



BIRMINGHAM
REPERTORY
THEATRE

THE LOVELY BONES

By Alice Sebold

Adapted by Bryony Lavery



INSIGHT PACK



Contents

Introduction	pg 3
Synopsis	pg 3
Themes	pg 4
Characters & Creative Team	pg 6
Alice Sebold & Bryony Lavery	pg 7
Model Box Designs	pg 10
Classroom Activities	pg 12



Introduction

Welcome to this REP Insight Pack, uncovering the unique coming-of-age story of *The Lovely Bones*. Whether you are a GCSE teacher looking for a dynamic learning resource as part of your English curriculum, a student studying the play, a theatregoer wanting to explore the play further or just genuinely interested in getting your teeth into this dark tale, this will help you explore the creative process behind this production, with relevance to Key Stage 3, 4 and 5 pupils. These resources contain background information on the play, illustrations from the designer, interviews from the director and activities for students that are perfect before or after a visit to the theatre. We hope you find them useful.

Synopsis

The narrator of *The Lovely Bones*, Susie Salmon is a normal fourteen year-old girl. She has just received her first kiss and is looking forward to going to high school next year. She is on her way home from school when she is stopped by a man who wants to show her something in the cornfield. Susie thinks she can trust this man because he is a neighbour who knows her parents. Unfortunately, this man is George Harvey, a serial killer who subsequently rapes and murders Susie.

Susie arrives in heaven where she meets Franny, her guide in the afterlife. Heaven can be whatever she wants, and Susie chooses to create her heaven in the image of her hometown high school. However, the only thing Susie truly wants is to be back on Earth, growing up with the people she loves. This is the one thing Susie cannot have in heaven, but there is one way Susie can keep up with her family. From heaven, Susie can look down and watch her family as they struggle with their own feelings about her murder.

The Salmon family is forever changed as a result of Susie's murder. Susie watches as her parents drift apart and her siblings and friends grow up and have experiences Susie can only witness. Her mother, Abigail wants to run away from her feelings, whereas her father, Jack wants to confront those feelings head on. Jack Salmon, unsatisfied with detective, Len Fenerman's investigation, begins his own. This investigation leads Jack to suspect George Harvey. However, police cannot arrest Harvey because there is no evidence linking Harvey to Susie.

Susie follows her sister Lindsey's life from heaven. Lindsey experiences major life milestones witnessed vicariously by Susie. Susie cannot herself grow up, but can have a basic understanding of the process by watching her sister. She watches as Lindsey grows into a strong young woman who also shares her father's determination to find Susie's killer. Lindsey learns from Grandma Lynn the name of the man her father believes killed Susie. Lindsey begins watching Harvey's house, committing his schedule to her memory, and waiting for her opportunity.



Family members are not the only people affected by Susie's death. Ray Singh, the first and only boy Susie kisses, is at first a suspect. He is quickly ruled out by police, but remains haunted by the memory of Susie's death.

Ruth Connors, an unpopular girl in Susie's class, is also impacted by Susie's death. She is the last person Susie touches as her spirit leaves Earth. As a result, Ruth becomes obsessed with death and even begins seeing the dead on Earth. Ray and Ruth become forever linked in their shared grief and understanding.

George Harvey, Susie's killer is also watched by Susie. In heaven, Susie meets and learns the stories of all of his victims. She sees Harvey hide her body, lie to her father and the police, and run from the crimes he has committed. Susie wants to help the living apprehend her killer, but can only watch as the police and her family try to gather evidence and find her murderer.

Through the experiences of the Salmon family in *The Lovely Bones*, readers can examine their own feelings and reactions to loss and mourning. Can something good come from a horrible tragedy? Can healing come from a place of tremendous violence and despair?

Themes

Mortality: Susie Salmon recounts from the afterlife her grim and violent death at the hands of her rapist and neighbour, George Harvey. Susie says that the way we die, and the needs, desires, and qualities we possess at the time of death impact our experiences in the after world. This is the story of Susie's experience in the after world, where she watches her family on Earth breakdown and rebuild. She also stalks her killer and tries to engineer his capture, while learning about his previous crimes and communing with his other dead victims. Eventually, Susie comes to terms with her existence in the new realm. The novel contrasts a hideous death with a lovely and compelling vision of the after life.

Love: As a vital counter to all the death and violence, *The Lovely Bones* offers us a tender vision of familial love, and a variety of love affairs and romances. We watch the uncomplicated love of 'super couple' Lindsey (Susie's sister) and Samuel (her beau). And then there is the affair between Abigail (Susie's mother) and Detective Len Fenerman, who is in charge of Susie case. We also see the crumbling and then reinvigorated love between Susie's parents. Things get really complicated when we talk about the love triangle of Susie (as a ghost), Ruth Connor, and Ray Singh (Susie's first love). Where Susie and her loved ones experience abundances of love, her killer is loveless and unloved.

Violence: *The Lovely Bones* begins with Susie's brutal rape and murder by George Harvey and looks at his other crimes. This violence is also a violence against Susie's family, which nearly breaks apart under the strain of her death. *The Lovely Bones* stays focused on violence against women and girls, particularly those whose lives are taken by violent attackers.



The Supernatural: Whereas we know that the violent crimes in *The Lovely Bones* are reflections of brutal reality, the supernatural events of the novel leave us room to indulge our imaginations and dream of a beautiful beyond. Susie is definitely a benevolent ghost. She's only mean to bad people. Her powers are often limited to casting her reflection in glass surfaces and thinking hard about people to make them think of her. In all, the supernatural aspects of the novel give us some hope and counterbalance the sadness of death. Such aspects also argue that it's important we remember the dead, and share the truths of their lives and death. Doing so helps their spirits forget about Earth and move on.

Family: *The Lovely Bones* examines the opposite extremes of family life. On the one hand, we have the Salmons, a happy loving family with a stable life in the suburbs. On the other, we have Mr. Harvey, who is completely alone in the world and has never known a happy family moment. He infiltrates suburbia and uses it as a disguise for his dark plans – to destroy the happy family he envies. Yet, even the taking of the oldest child doesn't destroy the love the Salmon family shares. Much of the novel's power lies in its depiction of the breaking down and rebuilding of the Salmon family, the saga it undergoes after Susie's death. It also draws on the popular idea that in the afterlife we meet up with our loved ones. While Susie waits for the rest of her family to join her, she contents herself with her grandfather, who lives with her in heaven and helps her transition her existence away from Earth.

Time: Susie's conception of time greatly expands once she exits Earth. She knows what time it is on Earth, but sees that each person is their own clock. When that clock stops, a deeper kind of time is revealed - eternity. For Susie, everything that happened to her on Earth is endlessly far and endlessly near her in time. *The Lovely Bones* also looks at how photographs preserve and reactivate moments from the past, rendering them useful for present existence. Furthermore, it argues that remembering the dead – through art, thought, and chronicle – is a vital human activity, which can make things much easier for those who are no longer in the Earthly realm.

Rules and Order: *The Lovely Bones* takes a look at how the order and safety of a suburban neighbourhood in the 1970s is utterly disrupted by Mr. Harvey's rape and murder of Susie Salmon. Harvey is the disruption of order personified. A serial rapist/killer Harvey destroys the order of the lives of his victims, their loved ones, and his neighbourhood. Opposing him is Detective Len Fenerman, whose goal is to restore order, or at least the fantasy of it in the town. His lack of success in that regard – his failure to recognise Harvey's guilt until it's too late – gives the novel a realistic feel. Life is disorderly, messy, and often seemingly unfair. Love, it argues, is all the order we can hope for, and to live in a loving way is sometimes all we can do when life turns chaotic.

Characters & Doubling

This production of *The Lovely Bones* is performed by 13 actors who, between them, share the following roles –

Susie Salmon

Abigail Salmon

Jack Salmon

Lindsey Salmon

Mr Harvey

Len Fenerman / Samuel

Ruana Singh / Franny

Lynn / Cop / Mrs Flanagan

Ruth Connors / Buckley Salmon

Ray Singh / Principal Caden / Holliday

The Heavenly Girls

Creative Team

Writer	Alice Sebold
Adapter	Bryony Lavery
Director	Melly Still
Designer	Ana Inés Jabares-Pita
Lighting Designer	Matt Haskins
Composer	Dave Price
Sound Designer	Helen Skiera
Movement Director	Mike Ashcroft
Puppetry	Emily Mytton
Casting Director	Polly Jerrold
Assistant Director	Lucy Bird
Voice & Dialect Coach	Charmian Hoare



Alice Sebold & Bryony Lavery



Holly Williams interviewed novelist Alice Sebold and playwright Bryony Lavery during rehearsals for *The Lovely Bones* and they talked about the process of bringing the story to the stage –

“Your characters never really go away – of course you feel a fondness towards them.” Novelist Alice Sebold has recently had reason to revisit the characters of *The Lovely Bones*, her 2002 globally best-selling novel about a young girl, Susie Salmon, who watches her family from heaven after she’s raped and murdered by a serial killer.

For those who’ve never encountered the novel, it might sound like grim reading. In fact, *The Lovely Bones* found a huge audience due to its tenderly drawn portrait of a family coming to terms with grief. Millions of readers felt a fondness of their own for Susie and the Salmon family.

Now, they’re coming to life onstage. Bryony Lavery has adapted the novel, for the first theatrical version of *The Lovely Bones* anywhere in the world.

What was her initial reaction to being asked to turn this smash hit book into a stage play?

“I think it was ‘yikes!’” laughs Lavery. “It’s not a straight narrative – it’s like loads of paths through a rather beautiful and disturbing forest, which doesn’t make it easy to adapt at all...”

Still, the playwright is no stranger to crafting stage versions of classic novels, from *Brighton Rock* to *A Christmas Carol* to *101 Dalmatians* – and she’d add *The Lovely Bones* to their rank. “It is a classic. It always brings us comfort, because of its strength and its honesty and its toughness, actually.”

But what did the American writer think of her novel being turned into a play?



“I liked the idea – I think there are things you can do onstage that you can’t do in any other medium,” says Sebold. She’s been reading drafts and offering feedback, but she’s happy to cede control of the material. “I just trust the people who are performing it and directing it – they know what happens to words when you put them on stage, and I don’t.”

Plus, part of the appeal was that Sebold couldn’t imagine quite how the story, which moves seamlessly between heaven and earth, could actually be realised on stage.

“For me, it’s going to be amazing to see: how do they have different levels, heaven and earth, and the various places that are in the novel? How do they make it real, but not too real? That’s one of the reasons why I think theatre can be fascinating: there are lots of imaginative recesses for the audience to fill.”

The process of adaptation is something Lavery gets great satisfaction from – partly because of the need to solve these challenges. “I love it. I get to be the junior writer to great writers. But the main thrill is to make it a theatrical-shaped piece of work rather than a novel, and each one has different problems and different joys.”

Lavery’s initial idea for staging this story was to have very defined heaven and earth spaces on different physical levels. But after workshops with actors and the show’s director, Melly Still, they discovered that heaven could be everywhere – because “that’s the magic of theatre.”

“The most wonderful thing about it is our Susie wanders through her family [on earth], but of course they can’t see her,” explains Lavery, “so one feels incredible empathy with her, because she’s this child that’s being ignored.”

This adds a degree of poignancy – but also, a degree of humour. This Susie has a very familiar teenage stropky exasperation with her situation in the afterlife, and at her family not listening to her.

“That yields a lot of comedy and texture, because she’s so furious about it; she’s a wonderful pouty teenager at times,” Lavery says. And she adds that laughter is really necessary in this often dark story.

“You can’t hold your breath for two hours; you need to open a steam valve and let something out.”

Working on dark material can be harrowing – but the process here has, in fact, proved to be really rather good fun. Because of this, Sebold has ended up being rather more involved in the production than she had expected.

Speaking warmly of pinging emails back and forth across the Atlantic with Lavery, she says; “One of my favourite words is ‘moxie’, and she seems to have quite a bit of it...”

For Lavery, it’s not so common to be adapting material where the original writer is still with us. But working with Sebold has been wonderful, she says. “I was quite daunted at first, because Dickens and Graham Greene and people don’t send notes... but a writer’s notes to another writer are always thrilling and challenging.”



Is she looking forward to Sebald seeing it? “Of course – because she sounds fun. But I’ll be as nervous as anything.”

How does it feel for Sebald, handing over her much-loved characters to someone else?

“There are some authors who like a sense of control where those things are concerned, but I really enjoy seeing what other people do with my stuff,” she says sanguinely.

Still, in revisiting *The Lovely Bones*, Sebald must also revisit a very real trauma of her own. In 1981, when she was a student, she was raped and beaten while walking home one evening.

The novel is certainly not about her, but the attack was a spur.

“When people say ‘it’s autobiographical’ the first thing I say is ‘but I’m not dead’,” she comments dryly. And while she acknowledges that, without that experience, she might not have written *The Lovely Bones*, she says that her true inspiration was “all of those girls who never had a voice because they died, unlike myself.”

She recalls how, in the Seventies – when the story is set – there seemed to be “so many serial killers”, and so many young female victims. “And we were fascinated by serial killers like Ted Bundy, but we didn’t really know anything about the women he killed. I was very aware of this voiceless mass of women – that was pretty much the inspiration for me,” she says.

Sexual violence is certainly not something we’ve done away in the intervening decades. But *The Lovely Bones* has also proved a timeless story, and one worth revisiting for altogether more hopeful reasons.

There is something comforting in the balanced structure of the story: not only do the family on earth slowly come to some acceptance of their grief – a process anyone who’s lost anyone will recognise - but in heaven, too, Susie must go on the same journey of letting go.

“It’s not about murder; it’s about redemption,” agrees Lavery. “*The Lovely Bones*’ refers to the lovely new bones that grow around this reconfigured family. It’s a tough book – it doesn’t do ‘oh the murderer’s going to get caught and everybody’s going to be happy’ – but it’s about reconstruction after terrible disasters.

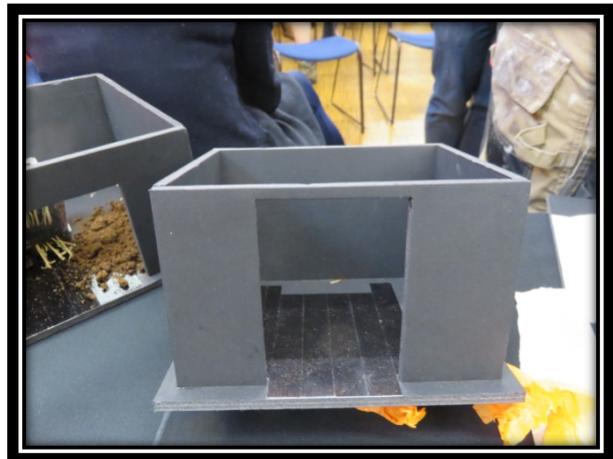
“And it’s about family – even if one of them is in heaven.”

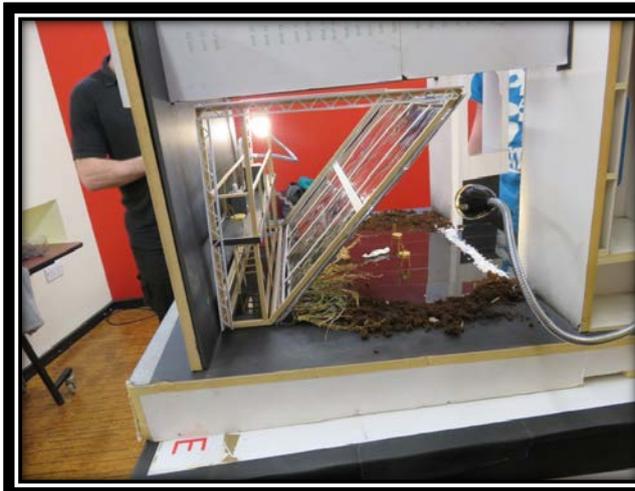
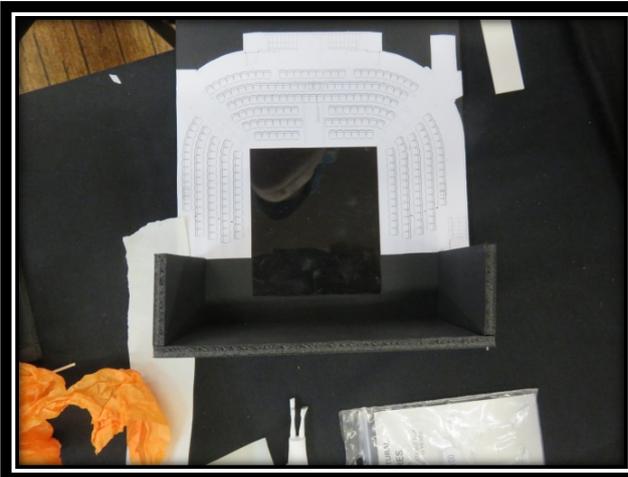
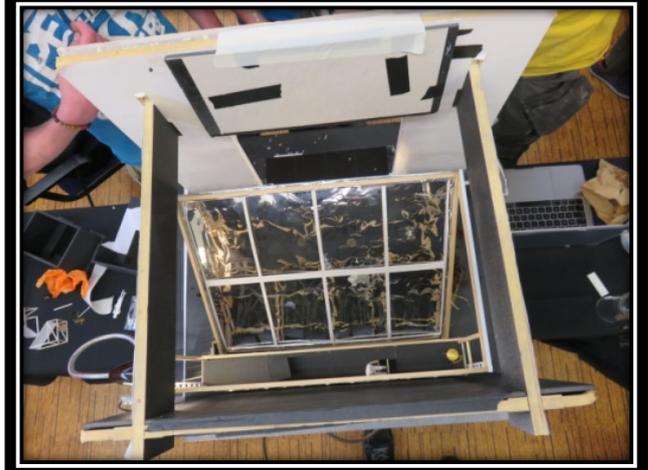
Sebald still often hears from readers that the book provided solace when trying to come to terms with a death in the family, even if in very different circumstances.

“That was a wonderfully unexpected result of writing the book,” she says. “It’s like a play being written: you just can’t predict where your work is going to go.”

Model Box Designs

The REP is a producing theatre, which means that we make from scratch all of the things that you see onstage. Each show has a designer who is responsible for designing the set, costumes and props. For the set, the designer produces a 1:25 scale model of the proposed design, and this model is then used by our carpenters, metalworkers and painters as the source material for creating the full-size set. Below are photos of the model box designs by Ana Inés Jabares-Pita, the designer for our production of *The Lovely Bones* –







Classroom Activities

Activity 1 – Working from Script

Below is an extract from Scene 27, of the adapted script of the REP's production of *The Lovely Bones*. The scene takes place where Susie's ghost watches her murderer attend her funeral.

Read through the script and explore different ways of staging this scene. What is going on? What is Susie feeling? What sort of dramatic conventions can you use explore Susie's emotion's in this scene?

21.SUSIE'S MEMORIAL SERVICE....

A memorial service which settles around them...

FENERMAN there...

ABIGAIL

Detective Fenerman.

JACK

Thank you for coming.

Will you join us?

FENERMAN

Thank you.

I just want to be in the vicinity...

LEN looks at **ABIGAIL**...

You okay?

ABIGAIL looks at him

Abigail...?

ABIGAIL nods

LYNN sees this....comes between them as...

JACK

We appreciate that.

LYNN

You are...?

ABIGAIL

Len.

Detective Fenerman



LYNN

I'm the evil *mother*

Come sit down, Abigail...

Next to *Jack*...

SUSIE

being dead makes you very popular

There's a poem by Ruth...

It's about *me*

RUTH

I

golden-haired dog

following your trail

through dew-wet grass

My mind

lobster

clawing through its deep sea cage

My heart

telescope

looking for you in your dark sky

SUSIE

There's some lovely singing.

There is... as... RUTH is staring off into space

FENERMAN

What is it, kid?

RUTH

Nothing.

I just like the way the churchyard looks.

FENERMAN

poetic right?

MR.HARVEY appears on the periphery...

LYNN

You okay, Abigail?

ABIGAIL

I'm fine, Mother.

LYNN

Looks around during the singing...



Arrested by HARVEY's figure...

To LINDSEY...whispers....

By the door.

That's him....

Isn't it?

LINDSEY turns round

Sees HARVEY there

LINDSEY

Yes

looks at him....

that's Mr.Harvey...

HARVEY looks straight at LINDSEY

SUSIE

Lindsey don't *talk* to him!!!

don't *go* anywhere with him!!!

LINDSEY faints.

ABIGAIL

Lindsey!

All gather round LINDSEY... COMMOTION

[parents worry..LEN hovers...LYNN observes...variously]

Lindsey! Get her some water...give her some space give her some air...it's the girl's sister!!!

Jack...hold her ..get her /on a chair...

SUSIE

Dad, don't let Mr.Harvey get *anywhere* near Lindsey

JACK

Lindsey, what happened?

What did you *see*?

Did you see *Susie*????

LINDSEY

He came to Susie's service!

JACK

Who?

LINDSEY/SUSIE

Mr.Harvey!!!

JACK stands up, turns to look for MR.HARVEY, but he's vanished.



Activity 2 – Devising in Pairs

In pairs ask student to label themselves as Susie and Mr Harvey and create bits of movement to explore the two characters using the followings exercises, bare in mind Susie is a ghost and Mr Harvey cannot see her.

Exercise 1 Round – By – Through: Ask young people to find a way to travel around their partner using three movements; a movement where they go through round each other, a movement where they go by or along each other, and a movement where they go through each other. Ask them to think about how they move in the space making sure their actions are identical for each of the three movements. Then develop this activity for people to move as their characters and explore their character's movement more.

Exercise 2 Mirroring: Ask young people to begin by mirroring their partner around the room, they are interact with things in the room, interact with other pairs, but eventually they need to main the character of either Susie or Mr Havey, every time you (the facilitator) shouts switch, so that the leadership in the mirroring changes, but also the character they both represent changes.

Exercise 3 One, Two, Three: Ask young people to count to three between them. They say one number each, and restart after three, it should always be rotating between each partner so they both would be saying 1, 2, or 3 at some point. After a little practice, replace 1 with an action to resemble Susie. Again after a little practice, replace 2 with a phrase that could be said by Mr Harvey. Lastly replace 3 with a movement to resemble the theme of The Supernatural.

Activity 3 – Letter to your younger self

As the facilitator ask everyone in the room to find their own space with a sheet of paper and a pen. Play some music and ask the participants to free-write continuously for 2 minutes.

Their task is a letter to their younger self.

If they could physically see themselves in a memory they've once had, what would they change?

What would they want to say to their younger selves?

What do they wish they did differently?

What memory is prominent in their lives, where they could take control of their younger self once more?

Once people have wrote letters, if people are comfortable these can be read aloud and people can discuss how some of these stories might be put on stage or brought to life. To make young people comfortable the teacher/facilitator may also take part in this activity and share their story to the group.



Activity 4 – Post-Performance Character Breakdown

Ask the pupils to pick a character from the play that they found interesting. Ask them to list three things that they admired about them and why, e.g. their personality, their behaviour, their ambitions, their motivations, etc. Likewise, if they disliked anything about their attributes, ask them to list up to three things. Pick pupils to share their thoughts and reasons for admiring or disliking their selected character. They can use the below template to help.

Character Name: _____

Character's Job: _____

List 5 Words that describe the character for you

Sketch Your Character

What was your initial impression of the character?

What journey does the character's story go on? What do they want? What's the problem that comes in the way? Does the character get what they want and how?
