

PHILLIP PULLMAN'S

ADAPTED BY BRYONY LAVERY

THE UNDERSTUDY
DRAMA & THEATRE RESOURCES

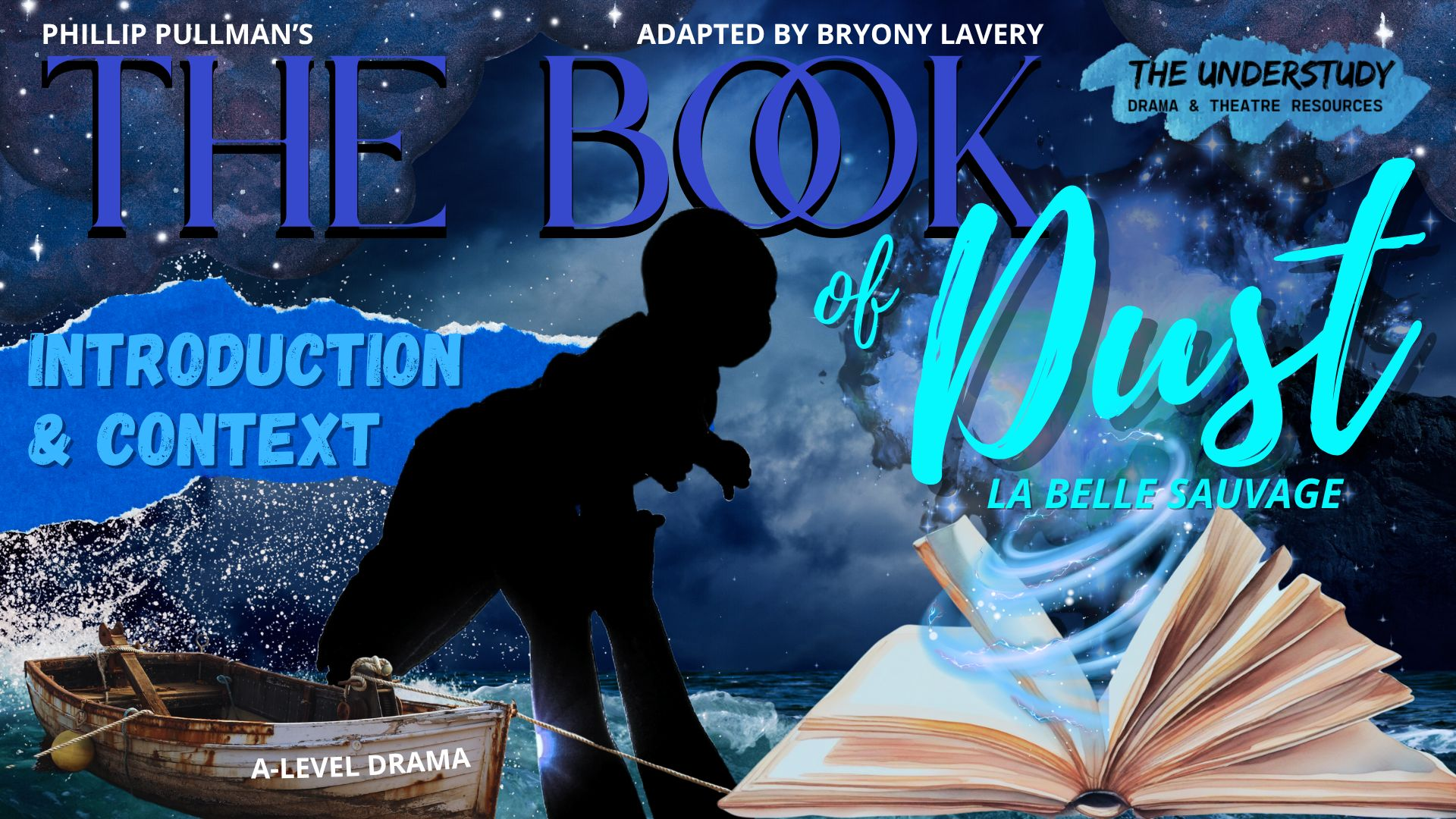
THE BOOK

of *Quest*

INTRODUCTION
& CONTEXT

LA BELLE SAUVAGE

A-LEVEL DRAMA



RIVERS AND FLOODS

Move around the space as if wading through rising flood water. Start ankle-deep, gradually increasing to waist-deep. No talking - only physical expression of:



10 MINUTES

- Growing concern
- Protective instincts awakening
- The weight of water against their bodies

Teacher Narration:

"The rain never stops. That river is just rising and rising and rising and... It's the things in the water getting stirred up. You don't want to get that river angry. It's something messing with the sky... No... It's something stirring up the water.

We inhabit a world of doubt. It is very perplexing to know who to trust. So for the time being, Malcolm, we trust no one. Not your mother, none of your friends. Not one word. Do you understand?"*

SFX Options

Extreme thunder and lightning
storm sounds with howling wind

Epic Thunderstorm + Huge Ocean
Waves + Rain Sounds for Sleeping



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DEBRIEF CIRCLE

*Offer one word or a
short phrase to
describe how the
rising river experience
made you feel.*

PRACTICAL INVESTIGATION 1:

Rivers and floods

You can divide into groups or work as one company, depending on the size of your class. Groups of 3-5 would be good.



30 MINUTES

You should demonstrate your ideas through a three minute scene that includes:

Specifically, it would be the River Thames flowing through Oxford to London that needs to flood - and it is used regularly through the play so needs to be a sustainable option.

Each group is a special effects / scenic design company who have been tasked with the job of 'creating a river on stage'. How would you go about doing this? Each group must create a pitch where they explain and demonstrate as best you can with the resources available how you would use set, lighting and sound to create a rising river on stage. Each group is trying to convince the producer (the teacher) that their ideas will have the best theatrical effect without being untenable or unsafe.

You also need to consider how you would create a canoe on stage and have it appear to travel through the river (with people in it).



You may explain bits that you can't quite produce with current resources.

Preparation: Loading the canoe, checking supplies, saying goodbye

The Journey: Paddling against current, navigating obstacles

Danger: A specific threat (secret agents, flood debris, wild animals)

Protection: Shielding a baby from harm

Resolution: Finding temporary safety

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Introduction to DÆMONS



In Phillip Pullman's *The Book of Dust* (and its companion trilogy *His Dark Materials*), a dæmon (pronounced "demon") is the **external, physical manifestation of a person's inner self or soul**. Think of it as a part of a person's consciousness and spirit that exists outside their body, in the form of an animal.

A Visible Soul: Every human in Lyra's world has a dæmon. It's not a pet; it's an inseparable part of them. They are essentially two halves of a whole being.

Animal Form: Dæmons take the form of animals. This animal form often reflects the personality, character, or deepest nature of the human they belong to.

Human Intelligence and Speech: Dæmons possess human intelligence and can speak. They often engage in conversations with their humans, offering advice, comfort, or even arguments.

Changing Forms (Children): For children, dæmons can change form at will. This fluid nature reflects the developing and uncertain identity of a child.

Settling (Adolescence): During adolescence, a person's dæmon undergoes a "settling," where it permanently takes on a single animal form. This form is the one that best encapsulates the adult's true character.



Introduction to DÆMONS



Opposite Sex (Usually): Dæmons are typically of the opposite sex to their human. However, there are rare exceptions where they are the same sex, which Pullman suggests might indicate a unique quality or gift.

Inseparable Bond: The connection between a human and their dæmon is incredibly strong and intimate. They feel each other's pain and emotions. Being separated from one's dæmon for too long is agonizing and can even lead to death.

Taboo to Touch: It is a strict social taboo for a human to touch another person's dæmon. Doing so is considered a profound violation, akin to touching their very soul. Dæmons can, however, interact with other dæmons.

Connection to Dust: Dæmons, particularly their settling and the nature of their forms, are deeply connected to the mysterious substance known as Dust (also called Rusakov Particles), which is linked to consciousness, self-awareness, and the maturation of individuals.

PRACTICAL INVESTIGATION 2: DÆMONS

THINK THEN DISCUSS: What would your dæmon be?

What are the different forms it would have taken during your childhood?

Has it settled at your age now?

What has it settled as? **Why?**



PRACTICALLY EXPLORE (if you have time):

Working in pairs: you should improvise a little scene where one of you is the human and the other takes on the form of their dæmon.

- Move around the space maintaining an invisible connection
- The dæmon reacts to and reflects the human's emotions
- Practice scenarios: fear, protectiveness, curiosity, determination

You can swap over and share any work that you like.

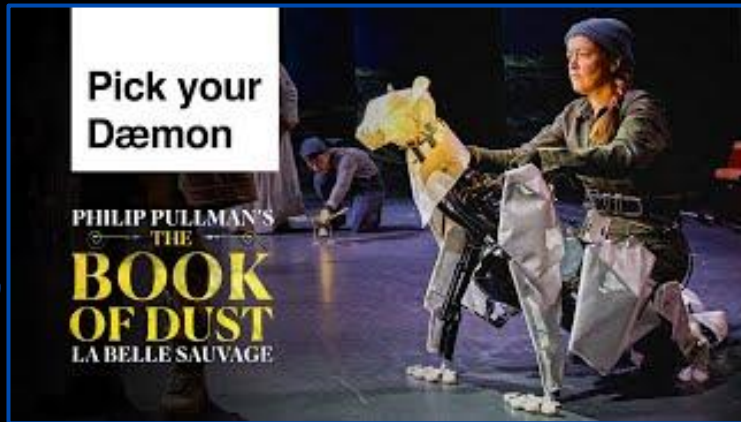


DISCUSS

the concept of dæmons and why they are dramatically interesting.

HOW

might you portray these daemons on stage?



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REFLECTION

What excites you about studying this play?

What has intrigued you?



HOMework

1.

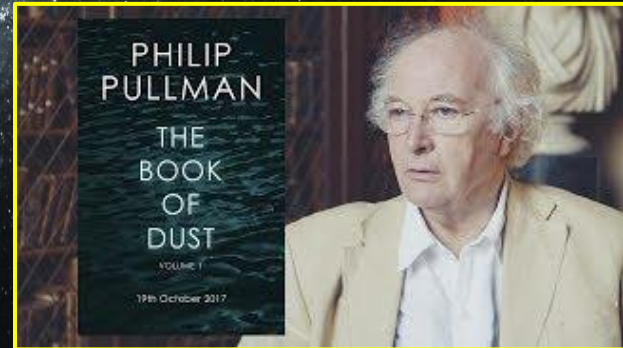
Create a design for your own personal daemon to be portrayed on stage.

It could be a costume design / a puppet design / a mask design / make-up - any way that you would think to portray these daemons on stage.

2.

Watch this video as further introduction to the original text:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kCJkg0xBbA



3.

Read the next few slides of further information and context for The Book of Dust: La Belle Sauvage

FURTHER INFORMATION / CONTEXT / SETTING

Here's the context for *La Belle Sauvage*:

The Book of Dust: La Belle Sauvage is a fantasy novel by Philip Pullman, published in 2017. It serves as the first volume of *The Book of Dust* trilogy and acts as a companion to Pullman's highly acclaimed *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

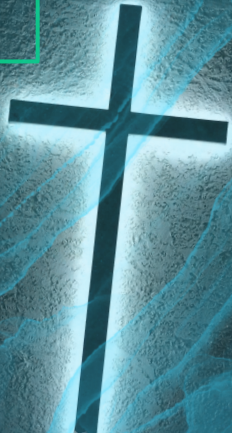


Timeline: The story is set twelve years before the events of *His Dark Materials*, when Lyra Belacqua, the protagonist of the original trilogy, is just a six-month-old infant. It specifically details the events leading up to Lyra's arrival at Jordan College, Oxford.



Setting: The novel takes place in the same alternate universe as *His Dark Materials*, a world where:

- **Dæmons:** Human souls exist outside their bodies in the form of sentient animal companions called dæmons. These dæmons are an integral part of their human, reflecting their personality and emotions. Baby dæmons, like Lyra's Pantalaimon, are still in flux and can change form.
- **The Magisterium (The Church):** This powerful, oppressive international theocracy dominates society. It actively suppresses independent thought, scientific inquiry, and anything it deems heresy, including research into "Dust."
- **Dust:** This mysterious subatomic particle is central to Pullman's cosmology. In *His Dark Materials*, it's revealed to be connected to consciousness, self-awareness, and the human soul. The Magisterium views Dust as a sign of original sin and seeks to control or eradicate it. In *La Belle Sauvage*, the initial research and understanding of Dust are just beginning to unfold, creating a conflict between those who seek knowledge and the authoritarian Church.
- **Oxford and the River Thames:** Much of the story is set around Oxford, particularly focusing on the River Thames and its surrounding areas, which become a significant landscape during a massive flood.



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LA BELLE SAUVAGE

The title "La Belle Sauvage" holds multiple layers of meaning and significance within Philip Pullman's novel, serving as a rich metaphor for various aspects of the



1. The Name of Malcolm's Canoe:

- The most literal and immediate meaning is that "La Belle Sauvage" is the name Malcolm Polstead gives to his beloved canoe. This canoe is his prized possession, a symbol of his independence, ingenuity, and connection to the river. The canoe becomes absolutely central to the plot, as it is the vehicle Malcolm and Alice use to navigate the perilous flooded landscape and transport Lyra to safety. Without "La Belle Sauvage," their journey would be impossible.

2. "The Beautiful Savage" (Direct Translation)

"La Belle Sauvage" is French for "the beautiful savage" or "the beautiful wild one." This translation immediately evokes several connotations relevant to the book:

Malcolm and Alice: Both Malcolm and Alice, in their own ways, embody a certain "savage" or "wild" quality. They are resourceful, resilient, and adapt quickly to the brutal, untamed environment created by the flood. They operate outside the strictures of polite society when necessary, relying on their instincts and courage. Their journey is a return to a more primal state of survival.

Lyra: As an infant, Lyra is, by nature, "savage" in the sense of being untamed and unburdened by societal norms or conscious thought. Her future self in *His Dark Materials* is known for her wildness, her quick wit, and her ability to navigate dangerous situations with a fierce, untamed spirit. The title hints at her inherent nature even as a baby.

Nature Itself: The devastating flood transforms the familiar landscape into a wild, "savage" force. Yet, there is a terrible beauty in its power and scale. The title reflects this duality of nature – destructive yet awe-inspiring.

Review of the NOVEL

This review of the novel that the play is based on offers some useful insight into some of the themes and ideas of the world that Pullman created. You may want to read it now, or save it for after you have read the play.

The Book of Dust Vol 1: La Belle Sauvage by Philip Pullman review – worth the wait | Children and teenagers | The Guardian





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