

AGE EXCHANGE THEATRE

ROUTES

TEACHER'S NOTES

We hope that teachers will find ***Routes*** to be a useful starting point for classroom work in many National Curriculum areas. These notes look at some content areas and concepts which the play explores in the order in which they occur in the play, and offer some ideas which relate to Key Stages 2 and 3.

We should be very happy to hear your response to the play, and to learn how you have used it as a trigger for classroom work.

A **summary** of the play is enclosed. This will give you some idea of the story, which spans the lifetime of Kirtar up to his old age in Britain in the present.

Age Exchange also has a **Reminiscence Box** entitled ***Born in the Indian Subcontinent*** which is full of objects to explore in the classroom. All Reminiscence Boxes are available for hire through Age Exchange.

We hope as many schools as possible will invite older people (especially grandparents) to watch the show with the children.

The performers will be speaking in **Punjabi and in English**, but they will always underline the meaning of their dialogue with action, gesture, and expression.

The Indian village is created by the actors in sounds and images.

In **Music and Drama**, the children may like to make a similar representation of their own area. What are the sounds and images of their daily lives in an urban area? What would a visitor from a far away land notice about the area?

In **Geography** work, the class might locate India on a map of the world. The size of the country means that there are a range of climates. (AT2) They could locate the Punjab area from which Kirtar's family come, and see if it is flat or mountainous, well served by rivers or desertified, densely populated or mainly agricultural. (AT4) Maybe some of the children also come from that area and can give more detailed accounts of an Indian village, either first or second hand. (AT1)

If some of the children have parents or grandparents who know a great deal about an Indian village, perhaps the older people could visit the classroom and talk to the children in small groups, ideally enlisting the help of the children in translating. The children could start to understand the **History** of the family and its migration through **Oral History**. (AT2) Where more than one source is available to the class, the children will certainly realise that there is more than one way of telling about the past, and more than one way of interpreting what happened and why. This work will link in with the speaking and listening component of the **English** curriculum (AT1).

The class should understand that in an Indian village, many things we take for granted here, like electricity, gas, running water, shops, supermarkets, factories, banks and public transport would not necessarily be available. The comparison and contrasting of their own area with the village would relate to **Geography** studies (AT2), and also to the **Science** curriculum, considering what natural materials would be available in such a village, and how the people would cook, wash, buy food, make clothes, travel, etc. In **Art**, the children could produce a visual version of the Indian village, perhaps using the traditional images on the backcloth and programme cover as a starter, and a contrasting picture of their own immediate surroundings. The **Routes** design is based on a traditional method of painting on village walls, making the outlines of the images in rice grains set in mud or cow dung.

The land farmed by the villagers has often been in their families for many generations, and everyone in the family will help with the harvest. The crops will be dependent on rain at certain times, and there can be climatic changes (such as an early monsoon or a drought) which bring great hardship to the families. In **Geography**, (AT3) the class could contrast this dependence on favourable climate with the way they and their families lead their own lives, more or less regardless of the weather.

Borrowing money is mentioned many times in the play. The children need to understand that the moneylender can be an important figure in a village when special expenses need to be met or crops fail. He may be paid back when the next harvest comes in, but he will charge interest on what he lends, so families can get into severe difficulties. Perhaps in a **Maths** lesson, the pupils can try some simple exercises with borrowing ten pence and having to pay back interest for each minute it is on loan, so that they can see how a person can be ruined by high interest mounting over a period. The play also involves some conversion from pounds into rupees. Perhaps the children could translate one kind of money into another, using their own experience, if any, of foreign travel to help them.

The **family structure** explored in the play is one where the bride comes to live with the husband in his home. She joins the house-hold of the mother-in-law, and brings with her a dowry to enrich her husband's family. This dowry is her birthright, so the point in the play where she sacrifices her dowry to help her husband finance his visit to England has great significance for all the family, including her children. The sense of continuity with the past through significant objects and images would connect to the **History** curriculum.

Vouchers for work in England were made available in many commonwealth countries in the 1950s and 60s when there were labour shortages here, especially in heavy industry and public services. This availability of work created much migration of population, which will tie in with the **Geography** (AT4) and, in terms of change in a given area, with the **History** curriculum (AT3). The children might like to consider the impact on a family of having the breadwinner leave home for many years for another continent.

Many families took advantage of the opportunity to take better paid work abroad to solve financial problems at home. For many workers, the journey to England would also be their first journey away from their village. They would need to travel many miles to a big city in India first before leaving for Britain. What different kinds of **transport** do the children think they might have had to use? What would be the nearest big city? From which town might Punjabi people have sailed or flown?

Many village people who came over did not read or write a great deal, and certainly would not read in English, so the **language** difficulties would have been enormous in finding their way round London or any other British city. The children might experiment with trying to interpret certain signs and instructions in another script in order to understand some of the problems experienced by Kirtar and others like him. This will link with **English work** on reading and on speaking and listening (AT1, 2 and 3).

Immigrants depended heavily on **mutual support** and would go first to family friends or relatives who would help them, so there will be growing communities from certain regions in different parts of Britain. New immigrants would need to learn a new way of life in order to survive, such as traffic law, getting from A to B on public transport, adjusting to a new social system and different modes of dress and behaviour. In **Drama** or **English**, the class might like to divide into two groups and invent certain simple rules (eg. never sit down facing someone), customs (eg. special form of greeting) and five important new made-up words. The two groups could visit each other and see how they managed to communicate in the foreign land and language (AT1).

Often the breadwinner who came to Britain decided to bring the family over, rather than to return, since opportunities for continuing to earn would be more limited at home. In our play we show the impact on the family of moving to Britain, both on those who leave and those who remain behind. In **Creative Writing** in English (AT3), the children might consider the reaction of their grandparents and friends if they were to leave Britain now for many years, and maybe for ever. Would all of them want to leave behind the scenes of their childhood, all the people and places they had known, to follow their parent in an unknown land? A **Poem** on this subject or a short **Drama** scene would both be good ways of exploring these ideas.

The play touches on questions of **bullying and prejudice** in the classroom. Teachers may wish to use the experience of Kirtar's son, Sevva, in the play, to discuss these issues. What should a child do when s/he is the victim of bullying. Who should s/he turn to? Are all the class responsible if one of them is victimised? These questions could form part of **English** (AT1) or Religious Studies. There may be some opportunity for discussion with the actors in role as to why they acted as they did, or the pupils may have their own experiences to relate. The fact that the characters in the play practice Sikhism could also open up discussion on comparative religion, for example different kinds of wedding ceremonies.

All the scenes in *Routes* were suggested to us by the **experiences of older people from India and Pakistan**. The story is told from their point of view. Growing old away from home and watching one's children and grandchildren adopt a new language and culture can be a sad experience for older people. Many elders regret the loss of the original language over two or three generations, especially the barrier this creates between them and their grandchildren.

The class might discuss how many languages they speak between them and when they use their **second language** and how important it is to them. They might also consider what a lot/little they know about the **culture** of their grandparents (their music, their stories, their religion, their memories) and how much they know through events in the school and elsewhere about each other's language and culture. There is a great deal of **Music** in the play. All of it is played live by the performers using traditional instruments. The children may be interested in the rhythms and sounds and also the very different kinds of songs they will hear. They may like to listen to recordings of other kinds of music from different countries and consider why certain instruments are in common use, and why certain rhythms are associated with different cultures. Maybe one of the children has a relative who can play a traditional instrument and would be willing to bring it to the classroom to show them.

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AN ENGLISH SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

The actors call the village audience together to hear the players.

We visit their Punjabi village in sounds and in images: women going to the well, milking the cows, cooking, shopping, the village money lender, the blacksmith, the stall holder, the temple and the fields where the men bring in the harvest.

We meet Kirtar's family. We see him learn to farm his fields and take over the work. His father becomes sick, and dies shortly after. Kirtar must look after the land alone.

His mother wants to find a bride for him. She is getting old and wants someone to help with cooking and sewing. She knows of a beautiful girl in the next village who will make Kirtar happy.

The son agrees, but knows he must improve the house to make it fit for a bride. He goes to the moneylender to borrow money for a new roof and floor. He is lent the money, and will repay the moneylender with the harvest from his fields.

The mother travels to next village, meets the bride's father, and agrees the dowry.

The bride and groom are prepared and the wedding is celebrated. The wife is taken to her new home where she helps the mother-in-law.

The moneylender visits the husband in fields. He requires repayment soon. He is reassured he'll be paid after harvest.

Kirtar returns home, and talks confidently about the harvest, and paying off what he owes.

But there are three bad years with poor harvests, and he is unable to repay the moneylender, who refuses to wait longer and claims Kirtar's land.

Kirtar returns home to his mother, wife and children and breaks the news. His mother is very angry as this land has been theirs for generations. They are all despairing.

Then there is news in the paper. There are vouchers for Indian people to travel to England where there is work available.

Kirtar dreams of becoming rich in England, and buying back his land in India. His mother and wife will also become rich and have servants to command. He will return to his village a rich and respected man.

Kirtar's dream over, he runs to tell his mother and wife about his plan to go to England for work. They are very upset, but they accept his idea as a possible solution to their problems.

Kirtar now needs money for his ticket to England. His wife gives him her wedding jewels (her dowry) as a bond for the moneylender so her husband can borrow the money for the air fare.

The moneylender accepts jewels, but demands a high rate of interest on the money he lends for the fare to England.

Kirtar bids farewell to his wife and mother. He travels by cart and train to Delhi where he organises his voucher, his passport and his ticket. Then he flies to England.

A friend meets him in London and takes him to his house to stay. The friend finds him a job in a foundry, and they work shifts, taking it in turns to sleep and work.

When Kirtar is paid he sends money to his wife. She writes to thank him, and we hear through her song how much she misses her husband.

Kirtar now sends money for his wife and children to join him in England.

The wife tells her mother-in-law that Kirtar is well and has sent money. When the mother hears that the money is for the wife and children to travel to England, she is very upset and does not want to lose her grandchildren. The wife says that when they are settled they will send for her, but she says she is too old to travel.

The wife travels to England and is reunited with her husband. After four years she is very shy with him and surprised that he now does everything for himself. He is proud of the house that he has saved for, but to the wife it is all very alien.

Kirtar takes the children to school, and the wife gives way to her fears and sorrows at being alone in a foreign country where she knows no one. She misses her home.

An Indian neighbour calls on her, shows her how the heater and the cooker work and promises to show her around. She is reassured, and starts to work.

The wife is hovering and cheering up when her little boy, Sevva, comes in crying from school followed by Mitu, his tearful older sister. He is upset because no one understands him and he can't speak English. Mitu says they have been teased at school and called Pakkis.

Kirtar comes in and encourages them to persevere and learn to speak English.

The children run out to play in the street and make friends with local children. A white boy, Tom, plays hopscotch with them and they invite him home. Their mother offers Tom Coca Cola and samosas. She is pleased that Sevva has a friend.

Sevva is excited about seeing Tom in school the next day, but he is disappointed. Tom is now hostile. His mother has said he must not make friends with Sevva as he is different. He wants to move to another desk.

The teacher tells Tom to behave, but after school he terrorises Sevva.

Sevva runs home to his mother, who is very upset for him. She wants to complain to the teacher, but the boy fears the teacher is powerless to stop the bullying. Kirtar comes home and his wife tells him to call the police. He says that will only create trouble, and it is best for Sevva to ignore these insults. Sevva feels angry and impotent. He storms off.

The mother and father are at a loss. The mother wants to go back to India, but the father insists that they must make a life here.

However, he does agree that the wife should take their daughter, Mitu, back to the village in Punjab to see her grandmother and to understand something of her background. The visit is helpful for them both. Mitu finishes her studies and her parents are proud of her.

Sevva is a problem to his parents. He rejects his culture and will not show respect to his parents. There is a quarrel and his father throws him out of the house.

Now Kirtar is ill and getting old. The years are passing. Mitu still looks after her parents, but she has her own family to look after. She leaves them watching an Indian film and remembering their own past. They are settled now and feel they have much to feel positive about in their new life.

The mother then mentions Sevva and says how sad she is that he has gone, but Kirtar becomes angry. He will not hear Sevva's name mentioned.

There is a knock at the door and it is Sevva with a young Indian wife and child they have never seen. Kirtar overcomes his anger. He welcomes his new daughter-in-law and shows her a photograph of his village in Punjab, with Sevva as a small boy. He is reconciled with Sevva and his wife is overjoyed.