



ABBEY THEATRE
ME, SARA

DYLAN COBURN GRAY

Teacher's Pack 2017

by Sarah FitzGibbon

INTRO- DUCTION



FOREWORD

Welcome to our third in the Priming the Canon programme, *Me, Sara* by Dylan Coburn Gray, based on the character of Sara Tansey from JM Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. Running since 2012, the aspiration for this programme has been to expose young people to the highest quality theatrical experience in their school or local arts space; to link Irish primary schools with great works from Irish literary history; for schools to connect with their cultural heritage and their national theatre. To ensure the applicability of this work to your classroom, we road test both the performances and the resources in our pilot schools. We are very grateful to these schools including St. Catherine's in Donore Ave. Dublin 8 for their continued support and trust in our work.

Other plays in the programme include *Me, Mollser* by Ali White based on the character of Mollser from Sean O' Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* and *Me, Micheal* by Tara McKeivitt based on the character of Micheal from Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Both of these pieces are available in both Irish and English and *Mise, Micheal* will be touring in Autumn 2017.

We start by identifying a child character in a play from the Irish canon - a series of plays that are common to the repertoire of the Abbey

Theatre. When designing the programme, we felt that the voice missing from the canon was that of the child, which is why we choose to focus on the child characters in these plays. Phil Kingston and I identify writers and directors who can give life to these often minor characters and work collaboratively with them to develop a programme. Key to providing an educational context is having a facilitator visit the classroom in role before the performance begins. This is an effective Theatre in Education model as it prepares the young people for what they are about to see or engage with.

For this production Dylan Coburn Gray, supported by Sarah FitzGibbon and Phil Kingston, developed *Me, Sara* throughout 2016. Amy Conroy cast and directed Juliette Crosbie to perform the text while Sarah FitzGibbon and Phil Kingston worked with Morgan Cooke on the pre and post show elements. The Farmer Tom monologue was written by Phil Kingston and trialled in St. Catherine's. The props and costumes were provided by the Abbey Theatre's prop and costume department, while Mary Sheehan co-ordinated the tours for the Community and Education department.

ME, SARA'S RESOURCES

We hope to support you to extend the Priming the Canon experience by incorporating elements of the Primary School Curriculum.



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LESSON ONE

WRITE YOUR OWN *ME, SARA* MONOLOGUE

SARAH'S NOTE:

Explain to the class what a monologue is. Tell the class that they will have a monologue written within one hour. They won't believe you but it can happen and leads to a great sense of achievement. Further editing can be done later but for empowerment in writing, this exercise is hard to beat. I'd like to thank Jed Murray for introducing me to it. He created this exercise by adapting exercises used by David Bowie when song writing.

STEP 1

Invite the class to close their eyes and imagine Sara's journey from her home (a small farm holding near the harbour) to the shebeen. Talk them through the journey, focusing on the sounds, textures and smells she might encounter. Consider the textures of the things she will touch or walk on - tall grass, rock, stone, sand. Consider the sounds of her journey - the sea, the shoreline, the farm, its animals and the shebeen. Consider the smells of her day such as the salty wind, grass fields and the turf fire.

STEP 2

As they uncover their eyes, ask each child to give you one word that popped into their head during their 'imaginary' journey. Record each word beside the child's name. If they are stuck, encourage them to think of textures, sounds, smells and feelings. No words can be repeated and each student adds one word.

STEP 3

Read back their list of words. Go back to the students and ask them to make a short sentence around the word they said e.g. GRASS... Grass blowing in the wind. Encourage them to go back to the image in their mind when they chose their first word. Clearly write out each sentence.

Collect and read aloud back to them. Get their response and read it again.

DEVELOPMENT:

Put the class into groups of four or five, give each group a photocopy of their monologue and allow them to cut it so that each sentence is a strip on its own. As a group, they agree an order or sequence for their monologue. They can add two new sentences, if they like. Each group presents their monologue. You can extend this exercise by encouraging the class to create a soundscape of the sea behind the monologue. This will heighten the sense of performance.

REFLECTION:

Reviewing the Sara monologues, ask the students to reflect on their daily journey, focusing on small details e.g. the bowl you use for breakfast every morning. Allow them to create their own monologue starting with words, developing these into sentences and sequencing them until they feel they are reflective of that journey.

The pupils in St. Catherine's wrote their monologue collectively about their journey to school. The highlighted words are the starting words.

The wet, long, tiring **journey**.

Brown disgusting polluted **canal**.

The morning **routine**.

Was **enroute** through the mankey streets to school,

late in a busy city of busy people.

The **fresh air** blows in my face.

The whoosh crack of **shopkeepers** putting up their shutters.

Cycling fast-riding with the **wind**.

Smell of metal...**bus** too close.

Groggy... haven't fully woken up yet.

Boisterous children enter the school, not wanting to leave their parents.

Everyone beeping horns in the **traffic**.

Slow cars inching closer to the green light in a line of frustration.

Air smelt and felt **toxic**, warm on my skin.

The city woke up feeling **dozy**.

A long, lazy walk with birds **chirping** in the Dublin morning.

GENDER IN THE TIME OF THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD BY J.M. SYNGE

A process drama in three to four sessions explore gender roles in Ireland 1904 with curriculum links to Drama, History, SPHE and English

SARAH'S NOTE:

We road test all our resources, I will outline how I framed the discussion with our test 6th class in St. Catherine's, Donore Avenue, Dublin 8.

Firstly, I introduced *The Playboy of the Western World* by J.M. Synge. I explained that when it was first staged that there had been riots in the Abbey Theatre. The riots were so bad that the police had been called. I asked them to think of why would an audience riot? Most agreed that it would have been something blasphemous, religiously or racially offensive. I explained that there were several reasons for the riots but that the main reason was the play was seen as an offence to

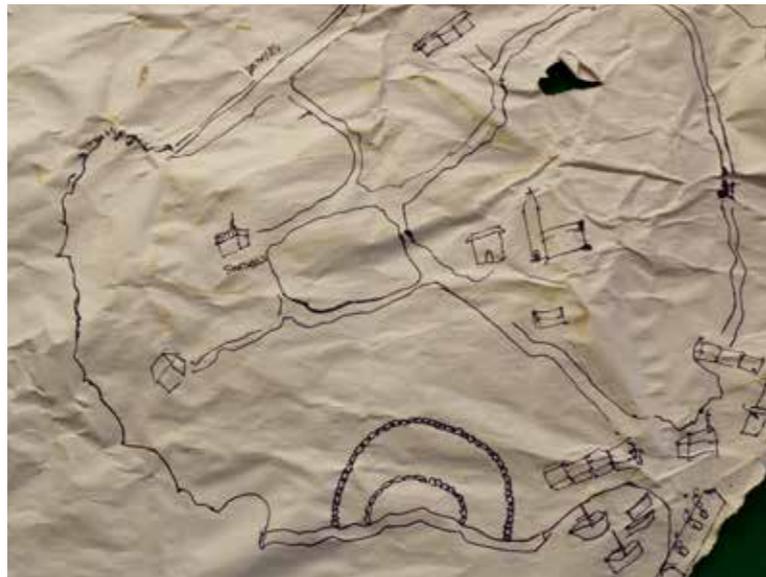
public morals and insulting to Ireland. In particular a line Christy gives where he refers to "a drift of females standing in their shifts". I explained that in a modern context this meant that he talked about girls lining up in their underwear before him. I made it clear that this was an image used in language and the scene as described wasn't presented. Synge was presenting his experience of rural Ireland to a largely urban population at the beginning of the Cultural Revival and that urban audience didn't like what they saw - drunkenness, violence, criminality and immodest references to women in the west. It was great publicity for the play which has become one of the classic texts in Irish theatre, lauded in particular for its beautiful use of language and love of poetry.



SESSION ONE

STEP 1

The class are presented with a map of a fishing community on the Mayo coast circa 1904. There are a few structures the church, the shebeen (shop/pub) a few farm houses and a few cottages for fishermen and labourers and their families, a long strand and a harbour. The class are informed that there is no electricity or gas in this part of the world so that in the evening's light came from lamps and candles. They had to grow, catch, cultivate and create what they ate and wore every day. Many people had hand-me-down clothing and no shoes. Ask the class to think of what work it would take to make a simple meal like breakfast. Discuss.



STEP 2

Put them into groups, tell them that they will become family groups in time but for now they have to list off all the tasks or jobs that would have to happen for the family to thrive and survive day-to-day. They can decide whether they are famers, farm labourers or fishermen. On paper, allow them to decide who is in their family with one caveat that all children are over 8 years old and everyone has to pitch in with all work.

STEP 3

Ask them to mark out a sheet of paper with morning, afternoon and evening and assign what tasks would be in what part of the day. When they have done this ask them to assign each task to a family member, bearing in mind that everyone in the family had to pull their weight and there were no children under the age of eight.

STEP 4

Plan out how you might recreate the village in the classroom or hall. What objects could you use to symbolise shared locations and decide, using the map for reference where each family might live in relation to the land marks and each other. Mark the locations of the homes on the map.

SESSION TWO

STEP 1

Shifting tack completely say that one of the things you hope to explore in the drama is difference. Ask those in the class with brown eyes to stand up; then ask those with green eyes to stand up and finally those with blue eyes to stand up. Depending on your class choose an eye colour which will mean that there is at least one per family group. Inform them that people with this eye colour had a special role in the community and had to wear particular clothes, i.e. an apron.

STEP 2

Ideally this part of the drama should take place in a hall, but it can take place in the classroom. Allowing a class 'live through a day' can be a bit chaotic but well worth it.

Invite each family to create their space for their home and set up the agreed location of the church, harbour, the strand and shebeen. Once they have established their families and homesteads, invite those with blue eyes to come up and get their aprons. Give each family back their lists. Tell them that all tasks to do with the making, washing and repairing of clothing will fall to the blue eyed people. They are also responsible for making meals, taking care of pigs and chickens on the homestead, minding children, keeping the fire lit, tidying and making beds. The blue eyed people have to tell people if they are going anywhere and should always

be accompanied by a non-blue eyed person when they are off the homestead. They can travel with other blue eyed people if they can get permission and they are not to handle money unless they are the only adult in their family. The blue eyed people are not allowed out after dark and never in the shebeen at night. They can get things from the shebeen during the day but only if accompanied.

Allow the groups a moment to reallocate tasks based on the new arrangement.

STEP 3

Get everyone to settle as if they are asleep. Once settled tell them that you will talk them through a day in the life of this community, so you will call out times of the day and each person should decide what they are doing at that particular moment and enact it. They should interact with other members of the community. Tell them that every so often you will 'freeze the action' to jump to the next time slot. Play this exercise through for a full 24 hours but do watch the blue eyed characters for fatigue. Until ultimately they return to a sleeping state at night. This part of the class can take up to 20 minutes.

Sarah's note: This is always a good time to do some creative writing - a diary entry. However as my class was quite small, I felt it was appropriate to debrief the

blue eyes first.

STEP 4

Ask the blue eyed ones to bring their chairs into a circle and all the others to form a second ring of chairs around them. Thank the blue eyes for all their work on the drama and acknowledge that it was hard for them but that we are going to talk about that now. Ask them 'How was your character's day?' We let their feedback unfold.

In St. Catherine's they talked about how everyone treated the blue eyes so poorly. What shocked and embarrassed the participants sitting in the outer ring was that no one had said thank you to any of the blue eyed people at any point.

Quotes: 'There was no point in going out, as no one helped you and you'd just have more work to come back to so what was the point'.

Turn your attention to the outer circle and ask them how was their characters day? How did they feel about the blue eyes observations.

Quote: 'We felt like we were higher... better than them.. it was fun and hard to give it up... It was easy to

become a bully.'

Through this vehicle, discuss concepts such as status, privilege, power and exploitation. Explain that this was what life was like for many rural women in the early part of the last century. Finally ask them why do they think that they did this drama with them? Ideally they make the connection to drama and the issue of suffrage. You can inform them that in Ireland that certain women got the vote nearly 100 years ago in 1918.

Discuss voting and how giving someone a vote can affect change.

DEVELOPMENT:

Using Farmer Tom's monologue as Teacher in role or as a read text, discuss why did people think that way about women and men back then.

SESSION THREE



Phil Kingston as Farmer Tom during pilot work in St. Catherine's Donore Avenue.



Morgan Cooke as the final character

PLEASE NOTE:

This is a guide text for the Farmer Tom character. The facilitator is expected to improvise elements on the dialogue with the class group prior to the show.

Tom is one of the men of the village. He's a farm labourer working mainly for the Widow Quinn. He's never married as no woman saw much future in being tied to such a feckless, purposeless and unambitious man. He lives for the camaraderie of the shebeen. Like all of the villagers he has been changed by Christy's brief stay.

... Usually I'd sit down because I've been on my feet all day. Working. That's me, a worker. I've been in the fields digging. But I'm not here long. Just enough to tell you about herself. Her as you'll be meeting.

Pretty place you've got here. All the pictures on the wall. Never seen so many pictures in one place before. Did you girls do them?

Boys too, eh? Never heard of boys making pictures.

We don't have as much things as you, with your machines, big and small. We have the sea and the land. We live next to it, the sea, so it's always there. In your ears. And the smell of it. And the cold wind off it. It's warm in here, so, but I couldn't stay long. Like to be outside.

I like to see the ships. It's a change from all the cows and sheep. But the ships don't stop for us, they sail by. There's a sailor lives in the village, Donal, Donal Tansey, but he has to walk miles from the docks to get back here.

I would have been a sailor if it wasn't for my leg. And my eyes. And not having the balance for the sailing. You need the balance.

They tell us what's been happening in Dublin, the sailors. They have to stop there, the ships. Full of stories they are about Dublin, it being the capital. They say. Not to me it isn't, it's just somewhere over there, on the other side. Like if Ireland were my hand it'd be the thumb. We're more like half way up the little finger.

And Dublin's full of the English, isn't it? King's law and all that. I don't like being bossed about, being told what to do, by anyone. I know I work the Widow's fields, as I don't have any of my own but she couldn't do 'em on her own, could she? I know she did once but now I'm here to do them, well, I reckon they're better. So it's not like she's my boss. She does tell me what to do. But I let her.

And the King's not my boss. He can boss them all he wants in Dublin but it's different here. I'd like to see those English soldiers come here and tell us what to do.

At least he's a King. They say it was worse when his mother was on the throne. Victoria. Face on her like a cow knows it first for milking on a winter morning and your hands are cold as a brass door knob.

Anyway it's Donal's daughter you'll be meeting, Sara, Sara Tansey. She was always one for the talking,

always with the smart answer. I think girls should wait for the man to speak. But she didn't. Doesn't.

She was part of a gang of them before, before the Playboy came, a gang of girls went round together. I saw them one day going through the fields on their own, no man with them and I knew the Widow hadn't given them leave because she was away selling her fleeces and had left me in charge. Well, she hadn't said that but I was the only one there so....And when I gave out to them for the shameless boldness of them didn't they talk back to me? Sara, in the main. Cheeky as a crow as would tear down from the sky and bite your breakfast from your hand on a Spring morning.

"Farmer Tom", she says, "the Widow'd let us walk here any time".

They call me Farmer because I amn't one, you see.

But look, I'm away with myself, I'm to tell you how things are now. We're quiet folk, we don't make a lot of noise. We don't have your machines see, so we make our own stories, tell them to each other. Sometimes the story can be true or made up and sometimes it's hard to tell the difference. Like when you hear something about someone and it might be good, it might be bad but it's a good story. Or you tell something about

yourself and you add some bits and take some bits away to make it a good story. But it stops it being true.

I didn't used to mind that, how true it was but that was before what happened. We're careful with our stories now. Before we'd all know, to ourselves, who was coddling who and not say anything. Now...well.

So let's go and meet her then. I'll see you afterwards.

ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

This can be done as a Teacher in Role or in pairs with one student being Farmer Tom and the other being an interviewer.

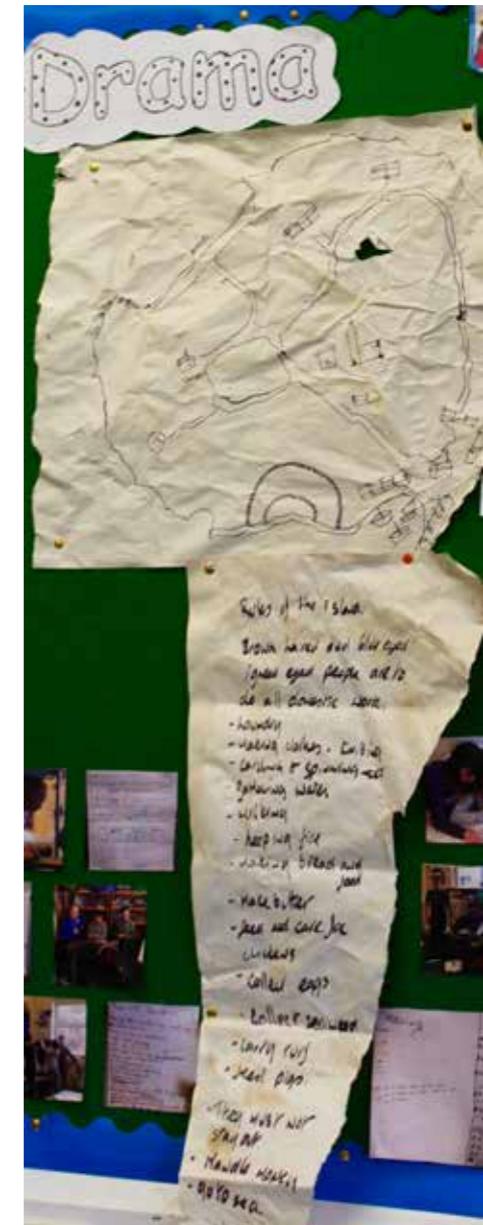
- Where's he from?
- What period is it?
- Why does he think the way he does?

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:

- Creating family scenes where a blue eyed character wants to break the rules.
- Creating a family scene where they discuss a news story about women getting the vote.

REFLECTION:

- Write the story of the person who has got away.
- Create diary entries of the characters.



SESSION FOUR

VOTE WITH YOUR FEET

SARAH'S NOTE:

I prefaced this exercise by asking about what do they know about voting. The Marriage Equality Referendum has impacted this generation and they do seem to be very aware of the need to vote. It is important not to assume that all students are aware of what age they get the vote. But crucially why it might be important to vote. If you can use a hall or open space for this but it can take place in a classroom.

STEP 1

Give pupils a letter, half are A and half are B and ask them to remember which letter they are.

Tell the class that one end of the space is 'Strongly Agree' the other end is 'Strongly Disagree'. The pupils will be asked to use their personal opinion to decide where they stand on a list of statements that will be read out. Pupils can stand in the middle or place themselves nearer one side or another depending on how they feel.

Below are suggested statements feel free to add your own. The statements should allow for a diversity of opinion so there is a sense of having an opinion and

being able to express it.

- Homework should be banned
- Boys and girls should be schooled separately
- Loyalty to friends is more important than family
- Runners are better than shoes or boots

Give some pupils a chance to express their opinions, particularly if they are divided.

STEP 2

Thank them for their opinions and ask all with the letter B to stand to one side. Repeat the exercise with new statements. Tell the remainder of the class, whatever the majority of them vote on will become a new class rules for a day. Please vary these according to your classroom and your situation. However they should be invested in the outcome whether they have a vote or not.

- 4th class should be your bosses for a day
- All pupils can choose where they sit for 5 minutes after small break
- All pupils are responsible for cleaning the classroom
- All pupils have to wear slippers in school

Again gather opinions of those participating on each one.

STEP 3

Invite the class to sit together and make observations about how those left out (B) reacted to the last number of statements i.e. were they bored or disengaged? Frustrated? Happy for others to make the choice for them?

Ask the Bs How did it feel when they were excluded from decisions that affected them? Why would their opinion matter? For the others, ask them how it felt making decisions that affected others?

Ask the As how it felt making decisions that affected others?

Ask the whole group does it change how a society sees people if they can vote? Why?

DEVELOPMENT:

Remind the class of Me, Sara and if you wish furnish them with the following facts about suffrage in Ireland.

- Women over 30 who owned property got the right to vote in 1918 across Ireland, England, Scotland

and Wales to acknowledge the role of women in the WW1 War effort.

- Promises of equal rights from the Proclamation were embraced in the Constitution in 1922 when Irish women achieved full voting rights.
- Over the next ten years laws were introduced that eliminated women's rights such as women having to leave their jobs once they were married, being institutionalised if they have a child outside of marriage and not being allowed to serve on juries.
- The 1937 Constitution further stripped women of their previously granted rights.

What difference would it make to girls like Sara if they had the vote back in 1904? How would her life be different if she was born today 100 years after getting the vote?

Allow As to be Sara from 1904 and allow Bs to be a journalist from today. Allow the journalist to interview 'Sara' and gather her reaction to life today.

REFLECTION:

In a democracy we believe that all citizens should have a say in how their state is run. That is why they have a vote to decide who rules . Who gets to vote? What age do you have to be to vote? Do the class feel that is right or should they be allowed to vote at 16? Ask the class to write a speech about what they feel about voting after the exercise.

STRAIGHT FROM THE WRITER'S MOUTH

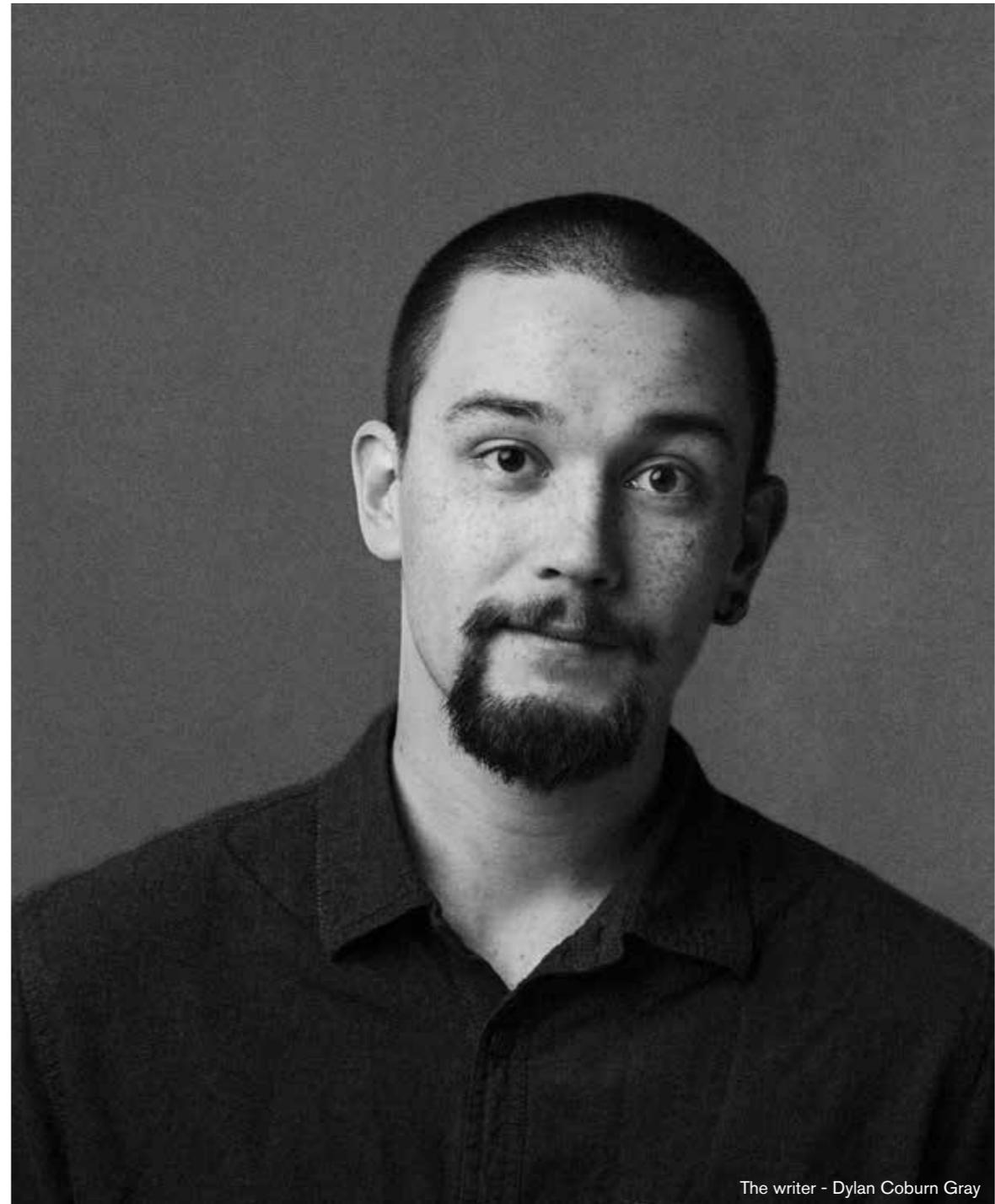
SARAH'S NOTE:

Dylan Coburn Gray wrote *Me, Sara* based on J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*. I explained to the class that Synge was not from the west of Ireland but had spent a lot of time there trying to catch the lyricism of the language. In Ireland we use Hiberno-English. This is a particular type of English which is unique to Ireland and can explain why while we speak English, our English is different to that you might hear in England. This is particularly the case in the West where often English has a sentence structure of Gaeilge. 'I am after doing that' is a classic example.

When a writer is describing a place, their audience/reader may not have the same picture in their mind as the writer has in theirs. That is the challenge. J.M. Synge was able to use a set with lights and sounds to help the audience know where the story was taking place. Dylan Coburn Gray lets the audience know where the play was taking place just with words. So he has to help the audience draw the scene in their mind with these words.

He suggests that you think about making Cinquains to try out your image making, descriptive writing and poetic abilities.

Please copy the following page to give to students in pairs



The writer - Dylan Coburn Gray

A Cinquain is a five line unrhymed poem and is an example of shape poetry as when you write it forms a particular tree like shape. It is also cunning because you use descriptive writing to describe something which you only reveal at the end of the poem.

TRY THIS WITH A FRIEND.

Put something in your head. This is your topic. Get two blank sheets of paper.

On one sheet create a Word Storm on your topic by writing down all the words that you can think about it. How it smells? Tastes? Looks? What is it's texture? Where does it live and what does it do? When you have your word storm get a fresh sheet of paper and try selecting words like this:

Line A: One vague or general one word topic

Line B: Two vivid adjectives that describe the topic

Line C: Three interesting –'ing' or action verbs that fit your topic/thing

Line D: The tricky bit but your Word Storm will help. You need a four word phrase that captures a feeling about the topic

Line E: Your topic

HERE ARE THREE EXAMPLES:

Man
Loud, hairy
Cuddling, cleaning, coffee drinking
Smiling, welcoming us home
Dad

Carnivore
Hidden, silent
Stalking, stealing, milk drinking
Unpredictable plush with claws
Cat

Light
Cold, noisy
Freezing, chirping, waking
'What's going to happen?'
Dawn

ME, SARA

These resources were developed by Sarah FitzGibbon who has worked with the Abbey Theatre's Education department crafting their schools' educational programmes since 2012. These included Priming the Canon and the Theatre Making and Citizenship Programme for secondary schools. Sarah has been steeped in the Drama Curriculum since it came on stream. She and her collaborator Joanna Parkes have written *Step by Step Educational Drama* (2006) and *Step by Step Together* (2009) supported by Dublin City Council's Arts office and Youth Theatre Ireland. She is regularly engaged by DCU, Trinity, NYU Steinhart study abroad programme to share her experience in Process Drama. She has worked in a variety of capacities with a diversity of professional theatre companies including Graffiti Theatre Company, TEAM Educational Theatre Co., Macnas, Barabbas, The Company, Replay Theatre Company, Puca Puppets, Youth Theatre Ireland, Dublin Youth Theatre and the Murphy's Cat Laughs Comedy Festival.

Writer: Dylan Coburn Gray

Director: Amy Conroy

Sara: Juliette Crosbie

Farmer Tom: Morgan Cooke

Props: Eimer Murphy

Costumes: Saileóg O Halloran and Vicky Miller

Programme designed by Sarah FitzGibbon and Phil Kingston for the Abbey Theatre

Educational Resources by Sarah FitzGibbon

Producer: Phil Kingston

Tour producer: Mary Sheehan

