

With whom does Willy Russell intend the audience to sympathize and identify essay...



Our Day Out was originally written as a television play, which was set in Liverpool. Willy Russell wrote it in 1977. He was born in 1947 in Whiston, but most of his childhood was spent in Knowsley just outside Liverpool. He has written a string of popular award winning plays and musicals. One of his most famous was Educating Rita, which was successfully adapted into a film and nominated for an Oscar. Other of his well-known works includes Shirley Valentine and Blood Brothers.

Most of Russell's plays and characters are based on their situations, which are drawn from real life experiences, although the stories are generally humorous there is usually a hidden agenda as the characters tend to crave freedom from a deprived background. A good example of this is Our Day Out. Russell wrote this after his experiences as a teacher at Shorefield Comprehensive School, when accompanying a teacher of the remedial department on a trip to Conwy Castle. The play implicates all the vital elements of the trip, which contrast with the complex teaching methods of the characters.

Russell uses dramatic devices to create warmth, humour and a sense of humanity in his work, to show different archetypal views which his audience can identify with. The opening of the play sets the scene for the rest of the story. Russell uses slang and dialect, which the audience can recognize to that of the inner city of Liverpool. "Agh ey, Les. Come on. I wanna get t'school" This use of slang and dialect is used throughout and creates a humorous setting for the rest of the play. Carol one of the main characters in the play, is first introduced during scene one.

She is portrayed as being shy and a bit of a loner and coming from a poor or underprivileged background. " Carol rushes along the street wearing a school uniform which doubles as a street outfit and her Sunday best. " This immediately gains the audience's sympathies for Carol as it implies that she cannot even afford a change of clothes. In scene three Mr. Briggs the deputy head teacher and one of the play's main protagonist's is introduced. The scene takes place in the headmaster's office. " Well I'd like you to go with her, John. " " I'd just like you to be there and keep an eye on things.

I don't want to be unprofessional and talk about a member of staff but I get the impression she sees education as one long game" Immediately the audience depicts Mr. Briggs as being slightly pompous and authoritarian in his manner. It also shows that the headmaster and Briggs do not have a very good opinion of Mrs. Kay's teaching abilities. In scene four we are introduced to Mrs. Kay another main protagonist. She is portrayed as a kind, caring and a mother hen figure. She is well liked by the children, but they seem to think of her as something of a " soft touch". " Look Brian. You know I'd take you.

But it is not up to me. " She is relaxed and very friendly with the children, but can at times be quite manipulative, patronizing and devious in her manner, as this next quote shows. " Ronnie, the kids with me today don't know what it is to look at a bar of chocolate. Lemonade never touches their lips (we almost hear the violins). These are the children, Ronnie, who stand outside shop windows in the pouring rain, looking and longing and never getting. " In scene five on the coach Mr. Briggs has been sent to keep order and this causes tension between him and Mrs. Kay as she feels her authority is being undermined.

<https://assignbuster.com/with-whom-does-willy-russell-intend-the-audience-to-sympathize-and-identify-essay-sample/>

The Boss thought it might be a good idea if you had an extra member of staff" During scene six, we get more of an insight into Carol's personality and her background. " Isn't it horrible, eh, Miss. Y' know... all the thingy like. The dirt an' that. (pause) I like them nice places. " " Y'know them places on the telly. Where they have gardens an' trees outside an' that. " " Miss, y'know when I grow up, Miss. Y'know if I started to work hard now an' learned how to read, eh? Well, d' y' think I'd be able t' live in one of them nice places" The audience immediately sympathizes with Carol.

It is at this stage in the play that Carol begins to realize the confines of her life. Despite the fact that she is in the remedial class, she is ambitious and keen to have a better standard of living, but obviously educationally ill equipped to attain this. Russell uses the episodic structure of the play to set the action for the next few scenes. " We are closed" This is the response given to the coachload of children by various shopkeepers along the way.

It is a stereotypical prejudice; they have never met any of the passengers on the coach, however they automatically assume that their " sort" means trouble. I only ever did it once, take a Liverpool coachload. I tell you not one word of a lie Miss Powell, they'd rob your eyes if you wasn't looking" Russell uses ironic comedy in the next scene, when the children are allowed into the shop to " purchase" sweets etc. Here the children prove that judgements made by the previous shopkeepers were justified. " As the orders are shouted, the kids are robbing stuff left, right and centre - it's the usual trick but the two men are falling for it. " " The thievin' little bastards! " Back on the coach Mrs. Kay decides a detour.

Mr. Briggs is not too happy with this decision; he obviously feels his authority is being threatened. " But I thought this trip was organized so that the kids could see Conwy castle" This causes added friction between the two characters. On arrival at the Zoo, Mr. Briggs is persuaded by Mrs. Kay, much against his better judgement to allow the children to wander around unsupervised. " All right Mrs. Kay. We'll trust them to act responsibly" His trust in the children is short-lived as we soon find out that the children have been " robbing" the animals.

It is not until they are back on the coach and ready to leave, when an irate zookeeper accuses the children of stealing the animals. Mr. Briggs' manner is surprisingly defensive but soon we discover his trust is misplaced. " A clucking hen is heard" " Right! And now I want the rest! " " I trusted you lot. (pause) I trusted you. And this is the way you repay me (pause) I trusted all of you but it is obvious that trust is something you know nothing about. " This scene leads Mr. Briggs to reassert his authority over the excursion.

" Mrs. Kay. When we get to the castle we'll split up into four groups each member of staff will be responsible for one group. " Mrs. Kay obviously feels undermined and untrusted by her colleague this creates tension, which builds into a climax in the next scene. At the castle the children run amok. Mr. Briggs is extremely angry and appalled by the behaviour he demands Mrs. Kay to get a grip on the situation. " Look! All I want to know from you is what you're going to do about this chaos" Mrs. Kay tries to pacify him and replies in a defensive manner. Well, I'd suggest that if you want the chaos to stop, then you should stop seeing it as chaos.

All right, the headmaster asked you to come along – but can't you relax? "

The argument escalates and the tension rises to a crescendo when Mr. Briggs and Mrs. Kay fiercely argue over their opposing views on how to educate these "type" of children. Mr. Briggs states " Well, that's a fine attitude isn't it? That's a fine attitude for a member of the teaching profession to have" Mrs. Kay then replies " Well what is your alternative? Eh? Do you really think that there is any point pretending?

Even if you cared do you think you could educate these kids, my remedial kids? Because you are a fool if you do. You won't educate them because no one wants them educating. " We begin to see Mrs. Kay in a totally different light her next comments are even more damning. " Teach them? Teach them what? You'll never teach them because nobody knows what to do with them. Ten years ago you could teach them to stand in line, you could teach them to obey, to expect a little more than a lousy factory job.

But now they haven't even got that to aim for. Mr. Briggs, you won't teach them because you're in a job that's designed and funded to fail! There is nothing for them to do, any of them, most of them were born for factory fodder, but the factories have closed down. " Mr. Briggs responds angrily to Mrs. Kay's vitriolic outburst. The audience now sees him as a defender of the children's rights and Mrs. Kay as a disillusioned, defeatist, and insecure person, who does not see any kind of decent future for the children. " And I suppose that's the sort of stuff you have been pumping into their minds is it. "

This shows Mr. Briggs in a new light to the audience, previously he has been portrayed as a strict, humourless, uncaring authoritarian. He now comes across as a caring optimist who is striving to obtain the best results he can, whilst understanding the limited abilities of the children. He sees education as an escape from the deprivation that the children are trapped in. Whereas Mrs. Kay seems totally disillusioned and defeatist in her attitude to educating them. Her attitude, is almost one of what is the point? In attempt to diffuse the angry atmosphere that has erupted between staff and children, Mrs. Kay suggests another detour to the beach.

“ We can't come all the way to seaside and not go down to the beach! ” At the beach in attempt to calm things down Mr. Briggs isolates himself from the group, whilst the rest, relax or play. For most of the deprived children a visit to the beach is an exciting experience. As Carol informs Mrs. Kay “ Yeh, but I don't wanna go home. I wanna stay here. ” When the day is over and the group reform they realize that Carol is missing. This causes tension to rebuild between Mr. Briggs and Mrs. Kay, when she asks him if has seen Carol.

Have you seen Carol Chandler in the last half of an hour” he replies angrily “ Look! I thought I made it quite plain that I was having nothing more to do with your outing. ” “ You mean you have lost her” Mrs. Kay on the defensive replies “ no I mean she might have wandered off” Mr. Briggs is very condemning in his response “ Well, what's that if its not losing her? All I can say is it's a wonder you haven't lost half a dozen of them. ” He is threatening and aggressive in his manner he probably does not want to take any blame for the disappearance of a pupil.

<https://assignbuster.com/with-whom-does-willy-russell-intend-the-audience-to-sympathize-and-identify-essay-sample/>

Don't you try telling me a word because you haven't even earned the right. Don't worry, when we get back to school, you're number's up. As well as hers. " Despite Mr. Briggs's aggression he is concerned for Carol's safety and goes looking for her. He finds her in a distressed and suicidal state. She is perched on the edge of the cliff threatening to jump. " I've told y'... I'm not comin' down with y' (pause) I'll jump y' know... I will. " Mr. Briggs talks Carol round he persuades that there is more to life than what she sees.

" Look... Carol... You're talking as though you've given up on life already. You sound as though life for you is just ending, instead of beginning. Now why can't, I mean, if it's what you want, what's to stop you working hard at school from now on, getting a good job and then moving out here when you are old enough eh! " Through gentle persuasion, he gets Carol to come down and they return to the rest of the group. In attempt to alleviate the dramatic events of the last hour, it is decided that one last detour to the fair should take place. The day ends on a positive happier note. On arrival back at school Mrs. Kay hands the camera over to Mr. Briggs for it to be developed.

There is a devious reason for him offering to develop this. It is almost as if now he is back within the school confines, he must revert back to being the strict " uncaring" disciplinarian and wants no tangible record of the day. After Mrs. Kay leaves he destroys the film. " Briggs moves to his own car, but his hand in his pocket and produces car keys and the roll of film. He looks at the film and up at the school. He pulls open the film and exposes it to the light, crumples it up and puts it into his pocket. "



After analyzing the main characters in this play, in my opinion the audience now sympathizes with Mr. Briggs. Although his manner appears rigid and humourless and his teaching methods may be strict, he does have empathy with the children, but doesn't often show it. This to him would be like a sign of weakness. He strives to educate them to the best of his abilities. Unlike the disillusioned Mrs. Kay who thinks that they have no hope of attaining anything better, so not worth the bother. He uses his authority and stern manner to try and encourage them to work, to their full potential.

I enjoyed this play immensely as it is crammed with black humour, comedy and the use of dramatic devices to create scenes which make the audience think about the wider issues of inner-city depravation. I feel that Willy Russell intended the audience's sympathies to lie in main with the remedial class children. He wanted to highlight the hopelessness of their situation and their attempts to escape the confines of a society which automatically assume that because a child comes from a poor impoverished background that they should be discounted as "factory fodder" and not worthy of anything better. Which we all know is not the case.