

A LEVEL
Teacher Guide

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459
For first teaching in 2016

The Long and the Short and the Tall – Willis Hall

Version 1



The Long and the Short and the Tall

Summary

The Long and the Short and the Tall is set in the Malayan jungle in 1942. The time is late afternoon. The stage setting is the interior of a deserted store hut which Willis Hall describes in the stage directions.

The members of the British patrol are:

839 Cpl. Johnstone, E. (Johnno)

465 Sgt. Mitchem, R. (Mitch)

594 L/Cpl. Macleish, A. J. (Mac)

632 Pte. Whitaker, S. (Sammy)

777 Pte. Evans, T. E. (Taff)

877 Pte. Bamforth, C. (Bammo)

611 Pte. Smith, P. (Smudger)

A Japanese prisoner

Act One

There is a burst of gunfire followed by silence. The door to the store hut is kicked open and the members of a British Army patrol enter the deserted store hut. Johnstone gives orders to the men and is met with humorous sarcasm from Bamforth. Whitaker, the radio operator tries to get a signal from his radio but the battery appears to be dead. Macleish and Smith are put on guard whilst Mitchem and Johnstone go out on a sortie. Whilst the officers are out on their sortie, Bamforth and Evans enjoy some lively banter and then Bamforth takes offence with Macleish when he tells Bamforth to pack it in. Tempers are roused and fists are raised and Smith tries to intervene.

Mitchem and Johnstone re-enter the store hut. Mitchem calls them, a 'useless shower' and he rebukes Macleish who was left in charge. Bamforth admits the ruckus was his fault. The patrol are briefed about the march back to the army camp.

Whitaker tries to get a radio signal again and there is a faint signal. The voice of a Japanese operator comes through on the radio. If the radio batteries are nearly flat then this means the enemy troops are close by. Mitchem takes decisive action and decides that the patrol should clear out straight away.

Meanwhile, Evans and Bamforth are on guard and Bamforth sees a movement down the track. Mitchem

joins them and they see a Japanese soldier who appears to be searching for something. Bamforth laughs as he tells Mitchem that the Japanese soldier is having a cigarette. Bamforth continues to describe what he can see. The Japanese soldier begins to walk off but he stops and turns around having seen the track leading to the store hut. Mitchem orders the patrol to hide up against the walls of the hut. Whitaker suddenly realises he has left the radio set on the table which is in full view from the window, but it is too late. Footsteps are heard on the wooden veranda outside. The Japanese soldier peers in through the window and fails to see the patrol. He is about to turn away when he notices the radio set on the table. The door to the hut opens and as he enters Johnstone grabs the enemy soldier, putting an arm around his throat and his free hand over his mouth. They struggle and Johnstone orders Evans to stab him. Evans makes an attempt to do so but he cannot make himself do it.

Everyone refuses to kill the prisoner except Bamforth who is about to drive his bayonet into the prisoner when Mitchem orders him to stop. He wants the prisoner alive as he may have useful information. Bamforth guards the prisoner whilst it is clear that Johnstone would prefer to kill him.

Bamforth jokes about teaching the Japanese prisoner English and although neither speaks each other's language, they begin to strike up a relationship. Bamforth teaches him to place his hands on his head.



Meanwhile, Mitchem decides they will have to take the prisoner back to camp with them and he sends Macleish and Smith on a sortie to check all is clear. Johnstone attempts to persuade Mitchem not to risk taking the prisoner the fifteen miles back to camp and suggests they get rid of him now. However, Mitchem believes that he could provide vital information back at the British Army camp.

The prisoner shows Bamforth photographs of his wife and family. In return, Bamforth offers him a cigarette. As the prisoner leans forward to light it, Johnstone knocks the cigarette from his mouth. In retaliation, Bamforth knees Johnstone in the groin and continues to strike him. Mitchem intervenes and puts Bamforth on open arrest.

Macleish and Smith return from their sortie in a state of exhaustion. They report that the Japanese Army has broken through in strength and there are hundreds of Japanese soldiers moving along the main trail back.

Mitchem decides that they shall wait until it is dark which could give them the chance of making it safely back to the British Army base. However, the consequence of this is that they will have to ditch their prisoner. Mitchem then asks Whitaker to try the radio one more time. Whitaker hesitates because if the Japanese Army are in range they will be able to pick up their radio signal. Mitchem orders him to go ahead anyway.

Once again, they heard the voice of the Japanese radio operator. There is silence for a few seconds. Then they hear the taunting voice of the Japanese operator, 'Johneel!... Johnee... British Johnee!...We-you-come-to-get...We-you-come-to-get'.

Whitaker reacts fearfully. The whole patrol turn to look at the Japanese prisoner, who noticing that all the attention is focused on him, slowly raises his hands in the air and places his hands upon his head, smiling.

Act Two

It is thirty minutes later. Bamforth, Evans and Johnstone are asleep. Smith and Whitaker are on lookout whilst Macleish guards the prisoner and Mitchem cleans his sten. Whitaker keeps asking what time it is and talks about his lost watch.

Macleish and Mitchem discuss the fate of the Japanese Prisoner. Macleish says that he is a human being with a wife and family. However, Mitchem knows he has to decide the fate of their prisoner without recourse to personal feelings. He has a job to do and will do it if necessary. Macleish questions the notion of killing and Mitchem lectures him on the realities of war. Macleish is shocked by the thought that Mitchem is going to have to kill the prisoner and tells him it is murder. Mitchem admits the whole thing stinks but he has to do his job and put the British patrol first.

Whitaker asks what the time is again. Macleish is offered a cigarette by the Japanese prisoner and Mitchem gives permission. Macleish starts to talk to the prisoner and Mitchem advises him not to get too attached to him.

Bamforth, Evans and Johnstone are woken up and Bamforth says he has to '...go outside.' Whilst he is gone, Johnstone realises that the Japanese prisoner is smoking British Army issue cigarettes and the assumption is made that he has been looting from the British soldiers up country. Macleish is sickened and threatens to kill him. Johnstone wants to beat up the prisoner but Mitchem tells him to hold it. Macleish searches the prisoner's pockets. Johnstone slowly and carefully proceeds to rip up the prisoner's family photographs and drops them and the wallet on the floor. The prisoner moves forward and Macleish strikes him across the face.

It is at this moment that Bamforth re-enters and protests about what they are doing. He tells them that they are his cigarettes and he gave them to the prisoner. Macleish is ashamed whilst Bamforth is sickened by their immediate assumption about the British Army cigarettes. To make amends, Evans makes an attempt to piece together the photograph fragments. As Macleish goes to give the cigarette case back to the prisoner, Johnstone demands a closer look. It turns out to be a British cigarette case made in Birmingham. The mood swings against the prisoner again and Bamforth tries to defend him by telling them about Whitaker's hoard of Japanese loot in his locker back at the main camp. Whitaker says it isn't a crime. They give the cigarette case back to the prisoner.

There is a lull in the tension and the focus shifts away from the prisoner. Bamforth teases Whitaker about his inexperience with women but Whitaker nevertheless talks about his girlfriend back home and his innocent courtship. He admits he hasn't had a letter from her for almost six weeks.

Mitchem announces that it is time to clear out. Bamforth tries to offer the prisoner some water to drink before they set off. He is ordered not to do so and it becomes clear to Bamforth that they will be killing the prisoner in cold blood. Bamforth makes a stand to protect the life of the prisoner. He appeals to Whitaker, Evans and Smith in turn to make a stand to protect the life of the prisoner. They all refuse.

Mitchem and Johnstone attempt to overpower Bamforth whilst Whitaker is told to guard the prisoner with his gun. As they do so, the prisoner rises to his feet. Whitaker starts to panic and pulls the trigger, killing the Japanese prisoner. He drops his gun and puts his head in his hands. Mitchem realises that the sound of the gunfire will alert the Japanese Army. After a final, unsuccessful, attempt to signal back to base camp, they file out of the hut, leaving the radio behind.

After the door is closed, the radio bursts into life. It is the British Army base camp. There is the sound of machine gun fire. A wounded Johnstone re-enters the hut whilst Whitaker is heard screaming for his mother followed by the sound of a single gunshot. The British Army operator comes through again on the radio. Johnstone picks up the receiver and tells him, 'Get Knotted! All of you! ... The whole damn lot of you!'

Johnstone takes a cigarette from the dead Japanese soldier and also the white silk scarf from around his neck. Obviously in great pain, he ties the scarf to the barrel of his sten and waves it at the window whilst he smokes the cigarette.

There is silence in the jungle. Then a bird begins to sing.





The author and his influences

Willis Edward Hall (1929 – 2005) was a playwright who also wrote for television and radio. He was born and grew up in Leeds. He undertook his national service in Singapore as a signals corporal and it was during this time that he wrote regularly for Radio Malaya and he designed theatre sets for the Singapore Little Theatre. On his return to England, he worked as a journalist before he developed his career as a full time scriptwriter for television and radio.

The Long and the Short and the Tall is possibly his most famous play, although he is also well known for his collaborations with Keith Waterhouse. Their first successful partnership was the stage adaptation of Keith Waterhouse's novel *Billy Liar*. This stage version ran in London for eighteen months. Together, Hall and Waterhouse wrote over 250 scripts for theatre, television and film screenplays such as *A Kind of Loving*, *Billy Liar* and *Whistle Down the Wind*.

His first play, *The Disciplines of War* (a commission by the Oxford Theatre Group) was premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe on 27th August 1957. The first professional production of the play was at the Nottingham Playhouse with the new title, *Boys, It's all Hell*. Lindsay Anderson showed great interest in the work, especially in the realism of the characterisations. The play was then performed

at the Royal Court Theatre, London on 7th January 1959 with its new title, *The Long and The Short and The Tall*. The theatre critic Kenneth Tynan was impressed by the production. A film version was produced in 1961 and the BBC broadcasted a television series of the play in 1979 with Mark McManus cast as Sgt. Mitchem.

Much of Willis Hall's influences are drawn from his Leeds working class background which he and Waterhouse shared. As children growing up in Hunslet, Hall and Waterhouse met at Cockburn High School. The Hunslet community possessed a clear sense of social distinctions and class divides.

Hall skilfully paints this social distinction in *The Long and The Short and The Tall*, not only through the differing ranks of the soldiers, but also in their divergent social backgrounds and attitudes. Distinctions are also made between the professional soldiers, Mitchem and Johnstone, and the conscripted members. The conflicts between the soldiers stem largely from these differing army ranks, social status and their attitudes to the war. Hall also creates strong depictions of working class attitudes through the lively dialogue.

Exploring the play

Students will explore the creative possibilities of directing, acting and staging *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, focusing on the theme of conflict. This will be assessed in the written exam but the play needs to be explored practically in lessons. Students will analyse the text and explore how its scenes can be staged and performed for an audience. They will analyse and interpret the opening and three additional scenes of this performance text in depth, making decisions about which theatrical methods/ devices could be used, together with the study of the relationships between the characters and how they could be realised in performance. They also need to be able to provide justified ideas for design and staging the play.

Key themes

Conflict

Evidence of conflict existing between members of the patrol is evident from the start with their initial entrance into the store hut, with Bamforth's clear lack of respect for authority and towards Johnstone in particular, creating a clash between the two men. The dynamics of conflict in the play are largely stemmed from Bamforth's confrontational attitude towards Johnstone and his teasing comic banter with the other conscript members of the patrol (particularly in Act One), which create shifts of mood and rising peaks of conflict.

The conflict between the men is not only verbal but also physical. Bamforth's insubordination towards Macleish nearly results in a physical fight but is interrupted by Mitchem and Johnstone's re-entrance into the hut. Bamforth also retaliates physically towards Johnstone after Johnstone knocks a cigarette out of the Japanese soldier's mouth with the back of his hand. Bamforth brings his knee into Johnstone's groin and then cracks his forehead against the bridge of Johnstone's nose.

It is the surprise entrance of the Japanese prisoner into the store hut which really changes the focus of conflict in the play. His unexpected arrival and subsequent capture becomes the catalyst for the serious conflicts in the patrol to develop towards irrevocable crisis. He serves to expose aspects of the characters of the British patrol so we can clearly judge the other characters by their attitude and behaviour towards him. As the mood darkens in Act Two, symbolised by the fading light as evening approaches, the physical violence culminates in Mitchem and Johnstone physically overpowering Bamforth as he defiantly tries to protect the Japanese prisoner.



Eventually, it is the very presence of the Japanese prisoner in the hut with the British patrol that brings out the true nature of each of the British soldiers, particularly Bamforth, Mitchem, Johnstone and Macleish. Their reactions to him expose conflicts between the British soldiers and also their attitudes to war.

Humour

Although *The Long and The Short and The Tall* is a play which depicts the harsh realities of war, Hall skilfully counterpoints mood and atmosphere with lively comic banter and humour to provide relief from tensions within the patrol. Bamforth is immediately identified as the main source of humour from the beginning of the play. In Act One the humour is mostly lighthearted and, at times, leads to teasing, with Bamforth as the main instigator. However it is this very repartee which then often leads to tension arising as other members of the patrol take umbrage with Bamforth's sharp joking and clever mockery. In Act Two, as the drama develops, the comic humour becomes darker and crueller. Bamforth's bitterness and outrage towards the other characters as they fail to support him to save the Japanese prisoner is unleashed through acrimonious sarcasm. So the changes and development of the tone of the comic humour

changes as the play moves towards its inexorable ending. This development of the tone of the humour in the play also reflects the development of Bamforth's character in the play as he becomes more resolute and determined to expose the hypocritical attitudes of the soldiers towards the prisoner.

Views of War

It was not Willis Hall's intention to write a play about the futility of war, nor an anti-war play, but a play about human dignity which explores the premise of the possibility of maintaining a sense of dignity in a war time context. It is about the morality of war and the dilemma of killing a prisoner of war in cold blood. In many respects, Hall sees the Japanese prisoner as the hero of the play (coupled possibly with Bamforth) who personifies the moral dilemma: Should you kill an enemy in cold blood?

Hall also presents us with other views of war through the interaction and dialogue between the characters. Upon their first entrance into the store hut, the weariness of the patrol and their bickering presents us with the notion that war is intolerable and miserable.

The conversations between the men, notably Smith and Evans, creates a mood of nostalgia for the families and homes that the men have left behind. The fact that war separates soldiers from their families creates a feeling of longing and melancholy.

It is the Japanese prisoner who becomes the catalyst for the exposition of differing views of war. Johnstone sees the prisoner as a natural enemy and is willing to kill him immediately. He shows no regard for the Geneva Convention and does not hide his desire to kill the Japanese prisoner.

Despite Mitchem's cynical attitude to war, he knows he has a job to do and does not allow personal feelings to cloud his judgement. He knows his job is unpleasant but his military experience and rational judgement allow him to clearly assess their situation. As he says, 'As far as I'm concerned, it's all these lads or him.' Mitchem's clearest assessment of war is his dialogue with Macleish in Act Two. 'The army's full of square-head yobs who keep their brains between their legs. Blokes who do their nuts for fifteen seconds and cop a decoration, cheer boys cheer, Rule Britannia and death before dishonour.... The trouble with war – a lot of it's like this this – most of it. Too much.'



Performance characteristics and staging requirements of the text

The Long and The Short and The Tall is a naturalistic play with the static set of a deserted store hut in the Malayan Jungle. Willis Hall provides us with a clear description of the stage setting: A wooden walled hut with a palm thatched roof, with the door set in the upstage wall of the set, with windows on either side. There is a rickety table and two chairs.

Students need to be able to justify their chosen staging form and consideration should be paid to the actor/audience relationship. Due to the claustrophobic setting in the store hut, careful consideration also needs to be given to the blocking of the play. This needs to be investigated through practical exploration of the play in lessons.

Common misconceptions or difficulties students may have

The main misconception is that a set text is merely regarded as a story on the page. Students will need to be able to offer a potential dramatic realisation of their chosen scenes from the play in performance, focusing on the theme of conflict.

Students will need to be given exploratory tasks (practical and research-based) to develop their own understanding of the play in performance. Students will need to be able to undertake independent research as well as being able to work with others as they study the play. The ability to verbally communicate their ideas in response to the play and translate this understanding into writing will be a vital aspect. Students also need to be given opportunities to develop their writing to articulate their response to the text.



How to approach essay questions in the exam

Students will be set two compulsory questions in Section A. Each question must be answered on a different play. Students are expected to have knowledge and understanding of the opening and three other scenes from the text together with justified suggestions of how theatrical process and practices could be used to communicate and emphasise the theme to the audience.

They need to have understanding of how the play can be performed to convey meaning.

Students also need to show how theatre conventions, forms and techniques are used on stage in live theatre. Students also need to be able to make informed and justified suggestions for staging their chosen scenes in a performance to an audience.

Activities

This naturalistic war play, focusing on a relatively small cast, needs to be explored in a practical way, using a range of approaches from working directly from the text, to improvisation beyond the text to build up and develop a sense of character. It is also important that the attitude of the characters towards the war is emphasised, as well as the interactions between them.

There are further practical activities for exploring the play in the OCR Topic Exploration Pack for The Long and The Short and The Tall. <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/340137-set-text-the-long-and-the-short-and-the-tall-topic-exploration-pack.docx>

1. Exploring the theme of conflict in war

The following activity is designed to enable the students to build their understanding and awareness of the theme of conflict in a war context and also to develop their interpretation of the characters in the play through initial activities before they read the play.

The following film extracts might be useful ways in for the teacher to introduce the theme of conflict, keeping in mind the war context of the play or they could be used towards the end of the study of the play, relating the differing contexts to the characters in the play as suggested, considering how they would react in these situations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VICyZk-XSLA&feature=youtu.be>

This dialogue scene from 'Paths Of Glory' shows the military authority figure attempting to corrupt the rebel by making him conform, in this specific case, by offering him promotion.

Within the context of the play, this could relate to Bammo's refusal to conform and his dislike of authority. Students can discuss the importance of the notions of duty and obedience as a soldier.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8PbNPdnB6k8&feature=youtu.be>

This film clip from 'The Hill' shows different responses of characters' arrival in a prison camp for deserters: rebelliousness, fear, compliance, and silence.

This extract could be related to the different attitudes of the private soldiers in the British patrol and how they might react in this situation. Students can discuss the morality of war and the treatment of prisoners.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OixVPcCbxc0&feature=youtu.be>

This 'Slaughterhouse Five' clip shows a group of war prisoners being exposed to propaganda to 'convert' them to the enemy's side.

Key questions for discussion can include:

- What evidence is there in the play of the role of propaganda in war?
- What evidence is there in the play of the treatment of the enemy and how they are regarded in a war context?

2. Identifying conflict through non-verbal expression

Groups create a tableau that visually communicates the main, important focus of a unit from the script. Students are asked to give the tableau a title that encapsulates the focus of action/conflict in the image. If all the groups are working on the same unit, assessment can then be made on the different choices that have been made by different groups and pupils can then assess the strengths of the tableaux and then be asked to refine their original tableaux, offering their reasons for doing so.

Students should consider:

- blocking/sightlines
- facial expression
- posture
- gesture
- focus (ie where they are looking)
- levels
- proxemics
- spatial Relationships
- status
- rank.

Discussion questions

- How is the notion of conflict expressed through non-verbal communication?
- How could these notions be communicated more effectively?

3. Reading the script focusing on vocal dynamics to reveal aspects of conflict

This explorative strategy will enable students to develop awareness of the presence of conflict and how it is expressed verbally by the characters. Focusing on a section of text, students act out a scene. On each read through, students vocally emphasis the following in turn:

- all the verbs
- all the adjectives
- all the adverbs
- all the personal pronouns.

Discussion questions

- What is revealed by placing differing emphasis on different words in the dialogue?
- Consider which words reveal themselves as key words in a sentence.
- What is revealed about the nature of conflict being expressed in the dialogue?

4. Exploration of character and subtext

Putting two groups together, they rehearse the following scenario:

One group plays the action and the original text of the scene, with the other group standing outside the space. This second group are also cast with a role from the scene.

The characters standing outside of the space can interject their thoughts at any given moment by clapping for the action to freeze. The teacher might clap for the performing characters to freeze and the outside characters can say what they consider the characters to be thinking or can say what they think the character would really want to be saying. This might be a useful method to focus on key moments in episodes from the play.

5. Exploration of inner monologues

This activity works as a development of Activity 3 in the OCR Topic Exploration Pack for The Long and The Short and The Tall. <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/340137-set-text-the-long-and-the-short-and-the-tall-topic-exploration-pack.docx>

The purpose of this activity is to heighten awareness of the emotional life of the characters in the episode and provides a clearer perspective of the characters' motives. The Japanese prisoner will also be given a 'voice' in this activity. Working on sections of text, students are asked to incorporate their inner monologues into the original text so the two become merged. This will involve negotiation in the group to decide which content from the inner monologues will be most effective to include.

When a character is speaking their inner monologue lines in tandem with the text, consider the following:

- Is the line delivered to the audience as an aside?
- Is the line delivered as an aside but not to the audience, as if saying it under their breath?
- Is the line delivered to another character as if it is an actual line from the text?

Answers to these questions allow students to justify their choices with reference to their understanding and interpretation of their character and to assess the dramatic effectiveness of the delivery of the lines.

Discussion questions

- What do the inner monologues reveal to us about the characters?
- What aspects of subtext are now revealed?
- What new aspects have been revealed and could activity be applied when performing the text?
- Has this activity changed the way we relate to the characters in comparison to previous views?

6. Further exploration of characters and their attitudes to life

This simple exercise allows students to explore their understanding of the characters and the text. Standing in a circle, focusing on one character at a time, each student takes a turn to complete the phrases listed below. Students draw upon their understanding of the text and their own imagination.

- War is like...?
- Conflict is like...?
- Home life is like...?
- Family is like...?
- The enemy is like...?
- Authority is like...?

7. The development of conflict in the play

Using a large piece of paper, draw out a graph with the numbers one to ten on the vertical axis which represent the levels of conflict in the play, with ten being the most serious. Students assess the levels of conflict as the play proceeds by drawing a line from left to right and grading the conflicts from one to ten. This will assist in assessing the shifting levels of conflict and the dramatic structure of the play as it progresses.

8. Exploring the comic banter in the play (verbal sparring)

Although students are primarily approaching this set text with a clear focus on the theme of conflict, it is also important to practically explore the aspects of the humorous banter which provides comic relief from the tensions and conflicts between the soldiers. The comedy aspects become darker and cruel in Act Two and therefore are important to explore.

This exercise is best explored in groups of four, with two students reading the dialogue with the other students standing next to each of the readers. Select units of action from the text which focus on comic banter between two characters. Arm the non-reading students with post it notes. As the dialogue is read out, their partners place a post it note on the body of the other character when they feel their character has scored a 'point' against the other one through the content of the comic banter. This also assists in exploring the pace and rhythm of the scene.





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