

Dear teachers,

the following questions and topics are just ideas and suggestions to prepare yourself and your students for our performance of "*We Happy Few*" by Imogen Stubbs. Please add, remove, and change as much as you like.

We are looking forward to seeing you in the theatre from 23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> of June and are always happy to receive feedback on this pack and the performance from you,

*The Parlement of Foules*

### **Lesson 1: World War II- A “Total War”**

World War II was one of the deadliest and most costly wars in human history. Nearly every world power, including both Germany and Great Britain, were directly involved in the war. The war did not only affect the military forces but especially civilians as well.

#### **Task:**

-How would you define “total war”?

(World War II was a “total war” in that all civilians were expected to lend a hand in the war effort.)

-Form groups of up to 4 people. Create and give a short presentation about how a certain group of people could contribute to the war effort. Some examples of groups could be:

- Children
- Senior citizens
- Injured or disabled people (unable to fight in the war)
- Women (generally were not allowed to fight in the war)
- Factories/Factory Workers

For more information on the concept of “total war” in World War II, visit this site:

[http://ibatpv.org/projects/worldwarII/total\\_war.htm](http://ibatpv.org/projects/worldwarII/total_war.htm)

In addition, this video may help you better understand the impact World War II had on the homefront.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPq1x7Qib-I>

### **Lesson 2: Winston Churchill**

Winston Churchill is regarded as one of the most influential leaders in world history. In the dark days of World War II, Churchill led the United Kingdom with fierce determination and an undying commitment to victory.

During his time as Prime Minister, Churchill was well-known for his poignant speeches, which were broadcast to the British people through radio. These speeches helped to keep the British people motivated and optimistic about the months ahead, despite the long battle they knew was coming.

During his first speech to the House of Commons after being elected Prime Minister, Churchill famously uttered the line “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.”

#### **Task:**

Churchill’s full speech can be heard with this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8TlkN-dcDck>

-Discuss the importance of this speech, given the circumstances that the United Kingdom was in at that time.

-Why was it so crucial for Churchill to make a speech of this kind? (the previous Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, had just resigned, as his country had lost faith in his government's ability to properly handle the war)

This was not the only memorable and important speech Churchill would make. Here are links to two more of Churchill's speeches.

"We Shall Never Surrender"- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-s9ji6XdAY>

"This Was Their Finest Hour"- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfQTCcbb8kU>

-Discuss the meaning behind each of these speeches, can you guess what major events in the war these speeches were in response to?

After hearing these speeches, you might be interested to learn that Churchill struggled with a speech impediment for most of his life. His ability to work through this disorder, and deliver some of the most important speeches in world history, is truly inspiring to many.

For more information on Winston Churchill, be sure to visit

<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/>

### **Lesson 3: Women in WWII - We can do it!**

How might British women's lives have been different during the war? What opportunities and difficulties did they face? How did they contribute to the war effort? What differences can you think of between women in Germany and women in Britain?

**Task:** Read the following text. [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women\\_WW2.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/women_WW2.htm)

-Imagine you are a woman in WWII Britain. Which of the jobs would you have liked to do and why?

-In groups of up to four people, create an advertisement poster for the job you have chosen to persuade other women to join. Present the poster in front of your classmates.

-At the end of the text, you find some information on German women during the war. How do you feel about their role? Do you find it sensible/useful? Why or why not? Why do you think, Hitler might have thought that way?

### **Lesson 4: Shakespeare - A National Poet**

Though the Artemis Players do not exclusively play Shakespeare the Bard is at the heart and soul of *We Happy Few*. To begin with collect some reasons why you think the theatre group in the play decides to play Shakespeare during WW2 to people all over Britain.

Actors from "Shakespeare in Love" explain Shakespeare, his words and plays:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTtPW-zT45k>

**Task:** “A national poet or national bard is a poet held by tradition and popular acclaim to represent the identity, beliefs and principles of a particular national culture.” (cf. Nemoianu, “National Poets' in the Romantic Age: Emergence and Importance.” Romantic Poetry)

With this quote in mind, find out why William Shakespeare is called the “English national poet.” What does this title mean and how does it make Shakespeare such an important author 400 years later?

**Task:** One of the most important Shakespeare plays for *We Happy Few* is *Henry V*. The title itself is taken from the St. Crispin's day speech.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-yZNMWFqvM>

WESTMORELAND. O that we now had here  
But one ten thousand of those men in England  
That do no work to-day!

KING. What's he that wishes so?  
My cousin, Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin;  
If we are mark'd to die, we are enow  
To do our country loss; and if to live,  
The fewer men, the greater share of honour.  
God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.  
By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,  
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;  
It yearns me not if men my garments wear;  
Such outward things dwell not in my desires.  
But if it be a sin to covet honour,  
I am the most offending soul alive.  
No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England.  
God's peace! I would not lose so great an honour  
As one man more methinks would share from me  
For the best hope I have. O, do not wish one more!  
Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host,  
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,  
Let him depart; his passport shall be made,  
And crowns for convoy put into his purse;  
We would not die in that man's company  
That fears his fellowship to die with us.  
This day is call'd the feast of Crispian.  
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,  
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,  
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.

Preparation material for “*We Happy Few*” by Imogen Stubbs, performed by *The Parlement of Foules*

He that shall live this day, and see old age,  
 Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,  
 And say "To-morrow is Saint Crispian."  
 Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars,  
 And say "These wounds I had on Crispin's day."  
 Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,  
 But he'll remember, with advantages,  
 What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,  
 Familiar in his mouth as household words-  
 Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,  
 Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester-  
 Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb'ed.  
 This story shall the good man teach his son;  
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,  
 From this day to the ending of the world,  
 But we in it shall be remembered-  
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
 For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
 This day shall gentle his condition;  
 And gentlemen in England now-a-bed  
 Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,  
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

Watch the speech and discuss why it could be so important to the play. What is the situation/the topic? Why do you think did Imogen Stubbs chose this title and what does it tell us about the play and the people in it?

### Lesson 5: Characters in the Play

**Hetty Oak** has been working in the theatre all her adult life. She started out in the lighting and costume departments, but when the director left, she took over. Hetty reigns with a firm hand but is always fair to others and gives support to all who need it. She does not really like having all the power and responsibility but would rather do things herself than seeing them done badly. She is often working long hours to keep her mind occupied and not think about her past and a very special person who is currently fighting in the war.

**Flora Pelmet** is Hetty's best friend and they complement each other in almost everything. They met while working in a theatre and now live together with Flora's cousin Reggie. Flora does what she can to help Hetty in putting the Artemis Players together and helps with organising rehearsals and performances. She is a very nice

person and in a positive mood most of the time. That is why she is on very good terms with almost all Artemis Players. What she does not like is people being rude to others. Flora's positive attitude is her way of dealing with life's burdens.

**Helen Irving** is a middle-aged actress and mother to Rosalind. Her bitchy, loud and drunken attitude towards her daughter and the others only serves to hide her very inner feelings. In fact, she is a very desperate woman who has witnessed /faced a lot of tragedy in her life and is indeed capable of love.

**Rosalind Roberts** is in her early twenties and recently graduated from a top drama school in London. Despite the advantages her social class has to offer and her educational past, Rosalind is an insecure young woman with a difficult relationship towards her bitter mother, who has been harshly criticizing Rosalind all her life. The constant nagging criticism of her personality, talents, and femininity often hold her back and keep her from living up to her full potential. Being kind, helpful, engaging and easy-going, Ros soon becomes a beloved member of the Artemis Players and is able to get a better perspective on her role in life.

**Charlie (Charlotte Peters)** is a 19 year old tomboyish girl, who has spent most of her childhood with her two older brothers. Through the close bond with her oldest brother Tommy, she has developed a passion for cars. Therefore, she knows a lot about them and is somewhat skilled as a mechanic. Since she has graduated from school, she has been supporting herself with minor, small jobs, feeling unfulfilled and restless, while her two brothers are serving in the war.

**Jocelyn Thrupp** is an elderly lady who is brought into the group after she finds a venue for the Artemis Players' first performance. The fact that she has a passion, but no talent, for singing is one of her many eccentric characteristics. She is often too caught up in her own thoughts to pay much attention to her surroundings. This often leads to her being not quite up to speed with what is happening around her. Nevertheless, Jocelyn's heart is in the right place and she is always ready to help others.

**Ivy** is Reggie's maid. She is not very talented at her job but her good heart and determination to try keep her employed. Ivy grew up in an orphanage and has never had a family but she tries to make the best of things and live a happy life. Her talent for singing cheers herself as well as those around her and her passion for music bring her and Joseph closer.

**Joseph Rosenbaum** is a 25 years old German Jew seeking refuge from persecution in Germany. He is travelling with his mother, Gertrude, while his father, a doctor, stays in Germany to help people in need. Joseph has been taught English by his father who read out Shakespeare plays to him;

therefore, his English is fairly extraordinary. He is well-mannered and rather modest, but he enjoys social interaction and, like his father, enjoys supporting other people.

**Gertrude Rosenbaum** had to leave her husband behind when she and her son Joseph fled from the Nazis. She has difficulties adapting to life in England, because she does not speak the language and misses her old life and especially her husband very much. Her music and her son are the two things she has left, which is why she would protect them with all her strength.

**Reggie** is Flora's cousin and a non-acting supporter of the Artemis Players. He appears every now and then as a helping hand and a caring companion.

Task: With these characters, which plotlines could you imagine? What might happen in the play? Which friendships or enmities might develop?

Draw a possible character "web" (a diagram indicating as many relationships as possible)

### Lesson 6: Conflicts and Minorities

As learned in the first lesson on the characters, the characters of our play all arrive with their special kind of baggage. To understand these backgrounds and how they shaped the characters, prepare some short presentations on the following groups of people, their social position, rights, public opinion on them etc. in Britain during WW2. Also consider the influence of age, class etc.

- single mothers
- single women without a family to support them
- actresses
- (Jewish) refugees
- homosexual people
- teenage mothers

After the presentations discuss how these personal situations may shape and influence the characters and their relationships with others.

**Extra source:** Judith Kerr is a British writer with German roots. Being Jewish, she and her family fled from the Nazis in the 1930s. She has written partly-autobiographical books about her time as a refugee. They are a very interesting first hand account of what it was like to grow up in wartime Europe. And they are not too long... ;-)

*When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*

*Bombs on Aunt Dainty*

*A Small Person Far Away*

## Lesson 7: Staging the Play

Read the short plot summary.

How do you imagine the stage? What might the costumes/light be like? Are there any specific props you would find very important?

The scene changes in the play are often very fast. How could that be solved on stage?

There will be music at some points in the play. Which kinds of music could you imagine? Which kinds would you choose? Would you rather have live music or play recordings or both? What could be the reasons to use either of them?

“We Happy Few” is a play about a group of women who form a travelling theatre group during the 2nd World War in Britain. Hetty Oaks and Flora Pelmet are the driving forces of the enterprise because they refuse to spend the wars “making Chutney and knitting pom pom hats”, as Hetty puts it. They hold auditions and take young Rosalind and Charlie into their group, as well as Flora’s cousin’s maid Yvi. Elderly socialite Jocelyn, Rosalind’s mother Helen and two refugees from Germany, Gertrude and Joseph, complete the group. On their way, the “Artemis Players” encounter sexist ministry officials, food rationing and the frequent loss of props. They play in schools, church halls, town halls and wherever they are wanted. But this many people spending this much time together must lead to conflicts and the Artemis Players are on the tip of breaking apart more than just once. But their common feeling of purpose and their passion keep them going until they make history as extraordinary performers and preservers of culture during Britain’s darkest days and finest hour.

## Lesson 8: Reflection

How did you like the play? Could you follow the action well? Were the actors easy to understand? Was the language difficult?

How accurate was your character web? Were there surprises in the plot?

Did you relate to one character in particular? Why?

How did you like the Shakespeare scenes? Were they comprehensible? Did they fit in well? Why? Why not? What made them (not) fit in?

What do you think about the ending of the play? What do you think the characters did after the war? How did their lives proceed?

The schools pack for “We Happy Few” has been created by Hannah Elleringmann, Franziska Ptok and Eric Penkala. Edited and assembled by Franziska Ptok

Preparation material for “We Happy Few” by Imogen Stubbs, performed by *The Parlement of Foules*