

Novel Theatre Company

***CARRIE'S WAR* by Nina Bawden**

Teacher's Notes

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Background: Nina Bawden's Life and Work

"Carrie had often dreamed about coming back. In her dreams she was twelve years old again; short, scratched legs in red socks and scuffed, brown sandals, walking along the narrow, dirt path at the side of the railway line to where it plunged down, off the high ridge, through the Druid's Grove. The yew trees in the Grove were dark green and so old that they had grown twisted and lumpy, like arthritic fingers. And in Carrie's dream, the fingers reached out for her, plucking at her hair and her skirt as she ran. She was always running by the end of this dream, running away from the house, uphill towards the railway line."

- Nina Bawden, *Carrie's War*, Chapter One

*"No one could be too old for it... *Carrie's War* is as vivid and elusive as a good dream."*

- *Times Educational Supplement*

Childhood and evacuation

"I never decided to become a writer: I always thought I was one." – Nina Bawden

Nina Bawden was born in London in 1925; her maiden name was Nina Mabey. Her father was a marine engineer. The family were not poor, but, according to Nina, "no one's job was secure in those days", and so her father "had a fear of poverty that affected all of us". Nina's mother saw education as a way to ensure her daughter's future and, at the age of eleven, Nina found herself under a great deal of pressure to succeed in a scholarship examination for the local grammar school:

"It wasn't the first time in my life I had been afraid, but I believe it was the first time I had been afraid for someone else and it is a fear that haunts me still. I can put up with my own disappointments; it is other people's that I cannot bear."¹

Nina Bawden's memory of how responsibility can weigh on a young girl informs the character of evacuee Carrie Willow, charged with looking after her little brother Nick, in *Carrie's War*.

Fortunately, Nina succeeded in gaining her scholarship to Ilford County High School. She studied there until the outbreak of World War II, when, like many other British children, she was evacuated to the country. At first, Nina was evacuated to Ipswich, but after Hitler's invasion of the Low Countries, the school

¹ All quotes in this section are from Nina Bawden's autobiography, *In My Own Time*.

was moved to Wales. Nina and her friend Jean stayed for a week with a miner's family in Blaengarw, South Wales, but were then moved to the larger town of Aberdare. Nina cried to leave Blaengarw, and her vivid memories of this coal mining valley town would later inspire the creation of the unnamed town which provides the setting for *Carrie's War*.

University and marriage

As a girl, Nina dreamed of working on a newspaper and becoming a war correspondent. She studied at Somerville College, Oxford, alongside Margaret Roberts, later Lady Thatcher. A passionate and committed socialist, Nina was shocked when Margaret announced her intention to join the Conservative Party. Nina believed that

"She and I, with our lower middle-class backgrounds, had been lucky to get into Oxford. It would be despicable to use our good fortune simply to join the ranks of the privileged! Our duty was to make sure, when the war ended, that a new, happier, more generous society would take the place of the bad, old, selfish one."

After graduating, Nina was offered a job as a trainee reporter on the *Manchester Evening News*, but turned it down in order to marry Harry Bawden. She became pregnant with her son, Niki, soon afterwards. Niki suffered from schizophrenia and died in tragic circumstances as a young adult. A moving account of Niki's life is contained in Nina's autobiography, *In My Own Time*. Nina had another son, Robert, with Harry Bawden, and a daughter, Perdita, with her second husband, Austen Kark.

Writing success

Nina's first novel, *Who Calls the Tune*, a detective story, was published in 1953. She wrote it in secret, "telling no one what I was doing in case they should laugh at me". The novel was a success:

"It came out to astonishingly good reviews and it seemed to me that life could hold no more happiness without bursting."

Other, critically acclaimed, adult novels followed, and it was not until 1963 that Nina wrote her first children's novel, *The Secret Passage*. She chose to write it because

"I wanted to give my children something that would encourage them to feel they could make a difference to what happened in the world, show them fictional children who were people like themselves, bright and gutsy and determined, able to think, to reason, to hold a moral view."

Since *The Secret Passage*, Nina Bawden has alternated between writing children's books and adult literary fiction, achieving great success in both genres.

Carrie's War

In 1972, Nina wrote an adult novel, *Anna Apparent*, about a wartime evacuee who suffers terrible abuse on a Welsh hill farm. After writing *Anna Apparent*, Nina remembered her own experiences as an evacuee in Wales, and began to write *Carrie's War*:

"Sometimes I am not sure at the beginning on which side a book will fall. And sometimes, publishing a novel as a children's book is a matter of marketing... When I started Carrie's War I had not intended it for children; it was only slowly, as I wrote the first chapter, that I began to see the direction it was taking."

Carrie's War was published in 1973, and, like many of Nina Bawden's books, has never been out of print. It was adapted for television in the 1970s, and was filmed by BBC Wales in 2002. *Carrie's War* won a Phoenix Award in 1993, twenty years after its original publication.

Novels

Nina Bawden's other children's novels include *The Secret Passage* (1963); *The Witch's Daughter* (1966); *A Handful of Thieves* (1967); *The Runaway Summer* (1969); *Squib* (1971); *The Peppermint Pig* (1973, winner, Guardian Fiction Award); *The Finding* (1985); *Keeping Henry* (1988); *The Real Plato Jones* (1994, shortlisted for the W H Smith Mind Boggling Books Award) and *Granny the Pag* (1995, shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal).

Her adult novels include *A Woman of My Age* (1967); *Anna Apparent* (1972); *Afternoon of a Good Woman* (1976, winner, Yorkshire Post Novel of the Year Award), *The Ice House* (1983); *Circles of Deceit* (1987, shortlisted, Booker Prize); *Family Money* (1991, shortlisted, Booker Prize) and *A Nice Change* (1997). There have been several film and television adaptations of Nina Bawden's books. In 2004, Nina Bawden was awarded the Golden Pen for a lifetime's contribution to literature.

Potter's Bar and afterwards

In 2002, Nina's husband Austen Kark was killed in the train crash at Potter's Bar. Nina herself was badly injured in the terrible accident. She published a book, *Dear Austen*, exploring her response to the crash and its aftermath. Taking the form of an open letter to her husband, *Dear Austen* is both deeply personal and strongly political; an honest account of grief and an angry demand for justice. Nina became highly involved in the fight for adequate compensation for the victims of the crash:

“I used to disapprove of the ‘compensation culture’, but experience has tempered my disapproval considerably. Making people responsible, for the cracked paving stone they should have replaced or for the bolts that should have secured points 2182A, might make them more careful.”

Nina Bawden served as a magistrate for many years, and was awarded a CBE in 1995. She currently lives in Islington, and is working on a new children’s book.

Background: Evacuation

“As if Hitler had arranged this old war for their benefit, just so that Carrie and Nick could be sent away in a train with gas masks slung over their shoulders and their names on cards round their necks. Labelled like parcels – Caroline Wendy Willow and Nicholas Peter Willow – only with no address to be sent to. None of them, not even the teachers, knew where they were going.”

- Nina Bawden, *Carrie’s War*, Chapter One

“The best account I know of how children adapted to strange surroundings in wartime”

- *The Times*, on *Carrie’s War*

Background

During the First World War, over fourteen hundred British civilians had been killed in bombing raids; first by Zeppelins, then by bomber planes. In the period between the wars, the Air Raid Precautions Committee was set up in order to examine the problems caused by air raids, and to look into the possibility of evacuating the civilian populations of British cities, in the case of future air attacks. In 1925, the Committee’s report claimed that it would be impossible to relocate the vital work carried out in major cities, and proposed to separate the population into two groups; workers and “*les bouches inutiles*” [useless mouths]. All those who played no part in war work were to be considered “useless mouths”. This group included elderly people, people with disabilities, pregnant women, nursing mothers and, of course, children. In the event of war, it was deemed advisable to remove these people from British cities and send them to the countryside or overseas. This plan became known first as “evasion”, and then by the familiar name by which we refer to it today - evacuation.

Preparation for Evacuation

By late September 1938, with Britain on the brink of war, plans were made to evacuate two million people from London. Half a million schoolchildren were due to leave on September 30th, when the signing of the Munich Agreement seemingly averted war between Britain and Germany at the last minute [or, at any rate, achieved a postponement of hostilities]. The evacuation scheme was called off, and four thousand children who had already been evacuated, returned to their homes within days. During the year that followed, as Britain prepared for war, arrangements for the evacuation of civilians became an important part of that preparation.

Every area in Britain was divided into one of three categories: evacuation areas, reception areas and neutral areas. “Evacuation” areas, mostly towns and cities,

were the most likely targets of bombing raids, and vulnerable civilians such as children were to be given the opportunity to leave. They were to be sent to “reception” areas (generally rural areas, or smaller towns) which were considered comparatively safe. Neutral areas were neither one nor the other. As war became depressingly inevitable, arrangements were made to begin the evacuation on September 1st, 1939. This time, there was no last-minute reprieve. The evacuation went ahead as planned. Two days later, Britain was at war with Germany.

Leaving the cities

It was the largest mass movement of people in British history. One and a half million people were moved from evacuation to reception areas in a few days. Some were sent under the official Government scheme, others made their own private arrangements. Some children, often known as “seavacuees”, were sent overseas for the duration of the war, either by Government scheme or by private arrangement. But the majority of children were evacuated to other parts of Britain. They were told to turn up at school with their suitcase, gas mask and enough food to last a day. They were issued with labels bearing their name and school, but were not told where they were going. A “rehearsal” was carried out on August 28th, and on September 1st, the children were finally on the move.

Most children travelled by train. Some ended up only a few miles from their home towns; others faced a long, crowded journey on a train with no toilet facilities and arrived at their destinations tired, hungry, dishevelled, dirty – and in no state to impress their prospective hosts.

Billeting and foster parents

The evacuees were to stay in private houses, known as “billets”. Billeting officers had examined all the houses in their area, deciding how many evacuees each householder could be made to take. Those who took in child evacuees were known as “foster parents”, and received small sums of money from the government and / or the children’s own parents or guardians. Despite this incentive, many were understandably reluctant to open their houses to complete strangers. But, if you lived in a reception area and were considered to have enough room, taking evacuees was compulsory. Unsurprisingly, this caused a certain amount of resentment, and some evacuees faced prejudice from their hosts before they even arrived. Others, however, were keen to “do their bit” for the war effort by taking in evacuees. “CARING FOR EVACUEES IS A NATIONAL SERVICE”, read the Government posters, and many host families were keen to do their patriotic duty. -

Arrival

“...she had already begun to feel ill with shame at the fear that no one would choose her, the way she always felt when they picked teams at school. Supposing she was left to the last!”

- Nina Bawden, *Carrie's War*, chapter 2

“We must have been tired and filthy and it felt, in that church hall where we were assembled, as though we were up for auction – and as adults came along and selected children here and there, it felt to those who were left to last (I was one of them!) that no one wanted us.”

- evacuee Charles Crebbin

Many children were so traumatised by the experience of their arrival in a strange town, that they resolved to return to London at the first opportunity. Humiliations abounded as the evacuees, in some cases already stigmatised as “dirty townies”, reached their reception areas. It was common for the evacuees to be made to wait in a central building such as a town hall whilst prospective hosts came to look them over, picking and choosing those they liked the look of, and discarding the rest. Many towns had been sent too many evacuees for the number of billets available, and “undesirable” children often faced the shame of being dragged from house to house by a billeting officer, begging for someone to agree to take them in.

In *Carrie's War*, Albert Sandwich calls the selection process a “cattle auction”, and in her adaptation of the novel, Emma Reeves adds the words “slave market”. These two highly charged phrases come up time and time again when reading evacuees' stories of their arrival and selection. Others include “being picked out like sweets in Woolworths” and “feeling like puppies in a pet shop”.

Back to the billet

For some evacuees, worse was to come when they went home with their host families. Stories abound of children being made to strip naked in front of their hosts, or of having their heads forcibly shaved, in the efforts to combat the lice which some foster-parents believed their “townie” guests to be carrying.

But there were positive experiences of evacuation, too. In *Carrie's War*, despite the peculiarities of Mr Evans, Carrie relishes her new-found independence – as did Nina Bawden. Pictures of happy city children enjoying the freedom and fresh air of country living, were used to encourage parents to send their children away from the urban areas.

Town and country

In the late 1930s, before television and travel ironed out cultural differences, regional diversity in Britain was much more extreme than it is today. Many hosts and evacuees struggled to understand each others' unfamiliar accents. In North Wales, some hosts spoke only Welsh, and found themselves initially unable to cope with the influx of English-speaking evacuees from Liverpool. In a climate of mutual distrust, rumours flourished. Evacuees were "dirty", "hooligans", slum dwellers, riddled with head lice and ringworm, persistent bedwetters. Whilst this was certainly true of some city children, these problems were not confined to urban areas alone. And whilst there were some evacuees whose standards of hygiene left a lot to be desired, conversely there were evacuees from comfortable homes who were appalled to find themselves in poor, dirty houses where they might be deprived of familiar luxuries such as indoor toilets. Evacuation caused social upheaval on an extraordinary scale. For millions of British people, it was an unprecedented chance to see how the other half lived.

The drift back

For the first year of World War II, the expected devastating air raids did not happen. During this period, known as the "Phony War", many children moved back home. Some were brought back by their parents; others ran away. A government campaign was launched to encourage parents to leave their children in the country. A famous poster showed Hitler whispering the words "Take them back!" into a mother's ear, above the slogan "Don't do it, Mother – leave the children where they are."

When the bombing raids did begin, the devastating impact of the Blitz triggered a second wave of evacuations in 1940. It was now expected that Hitler would invade Britain soon, and many areas in the South were reclassified from reception areas to evacuation areas. There was a third wave in 1944, when the flying bombs began to be dropped on London. But despite all the dangers, there was always a steady trickle of children returning to urban areas to live with their families. Many people, understandably, could not bear to be parted from their children, and took the attitude that "If we die, we die together". Others believed that the pain of parting from their children was worth it for the sake of their children's safety. Fearing the impact of the deaths of children on the country's morale, the British Government vigorously supported its own policy of evacuation until the end.

Going Home

In 1945, plans were finally put into place for the organised return of evacuees. Although generally perceived as a joyful event, the return stirred mixed emotions. Naturally, there were ecstatic reunions, but for many the end of evacuation was tinged with sadness. Some children had been parted from their parents for the entire duration of the war. After six years, some now felt closer to their foster families. Parents and children did not always recognise each other, especially if the children had been evacuated overseas. A great many children were sad to leave their foster homes. Some refused to leave. And, of course, for those children who had lost their homes and families in the war, there could be no happy homecoming.

Background: American Soldiers in Britain

“Americans are not Englishmen who are different, but foreigners who are rather like us”

- pamphlet issued by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs

The USA entered the Second World War in December 1941, after the bombing of Pearl Harbour. By January 1942, US troops had begun to arrive in Britain. They joined various other groups of Allied soldiers, including troops from Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, India and other Dominion countries. By the end of 1942, there were nearly a quarter of a million US troops stationed in Britain, and the unparalleled resources of the latest arrivals made an enormous impression on the war-ravaged country.

After three years of rationing, black-out, austerity and, of course, air raids, Britain was a shadow of its former self. There was little food to spare, clothing was dowdy and endlessly recycled, petrol was unobtainable except for vital war work, and luxuries and treats of any kind were rare. All types of resources were diverted into the war effort. The arriving American soldiers were warned to

“REMEMBER THERE’S A WAR ON. Britain may look a little shop-worn and grimy to you. The British people are anxious to have you know that you are not seeing their country at its best. There’s been a war on since 1939.”

- American information pamphlet, *A Short Guide to Great Britain*, reprinted by the Imperial War Museum.

American wages were much higher than those of British soldiers, especially in the lower ranks. A British private was paid 14 shillings a week – an American private, £3 8s 9d. The American soldiers were cocooned in camps in which the conditions, compared to those of British soldiers and civilians, were positively luxurious. They had their own newspapers and movies, and the food was plentiful and superior. Clubs were opened for American servicemen only, where troops could enjoy meals, dancing and concerts.

“She said, ‘The Americans are better off than we are, that’s why. Mr Evans can’t abide that, people being well off and throwing their money about.’”

- Nina Bawden, *Carrie’s War*, Chapter Eight

Obviously, these young men were keen to meet British women, and British women were keen to meet them:

“The Yanks were the most joyful thing that ever happened to British womanhood. They had everything – money in particular, glamour, boldness, cigarettes, chocolate, nylons, Jeeps – and genitalia... almost every working-girl aspired to ‘have a Yank’”.

- Eric Westman, a British serviceman

British men, however, were not so eager to welcome their American guests. To the British “Tommys”, bloodied by the hardship of war, the GIs seemed soft and degenerate. The Americans retorted to such jibes by pointing out that, once again, Britain seemed to be reliant on US help to win a war against Germany. Whilst the British worried that American informality was a sign of poor military discipline, the Americans were disgusted by the inflexible nature of the British class system (although their own society still practised race segregation).

In an enduring phrase which has come to sum up British resentment of their allies, American soldiers were famously described as “Overfed, overpaid, oversexed and over here”. The “oversexed” part infuriated young British men—how could they compete with the rich Americans’ ability to show girls a good time?

“Not that they needed to hear what Mr Evans had to say because they had heard it before. Girls who wore lipstick and silly clothes and went out with American soldiers were good as damned in his opinion.”

- Nina Bawden, *Carrie’s War*, Chapter Seven

This issue became a major concern to both the British and American Governments. Fearing that too many of the “wrong sort” of woman would attempt to ensnare GIs, the authorities tried to ensure that American soldiers were introduced to “a better type of English girl”. “Nice” girls were selected by the Red Cross, the Church and the Women’s Voluntary Service, and asked to accompany American soldiers to dances and parties, or to offer them tea in their houses. As one of those “nice” girls, Nina Bawden invited American soldiers to tea in her rooms in Somerville College, and worked as a waitress in the Red Cross Club.

Like evacuation, the stationing of so many American soldiers in Britain provided a chance for very different people to get to know each other’s cultures, and caused social upheaval which would have a great impact on society after the war.

Background: Britain and the African slave trade

“It was the fashion at that time for rich people to have a little black page, dressed up in silks and satins and riding on the step of their carriage. So they fetched this poor innocent away from his family, across the sea, to a strange land.”

- Nina Bawden, *Carrie’s War*, Chapter Five

“There is no one feature of slavery to which the mind recurs with more gloomy impressions, than to its disastrous influence upon the families of the masters, physically, pecuniarily, and mentally. It seems to destroy families as by a powerful blight, large and opulent slaveholding families often vanish like a group of shadows at the third or fourth generation.”

- James Pennington, a blacksmith, writer, teacher and pastor who escaped from slavery at the age of twenty

“The family went downhill in the thirties – lost their money gambling and giving grand parties and travelling abroad, Hepzibah says...”

- Nina Bawden, *Carrie’s War*, Chapter Six

From the very beginning of the 16th century, Europeans were taking slaves from Africa and forcing them to work in their colonies abroad. An early British slave trader, John Hawkins, was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I, but Elizabeth herself – like many of her subjects - was understandably appalled at the thought of people being kidnapped and enslaved. A justification for slavery was created – that it was moral to take Africans as slaves because by doing so, their masters were introducing them to civilisation and Christianity. This justification persisted for hundreds of years. Meanwhile, slavers and slave owners continued to profit at the expense of degrading other human beings.

“Slavery is not to be deprived of any political privilege. It is not to be deprived of the right of suffrage... It is not the relation of master and servant - it is not the relation of master and apprentice - it is not the relation of ruled and ruler; but it is the relation in which man is made the property of his fellow-man. It is to be bought and sold in the market: it is to be a being indeed, having all the powers of mind of a man, capable of enjoying himself in time and eternity - it is to take such a man, and make property of him. Having the physical power of a man, he may not exercise it, having an intellect, he may not use it, having a soul, he may not call it his own. The slaveholder decided for him when he should eat, when he should drink, when he should speak, and when he should be silent - what he should work at, and what he should work for, and by whom he should be punished. He had no voice whatever in his destiny. This was a slave.”

- Frederick Douglass, lecturer and former slave

Most slaves were made to work in the colonies, but from the 16th century until the late 18th, there were some African slaves in Britain – although it was later decided that slavery had never been legal on British soil. In 1771, a slave, James Somerset, who had been bought in Virginia, escaped from his “owner” whilst in Britain. He was recaptured and put aboard a ship bound for Jamaica, but his abolitionist friends discovered his fate and tried to help him. A test case of *habeas corpus* was brought before Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, who declared that slavery was illegal under the laws of England.

“As soon as any slave sets foot in England he becomes free”

- Attributed to Lord Chief Justice Mansfield

This ruling was welcomed ecstatically by abolitionists and slaves - there were between fourteen and fifteen thousand slaves in Britain at that time. However, although Mansfield’s ruling had deemed slavery illegal in Britain, British traders continued to kidnap African people and sell them elsewhere. It was not until 1807 that Parliament acted to suppress the slave trade, and outlawed the buying, selling and transporting – but, crucially, not the owning, of slaves. Slavery was finally outlawed in the British colonies in 1833, and continued in the American South until the end of the Civil War in 1865.

For more information about the history of slavery, see <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/slavery.htm>

For information on modern slavery and what can be done to fight it, visit www.antislavery.org.

Novel Synopsis

CARRIE WILLOW, a widow in her early 40s, returns to South Wales with her children. It's an impulsive visit – the family are on the way to the seaside when Carrie suddenly decides to stop at an old mining town. She tells the children that she lived there during the war, with her brother NICK, and hasn't been back since. Carrie takes the children to Druid's Grove, and tells them that this place was sacred to the Druids – there's a spring with healing powers and the remains of an iron age temple. However, the house in the grove, Druid's Bottom, is in ruins and the town is derelict. Carrie begins to tell the children the story of how she and Nick were evacuated during the war.

The story now moves back 30 years in time. During the Second World War, Carrie and Nick are sent on the train to a mysterious destination. They're given labels to hang around their necks with their names on, and packed lunches. Nick eats all his food and is sick as the train turns the corner by Druid's Bottom. The many children on the train are dropped off at various stations along the route. By virtue of where their names come in the alphabet, Carrie and Nick find themselves at a small mining town, along with ALBERT SANDWICH, a slightly older, intellectual boy. The children are subjected to a "cattle auction" (Albert's phrase) as they are chosen or otherwise by their Welsh hosts. Carrie, Nick and Albert are left almost until last. Eventually, LOU EVANS is persuaded to take Carrie and Nick, although she doesn't want to take two children, and certainly not a boy. But Carrie convinces Miss Evans that she and Nick can share a room.

Miss Evans lives with her brother, SAMUEL ISAAC EVANS, who keeps a grocery shop. She tells Carrie and Nick to call her "Auntie Lou", but to call her brother "Mr. Evans". She explains that her brother is "very strong Chapel." That first night, Carrie and Nick go to bed before Mr Evans gets home, and listen to him shouting at Auntie Lou in the dark. Nick decides that he must be a "horrible, disgusting, real-life OGRE".

Mr Evans turns out to be a bully, who bullies not just the children, but Auntie Lou herself. One day, he catches Nick stealing biscuits and threatens to beat him with his belt. Carrie appeals in vain – Nick is only saved when he threatens to tell his teachers that he stole because he was hungry. Instead of beating Nick, Mr Evans prays for him for so long that Carrie decides she'd rather have been beaten, herself.

Carrie's mother comes to visit, and Mr Evans puts on a friendly act in order to impress her. Carrie tries hard to reassure her mother that everything is all right. Just as their mother's about to leave on the train, she desperately asks the children if they're happy. Nick claims that he is, and says he loves Auntie Lou.

Mr Evans sends Carrie and Nick to collect a Christmas goose from HEPZIBAH GREEN, who is the housekeeper at Druid's Bottom. Druid's Bottom is a large

house outside the town, owned by Mr Evans' invalid sister, DILYS GOTOBED. Dilys married the mine owner's son, and Mr Evans has never forgiven her. Their father worked at the local pit, and was killed by a rock fall which wouldn't have happened, according to Mr Evans, if the owners had taken proper safety measures. Now, Mr Evans and Mrs Gotobed don't speak, but she does give the Evans' a goose every Christmas. Auntie Lou normally collects the goose, but this year she's ill, so Carrie and Nick go instead. They make their way through the grove by Druid's Bottom – a deep, dark valley by the railway tunnel. They are scared by a mysterious thing which makes a gobbling sound.

Arriving at the house, Carrie and Nick find themselves in Hepzibah's kitchen, which is warm and safe. Their mysterious pursuer turns out to be MR JOHNNY GOTOBED, a distant cousin of Mrs Gotobed's dead husband. Hepzibah invites Carrie and Nick to tea. They discover that Albert Sandwich has been billeted at Druid's Bottom. He tells them that Hepzibah is a witch.

Hepzibah tells the story of the Screaming Skull, which is kept in a box in the library. Long ago, during the slave trade, the Gotobeds kept a little African boy as a page. He begged to go home, and they promised that he could, but then he became ill and died. On his death bed, he cursed the house, saying that his skull must be kept in the house, and that a dreadful disaster would happen if it is ever taken away.

When Carrie and Nick get back to the Evans' house, Carrie infuriates Nick by diplomatically not admitting quite how much they liked Hepzibah and Druid's Bottom.

Nick and Carrie befriend Mr. Johnny, who turns out to be a lovable man with a great knowledge of farming and wildlife. However, he has a speech impediment and learning difficulties, and Mr. Evans is prejudiced against him, calling him an "idiot". This infuriates Nick, who has become very friendly with Mr Johnny.

As time goes on, Nick and Carrie spend more time at Druid's Bottom than they do with the Evans family. One day, whilst Albert is reading in the library and Nick is with Mr Johnny, Hepzibah takes Carrie to meet Mrs Gotobed. She's wearing an evening dress, and explains that she's going to wear all of her glamorous dresses again before she dies. She's saving one special dress – grey with pink ostrich feathers – till last. She asks Carrie to give Mr Evans a message when she's dead – to tell him that she hadn't forgotten him, "but sometimes you owe more to strangers," and she's done what she thinks is right.

Carrie's Mother sends her a dress for her birthday, but it is too small and too short. Carrie and Albert go walking in the Druid's Grove. Albert explains that there is an old temple nearby, and the place is sacred to the old religion. Albert kisses Carrie. This makes Carrie very happy – until she's late for her birthday tea and Mr Evans is angry. However, his attention is turned away from

persecuting Carrie when Auntie Lou comes in, wearing a pretty dress and lipstick, on her way out to a dance at the American base nearby. Mr Evans shouts at Auntie Lou. Carrie says Auntie Lou must be mad to provoke Mr Evans like that. Nick points out that she did it to protect Carrie from Mr Evans' temper.

Hepzibah tells Carrie more about the past lives of Mr Evans, Auntie Lou and Mrs Gotobed. Mr Evans used to work down the pit till his dad died, then he stopped, claiming it was no life for a dog. He scrimped and saved to buy the grocery business, and bitterly resented his sister's luxurious life. Carrie's sorry for Mr Evans but Nick just thinks he's bonkers.

MAJOR CASS HARPER, an American soldier, comes to call for Auntie Lou. Carrie sends him away, explaining that Mr Evans will never let Auntie Lou go out with him. Nick is furious with Carrie. They run to find Auntie Lou, who's scrubbing the Chapel floor. They send her to the Dog and Duck pub to find Major Harper. She gets back late, looking radiantly happy. Meanwhile, Mr Evans seems very tired. Carrie sympathises.

Mr Evans' son FREDERICK arrives home on leave. Mr Evans sends him to Druid's Bottom with Carrie and Nick, to help with the hay harvest (hinting that it might net him something in his Aunt Dilys' will). Whilst helping, Frederick mocks Mr Johnny, imitating him. Mr Johnny attacks Frederick with a pitchfork. Nick and Albert break up the fight. Frederick's been hurt, but not badly. Carrie says it serves Frederick right for his bullying. Frederick claims that Mr Johnny is a "vicious loony" who should be locked up. The confrontation ends when Mrs Gotobed, arrives outside, wearing her grey dress with the ostrich feathers. She tells Frederick off for bullying. Sucking up to his rich aunt, Frederick pretends it was all a joke. He then tells her that he doesn't want to work in Mr Evans' shop after the war. She says it will break his father's heart.

Carrie is afraid when she realises that Mrs Gotobed's wearing the dress she was saving until last. Mrs Gotobed tells Carrie that it's a waste of time, being afraid. "Things are seldom as bad as you think they're going to be." She reminds Carrie of the message for Mr Evans.

Mrs Gotobed dies. Carrie's worried that Hepzibah and Mr Johnny will now have to leave Druid's Bottom, but Albert says that Mrs Gotobed told him she'd made a will saying that Hepzibah and Mr Johnny could stay on as long as they wanted to, after her death. The house has been left to Mr Evans, but he can't sell it or let it whilst Hepzibah's there. Carrie realises that this is what Mrs Gotobed's message to Mr Evans meant. She thinks that when she tells him, he'll be pleased to know that his sister still loved him. However, when he finds out, he's furious, and threatens to drag Hepzibah through every court in the land.

But as it turns out, Mrs Gotobed's will cannot be found. Mr Evans storms round to Druid's Bottom and searches the place, but doesn't find the will. The bank and

her solicitors don't have one either. Mr Evans gives Hepzibah a month's notice to get out.

Mr Johnny tells Carrie that Mr Evans found an envelope in Mrs Gotobed's room and took it. Albert thinks it's the will, without which all Mrs Gotobed's money goes to Mr Evans, her nearest relation – and no provision is made for Hepzibah and Mr Johnny to stay on in the house.

Carrie's mother writes – she's rented a house near Glasgow and wants Carrie and Nick to join her. She sends money for rail tickets, telling them to come in two weeks' time. Nick doesn't want to go – he and Auntie Lou have got a secret and Carrie keeps finding them giggling together. Carrie isn't sure what she wants.

Albert tells Carrie that Hepzibah still hasn't found anywhere for she and Mr Johnny to go. He thinks there must be some sort of law about turning people out of places they've lived in for years. Albert says he thought of asking a solicitor about it, but turned back. He's angry with himself – he feels like a coward.

Nick gets excited about going home and makes up songs about “the last time” he'll do things. Auntie Lou sings with him. Mr Evans takes them all for a last picnic, and gives them presents. Nick is given the knife he's always wanted, and Carrie receives a ring.

During a farewell tea in Druid's Bottom, Albert sees the ring Mr Evans gave Carrie, and realises it's Mrs Gotobed's garnet ring. Carrie now believes that Mr Evans stole it, and that he must have stolen the Will, too. She remembers the ancient curse and flings the skull from the window, into the old horse-pond, which is said to be bottomless. She would rather destroy the house than see Mr Evans get it.

Albert tells Carrie that Hepzibah's found somewhere to stay. Awkwardly, they promise to be friends. Albert makes Carrie promise to write first.

Back at the Evans' house, Carrie discovers that Auntie Lou's run off to marry Major Cass Harper. Nick knew all about it. He says he didn't tell Carrie as she's always sorry for Mr Evans. Carrie says she's not sorry now.

Carrie wakes up early in the morning, and decides to confront Mr Evans. She finds him cooking breakfast for them. He tells her he doesn't mind that Auntie Lou's gone – it will be one less mouth to feed for Frederick when he takes over the business. (Carrie, of course, knows that Frederick has no intention of taking over the business). Mr Evans complains that both his sisters ungratefully abandoned him. He shows Carrie an old photograph – all that Mrs Gotobed left him on her death bed. She left it in her room, in an envelope with Mr Evans' name on – along with the ring. Carrie realises that Mr Evans hasn't stolen the Will after all.

Carrie and Nick leave for their new life in Glasgow. As their train turns a corner on the mountain and goes past Druid's Bottom, Carrie sees that the house is on fire. She screams. By throwing the skull out of the window, Carrie believes, she has fulfilled the curse, and killed her friends.

Thirty years later, Carrie doesn't believe in curses any more, but she still cries whenever she thinks about Druid's Bottom, Hepzibah, Mr Johnny and the Evans family. In the local hotel, where they're staying, Carrie's eldest boy hears her crying in the night. In the morning, he tells the other children not to disturb her, and takes them on a walk to Druid's Grove.

They make their way to Druid's Bottom – where, to their surprise, they find Hepzibah and Mr Johnny still living in the outbuildings of the ruined house. Hepzibah explains that, at the time of the fire, Mr Johnny woke them all up and they all got out safely. Not long afterwards, Mr Evans died and Auntie Lou inherited everything. She asked Mr Johnny and Hepzibah stay on as caretakers. They've been there ever since. Eventually, Albert Sandwich bought the house from Auntie Lou's son, and told them that no-one could turn them out, now. Albert never married. His best friends are Hepzibah and Mr Johnny – he arranged for Mr Johnny to have speech therapy and now he can speak much more clearly than before. Albert's due to visit at the weekend. Hepzibah makes breakfast for the children and for their mother, whom, she believes, is on her way to Druid's Bottom. Although the eldest boy tells her Carrie's not coming, Hepzibah insists they go out into the grove to meet her. The eldest boy feels sorry for Hepzibah – she's not a witch, just an old woman who has guessed wrong. But the others believe that Hepzibah is right. They run out to meet their mother.

Play Synopsis

Act One

GROWN-UP CARRIE WILLOW and her SON arrive at Druid's Grove. Carrie wanted to show her son this place, because she had happy memories of coming here during the war. But Carrie finds that she can't face going to Druid's Bottom, the house in the grove. She is too guilty, because of something she did in the past. Carrie remembers that "I did a terrible thing, the worst thing I've ever done in my life". Prompted by her Son, Carrie begins to tell the story of how she and her brother Nick were evacuated to Wales during the war. As she speaks, the train whistle blows and transports us back to the 1940s in Carrie's memory.

After parting from their mother, on the train, Carrie and Nick meet ALBERT SANDWICH, a slightly older, intellectual boy, who is suffering from a chest infection. When they arrive in Wales, the children are subjected to a "cattle auction" as they are chosen or rejected by their Welsh hosts. Albert's "London lip" annoys a billeting officer, and his hacking cough puts them off. Carrie, Nick and Albert are left almost until last. Eventually, HEPZIBAH GREEN takes Albert home, and LOU EVANS is persuaded to take Carrie and Nick, although she doesn't want to take two, and certainly not a boy. Carrie convinces Miss Evans that she and Nick can share a room. They go to the Evans' house.

Miss Evans lives with her brother, SAMUEL ISAAC EVANS. She tells Carrie and Nick to call her "Auntie Lou", but to call her brother "Mr. Evans". Mr. Evans, she explains, is "very strong Chapel." He turns out to be a bully who is strict and mean. He insists that the children don't walk on the stairs carpet, and doesn't let them go upstairs during the day, even to use the toilet – they have to use the spider-filled privy in the yard.

Mr Evans sends Carrie and Nick to collect the Christmas goose from HEPZIBAH GREEN, who keeps house at Druid's Bottom. Druid's Bottom is a large house outside the town, owned by Mr Evans' invalid sister, DILYS GOTOBED. Dilys married the mine owner's son, and Mr Evans has never forgiven her. Their father worked at the local pit, and was killed by a rock fall which, he believes, wouldn't have happened if the owners had taken proper safety measures. Now Mr Evans and Mrs Gotobed don't speak, but she does give the Evans family a goose every Christmas. Auntie Lou normally collects the goose, but this year Carrie and Nick go instead.

Carrie and Nick make their way through the grove to Druid's Bottom. They are chased through by a mysterious person before arriving at the house and meeting Hepzibah, the housekeeper, and Albert Sandwich. Their mysterious pursuer turns out to be MR JOHNNY, a distant cousin of Dilys' dead husband. He has a speech impediment and a learning disability and finds it hard to communicate.

Whilst Nick goes to the kitchen with Hepzibah and Mr Johnny, Albert tells Carrie that Hepzibah is a witch. Albert shows Carrie the library, and introduces her to the Screaming Skull, which is kept in a box there. Whilst alone in the library, holding the skull, Carrie hears a woman crying upstairs.

In the kitchen, Hepzibah tells the story of the skull. Long ago, during the slave trade, the Gotobeds kept a little African boy as a page. He begged to go home, and they promised that he could, but then he became ill and died. On his death bed, he cursed the house, saying that when his body had rotted, his skull must be kept in the house, and a dreadful disaster would befall the house if it was taken away.

When Carrie and Nick get back to the Evans' house, Carrie infuriates Nick by diplomatically not admitting how much they liked Hepzibah and Druid's Bottom. Carrie overhears Mr Evans telling Auntie Lou that he wants Carrie to spy on Hepzibah.

Mr Evans catches Nick stealing biscuits and threatens to beat him with his belt. Carrie appeals but in vain – Nick's saved when he threatens to tell his teachers that he stole because he was hungry. Instead of beating Nick, Mr Evans prays for him – Carrie reflects that if it was her, she'd rather have been beaten.

In a letter to her mother, Carrie narrates – she and Nick have befriended the household at Druid's Bottom, and are spending a lot of time there, helping on the farm, and milking the cows. Nick and Mr. Johnny become very close. Nick is always able to understand him, although Mr Johnny's language is indistinct to everyone else.

One day, Hepzibah takes Carrie to meet Mrs Gotobed. She's wearing an evening dress, and explains that she's going to wear all of her evening dresses again before she dies. She's saving one special dress – grey with pink ostrich feathers – till last. She talks disparagingly of Mr Evans, saying that Auntie Lou "should have got out years ago". She asks Carrie to give Mr Evans a message when she's dead – to tell him that she hadn't forgotten him, "but sometimes you owe more to strangers," and she's done what she thinks is right.

Carrie's mother sends her a dress for her birthday, but it is too small. Whilst trying on the dress, Carrie lets slip to Auntie Lou that she's seen Mrs Gotobed. Mr Evans tries to bully more information out of Carrie, and Auntie Lou diverts his attention by asking if she can go to a dance at the American base nearby. Mr Evans rages at Auntie Lou. Carrie says Auntie Lou must be mad to provoke Mr Evans like that – Nick points out that she did it to save Carrie. Carrie worries that Mr Evans will try to force her to harm her friends.

Act Two

MAJOR HARPER, an American soldier, comes to call for Auntie Lou. Carrie sends him away, explaining that Mr Evans will never let Auntie Lou go out with him. Nick is angry, and Carrie realises she's done the wrong thing. Nick runs to get Auntie Lou, and they send her to meet Major Harper in the Dog and Duck pub.

Mr Evans' son FREDERICK arrives home on leave. Mr Evans sends him to Druid's Bottom with Carrie and Nick, to help with the hay harvest (hinting that it might net him something in his Aunt Dilys' will). Frederick's very strong, and is almost able to harvest the hay by himself. Albert's not nearly as strong, but isn't embarrassed. He and Carrie work together to carry Frederick's enormous fork-loads. Frederick mocks Mr Johnny, imitating him. Mr Johnny attacks Frederick with a pitchfork. Nick and Albert break it up. Frederick claims that Mr Johnny is a loony who should be locked up.

The confrontation is broken up by Mrs Gotobed, who arrives outside, wearing her grey dress with the ostrich feathers. She tells Frederick off for bullying. Sucking up to his rich aunt, Frederick pretends it was all a joke. He then tells her that he won't work in Mr Evans' shop after the war. She says that will break his father's heart. Carrie is afraid when she realises that Mrs Gotobed's wearing the dress she was saving until last – until her death. Mrs Gotobed tells Carrie that it's a waste of time, being afraid. "Things are seldom as bad as you think they're going to be." She reminds Carrie of the message for Mr Evans.

Mrs Gotobed dies. Carrie's worried that Hepzibah and Mr Johnny will now have to leave Druid's Bottom, but Albert says that Mrs Gotobed told him she'd made a will saying that Hepzibah and Mr Johnny could stay on as long as they wanted to, after her death. The house has been left to Mr Evans, but he can't sell it or let it whilst Hepzibah's there. Carrie realises that this is what Mrs Gotobed's message to Mr Evans meant. She thinks that when she tells him, he'll be pleased to know that his sister still loved him. However, of course, he's furious. He threatens to drag Hepzibah through every court in the land.

But Mrs Gotobed's will cannot be found. Mr Evans storms round to Druid's Bottom and searches the place, but doesn't find the will. The bank and her solicitors don't have one either. Mr Evans gives Hepzibah a month's notice to get out. Albert blames Carrie for passing on the message, and Carrie feels guilty.

Mr Johnny tells Carrie that Mr Evans found an envelope in Mrs Gotobed's room and took it. Albert thinks it's the will, without which all Mrs Gotobed's money goes to Mr Evans, her nearest relation – and no provision is made for Hepzibah and Mr Johnny to stay on at the house. But they can't prove it.

Carrie and Albert go to see MR RHYS, a solicitor, in order to ask him if Mrs Gotobed left a will. Mr Rhys refuses to take them seriously, and Albert won't back Carrie up. Carrie's angry with Albert, but forgives him as he is even angrier with himself. In Druid's Grove, Albert kisses Carrie.

Carrie and Nick are summoned to join their mother in Glasgow. Carrie writes a cheerful letter to her mother, but is secretly miserable about having to leave her friends. Mr Evans gives Carrie a present of a garnet ring.

During a farewell tea at Druid's Bottom, Albert sees Carrie's ring and realises it used to belong to Mrs Gotobed. Carrie realises that Mr Evans stole it, and must have stolen the will too. She remembers the ancient curse and flings the skull from the window, into the old horse-pond, which is said to be bottomless. She would rather destroy the house than see Mr Evans get it.

Awkwardly, Carrie and Albert promise to remain friends. Albert makes Carrie promise to write first.

Back at the Evans' house, Carrie discovers that Auntie Lou's run off to marry Major Cass Harper. Nick knew all about it. He says he didn't tell Carrie as she's always sorry for Mr Evans. Carrie says she's not sorry now.

In the morning, Mr Evans tells Carrie he doesn't mind that Auntie Lou's gone – it will be one less mouth to feed for Frederick when he takes over the business. (Carrie, of course, knows that Frederick has no intention of taking over the business). Mr Evans reflects on how both his sisters have ungratefully abandoned him. He shows Carrie an old photograph – all that Dilys left him on her death bed. She left it in her room, in an envelope with Mr Evans' name on – along with the ring. Carrie realises that Mr Evans hasn't stolen the Will after all.

Carrie and Nick leave for their new life in Glasgow. As their train turns a corner on the mountain and goes past Druid's Bottom, Carrie sees that the house is on fire. By throwing the skull out of the window, Carrie believes, she has fulfilled the curse, and killed her friends. Carrie screams as the train turns the corner and whistles, horrifyingly loudly. The whistle returns us to the present day – where Carrie's story began.

Thirty years later, Carrie tells her son that she doesn't believe in curses any more, but she still can't face going to Druid's Bottom. She sets off back to the town. Her son goes exploring alone - and, to his surprise, meets Hepzibah, Albert and Mr Johnny. Hepzibah explains what happened. At the time of the fire, Mr Johnny woke them all up and they all got out safely. Not long afterwards, Mr Evans died. Auntie Lou inherited the house and asked Mr Johnny and Hepzibah to stay on as caretakers. They've been there ever since. Eventually, Albert Sandwich bought the house from Auntie Lou's son, for Hepzibah and Mr Johnny. Albert never married. He visits Druid's Bottom all the time – he's up from London

for the weekend now. His best friends are Hepzibah and Mr Johnny – he arranged for Mr Johnny to have speech therapy and now he can speak much more clearly than before.

Hepzibah is looking forward to seeing Carrie, and sends Mr Johnny to find an egg for her. She won't listen to Carrie's son when he explains that his mother isn't coming. To her son's surprise, Carrie does turn up. She's made her way to Druid's Bottom, and is reunited with her old friends.

The book and the play

The play sticks quite closely to the story of the book, but there are a few changes. Here are some of the changes. Students may be able to identify more.

Carrie has only one child in the play, but in the book she has four children – three boys and a girl.

In the play, the character of the Billeting Officer is introduced, and is actively hostile to “townies”.

In the book, Carrie’s mother comes to visit them in Wales. This visit is not shown in the play, but Carrie is seen writing letters to her mother in which she often glosses over the truth.

In the book, Albert only talks about going to see Mr Rhys, the solicitor. In the play, Albert and Nick actually go to see him.

In the book, Albert kisses Carrie on her twelfth birthday. In the play, this doesn’t happen until nearer the end – just before Carrie and Nick leave for Glasgow.

The book ends as Carrie’s children “run ahead to meet their mother, coming through the Druid’s Grove. We are told that Albert is visiting Druid’s Grove that weekend. In the play, Albert actually arrives, and is reunited with Carrie.

Class discussion: *What changes has the adapter made in order to tell the story on stage? Why do you think she has done this?*

Information and Activities for Students

History

As fiction, *Carrie's War* supports National Curriculum studies on WW2 – the Home Front. The themes addressed in *Carrie's War* will be particularly useful background for students studying History at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

For example, reading, watching or studying *Carrie's War* links particularly well into Key Stage 2, **Unit 9**: What was it like for children in the Second World War? **Section 3**: Why were children evacuated? *Carrie's War* provides insight into the following questions:

- What was the Second World War? When and where did it take place?
- What was the Blitz?
- Why were children evacuated?
- What was it like to be an evacuee?
- What did people eat during the war?
- In what other ways might the war have affected people?
- What were children's experiences of the war?

Class discussion: After seeing the play, or reading the book, ask the class to share what they've learned about these topics.

Some useful quotes which might help the students:

CARRIE: It was during the war. The Government sent the children out of the cities, to escape the bombs. We didn't know where we were going. We were just told to turn up at school with a packed lunch and a change of clothes. Our mother tried to make the best of things. "It'll be such fun, living in the country! You'll love it, see if you don't." As if Hitler had arranged the war for our benefit. So we could be sent to live with total strangers. She made it sound like it was all some great big adventure!

CARRIE: I don't see why we have to wear these things. I mean, I'm not luggage! I can remember who I am and where I live.

ALBERT: Not if you were dead, you couldn't.

CARRIE: Well, obviously -

ALBERT: That's why we've got them, you know. So that if the train gets bombed, they can identify your body.

BILLETING OFFICER: Stand over there - over there - by the wall, with the others - and wait for someone to choose you. Now, we need a nice girl for Mrs Davies - let's see... I'm not sure... Mrs Davies, you might want to take a look at this one.

CARRIE: What's going on?

ALBERT: A sort of cattle market, it seems. Or a slave auction.

NICK: Did she get all the sick off my mouth?

CARRIE: Not quite. Come here. And try to cheer up! No-one will want us if you look like that!

NICK: Mr Evans is a mean old pig, and it's freezing all the time 'cos he won't ever put the gas on. And we never get meat, he keeps all our meat ration for himself and we just get his leftovers even though he gets money from the government and Mum and Dad - he DOES! - You told me.

ALBERT: You almost fell in the horse pond, that's all. It's quite dangerous in the blackout.

CARRIE: What's wrong with American soldiers?

MR EVANS: You know what they say. Over paid, over fed, over... And over here. It's a life of luxury in that Camp. Everything laid on for them, handed out on a plate. Food, films, dancing - and now women. Our women.

MR RHYS: If you really want to help people, how about joining the Girl Guides?

NICK: I'd like to be bombed, it'd be super-exciting.

Class Investigation:

- Why does Carrie's mother tell her children that evacuation will be an adventure?
- What is "the blackout"?
- Why should Carrie join the Girl Guides?
- Would being bombed really be exciting?
- Why does Mr Evans hate American soldiers so much?
- What was the "meat ration"? How much was it?
- Do the students know anyone who was evacuated, or whose family took in an evacuee, during the war? What were their experiences?

Class discussion: If you had been a parent in WWII, would you have sent your children away for their own safety? If war broke out today, would you want to be sent away from your parents?

Reading / Writing / Speaking

Character Work

Look at the main characters in Carrie's War:

Carrie Willow

"Places change more than people, perhaps. People don't change at all..."

Nick Willow

"This is the best tea ever. We never get anything like this from mean old Evans."

Albert Sandwich

"I hate being a kid! You can never make anything happen, or stop anything bad happening. All you can do is stand there and watch and wait to find out what happens."

Samuel Isaac Evans

"I watched my Dad die. Killed by a rock fall. Need never have happened, if the company had given a stuff about safety."

Louisa Evans

"Oh, I'm not scared. Exactly. But I've always – minded him."

Frederick Evans

"It's a narrow place, this valley, Auntie Dilys. Too narrow for me."

Hepzibah Green

"No harm ever comes near the innocent."

Johnny Gotobed

"Tell a story! Tell a story!"

Mrs Gotobed

"Things are seldom as bad as you think they're going to be. Not when you come to them. So it's a waste of time, being afraid."

Carrie's Son

"You're being weird, you do know that, don't you?"

Mr Rhys

"Don't you know there's a war on?"

- What do the characters say about themselves?
- What do other people say about them?
- When are they telling the truth?

- When are they lying to each other?
- When are they lying to themselves?
- At what moments in the story do the characters grow and change?

Characters and Relationships: Ideas for class discussion -

- The adults all seem to expect Carrie to look after Nick. How does Carrie feel about this? What does Nick feel?
- What sort of person is Albert Sandwich? In what ways is he different from Carrie and Nick?
- What do Mr Evans and Auntie Lou expect the evacuee children to be like? Are they surprised?
- Who is in charge at Druid's Bottom? Hepzibah? Mrs Gotobed? Albert? Mr Johnny? What is unusual about this "family" and their relationships?
- Why is Mr Evans so hostile towards Mr Johnny? How might people react differently to someone like Mr Johnny today? How much have attitudes changed?
- How do Carrie and Nick react differently to Mr Evans? Which of them is "right?"
- Who is to blame for the long-standing quarrel between Dilys Gotobed and Mr Evans? Do you ever feel sorry for either of them?
- How does Carrie's Son feel about his mother? How does their relationship compare to Carrie's relationship with her mother? To Carrie's relationship with Nick?
- How have relationships between adults and children changed between the 1940s and the present day?

Letter writing

CARRIE: All right, you write that. And you send it to Mum. And she'll read it and worry and think about it when she's driving her ambulance, and - Is that what you want? Is it?

During the course of the play, Carrie writes at least three letters to her mother. In every letter, Carrie is careful what she says, as she doesn't want her mother to worry. Writing similar letters will give students a chance to explore subtext:

- Imagine you are an evacuee during World War II. Write a letter to your parent, guardian or someone you don't want to worry about you. Then write a secret diary entry, in which you tell all about what *really* happened.
- Imagine there is a war happening *now*, and you have been sent away from where you live for your own safety. Where would you go? Who would you stay with? What is it like? Write a letter, email or series of text messages to your parents, in which you try to reassure them that everything is all right. Then write a letter, email or series of text messages to your best friend, in which you tell them the truth.

ALBERT: I mean it. You have to write the first letter. And if you don't - I'll know, won't I?

Carrie never does write to Albert, and he's too proud to write first. Students can imagine what might have happened if they *had* written the letters:

- Imagine you are Carrie, writing to Albert, although you saw the house burn down. Do you mention your fears that he may never get the letter? Do you confess to throwing the skull in the pond? What else do you have to say to him?
- Imagine Albert finally did give in and wrote to Carrie. Write the letter. How long might he have waited? Weeks? Months? Years? Will he make up an excuse for writing? Will he confess that he's hurt that Carrie hasn't written? What else will he say?

Story writing

Ask the students to write their own stories, inspired by the themes (but not necessarily the plot or characters) of *Carrie's War*. Ask them to choose a line from the play, and use it as the first line of a story or written play. Some suggestions might be:

I once did a terrible thing. The worst thing I've ever done in my life...

Make sure you look after your little brother!

God's creatures, spiders. Just like you and me.

A boy! What did I tell you?

He's a monster! A real life scary monster!

I just want to go home for Christmas!

When I die, tell him that I hadn't forgotten him.

It was her life, you see. Parties and ballgowns.

It was amazing! The most exciting thing I've seen in my life.

Getting used to things doesn't make them any better.

Put the past behind you. It's the best way.

Listening / Drama

Hotseating

A popular exercise, used widely in drama training, and by professional actors working on productions. This exercise is suitable for students of a wide range of abilities and ages. Obviously, with older and more advanced students, more sophisticated responses can be expected, but younger students can get a great deal out of it too.

Students are asked to take on the role of one of the characters from *Carrie's War*, and sit in the "hot seat", where the other students can ask them questions about their lives, which they must answer in character. Questions can be simply factual, but more penetrating questions, which investigate a character's deepest conflicts, are very useful in coming to understand them. Remind your students that characters don't always tell the truth! However, if a character appears to be lying, the other students are allowed to give them a Jeremy Paxman-style grilling – or even heckle them in the manner of a *Jerry Springer*-style audience.

Some questions might be answered simply at first, but follow-up questions and discussions might extract some more interesting answers and deeper truths. For example:

Carrie – how do you feel about Albert Sandwich?

Nick – Mr Evans says someone's been stealing his biscuits. Do you know anything about it?

Albert – are you popular at school? Do you have many friends?

Mr Evans – why are you so angry with your sister Dilys?

Auntie Lou – has Mr Evans been a good brother to you?

Mrs Gotobed – why do you love dressing up in ballgowns?

Hepzibah – why do you always look after Mr Johnny, when he's no relation to you?

Mr Johnny – what was your life like before you came to live at Druid's Bottom?

Frederick – what do you plan to do after the war?

You could try asking characters the same question at different points in the story – e.g. how does Carrie feel about Mr Evans when she first meets him? When his sister dies? When she thinks he's stolen the Will? At the end of the play?

Further role playing

The students could act out scenes which don't appear in the play, which might have happened before, after or during the action of the play. For example:

Hepzibah breaks the news to Mr Johnny that they are going to move to Wales.

Carrie's Mother comes to visit and has a private word with Mr Evans and / or Auntie Lou.

Mr Johnny takes Nick on a trip to the mountains to see the baby gulls.

Mr Evans finds out about the Will and storms over to Druid's Bottom to confront Hepzibah.

Mr Evans tells Auntie Lou that she is not, under any circumstances, to attempt to see any American soldiers.

Mr Johnny has got into a fight with a farmer's son. The farmer confronts Hepzibah.

Carrie and Nick arrive in Glasgow and are reunited with their mother.

Albert confides in Hepzibah that he is hurt that Carrie has never written to him. She tries to persuade him to write first.

Carrie and / or Nick finally decide to confront Mr Evans and tell him to stop bullying Auntie Lou.

These role-playing exercises could lead on to more general exploration of themes from the play, e.g. being sent away from home, protecting younger siblings, guilt and regret, respecting and appreciating people who are different (e.g. people with learning disabilities and speech impediments) and bullying. Students could discuss the different ways in which adults bully other adults, adults bully children and children bully children. Can children bully adults?

Improvisation

Ask the students to take lines from the play and use them to inspire their own improvised scenes. The stories may have nothing to do with *Carrie's War* or evacuation – but they may still give the students an insight into how the themes of the story are still relevant today. The lines could be used as the first line, or the closing line of a scene, or could be hidden in the middle.

Some examples of lines which could be used:

I don't want to go I don't want to go I don't want to go.

How bad can it be? It's not like you killed anyone, is it?

You're much prettier than her.

Keeping secrets from me - in my own house?

You be quiet, and go to your room, girl!

I won't spy for him! I won't tell him anything!

He's always making her cry.

Do him good to get off his backside for once!

Help! Get him off me! Get him off!

Why didn't you fight? I never thought you'd give up so easily.

I mean it. You have to write the first letter. And if you don't - I'll know, won't I?

Working on Scenes

Students can work on the following extracts from the play, in pairs, and present them to the class. They could then think of parallel, modern situations, and create their own scenes based on those ideas.

Scenes from the Play

Scene One. Nick and Carrie argue about Carrie's attitude to Mr Evans.

NICK

I'm not speaking to you.

CARRIE

What did I do?

NICK

You're worse than him. He hates everyone, but you're nasty about people you like - just to suck up to him. Saying Hepzibah was *quite nice!*

CARRIE

We hardly know her!

NICK

I do! I love Hepzibah, and you just stood there and let Mr Evans call her a *thief...*

CARRIE

I didn't!

NICK

Well you didn't stick up for her!

CARRIE

You know what Mr Evans is like! If he thinks we like Hepzibah, and Mr Johnny, he'll never let us go there again. He hates to see anyone enjoying anything. It - makes him jealous.

NICK

Just like you, then.

CARRIE

That's not fair.

NICK

Like you know about being fair. Traitor.

CARRIE

I think you'd better go to bed.

NICK

Don't touch me. Don't talk to me. Don't even look at me. You filthy traitor.

CARRIE

Oh Nick, don't be silly.

NICK

Listen to yourself! Why don't you just go downstairs and suck up to your best friend Mr Evans?

Scene Two. Albert apologises to Carrie for letting her down.

ALBERT

Carrie - wait! Please!

CARRIE flings herself to the ground and sits down. ALBERT joins her.

ALBERT

I know. I know. I'm sorry. Now it's your turn to be angry with me.

CARRIE

Why didn't you fight? I never thought you'd give up so easily.

ALBERT

Do you want the truth?

CARRIE

Yes!

ALBERT

I was scared he'd laugh at me.

CARRIE

That's all?

ALBERT

That's all. I let everyone down because I can't stand to be ridiculed. I'm a rotten coward and I hate myself.

CARRIE

You're not.

ALBERT

Yes, I am.

CARRIE

No, you're not. You're just too clever to rush into things.

ALBERT

Does that make me clever? Or stupid?

CARRIE

It wouldn't have made any difference, anyway. Grown ups only listen to grown ups.

ALBERT

Oh, I hate being a kid! You can never make anything happen, or stop anything bad happening. All you can do is stand there and watch and wait to find out what happens. If I was grown up, I could stop this. I could buy Druid's Grove and - we could all live here together.

CARRIE

Me and Nick too?

ALBERT

Of course. That's what I meant.

CARRIE

Did you hear that?

ALBERT

What?

CARRIE

The first time we came here. When we were so scared. It wasn't just Mr Johnny - I thought I heard something else. A sigh. Like someone - something - breathing. Don't laugh!

ALBERT

I'm not. You know there used to be an old temple here?

CARRIE

You said that's where the skull came from.

ALBERT

I was guessing. The temple was just a few stones and some old bones. But they've found similar arrangements all over the world, so they think this religion must have been everywhere once. So many people, believing in something - it must leave an echo, don't you think?

CARRIE

I don't know.

Scene Three: Carrie finds Mr Evans deserted by Auntie Lou.

CARRIE
Mr Evans?

He doesn't respond.

CARRIE
Have you been up all night?

MR EVANS
Was just going to wake you. Train goes at seven.

CARRIE
Auntie Lou...

MR EVANS
Gone. Off with her fancy man. Thought you knew.

CARRIE
Are you - angry?

MR EVANS
Ate a lot, didn't she?

CARRIE
Did she?

MR EVANS
Always at it, munch munch, nibble nibble. One less mouth to feed. Fred will feel the benefit, when he comes home to take over the business.

CARRIE
Fred...

MR EVANS
What?

CARRIE
I'm sure you're right.

MR EVANS
One thing riles me, a bit, mind. Why didn't she tell me face to face? Instead of stealing away like a thief in the night –

CARRIE
Maybe she was scared?

MR EVANS

Scared? What's she got to be scared of me for?

CARRIE

I don't know.

MR EVANS

No - she just wanted to make me look small. Like her fine sister, Dilys. Make a right pair, they do, sending messages, leaving notes - look at this, now! An old photograph! That's all I had from Dilys on her deathbed. No letter, nothing. Just tucked away in her jewel case in an envelope with my name on. This photograph - and that ring you've got.

CARRIE

This ring was in the envelope? And the photograph? Nothing else?

MR EVANS

(shakes his head)

Photograph. Ring. That's your lot.

(to himself)

Thirty years...

CARRIE

Can I see the photograph? Is that you and Mrs Gotobed?

MR EVANS

Long time ago now.

CARRIE

She's wearing the ring... this ring.

MR EVANS

I bought it for her with my first wages.

CARRIE

She used to wear it all the time... Until the very end.

MR EVANS

What are you grinning about?

CARRIE

I'm just glad. About the ring and the picture. It means she never stopped thinking about you.

MR EVANS

Seems more like a slap in the face to me. But take it your way if you like. Now get upstairs and wake that idle young brother of yours.

CARRIE

Mr Evans –

MR EVANS

Sharp now, or you'll miss your train.

-

Further Reading

Fiction

The diverse experiences of displaced children in World War Two have inspired many novels. Here are just a few examples – all very different in story and tone, but all of them acknowledged modern children’s classics.

Jonnie’s Blitz – Bernard Ashley drew on his wartime experiences as a child in and around London in writing this novel.

I am David – Anne Holm. The story of a boy who escapes from a Nazi concentration camp.

When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit – Judith Kerr. The story of a young Jewish refugee girl and her family, forced out of Germany by the Nazis.

Goodnight Mr Tom - Michelle Magorian’s novel tells the story of a very different evacuee to Carrie and Nick. In this heart-warming story, a young boy is saved from his cruel mother thanks to being evacuated and billeted with a crusty old man.

The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips – Michael Morpurgo. Lily and her family are forced to move out of their home in order to make way for the American soldiers who are preparing for the D Day landings.

The Silver Sword – Ian Serrailier. A group of brave children travel from Poland across war-torn Europe, hoping to be reunited with their parents.

The Machine Gunners – Robert Westall. A boy finds a German bomber in the woods.

Factual

In My Own Time (Nina Bawden, 1995) - Subtitled “Almost an Autobiography”, this very personal reflection on aspects of Nina Bawden’s own life and that of her family sheds a light on her creative process and on the realities behind her famous fictional creations. Chapter Three, *Other People’s Lives*, provides some fascinating insights into the creation of *Carrie’s War*, and how Bawden’s attitude to her own famous novel has changed over the years.

The Children’s War – Juliet Gardiner. Official companion to the Imperial War Museum’s Children’s War Exhibition.

Evacuees – Evacuation in Wartime Britain - Mike Brown

My War: Evacuee – Peter Hepplewhite

Britain at War: Evacuation (History Detective Series) - Dr Martin Parsons

Web Links

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWevacuation.htm>

Information about evacuation

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2children/home.shtml>

More information about evacuation

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/yourlife/evacuation/>

This is the official site of the recent CBBC reality show which asked several modern children to live as evacuees in order to see how they coped.

www.antislavery.org

A website which promotes human rights and campaigns against slavery. Contains educational material on the forms of slavery which are still going on today.

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/slavery.htm>

More information about the history of slavery

www.noveltheatre.com

The home page of Novel Theatre, producers of *Carrie's War*

Contact

Contact Novel Theatre

If students wish to put questions to any of the actors in *Carrie's War*, or to the director or producer, they should write to Novel Theatre Company Ltd, P.O. Box 7579, London NW3 1WA.

Contact Nina Bawden

Letters to Nina Bawden should be sent to Curtis Brown Group Ltd, Haymarket House, 28 – 29 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4SP.

Contact Emma Reeves

Emma Reeves, adapter of *Carrie's War*, can be contacted through David Higham Associates, 5-8 Lower John Street, Golden Square, London W1F 9HA

All extracts from *Carrie's War* (the novel), *In My Own Time*, *Dear Austen* etc © Nina Bawden.

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