

## INSIDE SAM'S HEAD by MARSALI TAYLOR

### CAST LIST

SAM  
LESLEY  
CAROL  
MOTHER  
SOPHIE  
FRENCH TEACHER - Madame Delarge  
ENGLISH TEACHER - Miss Seeker  
SCIENCE TEACHER - Mrs Nathan

### PUPILS:

MARIE  
SUE  
ANNA  
STACEY  
ANITA  
ISOBEL  
DEBBIE  
AMANDA  
JANE  
PUPIL

This play can be done by an all-female cast and equally by a mixed cast, changing some pupils' names to boys. Sam could be male or female. The teachers, too, could be either sex.

Maximum numbers are 18 but this can be reduced to 13 or 14 if required. Less would make some of the group scenes difficult, though there may be possibilities, for instance - giving Sophie only one friend, a composite Anita / Isobel. Other pupils too could become composites. Further reductions like this would result in a minimum cast of around 10.

Doubling, if desired, for a cast of 13, might be as follows: Mother / Stacey; Madame Delarge / Anna [Anna's lines in French class given to Sue]; Miss Seeker / Debbie; Mrs Nathan / Amanda; Sue / Pupil. If an exam piece, Jane may have to amalgamate with another character, such as Marie to give it sufficient weight. All the pupils' parts can be made more substantial by careful work on the improvised section.

If the improvisation section is built up, there will be enough for all cast to have sufficient to do. There are other opportunities for ensemble work too.

The play has a running time of approx twenty to twenty-five minutes.

It would make a good GCSE examination piece, providing doubling is used to ensure sufficient exposure time.

## THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS.

Sam is not profoundly deaf - she can 'hear' at times, if she is expecting a sound and is focusing all her intention on it. She can follow conversations, providing she can see the speaker - a mixture of lip-reading and picking up clues from body language. She can often pick up sounds, like the telephone, through the vibrations they make.

Sam takes the audience into her head, to experience what it is like to be her. We experience her frustration, how she sometimes picks up tantalising pieces of a conversation but then either cannot make sense of it [particularly true of jokes] or has to use her obviously considerable intelligence to juggle sounds until the 'proper' sense is evident.

Because she is so bright, she manages to cope with normal education, but herein also lies a problem. Sam wants to be accepted as normal, the same as everyone else. Only her closest friends and her sister know that she is deaf. Her teachers do not know, because Sam wants to be treated the same as everyone else. We admire Sam's pride and understand her reasons, aching for her as a bullying and insensitive teacher persists in treating her as stupid and, worse, as deliberately refusing to do her work.

In the end, the truth has to come out and it is, really, the best thing all round. Teachers and other pupils are able to include Sam in more by being aware of her problem but, because she has made it clear that she wants to be normal and because she can really cope extraordinarily successfully, no one patronises her. Each 'side' accommodates a little to the other.

The moral seems to be understanding on both sides. Sam needed to recognise her pride sometimes as too extreme, actually in the end making things hard for herself. Schoolfriends and teachers have to realise both her need to be normal and the small subtle accommodations that can be made without wounding her pride.

The play achieves a sympathy from the audience by teaching them to 'hear' or not hear as she does. We experience the jumble of sounds she has to live with - deafness is not to live in a silent world; quite the contrary. We experience - by 'hearing' only when someone is facing the audience and 'not hearing', when that person is turned away - something of the frustration and, sometimes, comedy as things get misinterpreted or only partially understood. The whole play is experienced through Sam herself; we are 'inside her head.'

### EXTRACT ONE

*A stage with items scattered around it, well spaced out, in a rough semi-circle. Each item needs an individual spot. The items are: a table with 'phone on it; a vacuum cleaner; a table, different height, with a radio on it, tuned to a music station; a drum-set; a microwave; a table, again different height, with a tape recorder with talking taped on it; two alarm clocks together. Each item has a person in black in charge of it - one of the cast members who play the pupils.*

*At the opening of the play, the stage is in darkness. Through the darkness, we hear the sound of the alarm clocks; a spot goes up on them as they continue to ring. Then, at five second intervals, each of the above items starts to make its noise, at the same time a spot coming up on it as it begins to sound. The sounds should be loud, and, once all have joined in, almost unbearable.*

*Sam enters into the centre of the semi-circle. A spot comes up on her.*

*SAM inaudible over the din behind*

*Good evening. Pleased to meet you. I'm Sam and I'm going to take you on a journey inside my head. [Shouting.] Can you hear me out there?*

*She notices the noises and moves from item to item. As she touches each one, it is switched off by its operator. As each item is silenced, the stage lightens to normal bright. Sam brings the vacuum cleaner down centre and sits on it.*

SAM

You see, that's the problem. Haven't you ever noticed what a noisy world it is? Machinery, music, people talking - all these noises - along with the noises inside my head ...

I'm not deaf, or at least not so's you'd notice. I'm not different. I read and watch and pick up clues and guess from context. You'd never know if you met me.

*Sam rises and moves to the person with the drumset. The drum thuds in time with her steps.*

SAM

Those are my footsteps. There are times when I'm walking and they reverberate up my spine and echo in my head - thump, thump - drowning out everything else. But at least I can control those.

*She makes a 'cut' gesture towards the drums and moves over towards the alarm clocks. They start to ring.*

SAM

They call this tinnitus. Like two alarm clocks, all the time, ringing and ringing on slightly different notes. It never stops - never - not even in my dreams. [*Looks straight at audience.*] People think being deaf is silent. I wish. [*Spot on the 'phone as it rings. Sam does not react.*] Ringing on and on. What I'd give, sometimes, for silence.

MOTHER *entering and grabbing 'phone*

Yes - yes - no, that's okay - 4.15 on Wednesday - right, thank you. [*Puts 'phone down.*] Sam, you could have got that.

SAM

What? Oh, sorry, Mum, didn't hear it.

*Mother exits.*

SAM *defensively*

Well, I'm used to hearing ringing noises. And there's this. [*Beats tattoo on vacuum cleaner. Switches it on briefly.*] I bet most of you don't even notice the air conditioning in here. Somehow, it's right on my frequency. And then there's more noises on top. [*Indicates microwave, radio and tape recorder, which are then switched on.*] And the noise you're trying to listen to. [*She brings the radio to the front. There is a pause while we all strain to hear the separate sounds - which juggle between the tape recorded voices and the radio music for dominance, as the operators juggle the volumes. Then Sam makes the 'cut' gesture again and the sounds are switched off.*] And then people talk to you as well and wonder why you can't hear them. Well, I'm not going to go explaining, am I? Mega - embarrassment....

## EXTRACT TWO

SAM ...And sometimes you really miss things - moments. I remember once ...

*All freeze. The light becomes intensely bright, but cold. Gobo of bare trees. A sunny, still day in Winter. Sam stands and comes forward. The Mother comes on, slowly, turns her face to the sun, smiling, then tilts her head, listening. We hear birdsong. Her face becomes rapt, joyful: the end of Winter is in sight and Spring is near. She starts looking around her, bends to touch the soil.*

MOTHER

The first crocus shoots - through already.

*She stands once more, listening, looking, seeing all the signs of the new season.*

SAM

Mum, what are you doing?

MOTHER

Listen - the birds are singing.

*Sam listens. She can't hear it.*

SAM

It's freezing out here.

MOTHER

Spring's not so far away.

SAM

The ground's solid. Iced over.

MOTHER

Look at the green on the pine trees.

SAM

Everything's white.

MOTHER

No, under the frost it's green. Look at the ivy, how bright the leaves are.

SAM

They're withered.

MOTHER

And the perennials - the lady's mantle and pinks. They're all ready to come again, just as soon as the thaw ends.

SAM

Mum, it's December.

MOTHER

Tomorrow's New Year's Day. The birds know it. Oh, it's beautiful - look at the blue of the sea. It's like a summer's day, early in the morning, before anyone's awake. [*A long pause, enjoying it. Then she moves purposefully.*] Well, this won't get the house cleaned for New Year.

*She goes off, suddenly revitalised. Sam watches her go.*

SAM

And I couldn't see it. Somehow she knew that the worst was over: the warmth conquering the cold, the days lengthening. The birds had brought the end of Winter and all I could see was the frost on the ground and the leaves withered on the stalks and three long months still to go.

*She returns to her seat, dejectedly. Lights up. The class are all laughing as they rise to put books away and start exiting. Sam tugs Lesley's sleeve.*

SAM

What was all that?

LESLEY

Oh, she just made a joke.

SAM

What was it?

LESLEY

Oh, I can't remember.

CAROL

It wasn't very funny.

SAM

It's easy for you. You can choose to listen or not - I can't. I have to depend on the rest

of you to be able to join in. I'm sick of being on the outside, pretending to laugh because you're all laughing, so that I'm not different. I don't care if it isn't funny. I just wanted to hear the punchline - just once. [*She storms off.*]

LESLEY

I hadn't thought. You don't, do you? I hated that listening test we had to do, but Sam's whole life's a listening test...

CAROL

... and we just helped her fail it....

### EXTRACT THREE

MRS NATHAN

Quiet down there. Sam, let me see you working on your own for once.

*Sam reacts to this unfairness then, resignedly, starts working, sneaking looks at Carol's book.*

MRS NATHAN

Sam! Stop copying!

SOPHIE

Please, Miss ...

MRS NATHAN

In a minute, Sophie. Very well, Sam, stand up and tell us all what you've worked out.

SAM *softly*

I don't understand it, Miss.

MRS NATHAN

I can't hear you. Speak up.

SAM *normal volume*

I don't understand what we've to do, Miss.

MRS NATHAN

You're not a mouse, girl! For goodness sake, you're all loud enough in the corridors.

Now go to the board and do the diagram.

SAM

I can't do it. I don't know how.

MRS NATHAN

And why not?

SOPHIE

Please, miss ...

MRS NATHAN

Because you were far too busy chatting to Carol to listen to instructions.

*Sam has had enough. She slams her book down and sits, shaking, about to speak.*

MRS NATHAN

Sam!

SOPHIE

Miss, it's because she couldn't hear you.

MRS NATHAN

You will both be in the corridor if I have any more of this!

*Sophie wants to keep speaking. Sam catches her eye, shakes her head. Reluctantly, Sophie sits. Isobel puts her hand up.*

ISOBEL

If you please, Miss ...

MRS NATHAN

Yes, Isobel?

ISOBEL *embarrassed but determined*

Please, Miss, what Sophie was trying to say was that Sam can't hear very well. She lipreads a lot but you had your back to her. She was asking Carol what you told the class to do.

*Their reactions make it clear that this is news to the rest of the class, too.*

MRS NATHAN

Oh ...

ISOBEL *going to finish now she's started*

And, Miss, she doesn't speak quietly on purpose. Her voice sounds loud inside her head.

MRS NATHAN *stunned silence, then:*

Well, Sam. you should have - no, I suppose not. Well, I'm sorry. In future, stick your hand up if you're stuck, okay?...

#### EXTRACT FOUR

*Sudden change to disco lights. Suggest that disco tops are under school ones; school tops are then simply removed. Everyone is dancing, enjoying themselves. While dancing, they are talking - mostly a shout, then a reply of 'can't -hear -you -shrug'. Sam, down centre, says something to Lesley and Carol.*

SAM *shouting*

D'you want a drink?

LESLEY

What?

SAM

Drink!

LESLEY AND CAROL

Can't hear you!

*Music softens. Sam turns to the audience as lights fade slightly, spot on Sam.*

SAM

I like discos. At a disco, everyone's like me.

*Lights back up. Music full blast. Ten seconds of dancing, then music and coloured lights fade to dim lighting, with spot on Sam, Carol and Lesley. Around them, others head for the bus, laughing - it's been a good disco.*

CAROL

Here, Anna told me this joke. This man went into this cafe and ordered steak pie. And the waiter said, 'What would you like with it?' And the customer said, 'If it's anything like last time ... [Carol turns head to Lesley and becomes inaudible.] ... I'll have a hammer and chisel.' [Lesley laughs.]

SAM

What?

CAROL

Sorry, Sam. [Belted out.] If it's anything like last time...

LESLEY

I'll have a hammer and chisel.

*Spot on Sam laughing with them...*