to believe anything.’

**Introducing the Task**

Explain to the students that you are going to give the students some quotes from the play and that you would like them to decide who said what.

**Completing the Task**

Once the students have organized their quotes ask them to justify their choices and then reveal the correct answers. Find out if any of the students attached their quotes to the wrong character and if they did, why. Are there any surprises?
When the students have got the quotes attached to the right character ask them to consider what the character has said. Why did they say it? What does it mean? Who were they talking to? What does it tell you about that character or their view of another character? When the students have done this ask them to chart the journey of one particular character throughout the play – if they were to tell the story from their point of view how would it go? What feelings, thoughts or anxieties might they express? Encourage the student to take notes whilst reading or watching the play so that they can refer back to various pages where they found their evidence.
‘Examining Equus’

The following activity is designed to help students to develop a critical mind when viewing a piece of theatre or reading a play.

The following questions can be used as a starting point for discussion, an essay or a review.

Why does Dysart use direct address? Is it effective?

Why are the horses played by actors? Does it work?

Why do the actors remain on stage throughout? What might it symbolize?

In what way is Dysart affected by the case of Alan Strang? How is this portrayed by the actor playing him?

What is the relationship like between Dora & Frank? What clues are there in the staging of their scenes?

When Alan stabs the horses, what effect does this have on the audience? Is this what the writer intended?

Why is the story of Alan told through flashback? How effective is this method?

How believable is Alan’s story? Why / Why not?

What is your overall view of this production of the play? Comment on staging, acting, set, costume, lighting etc.
Bibliography

‘Equus’ Peter Shaffer. Editor Adrian Burke – Longman Literature.

This book contains a useful glossary at the back and suggestions for further study.

Useful Links

http://www.wickedness.net/Evil/Evil%206/mendez%20paper.pdf

From ‘Bad’ to ‘Mad’: Labelling and Behaviour in Peter Shaffer’s Equus

http://arts.guardian.co.uk/theatre/drama/reviews/story/0,,2023118,00.html#article_continue

Review in the Guardian

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/

Useful site explaining Christian religion and beliefs

http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/article.aspx?id=597

Article on Sigmund Freud and his theories

http://www.mind.org.uk/Information/Booklets/Understanding/Understanding+mental+illness.htm#What_is_mental_illness

Information on all aspects of mental illness

Resources written and compiled by Helen Blackmore and David Viney