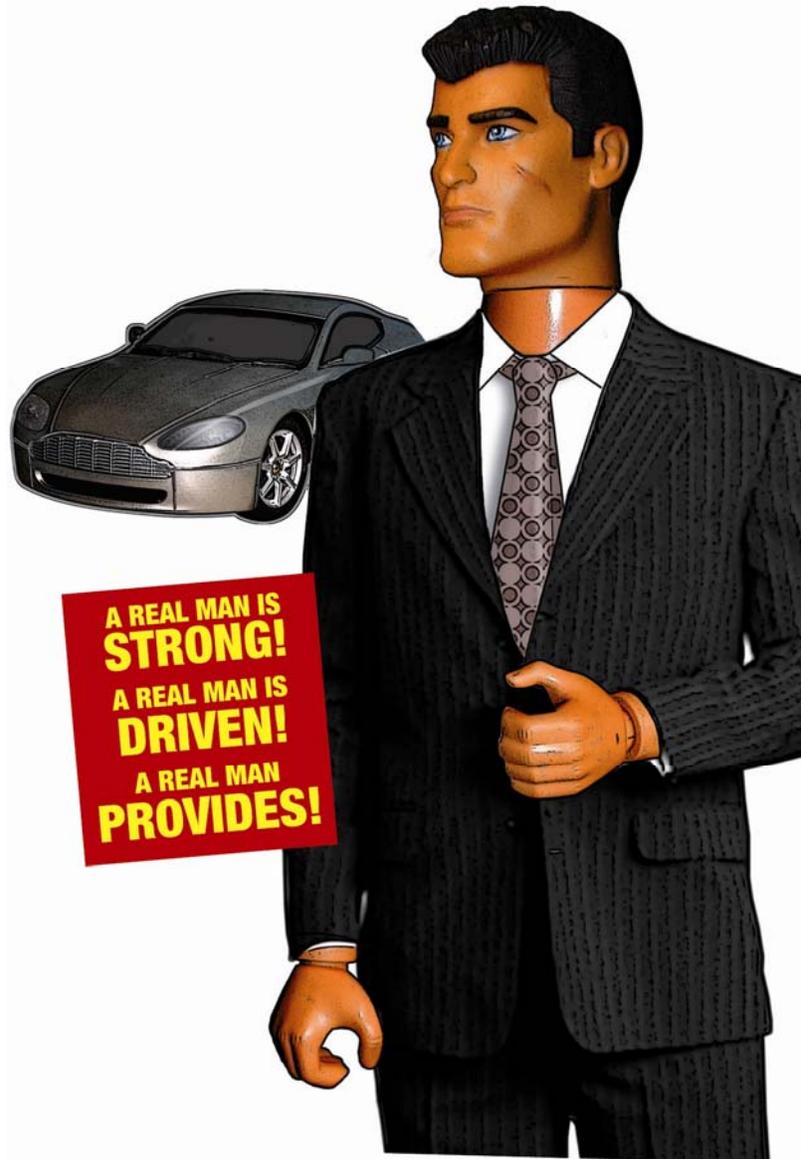


Education Pack



MY CHILD By Mike Bartlett

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Introduction and Curriculum Links

This resource pack is aimed at teachers and students of Drama, Theatre Studies, English (GCSE & A level) and Performing Arts National Diploma: Improvisation, Devising, especially issue based work, Scriptwriting, Contemporary Theatre and Performing Arts in Context. Due to the nature of the material in the play, we recommend it to students aged 15+.

Given the themes in the play it will also be of interest to students and teachers of Citizenship and PHSE.

The interviews with the artistic team give insights into the writing and directing processes as well as illuminating the themes in the play as they see them.

The exploration of some of the themes through essays, images and media articles both informs and encourages discussion & debate.

There are exercises at the end of each section guiding further discussion, improvisation and creative writing.

Further reading encourages work beyond the classroom.

YWP information explains how the department operates and how students aged 13-25 can submit scripts or join our writers' groups.

Production Photograph



Ben Miles (Man) and Adam Arnold (Child)

Interview with Mike Bartlett, playwright

Describe your writing process

I don't know if I have a process. I read a lot of newspapers, watch a lot of television news, examine my own feelings and experiences and try to think about the world as much as possible. I am looking for subjects where I am not immediately sure what I think about them, where there is a problem or a paradox or something missing in the argument that is being presented. With reference to MY CHILD, one of the starting points was the assumption by nearly everyone that striving for success and money, and being given a choice over every single aspect of one's life is intrinsically and without reservation a good thing. And that being 'good' means being successful, rather than living according to a set of values or ethics. I was interested in what we lose when we live simply through self-interest and freedom of choice.

These thoughts and subjects hang around for a long time, as I try to work them out and then, alongside that, I'm thinking about form – what is interesting? What haven't I seen on stage? What will engage a sophisticated, quick, intelligent, fun-loving audience? Hopefully, at this point, the two come together – a form appears that immediately demands the content, or vice-versa. After that it is a case of writing freely and quite quickly, knowing that I'll come back and edit afterwards. I then read and cut, and re-read and re-write the whole play.

What are the main themes in the play?

The play is about what it means to be a good man and what it means to be good father. As I mentioned above, it is also about the concept of choice and success, and the way that we choose to live our lives. It is also about how within families we can be at our most manipulative, cruel and violent to the people we love.

What interests you about these?

I think, generally speaking, we have little sense of duty left. Less and less people are living their lives according to a set of principals coming from religion, society, politics, or ethics. Instead we decide what is best in a given situation, and often we look after ourselves first. I'm also interested in the games we play with the people we love, and how traits and behaviours are passed down from one generation to the next; the things we choose to do differently to our parents, and the things it seems we cannot escape.

Did you do any research?

No. Only in terms of things I had picked up before writing the play – but that was more general reading.

What do you want the audience to leave talking about?

I would like them to be talking about the world, about their families, about the characters and what they would do. I don't really mind, as long as the world of the play has engaged them.

How do you hope it will affect the audience?

I hope they have a good time and go on a journey, both with the characters in the story and in terms of their own emotions. I hope the play surprises them.

How relevant is it to a young audience? Is there an age limit?

I think the play is relevant to anyone that has a family. It is a fast-moving play with short scenes and strong conflict – much like a lot of good television. But the difference with this is that the audience are only a metre or two away from the action and in the same space. I am so often bored in the theatre and I hope there won't be a moment in the play where there's a chance for that to happen.

The play has strong language, so it's probably not suitable for under 12's.

Why did you become a playwright? Describe your journey.

I acted at school and did a bit of direction. I think I liked it then because it was really a social thing where you made friends (and met lots of girls!), but I found I actually loved being on stage telling a story. Then I directed a couple of plays and found that was even better because you didn't have to learn lines and you got to have a say in everything – casting, lighting, design etc. I did English and Theatre Studies at university where I still wanted to be a director, but I couldn't find many plays that I wanted to do, so I wrote a few of my own. I then came out of university and tried to start a career as a director, but didn't get any work, and wrote a play instead, called NOT TALKING. This suddenly meant I was going to meetings, and I did the YWP course.

I realised through the course and the meetings that actually I loved writing for the stage. I didn't particularly want the attention of acting any more (and I wasn't very good at it), or the responsibility of a director, but I did want to find ways to engage a group of people together in a dialogue about the world. I wanted people to come out of their homes and come together and enjoy an evening of something interesting, unusual and unclear. We are bombarded with opinion these days and told we must know what we think, so we are rarely given an opportunity to feel and question and think freely. I think that's sort of what theatre is – thinking and feeling together in public.

Who/what are your influences, both in and beyond theatre?

Shakespeare, Chekhov, Samuel Beckett, Forced Entertainment, Tony Kushner, Edward Albee, David Grieg and recently debbie tucker green and Caryl Churchill. A brilliant book called PLAY IN A GODLESS WORLD by Catherine Bates. Keith Johnstone's books IMPRO and IMPRO FOR STORYTELLERS.

Education Ideas (I)

A method Mike uses both as a warm up and also to use as inspiration is to write lists.

A good starting point for writing about any character is to think of both the practical things they do in day to day life and the emotions they feel.

To get you into the swing of this, write lists of the following, using yourself as the subject:

(You must be spontaneous, so have a time limit of one minute per list)

- a) Interesting things that you saw on the way here today.
- b) Boring things that you saw on the way here today.

- a) What makes you happy?
- b) What makes you sad?

- a) What makes you excited?
- b) What makes you nervous?

- a) What are you looking forward to doing at the weekend?
- b) What are you not looking forward to doing at the weekend?

As you will have noticed, the A's and B's are always two contrary emotions.

Separate out your lists, so you group the A lists together and you group the B lists together.

These lists can now be used to help you create two fictional characters with contrary emotional states. The A character will be interesting, happy, excited and optimistic.

The B character will be a boring, sad, nervous and pessimistic character.

Write a short scene between character A and character B in which B has lost something and A is trying to help them find it. Now swap them round so that A has lost something and B is helping A to find it. How do these two scenes compare? Which was the easier to write?

Image of the set's model box, designed by Miriam Buether



Interview with director Sacha Wares

Why did you choose to direct this play?

I first read MY CHILD last autumn when Mike Bartlett submitted it for the Young Writer's Festival. I was so moved by the writing and immediately felt that it was a story I could connect with emotionally. I was incredibly impressed by the economy of the writing, the fluidity of the form, and the rhythms of the language. I was also very excited by the challenge presented by the last scene of the play. The last few moments of the drama are incredibly physical and demand inventive and imaginative staging solutions. When I first read the play I couldn't really imagine how this might be done, and I felt excited by the prospect of looking for a way.

What is it about?

The play follows the story of a man in a state of crisis. His marriage is over and he is desperate to try and stay in contact with his young son. His former wife believes he is an inadequate father and is determined to push him out of her life as well as her son's. As the man struggles to work out what to do, he finds himself faced with a moral dilemma – whether to stay true to his beliefs about what a good father should be (beliefs that he has inherited from his own parents) or to try and become the kind of man his ex-wife and son admire.

What are the themes?

There are many themes in the play. Primarily, I would say the play explores how the break up of family affects everyone involved and how patterns of behaviour and cycles of manipulation are passed down through generations. It also asks big questions about what values might be getting lost in our increasingly aspirational, success-driven society and whether it is right to let those values die.

What interests you about these themes?

Like so many people, I come from a family that became splintered after a divorce. So, on a personal level, I connect very strongly with the story and what it says about the way both adults and children resort to complex manipulation tactics in times of emotional crisis. I am also very drawn to the central question in the play about what constitutes the best way to survive in a success-driven culture. We are all faced every day with choices about how to live and for me it is very interesting to work on a play that gets to the heart of this debate and asks us to really think about the values we hold.

What preparation have you done?

My main preparation for this play has involved lengthy discussions with the playwright about how he sees the play, what his inspirations were, what he wants the audience to feel, and what he believes the dramatic action is scene by scene, line by line. In addition, I have researched key aspects of the story in a variety of ways: interviewing experts, going on 'people-watching' expeditions, and fact-finding over the internet. Here are a few examples:

- I interviewed a doctor, as well as carers who work with the elderly, about the illness that affects the Older Woman character.
- Using the internet, I researched the procedure of DNA testing that the father and the child undergo.

- I spent time in estate agents in Notting Hill finding out about property prices and looking at the people who - like the characters in the play - are in the process of buying property in this area of London.
- I also spent an afternoon in Hamley's watching young people playing on the new PS3, since this is an object the child in the play is very keen to own, and I wanted to find out more about what games he might be playing with his friends at school.

To research ideas for the set design, myself and the designer, Miriam Buether, spent a lot of time in the different locations mentioned in the play, taking photographs of people and places which we then used as the basis for the set design. The design incorporates a lot of advertising images and for two months before I went into rehearsals I carried a camera everywhere I went, taking pictures of all the different posters I saw on the street and the tube. This was a really interesting part of the process. On a practical level it helped me compile a list of the adverts we could use in the production, while also making me acutely aware of how powerfully our society is influenced by advertising.

What methods will you use in rehearsal? Describe your working process.

Games will be a really important part of the rehearsal process for this play, since all of the characters are involved in complex game-playing with each other, and it will be really important for the actors to find this spirit of 'play' if the production is to communicate an exciting, live feeling of risk.

This first week has been spent playing two different rehearsal games. The first involves the actors making decisions about where they can score points against each other in each of the scenes. It's a fun game in which the actors place stickers on each other each time they think they have scored a 'point' in the argument, counting them up at the end to see who comes out best and worst in each scene. The second exercise is a very physical one in which the actors have to decide whether they are 'pushing' or 'pulling' each other on each of their lines. The game helps the actors be specific about what they are playing at every moment, and also creates a real physical intimacy and sense of daring within the company.

This week we also began physical training for the two actors who will perform the violent fight. Our choreographer arrived from Paris and spent an afternoon teaching the two actors how to fall safely, how to make violent physical contact without hurting one another, and how to build their strength and stamina. Since then, the two actors have trained for an hour and a quarter everyday, so that when we come to choreograph the fight they will be physically prepared to do it.

What challenges might you face?

This play presents two especially big challenges. The first is that, because of the huge age range of the cast, I need to try and find a way of working that is useful and effective for a group of performers with vastly differing levels of experience. The second concerns the stage violence and the necessity to find a physical language that will communicate the real ferocity of the drama, while also ensuring the physical safety of the performers and the audience in a very intimate, enclosed space.

What do you want the audience to leave talking about?

What is particularly exciting about this play is that there are no 'goodies' and no 'baddies'. Nothing is simple, and the way the story is told forces the audience to reassess what they think about the characters all the time, so that our sympathies are constantly shifting. Ideally, I'd like the audience to leave the play debating with themselves and one another about the choices each of the characters make – asking what they might have done differently or done better in order to change the painful outcome.

Describe your journey in becoming a director.

When I left school I went to America for a summer to work as an apprentice in a theatre festival. I was there for three months, working in all the different departments of the theatre and learning what happens in a professional theatre environment. I then went to QMW College London University/Central School of Speech and Drama to do an English and Drama degree. The course was partly practical and partly academic. On the practical side, I majored in stage design. On leaving University, I spent some time directing in fringe theatres, and also working part time as senior script reader for the National Theatre. I then did a year as trainee director at the Donmar Warehouse, learning from the rehearsal processes of experienced directors like Sam Mendes. When I left the Donmar I began directing at a professional level (firstly at the Bush, then the Gate, Sheffield Crucible and the Royal Court), while also continuing to script read for the National Theatre and Royal Court. After a few years of working, I felt I wanted to broaden my influences more, and so I applied for a bursary to spend some time researching contemporary theatre practices in Europe. I travelled for three months visiting ten European countries, seeing over 80 plays. Subsequently, I spent some time researching in the archive at Odin Teatret in Denmark, before returning to London and continuing my work as a theatre director here.

Who/what are your influences in and beyond theatre?

I have been influenced by a number of European theatre directors and dance choreographers – not directly in terms of their aesthetics, but the way each of them has striven to find their own individual voices as artists. Some directors I particularly admire are: Ariane Mnouchkine in Paris, Frank Castorf, Christoph Marthaler, and Christoph Schlingensiefel at the Volksbuehne in Berlin, and Romeo Castellucci in Italy. Choreographers whose work has had a profound impact on me include Pina Bausch (Germany), Alain Platel (Belgium), and William Forsythe (Germany). I also have huge admiration for British writers Caryl Churchill and Debbie Tucker Green, and director Simon McBurney. These artists all work in very different ways from each other, but have in common a determination to stay true to their own vision of what theatre or dance is, to give expression in their own original way of seeing the world, and to constantly push themselves to make new discoveries about the field they work in. The majority of them also create work that is politically engaged, asking profound questions about the world we live in now.

Whenever I see their work, I am reminded of the importance of courage in making theatre and the fact that imitation is pointless - the main thing to aim for is the development of one's own distinctive taste, opinions, skills and vision.

Research images, taken by Sacha Wares, the director



"Mum. Can we go to Starbucks? I want a muffin"

"He's got a PS3"



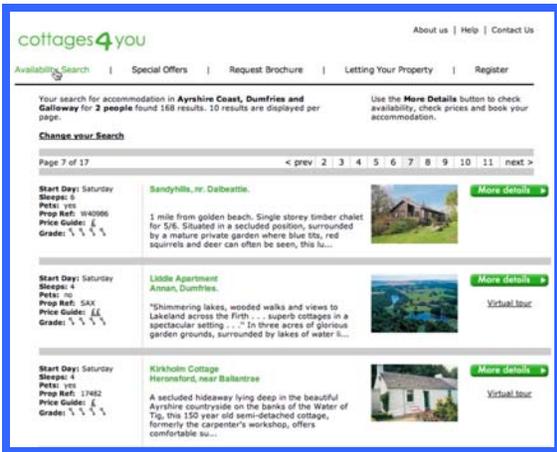
"Can I buy you a drink?"



"Excuse me. Is this a Circle Line train?"



"I thought you liked wrestling"



“I checked your computer and found all the Scottish houses you were trying to book”



“Cows are normally so... placid”



“You know they’re buying a house... Notting Hill... It’s got a roof terrace”

Education Ideas (2)

Try the games used in the rehearsal room:

1. Select a scene for students/actors to run through and get a feeling for. Then they repeat the scene making decisions about where they think their character can score a point against the other character. The actors place stickers on each other each time they think they have scored a 'point' in the argument, counting them up at the end to see who comes out best and worst in each scene.
2. The second exercise is a very physical one in which the actors have to decide whether they are 'pushing' or 'pulling' each other on each of their lines. The actors have to decide what kind of 'push' or 'pull' to use, how much force to use, and what direction the action goes in. For example, patting someone on the head is a 'push' in a downwards direction with a soft force, while an embracing action is a 'pull' towards yourself and can be performed with various levels of force. The actors should try to be as imaginative as possible with the range of physical actions they use – trying to discover all the possibilities of the text. The game helps the actors be specific about what they are playing at every moment, and also creates a real physical intimacy and sense of daring within the company.
3. After the games run the scenes again and see what affect they have had.

The following information is about Fathers 4 Justice. A political organisation that was set up by a father who was having difficulties with his own custodial case.

Fathers 4 Justice

Origins

Fathers 4 Justice (or **F4J**) began as a fathers' rights organization in the United Kingdom. It disbanded in January 2006, following reports of an alleged plot by members to kidnap the son of Prime Minister Tony Blair. However on May 20th 2006 the UK Fathers 4 Justice returned.

It was founded by Matt O'Connor, a marketing consultant and father of three. O'Connor had become incensed with family law after a court temporarily barred him from seeing his two young sons outside of a contact centre, following separation from his wife in 2000. On 17 December 2002, O'Connor and a small group of supporters staged their first protest by storming the Royal Courts of Justice dressed as Father Christmas. In January 2003 O'Connor officially founded Fathers 4 Justice. Initially the group targeted the homes of family court judges and family lawyers' homes and offices with traditional protests.

From the onset, they championed the cause of equal parenting, family law reform and equal contact for divorced parents with children. F4J protestors interrupted the UK national lottery draw in May 2006. F4J is well-known for its campaigning techniques of dramatic protest stunts, usually dressed as comic book superheroes and frequently scaling public buildings, bridges and monuments. However, some members of F4J have a documented history of intimidating attacks on CAFCASS and court staff.

Activities

On 21 October 2003, campaigners Eddie Gorecki and Jolly Stanesby scaled the Royal Courts of Justice, dressed respectively as Batman and Robin. The following day, the group's members rallied through London around a military tank in solidarity with Gorecki and Stanesby.

A significant escalation in the protesting style occurred nine days later when group member David Chick scaled a 120 foot crane near Tower Bridge, London, dressed as Spider-Man. The Metropolitan Police set up a cordon around the area that disrupted traffic through some of East London for several days. Chick was subsequently cleared and published a ghost-written autobiography in February 2006.

F4J's campaigning policy has always been that its organised publicity stunts and protests should be humorous, non-violent, and ultimately harmless. The group advocated non-violent protests aiming to cause disruption rather than damage. The choice of the superhero costumes was based on the claim that "fathers have the role of superhero in the lives of children". Protests have not been restricted simply to fathers as female supporters have adopted similar disguises and joined in the protests.

On May 20, 2006, a group of Fathers 4 Justice campaigners interrupted the broadcast of the UK National Lottery programme on BBC One, delaying it for a few minutes before the live draw was resumed.

On Sunday December 10, 2006 Fathers-4-Justice US staged a re-enactment of the Boston Tea Party, titled the 'Boston "Custo-Tea" Party' in protest at perceived corruption in the family court system in which lawyers provoke battles between parents over custody of children for profit.

Flour bombing

On 19 May 2004, a major alert was caused when two members of the group threw purple flour bombs at Tony Blair during Prime Minister's Questions at the House of Commons. This protest, along with a purple powder attack on the Liberal Democrat candidate in the 2004 Hartlepool by-election, Jody Dunn, appeared to signal a departure from the group's declared profession of nonviolence. Following the House of Commons incident The Times wrote that the group "has succeeded in becoming the most prominent guerrilla pressure group in Britain ... within eighteen months of its founding."

Internal strife

Shortly after the May 2005 election, Matt O'Connor called a truce with CAFCASS, the government body responsible for providing reports on the suitability of non-resident parent contact. In June 2005 a breakaway group was formed, the 'Real Fathers For Justice'. Disillusioned with F4J founder Matt O'Connor, the rebels called for democratic control of the pressure group and financial accountability. Since its formation the group has continued a campaign of direct action. On 6 February 2006 activist Mike Downes pelted education secretary Ruth Kelly with an egg outside Salford Magistrates Court. In April 2006 two of their members climbed onto Westminster Abbey, with a dummy attached to a cross. In May 2006 activist Andrew Tindale handcuffed himself to Minister Beverly Hughes at the G-Mex Centre in Manchester. In July two activists ran onto the centre court at Wimbledon during the quarter final match between Roger Federer and Mario Ancic. The pair wore t-shirts with the Wimbledon logo and the slogan "Family Law: It's a Racket". Carrying rackets and tennis balls, one of them managed to serve a ball at the Royal Box before being led away by security. The stunt prompted an announcement by Wimbledon that they may have to increase security.

In November 2005, the group suffered further negative publicity when the prime-time ITV programme *Tonight with Trevor McDonald* exposed some of its members as violent and obnoxious in their behaviour. However, it was claimed that these were never members in the first place and the programme gave no right to reply. Some members were expelled but the organisation defended its position and attacked the documentary. On 23 November 2005, Fathers 4 Justice ended its truce with CAFCASS and the Child Support Agency, calling for a public inquiry into family law.

F4J temporarily disbands

During January 2006 the British newspaper The Sun published a story in which it claimed that members on the fringes of Fathers 4 Justice planned to kidnap Leo Blair, the young son of Prime Minister Tony Blair 'for a few hours as a symbolic gesture'. The Police said that they were not aware of such a plan, but probably it had never got beyond 'the chattering stage'. Downing Street refused to confirm or deny the existence of a plot as it does not comment on matters concerning the Prime Minister's children. But they did manage to release an image to the Press as soon as the story broke.

Fathers 4 Justice Founder Matt O'Connor condemned the alleged action and threatened to shut down the campaign. Within days, Fathers 4 Justice had been disbanded. However, an F4J splinter group, the 'Real F4J', continued operating. On April 13, 2006, Maundy Thursday, two members climbed 40 feet up Westminster Abbey with a dummy on a cross, claiming that fathers are being "crucified" in the courts over access to their children.

Impact

Fathers 4 Justice's main impact remains upon media coverage and legal treatment of fathers' rights issues in the UK. The use of high-profile and disruptive stunts has garnered significant UK media coverage. Matt O'Connor has sold the rights to his story to Harbour Pictures written by Shameless writer Danny Brocklehurst. A significant, unintended result of the F4J campaign has been the exposure of flaws in security at high profile British institutions such as Buckingham Palace and the House of Commons, at a time when the British government is particularly concerned with the threat of terror attacks by al-Qaeda-affiliated groups.

Donations to the group went to a non-profit limited company owned by O'Connor. F4J does not have charitable status, but in June 2005 the group launched a related charitable foundation, Fathers 4 Justice Foundation, to work with young offenders from fatherless families.

Criticism

Critics of the organisation claim that the inequalities which F4J claim to fight against are exaggerated. For example, one of the primary goals of F4J is to establish equal parenting rights after divorce, claiming that in 40% of family court cases the father is denied or is restricted in contact with their children.

Often opponents and supporters appear to inhabit completely different worlds. Court staff and supporters cite the 'best interest of the child' principle, and point out that in the majority of cases contact orders are made. F4J activists frequently object per se to attending court in order to be granted contact with their children, to contact with their children being constrained by legal order and promote the adoption of an assumption of 50/50 parenting. Defenders of the status quo hold that the 'best interests' of the child must be paramount, and that on occasions this will mean limiting the access of an absent parent to their children. Other critics have challenged that while there are occasions that fathers are prevented from seeing their children, there are many other cases of absent parents failing to maintain contact even when allowed by the courts, or making agreed maintenance payments.

Fathers 4 Justice claim that the good intention of lawmakers (The Children Act was intended to make child contact matter easier) has been undone by an institutionalised sexism which discriminates against fathers. Critics counter that judges are required to operate under a "presumption of contact" principle in family courts which forces them to provide, whenever possible, contact between fathers and their children. Mainstream media outlets such as the terrestrial television channels have gone as far as to attack this principle (which is in any event over-ridden by the 'best interest' mantra) for being biased in favour of men, as they say it has led to children being forced to see fathers who have abused them in the past.

Members of the group are also alleged to have conducted a variety of intimidating attacks in order to terrorise court staff and family lawyers. These attacks include throwing purple (the group's colour) paint on the outside of CAFCASS buildings, pushing rotten meat/fish through letterboxes, sending fake bombs, hate mail and verbal abuse. NAPO (the union for CAFCASS staff) has compiled a file of the incidents. Fathers 4 Justice have admitted to incidents involving CAFCASS property but deny involvement in the harassment of individuals. (see: fraught nature of protest, above) During protests outside CAFCASS offices individual case workers were identified by name in a similar style to animal rights protesters. One office was invaded by F4J members who tied up an employee said to suffer from a heart condition.

www.fathers-4-justice.org

Media comments on F4J

“...when historians look back on British Society at the start of the third millennium they will accord a small but important chapter to the men in tights.”

The Times Newspaper, January 2006

“...fiercely intelligent, charmingly foul-mouthed and a fantastic turn of phrase...few could equal O'Connor when it comes to taking a conversational thread, yanking, unravelling and generally running with it.”

Will Self, Author, GQ Magazine, June 2006

“Fathers 4 Justice masterminded some of the biggest political stunts of recent years.”

Esquire Magazine, 2005

“No comment.”

PR Office, Scotland Yard

“Matt O'Connor should take out a full page advertisement apologising for starting Fathers 4 Justice.”

Yasmin Alibi-Brown, Evening Standard

“Fathers 4 Justice? The worst campaign group I have ever heard of.”

Downing Street Press Spokesman

Marketing imagery used by F4J



BLAIR & CO
FAMILY BUTCHERS

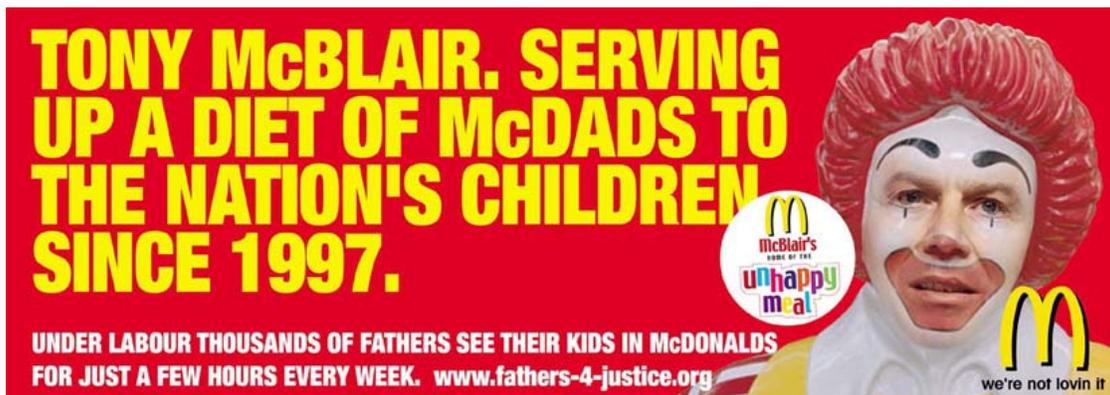
300,000 CHILDREN HAVE LOST CONTACT WITH THEIR FATHERS UNDER LABOUR.
FATHERS 4 JUSTICE. www.fathers-4-justice.org

**Family
Law Lotto.
Next time it
could be you.**



www.fathers-4-justice.org

DON'T GAMBLE WITH YOUR CHILDREN



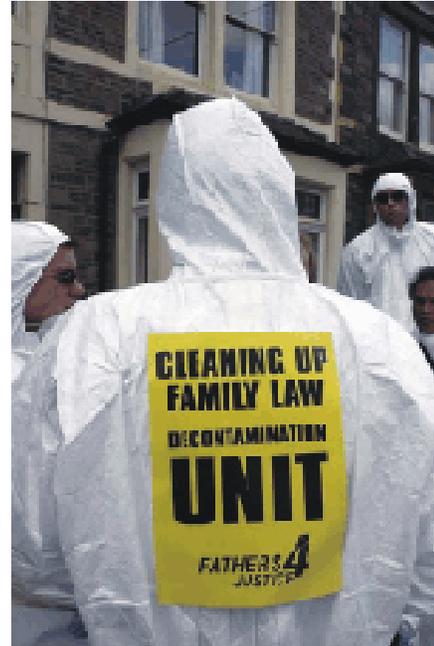
**TONY McBLAIR. SERVING
UP A DIET OF McDADS TO
THE NATION'S CHILDREN
SINCE 1997.**

UNDER LABOUR THOUSANDS OF FATHERS SEE THEIR KIDS IN McDONALDS
FOR JUST A FEW HOURS EVERY WEEK. www.fathers-4-justice.org

McBlair's
HOME OF THE
**unhappy
meal**

we're not lovin' it

Photographs of F4J Protests



The following articles by journalist Yasmin Alibi-Brown disputes some of the issues claimed by Fathers 4 Justice and challenges some of the organisation's methods:

**Misogynistic bullies don't deserve justice
by Yasmin Alibi-Brown, The Independent: 22 November 2004**

More bravado and bullying by the lads from Fathers4Justice. First they invaded a conference on family law in Devon where Jonathan "Jolly" Stanesby of F4J handcuffed Margaret Hodge, the minister for Children, and held her for 40 minutes. Not funny, Jolly. Then they warned of pre-Christmas mayhem for their 10 "most wanted villains", including Charles Clarke and Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, the highly regarded family court judge who will not meet them.

Now they have turned on the BBC and the presenter Fiona Bruce because she fronts a documentary to be broadcast tonight that looks into allegations that some of the key members of the F4J defence force are convicted perpetrators of violence against their former partners. F4J "accuses" Bruce of being a supporter of Women's Aid, which helps such victims - a revealing objection, don't you think?

The makers of the "Families at War" programme, part of the Real Story series, say there is no generalised slur on the campaign itself, but a rout of self-made martyrs is not easily persuaded out of monomania and, anyway, this is not what this campaign group has come to expect from its friends on newspapers and in television.

Like fond parents of spoilt children, the media mostly excuses and delights in the capers of F4J, perhaps because there are a significant number of separated media fathers who feel an instinctive bond with these chaps who make a spectacle of themselves, dressing up as Batman - boys who never grew up and who expect us all to bow to their demands. Some feminist journalists too have fallen for the loveable rogues, describing them as the new suffragettes. To equate the struggle for universal voting rights with these bounders is blasphemy.

I wonder if the nation would so generously empathise with young Muslim men if they handcuffed David Blunkett and threatened Jack Straw, to protest against their victimisation by the iniquitous new anti-terrorist laws. And what if lone mothers in Cinderella costumes attacked politicians, intimidated judges and journalists, stopped traffic and created deliberate chaos to get the Child Support Agency to secure decent financial support for their children from absent fathers?

Intolerably large numbers of these custodial parents live in poverty and misery while the fathers avoid payments and the CSA lurches from one wretched crisis to another.

The chief executive of this enforcement body has just resigned after its computer system failed to deliver, leaving mothers (and some lone fathers entitled to financial support from working mothers) with no way of getting what they are legally owed. What have F4J to say about this issue? I can guess: the demands of the CSA are yet another bit of state oppression in their lives, the unspeakable tyranny that forces them to pay up for children they helped bring into the world.

Many of us who oppose and despise F4J's tactics are keenly aware that post-separation anguish is tragically suffered by too many fathers. There are indeed mothers who violate all agreements and provoke constant aggravation with the non-resident parent in the hope that the contact will eventually cease, thus emotionally amputating the child from the father and, unforgivably, from loving grandparents who have done nothing to deserve such punishment.

Some of my own acquaintances are among these vindictive mothers. In one case, one wife told me she was getting her husband to pay for a massive house renovation before chucking him out and bringing in her young lover to live with her and her three young children. She did too. And now the father is left begging to see his kids while paying for their private education and everything else she demands. But he hates F4J because the image they have promoted of themselves is so offensively misogynistic.

Saner and more temperate fathers' groups, such as Fathers Direct, are not; mothers and fathers are treated with equal respect. These groups work hard to dispel the myth that all separations end in ugly hate and wars. (F4J mocks their girliness.)

In a government green paper, Parental Separation: Children's Needs and Parent's Responsibilities, evidence is produced to show that more than 80 per cent of separated parents are happy with the access arrangements that they have worked out. Most lone mothers say they would like more involvement, not less, sometimes even women who have been terribly treated by the fathers.

Among the women who block or reduce access, a number do so because they are genuinely trying to protect their children. F4J gets very cross about these "recalcitrant mothers" and condemns Lord Justice Thorpe who has decreed that mothers can intervene in arrangements if children are getting anxious or depressed.

It is alarming to witness F4J imposing its uncompromising conditions on the law, society, politics, family life and the national conversation. Anyone who opposes them is given the treatment. The MP Clive Soley, for example, who has criticised these self-pitying warriors, gets regular warnings on the internet. One message says: "Watch yerself you wouldn't want to wake up one morning and find the BNP has stolen your seat."

This campaign has succeeded in getting the majority of Britons to believe that most departed fathers are desperately seeking justice in a cold world and that the only policy that will give them redress is an automatic 50-50 share in their children's lives. Family law is complicated and fraught, necessarily so. There cannot be absolutes, and in the end it is the children who have got to matter more than super-petulant parents.

In new research carried out by Young Voice, children of divorced parents are interviewed about their lives from the point at which the parents parted. The law may stress the best interests of the child, but in reality the thoughts and desires and needs of children are too often drummed out by noisy adults. Read their words and you get a glimpse into how different each child is and how they change too - happy one year seeing both parents then adamantly refusing to pack and repack and transport their lives.

Sarah finds it hard that there are such different rules in the two households she has to live in. Her mother doesn't talk to her dad about money but moans about it to her, and that gets her down. Jason didn't want to live with his dad, who then locked him up and blamed his mum. Rachel feels that "whoever you live with you have ups and downs, whether they are your dad's partner or your dad's frog".

Under-resourced family courts have to deal with these fragilities and with other problems of abuse, neglect, drug addictions, poverty, and family relationships. Sometimes the courts do very badly; other times they manage incendiary situations sensitively. One change that would help to diffuse conflicts would be to open up the courts, so they are not shrouded in secrecy and easily maligned. With the surge in divorces, this is an imperative.

By now, I will have been posted on to the F4J website as yet another man-hater, an enemy to be pursued and brought into line. Maybe next they will start to mock kidnap their opponents and show them on a video, just for a laugh, just for the publicity.

Education Ideas (3)

Fathers 4 Justice is a highly political organisation. In order to make a fair comment on their actions, one must consider both the praise and the criticism that it receives.

Reading the information on Fathers 4 Justice, write a monologue from the point of view of a Fathers 4 Justice member. Use the information to draw out the kind of feelings that that father might have towards their child and the desperation that they might feel.

Now write a second monologue from the point of view of a mother/child/friend who is related to this father and who is finding his involvement with Fathers 4 Justice difficult. Think about the effect that the father's actions might be having on them and why.

Families Need Fathers (FNF) is another organisation that fights for fathers' custodial rights after divorce. Here it discusses what it calls a common form of child abuse that goes unrecognised, where one parent is alienated from the child by the other; a method that the mother uses on the father in MY CHILD.

Parental Alienation Syndrome.

25th April 2007 marks the first anniversary of International Parental Alienation Awareness Day, initiated to increase public understanding of this common form of emotional child abuse which is insufficiently recognised and acted upon in the eyes of the law and the general public in the UK.

Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) occurs post family breakdown, where one parent 'brainwashes' the child against the other (usually the parent the child lives with) often leading to the other parent's complete removal from their child's life.

PAS is not acknowledged in UK courts and is only referred to as 'implacable hostility' on the part of the parent subjecting the child(ren) to this form of emotional abuse, which can have devastating life-long effects for all parties, both children and parents alike.

Families Need Fathers hear from thousands of individuals who have experienced the trauma of PAS, several of whom are willing to present their stories to the media in order that the courts and medical profession will acknowledge this very real form of child abuse.

- A member's son lives with his mother, and has been obviously subjected to PA since 2003 when he was 3 years old. This has caused severe disruption to paternal contact. The CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) Legal Officer and the High Court Judge blamed the breakdown of the father-child relationship on the maternal family, yet the mother was able to continue preventing the existence of a relationship, even banning the father from the child's school. The result of this parental alienation was **no** contact between the child and any members of the paternal family.
- A mother has sole legal residence of the children (they live with her), yet she is subject to the effects of parental alienation by the children's' father, as diagnosed by a forensic evaluation. She has recordings of father and son aggressively discussing their campaign against her, yet no-one involved (Judge, family therapist, parent co-ordinator) gives the severity of the situation the acknowledgement or treatment it deserves.
- A member underwent a 10 year battle to stop the alienation of his children against him and to have their right to parenting time with him upheld. This involved 40 hearings, 12 different judges, a succession of CAFCASS Officers and a psychiatrist's involvement, all of whom found him to be entirely focused on the best interests of his children. However, in 2004, the father was forced to withdraw his application. He said, "The mother's alienation is so engrained that I can see no further practical way forward."
- A member's ex-wife absconded with their children to Wales, gave false addresses and made false allegations of abuse, was untruthful in Court and won a full residence order in her favour. The father was granted no contact with the children, the schools or doctors. He has not seen or spoken to his 2 children for 2 years.

Any parent, irrespective of gender, can be subject to this devastating experience.

Jon Davies, FNF CEO, says “The denial of Parental Alienation can lead to the unnecessary tragedy of life-long separation between a child and their parent. This is a pattern which needs to change, and raising awareness is part of that process.”

What do severely alienated children look like?

- They have a relentless hatred towards the targeted parent(s).
- They parrot the Obsessed Alienator.
- The child does not want to visit or spend any time with the targeted parent.
- Many of the child’s beliefs are enmeshed with the alienator.
- The beliefs are delusional and frequently irrational.
- They are not intimidated by the court. Frequently, their reasons are not based on personal experiences with the targeted parent but reflect what they are told by the Obsessed Alienator. They have difficulty differentiating between the two.
- The child has no ambivalence in his feelings; it’s all hatred with no ability to see the good.
- They have no capacity to feel guilty about how they behave towards the targeted parent or forgive any past indiscretions.
- They share the Obsessed Alienator's cause. Together, they are in lockstep to denigrate the hated parent.
- The children's obsessional hatred extends to the targeted parent's extended family without any guilt or remorse.
- They can appear like normal healthy children until asked about the targeted parent that triggers their hatred.

By Douglas Darnall, Ph.D, from *Journal of Parental Alienation: Vol. 1 No. 1* - August 2005, Pg: 1 of 15

Judges, CAFCASS staff, social workers, and others often fail to recognise Parental Alienation as a genuine occurrence, and the children may lose a loved and loving parent for a long time or sometimes permanently. This can also have a long-term effect on the child’s relationship with the parent causing the alienation, if during adulthood the child discovers that they have been misled.

www.fnf.org.uk

Education Ideas (4)

Improvise a court scene with four characters – the mother and her lawyer, the father and his lawyer. Create a discussion about why each party wishes to keep their child.

Use the above scene to write a monologue from the point of view of the child who is being fought about. Do they want to take sides with one of their parents? If so, what has happened in the above scene that made them feel this way? It might help to write a list of emotions that the child feels towards each parent.

Now write three short monologues, one from the point of view of the mother, one from the point of view of the father, and one from the point of view of the child. Each sentence should start with the words, 'I want'. The mother's and father's monologues should focus on why they each want their child and the child's monologue should be based more broadly on what they want in life and how they hope the situation between their parents will be resolved.

Further Reading

Texts by the following playwrights and practitioners, mentioned as influences by Mike Bartlett and Sacha Wares can be found at the Royal Court Bookshop:

Chekhov, Samuel Beckett, Forced Entertainment, Tony Kushner, Edward Albee, David Grieg, Debbie Tucker Green and Caryl Churchill. *Play in a Godless World* by Catherine Bates. Keith Johnstone's books *Impro* and *Impro for Storytellers*.

Two articles by the Spanish forensic psychologist, José Manuel Aguilar Cuenca, whose job is dealing with the emotional fallout from the family courts, translated by Julian Fitzgerald: *Children in the Parental Separation Process* and *Interview with J.M. Aguilar* in December 2005.

An article "Should Courts Order PAS Children to Visit/Reside with the Alienated Parent? A Follow-up Study" written by Richard Gardner was published in the *American Journal of Forensic Psychology*, 19(3):61-106, 2001 and is reproduced on his website.

The book '*The Parental Alienation Syndrome*' by Dr Richard Gardner can be obtained from Amazon Books.

Read an abridged version of *A Guide to Parental Alienation Syndrome* by FNF's Stan Hayward, whose website is at www.parentalalienation.co.uk

Read *The Spectrum of Parental Alienation Syndrome (parts I and II)*, a comprehensive review of U.S. research on PAS by Deirdre Conway Rand Ph.D. (*American Journal of Forensic Psychology*, Volume 15, Issues 3-4, 1997, abridged). Full references to other academic papers are included.

Visit the F.A.C.T. Parental Alienation Links page.

See also the Parental Alienation website and the Parental Alienation Information Network website. Another site is The Rachel Foundation.

Journal of Parental Alienation:

<http://www.fnf.org.uk>

www.fathers-4-justice.org

www.fathersdirect.com

Royal Court Young Writers Programme

Empowering playwrights today to challenge and engage the audiences of tomorrow...

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These resources were created by Laura McCluskey for the Royal Court Young Writers Programme, as part of our Education work.

If you would like to know more about our Education Programme and teacher resources, please contact Lyndsey Turner, lyndseyturner@royalcourttheatre.com.

To be part of the Teacher's Forum, book tickets or find out more about the Royal Court, please contact our Audience Development Officer, Gemma Frayne, gemmafrayne@royalcourttheatre.com.

Both may also be reached via the address and telephone number detailed below:

Royal Court Theatre
Sloane Square
London SW1W 8AS

Tel: 020 7565 5050

We would appreciate any feedback you have on these resources as we are constantly trying to improve our service to teachers.

Royal Court Young Writers Programme:

Associate Director	<i>Ola Animashawun</i>
Administrator	<i>Nina Lyndon</i>
Outreach Worker	<i>Lucy Dunkerley</i>
Writers Tutor	<i>Leo Butler</i>

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