



A MONSTER CALLS

FROM THE NOVEL
BY PATRICK NESS
INSPIRED BY AN IDEA BY SIOBHAN DOWD



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CREATIVE TEAM

PATRICK NESS

Author of 'A Monster Calls'

Patrick Ness is the multi-award winning author of ten books for adults, young adults and children. *A Monster Calls*, inspired by an idea by the late Siobhan Dowd and which Patrick also adapted for the screen (2016, starring Sigourney Weaver, Liam Neeson and Felicity Jones), is published in forty languages. The first in his *Chaos Walking* trilogy is currently filming with director Doug Liman (*Bourne Identity*) and starring Tom Holland (*Spiderman*) and Daisy Ridley (*Star Wars*). Patrick has received numerous accolades for his writing, including the Costa Children's Book Award, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, and the Red House Book Award, and was the second ever author to win the Carnegie Medal twice and the first to win two years in succession. He created and wrote the 8-part BBC *Doctor Who* spinoff *Class* and as a screenwriter has written for Fox, Lionsgate, Heyday, Warner Brothers and Entertainment One. His latest book, *And the Ocean Was Our Sky*, was published to critical acclaim earlier this year

SALLY COOKSON

Director

Sally Cookson trained at LAMDA and worked as an actor for ten years before embarking on a freelance directing career. Her theatre credits include *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse, Bridge Theatre); *Jane Eyre* (Bristol Old Vic/National Theatre); *Peter Pan* (Bristol Old Vic/National Theatre/Troubadour White City). She is an associate artist at Bristol Old Vic, where other productions include *Sleeping Beauty, Treasure Island, The Boy Who Cried Wolf, Papa Please Get the Moon for Me, Clown, Strange Case, Pericles, Pains of Youth* and *The Visit*. Her numerous collaborations with Travelling Light theatre include *Strictly Balti, The Ugly Duckling, Boing!, How Cold My Toes, Shadowplay, Cloudland, Lenny and Bob the Man on the Moon*. Other theatre includes *One Hundred and One Dalmatians, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Cinderella: A Fairytale* (Tobacco Factory Theatre, Olivier Award nomination); *La Strada, Hetty Feather* (Olivier Award nomination); *We're Going On A Bear Hunt* (Kenny Wax Productions); *Romeo and Juliet* (The Rose Theatre); *Stick Man and Tiddler* (Scamp Theatre).

SIOBHAN DOWD

Original Idea

Siobhan Dowd was born in 1960 to Irish parents. Brought up in London, she started her career working in New York City for International PEN, where she led the Rushdie Defence Committee and was named one of the 'top 100 Irish-Americans'. On her return to the UK, Siobhan co-founded English PEN's readers and writers program and went on to serve as Deputy Commissioner for Children's Rights in Oxfordshire. Siobhan only started to write herself when she was invited to contribute a story to an anthology for children about racism. She went on to write four award-winning novels, celebrating the publication of *A Swift Pure Cry* and *The London Eye Mystery* but *Bog Child* and *Solace of the Road* were published posthumously. Waterstones had only just named her one of the top '25 Authors of the Future'. She died in April 2007 aged just 47. In her final days Siobhan set up The Siobhan Dowd Trust to use the proceeds of her work to fund reading projects for children.

ADAM PECK

Writer in the Room

Adam is a playwright, dramaturg and librettist. He has been an Associate Artist at Bristol Old Vic since 2013. Work includes the Olivier award-winning *A Monster Calls* (The Old Vic); *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (Elliot Harper Productions and West Yorkshire Playhouse); the OFFIE-winning and Olivier Award-nominated *Cinderella: A Fairytale, 101 Dalmatians, Bonnie & Clyde* (Tobacco Factory Theatres); *Igloo, Sleeping Beauty, Medusa, The Boy Who Cried Wolf, Minotaur, Only* (Bristol Old Vic); *Varmints* (Sadler's Wells); *Fagin's Twist* (Avant Garde Dance); the *My First Ballet* series (English National Ballet); *Father Christmas* (Lyric Hammersmith); *Septimus Bean & His Amazing Machine* (Unicorn Theatre). He is currently developing a new musical with John O'Hara and Sally Cookson.

MICHAEL VALE

Set Designer

Michael has designed the sets and costumes for over 200 theatre and opera productions both in the UK and abroad including those he has directed.

Companies he has worked with include: The Royal Shakespeare Company; The National Theatre; The Royal Opera House; English National Opera; Glyndebourne Festival Opera; Opera North; English Touring Opera; De Vlaamse Opera, Antwerp; Los Angeles Opera; New Zealand International Arts Festival; The Ibero-American Theatre Festival in Bogota; Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts; Galaxy Theatre, Tokyo; Warsaw Globe Theatre Company; Munich Biennale; Lyric Hammersmith; The Royal Court; Almeida Theatre; Soho Theatre; Manchester Royal Exchange; Birmingham Rep.; West Yorkshire Playhouse; Sheffield Crucible; Northampton Theatre Royal; Liverpool Playhouse and Everyman; Bolton Octagon; Nottingham Playhouse; Old Vic Bristol; Old Vic London; Plymouth Theatre Royal; Edinburgh Royal Lyceum; Oldham Coliseum; Manchester Library Theatre; Oxford Playhouse; Salisbury Playhouse; Colchester Mercury Theatre; English Touring Theatre; The Royal Festival Hall; The Queen Elizabeth Hall; The Sage, Gateshead; Wales Millennium Centre; Battersea Arts Centre; Linbury Studio Theatre; Amici Dance Company; Fuel; Hi-Jinx; Spymonkey; Kneehigh Theatre Company and Told By An Idiot, with whom he is an Associate Idiot.

His work has received one Olivier Award and been nominated for three further Olivier Awards; an Irish Times Theatre Award; a Manchester Evening News Theatre Award a Charrington Fringe First Award and two Off West End Theatre Awards.

KATIE SYKES

Costume Designer

Theatre as Set and Costume Designer includes: *Swallows and Amazons* (York Theatre Royal); *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Hetty Feather* (West End); *Romeo and Juliet* (Rose Theatre, Kingston); *Cinderella: A Fairytale*, *101 Dalmatians* (Tobacco Factory); *Chloe and the Colour Catcher*, *Antigone*, *World Cup 1966* (Bristol Old Vic); *La Strada* (Coventry Belgrade); *Up Down Man* (Salisbury Playhouse); *The Wind in the Willows* (Mercury Colchester); *Boing!* (Sadler's Wells/Unicorn); *Into The West* (New Victory, New York); *Cloudland*, *How Cold My Toes*, *Mother Savage* (UK tour).

Theatre as Costume Designer includes: *Jane Eyre*, *Peter Pan* (National Theatre); *Treasure Island*, *Sleeping Beauty* (Bristol Old Vic).

BENJI BOWER

Composer

Theatre includes: *A Monster Calls* (The Old Vic); *Tom* (Sadlers Wells); *La Strada*, *Hetty Feather* (West End/Kenny Wax); *Peter Pan*, *Jane Eyre* (Bristol Old Vic/National Theatre); *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, *Treasure Island*, *Papa Please Get the Moon for Me*, *Aesop's Fables* (Bristol Old Vic); *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (UK/World tour); *Outpost*, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*, *Cinderella*, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, *Ugly Duckling* (Tobacco Factory Theatres); *Orpheus and The Furies*, *Table of Delights* (Damfino Theatre). Television includes: *Panorama*, *Horizon*, *Countryfile*, *Autumnwatch* (BBC).

DAN CANHAM

Movement Director

Dan Canham is a contemporary performance-maker and choreographer. Through his company, Still House, he makes socially engaged work that foregrounds under-heard stories and celebrates those performing at its heart.

Movement director credits include: *A Monster Calls*, (Old Vic/Bristol Old Vic), *Peter Pan* (National Theatre) *Jane Eyre* (National Theatre/Bristol Old Vic) *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe* (West Yorkshire Playhouse/Eliot Harper), *Romeo + Juliet* (Rose Theatre Kingston) *101 Dalmatians* (Tobacco Factory Theatres), *Shooting with Light*, *Voyager* (Idle Motion) *Once Upon a Time* (Aga Blonksa) *Solo two* (Tassos Stevens).

For Still House: *SESSION* (LIFT festival, NT Riverstage), *Of Riders and Running Horses* (Tbilisi Theatre Festival, Shanghai Theatre Festival, NT Riverstage, Dance Umbrella, Mayfest), *30 Cecil Street* (Sadler's Wells, PuSh Vancouver, Brisbane Festival), *Ours Was the Fen Country* (National Theatre Shed, Dublin Dance Festival).

Performing credits include: *A Matter of Life and Death* (National Theatre), *To Be Straight with You* (DV8 Physical theatre) *The Bacchae*, *Tristan and Yseult*, *Brief Encounter* (Kneehigh Theatre) *Rite of Spring* (Fabulous Beast/ENO), *Faust* (punchdrunk) *Agnes and Walter* (Smith Dance Theatre) *Mother Savage* (Travelling Light).

AIDEEN MALONE

Lighting Designer

Theatre includes: *Death of a Salesman* (Young Vic); *Princess and the Hustler* (Bristol Old Vic); *Jack Lear* (Hull Truck Theatre); *The Worst Witch* (Royal and Derngate); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Watford Place); *A Monster Calls* (Bristol Old Vic/The Old Vic); *East is East* (Bolton Octagon); *Brighton Rock* (Theatre Royal York/UK Tour); *Napoleon Disrobed* (Theatre Royal Plymouth/Arcola); *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Conquest of the South Pole* (Liverpool Everyman); *La Strada*, *Hetty Feather*, *Coyote on A Fence* (West End); *Jane Eyre* (National Theatre/Bristol Old Vic); *Peter Pan* (National Theatre); *Raisin in the Sun* (UK tour); *Brighton Rock* (York Theatre Royal); *Delirium* (Barbican); *Dogs Barking* (Bush); *Bone Room* (Young Vic); *The Suppliants* (Gate); *Frankenstein* (Salisbury Playhouse); *Lighten Up* (Unicorn); *Greed* (Battersea Arts Centre); *Turn of the Screw* (Hackney Empire); *Dialogues de Carmelites* (Royal College Of Music); *On Thee We Fed* (ENO Works); *Imbalance*, *Kaash*, *Quimeras* (Sadler's Wells); *Tete*, *Raft*, *Unkindest Cut* (UK tour).

MIKE BEER

Sound Designer

Mike started his career at the Sherman Theatre Cardiff in the late 80's. Since then he has toured and designed Theatre and Corporate events for many different company throughout the UK, Europe, Asia and America.

Sound Designs include:
Now The Hero, (Taliesin Arts) *Good Omens Escape Room*, *Tomb Raider Live*, *Annabel 2 promo house* (Premier EAC), *A Monster Calls* (The Old Vic) *La Strada* (Kenny Wax) *Eye of the Storm*, *A Story of Tom Jones-The Musical* (TNN Productions), *Tide Whisperer*, *Candy Lion*, *Illiad*, *Coriolanus*, *The Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (National Theatre Wales), *Sleeping Beauty*, *Jane Eyre*, *Peter Pan*, (Bristol Old Vic), *Frankenstein* (Living Spit) *Sweeny Todd*, (WNO), *Romeo and Juliet* (The Rose Theatre), *Under Milk Wood The Opera* (Taliesin Arts Centre), *Legal Fictions*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (The Theatre Royal Bath).

Mike was recently nominated for an Olivier Award for Best Sound Design for his work on *A Monster Calls*.

Mike Specialises in site specific projects working closely with National Theatre Wales, Wild Works and Walk the Plank, projects include, *City of the Unexpected*, a project with a live audience of over 50,000 in the streets of Cardiff.

The Passion, *Michael Sheen's Port Talbot Easter Epic*, *100 The Day Our World Changed*, set in the The Lost Gardens of Heligan, Cornwall.

Over the last 10 years, Mike has worked closely with Stage Sound Services as Sound Designer and Project Manager, working on various projects throughout Europe and the UK.

DICK STRAKER

Projection

Theatre and Opera credits include *A Monster Calls* (Old Vic), *Greek* (Scottish Opera), *Carmen* (Grange Festival Opera), *Don Juan in Soho* (Wyndhams Theatre), *Aida* and *Andrea Chenier* (Opera North), *Notorious* (Gothenburg Opera), *Cymbeline* and *Love's Sacrifice* (Stratford RSC), *The Commission* and *Cafe Kafka* (two operas for Aldeburgh and Linbury Theatre), *Roots* (Donmar Warehouse), *Fortunio* (Grange Park Opera), *Paper Dolls* (Tricycle Theatre), *Going Dark* (Fuel Theatre), *Tiger Country* (Hampstead Theatre), *Tales of Ballycumber* (Abbey Theatre Dublin), *The Mountaintop* (Trafalgar Studios), *Rushes* (Royal Ballet), *The Ring Cycle* (ROH), *Sugar Mummies* and *Hitchcock Blonde* (Royal Court Theatre), *Julius Caesar* (The Barbican), *Richard II* (The Old Vic), *The Woman in White* (Palace Theatre London and Marquis Theatre NY), *Henry V*, *The Coast of Utopia*, *Jumpers* and *The Powerbook* (National Theatre).

Dick has designed for many seminal theatre, fashion, commercial and architectural projection events including projection design for Alexander McQueen's Savage Beauty exhibition (V&A and Metropolitan Museum of Art). He formed the company Mesmer and designs projection methods and content for unusual spaces and contexts.

JESSICA ROANNE CDG

Casting Director

Theatre includes: *Lungs*, *Present Laughter*, *All My Sons*, *The American Clock*, *SYLVIA*, *A Monster Calls*, *Mood Music*, *Fanny & Alexander*, *The Divide*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Girl from the North Country* (Old Vic and West End), *Woyzeck*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*, *King Lear*, *The Caretaker*, *The Master Builder*, *Dr. Seuss's The Lorax*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Future Conditional* (The Old Vic); *Running Wild* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre); *Love in Idleness* (Menier Chocolate Factory).

Children's casting includes: *School of Rock*, *The Audience*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *King* (Working Title), *Night Out* (Short)

Film includes: *Emma*, *The Kid Who Would Be King* (Working Title), *Night Out* (Short)

ABBY GALVIN

Associate Casting Director

Assistant/Associate work for Jessica Ronane
Casting includes:

Theatre: *Lungs*, *Present Laughter*, *SYLVIA*, *A Monster Calls*, *Mood Music*, *Fanny & Alexander*, *The Divide*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Girl from the North Country* (Old Vic and West End), *Woyzeck*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead*, *King Lear*, *The Caretaker*, *The Master Builder*, *Dr. Seuss's The Lorax*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Future Conditional* (The Old Vic); *Running Wild* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre); *Love in Idleness* (Menier Chocolate Factory).

Film: *Night Out* (Short)

Assistant/Associate Children's Casting includes:
School of Rock, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (West End); *Billy Elliot the Musical* (West End/UK Tour); *Matilda the Musical* (West End/UK Tour); *Bugsy Malone* (Lyric Hammersmith)

CHRISTOPHER ELMER-GORRY

Outreach

Christopher trained at East 15 Acting School and on the National Theatre Directors Course.

Christopher is a specialist in creating work with/

by/for children and young people and has worked in formal education and community settings. His practice was evaluated by Theatre Royal Plymouth in the initial testing of Arts Council England's 7 Quality Principles. Christopher created the PROPER Practitioner Training Course, a toolkit for Teachers and Youth Theatre Directors to develop their practice and achieve artistic excellence through participatory arts projects.

Directing Credits include: *Hacktivists*, *Deep Freeze* and *No Child*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Little Criminals* and *Divided* (Warts and All Theatre), *From The Ground Up* and *Press Go* (Almeida Theatre, Shoreditch Town Hall and Edinburgh Festival) *Oliver!*, *Immune*, *Kontakt*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Oh No! Not Snow!* and *DNA* (Royal & Derngate, Northampton) *Short Changed*, *Gargantua* (Theatre Royal Plymouth), *Exams are Getting Easier* and *What the Dickens?!* (Birmingham Repertory Theatre), *The Lion*, *the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Little Hope* (The Point, Eastleigh).

Christopher has worked as a Producer, Director, and Project Manager for many theatres across the country. He regularly delivers consultancy and training for Youth Theatre Directors.

Since graduating 13 years ago, his work has also taken him to Calgary, Canada and Madrid in Spain. He is Artistic Director and CEO of Warts and All Theatre which is based in Northampton. The company delivers work across the Midlands.



SYNOPSIS OF A MONSTER CALLS

Thirteen year old Conor wakes from a nightmare. It is 12.07am. It is the same nightmare that he has had before and he finds it difficult to accept the images that he keeps seeing. In the morning Conor notices that his mum hasn't got out of bed yet and so gets himself ready for school and completes other chores. Mum arrives in the kitchen and apologises for not being able to do more: her latest round of chemotherapy has made her extremely weak and unwell. She explains that Grandma will arrive the following day to help, despite Conor's insistence that they are coping fine without her.

At school, Conor encounters Harry, Anton and Sully who bully him. Harry and Anton are particularly cruel when they mention his mum and her hair loss. Miss Godfrey arrives just in time to see Conor's friend Lily push Anton to the floor. However, when Miss Godfrey asks Conor if Lily's version of events is true, Conor denies it. He acts as if he doesn't care when Lily confronts him after school.

Conor wakes from another nightmare, again at 12.07am. This time the Monster speaks to him from outside the window and emerges from the yew tree. Conor insists that he is not afraid of him and the Monster tells him:

'I do not often come walking, boy. Only for matters of life and death. I expect to be listened to.'

The Monster pledges to tell Conor three stories, after which Conor will tell his own story: his truth, which the Monster is convinced Conor is most afraid of.

Grandma arrives and begins to talk about an independent school near her house that she thinks would be suitable for Conor, who continues to deny any need to even consider it. It is clear to Grandma that Mum hasn't been completely honest about the seriousness of her illness, or that Conor is refusing to face the reality of possibly losing his mum.

The Monster arrives and tells his first story. It involves a King, who loses all but one of his

family through war. His grandson is his only living relative until the King marries a strange woman in order to heal his grief. A year before the Prince can legally take the throne, the King dies and so the crown goes to the Queen. Rumours spread that she has played magic tricks in order to gain power. The Prince falls in love with a humble farmer's daughter and they run away. Sleeping under a large yew tree, the Prince wakes to find the daughter dead. The Queen is blamed for the death of the daughter. The Prince asks for help from the villagers and the Green Man. The Prince manages to overpower the Queen who is condemned to burn at the stake. At the last minute the yew tree plucks the woman from the fire and takes her to a village by the sea where she cannot be found.

Conor is shocked to hear that the Monster has saved the woman, who has been accused of killing the daughter. However, the Monster reminds him,

'I never said she killed the farmer's daughter. I only said that the Prince said it was so'

The Monster reminds Conor that people sometimes need to lie, including to themselves. In some stories, and in life, there are characters who aren't totally bad or totally good. Most people are somewhere in between.

At school Lily tells Conor that she forgives him for not telling Miss Godfrey the truth about what happened in the playground, making allowances for what he's going through. Conor feels increasingly isolated and that everyone now treats him differently following his mum's diagnosis. Harry and the boys approach to taunt Conor but he refuses to react even when Harry raises his fist.

It becomes clear that Mum's treatment is not working as it should and so Conor must go and stay with Grandma whilst his mum is back in hospital. His Dad flies in from America, where he lives with his new wife and child. As Conor hugs his mother she notices the yew tree outside.

Grandma's house is very neat and tidy with valuable antique furniture and Conor does not feel at home there. When Conor forces the hands of an antique clock to 12.07, the Monster appears once more.

Story Two involves an Apothecary (the old name for a chemist or someone who uses herbs and plants to heal illness) during the Industrial Revolution. The Apothecary becomes increasingly bitter that the new sprawling towns and cities are making it difficult to find the plants that he needs. He asks the Parson if he can cut down the yew tree that grows in his garden. The Parson refuses and preaches against the Apothecary's approach to healing. Suddenly, the Parson's two daughters become very ill and the bark of the yew tree could potentially save them. The Parson appeals to the Apothecary who refuses and the daughters die. The Monster tears down the parsonage and Conor helps, but he is actually destroying Grandma's precious living room. When Grandma arrives home from the hospital she is speechless with emotion.

Dad tells Conor that he will not be punished, as there is no point: he is dealing with more than enough. Conor goes to see Mum in hospital. She has taken a turn for the worse. She is given a new drug, made from the bark of yew trees, that she hopes will make a difference but Dad tells Conor that this is the time when he needs to be particularly brave. Dad then returns to America because his daughter is ill, and Conor is left once again

feeling lonely and isolated.

At school, Harry shakes Conor's hand and tells him that he no longer sees him proceeding to ignore him completely. No longer able to cope with feeling invisible, Conor beats up Harry, with the help of the Monster, and Harry ends up in hospital. Miss Godfrey tells Conor that in his circumstances, the usual punishment of expulsion would be pointless, he is being punished enough already. Lily writes Conor a note, which says, 'I see you'.

Conor is collected from school by Grandma, who explains that Mum's treatment is no longer working. Later that night the Monster tells Conor

'I did not come to heal her. I came to heal you.'

Conor's nightmare returns — he dreams that he is trying to prevent his mum falling off a cliff but she keeps slipping away from him. Conor admits that he just wants it all to be over but feels guilty for feeling that way. The Monster explains that the human mind is complicated and contradictory, and that Conor's wish is simply to end the suffering and pain.

Collected by Grandma, Conor arrives at the hospital to see his mum and say goodbye, shortly before 12.07am.



THEMES

FAMILY

Conor lives with his mum and is very loyal to her. He does not agree that sometimes they need help from Grandma, particularly as he does many of the chores himself, even though he is only thirteen.

Grandma arrives to help both Mum and Conor, despite Conor's resistance and although they are very different to each other, they both realise that they are going to have to rely on each other after Conor's mum loses her battle with cancer.

Conor's dad now lives in America and has a new wife and baby. Conor finds it difficult to understand why he cannot go and live with his dad in America rather than live with Grandma. He finds it difficult to understand why Dad's American family seems to take priority over him and his mum, and feels isolated and lonely.

HIDDEN EMOTIONS

Many of Conor's emotions are only shown through his nightmare which he has repeatedly after his mother is diagnosed with cancer. Only towards the end of his mother's life can he admit that in some ways, he just wants it all to be over so that he is no longer so frightened of what the future has in store.

The Monster's stories are carefully chosen by him to teach Conor that emotions are difficult, and life can be cruel and complicated. The stories also demonstrate that we all have good and bad inside ourselves and by sharing our nightmares with other people, we can understand and deal with them. Many of the characters in the Monster's stories are adults and so Conor learns that life can be complicated regardless of age.

GRIEF

Conor experiences a range of emotions as a result of what is happening. He finds it difficult to admit that he is frightened and the Monster and his stories enable him to process the grief that he is feeling. This includes the emotions of anger, loneliness, fear, resentment, denial, guilt and sadness which are all common and normal responses to losing a loved one.

The grief felt by Grandma is not explored as much in the story, but it is clear that she is also trying to negotiate the difficult emotions surrounding her daughter's death. Whilst Conor might deny what is really happening, Grandma tries to be more practical, having Conor to stay at her house, visiting Mum in hospital and starting to make arrangements for a new school for Conor when the time comes.

Dad is also experiencing a sense of grief, but his return to America at a crucial time suggests that he is finding it too difficult and needs to remove himself from the situation.

TRUTH

Conor's mum has tried to protect Conor from the reality of what is happening. The day before she tells him about the diagnosis, she allows him a day off school to create happy, fun memories. But later she is perhaps not so truthful about what is going to happen, and both Dad and Grandma become concerned that Conor does not completely understand that at some point, he will need to go and live with Grandma.

PEOPLE ARE COMPLICATED

In the stories that the Monster tells, he often includes characters who are not completely 'good' or totally 'bad'. The Prince does not tell the whole truth about what happened to the farmer's daughter, and the Apothecary and the Parson cannot or do not save the Parson's daughters. Most people are somewhere in between good and bad.

BEREAVEMENT

Conor's mum is terminally ill and he will have to say goodbye to her. He is only 13 and the adults around him are aware that he is finding the process very difficult — perhaps even more difficult than he himself realises. It is even harder for Conor because he is an only child and his mum is a single parent.

Conor also finds it increasingly frustrating that he feels invisible and isolated. Since other people have found out about his mum's diagnosis, they have begun to treat him differently, including being extremely unkind. Conor experiences some very difficult emotions about the way in which people now view him because of what is happening to his mum.

FRIENDSHIP

When Harry and his friends bully Conor, they are particularly cruel about his mum and her hair loss (which has been caused by the chemotherapy treatment she has undergone). Lily steps in and pushes Anton to the ground. Although Conor denies the story that Lily tells Miss Godfrey, Lily later forgives him because she realises that he is having a very difficult time. She has found it difficult to understand why Conor didn't tell the teacher the truth about the bullying but after speaking to her own mum, she realises that he is experiencing some very difficult emotions.



AN INTERVIEW WITH **BENJI BOWER, COMPOSER**



Benji Bower, composer, explains how he has created the soundtrack for *A Monster Calls*.

My starting point for this show was the feeling I got from the Patrick Ness' book. When reading it for the first time it affected me deeply and still does whenever I read it. A lot of people nowadays have been affected by cancer and illness in families and so it was easy to tap into Conor's heartache.

For me, whenever writing music it has to come from deep within. It has to mean something to me first and then hopefully that will come through to others. I think a lot in images: the book is very filmic and so it provided many of those images for me. The illustrations were so wonderfully dark, too.

Sally, the director, was very clear from the start that we should not sentimentalise the mother's illness. With music it is so easy to spoon feed people specific emotions so it was good to know what we needed to avoid to fit with Sally's vision and intention.

To develop the sounds that will be important for the creation of mood and atmosphere, I actually went to record a yew tree in deepest West Wales. In fact it is one of the only bleeding yews in Europe (it bleeds red sap). I have taken some of the sounds and processed/ morphed/effected/distorted the sound to make

a palate of sound to compose with. Therefore many of the sounds you will hear come from the yew but it won't sound like the sound of a tree as you might expect it to.

We also set up the idea of the nightmare being very dark and fractured, unrecognisable and backwards. This has led to a sound design that I have been creating with lots of glitches and jumps to accent the nightmare feeling.

Much of my palette of sounds comes from the tree. On this show we are using a lot of synths, subs and electronic instruments. Something one could try when creating sound for a production is to record some natural sounds and try and find the music within them. If you have access to a computer or FX processor, try and change the sound to something unrecognisable.

The advice I'd give to students who are creating their own sound ideas for an adaptation or original devised piece of theatre is that being in contact with your director is really important; as is having an understanding of the feeling that comes from the book or whatever you are using as a stimulus. I think if you can really connect with the content this will help the music and sound process.

Working out the boundaries of your sound world before you start is also important.

For example, what's the style and genre? Does it need to be associated with a particular place? For example, is it latin music etc.? This might help create your instrumentation. Depending on whether it is a recorded soundtrack or live performance, how many musicians do you have to work with?

All of these factors will limit or enhance your compositions and sounds. In rehearsal, I sometimes simply observe what is being staged, and other times I will workshop and experiment with ideas with the performers. I then go away and write/design the sound – collaborating with directors, designers and

actors utilises all of these approaches. We normally do a Research and Development week before we start a project, but when devising a show, collaboration is key to the process.

I normally get the word from Sally what our next show is and that then excites me into writing music which then I play in the rehearsal room and we see where our musical world will sit. Sometimes I will improvise and then I go back and write, or I write on the spot. It can be very scary at times but sometimes the best things come from improvising and playing around.



CHARACTERS

CONOR O'MALLEY

A thirteen year old boy who lives with his mother.

MUM

Conor's mother, who is divorced. She has been diagnosed with cancer and is receiving chemotherapy and other hospital treatment.

GRANDMA

Conor's maternal grandmother.

MONSTER/YEW TREE

The yew tree, which is centuries old and visible through Conor's window. The Monster emerges from the tree.

HARRY, ANTON & SALLY

Three students who bully Conor at school.

LILY

Conor's school friend who steps in when Harry and his friends threaten Conor.

DAD

Conor's dad, who has moved to America and remarried. He has another child with his new wife.

MISS GODFREY

A teacher at Conor's school.

MR MARL

A teacher at Conor's school.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

These activities can be adapted for Key Stage 2 and 3 students, as well as being extended to aid further exploration for Key Stage 4 and 5.

WARM UPS

WORKING AS A TEAM

- ➡ Moving around the room at a brisk walk (perhaps to the rhythm of some upbeat music), swing your arms and have a slight bounce in your step. Listen carefully to your teacher or workshop leader who will have the following instructions to choose from:
 - Stop
 - Go
 - Tall (make yourself as tall as you possibly can, on the spot)
 - Small (make yourself as small as you can, which may involve lying down on the floor in a tiny ball)
 - Clap (clap once and then carry on walking)
 - Jump (jump once and then carry on walking)
 - Hide (standing still, imagining that you are trying to avoid being seen by someone you don't want to see you)

Once you have had a few trial runs, aim to be totally synchronised with the rest of the group on each command. Anyone out of time might be 'out'.

- ➡ To make the game more difficult, your leader might reverse the instructions to their opposite or equivalent. Meaning that:
 - Stop means go, go means stop
 - Tall means small, and small means tall
 - A clap is a jump and a jump is a clap
 - Clap (clap once and then carry on walking)
 - Hide means that you have to make yourself as large as possible in the space so that there's no way you can't be noticed.

Again, after some practice, anyone doing the wrong move or being out of time has to leave the game.

You might even like to create some new instructions for your leader to use. Your aim is always to be working in complete cooperation with the rest of the group, working as an ensemble.

CREATING A WHOLE GROUP DYNAMIC

Stand in a space in the room. Try and balance the space between you and everyone around you – where are the gaps? Begin to walk around the room at a steady pace and aim to match the timing of everyone else. Remember to change direction and be aware of the different patterns your route is making across the space.

Now start to make eye contact with the people around you-smile, too! By making eye contact, you're tuning into the atmosphere and dynamic in the room. When your teacher or workshop leader counts down from four to one, you have a decision to make. Either stop, OR be the only one who continues walking. It may take a few tries to make it happen but the aim is to have an ensemble who are so in tune with each other that they can make this happen.

If you are an older group, you could also experiment with walking at a brisk pace and then, as an ensemble, beginning to slow down, stop, and sit on the floor. Without speaking, you can then try and get up and gradually increase the pace of walking again. All of this is possible without one person leading the ensemble. Instead, it simply relies on complete concentration and an ability to pay attention to the people and the space around you.

USING OUR BODIES TO MAKE OBJECTS

- Find a space in the room and stand in it. When your teacher or group leader tells you to, start moving around the space. After a while, they will shout a number. You need to get into a group of that number, and with your bodies create the objects you're given. You only have 10 seconds to do each one and the leader of the game will count down from 10 to 1, at which point you have to freeze in position.
 - Groups of 2: A knife and fork
 - Groups of 3: Chair and table
 - Groups of 4: A car
 - Groups of 5: A washing machine
 - Groups of 6: The Eiffel Tower
 - Groups of 7: A toaster, with pop up toast
 - Groups of 8: Big Ben (tower and clock, with sound effect of the bells)
 - Groups of 9: Santa's Sleigh
 - Whole group: A pirate's ship

SOUNDSCAPE

A soundscape is the use of sounds which are combined to create mood and atmosphere. Although music is sometimes used, there is often no melody, instead there are a series of sounds which combine.

For example, a churchyard at night might include the sounds of:

- Owls hooting
- Wind through the trees, including a yew tree
- Clocks chiming the hour
- Rain
- Animals searching for food

If you want to create a spooky churchyard, then you could include:

- A creaking gate
- Ravens calling to each other
- Crunching gravel

- Composer, Benji Bower, has used the recording of the sound of a real tree and then used synthesizers and computer software to manipulate it for *A Monster Calls*. However, how can you use your body, the floor, your voice (but not words) and the texture of your clothes to create a soundscape?
- You could also try this with the text below, using found objects. This can be items you find in the classroom or studio, or objects you've brought in from home, ranging from a pine cone, to a saucepan lid, sticks, jars etc.
- Using **Extract 1**, look at the idea that Adam Peck (*Writer in the Room*) had for the opening nightmare in the play. How can you create it with your own ideas and found objects?

EXTRACT 1

Thud. Conor falls on hands and feet on forest floor.

Atmosphere of place: whistling wind, cliff edge,

CONOR 'Mum'. 'You have to get out of here.'

Heavy feeling (1).

Dragging

CONOR 'Mum, you have to run.'

Dragging. Atmosphere.

MUM 'I'm fine, darling. There's nothing to worry about.'

Increased tension. Heavy noise. Dragging?

CONOR 'Mum, run! Please run!'

Rumbling, booming — sound of the dark monster down below; a thing bigger than the world climbing the cliff-face.

MUM 'But darling, there's-' 'No!'

Heavy feeling.

CONOR 'Mum.'

Invisible weight. Roar, burning cloud of darkness, pressing down.

MUM 'Conor?'

Hovering fists.

Violent pounce, grabbing, pulling. Thud.

Conor is released. Running, panting, throwing himself, reaching, pulling.

Catching, holding on.

ENSEMBLE STORYTELLING: PHYSICAL AND VOCAL

TELLING STORY TWO

- In groups of five or six, you are going to tell the story that the Monster tells Conor as his **SECOND STORY**. For each bullet point, create one tableau (or allocate different tableaux to different groups to reduce the number each group has to create). If you aren't one of the characters in the scene, perhaps you can find a way to become furniture or scenery to give the audience more information. Make sure you choose something you can do for a few seconds without wobbling.
 - A King is sad because his Kingdom has been ravaged by war
 - The King looks at his baby grandson who is now his only relative
 - The King marries a mysterious woman to try and heal his grief
 - The King dies and the Queen takes the crown because the Prince is not yet old enough to become King
 - The Prince falls in love with a farmer's daughter and they run away together to escape from the Queen who wants to marry the Prince herself
 - Waking up under a yew tree where they rested for the night, the Prince finds the farmer's daughter dead
 - The Prince tells villagers that the Queen has killed his beloved and must be punished
 - The villagers storm the castle and take the Queen to be burned at the stake
 - At the last minute the yew tree rescues the Queen and takes her far away from harm
 - The Prince admits that it was him who killed the farmer's daughter to make it look like the Queen had done it. By making the villagers angry, he knew that he would have their help to overthrow her, which he would not have been able to do by himself
- Once you have created these tableaux, focus on the text from Story Two using **Extract 2**.
- One of the challenges in the rehearsal room has been making this story convincing through the use of ensemble and physical storytelling. As well as playing the different characters, the ensemble must create a sense of location, and perhaps create a soundscape too, in order to create mood and atmosphere for the audience.
- Decide how the ensemble will tell the story. Will one person say all of the text? Perhaps people will take turns to deliver certain lines, or speak as a chorus? Are there words that you think everybody should say together?
- Experiment with combining this text with some of your tableau as appropriate. Once you are happy with this, move on to another part of Story Two and create your own text, using the bullet points to help you.

EXTRACT 2

If they found him, they would see the knife and the blood, and they would call him a murderer. They would put him to death for his crime. And the Queen would be able to rule unchallenged. There was nowhere for the Prince to run. His horse had been chased away while he slept. The yew tree was his only shelter. And also the only place he could turn for help. Now, the world was younger than. The barrier between things was thinner, easier to pass through. The Prince knew this. And he lifted his head to the great yew tree and he spoke.

He said enough to bring me walking. I know injustice when I see it. The prince ran towards the approaching villagers.

PRINCE (To VILLAGERS)

‘The queen has murdered my bride! The queen must be stopped!’

CREATING A FEAR-MONSTER

Many people are scared of things. Sometimes, being able to imagine the thing that we fear as some kind of creature can help us reduce our fear. Giving our fear a name or drawing a funny picture of it can also help.

- Dad telling Conor that he's moving to America
- Mum taking Conor for a special day out the day before she tells him of her diagnosis
- The conversation between Lily and Miss Godfrey after Lily hits Anton
- Lily's parents talking to her about what has happened to Conor and his mum
- Dad and Grandma arguing about telling Conor more information than his mum has about her condition and prognosis

QUESTIONS FOR OLDER STUDENTS TO DISCUSS

Many people are scared of things. Sometimes, being able to imagine the thing that we fear as some kind of creature can help us reduce our fear. Giving our fear a name or drawing a funny picture of it can also help.

- How long did Mum know her diagnosis before she shared it with Conor/Grandma/Dad?
- How long has Dad lived in America? What caused the divorce? Has Mum met Dad's new wife?
- Before Mum's diagnosis, what was her relationship with Grandma like?
- What job did Mum have before her illness? What was their daily or weekly routine?
- If Mum was to write a letter to Conor, what would she say?



ASKING QUESTIONS AND IMPROVISING SCENES

Books can often go into a lot of descriptive detail about events that we don't necessarily need to show on stage. However, it can be helpful to discuss or improvise scenes that aren't in the final version of the play in order to inform our performance.

- In groups of four, discuss what things people tend to be frightened of. This doesn't need to be your own fear, but common fears involve getting lost in crowds, losing something precious, the dark, flying, or failing tests. Choose one of those things.
- Once your group has decided which fear to physicalise, experiment with ways of showing that fear visually. Shape, levels, angles, contact between different people, eye contact with the audience, making claws etc are all ways that you can show your fear-monster to the people watching.
- Now that you have created a shape for the fear-monster, consider how it moves. If your fear is the dark, do you think the movement might be quite slow because darkness makes it difficult to see? If birds or small animals are the fear, perhaps hand gestures towards the audience's faces might be an effective motion? Walk from one side of the room to the other, maintaining the shape of your fear-monster as you do so.
- To make your fear-monster even more convincing, you now need to create a sound that your monster makes. Does it use real words, or gibberish? Is it loud or quiet? Perhaps non-verbal sounds like sniffing, growling or barking might be more effective?
- Finally: you now need to imagine creating a product or antidote to your fear-monster. For example, a spray that allows you to see in the dark if you don't have a light or a torch. In your group, create a TV advert for that product. Alternatively, how about creating an advert or interview which explains to people how to deal with their fear?
- Share your fear-monsters and adverts with the rest of your class or group.

EXTRACT 3

21. American's Don't Get Much Holiday

- DAD** 'Doesn't look like your grandma's home yet.'
- CONOR** 'She sometimes goes back to the hospital after I go to bed. The nurses let her sleep in a chair.'
- DAD** 'She may not like me, but that doesn't mean she's a bad lady.'
- CONOR** 'How long are you here for?'
- DAD** 'Just a few days, I'm afraid.'
- CONOR** 'That's all?'
- DAD** 'Americans don't get much holiday.'
- CONOR** 'You're not American.'
- DAD** 'But I live there now. You're the one who made fun of my accent all night.'
- CONOR** 'Why did you come then? Why bother coming at all?'
- DAD** 'I came -because your mum asked me to. I'll come back, though. You know, when I need to. (Beat) And you'll visit us at Christmas! That'll be good fun.'
- CONOR** 'In your cramped house where there's no room for me. And then I'll come back here for school.'
- 'Why did you come?'

PORTRAYING GRIEF AND LOSS

‘Stories are important. Stories can be more important than anything. If they carry the truth.’ Patrick Ness, *A Monster Calls*

Traditional theatre once insisted that theatre for children should be gentle, fun and without challenge. An annual trip to a pantomime, for example, allows children to join in a fairy-tale world in which the worst mishap is a custard pie in the face or a slapstick encounter with a ladder. However, contemporary theatre has become more understanding of the needs of children and young audiences, and aware of the importance of exploring difficult and challenging subject matter.

In *A Monster Calls*, the reader often responds viscerally to Conor’s loss and his refusal to fully confront the truth that he will soon lose his mother. Patrick Ness, in the original novel, says, ‘Stories are wild creatures. When you let them loose who knows what havoc they might wreak?’ and some people may suggest that this is exactly the reason why challenging subject matter such as bereavement should not be staged for young audiences.

Children’s books, however, frequently present difficult subject matter. From Roald Dahl to JK Rowling, we are constantly confronted with orphans, neglectful parents and even murderers but the written word can sometimes seem less threatening than live theatre in which the reality of such issues can hit hard. However, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* now runs in the West End and on Broadway and it too provides powerful reminders of our own mortality and the importance of family, loyalty and acceptance of emotions and conflict.

In 2005, Melly Still directed *Coram Boy* at the National Theatre. Helen Edmundson’s adaptation of Jamila Gavin’s novel deliberately retained the dark elements of child slavery, illegitimate pregnancy and even infanticide. Some critics claimed that the production, which also played on Broadway and has since been performed at the Bristol Old Vic, was too graphic for the younger end of the target audience but Melly Still responded at the time, ‘Theatre is a place where you can deal with big scary things and show that, without the pain and the death, our experience of joy and life is not so vivid. I’m steeped in that from a fairy-tale tradition and I believe it very strongly.’² *Coram Boy* is not a story without hope. The death of Meshak at the hands of Otis, the fraudulent ‘Coram Man’, leads to other children being reunited with parents, or finally finding someone who will love them as their own. Likewise, in *A Monster Calls*, Patrick Ness reminds us that Conor’s mum has actually helped him develop skills that will, in time, help him to cope.

Laura Wade’s *Alice* also explores the grief of a young teenager in a modern version of *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice chooses to escape the platitudinous guests following the funeral of her brother Joe who has been killed by a drunk driver. Consumed by her own grief, Alice’s mother has no time for Alice and both characters turn up in Wonderland as the Queen of Hearts and the Knave respectively. Lyndsey Turner’s 2010 production at Sheffield’s Crucible Theatre included a tea party that mocked and subverted the funeral wake, a televised croquet tournament highlights her lack of privacy and the Caterpillar’s Border Control asked Alice about her ‘emotional baggage’. Like Conor, Alice feels isolated and patronised as all thoughts have turned to the dead sibling instead of her.

In her 2013 article *Why Children’s Theatre Matters*³ Lyn Gardner wrote, ‘Theatre, particularly theatre for children, fires the imagination, it gives our children the skills and the creativity necessary to face the world, to understand it and perhaps to change it too’.

² Patrick Ness in *A Monster Calls*

³ **The Guardian: Down the rabbit hole**
theguardian.com/stage/2006/nov/22/theatre1

Alice, *Coram Boy* and *A Monster Calls* also encourage young audiences to engage their imagination through the non-naturalistic style of both performance and design.

Coram Boy's forest, for example, was created by the wailing song of grieving mothers stood scattered on stage representing trees. Much of the stage was left bare to allow for the larger ensemble scenes, and used aerial work to create a spectacular climactic underwater scene towards the end of the play. *A Monster Calls* utilises similar methods to create a yew tree, a monster and more besides.

In *A Monster Calls*, the minimal set and aerial work encourages the audience to 'fill in' many of the gaps and process the content simultaneously. Sally Cookson says, 'That's what I like doing when I'm in an audience. I don't like to be fed every idea and be told what I'm meant to be feeling in every single moment. I am always trying to offer up different interpretations. Each person who sees it will take something different from it.' Like *A Monster Calls*, *Coram Boy* used soundscape and an original soundtrack (by Adrian Sutton) as an integral part of the storytelling palette, combined with the music of Handel who also features as a character in the play. The use of ensemble and multi-roling relies on the audience's ability to suspend their disbelief and one could argue that in developing theatrical literacy we are also enabling our audiences to also develop emotional literacy through the themes and ideas to which we expose them.

The domestic setting of *A Monster Calls* makes it closer to our own 21st century reality than the 18th century *Coram Boy* and the idiosyncratic Wonderland for *Alice*. However, Michael Vale's set design demands just as much investment for the audience. There is very little furniture on set, and so the ensemble must bring characters and settings to life through movement and storytelling techniques.

Live theatre enables audiences to explore and engage with challenging issues because it gives them the imagination and creativity to do so in a safe place. Just as we find in grief and sadness, theatre also allows all of us to experience joy and happiness and the ability to navigate a way through the complexity and contradiction of life.



GLOSSARY

AMPLIFICATION	The use of equipment such as microphones and PA systems to amplify sound.
ENSEMBLE	A group of performers who work together to tell a story.
GESTURE	A universally understood action such as shaking hands, nodding or shaking your head.
PHYSICALITY	Use of the body to tell a story or create a story.
SYNCHRONISED	When two or more people do something in exactly the same way and at exactly at the same time.
PITCH	How high or low a sound is (particularly voice).
PROJECTION	The use of support in one's chest, abdomen and diaphragm to ensure that the voice is heard clearly.
REVERBERATION	An extended sound which appears to make things shake.
SOUNDSCAPE	A combination of sounds, created by performers or instruments to create mood and atmosphere.
TABLEAU	Also known as a freeze frame or still image, where performers create one image, or several (tableaux).
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT	<p>A period of days or weeks in which a director, designer and a number of actors experiment and explore different ways of telling a story.</p> <p>During this period, writers, academics, historians and other experts may also contribute to discussions to ensure accuracy in subject matter.</p>
MULTI-ROLING	When an actor plays more than one character in the same production.

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SUPPORT

‘If you speak the truth, you will be able to face whatever comes.’ *A Monster Calls*

If you have been affected by any of the themes in this production and would like to speak with someone in confidence, the following services offering help and advice are available:

KOOTH

Kooth.com

XenZone is a provider of online mental health services for children, young people and adults. Kooth, from XenZone, is an online counselling and emotional well-being platform for children and young people, accessible through mobile, tablet and desktop and free at the point of use. Please note that Kooth is not currently a UK wide service. Please visit the website for more information.

MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

macmillan.org.uk
0808 808 00 00

Macmillan Cancer Support is one of the largest British charities, providing specialist health care, information and financial support to people affected by cancer.

MARIE CURIE

mariecurie.org.uk
0800 090 2309

Marie Curie is a registered charity that provides care and support for people living with any terminal illness, and their families.

MIND

mind.org.uk
0300 123 3393

Mind offers information and advice to people with mental health problems and lobbies government and local authorities on their behalf.

SAMARITANS

samaritans.org
116 123

Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the UK and in Ireland.

CHILDLINE

childline.org.uk
0800 1111

Childline is a counselling service for children and young people up to the age of 19 that deals with any issues that cause personal distress or concern.

CHILD BEREAVEMENT UK

childbereavement.org
0800 02 888 40

Child Bereavement UK supports families and educates professionals when a baby or child of any age dies or is dying, or when a child is facing bereavement.