

Russell uses humour
to convey a serious
message in our day
out essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

William Russell, the author of *Our Day Out*, used to teach in a school that was in a 'socially deprived' area of Liverpool, from 1973-74. In his time there he went on a trip with them, and this is obviously where the idea for *Our Day Out* came about from. Back then, children were basically brought up to fail, to be factory fodder, and be in jobs where you're not required to think. Pupils at the age of 11 had to take an exam called the 11+, where if you passed, you went to Grammar School, where all sorts of opportunities are opened up to you.

If you failed however, you entered a Secondary Modern school. *Our Day Out* was actually written in 1977, and was very much based on his own experiences, so he knows what he's talking about with the problems that the children face, and is not just some bigotry politician preaching of things that he hasn't had first hand experience on. So that's the background to this play, now I will talk about the title question to this essay. Russell uses many techniques to get his message across.

The main aspects of his message are, he tries to bring awareness on the children's poverty, how they are deprived in their lives because of their social background, the way the education system doesn't help these children, but brings them up to be 'failures from the day they were born', and lastly how the children are not given the opportunity to show what they can do. Russell makes the first contrast by showing how the teachers use Standard English in the way they speak, and the children use local dialect.

Maybe because this demonstrates the difference between them socially and educationally, as the teachers obviously had a good education to become

teachers. I'll now move onto the play's characters. When you look at these characters you can see similarities between these and other ones from other things such as TV programs and other plays. They are very stereotypical, yet still believable in their own right. Mrs. Kay, is the teacher who organised this trip to the castle. She's the caring, understanding, sympathetic, overall nice teacher who sees the children's predicament for what it really is.

Mr. Briggs however, seems to be the complete opposite to this. He's strict, judgmental, and isn't aware of the children's backgrounds. He and Mrs. Kay, have obviously been deliberately put together for this play, as they are opposites, so they are going to have some conflicts during the trip. Then we move onto the children of the play. Carol, is probably the child that is focused on the much in the play. This is because, towards the end she starts to get some understanding of the hopeless situation she is in, and ultimately gets so depressed that she nearly throws herself off a cliff towards the end of the play.

Then we have the typical school 'bullies', Digger and Riley, who are the bozos of the children, who aren't even supposed to be there, as they are too old. They do things like steal a little boy's sweets after asking someone for one, and 'claiming' the back seat etc. But even through this, the author still wants you to realise they are still in the same predicament at the end of the day, through all the humour that they bring. Then there's the girl equivalent of Digger and Riley, in the form of Linda and Karen, the flirty girls, using cameo humour in their roles.

They even make a young male teacher, Colin, squirm after being flirty and silly. After Andrews is caught smoking in the back of the bus, Briggs takes him up the front to have a seat next to him, and proceeds to have a conversation with him. He learns from Andrews that his father beats him for his smoking, but not because of the act of smoking like Briggs thought, it's because he won't give him any! This shows that Briggs has a viewable lack of understanding of the children's way of life. The setting of the play takes the children from the streets of Liverpool to the zoo, to get away from their troubles and leave them behind.

They also go to the castle, and then finally to the beach, with Briggs' recommendation. But in the end, they return back to Liverpool, to inherit their problems once again. This pattern of events is on a cycle, no matter where they go, they always end up back at square one. This shows their route in life as well, as they can get away from it all, but they have to come back to reality of their predicament. Now, on to the funny situations of the play. The first one in the play that comes to mind, is when the Bus driver tells the children they can't have sweets or lemonade on the bus.

Then Mrs Kay gives him a totally put on speech about how these kids can't even afford to look at sweets, at which the Bus driver looks around the streets, then feels very guilty, and tells the nearest kid to take his money and go buy some sweets. Of course, the children got on the bus to reveal their numerous sweets and lemonade bottles. But this shows that the bus driver was willing to believe Mrs Kay when he looked around to see the conditions of the streets and the general area, so it must be pretty bad.

Then there's the incident where the children stop off at a small cafe. The men inside plan to scam the children, by increasing the prices of things, due to what they call 'inflation'. But the children play the oldest game in the book, by getting the two men to turn around to get sweets behind them, while grabbing handfuls of bars and lollipops. This shows that the men did indeed underestimate the children, but this also shows how the children are not all so innocent, maybe due to the environment they grew up in?

The zoo incident where the children steal the animals is another example of a funny situation. The children are about to leave in the bus when the zookeeper climbs aboard to alert the teachers that the kids have stole some animals from the zoo. A stampede of animals follows as the zookeeper takes them back inside. Briggs, who had finally trusted them, was let down greatly by this, as his trust in them was betrayed. But maybe the children took the animals because they don't have the luxury of having pets, due to their poverty. The situation where Mr. Briggs and Mrs.

Kay talking to each other about the children is a good example of where the author tries to get his point across. Mrs Kay says, "Most of them were rejects from the day they were born", she highlights upon the point I talked about earlier in the essay, about how children were brought up for factory jobs. In this Russell takes Mr. Briggs' argument (Willy Russell's opposite opinion) and tears it apart with Mrs Kay's speech. Now we move onto the serious situations of the play. The time when the children are in the zoo at the bear pit, with Mr. Briggs showing them round.

Ronson was saying how the Bear is trapped, and that's why it's so angry all the time, while someone else says how it's been in there all its life, so it won't know anything different, as it doesn't know anything else, it won't want anything else. This is another metaphor for the children and their predicament in Liverpool, of how they aren't given the chance to succeed and aren't given the chance in life from the day they were born, and how it happens because the children don't realise what's happening so therefore they are oblivious to what's going on around them.

The most serious situations of the play has to be the one with Briggs and Carol on the Clifftop. Carol, seems to understand the hopeless situation she and the rest of the children are to face in life. She's found by Briggs on the Clifftop, on the brink of suicide, Briggs tries to comfort her, and eventually she comes down. But this one girl has realised what situation she is in, and feels helpless because of it. The last serious situation is right at the very end with Briggs, after the children have all gone home, some saying how Briggs is a cool guy, and how they didn't know he's like that.

He holds the film with the pictures of him letting go of himself and actually having some fun with the children, and crunches it up, after saying that he'd take it to the lab to develop them himself. But by crumpling the film up, he shows another example of a circular cycle in the play, where by he starts off strict, then lets himself go, then when he's back in Liverpool, he goes back to strict again. I think he crumples the film so he can still retain his strict status at school, so the children don't get on top of him.