

THE UNSPOKEN PROJECT PRODUCTION OF

SPEECHLESS



STUDY GUIDE AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Speechless - A new musical

On Sept 12 2016 The Unspoken Project CIC brought their debut performance of “Speechless” to Communication Matters 30th Anniversary in Leeds. Speechless is a fully integrated disabled and non disabled mainstream show addressing issues around communication impairment. It tells the typical coming of age story of a teenager on the run from her loving but over bearing parents and their limited view of her adulthood; her need for a voice being heartily ignored and her being subjected to highly dubious medical practices that promise a miracle cure.

Speechless was designed with raising awareness of other methods of speaking and the use of communication aids, including AAC, and their users in mind and with the intention of opening debate around the subject of communication, it's uses and it's accessibility to those in need of it.

The exercises below are designed with those on Social Care or AHP courses and those studying disability at a post graduate level, so feel free to use and adapt them to suit your own needs. The timings given are as a guideline only.

The clips used for reference in each exercise can be found on the main Speechless resource page of the Communication Matters website.

The Speechless Character list

Rebecca walker	- A young adult with cerebral palsy and no speech
Anne Walker	- Rebecca's Mother
Peter Walker	- Rebecca's Father
Buster	- Rebecca's imaginary friend and her alter ego
Amy Bates	- Rebecca's PA/Carer/Babysitter
Jane Wright	- A Speech and Language Therapist
Yvonne and Vicky	- Care workers at Rebecca's school/day centre
Brian Davis	- Rebecca's art teacher
Jeremy	- Rebecca's head teacher/head of the centre
Terry	- A drunk man Rebecca encounter on a visit to London
Joyce	- The Walkers' nosey neighbour
Rosie	- A young girl who treats Rebecca like a toy
A Doctor	
A Journalist	
Anne's Church friends	

Exercise One

ref clips 1-6

- 1: Rebecca's mother misunderstands her attempts to communicate and assumes she is 'poorly'
- 2: Rebecca's parents sing about their 'happy family' and call Rebecca their 'baby'
- 3: Rebecca's parents call her 'clever' for smiling
- 4: Rebecca and her Dad (Peter) sit down to watch the TV
- 5: Peter misunderstands Rebecca making a joke about walking like a Mummy

From the outset of the story, we see Rebecca's parents infantilising and romanticising their daughters condition and the needs that they perceive that she has because of it. It's almost as though the perception of her needs through the eyes of her parents and, to a certain extent, the professionals around her, has meant that the type of care she is receiving has left her 'frozen in time and now allowed to grow up.'

- Whatever their reasons, Rebecca's parents continually deny and ignore their daughters physical age and intellect (instead assuming - wrongly - she has a lower mental age) along with denying Rebecca's need to communicate.

Using the clips mentioned as a reference, discuss whether you think this is happening more by one parent than the other. 10 mins

- How do Anne and Peter's views of their daughters and her condition differ? Make a list to compare and contrast their differing views and assumptions. 5 mins

- Do you think Rebecca's parents are 'bad' or 'stupid' people? Discuss what you think their experiences might have been to have shaped their reactions to and attitude towards their daughter? 5 mins

Exercise Two

clips 1,3,5 and 6.

- 1: Rebecca's mother misunderstands her attempts to communicate and assumes she is 'poorly'
- 3: Rebecca's parents call her 'clever' for smiling
- 5: Peter misunderstands Rebecca making a joke about walking like a Mummy
- 6: Buster raps about the frustrations of no one consulting Rebecca in choices about her own life.

Throughout the story, we are given an insight into Rebecca's - as yet unvoiced - frustrations and intellect through the presence of her (invisible to all but herself and the audience) alter ego, Buster.

Buster becomes the way in which to help us understand what Rebecca is thinking and gives the audience an idea of the frustration caused in not being able to communicate.

- Discuss how you think Rebecca's actual needs differ from what her parents perceive them to be. (5 mins)

- Consider how Rebecca could be showing, or be helped to show, some of her thoughts and intellectual needs (as opposed to her basic needs) when she is deprived of a means of sophisticated communication. List your ideas. (10 mins)

- Should children with an apparent communication impairment be encouraged to try and talk biologically first? Should it matter that they have biological speech if using AAC could still make communicating easier for them? (5 mins)

Exercise Three

Clips 6 - 9.

6: Buster raps about the frustrations of no one consulting Rebecca in choices about her own life.

7: Rebecca shows Amy a letter written about her levels of communication

8: Vicky and Yvonne try to encourage Rebecca to use her picture board and we are introduced to Jane

9: Jane talks to Rebecca about AAC and the way in which Rebecca's case has been dealt with so far

The show uses dark comedy to highlight the issues surrounding the professionals that dominate a child's life. Specifically, in the case of Rebecca, we are given a glimpse into common issues arising in the life of a child with a disability.

These include, but are not limited to, the interactions with and personalities of:

Education professionals (incl teachers and teaching assistants)

Care workers

Social/Support workers

Speech and Language Therapists

Front line medical staff

•Although a comedic extension of some of the interactions an individual might have, discuss how common do you think scenarios like this are? (5 mins)

•What resources and support do you think ought to be made available to education, support and healthcare professionals in order to lessen the occurrence of similar situations? Make a list of what you think these should be. (5 mins)

•Do you think there is enough awareness about communication impairment in society and mainstream education and health services as a whole? Discuss this in your group and if you decide there isn't enough, how do you think this could be changed? (10 mins)

Exercise Four

Clips 6 and 7.

6: Buster raps about the frustrations of no one consulting Rebecca in choices about her own life.

7: Rebecca shows Amy a letter written about her levels of communication

When Rebecca's 'babysitter' (i.e. her one PA) appears in the story, it's apparent from not long after her arrival that she is someone who can see Rebecca for who and what she is. Furthermore, she is also understands that the need for an ability for Rebecca to show her skills and intellect has arisen out of benign neglect and lack of information and understanding.

- Discuss and list the skills you think personal carers and assistants need to be equipped with. (5 mins)
- Can you imagine any resistance they might encounter from parents/educational and health professionals? How do you think they could go about dealing with this kind of conflict? Create a short dialogue to illustrate a this. If you feel comfortable (and if applicable), share with the room. (10 mins)
- If you are a UK resident, discuss what, if anything do you know about the provisions of carers for people with disabilities? For example, are you aware of the current UK care, sample care plans? Mind map what you know. (5 mins)

Exercise Five

Clips 7 - 10

7: Rebecca shows Amy a letter written about her levels of communication

8: Vicky and Yvonne try to encourage Rebecca to use her picture board and we are introduced to Jane

9: Jane talks to Rebecca about AAC and the way in which Rebecca's case has been dealt with so far

10: Jane gives Rebecca access to a VoxBox and shows her how it can be used.

Ultimately, in Rebecca's story, we see her PA and Speech and Language Therapist aiding her to have access to the communication she needs.

- Can you think of things that Rebecca might be able to do now she can communicate fully, that she perhaps couldn't do before? Make a list of what you think these things might be. (5 mins)

- What might she want to do, now that she can communicate her thoughts? Again, create a list of what sort of things you think she might want to do. (5 mins)

- How do you think her access to communication might change Rebecca's relationship with her parents? Discuss how you think their story might end. (5 mins)

Final discussion: Food for thought.

The questions below are general discussion points from the clips included.

If you are working in a single group or alone, take a couple of minutes to list your answers for each point so you can reflect back on them. If you are working as a subgroup of a larger classroom, each group could take a point and expand it, with a view to giving feedback to the room at the end.

- ➡ Is anyone 'too anything' for AAC?
- ➡ Should everyone be given a chance to use AAC if communication impairment seems like a possibility? Should everyone be given a chance regardless?
- ➡ Do you think things have changed recently? Are young children receiving the AAC they require at an early enough age?
- ➡ What do you think could be the advantages and challenges of speaking electronically?

Further reading

www.theunspokenproject.com/speechless

www.communicationmatters.org.uk/page/communication-matters-projects

www.communicationmatters.org.uk/resources

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

Useful contacts

www.communicationmatters.org.uk

<http://www.icps.org.uk/page/what-is-icps>

<https://www.scope.org.uk/support/families/diagnosis/cerebral-palsy>

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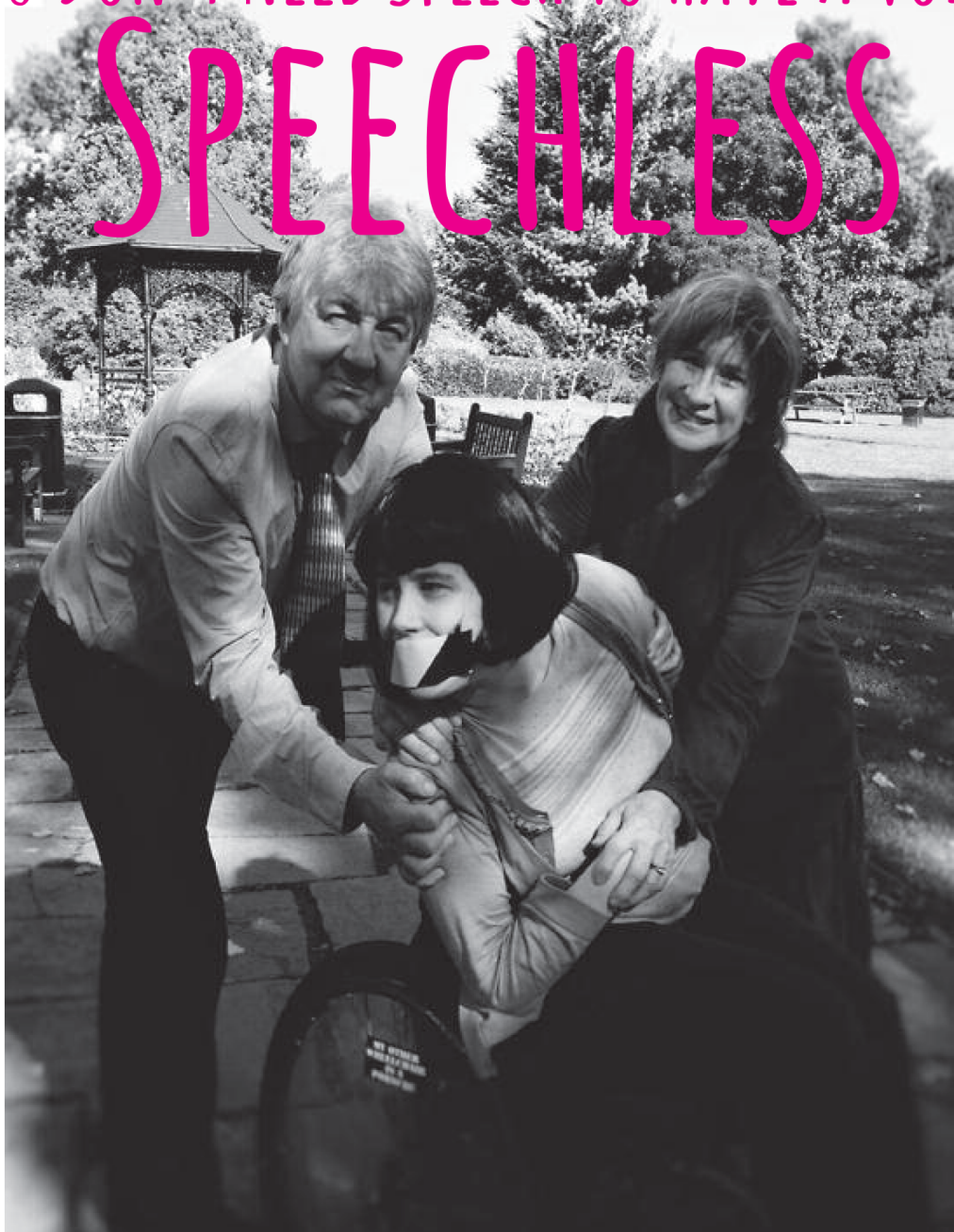
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SPEECHLESS

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BRINGING THE UNSPOKEN TO THE STAGE

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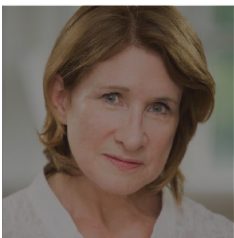
Communication
Matters

THE CAST:



KATE CARYER PLAYING REBECCA WALKER, A DISABLED YOUNG ADULT WITH CEREBRAL PALSY AND NO SPEECH

Kate is a woman with pink hair who also happens to have Cerebral Palsy & use a communication aid. She is a Founding member of the Unspoken Project CIC & has a BA (Hons) in *Performing Arts: Community Development* plus an MA in *Disability Studies & Special Education* from the University of Leeds. At the Communication Matters 2014 she won the Alan Martin award for contribution to the arts, partly for her work for The Unspoken Project.



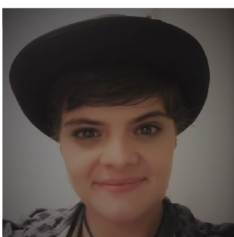
MAGGIE ROBSON PLAYING ANNE WALKER, REBECCA'S MUMMY

Maggie trained at Guildhall & her stage work includes roles in Shakespeare, the classics, contemporary drama, comedies, experimental theatre, musicals & cabarets. Her recent roles are as varied as her repertoire, what's more Maggie is also an accomplished voiceover artist.



DAVID WARWICK PLAYING PETER WALKER, REBECCA'S DADDY

David Warwick trained at RADA, followed by repertory seasons at Crewe, Coventry, Birmingham, Liverpool & Edinburgh. He has performed at a number of West End theatres, featured in many well know television shows (*East Enders*, *Dr Who*, *Only Fools & Horses*), as a director he has over 40 plays to his credit, some of which have toured internationally.



CAZZ REGAN PLAYING BUSTER, REBECCA'S IMAGINARY FRIEND

Caroline began her training in the profession under Sharon Harris & has since performed on television (*The Bill*), provided the voice-over narration for a number of theatre productions (*Sleeping Beauty*, *Murder By the Book*). She does regular work with Comedy Horror Pizza Productions, which can be found on You Tube.

SPEECHLESS

A COMING-OF-AGE TALE OF A WOMAN WITH CEREBRAL PALSY THAT EXPLORES ASSISTIVE COMMUNICATION IN A LIGHT THAT HASN'T BEEN SEEN IN THE WORLD OF THEATRE BEFORE!

Speechless shockingly overwrites everything you think you know about people without speech, and introduces their own stories to stage.

It tells the story of 19-year-old Rebecca Walker. She has no speech due to cerebral palsy. However, like many people in the UK and worldwide, Rebecca has no access to a communication aid or other methods of alternative communication.

This means that her story, opinions, and devious teenage thoughts remain unspoken. When Mr and Mrs Walker leave their so-called 'baby daughter' with a personal assistant, they did not know that the cotton wool imprisoning world that they lovingly built for their frail little disabled girl would come tumbling down.

Nor did they realise from this, a strong disabled young woman will find her voice, and will use this voice to change her parents view of disability and herself.

SPEECHLESS THE MUSICAL IS THE UNSPOKEN PROJECT CIC'S FIRST MAJOR PRODUCTION. THE UNSPOKEN PROJECT CIC IS AN INCLUSIVE PROFESSIONAL THEATRE COMPANY

We want to know what you think and would welcome feedback via facebook or email (hq.unspoken@gmail.com). Unspoken is a CIC but receives no funding. We rely on the generosity of our supporters to bring the voice of the speechless to the stage and give acting opportunities to disabled people.