



EFFINGHAM SECONDARY SCHOOL
WOZA ALBERT
GRADE 12



- Read the play text woza Albert
- For each if the scenes, answer the following questions in your notebooks:
 1. Who are the characters in the scene.
 2. What issues/problems/themes are being highlighted.
 3. Using your knowledge of POOR THEATRE (studied in Grade 11), how do the actors make use of Poor theatre techniques to transform their bodies vocally and physically into the character.

Political context of the play

The play is a satire play set in the context of Apartheid, South Africa (1981). Woza Albert! deals with the political division of the country where racial segregation was implemented. The focus shifts to black lives and the oppression of the black people in SA under the rule of Apartheid.

The play is performed by Percy Mtna and Mbonegni Ngema who very skillfully take on the roles of the many black people who struggled because of the injustices upon them. The play makes use of collective subjects where one character such as Auntie Dudu, Zuluboy and even Bobbejaan represent many people in society like them.

Woza Albert! looks at the black experience and the theme of exploitation is at the heart of the play. The play aims to show us how the black people of the country were made to feel inferior by being under the control of the white man. For example, the pass law was implemented to ensure that all black people were controlled. Albert Street plays a significant role in the play as a place of oppression and control of black lives. This street demanded that black people apply for their passes in order to look for jobs so that they could provide for their families. If they did not have their passes, these men were set to jail and even beaten up. The play explores how Apartheid devalued black people giving them limited access to the educational and economic sectors in society. The play poses the question:

What would happen if Morena (Christ) came to South Africa during the time of Apartheid?

The play deals with Morena (Christ) coming to South Africa, and would he doubt coming here if he could choose anywhere in the world. They explore beliefs and how people have faith in their Morena, dealing with the religion in the streets of Johannesburg. The main idea of Woza Albert, was however to protest. The genre of the play is therefore Protest



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Theatre. The play consists of twenty six scenes and makes use of protest elements through protest songs, dance and dialogue.

What is the significance of the title of the text?

- 1) The title refers to Albert Luthuli: The fallen hero of the struggle as a political activist who fought against Apartheid. 'Woza' means 'Come' or 'raise' and so it means to 'Raise' Albert and all those other heroes who fought in the struggle from the dead.
- 2) The title also refers to Albert Street in JHB, South Africa – A place filled with struggle of all those black men applying for their passes

and seeking for a job in order to make a living. This highlights the control and oppression of the government against its people.

The play makes use of the following:

Multi-rolling

Both men change roles frequently, the scenes are too short to allow for the development of personalities and in-depth plots. Multi-rolling is not done for comic effect but rather for the representation of collective subjects. However, in scene 18 – the coronation brickyard, the white boss (Bass Kom) calls for help dealing with Morena who has arrived to the workplace. He calls him a 'terrorist'. The humour would arise in the fact that it is offstage and Percy is playing the roles of both Bass Kom and Bobbejaan.

What is the function of the half squash ball painted pink?

When they play a white man, they use the half squash ball painted pink to do so. We might argue that a clown's nose is red however, a pink nose is used (Symbolizes a pig) so the white man becomes a figure of mockery or a buffoon who has been placed in high authority and oppresses the black man.

Songs - Are used in the opening scenes and the transitions between scenes.

Languages

The play is written in English with parts of dialogue and songs in Isizulu and Afrikaans. This was done so audiences could identify with the cultural context of SA.

Morena



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Means Lord/savior: if he really came to SA. What would happen? Would he save all black people who are oppressed and be like a genie who grants wishes and save people from suffering? OR would he be lured into the white man's chamber and be persuaded by him or even killed by him – Scene 18 refers to Morena being a 'terrorist'.

Key Themes of the play include:

Apartheid/ Racism/Oppression and Exploitation

In 1948, the national party began enforcing policies which declared non-whites would live separately from whites (racial segregation) and to use separate public facilities. The government did everything in their power

to oppress non-whites, for example Bantu Education limited their opportunities. Woza Albert! Explores the exploitation and oppression of black people under Apartheid. It is a play that intends to give a voice to all those who had none.

Religion

Understanding the Christian faith is essential to the play. The idea that Christ is coming to SA in a contemporary (present) world, poses the question where will he be? The authors are saying that he is likely to turn up in an unjust society built on discrimination and racism.

Poor Theatre – Jerzy Grotowski

- Jerzy Grotowski, a Polish Theatre director coined the term 'Poor Theatre'.
- Published a book 'Towards a Poor Theatre'
- He felt that theatre borrowed too heavily from film and wished to eliminate everything not required by theatre (Technology, visual aspects); leaving only the actor and audience.
- Poor Theatre strips theatre of all its mechanics focusing purely on the actor. The actor is trained to use intense, physicality of his body on stage.
- The focus shifts on the actor's ability to tell the story without the aid of technical design elements.
- Poor Theatre avoided all machinery and minimised all spectacle not created by the actor.
- Grotowski's performers were not allowed to wear make-up or to change costumes.
- All music/sound had to be produced by the actors themselves.



- No scenery in a traditional sense was used; however, a few functional props might be used. He abandoned the Proscenium Arch Theatre in favour of a large room used for all performances.

Actor-audience relationship

- Grotowski aimed to eliminate the division created by the 'fourth' wall in the theatre. By breaking down this 'fourth' wall, actors could connect with their audience in close proximity by addressing them directly.
- A close actor audience relationship was built.

- Sets used were functional rather than decorative, i.e. a prop for example was used in more than one way.
- Think back to *Woza Albert!...* the pink nose, the white coat used as a shawl (Aunty Dudu) and then as a white man's Coat.
- This created a unique relationship between the actor and audience.

Actor – Training

- The actor must devote himself, physically, vocally, and spiritually so that he completely transforms himself in performance.

Refer to scene 18 - The coronation Brickyard

How do the actors Make use of Poor Theatre techniques?

Comment on the set, props, costumes and use of physicality (the use of the body)

The set: The set is stripped to the bare minimum. There is no traditional scenery and the set consists of – The box, clothing railing with coats and half squash ball painted pink. The actors are bare chested only wearing trousers. These are the only few but functional (serves other purposes) props that are used. With regard to props and costumes: In scene 18 – Percy uses the squash ball and coat to represent a white man as he very quickly transforms himself into the white man and then removes the props to represent Bobbejaan.

Physicality: The actors make use of mime techniques, for example when Zuluboy mimes opening a bottle of coke for Morena and when both characters mime pushing a machine to make the ten thousand bricks. The performance is energetic and the actors create their own



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sound effects of starting a tractor engine and shovelling of the sand. Extensive physicality is used in order to recreate the atmosphere of the coronation Brickyard and the actors break the imaginary fourth wall by speaking or addressing the audience directly when stepping on the stage apron.

Activity: Refer to Scene 11 – A barber’s open air-stall. How do the actors make use of Poor Theatre techniques in this scene?