

Our Day Out By Willy Russell

Looking particularly at scenes 21 and 31, explain the serious message that Willy Russell tries to give us about the education and social deprivation. How does he use key characters and settings in order to do this?

“Our Day Out” is a funny play but it also has some serious points. It tells us the story of a group of students who are taken on a day trip to Conwy castle in Wales. This play was written in 1977 by Willy Russell. It was set outside a school in Liverpool. With a group of students going on a school trip to Conwy castle in Wales. Mrs Kay was in charge of this trip, she is easy-going and motherly person. The headmaster then sends Mr Briggs along with them who is a much stricter teacher. They set off to Conwy castle and on their way end up going to other places as well. The café, zoo, Conwy castle and the beach. Throughout the day Mr Briggs continues to battle between himself and Mrs Kay over the behaviour of the students.

They finish off the trip by going to the funfair where Mr Briggs mood changes and everyone is surprised. Mrs Kay took pictures of this day, she wasn't going to let Mr Briggs forget the day he was happy.

Education in the 1970's was different from now. In 1970 students were able to leave school at the age of fifteen and find a job. Students would do their 11⁺ exam to go onto secondary school. There was a class for students who couldn't read, write or do sums. This class was called Progress class. There was only a little hope that students would get a successful future. Grammar school was for clever student, but it was too expensive and parents wouldn't have the money to send their children there. Children would only have about two pound pocket money.

Some jobs were at the docks or car industries. There were only a few employments in the city as factories were closing down and moving to more modern cities.

There was a lot of poverty. The houses were terraced house which were in poor conditions. The front of the house would have been board up as they couldn't afford new windows. The father of the family would have some work in the docks. Where there was only little wages but hard work most of the work was manual. Women would have to sometimes resort to prostitution so that the rest of the family would have enough to eat.

In the play, Willy Russell tries to explain how difficult it is for these children by describing how they behave in various places and having two teachers who treat the children very differently because they have very different views about education.

Mr Briggs is a strict, aggressive teacher. He treats all children in the same way and expects them to do as he says. He cares about the children and wants them

to get the best education they can get. "We'll get that arranged as soon as we get back to school". He also expects them to follow the school standards. He shows this when he sees one of the student not in their school uniform. "What sort of outfit's that for a school visit?" she doesn't really take any notice of him, and is cheeky towards him. He tells her if she carries on with her attitude she'll be spending her time inside the coach. Every the lollipop man describes Mr Briggs as an "Arrogant git". He expects children to have respect for him and nobody can answer him back. "Don't you what me young lady". Later on does he only realise what the children really have and what going on a trip really means to them. Then he becomes less harsh on them. He then changes his attitude towards them.

"I might take you for a ride on the waltzer". On the waltzer the children and Mr Briggs spin around and enjoy themselves.

Mrs Kay is a less strict teacher and is more popular with the children. She is a motherly person. She understands what the children's life is like and how difficult life is. This is why she is easy going with the children. She allows the children to enjoy them and doesn't care much about education. The headmaster thinks "she sees education as one long game". This is why he sends Mr Briggs along with her. At the castle Mrs Kay battles with Mr Briggs to allow the children to have freedom as all they can achieve is "A good day out". Mrs Kay knows that they don't have much chance of getting a job as there isn't much employment as all factories are moving to modern cities. Carol asks Mrs Kay "Could I ever live in one of them nice places". Mrs Kay replies "Well you could try, couldn't you love". This was a hopeless statement. She knows she hasn't got much of a chance but shows that there's no point in giving up. This tells us Mrs Kay is a caring and helpful person and doesn't want the children to feel bad and regret the day they were born.

In scene 21 Mrs Kay leaves her seat and goes over to Susan's seat. Susan is playing 'I spy' with a couple of girls who are sitting with her. Mr Briggs moves across to talk to Colin. He is conspiratorial. Mr Briggs tries to talk to Colin to run down Mrs Kay. Mrs Kay has a word with the driver, suddenly the coach swings to a side. Mrs has decided to go to the zoo.

In this scene we now that the children don't get much school work. They have loads of freedom. Because they're poor they don't get much pocket money. "They've got enough freedom, with their two quid pocket money". We find out that the children can't behave as they're immature and call each other names. "He's a big baboon"

We learn that Mr Briggs has high expectations for these children "You have to risk being disliked if you're going to do any good for these types of kids" this states that he's strict and the children don't like him. He knows their education is important to them and this is the only way for a successful future. They have enough freedom at home. "They have enough freedom at home".

Mrs Kay is much easier with the children she allows them to do as they please. She knows that the children can't achieve anything so there isn't any point in educating them. "Let the kids roam wild"

Stage directions can help us to understand a character. Mr Briggs moves across to talk to Colin. He is conspiratorial.

'Mrs Kay ignores Mr Briggs when whispers in her ear' this shows that Mrs Kay doesn't want to hear a word off Mr Briggs as she doesn't care what he has to say.

We know that Mr Briggs likes to think he is strict. One incident in the play where he shows this attitude is when he gets up in the coach and goes across to Linda to ask her why she isn't wearing her school uniform "What sort of outfit's that for a school visit?" Linda shows her cheek, Mr Briggs is disgusted by her behaviour and tells her if she carries on with her attitude she'll be spending her time inside the coach.

The second incident is when they get back from the zoo and there all sitting in the coach. The coach starts, a man comes running towards the coach stopping it. Mr Briggs is informed that the children have stolen the animals for the zoo. Mr Briggs shows his strict attitude. He is astonished as he finds half the zoo animals are on the coach with them. The animals come out from every corner he is surprised and astonished as he stares icily with anger. He shows his anger on the coach with his spiteful words and aggression to the deprived children. Mr Briggs gets angry, "I trusted you lot" then Ronson tries to speak and then Mr Briggs shouts "Shut up".

We are told what Mr Briggs thinks of Mrs Kay. One incident in the play that makes Mr Briggs think of her in this way is when there at Conwy castle and Mrs Kay talks about the children regretting the day that they were born. "Well that's a fine attitude isn't".

Another incident is when Mr Briggs talk with the headmaster about Mrs Kay that she doesn't really seem like a teacher. "She always reminds me of a mother hen rather than a teacher" he thinks this because she always on the children side and treats them like her children.

In scene 31 Mr Briggs is pointing at a spot high up the castle while the children stand behind him and watch. In another part of the castle the kids are rushing about playing medieval cowboys and Indians. Carol and Andrews are with Mrs Kay looking over the estuary. Then Mr Briggs come and has a big argument with Mrs Kay about the children.

From this scene we know that the children haven't ever seen or been to a place like this. It seems like a dream to them. They run around screaming and shouting in the castle grounds "Can't y' see what's goin on? It's a shambles, just look at them".

Mr Briggs knows a lot about castle he tries to teach the children. He doesn't want the children too mess around, but it doesn't go to plan. The children go out of control. "Either you take control of the children in your charge or I'll be forced to abandon this visit". Mr Briggs wants the children to get a good education.

Mr Kay hasn't got much ideas about education she just wants the children to have a good time and enjoy them self. She doesn't really care if the children learn or not she knows that the children haven't got much of a chance of

achieving anything and getting a successful life. Even if they do get educated there's no employment for them as factories are closing down. "There's nothing for them to do, any of them".

Stage direction helps us understand character. Mr Briggs- approaches, obviously angry this shows us that he's angry when he goes up to Mrs Kay showing he is cruel and unkind. Mrs Kay- she turns and walks away. This shows that she doesn't care what Mr Briggs has to say and does what she pleases.

Mr Briggs likes to think he is strict. One incident in the play where he shows this attitude is where he wanted to talk to Mrs Kay and he shouted at the girls to move so he could sit down. "Anywhere girls just move".

We are told what Mr Briggs thinks of Mrs Kay one incident that would make Mr Briggs think of her in this way is when Mr Briggs talks to Mrs Kay about the children being alone in the café Mrs Kay allows the children to be alone but Mr Briggs disagrees with her as he knows they can't be trusted. "There are times when I really think you're on their side". The second incident is when Mr Briggs talks to Colin about Mrs Kay's problem. "You know what her problem is" he thinks that's he right and she got a problem. "I can't see through all this woolly headed liberalism.

The play also tells us a lot about social conditions and the lives of the children. Willy Russell is trying to make us understand that because the children are from rough backgrounds, they will find it hard to do well in school and life in general. He uses the characters of the children and the settings he puts them in to explain their difficulties. Although some of these situations are funny, they are also quite sad as the children do not know any better and don't feel it would make a difference to their lives even if they tried to behave well Carol is the best example of these problems. Carol is a girl which is in progress class. She is having a hard life she lives in a poor area in Liverpool. She hasn't got much money as she come from a poor background. She feel's that she'll never get a nice place when she gets older and learn to read and write. "Well think I'd be able to live in one of them nice places?" Carol isn't clever she can't read or write meaning that she can't get a job so she doesn't have much of a future ahead of her meaning she's going to be poor all the life.

Other characters also explain a lot to us about the social background Russell is trying to put over. Reilly is a boy who goes to the same school as Carol. He's two years older than Carol and he's in his final year of school. He lives with his parents. "Me old man works down here, sir". Reilly's father works at the docks. His father doesn't like working at the docks "he hates it".

Andrew is a boy who's in progress class. He started to smoke at the age of eight and still smokes at the age of fifteen. Andrews lives with his mother and she doesn't care the fact that he smokes. "Me mom says nott'n about it". His father comes round every now and then. And tries to get money of her but she don't give him it. "He tries to get money off her but she won't give him it though". Andrew and his mother both hate his father "we all hate him".

Ronson is really interested in the animals. He talks about their life and how hard it must be just spending their life in a pit and how cruel it is "I think that's cruel". He believes that keeping them in a pit makes them want to kill people as it makes them angry. "It kills them cos they're cruel to it. They keep it in a pit so when it gets out it's bound to be mad and wanna kill people".

This play was written for television and this helps Russell with the settings that are so important in his play. He is able to get the camera to move from scene to scene very quickly and this makes it seem all the more serious and also at times funny. Stage directions in the written copy of the play also give us ideas about the social conditions of the children. Some settings that are really important are the café, the zoo, Conwy castle and the beach.

At the café the children rush entering like a herd of animals pushing and being impatient. As the orders were being shouted out the children were robbing stuff left, right and centre, they were pointing to jars high up, as the owners turned their back, racks of chocolate bars disappeared into eager pockets. The owners sat back exhausted but satisfied, soon did they realise that they had been robbed. "The thieving little bastards!" it shows that the children are poor and can't afford to buy any of the sweets. The children are sly the way they do tricks to steal the sweets.

At the zoo the children are really interested in the animals and really want to learn about them. The children are listening and behaving well. "Yes they've been very good". When the teachers go for a cup of coffee they trust the children to behave and go around and continue to look at the animals. The children then by themselves get closer to the animals and start to cuddle them. They climb onto the coach Mr Briggs finds out that the children have stolen the animals his face turns like thunder.

"I trusted you lot" the children haven't been taught any manner so they don't now how to behave when by themselves. Most of them wouldn't even now what the word trust meant. This tells you that children aren't ever taught simple things and there from a poor background.

At Conwy castle the children get out of hand and start to race and chase and play havoc. They were like dogs let off the lead in the country. "Can't y' see what's goin' on? It's a shambles" most of the children haven't ever been further than Birkenhead so they don't now how to behave when there in a place such as this.

At the beach the children enjoyed themselves besides Carol. They went paddling in the sea and played football. Carol wished that she could stay here in Wales she loves it. It's beautiful nothing like where she lives in Liverpool. She thinks she shall be able to live a better life. Mr Briggs tries to persuade her to come back as she wants to be able to live out here by herself. "You go I'm not coming" this tells us she's living a horrible life and can't stand going back to it. Comparing the two places, where she's come from is dull, boring and she lives in a terraced house which hasn't even got windows and seeing Wales where there's a beautiful view off the sea and nice houses makes her want to stay.

From all these examples of characters and setting I have tried to show Willy Russell was trying to tell us about education and social deprivation. I feel that the children have a terrible background. There poor, heart less, dirty and lifeless. They live in a poor area. The houses they live in are terraced house which are in poor conditions. As these children have come from a poor background they don't have much of a future ahead of them. Mr Kay understands the children the best. She knows what the children are going through and how difficult it is for them. She feels that they should enjoy there life's and make the best out of them as that's all they can achieve. As they haven't got much chance of getting employment. I prefer education now rather than the 1970's because everyone is taught the same things meaning nobody misses out and everyone is treated equally and everybody gets the same education. Now we can continue on with further education like college and university to get a better a job. In 1970's children had a special class for students that couldn't read or write this was called 'Progress class' they would be separate from everyone else and learn how to read and write, when they learnt how too read and write they would go back too normal classes. At the age of fifteen they would leave school. There wouldn't been much chance of them getting a job. The disadvantage of education now is that children learn at different levels and with them all together some of them may mess around and not let others learn. Having a separate class for students who needed help was a good thing.