

# The Ballad of

Pondlife

McGurk

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**CATHERINE WHEELS THEATRE COMPANY**

**SCOTLAND**

**EDUCATION RESOURCE PACK**

Tracey Marama Lloyd 2013

Auckland Arts Festival 2013 presents a special schools season of  
**THE BALLAD OF POND LIFE MCGURK**

CATHERINE WHEELS THEATRE COMPANY | SCOTLAND

**Heartfelt honesty**

**Broken friendships**

**Striking solo performance**

**A five star hit at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2012**

**Direct from the UK, this enchanting coming of age tale about friendship, betrayal and overcoming adversity is especially suited for Intermediate and year 9 -11 Secondary school students.**

Martin is the new boy at school among a sea of unfamiliar faces. Meet Sharon: class bully who immediately takes a dislike to Martin and isn't afraid to show it. Enter Simon McGurk: Martin's new best friend, despite their differences. Simon and Martin spend the summer together. They make an oath to stick together, to never join the dark side with the bullies at school. Then Martin does something that will poison their friendship forever.....

**Bring your students to experience storytelling at its best from an internationally acclaimed company.**  
**2 shows a day, 10am & 1pm, at a venue near your school.**  
**Price: \$10** **Duration 50 mins**

**South Auckland**

**Mangere Arts Centre**  
Tues 5 & Wed 6 March

**North Auckland**

**Bruce Mason Theatre**  
Thurs 7 & Fri 8 March

**West Auckland**

**Corban Estate Arts Centre**  
Tues 12 – Fri 15 March

**Central Auckland**

**Town Hall Concert Chamber**  
Wed 20 – Fri 22 March

*The very model of audience-capturing storytelling, this is a well-written and excitingly performed tale.*  
London Theatre Review



## 10 reasons to take your students to see *THE BALLAD OF POND LIFE MCGURK*

1. A unique opportunity to see a highly acclaimed international theatre show.
  2. A brilliant example of solo acting
  3. Great value at \$10 per student
  4. Accessible and convenient locations in your part of Auckland – save on transport costs.
  5. Relevant themes for young teens – bullying, friendship, loyalty
  6. Interesting opportunities for curriculum assignments and assessments
  7. Engaging students in the performing arts is good for the mind and soul
  8. This show is a favourite of our experienced and widely travelled festival directors
  9. Your students will love and appreciate you for taking them out of the classroom
  10. You know the positive impact a show or story like this can have on a developing mind.
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### Background Information:

Catherine Wheels Theatre Company is a leading producer of theatre for children and young people, formed in 1999 by the director Gill Robertson. Their first production *Martha* won the award for Best Production at the Shanghai International Children's Festival. *Lifeboat* (2002) won the Barclay's Stage Award for Best Show for Children and Young People, and was performed at the New Zealand International Arts Festival 2008. *White*, the company's first show for under fours, won numerous awards worldwide.

Andy Manley is a British theatre artist based in Edinburgh. He creates performances largely through devising, and directs or performs depending on what feels right for the project. He started making his own work in 2003 and before that he was an actor. Over the last few years Manley has specialised in creating performances for children and young people.

Of his show, which has been performed at schools across Scotland, at Edinburgh's Imagine Children's Festival, at the Sydney Opera House and the Edinburgh Fringe, co-creator and performer, Andy Manley, said, "I thought it might be interesting to tell a story of someone who took the blame for something they didn't do and how this might affect them. The lovely thing about *Pondlife* is that, though it is for children...it also appeals as much to the adults in the audience. It's a very universal story."

Video link: <http://www.catherinewheels.co.uk/productions/The+Ballad+of+Pondlife+McGurk/video/#page-content>**CREATIVE**

### **CREDITS**

**Performer:** Andy Manley,      **Text:** Rob Evans,      **Director:** Gill Robertson,      **Producer:** Paul Fitzpatrick  
**Sound Designer:** Danny Krass      **Lighting Design:** Craig Fleming

## Resources and Classroom Activities:

### DRAMA:

Drama: UC / CI Levels 3 – 6 AS 1.3, 1.7

The set of The Ballad of *Pondlife McGurk* is designed for intimate and engaging story telling which doesn't rely on complicated sets or lighting. It was designed by all the collaborators.



The audience is invited to sit in one of four islands of carpet within the room with some seating available for those who might prefer not to sit on the floor for the whole hour. In between the carpeted areas there are runways providing paths to wooden boxes which are used in various ways during the performance.

This setting is particularly effective in drawing the audience immediately into the story, and ensuring rapt attention as eyes follow the storyteller around the room.

### Pre show activities - Discuss:

What is a set? - The purpose, who designs it, who creates it?

- A detailed oral description of this set is given by the teacher to the class or by a student to another peer and the students attempt to draw it based on the description
- Show the photo and compare the actual set to what they drew.
- Predict how the actor might use the corridors, circle and boxes.

### Post show activities:

Compare how the set was used to what they predicted.

- What choices did the actor make about using the corridors, boxes, circle?
- Why do you think he made those choices?
- How did it enhance the show / message?

**ENGLISH:**

English: Levels 3- 6 Listening, Viewing, Writing. AS 1.2, 1.4, 1.5

**Imagery, themes, meanings.**

**Pre show activities - Discuss:**

- What is a Ballad? Key features, origins, modern equivalents.  
( NB *Pondlife* is not performed as a ballad but as a story)

*Pondlife McGurk*  
*Was a troublesome child*  
*Some called him stupid*  
*Some called him wild*  
*But all called him Pondlife*  
*For that was his name*

- What might the image of the boy with the fishbowl on his head mean?



**Post show activities:****Meaning and Themes :**

The story covers issues of loneliness and friendship, how friendships change as children grow, and how bullying affects both the bully and the victim.

- Identify and discuss the main themes of Pondlife
- Talk about the fishbowl image and compare conclusions to pre show discussions
- Why was he called Pondlife? Was that his real name or a nickname?  
How does this relate to the image?

**Writing and reviewing:**

- Give students the attached review and ask them to comment/agree/disagree
- Task students with writing their own review for their school newsletter or for the Auckland Arts Festival website ( we will post in our schools section)
- Task the students with writing ***The Ballad of .....*** (their name).

**Characters:**

The story is performed by Andy Manley, one of the co-creators of this new work.

He imitates various characters in the story to great effect using different accents and characterisation to ensure the clear distinction between them.

- Identify the different characters performed by Andy.
  - How did he show the difference between characters? – Accent? Body language? Facial expression
  - Link a character to a theme or idea within the story.
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# The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk

## **Post Show Questions ( From The Company)**

The questions below allow pupils to reflect and discuss the performance. This work should happen as close to the end of the performance as possible.

### **At the beginning of the story Martin and Simon are best friends.**

Discuss with the class what they liked about each other

How is Martin's friendship different with Stuart and Colin?

### **In the story Martin and Simon find it difficult to talk about what happened at the pond.**

Chose 5 words that describe the different ways Martin & Simon felt about what happened.

Why did they find it difficult to talk even though they were good friends?

### **"I wonder what he'll think of me now. Put out my hand. Put out my hand to see if he'll take it"**

At the end of the story Martin worries what Simon will think of him now.

Discuss the questions Martin raises and discuss what might happen next.

### **When Simon grows up he names his company 'Pondlife McGurk Animation'**

Discuss why he would chose to use the name he was bullied with at school.

### **This performance was created specifically to be performed in a school hall.**

Discuss with the class what they thought of the performance and the way it was staged. Was it effective in creating characters and different environments?

Draw one of the characters we met in the story.

## [Edinburgh Fringe: The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk – Traverse at Scottish Book Trust](#)

**Writer: Rob Evans**

**Director: Gill Robertson**

**Reviewer: John Roberts**The Public Reviews Rating:



“The art of storytelling is dead...” a phrase that can be said about many productions that litter the fringe every year. You may have elaborate sets, celebrity castings, or 1001 other reasons to see a show, but if the production, cast and director fail to tell that story coherently and honestly then the experience can be hollow and soulless.

Thankfully that is not the case with Catherine Wheels’ production of The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk. Here we have no set, or celebrity castings, instead we have Andy Manley a regular performer with Catherine Wheels and one story. Whether you are 5, 14, 50 or 89 the universal theme of friendships lost is a powerful one. We have all experienced the grief, the pain and the loss of losing a best friend but we also remember fondly many years later the good times you had with them and that is what makes The Ballad of Pondlife McGurk so strong.

Rob Evans has written a story that captivates, empowers and releases your imagination from the strangleholds of everyday life whilst Andy Manley expertly delves into, embodies and brings to life a host of characters with verve and vigour. The raw energy that is displayed on the empty stage is nothing short of epic. Gill Robertson directs with deft precision, enabling Manley to engage with his younger (and older) audience.

This is what theatre is all about, perfect performance, perfect direction and ultimately perfect storytelling.

**Photo Paul Watt**