

**GCSE (9–1)**  
*Teacher Guide*

# DRAMA

J316  
For first teaching in 2016

## Kindertransport – Diane Samuels

Version 1





# Kindertransport

by *Diane Samuels*

## Introduction

Kindertransport is a performance text that has a variety of themes that can be related to contemporary issues even though it's based on historical events. This play is ideal for GCSE students because of the small cast and as it is broken up into many small episodes. Although casting is for five females and one male, it would be interesting to cross gender this piece to highlight social and historical issues for gender equality and opportunities across the generations.

Students are expected to have a good understanding of performance, design and directing across the whole play.

## Summary

Kindertransport is set in the mid-1980s of Evelyn's home in the suburbs of outer London or perhaps one of the Home Counties. All action takes place in the attic.

The play is broken into two acts and two scenes in each act.

The play jumps between:

- Three times periods; pre war, war and post-war.
- Three cities; Hamburg, Manchester, London.
- Three mothers; Helga, Lil and Evelyn and the impact of choices that a parent has to make for the protection of their child.

## Characters

**Eva Schlesinger** – nine year old German girl who grows up and is seventeen by the end of the play.

**Evelyn** – a middle-classed English woman in her fifties.

**Faith** – Evelyn's only child, twenty years old.

**Lil Miller** – Working-class English woman from Manchester. Ages throughout play from around early thirties through to her eighties.

**Helga Schlesinger** – Mother of Eva, German Jewish woman. At the start of the play she is in her thirties, by the end around forty.





A nine year old Jewish girl, Eva, is sent by her parents to leave Hamburg, Germany, in 1939 to safety in Britain by the Kindertransport (children's transport). Her English foster mother, Lil, hosts Eva through her formative years and even though she helps Eva to get employment for her parents, Lil can't help but treat Eva as her own child. Eva's parents fail to escape war-torn Germany and in turn, Eva loses sight of hope and direction. Eva grows up in Manchester with Lil and over time changes her name to Evelyn and begins the process of denying her roots.

When Evelyn's own daughter, Faith, discovers papers of her mother's former life in their attic, Evelyn is forced to confront the past which is haunted by the Ratfänger (the Ratcatcher); a German equivalent of the Pied Piper. Confessions of denial of her past life ensue and when Evelyn talks of her mother, Helga, surviving the war and coming to collect her to travel to New York, Evelyn remembers her refusal of her mother's offer and of her birth mother. Faith's curiosity of her family roots leave Evelyn a little raw and a mutual respect is shown for each other's feelings.

The shadow of the Ratfänger looms over Evelyn as she is left alone in the attic.





# Synopsis

## Act I Scene I

We are introduced to Helga and Eva in the opening scene. The mother, Helga is encouraging her daughter, Eva, to learn to sew a button on without help. We are in Hamburg in 1939 (pre WWII). Eva would much prefer to be reading her story book *Der Rattenfänger* (The Ratcatcher) as her bedtime story but Helga would prefer not. Eva is packing her suitcase to go to England on a train that will take her to safety away from the Nazi regime in Germany.

We move to the 1980s. Evelyn is helping Faith to prepare for leaving home looking through boxes for supplies of cutlery and crockery in the attic. Faith is worried about leaving her mother and manages to convince themselves that it would be best if she would stay. Evelyn asks Faith to tidy up the boxes and leaves the attic. Instead of tidying, Faith explores.

Eva and Helga are packing. Helga reveals her travelling gift to Eva; 'Put the heel of the right shoe to your ear.' She has employed a cobbler to hide a watch, some jewellery and the star of David in Eva's shoes. Eva is reprimanded for

hiding her harmonica in the suitcase; a crime in the eyes of the regime and a stunt where she might not be able to board the train to safety. Helga takes out the harmonica. Eva secretly puts it back.

Meanwhile Faith is looking through a box of old toys. Lil, Faiths' grandmother, Evelyn's mother, is visiting from Manchester, comes to the attic and tells Faith to put the toys away and come downstairs. Faith continues to play with the train and dolls and comes across the book *Der Rattenfänger* and picks it up as if it's very familiar to her. Helga reads Eva her story book, a German equivalent of the *Pied Piper*. The Ratcatcher emerges from the attic. No one notices him. As the story is told, Eva is preparing to catch the train, carries her suitcase and boards the train for England.

We meet the Ratcatcher dressed as a Nazi Boarder official and he finds the harmonica which he makes her play to prove she is telling the truth. He allows her to board.

Eva arrives in Harwich, England (after shouting abuse to the Nazis once she passed the crossing) and is surprised no one searches her.







Helga continues to read the story back in Hamburg and warns children to not be naughty so the Ratcatcher won't come and take them away.

## Act I Scene II

Helga has gone.

Faith is looking through the photos and letters in the storybook box. The letters are from a girl called Eva to her parents in Germany.

Eva arrives in London speaking no English and feeling abandoned. The Organiser tries to be sympathetic but not handling the emotional girl well, tells her that her foster mother is delayed.

Lil enters the attic tired of waiting for Faith and asks Faith why she hasn't tidied up.

Eva is still waiting to be collected. Lil crosses time zones and we see a younger Lil meeting Eva and alighting a train to Manchester. It is obvious there is a warm connection between the pair of them and even through the language barrier, they still have some touching moments.

Back in London 1980s, Faith is questioning Lil as to why the little German girl has never been spoken about. Even though Lil protests and tells Faith to put her mother's belongings away, Faith continues to question Lil until she reveals the truth; Evelyn is Eva, the little German girl.

Lil is helping Eva write a letter to apply for permits for her parents to enter the country.

Faith continues to interrogate Lil about her mother's true identity and she shares the basic details but states that Evelyn must not be troubled with the revelations.

Eva arrives home late and is told off by Lil. Eva reveals, after Lil's questioning, that she has been to the 'big houses' asking for jobs for her parents. Eva is scared that Lil will send her away for being naughty. Lil reassures her this is not the case.

Evelyn comes in to the attic and Faith asks Evelyn outright about the findings. Evelyn refuses to respond and Faith loses her temper and blocks Evelyn as she tries to exit the attic. Evelyn remains reserved with the details and Faith storms out the attic, followed by Lil.

Evelyn is left alone in the attic with the Ratcatcher looming.



Both Eva and Evelyn talk of the Ratcatcher as if an adult is reassuring a child that the Ratcatcher won't hurt her and the adult will protect her.

## Act II Scene I

Evelyn looks unkempt and is smoking.

It is Helga's and Eva's last night together they are reading the Ratfänger but Helga talks about comparing Eva to a jewel.

Faith apologises and asks Evelyn to open the door to the attic. Evelyn asks her to go and eat without her.

'Sieg Heil', a Mancunian postman, impersonates a German and enters giving a parcel to Eva asking her to teach him the proper way to salute. The parcel contains the Ratfänger, a letter and a Haggadah (a Jewish book to conduct a Passover service). Eva is being reminded by Helga to maintain her Jewish roots and practices.

Lil threatens Evelyn with the fire service and so the door is unlocked to the attic. Lil suggests talking to Faith but Evelyn is convinced she hates and blames her now the truth has been exposed and she can't do anything about it.

Eva wears her jewellery and is carrying a bag and gas mask box. Lil is seeing Eva off at the railway station to be evacuated from the city to the safety of the country. A very uncomfortable scene and Eva asks Lil to not make her go. Once on the train, Eva is overwhelmed with terror that the Ratcatcher will get her that she runs off the train and lands on the platform. Lil is apologetic for sending her off.

Evelyn and Lil are setting about sorting out the papers; first entry permit, letters, pictures, official letters. Evelyn struggles to rip up papers so Lil offers to do the task but Evelyn insists that Lil has already done enough and taken so much of her already to the point where she accuses Lil of making her betray her mother. A scene that sees Evelyn regress to a teenager and take all her pent up anger over her suffering parental detachment out on Lil. Lil remains





consistent and supportive. Evelyn gets so angry that she ends up tearing up the letter and contents of the box.

Ten year old Eva and Lil are at Manchester station. Eva has wandered off and is searching the platforms for the arrival of her parents as she has received a letter saying that they should have arrived from Germany two days earlier yet there's been no sign. A Guard approaches Eva and questions her being by herself and suggests she could be a spy. Lil is defensive and tries to curtail Eva's worries by reassuring her as much as possible. Eva convinces herself that she will never see her parents again; she takes her jewellery off.

Evelyn is still ripping up the letters. Lil finds the Ratfänger book and starts to tear it up. Evelyn stops her and also insists on not ripping the Haggadah. They discuss parent/child relationships.

Newsreel about the liberation of Belsen is heard. Lil is trying to protect a 15 year old Eva from the content of the footage. Eva is questioning her own reaction, or lack of, and insists they still go to the cinema for their treat.

Faith wants to come in to the attic but Evelyn still can't face her so Lil explains that they will be out of the attic soon.

Lil is sewing Eva's hem as she claims she can't sew. Eva asks about how much money her jewellery is worth so she can pay for her keep and implies she'll never need them again.

Faith knocks again and is allowed to enter the attic. She apologises for shouting though is upset that Evelyn has torn up the photos and family documents. Faith is obviously upset and asks Evelyn about who's going to take care of her family's memory. Evelyn states that she will tell Faith what she knows and remembers as long as she is not questioned again. Some history is told and we find out that Evelyn's father died in a concentration camp and when asked about her mother... Evelyn confesses to Faith that Helga did not die.

Helga appears.

Evelyn, Lil and Faith all break their fourth time wall and watch Eva, 17, meet the survivor Helga in Liverpool. She intends to take both herself and Eva to New York where her brother will help them make a fresh start. Helga is surprised that Eva has changed her name to Evelyn and that her daughter cannot understand her native language who has now being naturalised as English and adopted by Lil and her husband. Helga doesn't reveal her tactics of survival, even when Eva asks her what bad things she

did and instead she tries to convince her to leave for New York; Eva questions if she has to go.

## Act II Scene II

The attic has been tidied. Helga is standing in a corner with a suitcase.

Evelyn is looking for something to give Faith for her pending house move. Lil is talking about going back to Manchester, it's a tense exchange as it is clear that Lil was not aware Helga survived. Lil agrees to the offer of a lift from Evelyn to the station and leaves the attic space. Faith asks if she is Jewish and Evelyn being German and also about herself being denied her maternal Grandmother. Evelyn says it's all in the past and advocates baptism. She does, however, give Faith a few remaining items from her childhood, but holds back the harmonica, Ratfänger and her Haggadash.

A young Evelyn and Helga are on the Liverpool quayside, the latter about to board a ship to New York. Evelyn will not go on the journey and Helga is confused as to why when they are lucky that they have been reunited. Evelyn wishes Helga a safe trip and when they walk away from each other, Evelyn confesses that she sees Helga as the Ratfänger; taking her away from the place that has become her home. Helga expresses her own suffering. Evelyn confesses she never wanted to leave Helga; rather prefer dying with her than leaving her and surviving. Helga leaves.

Faith returns to the attic where Evelyn is crying. Faith tries to get her mother to open up but to no avail. Faith asks her mother for a box of her old toys, she leaves with a box.

Evelyn remains alone and the shadow of the Ratcatcher lingers.





## The author and her influences

*"Three incidents led me to write Kindertransport. The first was a discussion with a close friend, in her late twenties and born into a comfortable, secure home, who described her struggle to deal with the guilt of survival. Her father had been on the Kindertransport and I was struck by how her parent's feelings had been passed down to her. The second was the experience of another friend who, at her father's funeral, overheard her mother recalling her time at Auschwitz. Until that moment she had had no idea that her mother had been in a concentration camp. The third was the ashamed admission by a fifty five year old woman on a television documentary about the Kindertransport, that the feeling she felt most strongly towards her dead parents was rage at their abandonment of her, even though that abandonment had saved her life. "*

Diane Samuels

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<http://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/Book/1584/Diane-Samuels-Kindertransport.html>



# Exploring the play

## Key themes

*Guilt   Gratitude   Loss   New life   Memory*  
*Identity   Survival   Family*

## Performance characteristics and staging requirements

The performance style of the play is considered to be naturalistic though the Ratcatcher character could be played more stylised. The genre of the play is a historical drama because of the factually based content and events.

Shared Experience theatre company have an alternative view on how to play Kindertransport which could be worth exploring. [http://www.sharedexperience.org.uk/media/education/kindertransport\\_edpack.pdf](http://www.sharedexperience.org.uk/media/education/kindertransport_edpack.pdf)

Music is a key element to this play. Opening with 'The Ratcatcher music' and many reintroductions of this theme appear throughout. Professional productions have often used original compositions and Diane Samuels encourages this; originality and creativity. The significance of the mouth organ is key to Eva on her leaving Germany so this is something to be investigated. Jewish religion, as with most, use a lot of music in their practice and particular instruments and styles to represent their work, as with the music of England and Germany. This provides a great opportunity to examine the semiotics of music with country, religion and era.





## Common misconceptions or difficulties

- There is the misconception of the space that the play is staged in to create a split stage; cross cutting between the changes of time. There are opportunities to experiment with overlapping the characters in the stage space rather than creating separate areas for the actors to work in. Explore the idea of the play being timeless; all the events happening at once. Diane Samuels' idea of the time being the 'now'; how there is no past, present and future, and the scenes that are presented are merely moments rather than a linear, chronological order. Again, students can discuss how this links to the use of semiotics.
- There is a danger when performing the play that the audience think to applaud after each segment in each era. As a company or director a decision will need to be made as to how the flow of the play can be kept. Maybe the intention is for there to be a 'full stop' after each segment as long as it's justified and the students understand why they have chosen to this it can be successful. Otherwise, the actors need to keep the flow of the action moving to avoid the applause that is not sought at these intervals. You could get your students to experiment with ways of keeping the action flowing; sharing of props across scenes, lighting, sound effects, tableaux, use of stage space etc.
- Explore the mannerisms of each character. How can you show the change in age using the same mannerisms? The audience could identify the mannerisms of each character throughout their aging process and take away the need for any costume changes or acknowledgement of time change.
- Accents are a difficulty but they can play a part in the performance if you choose. Perhaps there's a need to have a light German accent for Helga and Eva early on in the play and then when we see Helga after her survival she has a heavier one? Remember the dialogue is written in English, with a few discrepancies, so perhaps it's worth focusing on the lines that uses German and focusing on the correct pronunciation rather than limiting a student with exploring the scenes with full accents throughout.





## Exploring the play further

There are fantastic resources for exploring the idea of myth/ fable. Teachers could start by exploring the traditional Greek Aesop Fables which students are probably familiar with and then moving on to the darker stories of Struwwelpeter.

Ebook of Shock headed Peter; Struwwelpeter:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12116/12116-h/12116-h.htm>

Or it can be bought here: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Struwwelpeter-English-Translation-Childrens-Classics/dp/0486284697>

Further author insights and research are available in Diane Samuels' book Kindertransport: The authors guide to the play. Available from Nick Hern website: <http://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/Book/1584/Diane-Samuels-Kindertransport.html>

## How to approach essay questions in the exam

The examination is worth 40% of the whole qualification and 25% is based on the set text Section A questions. The students need to have read and be familiar with the play as a whole. There is no need for them to be able to recite the script however it would be useful to know a few key phrases or quotes to accompany their responses.

The key themes are a focus and the questions will focus on the process of creating and developing a performance, working as a director, performer or designer as well as the performance of a character from the text. In the activities there are many other themes that could be the focus of the question.

The Section A questions assesses students knowledge and understanding of how the play is developed and performed so analysing the process and making notes throughout is vital.

## Activities

- Produce a timeline of events that happened before, during and after WWII that effected the Kindertransport families.
- Produce a character journey for each character highlighting the changes in the relationships with others throughout the play.
- Give students five different pictures of events at a train station; someone leaving, someone arriving, a close embrace, someone chasing a leaving train, an unhappy face at a window etc. Discuss how each character feels or improvise scenes based on the characters in the photographs.
- Students all sing 'The runaway train' <http://nurseryrhymescollections.com/lyrics/the-runaway-train.html>. What are the connotations of the words in the context of the play? Has the playwright eliminated words deliberately to emphasise others? Discuss the significance of trains in the play. Does a stereotypically male toy/ interest of trains being a theme in the play juxtapose the casting? How can you compare the train and the track to Faith's joy of her reunion with her dolls? Does one have more importance/significance than the other in the scene?
- Evelyn 'I never wanted to live without you and you made me...' improvise a scene with this as an opening line. What contemporary issues can be brought in to this scene?
- <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/6-stories-of-the-kindertransport>. Print off these six pictures of memories from Kinder. Put them in a box. Students should open them individually and explore the reactions through improvisations and their relationship with the contents of the box.
- This is a female dominated play - not just because of the characters themselves but the relationships that are evident: mother/ daughter; surrogate mother/ daughter; grandmother/granddaughter. Explore and discuss the role of males in the play. Does Samuels paint all males as having the higher status? Are any relationships between the females we meet that have any positive relationships with men? How can the Ratcatcher and his alter egos be portrayed? Is there any way they can be performed in a positive way to show a gentler, lower status than the females in the play?

- [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=shock+headed+peter+piccadilly](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=shock+headed+peter+piccadilly) A link to the search 'shock headed Peter'. This was staged at the Piccadilly Theatre in the West end in the late 1990s and although some of these links are videos of performances in German, they give a really good sense of the macabre that the character of the Ratcatcher brings to the play. An interesting study for the actor(s) who plays the Ratcatcher et al.
- After reading the drama, students can play 'My life is worse than yours because...'. In pairs, each character compares their life to the other's and how much worse it is. You could start this game at the beginning of the rehearsal process and at intervals throughout so as their knowledge of the characters grows, so does their understanding. You could also change it to be 'My life is better than yours because...' and other variations.
- Discuss the significance of Faith's name.
- All cast sit in a circle. With a picture of a 'Ratcatcher' each character hands the picture to the character they think could be the Ratcatcher in disguise. 'I think you're the rat catcher because...' and then they need to give evidence of the characters' actions or lines that they say that give provenance of being this sinister character. Perhaps the picture of the Ratcatcher could also be an exercise as to what 'he' looks like, maybe he's different for each character; what does the audience need to see the Ratcatcher as? Discussions about semiotics would be useful here.
- Discuss: How is the idea of jewellery or jewels are significant in the play?







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