



# Teaching Material

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# Introduction

With this teaching material, we hope to inspire teachers to use the Crazy Christmas Cabaret, this curious combination of English and Danish language and culture, as a way to acquaint their students with the English language and its many possibilities. We have tried to offer different angles on the show including both class discussion, written assignments, and research assignments. Parts of the teaching material is best used before you take your class to Glassalen while others require that the students have seen the show.

This year, we ask your students to research on Verne's novel including the characters. Therefore, we do not provide our usual guide to the references and innuendos embedded in our characters' names and personalities. After all, we don't want to give it all away.

We hope you find the following useful, and should you wish to comment on any part of the teaching material, please feel free to send us an email at [mail@londontoast.dk](mailto:mail@londontoast.dk)

*Good fornøjelse!*

## Suggestions for Class Discussion

### ***But c'est French?!?***

This year, we have put our faithful English teachers to the test by choosing a French novel as the point of departure of our 80 minutes tour de monde. However, we believe that our choice may offer interesting alternatives to the usual ways of preparing your class for watching a show.

A very important skill for students of all subjects is the ability to acquire information about a particular book without having to spend hours and days reading the thing itself. Have your students research on Jules Verne and his book using the internet, encyclopaedias, literary reviews, biographies etc. Their research should focus on some or all of the following points:

- An outline of the plot including a story line
- A list of the most important characters and their mutual relations including the three most important traits of each character
- The most important themes
- A short background on Jules Verne
- A brief introduction to the historical and literary context of the novel including its reception by the public

The result can be presented in class or handed in as a paper. Either way, their research may form the basis of class discussion. Consider the following points:

- Why do you think the novel was so popular at its time?
- Why do you think the novel still fascinates people so that the book itself continues to be read and we keep seeing new adaptations for film and theatre?

### ***How Does She Do It?***

Well, a pen and a sense of humour are not quite enough - essential as they may be. To write a play like the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret* there are a lot of things you need to know and master: the language(s) you use, dramatic techniques, comedy techniques, the genre you have chosen and the audience you are writing for. A lot of research is also inevitable. In order to play and pun on history, literature, politics, TV-programmes and the newest hits in music, you really need to keep up with things. Consider the following points:

- When you watch the show, spot the slapstick, the sexual innuendos, the topical jokes and the allusions to history and literature and consider the balance between them.
- Then try to define the comedy techniques that are employed in the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret*.

Try also to compare the role and importance of dialogue with that of costumes, setting, music, props and last but certainly not least the individual performances of the actors

## ***Making Sense of the Fun***

The Crazy Christmas Cabaret is perhaps not the type of show where you bring your notebook in order to prepare yourself for intellectual discussion. However, it is a good opportunity to practice keeping a critical mind while being entertained – another important skill for any student of literature, drama, and film.

- Have your students make a list of the characters in our cabaret and compare it to the characters they found in Verne's novel. Make sure they add a comment or two to each cabaret character so they have a basis for discussion. In class, discuss some or all of the following questions:
  - How many of the characters are taken directly from the novel?
  - What has happened to their names? Find the hidden references and innuendos.
  - What about the rest of the characters – where do they come from, and why would Vivienne McKee have added them to her show?
- Ask your students to pay attention to one or more of the following aspects of the show: plot, characters, setting, comic effects, theatrical effects, and the interaction with the audience.
- If your students have done the research assignment above, or perhaps seen one of the films based on the novel, ask them to pay special attention to the relation and interaction between our show and the novel or the film.
- Ask your students to note at least 3 cross-language jokes and explain in their own words why they are funny, how they work.

These observations can then form the basis of an essay, a review (see the writing exercise below), or a synopsis for a presentation in class. You might also begin your next lesson with a quick-write where you give your students 5-10 minutes to write down their observations and then use their results as the basis for a class discussion.

## ***When Pantomime Met Vivienne McKee***

To many people, going to see the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret* is a traditional part of Christmas. Now, an important part of any tradition is repetition, and even though the different shows have different names and different stories, the main elements are the same. These elements derive from the great tradition of the British Christmas Pantomime. Every winter in Britain, these “pantos” draw large audiences of all ages, and they are very much an integral part of Christmas. So, Vivienne McKee has successfully taken a very popular tradition and transferred it from one culture to another. This always calls for changes and alterations. For instance, a show called the *Crazy Christmas Pantomime* would not work in Denmark. Danish audiences would associate it with the silent world of Harlequin and Columbine - a far cry from the loud and lavish comedy presented by the London Toast Theatre. Also, McKee has put a lot of her own, rich creativity into her shows - it is sometimes hard to determine where the traditional British Pantomime stops, and London Toast Theatre begins. Hard as it is, though, we invite you to try. An understanding of the colourful background of the shows adds an extra dimension to the entertainment and gives you a lot more to enjoy.

Carry out a thorough research into the origins and traditions of the British Christmas Pantomime:

- Find and describe its most important characteristics. For instance:
  - Special characters
  - Special kinds of plots
  - Special dramatic effects
  - Special kinds of comedy
  
- Find and describe the most important stages in its historical development

This research assignment may be used simply as a basis for discussion or it may be used as a writing exercise and the result handed in as an essay. Students may benefit from carrying out this assignment before seeing the show.

(If you want to skip the research assignment, you can require a brief text about the origins and tradition of the British Christmas Pantomime to use as the basis of class discussion at: [mail@londontoast.dk](mailto:mail@londontoast.dk))

Having established the traditions and origins of the British Christmas Pantomime, consider the following points:

- Which elements of the traditional pantomime does one find in the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret*?
  - In which way have these elements been adapted and innovated?
  - Why do you think these adaptations and innovations have been made?
  
- Which elements of the show are specifically London Toast Theatre?
- How do the traditional pantomime elements and the elements that are specifically London Toast Theatre work in the show and interact with each other?
- How many of the alterations made to the pantomime elements are due to the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret* playing to a primarily Danish audience?
  - Why do you think these alterations were necessary?
  
- The traditional British Pantomime really is a very British phenomenon and usually not very successful outside the United Kingdom. Why do you think the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret* is such a success in Denmark?



# Writing Exercises

## ***Creative Writing - from 80 Days to 80 Minutes***

### Step 1

Ask your students to write a piece of creative writing of a certain length - for instance 3 pages. It must be a unified whole with a full plot including at least 3 interrelated characters.

### Step 2

Check that your students have fulfilled the requirements of the assignment and then ask them to rewrite it and cut it down by 1/3 of its length without losing the unity of the plot and readability.

### Step 3

Evaluate on the assignment in class. How did they experience step 2? Was it easy, difficult, frustrating, inspiring?

Consider the Crazy Christmas Cabaret. Vivienne McKee has had to cut the plot of Verne's novel to fit her purpose. Also, the original script of a cabaret is always too long – even before the actors start adding improvisations - and many scenes, jokes and gags have to be cut away. How has she managed her task? Has she cut enough, too much, too little? Has she kept the unity of the plot? Do the characters still make sense? Are there too many jokes or too few?

Variations on the exercise:

1)

Instead of having you students hand their original story in as a paper to you, you might divide them into pairs and let them read each other's stories. Then repeat the exercise with the shortened version. They can then meet in groups of 4 and discuss what happened to the stories, and finally, you may evaluate on the exercise in class and finish with the discussion of our show.

2)

Instead of step 1 above, have your students read a short story which you then ask them cut to half its length. You might also ask them to pretend they have to adapt it to a screen play thus making the comparison with our show more direct and immediately relevant to them.

## ***Sell the Show***

Every year, the London Toast Theatre does a press release, a newsletter and various other PR arrangements. How would you sell this show to a Danish audience?

- Write a newsletter and/or a press release. Hand it in as a written assignment, or read it to the rest of your class for class discussion.
- Divide into groups and arrange an event to promote the show. Present your suggestion to the rest of the class either by acting it out or as a presentation.

## ***Review the Show***

Once London Toast Theatre has created, rehearsed, sold, and performed the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret*, the show is in the hearts and hands of the audience. Among that audience are a number of reviewers from various newspapers and magazines. Every year, a lot of good and bad reviews find their way to the public and influence not only the mood of the cast and crew but also that of potential audiences.

Pick out a few reviews from different papers and consider the following points:

- Analyse the reviews and make a list of the different aspects of the *Crazy Christmas Cabaret* that get mentioned - e.g. the actors, the plot, the costumes, the jokes etc.
- Which of these aspects do the reviews focus on?
- Is there a pattern in their emphasis or are they all different?
- Is there a general agreement about the quality of this year's show?
  - Why do think that is/ is not?
  - If there is, do you agree?
- How do the reviews affect your impression and opinion of the show?

Write your own review of the show based on the reviews you have read, analysed and discussed. Hand it in as a written assignment or read it to the rest of your class for class discussion.