

Wimborne Community Theatre performed this scenario with students from Allenbourn Middle School in the Summer term 2014.

*(Props: Baskets at sides; badges for 4 WLYP children)*

*From 2 sides, CHILDREN come on humming 'Pack Up Your Troubles'. They stand on either side of acting space. During the song, REVEREND FLETCHER from the Minster, enters to give his speech. Stands centre.*

**REV. FLETCHER:** Today I wish to speak to you of those brave men of Wimborne and Colehill - who have nobly answered Lord Kitchener's call to arms & gone off to fight the enemy abroad. While I offer prayers to all of you who have already suffered family losses, I bid you stand firm and remember that death in battle is a **noble and worthy** sacrifice for King and Country.

*"Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori"*. For those whose Latin is deficient, this means "It is Sweet and Right to Die for our Country". Indeed, it is my belief that God has sent us this conflict to awake us from the slumber of greed and laziness into which many have fallen.

Let us hope, therefore, this Great War reminds us **all** of our Christian duties and responsibilities. And I when I say **all**, I mean just that – **Everybody** has a role to play in the War Effort – not just the courageous soldiers, sailors and aircraftmen, but the Women who they have left behind, the elders among us; the children too. *(To kids)* The time for play is over. It is time to do your bit for the war.

Now, listen very carefully. An order has come from the Munitions Minister. Mr. Winston Churchill himself - you children are to go forth into the woods of Wimborne and Colehill and search for.....conkers. Yes, conkers. Do you understand?

**ALL** *(confused, look at each other in surprise and mumble 'Conkers?' What for?)*

**REV FLETCHER:** I am not allowed to tell you why these conkers are needed. Suffice to say, they will **not** be used for any childish game....

**SOME CHILDREN** *(disappointed)*

**REV FLETCHER:** ...but for essential military purposes at Holton Heath. So, go forth and do your bit for the war effort! Dismissed!

*(REV FLETCHER leaves. Children on either side turn their backs to face away and pick up baskets. CHARLIE starts to sing 'Pack Up Your Troubles..' alone, softly, then all join in after first stanza. Freeze. FLUTE MUSC – and/or adult voice singing same tune. From the rear, singing the song slowly, unseen by CHILDREN, an ADULT IN BLUE OVERALLS -wounded soldier from Beaucroft Hospital - enters. He recognizes the wood. Almost smiles. Touches tree. Sits at distance).*

**CHILDREN ENTER**, singing happily in canon this time enter playfully, gathering conkers and putting them into baskets – some skipping – some bending; stretching up. **DRUMBEAT: ALL FREEZE.**

*1-4 come to front to speak)*

**EDITH:** We went to the woods after school was over...  
**ELLIE:** wondering **why** we had to gather conkers...  
**JESSICA:** ...to help the war effort. I was scared in the woods  
**CATHERINE:** We sang as we worked.

*All move again, singing in unison. NEXT 4 CHILDREN (5,6,7,8) come up to front.*  
**DRUMBEAT: ALL FREEZE.**

**MAX:** I'm tired. I've already been out selling newspapers early this morning, now more work. As if it isn't hard enough going to school!  
**LARA:** Read All About It! Children worn out from working for War Effort!  
**JUDITH:** Tell me about it! I have to look after my little brothers and sisters 'cos Mum's gone out to work.  
**ROSIE:** Read All About it! Women take over running the banks and buses!  
**ALL:** READ ALL ABOUT IT! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

*ALL unfreeze and move again, sing another verse; work - bring up basket filled.*  
MORE CHILDREN COME UP (9, 10, 11 12)

**ALANNA & BELLE** (Sisters): Extra! Extra!  
**ALANNA:** Our eldest sister's face's gone all yellow  
**BELLE:** Yes, ever since she started working at the Cordite Factory in Holton Heath.  
**ALANNA:** She looks like a canary! (*BELLE flaps arms*)  
**BELLE:** She says she can't tell us what she does there –  
**ALANNA:** 'cos it's cassi-field.  
**BELLE:** No –classified actually!  
**ALANNA & BELLE:** (*to each other*) Sssh! (*To audience*) Secret!  
**BELLE:** Even though she looks like a canary – she can't sing! (*sings badly*)  
**CHARLIE & FREYA:** Extra! Extra! Read all About it!  
**FREYA:** (*shouting like newspaper seller*) My brother got knocked off his bike while delivering bread in Wimborne! Read all about it!  
**CHARLIE:** I've still got the bruises! Look! Ouch! (Helped off by FREYA)  
**LIBBY:** Come on, everyone – let's get the job done! Sing up!

*LAST ROUND OF PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES – REALLY FAST, LOUD & BIG ACTIONS, Freeze. All rest, tired.)*

*(LIBBY, LOTTE & GRACE COME UP TOFRONT)*

**LIBBY:** Those Children shouldn't be grumbling!  
**LOTTE & GRACE:** True!  
**GRACE** (*to audience*): Didn't they listen to the Reverend Fletcher?  
**ALL THREE:** We're in the Wimborne League of Young Patriots.  
**LIBBY:** Outside school, we knit balaclavas and socks for soldiers at the front  
**GRACE:** To keep them warm and dry  
**LOTTE:** To do our part to win the war  
**LIBBY:** Look at our special badge!  
**ALL:** It makes us proud.

**CHARLIE** (shouts): Hey, Let's play a Game" –

**LOTTE:** But there's more work to do!

**OTHER TWO:** For the War Effort

**CHARLIE** (*points to basket*): Come on, spoil-sports – we've picked up loads of conkers today.

(*L, L & G agree reluctantly*)

**ESME:** What game shall we play?

**CAITLIN:** Grandmother's footsteps!

**ALL:** Hurray!

**HARRIET:** Can I go first? Please!!

**CHARLIE:** Go on then.

**FREYA:** Sssh! Lets' start!

**HARRIET** (*with her back turned*): I'm ready!

**CHARLIE:** Begin!

(*Play game once normally*)

**ROISIN:** *Hey, let's change the rules!* : I'm Lord Kitchener,

**BELLE:** And I'll be your walrus moustache. (*All laugh*)

**ROISIN:** Come on you lads, come and join up! Unless you're a bunch of cowards? Are you?

**ALL:** No!

**ROISIN (KITCHENER):** Right then, form a line, troops. Quick March!

(*THEY MARCH ACROSS THE STAGE TO REAR DSL*). Attention! (*All freeze*)

LOOK! Let's creep up on that Bosche sentry there.

**ROSIE:** BOSCHE? What's that?

**FREYA:** It's what soldiers call the Germans, of course!

**KIER:** I'll be the evil Bosche sentry with my machine gun! (*Gun SFX*) Rat-a-tat-tat! Ha, ha, ha! (*Walks to position, others go to starting line at back*)

(*Others go to rear, then march on the spot*)

**KITCHENER:** Repeat after me – Dull... deco..rations...pro...what was it?

**LIBBY/GRACE/LOTTE:** ` Pro Patria Mori'

**KIER:** Can we just get on with the game? Tommy dogs, you will all die!  
*Play game again – Humorous style – hammy deaths & patriotic statements as they 'die'. 'God save the King' Saluting etc.*

(**SOLDIER** *very tense during this phase, rocking. Eerie SFX. He calls out. Children freeze, but stay watching him, as he stands –shaking. From offstage we hear extracts from war poem – Wilfred Owen Dulce Et Decorum Est*).

A few younger children gather closer to **SOLDIER**.

**EDITH:** I recognize him. He lives in our road. Or he used to before ...the war

**ELLIE:** Isn't he Mary's uncle?

**EDITH:** Yes, I think so.

**JESSICA:** Is he alright?

**CATHERINE:** Dunno. Why is he wearing blue?

**MAX:** That's what the wounded soldiers wear up at the hospital in Colehill.

**LARA:** How do you know?  
**MAX:** Sell the newspapers up there, don't I?  
**JUDITH:** The one down Beaucroft Lane?  
**MAX:** Yeah.  
**LIBBY:** I'm going to speak to him. I've never met a hero before.  
**GRACE:** Nor me.  
**LIBBY:** Hello, Mr... *(To EDITH)* What's his name?  
**EDITH:** Cuff.  
**FREYA:** The poor man. I feel sorry for him. He's not well. *(Others SSH her)*  
**LIBBY:** Mr Cuff. I...  
**LOTTE & GRACE:** We're really proud of you!  
**GRACE:** You're so brave.  
**JUDITH:** Weren't you scared fighting?  
**LOTTE:** Of course, he wasn't! Silly!  
**JESSICA:** I would be!  
**FREYA:** Well, I think War's wrong. *(Others shocked)*. All our young men getting killed or wounded. And for what?

**OTHERS** *(angry or worried, all speak at once)*: Sssh! "That's wrong!" "Treason" "You should be ashamed!" "I agree with her" "Me too" "Didn't you listen to Rev. Fletcher"? "We should report her" *(Build to crescendo of argument)*

*Loud explosion – (In CUFF'S imagination) All children die in slow motion Like a **nightmare** version of Granny's footsteps*

*(Spell broken by **VOICE of WOMAN** calling)....: Jack! Jack!*

**NURSE COGGIN:** *(SFX Slowly children 'un-die' and get up – in slow motion again)* There you are, Jack. I've been searching for you everywhere. The nurses at Beaucroft have been so worried about you. I've come to take you back. Come now. Everything's alright. *(Pause. She spots child she knows)*. Oh... hello Edith.

**EDITH:** Hello, Mrs. Cuff  
**NURSE COGGIN:** What are you doing here, Edith?  
**EDITH:** We're collecting conkers.  
**OTHERS:** For the war effort.  
**NURSE COGGIN:** It's just that.. is your big sister here too?  
**EDITH:** Emily? YES – She's over there *(pointing)*  
**NURSE COGGIN:** I think you both ought to go home now. Quick as you can.  
**EDITH:** Why?  
**NURSE COGGIN:** Your mum... had news...a..you need to go home now.  
**EMILY:** Come on, Edith.  
**EDITH:** What's happened?  
**EMILY:** Don't ask questions, Edith. Let's hurry.

*(They leave. NURSE COGGIN takes JACK, the soldier off). Slowly, the CHILDREN pick up the baskets of conkers and walk off back to Wimborne. SFX Soft flute playing 'Pack up your troubles – or all humming softly).*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wimborne Community Theatre creates original site-specific performances, set in unusual outdoor venues or non-theatre buildings. They have created 20 productions since 1991.

Members of the community work in partnership with [artists and arts or heritage organisations](#) to develop and perform stories inspired by local places and the lives of inhabitants, past and present, real and fictional.

*On Saturday July 19th 2014, Wimborne Community Theatre and school children from Allenbourn Middle School performed an experimental sharing of **Letters to the Living, Songs to the Dead** to an invited audience in a secret Forest Garden location in Wimborne town centre.*

Performers from the group were hidden around the garden as the audience entered the site. As they were led round the paths by a mysterious figure dressed in blue, they heard snatches of voices and sounds which conjured up images of the experience of war. They listened to a poem recited by an elderly lady seated in the middle of the garden. Then the mood changed as a group of school children entered the garden to collect conkers for the war effort and the identity of the figure in blue was revealed as a soldier, recovering from shell shock.

Gill & Tony Horitz of Wimborne Community Theatre have kindly given the Museum of East Dorset permission to include the script of "The Conkerers" scenario, from Letters to the Living, Songs to the Dead, as part of this Learning Pack.

## Wimborne Community Theatre

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