SHIRLEY VALENTINE

STUDY GUIDE

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THE CANADIAN STAGE COMPANY
Welcome to our 08.09 production of Willy Russell’s *Shirley Valentine*, directed by Roy Surette. This play contains some challenging content, most appropriate for senior students. The material is termed a “Kitchen Sink Drama,” and is rich with content. Students may find Shirley’s inner turmoil and personal concerns reflective of their own lives, despite the surface differences. Other subject links include: Family Studies, Gender Studies, English, Sociology, Philosophy, and Travel and Tourism. For details on those content links, see page five.

As with all of our productions, we understand how valuable it is for teachers to prepare their students so they know what to expect when coming to the theatre. We are pleased to provide suggestions for numerous activities, prepared by experienced educators, and we recommend using a minimum of two in-class sessions on pre-performance activities and at least one session post-performance. We strongly encourage teachers to discuss and explore themes from this exciting play. If you have any questions, ideas or concerns, contact us at Canadian Stage.

Sincerely,

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# Your Guide to Live Theatre

**To all educators:**
We recommend that you go over the following simple rules of live theatre etiquette to ensure that your students have a positive experience and get the most out of the show.

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<tr>
<th>WHAT’S HOT</th>
<th>WHAT’S NOT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arriving at the theatre with enough time before the show to get your tickets and get to your seat.</td>
<td>Showing up once the play has started... you will not be let in until an appropriate break in the show and you may not be able to sit with your class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allowing other patrons through the lobby and to the door, and helping senior citizens with heavy doors.</td>
<td>Crowding the front lobby or doors so other patrons cannot get through, both before and after the performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sitting and staying in your assigned seat. Relaxing in your seat before the show by keeping your feet on the floor.</td>
<td>Leaving your hat on so that the person behind you is watching the play through the brim.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turning off any cell phones and pagers before the play begins.</td>
<td>Bringing food and drinks into the theatre—they are not allowed past the lobby. This includes gum!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once the play has started, checking out the actors... who are they, what are they saying, what’s going on between them?</td>
<td>Unwrapping noisy candy during the performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping any food or drinks in your bag. At intermission, you can enjoy them in the lobby.</td>
<td>Talking once the performance has begun—this includes blackouts!</td>
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<td>Remembering that the actors welcome and rely on your responses.</td>
<td>Text messaging during the performance. While it seems innocent enough, the lit screen distracts actors and those around you who are trying to concentrate on the play.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being really open with your friends, teachers, parents about what you liked and didn’t like about the play. (But waiting to discuss it until after the play is over.)</td>
<td>Forgetting that, unlike television, the people on stage are actually real and are affected by your responses, good and bad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wearing your favourite, comfortable clothing.</td>
<td>Playing with or throwing anything in your bags or pockets before, after or during the performance. You may be removed from the theatre for doing so.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realizing that when the lights go out, the play begins and whatever you had to talk about can wait.</td>
<td>Talking on a cellular phone or listening to your iPod/mp3/etc. while the performance is on. You may be asked to leave for doing so!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respecting the fact that flashlights, lighters and laser pens are not only distracting for the actors and other patrons, but can also be very dangerous.</td>
<td>Deciding that you don’t like going to the theatre before you’ve even walked in the door.</td>
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### FAMILY STUDIES

Set in Liverpool in the mid-1980’s, *Shirley Valentine* offers a unique look into a sub-culture of stagnancy within a family setting. *Kitchen sink dramas* rose to popularity in this time because they told the story of the *everyday*. Yet, *Shirley Valentine* explores what happens when someone attempts to break away from that everyday. Students will see a *family culture* that they are not familiar with—one that breeds depression and dissatisfaction, where duty and tradition come before desire and passion.

### ENGLISH

Language and dialect play a huge part in *Shirley Valentine*. The inflection of Willy Russell’s writing is most evident when spoken aloud. Explore the *culture of dialect*, and how character, societal perceptions, and story are affected by the way in which someone speaks. Learn about the *slang* of different dialects in the English-speaking world, while accessing the theatrical challenges associated with multiple *character voices*.

### GENDER STUDIES

The status of women in the mid-1980’s in Liverpool may seem unrecognizable to students in contemporary Canadian society. Yet, issues of *gender equity* remain prominent in Canadian society: employment, social status, salary scale, benefits, families, and abusive situations. Students can explore the challenges that women face in a contemporary Canada, in contrast to Shirley Valentine’s struggles. Students may find that Shirley’s internal turmoil, associated with her *status*, is reflective of their own hidden concerns.

### PHILOSOPHY

Morality (in its traditional sense) is treated unconventionally in the drama of *Shirley Valentine*. As Shirley liberates herself from an emotionally abusive situation, and she removes the bounds of her *societal status*, she feels joy in her newly-created self. However, alongside this forward-movement, Shirley also ends up being unfaithful to her husband and leaving her family for a stress-free existence in Greece. Students can explore how our increasingly secular society is *self-focussed*. Discuss when it is appropriate to create happiness for oneself, despite the *negative consequences* for your loved ones.

### SOCIOLOGY

*Shirley Valentine* offers a unique opportunity to explore the personal effects of *societal values* in a specific *sub-culture*. Both the time and the location of the play dictate a number of social and societal beliefs which inform and impact Shirley’s life. Students can discover the internal workings of a sub-culture, and how a sub-culture demands certain things of its members. Explore Liverpool in the mid-1980’s from the perspective of Canada in 2008. The results may be more surprising than you think!

### TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Greece as a destination represents an ideal for Shirley that she can only access by taking the trip. Selling a location and/or country is the essence of the travel and tourism sector. Giving atmosphere to a place, making it the “perfect destination” is what tourism is all about. Shirley references the food, the people, the activities and the scenery of Greece as the reasons for her to stay. Students can explore what makes a destination desirable, how to communicate that idea, and how to brand a destination rather than a special hotel, resort or attraction.
THE LIFE AND WORK OF WILLY RUSSELL

Early Years
Willy Russell was born in Whiston, near Liverpool in 1947 and has lived in Liverpool since the age of five. He watched the Beatles perform in the late 50’s, their pre-fame days, and was inspired to write songs. He says he was “nursing a secret desire to write. I thought that to do real writing, you had to wear tweeds, smoke a pipe and come from somewhere called Oxbridge. It seemed to me, though, that anybody, from whatever background, could write songs.”

Struggling through school and dropping out at the age of fifteen, Russell was encouraged by his mother to become a hairdresser. Although he was never good at dressing hair, his days working in the salon improved his listening skills. This, combined with having been raised in a family of women, has influenced his creation of strong but often invisible women. About his upbringing he says, “We didn’t live in a classic extended family, but there were all my aunties, cousins, my mum and granny. It was after the war and all the men were on shift in the factories, so I was brought up in a very maternalistic atmosphere, and I suppose I must have spent a lot of time sitting un-noticed but absorbing the women’s view of the world. You know what adults are like when they’re all together, talking; they think a small child isn’t interested or isn’t taking it in. But I think I did - not by consciously doing so. I think I absorbed it through my pores.”

In 1967 Russell returned to college, began his teacher training and at this time became interested in writing drama. He saw a production at Liverpool Everyman Theatre of A Day in the Death of Joe Egg and soon after he says, “I fumbled around writing plays.” His so-called fumblings won him The Evening Standard and London Theatre Critic Award for best musical in 1974 for his musical about the Beatles, John, Paul, George, Ringo ... and Bert. The production ran for eight weeks at Liverpool Everyman Theatre before it was transferred to the West End. This early success allowed Russell the freedom to work as a fulltime playwright, however, his new career as a playwright was also a result of the circumstances in England at that time. He explains:

What happened then was there was this huge explosion of regional writing which was just phenomenal. It only lasted a very short time because by the time Thatcher realized there weren’t any votes in the Arts, in and around 1985, the suits moved in and so it made it impossible to put plays on unless they either appealed to a constituency or if they ticked all the right boxes...There is no way a writer today could start in the way myself and other writers of my generation did. In fact, I very much doubt they would even get near the door let alone get a foot in it, which is just wrong on so many levels. You have to be a lot more determined now, a lot more hard faced and persistent and you shouldn’t have to be. The job of a writer is to write what he or she wants to write and not to be forced into what fits the current trend, because nobody can afford to take that chance anymore to see if a writer has what it takes.

The Famous “Poetry of Common Speech”
Willy Russell has since made a name for himself as one of England’s most celebrated contemporary dramatists, a popularity earned by writing to engage his audience with what he calls, “The Poetry of Common Speech.” According to Russell, “theatre is a potently poetic medium not, for one second here, do I mean flowery and excessive verbiage - quite the reverse. Theatre is an absolute distillation, a place in which the imagination can soar.” Some highbrow critics of the London Press believe that national theatre is culture and regional theatre, such as the work produced in The West End, is merely entertainment. This false distinction provokes strong remarks from Russell. He believes that middle class culture is a creation of the middle class for the middle class and withheld from the working class whose traditions are steeped in the spoken word. “They haven't accepted literacy yet,” he continues. “That's why I write for the theatre, because it's concerned with the spoken rather than the written word.”

Although some of the London critics patronizingly dismiss him as “the housewives' choice,” his numerous creative awards and academic honours speak volumes to the contrary; Shirley Valentine alone landed Russell the 1988 Olivier Award for Best New Comedy and 1990 Evening Standard British Film Award for Best Screenplay, as well as a BAFTA nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay, a Golden Globe nomination for Best Motion Picture - Comedy/Musical, and a Tony Award nomination for Best Play. He is also an acclaimed musician, songwriter, screenwriter and novelist.
**LIVERPOOL HUMOUR**

Besides its football fanatics, delicious scouse and legendary musicians, Liverpool is also known for its biting humour, which is fast, dry and usually has a dark side that does not invoke pity but rather a moment of recognition. It is no wonder that Willy Russell uses comedy so artfully in his writing. Russell places his working class characters in challenging situations, yet his belief in the goodness at the heart of humanity is reflected in what he writes. His ability to communicate this goodness with humour makes his work so appealing. In *Shirley Valentine*, he very quickly engages the audience's sympathy for Shirley and her circumstances by showing us her loneliness, regret and unhappiness, expressed through her biting humour.

Another celebrated English dramatist and fellow BAFTA award winner, Jack Rosenthal said the most important aim of his plays is to make people laugh “Because then they are laughing at themselves. I believe comedy is the best way to learn the truth about ourselves. Maybe it’s no accident that human beings are the only animals that laugh.” Russell’s view of comedy is similar and his influences reflect that similarity. When asked who is favourite authors are, Russell answered, “In no particular order, Bob Dylan, William Shakespeare, Alan Bennett, Alan Ayckbourn, Anon, Lennon & McCartney, Robert Browning, Brian Patten, Randy Newman, Noel Coward, Bertolt Brecht, John Irvine, Joni Mitchell, Billy Connolly, Charles Dickens, and many, many, many, more. And they’re all favourites because, in their various ways, and often through laughter, they all move me deeply.”

Willy Russell discusses comedy: “Playing tragedy is easy, comedy isn’t ...Comedy doesn’t pull its punches and if it’s not working then its not working and has to go.” Using comedy to convey the complexity of human life is not easy; Russell proudly asserts, “The craft and skill of playwriting is something that I treasure.” He studied drama for four years “with great, great lecturers...Learning why existing plays work from the inside” and the piece of advice he always gives to aspiring dramatists is to “Go away and learn about drama.”

**THE CHARACTER**

Shirley Valentine is one of Willy Russell’s most famous characters: wise, funny and always acerbic. She started her life full of passion and promise, but this spirit has been slowly and gradually eroded beyond recognition by years of putdowns, a loveless marriage, domineering children and forced complacency. Her journey of self-discovery is driven by the continual push and pull between her sarcastic zest and her melancholic longing for a different way of life, a new way of seeing and being seen by her world. The theme of flight, be it from the self, a situation or from circumstance, is central in this huge theatrical hit.

**Archetype vs. Stereotype**

In an interview with John Gill for the book *Willy Russell and His Plays*, Russell was asked if his secret to success is rooted in his ability to create relatable archetype characters. He replied: “I think it is the secret of all successful drama. Why is Willy Loman [Death of a Salesman] possible, and rich as a character? Not because he is a stereotype, although lots of what he does is stereotypical. More importantly he is an archetype, so he speaks to us at belly and heart level as well as a mind level.” Is Shirley Bradshaw an archetype? Is Shirley Valentine an archetype? Or, does the combination of these different facets of her personality make her a rich and relatable character?
Kitchen Sink Drama

Kitchen Sink Drama is a sub-genre of British drama which depicts a realistic and bleak view of family life. These stories were motivated by the social and political climate of post-war Britain and brought attention to the destruction of moral values caused by consumerism and the breakdown of community. The young were adopting a socialist political outlook, directing their anger against the previous generation and power of the establishment: censorship, sexual repression, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and conscription. Theatre was moving in a new direction, allowing the general public (everyone other than the stuffy middle-age bourgeois patrons) to find relatable characters and experiences represented onstage. These plays were dubbed “Kitchen Sink Dramas,” since they were often set in the kitchen of an urban flat, with a mundane setting emphasizing the banal reality of life. This movement began with John Osborn’s seminal 1956 play Look Back in Anger, which The Royal Court Theatre flyer described as an “intensely personal play” and “a disturbing comment on Osborne’s own generation”:

On May 8, 1956 a theatrical atom bomb was dropped by the English Stage Company on the stage of the Royal Court Theatre...the hitherto unsuccessful John Osborne saw success come to him overnight, the generation which has adopted aggression as its passport to life found a ready-made excuse for its behaviours, and hundreds of men found themselves dubbed the angry young men. Angry at what? Angry because their grandfathers and fathers had launched the world into two great wars? Angry because of their own incompetence? Or, perhaps, angry at the futility of life with no apparent hope?” - Streatham News (April 5, 1957)

Family tensions are often at the fore of these stories, with realistic marital, parental, sibling and community conflicts. Dramas such as John Osborne’s Look Back in Anger, Arnold Wesker’s The Kitchen, Tennessee Williams’ The Glass Menagerie and Shelagh Delaney’s A Taste of Honey depict the alienation of the young and class warfare as epidemics. The dismal and unrelentingly negative outlook of these works earned these playwrights the moniker of “The Angry Young Men.” There are many theories about why this theatrical experience is valuable. Perhaps these stories remind audiences of their own lives. Seeing oneself in a character onstage inherently increases one’s resonance with a piece of theatre. Perhaps these plays increase one’s awareness of the society surrounding them. These plays might also serve as a cathartic exercise for the writer, meant to relieve the trauma and stress of a deprived childhood.

The stories of Kitchen Sink Realism usually focus on a pessimistic working class man and his social problems from within a mundane setting. Shirley Valentine obviously differs from this tradition since it centers around the life and transformation of a woman. Unlike the work of ‘The Angry Young Men,’ Willy Russell’s work shows that anyone is capable of change, whatever obstacles may be in their path. Russell also uses humour, a device often lacking in Kitchen Sink Realism. Despite the obvious differences, there is a strong connection between this tradition and Shirley Valentine. We are introduced to the social problems of our working class heroine in her kitchen. Willy Russell quickly frees her from the dreary confines of the Liverpudlian kitchen sink. Even at the beginning we can see the strong, rebellious and independent aspects of Shirley’s character stand out against this domestic humdrum.

Source:
GREECE: A TRAVELLER’S DESTINATION

Greece is situated in Southeastern Europe, with an area of 131,957 sq.km. and a population of 10,964,020.

Athens is the capital of Greece with a population of 3,192,606.

Local time is GMT +2 hours.

The Hellenic Republic is a Presidential Parliamentary Democracy.

President of the Hellenic Republic: Mr Karolos Papoulias.

Prime Minister: Mr Constantinos Karamanlis.

Parliament: Three hundred elected members with elections held every four years.

Greece is a member state of E.U. since 1981.

The currency is the Euro.

The Greek economy adopts the principles of free enterprise and is bound by the regulations of international organisations such as ECOFIN and WTO, of which it is a member.
**Comedic Timing**

Comedic timing is the use of rhythm and tempo or pace to enhance comedy and humour, since the timing of a joke's delivery, verbal or physical, directly influences its comic effect.

**A Verbal Pause (Pregnant or Otherwise)**

A beat, or pause, is often employed for this purpose. Pausing heightens the suspense before delivery of the expected punch line and allows the audience time to recognize the joke and react or discern inconspicuous content (i.e. what the speaker is really thinking about.) A pause used to build suspense is often called a “pregnant pause” - classically defined as “many possibilities.” They are often used at the end of a comically awkward statement or in the silence after a seemingly non-comic phrase to build up a comeback. American comedian Jack Benny gained fame for his weekly radio show *The Jack Benny Program* (1932-1955) and was known for his perfected pregnant pauses. It is very important to use beats, as simply racing through a comic piece would spoil the effect of many of the jokes. Sacha Baron Cohen provides a wonderful example of the importance of comic timing in his mockumentary *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. Focus specifically on the clip of Borat being coached on the importance of comic timing. He struggles with the proper pause in the statement “That suit is black (pause) NOT!”

- Discuss how the comic timing in this routine of comic timing is successful.
- Watch Rowan Atkinson’s fabulous comic timing in any of his Mister Bean routines.
- Listen to over 610 free episodes of the *Jack Benny Radio Show* online at http://www.otr.net/?p=jbny

**Standup**

Following in the tradition of Jack Benny, standup comedians are also masters of timing. Jerry Seinfeld, Steven Wright, Chris Rock, and Bob Newhart all use timing a little differently. Watch a clip of each comedian and compare their use of rhythm and tempo. Their routines are almost like songs, so try and describe them in musical terms. The Abbott & Costello “Who’s on First” routine is another wonderful example of comic timing as being almost musical. Costello (the shorter of the two) speaks randomly at a high pitch, while Abbott (the thin one) speaks metered and steadily, with a low gritty voice: a tiny trumpet and a scratchy bass.

**Physical Comedy & Slap Stick**

Charlie Chaplin is a must-watch for physical comic timing, as he always relied on the physical joke being made at just the right time. His influence can be seen every subsequent slapstick comedian. Show some Chaplin Short Comedy classics and notice how the audience is always built up, to just the right level, before any joke is delivered. (i.e. A bucket of water is dropped on someone’s head.) Some great examples include: “A Woman,” “The Bank,” “The Immigrant,” “The Rink,” and “Easy Street.”

*Source:*

**TRAINING COMEDIC TIMING**

**Synchro-Clap**
Stand everyone in a circle. Two people face each other and clap hands simultaneously. Every clap should sound as if only one person is clapping. The ‘receiving’ player then turns to their right and does a synchro-clap with the next person. And so on. Once a firm rhythm is established, experiment with accelerating and decelerating as a group. You can also sing a song to the rhythm of the synchro-claps and change direction without dropping a beat if the ‘receiver’ passes the clap back to the ‘passer,’ instead of to their right.

**Count to 10**
Everyone stands in a tight circle shoulder to shoulder and they close their eyes. They try to count to 10 (or 20). Only 1 person can say a number at a time. If more than 1 says the same number they have to start over again.

**Restaurant**
Set up 3 tables (A, B, C) with two players sitting at each. Give each couple a topic for discussion. To begin, table A will talk, while the others just go about trying not to pull focus. Call table B and the focus will shift to their conversation, as table A has to stop mid sentence/mid word. Call all the tables in a random order. After a while let them give and take focus on their own, by feeling the rhythm of the conversations and the restaurant scene they are creating.

**Categories**
Sitting in a circle, establish one-two rhythm (clap-snap) with the class. The leader calls out the following lines and the class echoes. Lines are said on the clap: “Categories,” “Names of,” “Chocolate bars,” “such as,” “milky way.” Then it goes around the circle and everyone, in rhythm and in turn, says something that fits the category, and so on around the circle. Since we are exercising our sense of rhythm, place emphasis on keeping the word coordinated with the rhythm.

**This is a Watch**
The object of the game is to pass the object or objects around the circle without stopping or breaking the rhythm and eventually, the group should be able to complete a circle in which everyone has an object. To begin, one person has a watch (GIVER), which they will hand over to the person on her right (RECEIVER) with the following exchange:

GIVER: (Offering Watch) This is a Watch.
RECEIVER: A What?
GIVER: (Replying) A Watch.
RECEIVER: (Repeating) A What?
GIVER: (Replying) A Watch.
RECEIVER: Oh, A Watch. (Takes Watch)

Now the RECEIVER becomes the GIVER and this patterns repeats all the way around the circle. Once the group gets the hang of the rhythm you can add more objects going in different directions. When there are two objects in the circle, someone will wind up as the GIVER and the RECEIVER simultaneously, and must say both sets of lines. It is best to move from one object to two, then to three, and so on from there. Do not add another object until the group has successfully completed a circle with the amount before. For the visual learners in the class, you might want to write the lines out on the board so it is easy to follow.
**Film Terminology and Cinematic Effects**

The Shot: a single, uninterrupted piece of film.

Long Shot: the object on the screen appears small or appears to be seen from some distance away.

Close-up or Close Shot: the subject takes up nearly 80 percent of the screen space and therefore appears to be very large.

Soft Focus: to blur an image slightly.

Rack Focus: a technique used to bring either the background or the foreground suddenly into focus.

Deep Focus: all objects in the foreground, as well as in the background, remain in focus.

Low Angle: the camera is below the subject, which exaggerates size and strength.

High Angle: the camera is above the subject, which presents subjects as a little weaker and less in control.

Dutch Angle: the camera itself tilts slightly, but the effect is the same. The image appears sideways, to one extent or another, within the frame.

Pan: the camera pivots along the horizontal axis.

Tilt: the camera moves up and down – tilting along the vertical axis.

Zoom: the focal length of the lens changes, thus making the subject appear to move closer or further away.

Tracking or Dolly Shots: the camera is placed on a dolly or wheels, to it move smoothly with the subjects.

Low-key Lighting: shots characterized by darkness, shadows, and patches of bright key light.

High-key Lighting: shots characterized by brightness, openness and a lack of shadows or contrasts in lighting.

Neutral Lighting: when the lighting is even and balanced throughout the shot.

Sound: includes dialogue, music, sound effects, as well as pitch, timbre, direction.

The Fade: this type of edit occurs when the image on-screen slowly fades away and the screen itself is entirely black (or some other color) for a noticeable period of time, and then a new image slowly fades in from that black screen.

The Dissolve: the image slowly begins to fade out, but instead of fading all the way to black, it is replaced by another image that is slowly fading in.

The Crosscut (Parallel Editing): allows the director to show simultaneous events separated by space.

The Flashback and Flash-forward: this method of connecting shots is designed to give the viewer important information about what has happened in the past or to take the audience ahead of the story’s present time.

**Source:**
1. Introduction to the Play
Discuss/define orally with the class the following terms, which are key to Shirley Valentine:

- Monologue
- Housewife
- Working class
- Empowerment
- Middle-age
- Self-realization

2. Language: Vocabulary Hunt
The following terms are found in the script for Shirley Valentine. Encourage your students to look up these words, phrases and references. Students may work in small groups or as individuals to find the meanings and usages of the following:

- Mince
- Nark
- Elocution
- Deluge
- Begrudge
- Acropolis
- Fortnight
- Quizzical
- Chuckie Egg
- Beano Annuals
- Janet Reger
- Horlicks
- The Marmite Tendency
- Parthenon

3. Research and Media: Travel Guides
The action of Shirley Valentine takes place in two locations: Liverpool, England in the first act and Greece in the second. Although the specific location in Greece is not specified by Willy Russell, in the 1989 film, the scenes that take place in Greece were filmed on Mykonos, one of the Cyclades islands in the Aegean Sea. Acquaint your students with these locations by having them develop and create a tourism campaign for both destinations.

- Show your students some examples of travel guides, posters and brochures, pointing out the important elements of each and what makes them effective.
- In small groups the students will create promotional material for either location. The campaign should include a poster, a brochure and/or a commercial.
- Remind the students that the goal of their campaign is to increase tourism, so their campaign should include a catchy slogan and title, sightseeing highlights, a creative and visually appealing format, and written information on at least five of these eight topics: transportation, food and drink, culture, money and costs, history, weather, landscape and terrain, and safety.

4. Comedic Timing
Humour is a very important element in Shirley Valentine and any actress who undertakes this role must have impeccable comedic timing.

- Discuss how Willy Russell uses comedy (see page 7) and the basics of comic timing (see page 10).
- Watch some of the suggested clips and work through the activities on page 10 to develop the students’ sense of comic timing.
- Divide the class into pairs and give each pair a copy of the Shirley Valentine excerpt (Appendix A). One student will fulfill the role of director and work with the other student to prepare the monologue, incorporating the elements of comic timing that you have discussed and practiced.
5. What is the Drama Around Your Kitchen Sink?

Using page 8 (Kitchen Sink Drama) as a guide, discuss Kitchen Sink Realism with the class and how Willy Russell’s *Shirley Valentine* is related to this sub-genre of 20th Century British drama. These dramas were a result of the time and place they were created.

- Would it be possible to write a Kitchen Sink Drama in 2008/2009?
- What would it look like and what would it be concerned with?
- Have your students adapt one of the story lines from one of the classic Kitchen Sink Dramas you discuss to fit into the present day.

6. Music as a Source: Liverpool in Song

There are very few places in England that have multiple songs written about it, but Liverpool is an exception. Perhaps being the birthplace of the Beatles, or a hotbed of English football fans or simple being easy to rhyme with can explain its many musical mentions. Liverpool songs include: ‘Ferry Cross the Mersey,’ ‘Penny Lane,’ ‘Strawberry Fields Forever,’ ‘Maggie Mae,’ ‘The Leaving of Liverpool,’ ‘Liverpool Lullaby’ and ‘In My Liverpool Home.’

Print the lyrics for these songs on overheads to follow along, and play them for your class.

- What do you learn about Liverpool and the Liverpudlians? (Jobs, pastimes, mood, industry, successes, priorities, challenges, day-to-day life, etc.)
- Are there any contradictions between the ideas and images projected in these songs?
- What do these songs tell you about artists’ view of Liverpool?
- Do any of these songs reflect the point of view of a 42 year old housewife? If not, what might?

7. Discussion and Choral Dramatization:

Is Shirley Valentine an Archetype?

*Shirley Valentine* is a story of a 42-year old housewife’s journey toward self-discovery. Is it possible for you to relate to someone so different? Is she really all that different? She is from a different time and place from most young viewers. Willy Russell believes his characters are archetypes that speak to the audience on many levels (see Character, page 7). When asked how he could create such a character he answered, “I’m as happy writing about a teenage boy from Manchester [in his novel *The Wrong Boy*] as I am with the female parts. You just have to dare to know about whoever you’re writing about.” As a playwright, Russell says that it is his job to engage his audience, since he can only take his audience on a journey once he has them engaged. He continues, “I can’t write an opening hoping that it will work. I have to write knowing that what I write will get an audience.”

Read the opening of this play (Appendix B). Discuss how this section engages the audience.

- What is the difference between a stereotype and an archetype?
- Is Shirley Valentine an archetype? Why or Why not?
- On what levels does she speak to us?
- Does Willy Russell effectively represent the voice of a woman?
- Can you relate to Shirley in the opening of the play? Why or why not?

In small groups prepare this opening excerpt using choral dramatization techniques to reflect the many emotional facets the character. Think about repetition, dynamics, and number of voices.

8. Creative History: Setting the Stage for Shirley Valentine

The 1980’s were a decade of great change in Britain, including economic growth, a trend of privatization and the rise of feminism. The political climate drove dramatists to question the terms of choice and permission in the national and sexual economic revolution and their plays explored gender construction and sexual possibility. Examine the social, historical and literary context of *Shirley Valentine*.

In small groups, have students research one of the following topics and prepare a creative presentation for the class. The presentation could be in the form of a documentary, a newscast, a talk show, etc.
8. Creative History: Setting the Stage for Shirley Valentine (continued)

- Attitudes towards women
- Marriage
- The working class
- Willy Russell
- Liverpool in the 1980’s
- Kitchen-Sink Realism

9. Language: Liverpudlian Balderdash

Liverpool has many original and witty usages of the English language, which are unfortunately very often dismissed or caricatured as being lower than standard. This ‘Balderdash-style’ activity is not just a test of one’s Liverpudlian vocabulary, but rather a test of one’s imagination: the main objective is to create definitions that will bluff other players. Anything goes. Some of these expressions are pulled straight from the text of Shirley Valentine.

- Put each of the words/phrases listed below, including their Liverpudlian usage in a hat.
- Divide the class into teams of four. Give each group some pencils and scrap paper.
- Assign one group to be THE DASHERS, a responsibility that will rotate throughout the game.
- The DASHERS will draw one card from the hat, read the word aloud and spell it. (Not the definition!)
- The other teams will write the word on a scrap piece of paper and invent a meaning for this word.
- While the other teams are working, THE DASHERS write the correct meaning a scrap piece of paper.
- THE DASHERS collect all of the definition papers, including the real one they wrote and read them aloud in a random order. (Hint: Do not let your voice reveal the true meaning as you read aloud.)
- Each team guesses which definition they think is correct and THE DASHERS tally the score.
  - 1 point is given to each team for every vote (or guess) their phony definition receives.
  - 2 points are awarded to each team that chooses the real meaning.
  - 3 points are given to THE DASHER team if no one chooses the real meaning.
  - 3 points are awarded to any team that submits a definition similar to the real meaning, in which case it should not be read with the others but set aside until the end.
- Give a different team the job of THE DASHERS and play continues in the same manner.

⇒ made-up (to be very pleased about something)
⇒ a cuppa (a cup of tea)
⇒ a nosh up (a very large meal)
⇒ berk (a dope)
⇒ big blow (someone who brags a lot)
⇒ binhead (a person who is not very smart)
⇒ bolshie (a pushy person)
⇒ bossy boots (a domineering child)
⇒ chip butty (a french fries sandwich on buttered bread)
⇒ chucky egg (a soft boiled egg, mashed, with butter)
⇒ clever clogs (a know-it-all)
⇒ crown jewels (head injuries)
⇒ "Doin’ me ‘ead in." ("Annoying me.")
⇒ dry sod (someone with a subtle sense of humor)
⇒ firebobby (a firefighter)
⇒ “Give us a squirt.” (“Pass the vinegar bottle.”)
⇒ gob (mouth)
⇒ gob shakes, to have (a compulsive talker)
⇒ jigger (an alley or passageway)
⇒ kex (men’s trousers)
⇒ la (a friend)
⇒ long string o’misery (a whiner)
⇒ “Muck in, yer at yer granny’s.” ("Eat up." or “Bon appetit!”)
⇒ nark (a dispute, a quarrel)
⇒ queen of the wash house (a gossip)
⇒ skint (to have no money)
⇒ ta (thank you)
⇒ Tilly Mint (a woman who has ideas that are grander than she could ever grasp)
⇒ water-tight door (a diaper)
1. Shirley Valentine in Review: Writing a Theatre Review

Shirley Valentine has been produced all over the world, gaining critical acclaim for its author and the women who bring its heroine to life. Noreen Kershaw’s 1986 performance in the play’s premiere at the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool was considered “a bravura, pulsating comic and inventive solo performance” by the Liverpool Echo. Turkish audiences were delighted by Shirley Valentine, re-titled Bir Kadin (A Woman) in Turkish, at The Istanbul City Theatre in 1990, which reviewer Laurence Raw describes: “[Ayse] Sarikaya’s Shirley was a woman of spirit [. . .] whose acts of self-assertion was enthusiastically welcomed: Sarikaya earned a round of applause as she resolved to call herself by her maiden name ‘Shirley Valentine’ rather than her married name ‘Shirley Bradshaw.’”. Nicola Cavendish’s performance in the Canadian touring production of Shirley Valentine (1989-92) earned her much acclaim and a Dora Award. According to Vit Wagner of the Toronto Star, Cavendish “has the house in her hands from the opening moment…a bravura performance” and The Globe and Mail reported, “She’s not just Shirley Valentine; She’s a Universe.” A less impressed Entertainment Weekly critic described the 1989 film version of Shirley Valentine as having “Talented actors stumbling through clichéd plot twists (Shirley’s nemeses actually envy her), flat one-liners (“Marriage is like the Middle East—there’s no solution”), and pithy self-affirmations (“I’ve fallen in love with the idea of living”) that undermine any genuine feminist sentiments.”

While the play is still fresh in their minds, have your students write a review of Shirley Valentine. Review/teach them the basic review structure and have them read previous theatre reviews to give them an idea of the standard approach to theatrical criticism. Remind your students to keep their house programs after the play in order to have all of the correct information about the production at their fingertips. The areas the review should cover, in general or more specifically when merited are: all design elements (set, lighting, sound, and costumes), Nicola Cavendish’s performance, the music and how it supports the story, the direction, the basic narrative and the central theme(s).

2. Make the Musical Connection: “My Funny Valentine”

In 1937 Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart wrote the famous song “My Funny Valentine” for the musical Babes in Arms. Today it is considered a jazz standard and has been performed by hundreds of artists from Frank Sinatra to Dolly Parton, sampled by Kanye West in his song “Addiction” and is a favourite of American Idol contender Melinda Doolittle. This song has a lasting power.

- What is it about this song that has fixed it in our opinions as a classic?
- What makes this song so timeless?
- Considering the production of Shirley Valentine you watched, how does this song relate to Shirley and/or her transformations?

Listen to the song and view the lyrics online at http://www.lyricsfreak.com/f/frank+sinatra/my+funny+valentine_20055420.html

3. Writing in Role: The Wall Talks Back!

Shirley, for lack of companionship, finds herself talking to the inanimate objects around her. Have your students take on the role of either her kitchen wall or the rock on the Greek Island beach, and write a letter to Shirley responding to the all of the one-sided conversations she has had with you. Students could also choose to take on the role of another significant object in the story such as the silk robe from Gillian, the two-piece bikini, the glass of wine, the parasol, the calamari or even the “chuckie egg.”

- What would these objects have to say about Shirley?
- How do they see her and her transformation?
- What advice might they want to give Shirley?
4. Multimedia Character Sketch: 
Shirley Bradshaw or Shirley Valentine Scrapbooks

Have students create a scrapbook for either Shirley Bradshaw (married) or Shirley Valentine (single). They should decide on the specific point in her life when she is creating this book and include appropriate objects. Objects might include, but are not limited to, pictures, memorabilia, tickets, receipts, letters, drawings, etc. Let them be creative and have fun. Also, have them put some thought into how you think that character would design their scrapbook. Students should be prepared to describe the objects they included and why they thought they were important. You might want students to write a short paragraph explaining their choices as a supplement to the scrapbook.

To prepare your students for this project begin with a game of ‘Snapshots.’ Choose a title for your book of snapshots such as “My Fortnight in Greece,” or “How the Grapejuice Hound Changed my Life.” Ask for four volunteers, these students will create each of these snapshots as you describe them to the class. For example you might say, “This is a photo of vegans I work for, notice how they are feeding their dog collard greens and potatoes.” The students would then create that picture in tableau for the class. Once the students get the hang of it you can ask a student to take over the role of describer and ask students for suggestions of book titles.

5. Media Comparison: From Stage to Screen

Unlike many adaptations from stage to screen, Willy Russell wrote both the Shirley Valentine play and screenplay. In 1987, only a year after Shirley Valentine hit the stage, he was already starting work on the film adaptation which was released in 1989, directed by Lewis Gilbert and starring Pauline Collins. Like the play, the film won many awards including a BAFTA for its star and director and The Evening Standard Film Award for Best Screenplay. Show the movie to the class and discuss the differences in storytelling between the two very different media. Consider the following:

- What do certain cinematic effects add to your understanding of Shirley and the transformations she experiences? (ie. Flashbacks, photo montage, lighting, shots, See Additional Resources.)
- How does the addition of more characters help or hinder the storytelling?
- Is Shirley’s point of view weakened with the presence of other voices?
- Is the actress’s comic proficiency less important when she does not have to tell the story alone?

6. A Monologue for Personal Change

Shirley Valentine is an extended monologue in which the speaker, Shirley Bradshaw a middle-aged housewife, grapples with her dreams and her realities. Over the course of her journey she is able to see herself and the world with new eyes: she changes. Everyone has a wild and outlandish dream or aspiration. Shirley wants “drink a glass of wine in a country where the grape is grown. Sittin’ by the sea. Lookin’ at the sun.” Her husband would never go, yet her dream becomes a reality.

Ask your students to think about the theme of change that is present in the text and write about a dream they have that they feel is unattainable. What do they think is holding them back? Why would their aspiration be worth overcoming these setbacks? Then ask them to make a list of five to ten situations where that dream could become a reality. With a partner, or in small groups, the students should improvise their top three situations. Make sure they take notes and reflect on their performance after each improvisation. Finally, each student should pick their favourite scenario and create their own monologue for personal change. Their monologues should take them on a journey of self-discovery similar to Shirley Valentine.
7. Scene Extension: Choose your Own Adventure
At the beginning of the play we see Shirley Valentine in a rut of domestic boredom. As Shirley struggles with who she was and who she has become, she asks, “What happened? Who turned me into this?” She started her life full of passion and promise, but this spirit has been slowly and gradually eroded beyond recognition. Shirley explains this imperceptible change: “What I can’t remember is the day or the week or the month or the…when it happened. When it stopped bein’ good. When Shirley Valentine disappeared, became just another name on the missin’ persons list.” There is no exact moment that the change occurred, but rather a long series of moments strung together. What if some of those moments had been different? As Shirley Valentine, in the spirit of change, ask your students to improvise some of the following possibilities:

- What if she hadn’t fed the bloodhound the mince?
- What if her headmistress had never written “I can confidently predict that Miss. Valentine will not go far in life,” on her report card or left out the ‘not’?
- What if she had received “forty-three thousand housepoints an’a blessin’ from the Pope” for knowing that man’s most important invention” was the wheel?
- What if she and Marjorie Majors had been friends?
- What if she and Joe never had children?
- What if she had never married Joe?
- What if when Joe arrives in Greece she does in fact say, “Hello. I used to be the mother. I used to be your wife. But now, I’m Shirley Valentine again. Would you like to join me for a drink?”
APPENDIX A
(Pre-Show Activity: Comedic Timing)

ACT ONE, Scene One

SHIRLEY. ...Wait till he finds he’s getting’ chips an’ egg for his tea tonight. Well it’s Thursday isn’t it? And on Thursday it has to be mince. It’s the eleventh commandment isn’t it? Moses declared it. ‘Thou shalt give thy feller mince every Thursday and if thou doesn’t, thy feller will have one big gob on him all night long.’

What will he be like wall? What will he be like when he sees it’s only ships an’ egg? An’ I wouldn’t mind, it’s not even my bloody fault about the mince. Well I gave it the dog y’see. This dog at the place I work. ‘Well it’s a bloodhound y’see. But this couple I work for – they are vegans, y’know the vegetarian lunatic fringe – ‘The Marmite Tendency’ I call them. Well they’ve brought up this bloodhound as a vegetarian. Well it’s not natural is it? I mean if god had wanted to create it as a vegetarian dog he wouldn’t have created it as a bloodhound would he? He would have made it as a grapejuice hound. But his dog is a bloodhound. It needs meat. Well it was just on impulse really. I’m there today, an’ I looked at this dog an’ all’s I can think about was the pound an’ a half of best mince that’s in me bag. Well d’ y’know, I think it was worth what I’ll have to put up with from ‘him’ tonight; just to see the look on that dog’s face as it tasted meat for the first time. Course I don’t think Joe’ll quite see it that way. ‘Y’ did what? What did y’ do? Y’ gave it to the dog? You’ve gone bloody mental woman. Is this it? Have y’finally gone right round the pipe?’ (She adopts a rather grand gesture and voice.) ‘Yes Joseph I rather thin I have. I have finally gone loop the fracking loop. I have become crazy with joy, because today Jane gave me the opportunity of getting away for a fortnight. Joe! I am to travel to Greece with my companion. Our departure is less than three weeks hence and we shall be vacationing for some fourteen days. And now I must away, leaving you to savour your chips an’ chuckie egg whilst I supervise the packing of my trunk.’ (She drops it.) Our Brain was round before. I showed him the tickets. Didn’t I wall? An’ what did he say? ‘Mother, just go. Forget about me Father, forget about everythin’, just get yourself on the plane an’ go.’ (Laughs.) Well that’s how he is, our Brian; you wanna do somethin’? You just do it. Bugger the consequences. He’s a nutcase...
APPENDIX B
(Pre-Show Activity: Discussion and Choral Dramatization)

ACT ONE, Scene One

The kitchen of a semi-detached house. It is a well-established kitchen, bearing signs of additions and alterations which have been made over the years. It is not a highly personalized palace of pitch pine and hanging baskets but nevertheless has signs of personality having overcome the bleakness of the chipboard and formica. ...It is quite a comfortable and reassuring place.

Specifically the kitchen contains (apart from the obvious cooker, fridge, etc.) a door which leads out of the house, a wall with a window, a dining table and chairs.

As we open, SHIRLEY is beginning preparations for cooking the evening meal – this includes opening a bottle of white wine from which she pours a glass. Throughout the following scene she sets a table for two and she prepares, cooks and finally serves one of the truly great but unsung dishes of the world - chips and egg.

SHIRLEY. Y’know I like a glass of wine when I’m doin’ the cookin’. Don’t I wall? Don’t I like a glass of wine when I’m preparing the evenin’ mean. Chips an’ egg! (Takes a sip of wine.) I never used to drink wine. It was our Millandra who stared me on this. She said to me, she said ‘Mother! Mother, nobody drinks rum an’ coke these days. Everybody drinks wine now. Oh mother have a glass of Riesling instead.’ Kids. They know everything don’t they? Our Millandra was goin’ through her slightly intellectual phase at the time. Y’know her, an’ her mate – Sharron-Louise. Because it was all white wine an’ Bruce Springsteen at the time. Y’know the pair of them stopped goin’ down the clubs in town an’ stared hangin’ around in that Bistro all the time. Y’know where the artists go. They seen, erm, what’s his name one night, erm Henry Adrian, yeh. Apparently Sharron-Louise got his autograph. And breakfast as well I believe. Anyway, the pair of them are out of that phase now. And am I glad? Because y’know the two of them’d sit at the table for hours an’ all’s y’d hear from the pair of them was: ‘It...


