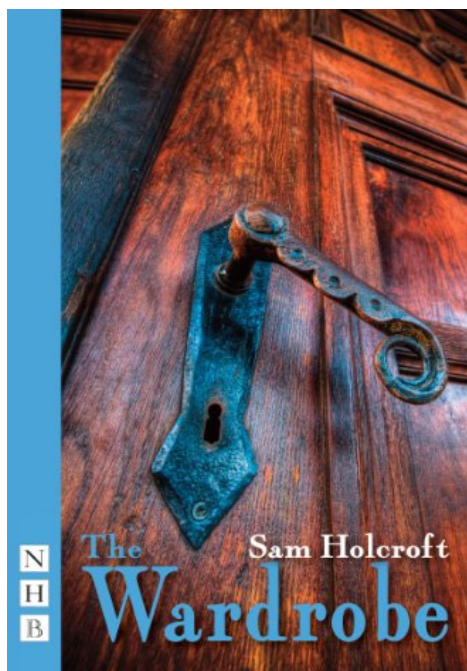


# Drama Spotlight: Key Stage 3



**The Wardrobe** by  
Sam Holcroft  
Published: 2014  
Price: £9.99

## What is the play about?

This play offers your Year 9s or even your GCSE students some great chances for both original scripted and devised drama work. The premise of the play is simple: it follows a wardrobe built in the Tudor times that has survived to the present day. We visit it at various times throughout its history and look at the different reasons young people climbed into it. For example, in one scene we see a young Elizabeth of York (Henry VIII's grandmother) hiding in there with her sister. Or, another scene shows a group of boys from a Catholic boarding school in 1888 reading newspaper articles about Jack the Ripper.

Each of the 12 scenes is set at a different time, with different characters. The one thing they have in common is the wardrobe. Therefore, you would not necessarily have to study the whole play—you could dip in and out of the scenes. Each group could be given a different scene.

Students could be encouraged to devise their own piece of drama, picking their own historical time and have characters hiding in the wardrobe. It would be a great chance to explore physical theatre and confine your acting to a space the size of a wardrobe. It's a play that will spark imagination with a diverse range of characters and time settings.

## How could I teach this play?

We think that this play would be great to be use with Year 9s. There's no swearing and it requires absolutely no set design....you just need to use a space which is the size of a wardrobe and let the children use their imagination—perhaps use stage blocks to create the confined space, or even just draw the space on the floor with chalk.

It would be great to explore the darkness of the setting, inside a wardrobe. You could explore how this affects the atmosphere and tension on stage, as well as ways in which the actors will alter their behaviour, voice, actions etc. as a result. Perhaps children could even be encouraged to make their own 'den' areas in which to perform scenes.

The play could be followed sequentially with a class or certain scenes could be used. You do not need to follow the entire play but each group could focus upon a different scene and instead focus upon the specific historical period and characters in each, rather than studying the play as a whole. It's a really flexible play and that's what makes it a great choice for teaching. Each scene can be treated as a stand-alone, mini play.

In terms of the historical periods it covers, we have listed these for you:

Scene 1: 1485. Royal Bedchamber.

Scene 2: 1633, England—A Spanish family who have fled after the Spanish Inquisition.

Scene 3: 1644, English Civil War

Scene 4: 1665, Great Plague of London

Scene 5: 1665-1770

Scene 6: 1780

Scene 7: 1805, Liverpool

Scene 8: 1827, Industrial Revolution

Scene 9: 1888 Boys' Catholic Boarding School

Scene 10: 1916, an auction house

Scene 11: 1950, anywhere in England following the publication of *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*

Scene 12: 2014, a museum in Britain.

Perhaps you could tie the context into a history topic that the children are studying.

This play is a great to teach students about the power of both setting and context in drama. The play uses exactly the same setting—the wardrobe, but the context changes each time. It will encourage students to realise that context affects a variety of performance aspects such as costume, language, props, character interaction, themes etc..

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It is a great play to look at and then use to stimulate and create original drama. Why not look at a selection of different scenes and then ask students to create their own scene in the wardrobe—they can use a historical period and characters of their own choosing. Or, why not choose the period and context for them, perhaps depending upon topical events, such as the 100 year anniversary of World War 1, or events in the news—the spread of Ebola or political instability in countries such as Afghanistan. The possibilities are endless.

The play will also offer the chance to look at some interesting drama theory. The scenes are very character-focused and so Stanislavski's approaches would work well when studying this play.

If you have more able students, the play offers many opportunities to study higher level theory. Why not introduce the students to the concept of constructivist set designs and let them create a three dimensional set design for the wardrobe which uses features such as levels, strange angles and does away with decorative and superfluous set design. You could then look at how Meyerhold used this form, as well as looking into famous names such as Kafka, Malevich or Popova. Students could then be encouraged to think about expressionism, or symbolism rather than realism and this could influence how they both stage and set the play. They could consider how symbolism could be used in each scene to help convey the contextual changes as the scenes change.

## Drama games to use with this play



To get used to the confined acting space, students could lie on the ground, closing their eyes. Explain that when they open their eyes they should imagine they are in the wardrobe and explore this environment for the first time using their bodies. As the game progresses you could shout out noises that are happening outside of the wardrobe and ask the students to react, such as 'you hear gun shots', or 'a murderer is on the loose.'

Pick a children's fairytale and improvise a scene which involves certain characters from that fairytale in the wardrobe.

Mix together characters in the wardrobe, from different scenes. For example, put the child from the scene set in 2014 in the wardrobe with Elizabeth of York.

Imagine, at any point, during any of the scenes, one character can step outside the wardrobe and be in Narnia or another fictional land.

Put a surprise in the wardrobe and ask the actors to find it and respond in character to it. Or, for the more able, don't put an object in, perhaps give them an empty box—students should imagine that they find an item and should respond to it.

Try to explore the idea of contradiction. Create a split scene—one scene should happen outside the wardrobe, which completely contradicts and contrasts the scene inside the wardrobe. Link this to Brecht's idea that he would often juxtapose music with action on stage.

Explore the function of the wardrobe and the space it represents to its inhabitants. For example, ask students to improvise a scene in the wardrobe—perhaps as children in 2014 who are playing a game in there. Then shout out different wardrobe functions and children should change their improvisations accordingly, such as 'it's a safe place,' or 'it's a place that will scare you,' or, 'it's an adventure.' You could play this game again, but this time shout out different contexts happening around the wardrobe—suggestions: a terrorist attack has occurred, a Royal Wedding is happening in the next room, the Mafia are holding an important meeting outside etc..