

# Our day out – how and why mr briggs changes



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Well-known playwright, Willy Russell, wrote the play ' Our Day Out' in the 1970s. ' Our Day Out' turned out to be such a successful play that in the early 80s a major national channel (i. e. Channel 4) transformed it into a short film lasting approximately 90 minutes.

The play is about a group of secondary school children who have a limited amount of intellectual skills, knowledge and abilities and they go from their school in a underprivileged area in Liverpool to Wales for a day out, which is intended to be to a castle in Conwy but ends up being a trip to shops, a zoo, the castle, a beach and a fairground. While they and their four teachers are on this trip they argue, fight and do not get on with each other at all, but as the day goes on one particular teacher starts to understand what the kids are like and the reasons behind why they're like that. ' Our Day Out' has a few main characters which are crucial to the plays plot and meaning, these are: Mr Briggs – a strict and disliked teacher; Mrs Kay – a laid back and caring teacher, and a student who goes by the name Carol who is not well off money-wise and education-wise, and she is a member of Mrs Kay's progress class. The purpose of education is to educate children, and even adults, to prepare them for their future – of families, jobs and lives. Education is compulsory because without it the future generation would not have much knowledge about anything and will also not have any life skills, which are vital for living reasonably well.

Eleven years of education is a substantial amount of time, and by attending school and being educated by qualified educators for eleven years (at the least), students are expected to develop emotionally, socially, physically and particularly intellectually. However they can only do this if they try and want

to, have support, involvement and encouragement from others. If the student's school life went successfully then they should know all the basics and maybe the complex points as well in the subjects they have studied. Not all students will be triumphant in learning; either through fault of their own, educational problems or through having bad luck by having inferior educators. The kind of teaching that ensures an effective education is one of fairness, praise and fun, with a teacher who is determined, like a friend, hardworking, a little strict, respected for all the right reasons and once again, fair. However, not all children had the right to be taught as effectively as was available in the 70s, through no fault of their own.

The reason for this was due to the fact that they were disabled or of special educational needs just like the young characters that feature in this play. Schools in that day and age had special needs children excluded from regular classes, activities and even the other children; they were put into special groups with people of a similar kind of ability – so they were labeled, not included and not much education was tried upon them either. An example from the play where this type of behavior is shown is when Mr Briggs says to a fellow teacher 'Are you sure these lot can be trusted' this shows that he thinks they're so stupid that they can't do one little thing and he also looks down on the children as if they are not important at all, like they're just a bit of extra space. The children who feature in Russell's play are all of special educational needs, and they all come from and have similar social history and backgrounds.

Right at the beginning of the play Willy describes the kids traveling on their way to school, 'wearing a school uniform which doubles as a street outfit

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and her Sunday best' this description portrays the girl's background as poor, lacking in money and material belongings. Another example of content which illustrates a child's home life not being very stable and insecure is when Andrew is explaining where his dad is, ' I dunno...

e just comes round every now an' then an' has a barney with me mam'. Mrs Kay and Mr Briggs each have their own unique and completely opposite teaching personalities and education philosophies. Mrs Kay's is not so much of a professional teacher as she has personal relationships with the children and therefore is not trusted or like much by the head or any other professional character such as Mr Briggs. Even though Mrs Kay does not appear to get on with Mr Briggs at all she still respects him as she does with everyone, as she is empathetic and kindhearted. Mrs Kay's philosophy on education is one of fun, happiness and merriment, she believes that they are much more important than education and puts them first, ' everyone enjoy themselves..

. and don't do anything that might be dangerous to yourselves or to others' she does not even mention learning; all she cares about is them – not education, not what they will benefit long term but solely the short term gains. Mrs Kay's views on education are very laid back and she seems to not care about it at all as she has not mentioned anything concerning ' education' throughout the whole of the play. Mrs Kay is seen as more of a motherly figure rather than as a member of the teaching profession, everyone is aware of this – the kids and teachers. She gets chatted about behind her back by a teacher i. e.

Mr Briggs, ' She always reminds me of a mother hen rather than a teacher' Briggs seems to not like her because of how amateurishly and leniently she behaves. Her first appearance in the play is with her looking out for a child's safety; ' Come away from that road will you? ' she didn't shout his telling off through anger but through care, concern and protectiveness. The children she teaches all respect her for who she is and for the way she treats them, they care for her as she does for them. Along with being a motherly figure Mrs Kay is also a good friend to the progress class, she is understanding and always on their side – never any one else's. She will do whatever she can to help the children as she loves them and pities them, as the kids were getting onto the coach she bluffed to the driver about how the kids ' don't even know what it is to look at a bar of chocolate' so that the driver would let them eat and drink on his coach – she is always on the children's side no matter who's at fault.

Mr Briggs is very strict, harsh in his tone and manner, threatening, controlling and is not as friendly as Mrs Kay since he is an extremely professional persona and is trusted by the head very much as the head told him that he'd ' like you (Mr Briggs) to go with her (Mrs Kay)' and ' keep things in some sort of order', this shows that he is trusted because he's professional and is professional because he's able to be trusted, so that makes him an authority figure. Unlike Mrs Kay, the student body does not like him in any way whatsoever, when he comes aboard the coach ' the kids sigh' as they know what he's like i. . a fun despiser and education admirer. Mr Briggs also feels the same way towards the progress class kids; he doesn't like them either because of how insufficiently intellectually

developed they are, for example he says to Mrs Kay out of the anger he gets because of the kids ‘ you’ve got some real bright sparks here..

. a right bunch’, he pokes fun at their special educational needs as he is not empathetic and understanding as Mrs Kay is. He misunderstands the students in many ways because he doesn’t try or even want to understand them or their backgrounds. When Briggs is on the coach in conversation with a couple of the kids he asks them about their parents and he doesn’t seem to fully comprehend and relate the replies to what they’re like i. e. what they’re deprived of, he says to one of the children ‘ I thought you meant he was away a lot’ after he asks him where’s his dad, then Briggs automatically assumes that the boys ‘ father goes out to sea’ not that his fathers no good, and when Mr Briggs has taken the boys reply of ‘ he just comes round every now an’ then.

.. o get money off her’ in, he pauses due to the effect of shock – this was the first stage of the days learning process for Mr Briggs. His philosophy on education is very different to Mrs Kay’s of fun, his is of learning and nothing else is the way forward. However, when Briggs first boards the coach he does make a little speech about how ‘ they (they teachers) want everyone to enjoy themselves’, but Mr Briggs makes it obvious that he didn’t really mean it when he describes his viewpoint on ‘ how to enjoy a coach trip’ as ‘ we sit in our seats.

.. alk quietly... look at the scenery’ hence he doesn’t know what fun is or/and he just doesn’t want them to have fun.

Along with Mr Briggs and Mrs Kay there is also one more key character, Carol, who is a member of Mrs Kay's progress class. Regardless of Carol's learning problems she does understand of how and why her chances in life are limited to some extent – she is realistic. An example of this is when Briggs and Carol were on top of the cliff and Briggs was saying to Carol ' what's to stop you working hard at school... getting a good job.

.. moving out here when you're old enough? ' Carol replied contemptuously ' Don't be friggin' stupid. ' so she knows what she can and can't achieve in life; she's intelligent enough not to listen to anything anyone tells her just to cheer her up, enliven and encourage her. Mrs Kay took advantage of this trip by taking the class to the zoo, with the disapproval of Mr Briggs.

At the zoo a group of the children got into conversation with Mr Briggs about a bear and the wild. Carol's experience above the cliff mirrored that of the comments the bear got from other students by how they'd not be able to survive, ' lived all it's life in a pit...

won't know nothin' else so it won't want nothin' else' and how Briggs said to Carol ' How could you live here? What would you do? Where would you live? ', therefore both the bear and Carol would not be able to survive in the wild or in Wales because they don't know how to and also because they've not been taught or experienced life out of the pit/Liverpool. This scene made Mr Briggs realize that these children are not as dim as he'd previously thought and that they are realistic and not gullible at all. Unlike Briggs, Mrs Kay sees her pupils within a larger social context by entirely understanding the backgrounds of the children. Mrs Kay shows this type of behavior when Mr

Briggs is quarreling with her about how the children are so much like animals, and Mrs Kay replies to his remarks by quietly saying ' it's a shame really.

.. we bring them to a crumbling pile of bricks and mortar and they think they're in the fields of heaven'. By saying this she lets him know what the children's lives are really like plus shows him that she knows and understands the children much better than he does, therefore likes them more too. Mrs Kay's knowledge of the children's backgrounds might be the reason for why she has given up on teaching them and stopped giving them false dreams, encouragement and future expectations.

An example of where she illustrates this is when she says to Briggs, ' stop fooling yourself... teach them what? You'll never teach them because nobody knows what to do with them..

. here's nothing for them to do', thus Mrs Kay quit trying to educate them due to the fact that she knows nobody (including the kids themselves) cares, and that the kids will definitely get nowhere in life so she doesn't want to waste or ruin there time as well as hers while doing something that won't be worthwhile to anyone. One of the foremost scenes in ' Our Day Out' is the cliff scene in which Mr Briggs and Carol feature. Willy Russell has cleverly used stage directions in this scene, to buildup tension. He has used stage directions a great deal; so more tension is given off in this emotional part of the play.

An instance of where tension is created via stage directions is when Briggs' movement is described ' he starts to move towards her. She takes a step

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towards the edge of the cliff', this gives off tension by the direction being short and simple while also describing short and simple movement. Briggs' original attempts at getting through to Carol failed and were futile, so he had to change his approach. At first Briggs techniques were his usual bossy, cruel and hasty ones such as ' Just come here! , ' Now you just listen you me' and ' I'm not putting up with a pile of silliness from the likes of you'; these techniques didn't seem to work with Carol cause she knew this time she was the one in control and with power, not him. But then Briggs realized this and knew that Carol was also conscious of this. So from bossy and dominant he had to change to caring, friendly and understanding.

As an alternative he started engaging in conversation (in which he found out about what Carol's life is like), he does this by asking her caring questions such as ' how would you survive out here? , which give out a positive effect to Carol as she'd feel more cared about and wanted. Also via the cliff scene Briggs learnt quite a fair amount from progress class student, Carol. One of the things that he learns is that the professional and strict way isn't always the way forward; there are more gentle and triumphant methods. In addition to him learning better teaching related techniques, he has also come into the world of reality – by having more knowledge of why the kids are like what they're like.

Mr Briggs' behaviour and interaction changes after the cliff scene by him being more sympathetic and thoughtful; he is now aware that the kids are underprivileged through no fault of their own. Before he changed he called out to Carol in a controlling and threatening way ' Carol Chandler! Just come here', but since that failed he had to change his way of communicating, and

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so that phrase developed to the likes of ‘ Carol, please come away from there’. The main means in which Carol caused Mr Briggs to change is when she said to him ‘ if you’d been my old feller, I woulda been all right, wouldn’t I? , this affected Briggs by him realizing his mistake in misunderstanding them so much and thinking that they (the progress class kids) know absolutely nothing. Consequently his behaviour and interaction changed towards the children for the better, he felt as if he now knew them properly and didn’t despise them no more. As the coach approaches the school at the end of the day out in Wales Mr Briggs changes his appearance slightly from fun loving to more smart and strict.

When he becomes aware of the photographic evidence Mrs Kay has, he says to her ‘ it would save you having to pay for it. I could do it in the lab’, which shows he seems to have learnt to put his barriers down a little and that there’s more to life than doing everything professionally by abiding by rules 24/7. As Briggs changed towards the negative near the end of the play, he also changed in a positive way as well. His language changed from critical, mean and negative thinking, ‘ you know very well that on school visits you wear school uniform’ to more understanding, positive and kind, ‘ we’ll let the uniform go this time’ towards the students and fellow teachers.

When Mrs Kay had just approached and informed Mr Briggs about Carol going missing one of the things he replied with was ‘ when we get back, I’ll have the whole lot of you! ‘, he said this because all the other teachers (Mrs Kay, Colin and Susan) hadn’t behaved how he did/how he wanted them to. However, by the end of the trip Mr Briggs attitude towards them changed, as

a replacement for his usual tone he used more polite vocabulary to turn them down ‘ No... I’d better not.

.. thanks all the same though’, so I don’t think that he’ll turn them in after using up so much effort in being polite and respectful to them. After going on this trip with the progress class kids I think that he will change his ways of dealing with the students at least a little bit if not oodles, because he now knows much more about them and so feels more pity and is more keen on them. From his old bossy, instruction-firing self, such as when he calls Carol by shouting out ‘ just come here! ’, he will change his tone to more courteous and somewhat negotiable.

So instead of using that quote to call out to Carol he will, in future, use something like ‘ please come over here, Carol’. As Briggs will be dealing with the children more positively, that doesn’t mean to say that he will live up to his words. In the zoo scene where he is discussing about how interested the children are in animals with Mrs Kay, he volunteers to ‘ come along and give them a small talk with some slides that I’ve got’ but I don’t think he will do that because it sounds pretty much like one of them things that you say and mean but know you’ll never get round to doing it for one reason or the other. Mr Briggs has changed during this progress class trip by starting to know and understand the backgrounds of the children; if he didn’t socially interact with them then he wouldn’t have changed or learnt anything about them at all. Besides understanding them more he has also started to realize that they are not as dumb he’d always thought, they do know about their chances in life being limited and they do know some bits and pieces.

An example of where Briggs becomes aware of their vast amount of knowledge and understanding is at the cliff when he tries to cheer Carol up by saying ' what's to stop you... getting a good job..

. and moving out here when you're old enough' to encourage her and give her hope, but to his amazement his attempt failed and Carol replied ' Don't be friggin stupid'. Russell has made this particular scene very dramatic by using brief and straightforward stage directions such as ' he gingerly approaches her' and has selected the vocabulary very carefully to make it even more dramatic. Throughout the whole play Mr Briggs has given the impression that he has been changing and developing into a better person but I do not think that these changes to Mr Briggs are permanent. I think this because when the coach gets nearer to the school he ' puts his tie back to normal..

. straightens his hair... combs his hair', if he were to change for good then why would he bother? The reason for him changing his ' fun' appearance back to his strict one is obviously because he don't want to stay that way or be seen like that, this trip was a one-off time for him.

Another example to support my point is also at the end of the play when Mr Briggs ' pulls open the film and exposes it to the light, crumbles it up', Briggs appears as if he's embarrassed and humiliated by the way he acted and he wouldn't have wrecked the film if he was to change permanently – I get the idea of him being embarrassed and humiliated because if he wasn't to change permanently for a different reason he'd still want to treasure the memories unless he was to be completely heartless, which he isn't. The only

change that looks as if it is permanent is the amount of sympathy and understanding he now has for the kids and I also think that he'll be a little less harsh, like at the end he tells Linda off softly about her non-uniform. So in my opinion Mr Briggs will be a better person but there won't be as much change that would be preferred.