

Our day out, by willy russell – review



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ Our Day Out” is a 20th century drama play. It is written by Willie Russell and is based around a school trip from Inner city Liverpool to Conway Castle, Wales. During the play we see visible differences between the two leading teachers Mrs Kay and Mr Briggs (whose name in the play was just seen as BRIGGS).

Although attitudes towards pupils differ greatly and both teachers believe in a different way of teaching and they disagree in the ways which the other one behaves and conducts activities, both teachers finish at the same point – both believe that when they speak, they speak on behalf of the majority. Mrs Kay is portrayed as a kind, warm woman who treats children as if they are on the same level as here as people, but talks down to them as stupid. She reinforces throughout the book that the children are the ‘ progress class’ and although are human beings, can still be seen as young children and to a certain extent stupid. Whilst thinking she is trying to be helpful with the children, it is clear to see how she belittles them.

To me a clear example is on page 31, just as Mrs Kay has announced a trip to the zoo.” But Progress Class, we’re very lucky today to have Mr Briggs with us...” Clearly here she is reinforcing that the class is the progress class, whereas Briggs would refer to the class as ‘ kids’.

However Mr Briggs is the opposite to Mrs Kay and is portrayed at the beginning of the play as ‘ the bad guy’ and ‘ nasty’ man. However this is only because of his strictness and intolerance of bad behaviour. Whilst this is seen as harsh and bad natured, Briggs speaks to the children as though they were a class of his own – a higher-level class. He teaches the children facts

and information, whereas Mrs Kay seems to try to protect from all things around them.

Because of this the children seem uninterested in her and all she has to say, unless it will benefit them directly, i. e. a trip to the zoo. Although Briggs seems uninterested in the children, this is only true when compared to Mrs Kay. Whilst on his own he is seen as an average teacher would be seen - smart, educational and quick to the point.

Yet when put in the same place as Mrs Kay he is seen as strict, bossy and intolerant. A good example of this is shown during the children's trip to the Zoo. Briggs: " And a brown bear is an extremely dangerous animal. You see those claws, they could a really nasty mark." Andrews: " Could it kill y'sir?" Briggs: " Well why do you think that its kept in a pit?" Ronson: " I think that's cruel sir.

Don't you?" Briggs: " Not if its treated well..." Here it shows Briggs is interacting with the children, which would seem an unlikely event due to his portrayal at the beginning as being uninterested in children. Yet as well as showing Briggs being interested in the children it also shows the children being interested in him.

They seem eager to ask him questions and he seems just as eager to answer them. This may be because for the first time the children are being treated as ' normal' children and not being spoken to like young babies or treated as though they are stupid. Mrs Kay is also seen as a motherly figure. She is seen holding the children's hands, linking arms with the children and cuddling them when she feels they need to be cuddled. This is seen as

unprofessional and is condoned by Briggs who in a visit to the zoo shakes the two girls who try to link arms with him off and tells them to walk properly.

Whilst Briggs is interested in educating the children, in hope of giving them a better future, Mrs Kay seems to want to build a wall around them and protect them from the outside world, whilst all she's really doing is stopping them from growing.

She seems aware of the fact that many of the children are deprived from certain aspects, like love and care, and she seems to thrive on this and tries to give them all that she thinks they lack. Briggs however does not interact with the children on a personal level, as this is seen as a misconduct of a teacher/student relationship. However in the novel there is one exception to Briggs becoming personally involved with a pupil and this was towards the end of the second act in the book. During the children's visit to the beach it has been noticed that one of the children, Carol Chandler is missing. Carol was mentioned earlier on in the play whilst being on the coach with Mrs Kay. It seemed that during the coach trip Carol saw through the wall Mrs Kay had built around them and showed an interest in the 'outside' world.

In a way could be seen as an interest in the world outside of Liverpool, where most of the children in the play seem destined to stay for the rest of their lives. Carol "Isn't it horrible miss?" Kay "Mm?!" Carol "Ya know...I like them nice places.

.." Kay "Which places?" It clearly shows Mrs Kay day dreaming. Further on in the conversation Mrs Kay seems to be between worlds whilst holding a conversation with Carol.

Carol asks Mrs Kay if she thinks that she could live in one of 'them nice places' which is responded by a simple "I suppose so love" type reply. Her lack of interest in Carol's conversation could provoke an event that happens later on in the play. However this relaxed and laid-back attitude can be seen as two things: disinterest in Carol or just Mrs Kay humouring Carol. However in the part of the novel, which is probably the highest in tension, it involves Briggs having to speak to Carol as an adult.

The scene is at the beach and Carol Chandler goes missing. Briggs finds her on top of a cliff inevitably looking as though she is going to jump off. Briggs has to persuade Carol to come away. Before we have seen Briggs as a man who likes children older and cleverer than the progress class, and finds the school trip an annoyance and burden. Yet here we do not see him as a man, who is not obsessed by strictness and routine order, we see him as a man who sees a child as an equal in some way. The scene goes through three moods.

At first when Briggs spots Carol on the cliff edge he is oblivious to what she is up to. He thinks she is sulking and in return to that thought he comes across as strong and cross. Carol "You go. I'm not coming". Briggs "You what?" Carol "Tell Mrs Kay she can go home without me.

I'm stopping here, by the sea". Briggs "Now just you listen to me. I've had enough, just about enough...

..." Here it shows a reference to Carol's feelings towards Briggs. Rather than saying, "you can go home without me" she refers to Mrs Kay. This shows the influence Mrs Kay has on the children, as though Carol expects her to

understand why she wants to stay, which brings back the significance of the conversation on the bus.

Yet Briggs shows anger, as though the whole trip has been too much for him and he has just been put to breaking point. Yet as the conversation continues he realises the seriousness of the situation and changes the viewpoint of the discussion to how it will affect him. Briggs " Just what are you trying to do to me" Carol " I've told y', just leave me alone... .

.. " Briggs " Stay here? How could you stay here?...

" As that continues Briggs seems to get more frustrated with Carol and they both lose their temper and explode at each other. If this were Mrs Kay it wouldn't have been that way. She would have stayed calm, yet this is not always helpful. By Briggs and Carol having this row Briggs can see Carol's reasons for doing what she is doing.

Carol " Don't lie, you! I know you hate me.....

.. " Briggs " What...

why do you say that?" Carol " Why can't I just stay out here and live in one of them nice white houses... .

..?" Finally Briggs understands why Carol is behaving as she is. He realises that like most of the kids in the progress class, she wants out of the scum that Liverpool is, and she wants a fair crack at life, which from the beginning of the play is obvious that for any of the children is never going to happen. After realising this Briggs changes his attitude to the situation again and

warms to Carol. He approaches her in what seems to be the way he thinks Mrs Kay would behave.

You can imagine in the play that his voice would drop in hardness and he would be quieter, less harsh and not as defensive as Carol. This seems to work, and towards the end of the conversation Carol relates to Briggs as a father, stating that she would have turned out okay if he had been her dad. This is an odd thing for Briggs and clearly takes him by surprise, as he is not portrayed throughout the play as a fatherly figure. Yet he seems pleased by this and the last part of that scene on the cliff closes with Carol and Briggs hugging. Yet as soon as they return to the beach the fatherly figure seems to disappear as Mrs Kay, who instantly fusses over her, greets Carol.

Mrs Kay " Carol! Oh the worry you've caused. Oh...

...love" Yet in a last attempt to be seen as the ' good guy' Briggs announces that they should go to the fair. After this the coach journey back catches Briggs out.

Mrs Kay takes a photo of Briggs with the children, who does not seem too thrilled at the thought of Mrs Kay placing them around the staff room. So as the end of the play comes to a close the coach arrives back at Liverpool and things return to normal. Briggs offers to get the photos developed for Mrs Kay. Yet he thinks of the day he has had, and decides to destroy the film. This is a significant ending, as the trusting Mrs Kay returns home and so does Briggs. This shows that like Carol and the other kids, the lives of Mrs Kay and Briggs are a normal routine and it will never change.