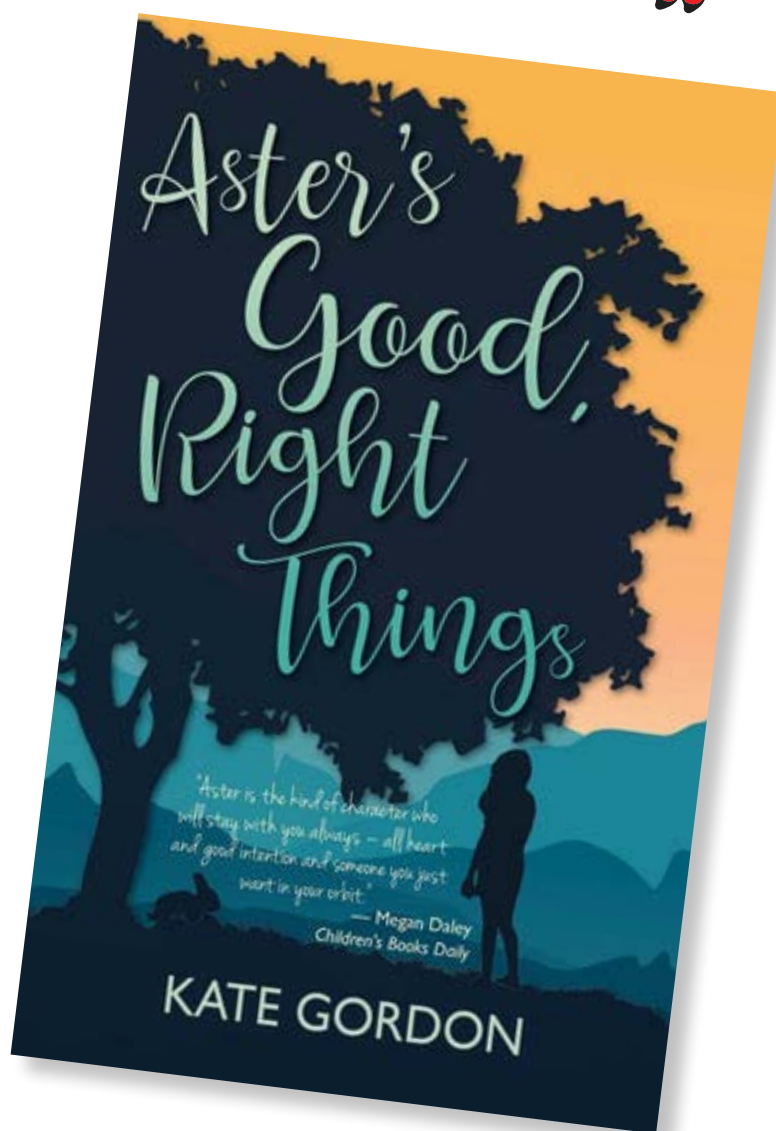


**Meerkat**  
Productions



## TEACHER RESOURCE PACK

FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH STUDENTS  
IN GRADES 3 – 8

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# INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE PACK

This resource pack is designed to deepen your students' engagement with both the book and the theatre experience before and after our visit. It includes photographs of the creative process, context for the play and in-depth classroom activities.

For teachers, this pack will:

- provide material to guide discussion about the book
- give you strategies to explore the learning potential offered by a theatre visit and how to develop children's responses
- enable you to use drama to develop literacy, particularly with reluctant writers
- increase your confidence in using drama in the classroom

The classroom activities have been designed to support and extend your students' experience of the performance and offer teachers ways to pick up on and explore the themes in the play, before and after our visit.

We use drama and storytelling as ways of exploring ideas that are relevant to the play. We employ characteristics such as **playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically** to enable effective learning. There are also links to key areas of learning:

- **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT;**
- **COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE;**
- **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT;**
- **EXPRESSIVE ARTS AND DESIGN, AND**
- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD**

While the activities will not take an objective led approach, teachers will be able to establish links to the relevant curriculum objectives for their particular year group and can adapt them for their particular educational setting. Our teacher resources always put drama at the centre of our activities. Working through drama allows children to explore subjects that matter to them within a fictional context, draw on their prior knowledge and apply it to new situations, develop language as they give expression to new understandings and develop emotional intelligence and critical thinking as they see things from different perspectives. It will also allow the students to take responsibility, make decisions, solve problems and explore possibilities from within the drama.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES RATIONALE

## AIM

To allow the students to engage with the themes of the book and the play by exploring their own understanding and experience of feelings.

## TEACHER ROLE

Many of the activities are teacher led and will require the teacher to go into role. This is not about performance, or being an actor, more about speaking from a different perspective to enable the students to enter the fictional world.

Facilitating whilst in role encourages students to explore the themes more deeply and extends the impact of the theatrical experience back to the classroom and long beyond the end of the show.



# ABOUT ASTER'S GOOD, RIGHT THINGS

## SYNOPSIS

Aster attends a school for gifted kids, but she doesn't think she's special at all. If she was, her mother wouldn't have left.

Each day Aster must do a good, right thing—a challenge she sets herself to make someone else's life better. Nobody can know about her 'things', because then they won't count. And if she doesn't do them, she's sure everything will go wrong.

Then she meets Xavier. He has his own kind of special missions to make life better.

When they do these missions together, Aster feels free, but if she stops doing her good, right things will everything fall apart?

## THE SHOW

The book discusses the following themes: Mental health, Labelling, Abandonment, Family, Parental Separation, Fostering, Friendship, Identity, Childhood/childishness, Growth/change, Resilience; and these themes are reflected in our adaptation.

As the book is over 35,000 words long we have to choose which parts of the story we can include in our 40 minute stage play; otherwise you'd be us watching all day!

The themes we have focussed on most in our show are friendship and mental health. Aster finds her anxiety more manageable when she learns that she has friends to support her; and Xavier finds in Aster someone who he can talk to about how he is feeling.

The show is performed by two actors. Both performers play multiple roles using a variety of drama techniques such as: naturalistic acting, direct audience address, audience interaction, puppetry, mime and movement, plus original songs, music and sound effects to support the story, create place and clearly demonstrate what is happening.





# BEFORE OUR VISIT

**THESE ACTIVITIES ARE DESIGNED TO EXPLORE THE STORY AND THE THEMES IN THE BOOK. THEY WILL HELP STUDENTS TO ENGAGE WITH THE PLAY.**

Based on feedback, teachers see a huge increase in student engagement in the performance when students are familiar with the story. Therefore, we strongly recommend you spend some time reading the book before our visit.

## BEFORE READING

### ACTIVITY 1: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS

Looking at the front cover, answer the following questions:

1. What do you think this book might be about?
2. Do you think this is a fiction book (a story) or a non-fiction book (facts)?
3. Is this a book you want to read? Why/why not?
4. What do you think about the illustrations on the front cover?



### Short on time before our visit?

Ask each student to read a specific section of the book and summarise it for the rest of the class. This way all students will have an overview of the story before we perform the adaptation.

## AFTER READING

### ACTIVITY 2: RECALL THE STORY

With the whole class, go around in a circle with each child taking it in turns to recap a part of the story. By the time everyone has spoken the entire story must have been retold. Each child may say as much as they can remember. Try and piece the story together in chronological order.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

1. Did you enjoy this story? Why/why not?
2. What did you like about the style of writing?
3. Why do you think the author uses Aster as the narrator?
4. Who would you recommend this book to?
5. Which parts made you smile?

### ACTIVITY 3: REFLECTION

- Xavier describes his depression as 'the black dog'. What do you understand the 'black dog' to mean?
- When Aster refers to her anxiety as 'noise', what do you understand that to mean?
- How would you describe Indigo?
- What do we know about some of the other characters in the book? Dad, Aunt Noni, Esme, Flynn, the teachers, Xavier's mum

#### ACTIVITY 4: ROLE - PLAY

Split students into pairs. One of them is to play the role of Aster and the other the role of Xavier. Role-play the scene where Aster and Xavier first meet under the tree.

- Are they nervous when they first meet?
- What do they talk about?
- Do they find out they have anything in common?

Give the students time to discuss, rehearse and prepare their scenes then present them to the class.

#### ACTIVITY 5: ANALYSING THE BOOK

Yellow Brick Books have put together a fabulous resource to support analysis of the book. You can find a guide here:

[https://www.yellowbrickbooks.com.au/AstersGoodRightThings\\_teachingnotes\\_2020\\_web.pdf](https://www.yellowbrickbooks.com.au/AstersGoodRightThings_teachingnotes_2020_web.pdf)

### PREPARING FOR THE PLAY

#### ACTIVITY 1: WRITING THE SCRIPT

The original book is over 35,000 words long. To be a 40-minute play, the adaptation can only be about 6,000 words long; therefore, we can only include certain storylines.

1. Which parts of the story do you think we will include? Why?
2. Which parts of the story do you think we will exclude? Why?

#### ACTIVITY 2: THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

1. Which characters from the book are you hoping to see in the play?
2. Why?



# AFTER OUR VISIT

THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES ARE TO PROVIDE FOLLOW UP SUGGESTIONS USING DRAMA ACTIVITIES.

## ACTIVITY 1: REVIEW THE PERFORMANCE

Using **Resource A** ask students to review the production. Ask them to explain the reasons for their opinions.

1. What were your favourite parts of the play? Why?
2. Was there anything surprising in the play or the way the play was presented?

We'd love to read your reviews! Send them to us at [admin@meerkatproductions.com.au](mailto:admin@meerkatproductions.com.au)

## ACTIVITY 2: UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTERS

1. Aster struggles to work out how to be friends with other children. Why do you think she finds it difficult to talk to people? What advice would you give her to help with this?
2. Xavier has a colourful dress sense that defies gender norms. How does clothing contribute to his characterisation?
3. How do you feel about Aster's home life? What impact did her mum leaving have on her?
4. How do you feel about Indigo's home life? What impact does her home life have on the way she behaves?

## ACTIVITY 3: CHARACTER PROFILES

Working in groups, students should choose one character from the production to focus on.

### PART A: Group Activity – Role on the wall

1. Using **Resource B**, in groups, ask students to draw a simple outline of the character on a large sheet of paper. Within the outline, write adjectives that describe the internal qualities of the character, those that they might feel about themselves. Outside the outline, list how other people perceive them. Individually students should use these sheets to help write a character description or biography about each character.

**PART B: Considering the following questions, students should look at the characters of Aster and Xavier to write a profile on.**

1. What are the internal qualities of each character which makes them likeable or not?
  2. How do other people see them?
  3. What does the character say that implies they are anxious?
  4. What does the character do when they are anxious?
  5. What has happened in their past to contribute to them behaving in this way?
  6. Is each character only anxious, or do they have characteristics which are contrary to this?
- Students should use the book and evidence from what happens in the play to support their argument.

## ACTIVITY 4: LABELLING

Our backdrop showed some of the labels the characters in the story are given and the ones they give themselves.

Which 5 labels would you give yourself? Share with the class, do they agree or disagree with your labels? Are there any they would add?



### ACTIVITY 5: MUSIC

Aster reacts strongly every time she hears a Madonna song because it reminds her of when her Mum left. In pairs share with your partner a piece of music that has memories for you. Do you associate it with happy or sad times?

### ACTIVITY 6: CONSCIENCE ALLEY

A useful technique for exploring any kind of dilemma faced by a character, providing an opportunity to analyse a decisive moment in greater detail. The class forms two lines facing each other. Each line plays one side of a character's conscious and decides on a line or word to repeat over and over again as the 'character' walks through the alley. For example, you might choose Indigo when she is told that she is going to be living with Aster and Aunt Noni. How will Indigo interact with Aster? How will she behave in the foster home? The teacher takes the role of the character (Indigo) and walks between the lines as each member of the group speaks their advice. It can be organised so that those on one side give opposing advice to those on the other. Students can take it in turns to play the character, to know what it feels like to be in their shoes.

### ACTIVITY 7: THOUGHT TAPPING

Get the students into groups. Ask them to choose two moments in the play and create a frozen image of each moment. These should happen in chronological order. Scenes could include:

- When Aster and Xavier meet for the first time
- When Aster takes Indigo's library duty for her
- When Aster is at home with her Dad, asking about why her Mum left
- When Aster is at the ice cream shop with Esme

Students should try to imagine how each of the characters was feeling and try to show that on their face.

Teacher to say 3, 2, 1 freeze and students are to hold their frozen image of the moment from the play.

Whilst they are holding their frozen image, the teacher will tap a student on the shoulder one by one. The student will say out loud what their character is thinking or feeling at that moment in time.

### ACTIVITY 8: ROLE-PLAY

Split the class in half, and then into pairs. One half of the class imagine you are Xavier and Xavier's mum.

Roleplay the conversation when Xavier is telling his mum all about his new friend Aster. What questions does his mum ask him? How does he talk about Aster? Share with the class.

The other half of the class imagine they are Aster and Aster's Dad. Roleplay the conversation when Aster is telling her Dad all about her new friend Xavier. What questions does her Dad ask her? How does she talk about Xavier? Share with the class.

### ACTIVITY 9: BRAINSTORMING

In pairs, come up with your own song to Esme like Aster and Xavier did.

## ACTIVITY 10: FRIENDSHIP

### PART 1

One of the main themes in both the book and the play was friendship. Discussion points in pairs or small groups:

- **What is a friend? Friends are people ...**

...we feel close to. Friends are people who have similar interests, people who care about us, and people we can trust. Friends offer support and understanding when we really need it.

- **What friendships were there in the play or the book?**

Aster and Xavier, Aster and Indigo, Xavier and Indigo, Aster's Dad and Aunt Noni, Aster and Esme, Flynn and Annaliese

- **What kind of things can we do to begin and keep friendships?**

Join a club or a team. Meet a neighbour. Seek out a friend at school. Make contact with the person you would like to know better. Find ways to spend time with them. Talk about yourself, sharing more information as time goes by. Talk on the phone, write text and/or instant message, become pen pals or e-mail pals.

- **How do you think self-esteem or feeling good about ourselves is related to friendships?**

When we feel good about ourselves, we are more likely to choose friends that are good for us. There is a saying "we teach people how to treat us". In other words, how we behave toward ourselves and other people gives them clues as to how they should behave towards us. If we feel good about ourselves and respect ourselves, and treat others with respect, we are showing people how we would like to be treated.

- **Why is it important to have good friends?**

True friendship is important. Friends support one another, listen to each other and give advice. When you and your friend share personal information about yourselves, you can learn from each other and explore what you have in common and what makes you different. Friends can teach us many things like how to play a game or how to make a craft. Friends can introduce us to exciting things like delicious new foods and interesting customs or celebrations. You can also learn about acceptance by appreciating the different qualities that make us unique individuals. When you accept people for who they are, you are being a respectful friend.

- **What kinds of things do you like doing with your friends?**

Ideas might include: playing games (video) and sports, hanging out, having lunch together, attending Girl Guides, Boy Scouts or other community groups, going to classes together (e.g. dance, martial arts, music lessons), watching television/movies, using the computer, working on projects and/or doing homework together.

- **How can we be good friends?**

- Share our interests and activities
- Trust each other and be honest
- Share our thoughts and feelings
- Respect each other's opinions and beliefs
- Try to relate to how the other person feels
- Be sincere with each other
- Accept each other for who we are
- Encourage and support each other
- Commit to the friendship

## PART 2

### Ball game

This activity helps students explore the qualities of friendships. Get the students to stand in a circle. Throw the ball to someone in the group, and ask them to call out a word that represents qualities of a healthy relationship (for example; trust, supportive, kind, fun...). Ask that person to then toss the ball to someone else. Each time a new student catches the ball, ask them to share a new quality... and so on.

## PART 3

### An infomercial advertising for a great friend

In pairs, student A is going to advertise all the great qualities you would benefit from if you were to get student B as your friend. They should really 'sell' the amazing benefits of Student B. They should focus on how they will make their partner stand out from all the other pairs. The infomercial should be 1 minute long.

Show the class

Students swap, Student B is going to advertise all the great qualities about student A.

Share with the class " with "Students then swap. Student B is going to advertise all the great qualities about student A and share with the class.

## ACTIVITY 11: MENTAL HEALTH

There is great concern that the events of 2020 and 2021, including the impact of COVID-19 and the consequent restrictions on community interactions are likely to have affected the emotional wellbeing of society. Professor Cathy Creswell, Professor of Developmental Clinical Psychology, and co-leading the COVID-19 Supporting Parents, Adolescents, and Children in Epidemics study stated "Prioritising the mental health of children and young people throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond is critical" (Oxford University news, 2020)

There is an opportunity to weave skills into the drama activities that provide the foundation for developing coping strategies for emotional difficulties, thereby supporting children's resilience. "There is increasing evidence that cultivating compassion for yourself and others can have a profound impact on your physiological, psychological and social processes" (Irons & Beaumont, 2017).

There is evidence to suggest that interoception (the ability to notice and connect bodily sensations with emotions) is a fundamental building block of developing emotional regulation (Mahler, 2016).



## PART 1: EMOTIONAL THERMOMETER

Ask the class to come to a resting position and close their eyes; or look down to the floor if this feels more comfortable. Ask them to move their hands as a way of answering the following statements – raise them towards the ceiling if they agree, down towards the floor if they disagree and somewhere in the middle if they're undecided.

Today I feel happy      Today I feel calm      Today I feel sad      Today I feel bored  
Today I feel excited      Today I feel nervous      Today I feel strong

To finish, ask everyone to have a quick shake-out of their whole body, and especially the arms and out towards the fingertips, like they're flicking paint from the end of their fingers.

## PART 2: MOMENTS OF CHALLENGE

Start with a brief discussion with the whole class - asking the question:

- What emotions do Aster and Xavier feel at the beginning, middle and end of the story?

Now in pairs, ask students to choose one moment of challenge from the story that they want to work on.

Ask them to write a short scene from the perspective of Aster and Xavier; decide where they are and what they are doing in the moment. Up to ten lines in total is plenty for this exercise.

- What do they say to each other in this moment?
- What do they not say to each other? (What is going through their heads, what are they thinking? Maybe there is something they are thinking that they decide not to say.)

Give students time to rehearse and prepare their short scenes. Share with the class.

## PART 3: THE COMPASSIONATE IMAGERY SCRIPT

Use the following script to take the students on a guided journey.

*Ask students to sit for this exercise. If students don't feel comfortable during the exercise, they shouldn't worry about it; instead they should just think of something that makes them happy - it is all inside their head, so no-one can tell if they are pretending or not!*

Make sure that you are comfortable in your seat. Roll your shoulders slightly back and hold your head as if you are both confident and relaxed. You can choose to close your eyes, or look at the floor or desk in front of you.

Take a breath in. Take a breath out. Notice your breathing.

Now try to make your breath just a little deeper and a little slower. Notice the rhythm of the breath. Try to imagine that each breath in and out is soothing you, like a baby being rocked gently back and forth.

Carry on noticing your breath, but this time move your mouth into a relaxed smile, like you've just noticed someone you really like has come into the room. Does this make you feel a bit different? Keep breathing with this relaxed smile. Try to keep this relaxed smile for as much of the exercise as possible.

Xavier was a good friend to Aster. He showed compassion and was non-judgemental. Now we are going to try to imagine something or someone who we think is compassionate. This means that they are someone who really cares and wants to help. Do not worry if nothing comes to mind, or you start to think about other things. That's ok, the mind is a tricky thing to focus. Sometimes this can take some practice.

Notice if someone or something comes to mind as I say the following words. Non-judgemental. Accepting. Wise. Strong. Warm. Kind.

It might help to think of someone who has been kind and helpful to you, someone you can trust. A friend or teacher or family? Sometimes it is hard to think of someone, but you might think of something that makes you feel safe and comforted, like drinking hot chocolate, or favourite soft jumper or the feeling of the warm sun on you. It will be different for every person.

I'm going to say the words again. Notice if the words remind you of anyone? Or if any sounds or colours come to mind when I say them.

Non-judgemental. Accepting. Wise. Strong. Warm. Kind.

If you have a person or image in mind then take a moment to think about how that image looks? What do they sound like? What do they feel like? How does it make you feel to be near it?

Hold on to that feeling. That feeling of being close to something or someone that makes you feel warm, that you can trust to be wise and kind, that will be strong for you, and that accepts you as you are, without judgement. That image or person, that feeling, is something you can come back to in your mind whenever you need comfort or support. When you are facing a challenge or feeling overwhelmed, you may find this image useful.

As we begin to end this exercise, notice your breathing again. Where do you feel it? Can you feel it in your chest, or in your throat, or in your nose?

Start to notice the room around you again. What can you hear in the room? What can you smell? Finally give your toes a wiggle, give your fingers a wiggle, have a wiggle in your seat.

*This script is based on one written by Dr. Sarah Wassall, and is influenced by the exercises freely available from The Compassionate Mind Foundation.*

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES RELATED TO YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING ANXIETY AND/OR DEPRESSION**

The Black Dog institute have created some fabulous teaching resources and videos

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/education-services/schools/school-resources/talking-about-mental-illness/>

Beyond blue youth have lots of suggestions if you have a friend or family member you think needs help or you need help with ways to talk to them

<https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/help-someone-you-know/supporting-a-friend>

Kids help line have people available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day

<https://kidshelpline.com.au>

R U OK

<https://www.ruok.org.au>





# ABOUT MEERKAT PRODUCTIONS

At Meerkat Productions our goal is to provide a theatrical experience that makes students and teachers alike lean forward and engage rather than sit back and watch passively. We want the memory of our performance to be long lasting; we want the work we do to be inspirational and we want you to be counting down the days until our next visit!

Our Book Week shows aim to support Literacy in the classroom, and we have found during our 20 year history that most Primary school teachers identify an impact, particularly in engaging lower ability children as well as increasing enthusiasm for and motivation to write.

## OTHER SHOWS

DID YOU KNOW MEERKAT PRODUCTIONS ALSO OFFERS OTHER IN-SCHOOL PERFORMANCES?



**BOOK WEEK: PICTURE BOOK ADAPTATION**



**ANTI-BULLYING: BULLY BULL RING**



**STORYTELLING & PUPPETRY:  
GOOD THINGS COME IN THREES & FRACTURED FAIRYTALES**



**MINDFULNESS, MANAGING ANXIETY, RESILIENCE: MR HUFF**



**CHRISTMAS SHOW: RUDOLPH'S RECRUITS**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
MEERKATPRODUCTIONS.COM.AU  
OR GIVE US A CALL ON 1300 308 311**

# RESOURCE A

Here are some phrases that people might use to describe the experience of watching a piece of theatre. For each pair, please mark a point on the scale towards whichever is closest to your experience of watching the performance today.

My concentration was wandering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I was completely absorbed by what was happening
I didn't feel like I was learning anything	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My eyes were opened to some new ideas
It didn't really get me going	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I was gripped by the sights and sounds of the performance
There wasn't much sense of atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I noticed a real buzz in the audience
I didn't feel much connection with the characters/story	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt I could really identify with the characters/story
It felt like time was passing slowly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I hardly noticed the time passing
I was mostly in my 'comfort zone'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt challenged and provoked
I felt tired and uninterested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt lively and enthusiastic
I didn't feel much connection with other audience members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	It felt good to be sharing the experience with other people
There wasn't really much that touched me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I found aspects of the performance very moving
The performance didn't really hold my attention	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I was often on the edge of my seat
There was nothing much new for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	It got me thinking about things differently
I felt flat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt tense and excited
I don't feel much urge to discuss the performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I will be talking about the experience for some time to come
It didn't say much about my life or experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Some aspects of the performance seemed relevant to my own life

# RESOURCE B

## ROLE ON THE WALL

