



A DOUBLE BILL
BY HAROLD PINTER

THE LOVER





AND

THE DUMB
WAITER



AN ENSEMBLE THEATRE
EDUCATION RESOURCE BY
SOPHIE KELLY

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ICON LEGEND


Teaching & Learning Activity


Discussion Activity


Create and Perform


Reflection

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Ensemble Theatre proudly acknowledges the Cammeraiagal people of the Eora nation as customary custodians of the land on which we stand and share our stories.

In harmony with the rhythms of land and sea, the Cammeraiagal people nurtured their culture and traditions through countless generations, and the connection continues to this day.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

PREFACE

This education resource for Ensemble Theatre's production of *THE LOVER & THE DUMB WAITER*, by Harold Pinter, has been designed for secondary students and teachers across Australia. Exercises have been designed that encompass theoretical and practical components and can be applied to different stages of learning at the discretion of the teacher, class, and context.

CURRICULUM LINKS

For NSW based students, *THE LOVER & THE DUMB WAITER* and its accompanying resources has links to the following syllabus outcomes within the NESA Curriculum:

DRAMA

STAGE 6

Theatrical Traditions and Performance Style

Topic 6: Black Comedy

This topic explores, theoretically and experientially, modern comic plays from different countries that deal with what is often uncomfortable or suppressed. Students must investigate the nature of comedy and use of humour to confront an audience with human experiences of pain, loss, the controversial or the taboo. In particular, by engaging with the forms, styles, techniques and conventions of the plays, students assess how audiences are affected and whether laughter provides a cathartic experience in this style of theatre.

Year 12

Making: H1.3

Performing: H2.2, H2.4, H2.5

Critically Studying: H3.1, H3.3, H3.4, H3.5

Year 11

Making: P1.3, P1.4

Performing: P2.1, P2.2, P2.6

Critically Studying: P3.1, P3.2, P3.4



KEY COMPETENCIES

- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical understanding
- Collecting, analysis and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities

KEY THEMES AND IDEAS

- Power and control
- Alienation and isolation
- Gender roles
- Violence and cruelty
- Absurdity of the human condition

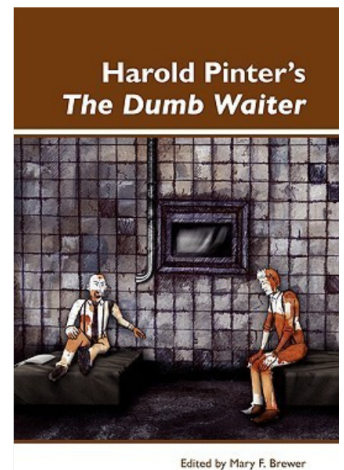


THE LOVER & THE DUMB WAITER rehearsal photos - Prudence Upton

SYNOPSIS

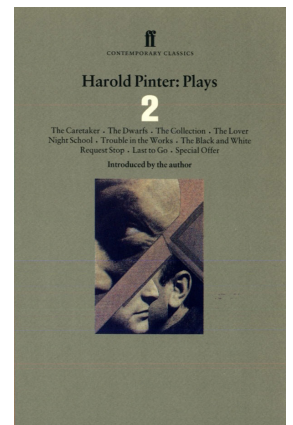
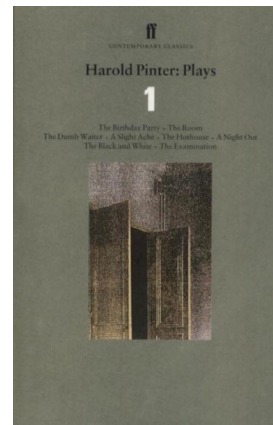
THE LOVER

Harold Pinter's *THE LOVER* (1962) is an exploration of desire, identity and the complexity of relationships within marriage. The play revolves around a married couple, Sarah and Richard, who live in an upper-middle-class London home. As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that their seemingly stable marriage is underpinned by secret lives and hidden truths. Sarah reveals to Richard that she has been having an affair with a man, whom she refers to as "The Lover." However, as the conversation progresses, it is revealed that Richard, too, has his own set of secrets, leading to a series of unexpected twists. The play challenges the boundaries of fantasy and reality, and through its characteristic Pinteresque dialogue, it examines power dynamics, the roles people play within relationships, and the complexities of desire.



THE DUMB WAITER

Harold Pinter's *THE DUMB WAITER* (1957) is a suspenseful one-act play that delves into themes of power, control, and existential uncertainty. The story takes place in a small, windowless room where two hitmen, Ben and Gus, wait for their next assignment. As they prepare for the job, the tension between them grows, revealing an uneasy dynamic in their professional relationship. Ben is calm and methodical, while Gus is more nervous and inquisitive. The tension escalates when a dumbwaiter, an old-fashioned elevator used to deliver food, begins sending mysterious orders, which seem unrelated to their task. As the play unfolds, the dumbwaiter becomes a symbol of the arbitrary and sometimes absurd forces controlling their lives. The characters' confusion and frustration grow as they try to make sense of the situation.



WHY ARE THESE PLAYS PERFORMED TOGETHER?

Harold Pinter's *THE LOVER* and *THE DUMB WAITER* are often performed together due to their shared themes of tension, ambiguity, and the complexities of human relationships. Both plays explore power dynamics and the secrets that shape interpersonal connections. In *THE LOVER*, the focus is on the private intricacies of a modern marriage, while *THE DUMB WAITER* delves into the power structures between two hitmen. The minimalistic settings and Pinter's characteristic use of silence and pauses create a similar atmosphere in both works, making them complementary pieces that showcase his mastery of psychological drama and the unsettling unknown.

LIFE OF THE WRITER – HAROLD PINTER

Harold Pinter (1930–2008) was an influential English playwright, screenwriter, director, and poet, best known for his distinctive style, which combined sparse dialogue, ambiguous narratives, and a focus on power dynamics. Born in East London, Pinter's early experiences during World War II shaped his understanding of fear and survival, themes that permeated his work. His debut play, *THE ROOM* (1957), was followed by *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY* (1958), which initially received mixed reactions but later became a cornerstone of modern theatre.

Pinter's plays often explore the tension between language and silence, where what is left unsaid carries as much weight as the spoken word. Notable works include *THE CARETAKER* (1960), *THE HOMECOMING* (1965), and *BETRAYAL* (1978), each marked by psychological complexity and dark humour. His writing was often political, reflecting his anti-authoritarian stance, particularly in his outspoken criticism of government policies and the Iraq War.

In addition to theatre, Pinter wrote screenplays such as *THE SERVANT* (1963) and *THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN* (1981). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005 for his contribution to modern drama. Pinter's impact on theatre is profound, making him a central figure in 20th-century drama.



Harold Pinter 1962. Wikipedia.



CHARACTER LIST - THE LOVER

SARAH

Sarah is a complex and enigmatic character in *THE LOVER*. She is a married woman who initially appears to have a traditional domestic role, but as the play progresses, her secret affair with another man is revealed. Sarah's behavior oscillates between playful and secretive, and she challenges conventional norms about marriage and fidelity. Her ambiguity and shifting motivations raise questions about her desires, identity, and the roles she plays in her relationship with Richard.

RICHARD

Richard is Sarah's husband, seemingly composed but hiding his own set of secrets. At first, he pretends to be unaware of his wife's affair, but as the play unfolds, it becomes clear that he, too, engages in fantasy and role-playing. Richard's control over the situation slowly unravels, revealing a deeper emotional vulnerability beneath his outward calm.



FRANCE - 1965: Jean Rochefort and Delphine Seyrig in *THE LOVER* by Harold Pinter. Eric Kahane's adaptation. Production of Claude Regy. Paris, theatre Hebertot, in September 1965. (Photo by Roger Viollet via Getty Images)

CHARACTER LIST - THE DUMB WAITER

BEN

Ben is a seasoned and pragmatic hitman in *THE DUMB WAITER*. He is calm, methodical, and authoritative, maintaining control in the tense environment of the small, windowless room. Ben's confidence is evident in his ability to direct Gus and manage the strange situation with the dumbwaiter. However, his stoicism also masks a sense of frustration and unease, as he's caught in the repetitive, often absurd nature of his work. Ben represents the hardened, detached professional.

GUS

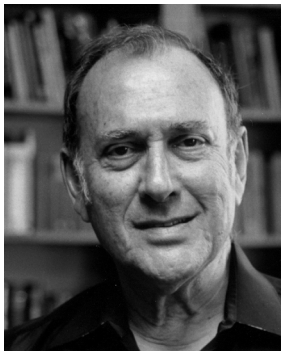
Gus is the younger, more nervous of the two hitmen. He questions the purpose of their assignment and becomes increasingly uneasy with the mysterious occurrences, such as the dumbwaiter sending orders. Gus's insecurity and curiosity contrast with Ben's composed demeanor, highlighting his emotional vulnerability and confusion. He serves as a foil to Ben's more controlling presence.



Theodore Caywood & Anthony Leung star in Harold Pinter's - *THE DUMB WAITER* - presented by Stairwell Theater - 2019 - directed by Sam Gibbs - set design by Andy Sowers - lighting design by Ryan Castalia - music by Matthew Gibbs - Rebecca Tyree - at 122 Community Center theater. WIKIPEDIA

MEET THE TEAM

CREATIVES



HAROLD PINTER
PLAYWRIGHT



MARK KILMURRY
DIRECTOR



SIMONE ROMANIUK
SET & COSTUME DESIGNER



MATT COX
LIGHTING DESIGNER



DARYL WALLIS
COMPOSER &
SOUND DESIGNER



**LINDA
NICHOLLS-GIDLEY**
DIALECT COACH



CHLOË DALLIMORE
INTIMACY COORDINATOR



LAUREN TULLOH
STAGE MANAGER



YASMIN BREEZE
ASSISTANT STAGE
MANAGER



SARA KOLIJN
COSTUME SUPERVISOR

CAST



NICOLE DA SILVA



GARETH DAVIES



ANTHONY TAUFA

Q&A WITH MARK KILMURRY, DIRECTOR

MARK, YOU HAVE DIRECTED WELL OVER FIFTY PLAYS FOR ENSEMBLE THEATRE ACROSS A VARIETY OF GENRES – WHAT DO YOU FIND FASCINATING OR CHALLENGING ABOUT DIRECTING A PINTER?

The beauty of directing a Harold Pinter double bill is the admiration I have for his breath of subject matters and his range of characters.

DID YOU COME TO THE PLAY WITH A SPECIFIC 'VISION' IN MIND OR IS IT SOMETHING THAT DEVELOPED AS YOU WORKED WITH THE ACTORS AND CREATIVES ACROSS THE PRE-PRODUCTION AND REHEARSAL PERIOD?

In *THE LOVER & THE DUMB WAITER* we see two different class settings: a marriage and a secret, in parallel with two hit men and a dumbwaiter. But in the unique voice of Pinter, similar themes emerge: the outside world becomes an unknown threat as relationships within the internal world descend into chaos and beyond.

DO YOU HAVE A SPECIFIC PROCESS OR APPROACH TO A PLAY BEFORE STARTING REHEARSALS? OR DOES IT VARY FROM PLAY TO PLAY?

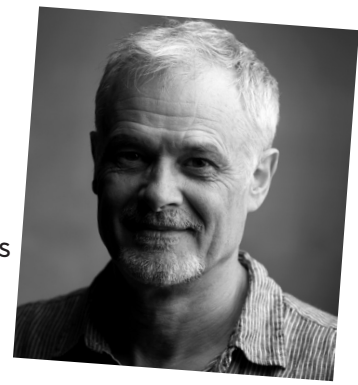
My process definitely varies depending on the play—its themes, characters, and staging all influence how I approach it. That said, there are a few key steps I always take before rehearsals begin. I start by reading the play multiple times and digging into any references or unfamiliar terms, to ensure I fully understand the language. I take plenty of notes along the way and sometimes get early ideas about staging or visuals, which I jot down as well. Before we even step into the rehearsal room, I have conversations with the creative team—set, costume, lighting, and sound designers—to share ideas and align our visions. Once rehearsals begin, I like to spend time discussing and analysing the script in detail with the cast, then start blocking scenes. From there, I encourage actors to bring their own ideas into the space, so the process becomes collaborative and alive.

PEOPLE OFTEN REFER TO PINTER'S LITERARY STYLE AS 'ABSURDIST' – DO YOU SEE *THE LOVER & THE DUMB WAITER* AS ABSURDIST PLAYS?

Harold Pinter remains as important a writer today as when he was first producing his work - not because he is absurdist (he's not) but simply because he explores the reality we all feel in everyday human connections. Of course, there are elements of the absurd in some of his text and in the situations his characters find themselves in, but I don't think it's correct to say his plays sit within the absurdist genre like we might say about Beckett or Ionesco.

AND FINALLY, WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST JOYFUL ABOUT WORKING AS A DIRECTOR?

In this case, it has been a pleasure to explore both these plays with such an extraordinary cast and creative team. I hope you enjoy watching these plays, as much as we have enjoyed putting them together!



Q&A WITH GARETH DAVIES, ACTOR

LITERARY DISCOURSE AROUND PINTER'S WORK HAS LED TO THE COINING OF THE PHRASE; "A PINTER'S PAUSE" – CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT YOU UNDERSTAND THIS TO MEAN?

The Pinter pause is where an enormous amount of the internal action takes place. One quote I like of Pinter's is along the lines of 'we use words to evade thoughts'. When a pause happens, the characters are less capable of what they're feeling or thinking. The characters often plan, assess, and have crises in the moments between speaking.



YOU ARE THE ONLY ACTOR IN BOTH PLAYS IN THIS PINTER DOUBLE-BILL – HOW DO YOU MANAGE MOVING FROM ONE ROLE TO THE OTHER SO QUICKLY?

It's tricky! I - like every actor - have played multiple characters multiple times, and thought it would be similar. However, it's not just two characters, but two plays, with different feels, textures, and styles. The great thing is I have two fantastic actors playing opposite me- so if I lock in with them at the beginning (hopefully) I can ride with them onto whichever of the two journeys we're going on.

ARE THERE ASPECTS OF EACH PLAY THAT FEED INTO THE OTHER?

The plays are very different stylistically, however they have deeply related concerns. Fundamentally, I believe each is an investigation in impossible social structures we take for granted as being at the heart of society. For the lover, it's romantic relationships- life-pairing, idealised marital bliss and the chains that go along with it. For the dumb waiter- it's class structure, our relationship to power, position, and the seeming futility of railing against hierarchy.

PINTER'S WORK IS OFTEN NOTED FOR ITS DARK HUMOUR. HOW DO YOU BALANCE MOMENTS OF TENSION WITH THOSE OF HUMOUR IN YOUR PERFORMANCE?

I feel like tension is one of the fundamentals of humour. Sometimes, because funny things make us feel happy we feel they must be about happy things. But humour can be a weapon to disarm, to laugh when otherwise we would cry, to pillorise, to satirise, to draw attention to how absurd and unjust attributes of ourselves or society often are. Humour can be mean, direct, and furious just as drama can be.

IF YOU HAD ONE PIECE OF ADVICE FOR STUDENTS THINKING OF EMBARKING ON AN ACTING CAREER, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

My only advice would be- just make stuff! Small things, big things, things with friends, for friends, for yourselves! In backyards, in bars, in the school yard. Doing is the best way of learning, and the goal should always be to improve your skills- there's a lot of things actors don't have any power over in their careers, but your own skills is something you can (and should) keep working on!



Q&A WITH ANTHONY TAUFA, ACTOR

PINTER IS FAMOUS FOR HIS SUBTEXT AND SILENCES – HAVE YOU FOUND THIS FUN TO PLAY WITH IN REHEARSALS? OR CHALLENGING?

The "Pinter pause" is quite famous/notorious for any actors dealing with modern classic theatre. We have tried to stay true to the silences and pauses as there are very specific rhythmic calling cards in *THE DUMB WAITER* which requires rigorous attention. The direct dialogue coupled with throw away dialogue he sometimes uses and turns of phrase in this East London vernacular has been challenging. Attempting to fill the "pauses" with life and authenticity really allows actors to work deeply and know how to solve all the quite technical aspects of a Pinter play. It's an actor's medium.



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GUS AND BEN AT THE START OF THE PLAY? DOES IT EVOLVE?

The relationship between the two characters Gus (who I play) and Ben (played by Gareth Davies) is a working relationship that feels like two brothers trying to build something together. Gus is the low status character constantly looking for answers and Ben is like the older brother, a high-status character who seems to know more than Gus. Their relationship has defined status but as the play goes on Gus seems to change because Ben can't answer his questions as he's done in the past.

WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND TO BE THE MOST CHALLENGING AND/OR EXCITING ASPECT OF THE DUMB WAITER REHEARSAL PROCESS?

The *DUMB WAITER* has been described as an absurdist play. Every time I solve a moment and think I understand what is happening, it has a knock-on effect that creates more questions about other moments! I have found making sense of certain lines quite tough and enjoyable in the same breath.

MANY OF PINTER'S PLAYS EXPLORE THE IDEA OF THE ABSURDITY OF EXISTENCE – IS THIS SOMETHING YOU'VE FOUND PRESENT IN THE DUMB WAITER?

The absurdity of existence is definitely in this play. It is relevant to life today as we distract ourselves from the political and environmental reality that is around us as well as the identity politics around us. How do we view each other or empathise with one another? Sometimes we switch off from difficult situations when we should confront problems. The whole idea of what life means has been a philosophical debate since we began!

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE LINE OF DIALOGUE? WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE LINE THAT MAKES IT SO ENJOYABLE FOR YOU?

My favourite line in *THE DUMB WAITER* so far has been, "What do you mean?" Gus, the character I'm playing, says it numerous times and I think is the essence of this play - and real life too as we navigate society and other people.

FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE THINKING OF PURSUING A CAREER IN THEATRE, WHAT OR WHERE WOULD BE GOOD PLACE FOR THEM TO START?

For any younger people or less experienced actors looking to work in theatre, watch, listen and read as much as you can. It can be quite fun to explore different genres of film and music. Go to theatre and act as much as you can. In front of the camera and observe yourself and habits and see as much theatre as you can.



THE DUMB WAITER rehearsal photos - Prudence Upton

Q&A – NICOLE DA SILVA, ACTOR

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RICHARD AND SARAH? DOES IT EVOLVE DURING THE PLAY?

Sarah and Richard have been married for ten years and have a deep love and appreciation for each other. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that Richard no longer wants to entertain Sarah's "lover", so he progressively chips away at her fantasy, and their relationship moves from accepting and mutual to destructive and vicious.



PINTER'S FEMALE CHARACTERS OFTEN INHABIT AMBIGUOUS SPACES BETWEEN BEING PASSIVE, SUBMISSIVE FIGURES AND EMPOWERED, AUTONOMOUS AGENTS – IS THIS SOMETHING YOU HAVE EXPLORED IN REHEARSALS?

On the page, Sarah reads as though she's at the mercy of Richard, and that is certainly a reflection of a time where women were beholden to their husbands in every sense. Pinter's writing can be considered quite ambiguous, but what became evident in rehearsals was that Sarah is able to navigate the situation to such a degree that she arguably holds all the power at the end. This is what makes Pinter's writing so interesting, and in fact quite a modern take of male/female relationship dynamics.

IN PLAYS LIKE THE LOVER AND OTHER PINTER WORKS INCLUDING THE HOMECOMING, IDENTITY, ROLE-PLAYING AND POWER ARE KEY THEMES – HOW AND WHY DOES YOUR CHARACTER SARAH NAVIGATE THESE IDEAS?

Power and identity are major themes of Pinter's work and "The Lover" is no exception. Sarah and Richard struggle for both power and identity throughout the course of the play, and neither wants to relinquish it, which is the perfect storm for comedy, drama and tension. Power continually shifts between them, until ultimately Richard submits to the role Sarah wants him to play.

STUDENTS MAY RECOGNISE YOU FROM YOUR WORK ON TELEVISION INCLUDING, WENTWORTH, BUMP AND DOCTOR DOCTOR, BUT YOU ALSO WORK REGULARLY IN THE THEATRE – DO YOU APPROACH A ROLE IN THE SAME WAY WHEN WORKING IN DIFFERENT MEDIUMS?

There are crossovers between preparing for theatre and screen work. In essence, both require a deep investigation into what drives your character regardless of the medium. However, theatre demands an extra layer of robustness in vocal, physical and spontaneous yet repeatable instinctual work, whereas on screen, you might have several takes to achieve a single moment. Your performance on screen also largely comes down to the edit, which is out of your control while in theatre you are navigating the arc of your performance in conjunction with the other actor.

CAN YOU SHARE A PIECE OF ADVICE YOU RECEIVED WHEN YOU WERE STARTING OUT AS AN ACTOR THAT HAS STAYED WITH YOU?

I think the best advice for actors starting out is the person you inherently are - your quirks, preferences, what lights you up inside, is ultimately more interesting than what you think any role 'should' be. Cultivating who you are as a person outside of your job will be a greater service to the longevity of your career, than trying to fit any mould. Also, have fun!



THE LOVER rehearsal photos - Prudence Upton

RUNNING THE SHOW: A CHAT WITH ENSEMBLE RESIDENT STAGE MANAGER, LAUREN TULLOH

CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT A STAGE MANAGER ACTUALLY DOES?

A Stage Manager is one of the core members of the creative team on the show. They are responsible for overseeing rehearsals, documenting the blocking in the Prompt Copy and communicating any decisions made during the rehearsals to the other departments via a written report. Once the show has moved into the theatre, the Stage Manager is responsible for running the performance; this involves operating the lighting, sound and audio-visual cues as written in the Prompt Copy, ensuring the props and costumes are ready and preset for the Actors to use and that the Actors are performing their role as instructed by the Director. When the show has finished its run, the Stage Manager is responsible for packing away all the props and costumes and ensuring that the Prompt Copy is up to date as the show may have another run in the future and this document is the 'bible' of the show.



WHAT WAS YOUR JOURNEY TO BECOMING A STAGE MANAGER?

Through my high school teachers, I was introduced to my local community theatre groups who both did two shows a year. I started as a backstage crew member and slowly worked my way up to Assistant Stage Manager and then Stage Manager. I realised that this was something I wanted to do, and I decided to apply for NIDA to attend their 3-year Technical Production course. I had to apply twice before I was accepted! After completing the NIDA course, I toured for three years on a children's show as ASM before settling back in Sydney. Through my contacts, I became a regular SM at Hayes Theatre Co and Ensemble Theatre. After 6 years of freelancing, I was offered the full-time position of Resident Stage Manager at Ensemble Theatre which I delightfully accepted and I've been here ever since!

STAGE MANAGERS WORK VERY CLOSELY WITH THE DIRECTOR AND THE ACTORS – WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES FOR A STAGE MANAGER DURING THE REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE PERIOD?

Essential skills for a Stage Manager include: patience, good listener, stay calm under pressure, observant, can communicate quickly & succinctly, an eye for detail, adaptable and have good problem-solving skills.

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED MOST ABOUT WORKING ON THE LOVER & THE DUMB WAITER?

Being able to do another show with Mark, Nicole, Anthony, Simone, Matt, Daryl, Sara; all people I have worked with before. There is a familiarity and shorthand that makes working together much easier and we can have more fun!

HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR/MANAGE THE QUICK SET CHANGE BETWEEN SHOWS?

There is a lot of planning! In the initial Set Design process (before rehearsals even start) the changeover needs to be factored in to ensure both sets are designed and built to be changeover friendly – that is easy, quick and achievable; so it can be done by two people (SM & ASM) in the 20-minute interval. Then during the rehearsal process, we have the main furniture items in the room, and they get switched over at lunchtime – we rehearse one play in the morning and the other play in the afternoon. It is during this process when I create a changeover document to note the position of the furniture. Once we move into the theatre, we have technical rehearsals and dress rehearsals, and this is when the Stage Management team are given time to practise and fine-tune the changeover. During Preview performances is when keeping to the 20-minute timeframe is essential, and we may discover an even better way to do the changeover. Throughout this whole process, the changeover document is kept up to date.



THE LOVER & THE DUMB WAITER rehearsal photos - Prudence Upton



TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITY 1

– PINTER'S PAUSE

OVERVIEW:

Harold Pinter is renowned for his use of silence and pauses in dialogue. These pauses aren't just gaps in conversation—they are loaded with uncertainty, subtext, and power and have been carefully considered by the playwright. This exercise encourages students to analyse how these silences function dramatically and how they shape our understanding of the characters and their relationships.

OBJECTIVES:

- To analyse the dramatic effect of pauses and silences in *THE DUMB WAITER*
- To explore subtext, tension, and power dynamics through close reading and performance
- To develop an understanding of how playwrights use rhythm and pacing as storytelling tools

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Choose a Short Scene

Select a passage from *THE DUMB WAITER* (1–2 pages is ideal) that features multiple pauses or silences. Look for a moment of high tension or ambiguity—for example, when Ben receives a mysterious order via the dumbwaiter, or when Gus begins questioning their instructions.

2. Annotate the Text

- Read through the scene as a group or in pairs.
- Highlight or underline each "Pause" and "Silence" in the text.
- For each pause, ask:
 - What just happened before this moment?
 - What might the character want to say but isn't saying?
 - Is the pause creating tension, releasing it, or changing the dynamic?
 - Is one character controlling the conversation by not speaking?

3. Subtext Mapping

On the side of the script or in a separate notebook, write what you think the character is thinking or feeling during each pause. For example:

- (Pause) → Ben is unsure whether to trust the order. He doesn't want to admit his doubt to Gus.



4. Performance Exploration (Optional)

Have students read the scene aloud, being deliberate with the pauses.

- Try it once rushing through the pauses.
- Try it again honouring every pause fully.
- Discuss: How did it feel different? What changed in the scene's impact?



5. Reflection Discussion or Writing Prompt

- What role do the pauses play in building the play's atmosphere?
- How do silences shift the power between Ben and Gus?
- How might different actors or directors interpret these pauses differently?



EXTENSION IDEAS:

- Rewrite the Scene: Remove all pauses and perform the dialogue as a fast-paced exchange. How does the tone or meaning shift?
- Direct the Scene: In groups, students act as directors and give each other notes on how to "play" the pauses (nervous, suspicious, defiant, etc.)
- Compare with ther Pinter works: discuss how Pinter uses silence in his other works – for example THE HOMECOMING

Glej Theatre, Slovenia



Shakespeare Theatre Company, 2017



Pinter at the Pinter, 2018



Hampstead Theatre, 2020

Old Vic, 2021



East Riding Theatre, 2021



TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITY 2

– EXPLORING UNCERTAINTY IN THE DUMB WAITER

OVERVIEW:

One of the most intriguing aspects of *THE DUMB WAITER* is its ambiguity. Pinter offers no clear answers about the characters' backgrounds, motives, or the meaning of the events that unfold. This deliberate uncertainty invites multiple interpretations and challenges students to consider how meaning is constructed—and often withheld—in dramatic texts.

PURPOSE:

- To develop students' ability to argue and support an interpretation with textual evidence
- To explore how ambiguity functions as a literary and dramatic device
- To engage critically with Pinter's language, structure, and themes

INSTRUCTIONS:



PREPARATION: Divide students into small groups and assign or allow them to choose one of the following debate motions. Each group will prepare to argue either for or against the statement.

SAMPLE MOTIONS:

1. Ben is more of a victim than Gus.
2. The play is a political allegory, not just a personal drama.
3. The ambiguity in *THE DUMB WAITER* weakens its overall message.
4. The characters are fully aware of the system they're part of—and complicit in it.

STRUCTURE:

1. Research & Preparation (20–30 minutes):

- Groups gather evidence from the play to support their side.
- They should consider character actions, dialogue, stage directions, structure, and pauses.
- Encourage use of key quotes and close reading to support their arguments.

2. Debate Format (optional):

- Each side presents an opening statement (1–2 mins)
- Rebuttal from the opposing team (1 min)
- Open floor for audience or class questions
- Closing summary from each side



3. Class Discussion/Reflection: After the debate, hold a reflective discussion: what made an argument convincing? How does ambiguity open space for interpretation? Why might Pinter choose not to offer clear answers?





TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITY 3

– PLAYING WITH PINTER'S DARK COMEDY

OVERVIEW:

Black comedy or black humour is a genre that uses disturbing or morbid subject matter to address themes like war, violence, death or moral and societal corruption. In black comedy the interplay between tragedy and comedy is tightly intertwined. Pinter himself said that; "we don't amount to much, but we can still amuse ourselves."

PURPOSE:

- To explore how Pinter uses tension, awkwardness, role-play, and silence to create dark comedy
- To explore how performance choices can shift the balance between humour and discomfort.
- To analyse the effect of performance choices on an audience

INSTRUCTIONS:



WARM-UP ACTIVITY (10–15 MINS): COMEDIC OR CREEPY?

- Read out short lines from *THE DUMB WAITER* or *THE LOVER* (without context).
- After each line, ask students: Is this funny, creepy, or both? Why?
- Encourage quick discussion about timing, delivery, and context—what makes something tip from absurd to disturbing?

Examples:

- "You were playing your little game in the kitchen." (*THE LOVER*)
- "We've only got Eccles cakes." (*THE DUMB WAITER*)



MAIN ACTIVITY: SCENE INTO STYLE (40–60 MINS)

1. Choose & Read a Scene:

In pairs or small groups, students select a short scene (1–2 pages) from either play.

Recommended:

- *THE LOVER*: The moment where the role-play is revealed
- *THE DUMB WAITER*: The food order conversation or the final confrontation

2. Initial Performance:

- Students do a straight performance of the scene.
- Focus on naturalistic delivery with full attention to Pinter's pauses and silences.

3. Rehearse with a Twist:

- Rework the same scene in two different tones:
 - 1. Play it for laughs – exaggerate absurdity, awkward timing, or discomfort.
 - 2. Play it for menace – suppress humour, lean into tension and power imbalance.

Encourage experimentation with:

- Pauses (longer/shorter)
- Physical distance and movement

- Eye contact (or lack thereof)
- Vocal tone and pace



REFLECTION & DISCUSSION:

After performing or watching other groups:



- What changed the scene from funny to unsettling?
- How do Pinter's silences help build comic timing—or undercut it?
- What makes us laugh even when the situation is uncomfortable or cruel?
- Can something be funny and disturbing at the same time? How does Pinter do this?

OPTIONAL EXTENSION:

Devise a short original scene (1–2 minutes) in the style of Pinter, using dark comedy. Include:

- At least one moment of silence
- A power shift
- A line that could be read as either serious or absurd

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Understand and apply the concept of dark comedy in performance
- Experiment with tone and subtext through practical rehearsal
- Engage with performance elements like timing, pacing, and silence
- Reflect on how different staging choices affect audience reaction





TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITY 4

- UNSPOKEN TENSIONS — COMPARING PINTER'S PLAYS

FOCUS PLAYS:

- THE LOVER (1962)
- THE DUMB WAITER (1957)
- THE HOMECOMING (1965)

OVERVIEW:

Harold Pinter continually returned to similar themes across his body of work including power, identity, role-play, and ambiguity. By revisiting these themes in different contexts - whether in a marriage (THE LOVER), a professional relationship (THE DUMB WAITER), or a dysfunctional family (THE HOMECOMING) - Pinter examined how individuals perform roles and navigate shifting power dynamics in order to survive emotionally or psychologically.

PURPOSE:

- To explore how Harold Pinter presents recurring themes such as power, identity, role-play, domestic tension, and ambiguity across different plays
- To analyse how language, silence, and structure contribute to meaning.

STEP 1: THEME IDENTIFICATION (15–20 MINUTES)

In small groups, assign each group one play and ask them to identify key themes. Use guiding questions like:

- Who holds power in the relationship(s)?
- How is identity questioned, masked, or role-played?
- What is the effect of ambiguity or unresolved tension?
- How are silences and pauses used to communicate emotion or conflict?

Each group should record their ideas in a chart like this:

Theme	Example from Text	Effect on Audience
Power & Control	Gus takes orders from Ben	Creates unease; power is arbitrary
Role-Playing	Sarah & Richard in THE LOVER	Identity is fluid, unsettling
Family/Domestic Tension	THE HOMECOMING family dynamics	Love mixed with control and cruelty



STEP 2: COMPARE AND CONTRAST DISCUSSION (20–30 MINUTES)

Bring groups together and compare findings. Facilitate a class discussion:

- Which themes appear across all three plays?
- How does Pinter present these themes differently in a domestic setting (THE LOVER, THE HOMECOMING) versus a mysterious or institutional one (THE DUMB WAITER)?
- How do silences, repetition, or shifts in tone reflect deeper emotional or psychological undercurrents?

Encourage students to consider:

- The role of setting (home, basement, bedroom)
- The ambiguity of character motives
- The balance between threat and humour



STEP 3: WRITTEN REFLECTION (HOMEWORK OR IN-CLASS WRITING)

Prompt: "Compare how Pinter explores power and identity in any two of the three plays studied. How do language and silence shape these themes?"

Students should refer to specific scenes, lines, and techniques.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Analyse and interpret dramatic texts
- Identify and compare themes across works
- Understand the role of language, structure, and silence in shaping meaning
- Develop critical writing and discussion skills







SET MODEL FOR THE LOVER. SET DESIGN BY: SIMONE ROMANIUK



SET MODEL FOR THE DUMB WAITER. SET DESIGN BY: SIMONE ROMANIUK