

# Our day out – willy russell essay sample



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The play *Our Day Out*, by Willy Russell was written during the 1970's. The play is set in Liverpool, which in the 1970's was not holding well economically, which had the population on a low morale. For example during this period of time Britain had become part of the European market, which left the docks in Liverpool desolated and no longer in use. This now left the city, which was once known throughout Europe for its great docks very deprived, and in recession with the coal industry also dying out and leaving the country yet more grief economically.

The play is on the subject of a progress class (which is a class consisting of children with poor literate skills e. g. reading and writing etc). The class has a trip arranged to Conwy in Wales. On the way to their destination the audience are entertained in the midst of hilarious acts of cunningness and stupidity (a good example of this would be when the children visit the zoo on the way to Wales and end of stealing various zoo animals). In addition to the funny side of the play the audience also learn a serious note to the play, which I will comment in detail later in this assignment.

The main characters in this play consist of two teachers and one young girl at the age of thirteen. Carol is the young thirteen-year-old student attending the progress class; she is branded for being shy and for possessing delicate feelings and emotions. She has a mother and daughter relationship with Mrs Kay, although her correlation with Mr Briggs is very rocky as in his view all the children in the progress class as forever puerile and frivolous children, who have no hope in the world. Carol is a curious and ambitious character.

The following quote distinguishes her ambitious side. As her thought on living in the glorious sunny locations she watched on her T. V. ‘ ... Y’ know if I started to work hard and learned to read eh? Well, d’ y’ think I’d be able t’ live in one of those nice places? ‘ (page 4) The quote above shows Carol’s ambition to learn to read and write, which in her mind will enable her to live a cosy life in a dream location. Mrs Kay is a teacher in her early forties, however is portrayed as a mother to the children in the book.

For instance she mothers Carol as if she were her own daughter. She cares deeply for the children of the progress class, maybe due to the fact that she suggests that the children in there do not have the chance in life to become an someone important and the feeling of guilt and responsibility comes over her which makes her feel the children should enjoy themselves now as they are near certain to be destined to a troublesome and poor futures. These deep feelings for the children bring in many confrontations with Mr Briggs who feels Mrs Kay is a bit too soft on the children.

Mrs Kay also feels sorry for the children and their living conditions as the following quote suggests. ‘(quietly) I know. And I was just thinking; it’s a shame really, isn’t it, eh? You know, we bring them to a crumbling pile of bricks and mortar and they think they’re in the fields of heaven? ‘ (page 37) The quote above shows the audience how Mrs Kay feels for the children of the progress class in terms of the fact that the children see the bricks and mortar by the side of the beach as heaven when they arrive at Conwey to bare witness to the crumbling castle walls etc.

Another quote to show Mrs Kay's sympathy for the children and their lack of education is when she confronts Mr Briggs and states the following, '(beginning to lose her temper ever so slightly) Well, what's your alternative? Eh? Do you really think there's any point pretending? Even if you cared do you think you could educate these kids, my remedial kids? Because you're a fool if you do. You wont educate them because nobody wants them educating ... ' This quote came after Mr Briggs criticised Mrs Kays teaching methods towards the kids in the progress class.

The reason as to why Mrs Kay acts as a mother upon the children is due to sympathy and care for the children. She feels the children should not be so harshly treated as they already do not have a bright future ahead of them because no one wants them educated properly and they should therefore enjoy what they can from school life. (page 38). The final main character within Willy Russell's play is Mr Briggs. He is a sombre and authoritarian individual. He is also a teacher in the progress class in his early thirties.

He does not feel much for the children in the progress class and treats them as if they were animals. He feels the complete opposite to Mrs Kay as he feels that the children in the progress class will get nowhere and do not have a hope in achieving anything. In his opinion it seems as if the children in the progress class are all naughty and should not be treated fairly. In the book he treats the children as if they were soldiers. For example they are constantly being shouted at and he always seems to have a suspicion on them as if they were up to something.

The following quote describes how angry Mr Briggs can become at the children of the progress class. '(shouting) Shut up, lad! (pause) Is it any wonder that people won't do anything for you? The minutes we start to treat you as real people, what happens? That man was right, you act like animals, animals! (pause) Well I've learned a lesson today. Oh, yes, I have. I've learned that trust is something you people don't understand. Now, I'm warning you, all of you, don't expect any more trust from me! (page 34)

The quote above shows the reaction from Mr Briggs when his trust for the children is broken in the zoo. Mr Briggs lets the children make their own way around the zoo as he goes for a coffee with Mrs Kay. The children return to the coach looking eager to leave. The reason for the sudden urge to leave the zoo is due to the fact that nearly all of the students have stolen an animal from the zoo to keep as a pet. Mr Briggs cracks when the zookeeper comes in to complain, about the children, he then displays his monstrous anger toward the children through shouting.

The school, which inhabits the children of the progress class, is situated in a dilapidated and pitiable inner city area in Liverpool. It is the sort of area, which is continuously stereotyped by the superior population living in the sophisticated outer suburbs, for being contaminated, and for the troublesome thugs living they're causing the problems, which causes problems for their minority. I would describe the area as tedious, untidy, dull vicinity. At this period of time Liverpool's inner cities were full of large unexploited repulsive factories, which made the city look cheap and unlooked after.

The area in my opinion is made up of an immense mass of unemployment, and is therefore full of old people who cannot afford the luxuries of life and who are entrapped within the pitiful area for the rest of their lives as Liverpool is not recognized for it offering pleasurable well paid jobs especially during this period of time. The main plot of the story written by Willy Russell is to illustrate the lives of children living in a deprived environment who attend a progress class from which they have no hope of making something of their lives.

This is because a progress class consists of children who are mentally idle, too destructive to attend schools with 'normal' children, or too untutored to attend a class with children who can actually read and write. Nevertheless the 'Liverpudlian' children of this progress class have had their first ever trip organised to Conwy in Wales. However as these children are no 'ordinary' children, they cause predictable havoc all the way to Wales.

For example in the bus, the Shops on the motorway, and finally the zoo which is a little extra break, for the children to enjoy themselves for a bit and to relax from the continues bus journey, also not to mention Conwy itself which also has scenes of panic and yet more stress given off by the teachers. 'Our Day Out' obviously has a serious note to it, with the children's living environment, education and the children's hopes, dreams and destiny's etc. However Willy Russell has added a reasonable amount of comedy to his play as well. A few of the humorous scenes are commented on follow.

Firstly a humorous scene in the play is when the children visit the shop to have a rest from the bus journey. Scene 15. In this scene two shopkeepers

are introduced into the play, their names are, John and Mac. Before the children arrive into the shop both John and Mac see the bus arriving full of children from Liverpool. The shopkeeper's stir up a cunning plan to charge the children extra for the sweets and other goods around the shop, they would do this by increasing the prices of the sweets and chocolates as the children arrived etc.

However as the children enter the shop they have plans of their own. The children begin to ask for sweets which are lie on the shelves high up in the shop, the audience to their amusement find that this is a distraction as John and Mac would have to turn their backs to find the sweets which the children asked for on the shelves high above, meanwhile the children are rapidly and frantically grabbing handfuls of whatever lay in front of them. As soon as the children leave the shopkeepers to their delight find that most of the sweets on the counter and beyond had flourished, meaning only one thing to them.

They had got off with their devious plan and made more money then was due by selling off nearly all their stock. The keepers though it had been a great days work and business would be booming from all the money they would have made from the sweets. " There was sixty quid's worth of stock on those shelves an' most of its gone," (page 25) informs Mac to John in an exited tone. This quote backs up what I have mentioned earlier about the shopkeepers delight and how their masterful plan had worked resplendently.

However as the story progresses and John and Mac hurriedly check the tills to cash in their loot when they find to their astonishment, horror and disbelief that the till remained basically the same as how it had been just

before the children arrived into the shop. This could visibly mean one thing now ... the children had outsmarted the shopkeepers and were now on the bus laughing at them. Both shopkeepers were furious that their furtive plan had been converted into the favour of a bunch of witty youngsters from Liverpool.

The simple following quote will portray the utter disgust of the shopkeepers and the hatred they feel towards the children. ' The thievin' little bastards! '(page 25) After such a high climax in excitement the anger from the keepers is not surprising as after being brought straight back down is not pleasant at all. Another humorous scene in the play is when the children visit the zoo as a rest bite from the bus journey in scene 24. To begin with the children are escorted around the zoo with the teachers.

However the children manage to persuade the teachers (even Mr Briggs) that they should be able to make their own ways around the zoo. The request is accepted and the teachers go off for a coffee in the zoo cafe?? whilst the children begin to become physical with the animals. As the play progresses and the children are called back to continue the journey they swiftly take hold of an animal and hide them from view, as they enter the coach. However just as Mr Briggs become slightly impressed with the children's behaviour on entering the coach a frustrated and hurried looking zoo keeper enters the bus fuming.

He claims that the children had stolen the missing animals. The complaint leads to the children having to be searched or own up. The threat of being individually caught it too embarrassing. Therefore the children decide to let



out a flurry of animals from under their cloths or wherever they may have hidden them as the zookeeper tries to round up the assorted animals from the bus. The scene steadily progresses to the point where Mr Briggs bellows at the children historic fashion. The last mention to the humorous side of the play is the strong ‘ Liverpudlian’ accent used by the students.

The way in which the children speak is humorous partly to do with the fact that it is pronounced in a comical way, but it also gains a bit of humour, as it sounds uneducated and therefore almost like an alien tongue. The following quote catches a moment when Carol informs the lollipop man of what a progress class is, ‘ What? Y’don’t know what a progress class is? Its Mrs Kay’s class. Y’ go down there in the week if y’ cant do sums or writing. If y’ backward like’. The quote above is humorous as it brings out the funny ‘ Liverpudlian’ accent and as mentioned earlier sounds uneducated and basically ‘ stupid’.

Both of these aspects makes Carol sound hilarious. Dramatic irony is a technique used for the reader to feel involved in the play, as they know what’s going on whereas as characters that are actually in and involved in the play do not. The technique can also make the reader want to continue reading or watching the play, as once they are made aware of events which have been steadily been built up with dramatic irony the reader would be eagerly anticipating the result of all the commotion. An example of dramatic irony is again when the children visit the zoo.

In this particular scene the children eventually gain the trust of Mr Briggs when he agrees to have a coffee with Mrs Kay whilst his group of children

now have the privilege to wonder around the zoo without him. As the scene progress and nears the end, the children reach a cage which contains various animals. Now without the knowledge of the teachers and the zoo keepers etc, Willy Russell is building up dramatic irony as soon the children begin to seize the animals of their choice and hide them away whilst making their way back to the teachers who are surprised to find that the children are very keen to continue their journey to Wales.

Now the audience are trapped in dramatic irony and are left in intense anticipation, as they cannot wait to discover whether the children finally do get away with the animals they stole from the zoo once the bus engine starts up. At this moment only the children and the reader or audience are aware of the goings on at the zoo. As much as the audience would like for the children to get away with their audacious robbery from the zoo, however as this scene progresses we find to our dismay that eventually a frantic zookeeper arrives on the bus claiming the children were the culprits behind the mass robbery of animals from the zoo.

Eventually the children give in and hand over the zoo animals. The example above employed the dramatic irony in it, as during the scene only the children and reader were aware of the children having stolen the animals whilst the teachers and zookeepers had no idea. This brought in suspense and comedy as the reader/viewer would be left in suspense again as mentioned many other time of the outcome of the happenings and the comedy is exercised as the teachers are about to set off unaware of the robbery from the zoo. The scene in which the children visit the shop on their way to Conwy uses dramatic irony.

This is because no one else in the scene is aware of the children stealing the sweets from the shop. In this particular scene the children do actually get away with their crime. The shopkeepers John and Mac only find out about the robbery when they finally open up the tills in which they expect a large sum of profit. The teachers on the other hand never find out about the children having stealing the sweets and chocolates etc through out the whole play. During the play Mr Briggs learns that children do not always obey when being shouted at constantly for every mischief they cause.

This is when he comes across Carol in scene 35. As the scene begins we find Mr Briggs being his regular self as he begins to holler at Carol asking her to come away from the cliff and back to the coach. This goes on for quite a while as each and every time he yells at her he realises it is not working. This results in him to undertaking a physical approach as he dawns near her gradually, however Carol threatens to jump off the cliff edge as he comes any closer. Briggs backs off and again brings on his aggressive style but once more Carol answers back saying that she will not move and wishes to remain in Conwy.

After hearing this Mr Briggs begins to calm down a little and lowers his aggressive tone as he begins to converse with her. This seems to work and Briggs realises this, which influences him to continue speaking to Carol in a calmer more friendly tone. From this Briggs learns now that shouting at Carol was getting him nowhere on the other hand calming down slightly and speaking to her gently helped him to relate with her and sooner or later bring her down. Ultimately Mr Briggs does manage to bring Carol down when he offers a gentle approach by opening his arms to her.

During the play Mrs Kay learns that the life of the progress class children is very sad, and that the way she had been treating these unfortunate children was perfectly fine as it was almost certain that they would not get anywhere in life which should mean they ought to enjoy the life they have in school. Mrs Kay is disappointed when she watches the children bedazzled by the sea and sand. She is thinking of the poor children never having seen the sea before and also the fact that this may be the last time they ever see the sea again.

The way the children see the castle also saddens Mrs Kay as again in her opinion the children of this progress class having never enjoyed the luxury of seeing a broken down castle away from home. She begins to think of the children's futures, which in many cases might mean they may never go out of Liverpool so far in their lives again. During the play Mrs Kay discovers that she had been right all along to treat the children gently and in a motherly manner as again these children deserved to enjoy the life they have now because they are certainly going to face tougher lives in the future.

During the play Carol realises how much better life is outside Liverpool. Before the trip Carol had never been outside Liverpool and would be unlikely to set foot outside Liverpool for a long time afterwards. This made Carol feel depressed as she already had a slight feeling that she may never come across a place like Conwy ever again. Carol basically realises that the life outside Liverpool is a lot better which leads to her to run away from the class as they prepare to leave Conwy. After looking at scene 35 for the first time I was shocked and bewildered at how Mr Briggs' attitude towards Carol alters.

Throughout the entire play until now Briggs was portrayed as an ever-livid individual. His method to sort out a problem child was always shouting at them. Therefore this scene is gob smacking as the teacher notorious for constantly shouting and fuming alters his attitude for the first time and calms down and actually lightens his tone and speaks calmly as the following quote will show, ' Look ... Carol ... your talking as though you've given up on life already. You sound as though life for you is just ending, instead of just beginning.

Now why cant, I mean, if that'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 your old enough? Eh? (scene 35) This quote demonstrates how Briggs comforts Carol after continually being rejected with his hollering method of speaking. Briggs tells Carol she may one day be able to live here if she works hard in school, this positive speaking and new body expressions (when Briggs opens up his arms and brings down his frown to a smile) makes Carol think and after a few more minutes Carol comes off the cliff edge and agrees to go back to Liverpool.

On a whole I think that this play is very enjoyable for an audience as it is crammed with humour, comedy, and dramatic irony etc. All these techniques used by Willy Russell bring the viewer(s) great entertainment lots of laughs, and intense suspense through the dramatic irony. The humour keeps the reader and audience happy and cheerful and gives them a little giggle once in a while in scenes such as the zoo and shop scenarios. The dramatic irony on the other hand keeps the audience interested in the outcomes of again the zoo scenes and shop scenes.

The cliff scene also provides a sort of suspense as the audience are left keen to find out what Carol decides as they are not aware of the fact that Briggs can be pleasant towards the children which would never allow them to predict that a good ending may come from the encounter Carol has with Mr Briggs. The play makes the audience think about how lucky the children today are when compared to the children in progress classes in the 1970's.

Today we do not have ' progress classes' which gives an even chance for everyone to make something of himself or herself. Whereas the children of the progress class in those days were doomed to an unpleasant future full of misery and suffering etc. All children now can have dreams and make them come true unlike Carol who was certainly not going to have her dream of living in a place like Conwy as she was a ' liverpudlian' and a pupil of the progress class which are the perfect mixture for a future of hard factory work and financial suffering etc.

Children now have a better future because as mentioned before they all have an even chance, which means they can have dreams of living somewhere pleasant and actually have it come true through hard work. In all basically the play made me personally feel how lucky I am to be a student of the present as I have all the facilities for success and a bright future if I take them to my advantage unlike the students of the depression Britain had during the 1970's.