

**GCSE (9–1)**  
*Teacher Guide*

# DRAMA

J316  
For first teaching in 2016

**Find me**  
**– Olwen Wymark**

Version 1



# Find me

by *Olwen Wymark*

## Summary

### Brief Synopsis

Find Me is a play based on a true story. The central character is a girl named Verity Taylor who suffers with mental health problems. The play studies the effects that her condition has on her family and questions the treatment she receives by the healthcare system.

The structure is episodic. The scenes vary in length and each portrays an incident which contributes to Verity's downfall. The play is not split into acts and scenes however there is a note in the front of the play script which states that there is an 'optional interval' and changes in setting are represented by the use of blackouts which are clearly noted in the stage directions. Although the play is mainly linear, flashbacks are used and the end of the play is announced at the beginning. Find Me is a social drama and tragedy as it 'shows the downfall of the central character, uses simplified characters narrowed down to what is essential, there is a significant impact on the audience during the Catharsis and there is no way out of the dilemma' that Verity and her family face.

The narrator's introduction explains the end of the story and the various settings in the play to the audience in the very first scene. The action then skips back to the beginning of the play when Verity was nine.

During the exposition of the play Edward is asked questions by the Interviewer about his daughter Verity. He explains that the birth was a little premature and that her mother wasn't allowed to have her for the first week. He goes on to explain that he found Verity to be a difficult child who was always a little distant. He describes times when she would wander off from home, flare up very suddenly and have tantrums. Verity's mother and father decided that physical punishment was wrong for Verity as she was a very sensitive child. When she was diagnosed with a mild epileptic condition they hoped that the treatment would help to settle her down, but it didn't. Verity was a solitary child who was always happier playing in her own private world.



The next section shows Verity playing with an imaginary village she has built out of blocks. The village is full of people that Verity promises to look after. When her mother, Jean, comes home and tells Verity to clear away the blocks to make room for the family to have tea Verity has a tantrum, knocks over all the blocks and accuses her mother of wanting all the people in her village 'killed'. This scene is the first to highlight the difficult relationship between Verity and her mother.

Their relationship is displayed further in the school scene that follows. Jean waits to pick Verity up in the rain with the other mothers whilst the teacher finishes off the lesson inside. The scene opens with Jean reading Verity's school report out loud to another mother outside the school gates. Although Verity is able to answer difficult questions on primary colours of light and gets a good academic report, it is during this scene that Verity's social behaviour is questioned. This is symbolised by a pair of Wellington boots; Jean brings them for Verity to wear on the way home, but instead of agreeing to put them on, Verity uses them to scoop up water from puddles and asks her classmates and mother if they would like to sip champagne from the boot. The scene ends with Verity and her mother standing at a distance from each other in the empty playground, before Verity runs off with Jean following distraughtly.

Verity's brother is the central character in the next scene; the family are out for dinner at a French restaurant. After a series of misunderstandings with the waitress, Verity begins to cause a disruption with a French family who are sitting at the table opposite. During this scene, Mark tells Verity that he hates her, before Verity is dragged out of the restaurant by her father, Edward.

In the following scene Mark is on a school trip and Verity is, in fact, the only child from the family at the bonfire. During this scene the audience is able to see the hope that both Edward and Jean have for Verity's recovery. They discuss that Verity has started a new school and has written a poem about bonfire night. Verity recites the poem and is congratulated by the friends and neighbours who are attending the party. There is a reference in the scene to Verity's interest in swimming, this builds up to the 'swimming gala' scene which is the climax of the play and precedes the optional interval.

Verity is the central character in the swimming gala scene. This part of the story is told from Verity's perspective. It is said that this part of the play was actually written by the girl who the play is based on. Verity is played by five different actors during this scene, all of whom represent



her voice. The five Veritys share a monologue which demonstrate the passion that Verity has for swimming and the critical importance of succeeding at the swimming gala. She explains how she feels safe in the water and that by winning she will make her mum and dad proud. Verity's monologue is broken by the teacher who tells her that she can't swim in the gala unless she has a swimming cap. Verity goes rigid and silent, almost catatonic, before a blackout which allows the setting to shift back to the family home. When the lights come up we find out that Verity has ripped up a whole box of her mother's photographs and locked herself in the bathroom. We find out later that she has smashed three windows and flooded the bathroom.

Because of her severe anti-social behaviour after the swimming gala, Verity, aged 11, is admitted to a mental hospital. She and her parents are interviewed by a nurse, clerk, registrar, doctor and another doctor, all of whom seem to be repeating the same questions. As they admit Verity, they place chairs in a circle around her like a cage, Verity turns away from her parents and they leave. After a year in the hospital Verity has made very little progress. She was able to come home for Christmas but it ended in disaster with Verity cutting her arms with a knife when she was supposed to be setting the table for Christmas dinner. With her arms dripping in blood Verity snatches her mums cape and scarf and says that now she and her mother have swapped clothes that Jean should go back to the hospital in Verity's place. Mark is also home for Christmas. He defends his mother and tells Verity to 'go back to hospital, where she belongs'. Verity refuses to go back to hospital and her parents begin the search for more suitable support. In the meantime Verity stays at the family home.

In the following scene Jean is visited by a social worker, Miss Everitt. The social worker is unable to offer any residential care for Verity. She explains that there are no suitable boarding school places, the children's ward at the hospital won't take her again, as in their view she is no longer in need of hospital care, and that the Rudolf Steiner Centre wouldn't accept her either as last time she was there she 'incited the other children to destructive behavior and vandalism'. Despite Jean explaining to the social worker that she can't cope with Verity at home, Miss Everitt leaves without offering a solution. In the following monologue Jean delivers a direct address to the audience in which she considers the cause of Verity's condition. She talks about her guilt and asks whether it is her fault that Verity is the way she is, whether she contaminated her daughter when she was pregnant. This is Jean's emotional release following Verity's breakdown.

In a series of letters, Edward tries desperately to get Verity a place at a variety of residential centres. All applications are turned down by voices that represent the replies to his letters. In one of his letters Edward explains that Verity is affecting the wellbeing of their young son Nicky, that he has a lack of appetite, sleeplessness and bedwetting. It is because of this that Jean eventually decides to leave the family home and take Nicky with her.

Verity is finally placed into care, but it is in a halfway house, not a mental hospital. Although initially this works well and Verity is said to be contented she eventually has an episode and falls/jumps from her first floor room. The fall resulted in her breaking most of the bones in her feet and she was admitted to the general hospital. However, once in hospital, she pushed a nurse who then fell over and hit her head. The nurse had a severe concussion and





therefore Verity was placed on a locked geriatric ward. When Jean protests the consultant agrees that the locked ward is the wrong place for her, he says that 'there has never been enough money spent on facilities and staff to provide environments for this kind of case, he admits that they do not know how to treat Verity.

Verity then delivers another monologue. This time it is a stream of consciousness where Verity talks about seemingly unrelated event and ideas. The monologue represents Verity's declining mental state and the lack of structure is perhaps a metaphor for the loss of control and her mental confusion at this point in the play.

Two new characters are then introduced. This scene depicts Verity sitting on the front wall of a house belonging to Ted and Dora. After inviting her in to the house, they call the police, after she claims she has been raped by a lorry driver. Ted and Dora are considered to be 'normal' characters; they offer Verity a sandwich and a cup of tea. They have been used as a narrative function to contrast to the highly abnormal behaviours of Verity. It is soon apparent that Verity has escaped from the locked ward at the hospital and found herself lost outside Ted and Dora's house. The lights fade and come up on the consultant who explains that because of the incident Verity has now been placed in a locked chronic ward for Geriatrics.

Whilst in the locked chronic ward for geriatrics, Verity is cared for by Sister Moses and a physiotherapist. It is during a physiotherapy session that Verity causes a disturbance and is sent back to her room. Verity is angry that she has had to go back alone and so decides to use the matches she has been hiding under her bed to set fire to a waste paper basket. She places Sister Moses' chair over the basket to burn it, saying that she is going to 'burn her ass off!'

As a result of setting fire to the chair the police and fire brigade were called. After a hearing which investigated the incident at Canterbury Crown Court, Edward and Jean are told that Verity will be admitted to Broadmoor Hospital under Section Sixty five of the Mental Health Act.

The narration from the beginning of the play is repeated. All five Verity's say one after another, loudly. Find Me!

## The author and her influences

Olwen Wymark was born on the 14 February 1932 in California. She moved to England to study at University College London from 1951 to 1952. Before this she had studied at the Liberal Arts College Pomona, between 1949 and 1951. She lived in London for most of her life. Whilst at University she met her future husband, Patrick Wymark and they were married in 1953. The couple had four children who Olwen continued to raise alone after Patrick Wymark's sudden death in 1970, aged 44.

'Find Me' was written whilst she was working as a Gulbenkian Writer in Residence at Kingston Polytechnic in Surrey in 1977. It was then performed at both Kingston Polytechnic and later at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1977.

In the acknowledgements at the start of the script, Wymark explains that she worked very closely with the parents of the child that the story is based on. Wymark thanks the parents of the girl that 'Find Me' is based on. She also thanks the students that worked with her in the development of the play through improvisation and discussion.

Wymark was one of the first female writers to tackle mental health issues. She was strongly influenced by the French absurdist theatre of Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, and was known for her postmodern approach. These influences and the unusual subject content resulted in Find Me becoming one of Wymark's most successful plays. She did however have many other publications. She worked with the Arts Council, the BBC and the National Theatre, writing a number of plays and going on to write countless adaptations for BBC radio. These included *Gymnasium* (1972), *Loved* (1980), *Best Friends* (1984), *Strike Up The Banns* (1990), and *Mirror Mirror* (1992). Radio adaptations include her 2001 version of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.

Wymark was a member of the Royal Society for Literature and the Académie Française, an active member of the Theatre Writers' Union, and also served on the Arts Council drama panel for some years. She died in June 2013.



## Exploring the play

It is essential that students have a good understanding of the whole text, from the perspective of a performer, designer and director. Students need to practically explore the whole text and have a good understanding of how it can be performed. After reading the whole text you may decide to look at key scenes first. This can support students understanding of the key moments in the text and you can discuss how this affects events in the rest of the text. Some key scenes to start exploring Find Me include:

- Edward and the Interviewer Scene
- Playground Scene
- French Restaurant Scene
- Swimming Gala monologue.

## Key themes

### Parent-child relationships

During the play, the relationship between Verity and her mother is brought into focus. It is suggested by Edward that because Verity was premature her mother may have suffered from post-natal depression. This is reinforced in Jeans monologue: she expresses her guilt surrounding her relationship with her daughter and her jealousy of Verity's trips with Edward.

### Treatment of patients with mental illness

Throughout the play the treatment Verity receives from health care professionals is highlighted. During the scene between the consultant, Edward and Jean (Verity's parents) argue that her condition is made worse because she is a 19 year old locked on a geriatric ward. When Jean protests the consultant agrees that the locked ward is the wrong place for her. He says that 'there has never been enough money spent on facilities and staff to provide environments for this kind of case', he admits that they do not know how to treat Verity. Although during the 1960s and 1970s there had been a shift away from the Victorian Mental Asylums and a commitment to community care for people suffering from mental health problems, in severe cases patients were still admitted to locked wards. This was a result of concerns about care in the community programmes following a series of killings by people with mental health problems. As a result of cases like that of Verity, Roy Griffiths led an enquiry which led to his 1988 report, 'Community Care: Agenda for Action'. This was the forerunner to the Community Care Act of 1990. This act

was major legislation setting out the basis for community care as we know it today.

### Seeking safety

Verity seeks places of safety throughout the play. She describes how she intends to keep the people in the village safe, how she feels safe in the water during the swimming gala scene, she creates a safe in the bubble around her whilst staying at the halfway house, and she locks herself in the bathroom after the swimming gala. When these places of safety are destroyed or disturbed Verity often has an emotional outburst.

## Performance characteristics and staging requirements of the text

### Multi role play

When Find Me was originally performed at the Orange Tree Theatre it had a cast of eight, five women and three men. All of the parts were shared among them. In the script, Wymark has given the characters numbers to indicate where changes of role take place. This multi role play means that to an extent characters are representational. Actors must be willing to take on more than one role and therefore have the opportunity to display their characterisation skills. A variation of body language, facial expression and vocal expression are essential to allow the audience to understand when changes of character take place.

### Minimal props and scenery

The original production had minimal costumes and no props. This type of performance can be linked to poor theatre which was developed by Jerzy Grotowski in the 1960's. In his plays audiences shared the performance space with the actors, there were no sets or props and only simple costumes. The script has clear lighting instructions including blackouts which are clearly noted in the stage directions. Other than this there are no technical requirements which makes the play ideal for performance in a studio theatre (although it is not required to be performed in this type of space.)

## Episodic structure

Find Me has an episodic structure. Each scene could be performed and enjoyed as an episode in its own right. Bertold Brecht used this technique regularly and the technique is referred to in this context as Epic Theatre. Find Me is in the most part linear (meaning events happen in chronological order), however at the very beginning of the play the narrator tells the audience the ending of the play. We can presume that Wymark chose to tell the audience the ending of the play at the beginning to take away the element of surprise and suspense. This is a Brechtian technique which means that the audience are not focussing on what they think will happen to the central character throughout the play, rather, they are focussing on the messages that the play is giving as they already know the outcome for Verity.

## Common misconceptions or difficulties students may have

Although some of Verity's symptoms are similar to that of a person that suffers from autism there is no suggestion that autism is the cause of her mental health issues. It may be helpful to research the condition of autism to gain a deeper understanding of Verity's behaviour's, however we cannot be sure that this was Verity's diagnosis. It is important to consider the time in which the play was written and the differences between how patients were treated differently to people who are diagnosed with mental health problems now. When exploring this point it will be useful to use the following as points for discussion and research:

- Society's reflection on mental health and learning difficulties
- Pressure on families in society with children with social or mental health issues
- How Verity's story shows up the issues within the mental health system
- The place of social services and issues surrounding the systems in place.



# How to approach questions in the exam

## Social, cultural and historical influences

Students should be able to identify the social, cultural and historical influences on the writing of 'Find Me'. They should be able to give examples of how these influences are apparent within the text or can be realised in a performance.

## Key themes

Students need to have studied the central themes of the play and consider how they impact the acting, design and direction of a performance.

## Performance Skills

Questions may require students to answer from the perspective of an actor. Students should have explored the whole text practically during their study of 'Find Me'. They need to understand how to perform the part of a range of characters of the text. All students need to have an understanding of how performance skills can be applied to their set text, and not just those who have completed the other components as a performer.

## Structure

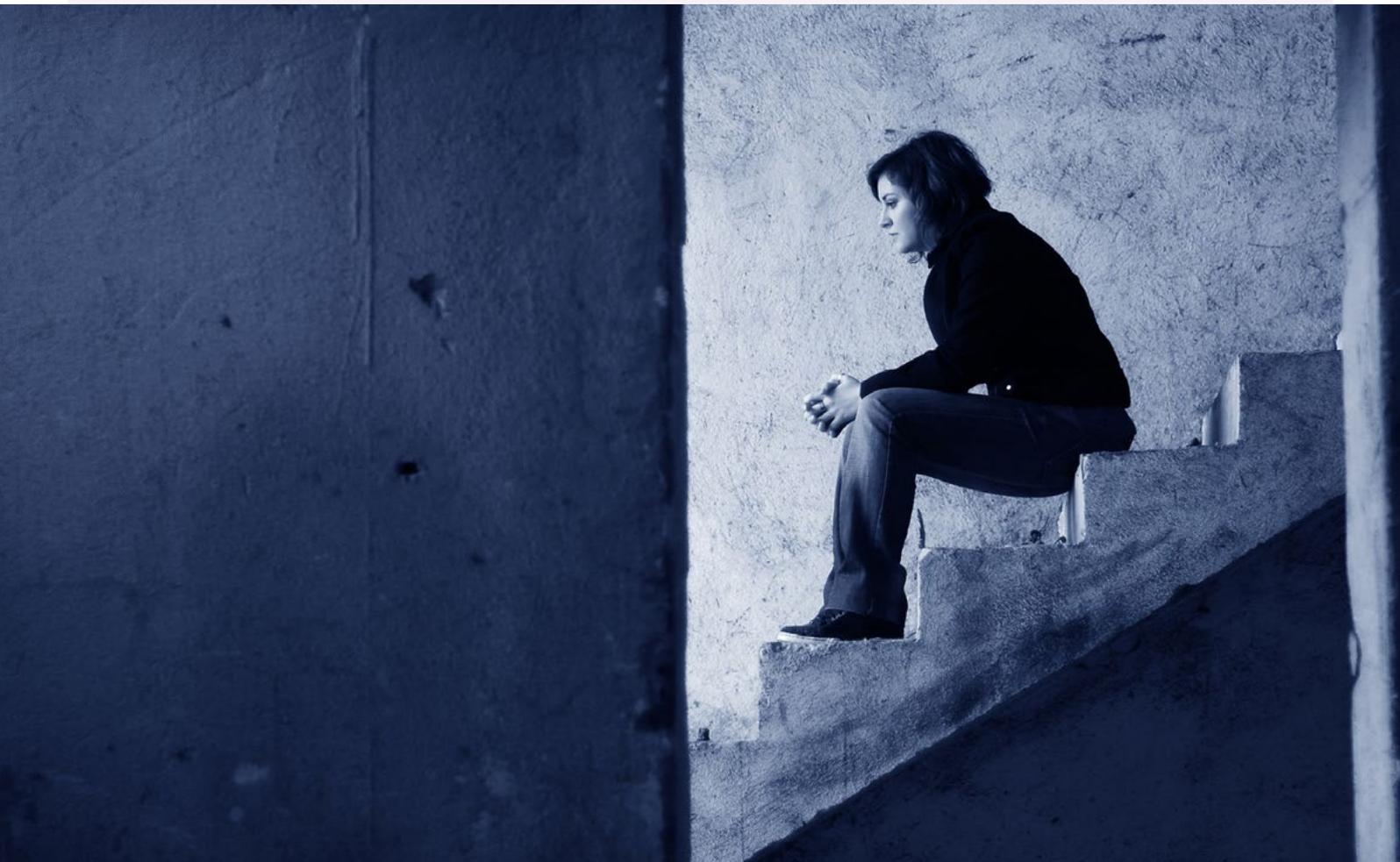
Students will need to understand the conventions of a play script. They should have an understanding of how the script is interpreted for a performance. Questions may pick out a specific feature of a performance text from those listed in the specification in Section 2c Drama: Performance and response.

## Staging and set design

All students need to have an understanding of how design skills can be applied to their set text, and not just those who have completed the other components as a designer. This includes lighting, sound, set (including props) and costume design. They should also have an understanding of how stage space can be used for a performance.

## Directing

Candidates may be asked to describe how they would direct a specific or general part of the play with a specific focus. This requires students to have a basic understanding of the role of a director and the types of decisions they can make when interpreting a script to create a performance. Directing only needs to be covered at a basic level at GCSE.



# Activities

## Edward and the Interviewer scene

*Preparation: As a class or in small groups read the scene between Edward and the Interviewer.*

In pairs label yourself A and B. A will play Edward, Verity's father, and B is the Interviewer. The Interviewer asks Edward questions about his daughter Verity and the impact her condition has had on the rest of the family. Spotlight performances to the rest of the class.

## The playground scene

*Preparation: As a class or in small groups read the scene that is set in the playground at Verity's school.*

Improvise a scene at a school coffee morning at Verity's school. The parents at the meeting are discussing the events in the playground the day of the Wellington boot incident.

### Extension

The Head teacher (this could be teacher-in-role) enters the meeting to answer the concerns of the parents and explain what he/she is going to do to address concerns.

## The French restaurant scene

*Preparation: As a class or in small groups read the scene that is set in the French restaurant*

Write a letter of complaint from the mother or father of the French family at the restaurant. Students can use the following as a starting point:

*Dear Sir or Madam*

*I am writing to complain about the disruption at your restaurant that we visited last week. My family and I were celebrating a special occasion and came to eat with you as we had heard the food was exceptional. Unfortunately our evening was completely spoilt by the behaviour of a young girl on the table opposite us...*

## Swimming gala monologue

*Preparation: As a class or in small groups read Verity's monologue from the swimming gala.*

In small groups or as a whole class discuss why you think Verity was so upset by not being able to compete in the gala? Decide who you think was to blame for Verity's breakdown following the swimming gala. In groups, get students to justify their choice using quotes from the text.

### Extension

Hot seat one student in role as Verity (or allocate a Verity and get the students into groups). Ask her a series of questions that enable her to explain her actions both during and in the aftermath of the swimming gala.

## The treatment of patients with mental illness

After reading the full play, list the events that you think lead to Verity being locked in the geriatric ward. Create a visual representation of this, either as a timeline, or by creating freeze frames and photographing them to create a display.

### Extension 1

Choose an event that you think could have been avoided. (Suggested events are the scene with Sister Moses and the Physiotherapist or when Verity jumps out of the window at the halfway house) Explore how this would have changed the events in the play, or improvise a new scene to explore the characters motivations.

### Extension 2

Use forum theatre to create an alternative ending to a scene. In this version of the scene the health care professionals take preventative actions to stop the situation escalating.

## Seeking safety

Use Activity sheet 1 to make a chart which lists the places of safety in one column and the reaction of Verity when this place of safety is taken away in the other column.

# Activity sheet 1 – Seeking safety

For example:

Place of safety	Verity's reaction



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