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WORLD WAR ONE

Archie Dobson's War Performance Script

Written by Rob John
Original songs by Barry Gibson

Archie Dobson's War

Written by Rob John with original songs by Barry Gibson and including movement sequences by Deborah Bellman.

Cover illustration © Frances Castle 2014.

Designed by Nick Redeyoff.

Music

'Listen to the fields' written and composed by Barry Gibson.

'Your King and country want you' written and composed by Paul Rubens. Published 1914.

'It's a long way to Tipperary' written and composed by Jack Judge and Harry Williams. Published 1912.

'Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag' composed by Felix Powell. Published 1915.

Note: the lyrics of this song – written by George Asaf, the pseudonym of George Henry Powell – remain in copyright.

'Struck, stuck in the middle' written and composed by Barry Gibson.

'Stille Nacht' written by Father Joseph Mohr, composed by Franz Xaver Gruber, 1818.

'Hush, here comes a whizz-bang', trad. Adapted from a popular song by Robert Patrick Weston. Published 1911.

'When this lousy war is over', trad. To the tune *'What a friend we have in Jesus'* composed by Charles Crozat Converse in 1868.

'We're here because we're here', trad. To the tune *'Auld lang syne'*.

'Can you, can you remember?' written and composed by Barry Gibson.

'Over there' written and composed by George M Cohan. Published 1917.

'Home! Sweet home!' written by John Howard Payne, composed by Henry Bishop.

Arrangements of contemporary songs by Barry Gibson.

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Scene 1

The cast (the ensemble) stands in the performance space facing the audience. They are dressed identically in black. As the lights go up the ensemble starts to sing and to mime farm activities including cutting the wheat with scythes.

Song: 'Listen to the fields'

AUDIO RESOURCE 1: backing track for song

Listen to the fields of wheat
Rustle in the summer sun,
Hear the skylark singing out,
Hear the church-bells ringing
In the distance...
In the distance...
In the distance...

As the tempo of the music changes the ensemble moves about the space creating a busy town scene and meeting and greeting.

And the stream flows
Through the meadow
And the fish swims
To the river
And the river
Pushes onwards
Past the village
To the town
All the people
And the factory
And the hustle
And the bustle
And the home life
And the voices
And the sunset
Tumbles down

As the music slows again the ensemble end their mime and turn to face the audience.

Listen to the fields of wheat
See the clouds roll past the moon,
Hear the wind of change, it blows,
Hear the thunder rumble
In the distance...
In the distance...
In the distance...

As the music ends the six narrators step forward. Each holds a book. As they speak they open their books and read to us.

Narrator 1: England.

**The names of people and places can be changed to reflect the locality of the performance.*

Narrator 2: Summer.

Narrator 3: 1914.

Narrator 4: This is Archie Dobson...

Archie steps forward. Unlike the ensemble Archie is dressed naturalistically as a ten year old in 1914. He is holding an apple and he freezes just as he is about to bite into it.

Narrator 5: In the summer of 1914 Archie is ten years old.

Narrator 6: Archie is a happy boy...

Narrator 1: ...who loves his mother...

Mother steps forward. Her role is signed by a shawl.

Narrator 2: ...and his father...

Father steps forward. His role is signed by a flat cap.

Narrator 3: ...and his sister, Mabel, too.

Mabel, whose role is signed by red ribbons in her hair walks across in front of Archie and helps herself to his apple. Archie stares angrily at Mabel.

Archie: ...sometimes.

Narrator 4: Archie likes going to school...

The ensemble moves into upper body still images of enthusiastic reading or writing.

Narrator 5: He's good at football...

Still image of footballers.

Narrator 6: ...and drawing...

Still image of painting and drawing.

Narrator 1: And one day soon he plans to get a dog.

Archie: My very own dog. Going to teach it to do tricks.

Mabel: You won't get a dog. Father'll never let you.

Archie: He will. I'll persuade him. You'll see.

Narrator 2: Yes, Archie is a happy boy.

Narrator 3: He has no idea...

AUDIO RESOURCE 2: FX - drum beats

The ensemble starts to stamp their feet in slow march.

Narrator 4: ...that a great war is just around the corner.

Stamping gets louder.

Narrator 5: He has no idea that his life is about to change –

Stamping stops. Silence.

Whole cast: – for ever!

Scene 2

After a moment's pause the ensemble moves about the space making the busy town scene again as workers arrive at Claxton's.

Narrator 6: Archie Dobson lives in the town of Glaveston.

Narrator 1: In Glaveston everybody works in the jam factory.

Archie: My father's the foreman. He tells everyone what to do.

AUDIO RESOURCE 3: FX - factory hooter

Father: Right back to work everyone. The jam won't make itself.

The ensemble becomes factory workers in Claxton's.

Narrator 1: Archie doesn't like the jam factory.

Archie: I'm not going to work here when I grow up.

Narrator 2: Archie would much rather live in the country...

Archie: ...and work on a farm. Live in the country and work on a farm like my cousin Walter.

Walter appears. He wears a flat cap and a red handkerchief around his neck. He mimes his farm work for a few moments then freezes.

Archie: My cousin Walter's brilliant. He's 18 and he can lift two sacks of spuds in each hand and he can whistle and catch rabbits and he's taught his dog to do tricks. One day I'm going to live in the country and work on a farm like Walter.

Ensemble movement changes to farm work as at the opening, while softly humming the melody of the slow sections of the song. The action continues in the foreground over the gentle humming.

Mabel: You don't want to work on a farm, Archie. Farms are smelly and dirty and boring.

Archie: But I want to be like Walter. Walter likes working on a farm, don't you?

Walter: Don't have much choice do I? Farm work's all there is round here. But I'm not doing it for much longer.

Archie: Why – what are you going to do?

Walter: Don't know. Something exciting.

Archie: Like what?

Walter: I don't know...but something's going to happen. I'm not going to be a farm worker much longer Archie. Something's coming. I can feel it.

AUDIO RESOURCE 4: FX - drum beats

Scene 3

Archie: No-one actually tells you there's going to be a war. You start hearing things, bits and pieces out of the papers...

The ensemble forms in a long line, marching in time to the drum. In front one member of the ensemble becomes the newspaper seller. In turn one member of the ensemble leaves the line, buys a paper and joins the line again at the opposite end.

The ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Archduke Ferdinand shot and killed in Sarajevo!

Archie: But I don't know what any of it means. Archduke Ferdinand? Sarajevo? Foreign people in places far away. Doesn't mean anything to me.

The ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Austria-Hungary sends troops to the Serbian frontier. Russian army on the move!

Archie: Doesn't bother me. I don't even know where Serbia is. Got nothing to do with us here in Glaveston.

The ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Germany declares war on France. Britain sends Germany a warning!

Archie: So what? My main worry's getting into the school football team after the holidays.

Narrator 1: Football. That's all Archie Dobson cares about...

Narrator 2: In the summer of 1914 life in Glaveston goes on exactly as it's always done.

The cast breaks from the line again move about the space miming everyday activity, shopping, working, school.

Archie: Nobody thinks there'll be a war. Not really. And then...

Narrator 1: ...August the 4th.

Drum beats continue. The cast slowly stop what they are doing and listen to the news. One child as the Prime minister walks to the front.

Narrator 2: His Majesty's government has declared to the German government...

Prime minister: ...that a state of war exists...between Great Britain and Germany...as from 11pm...tonight.

Final drum beat. Silence.

Scene 4

The recruiting officer comes to front of stage and addresses the audience, encouraged by the crowd.

Recruiting officer: Are you going to just stand by and let others get there before you?

Narrator 1: In every city...

Recruiting officer: Join today boys!

Narrator 2: ...and every town across the country...

Recruiting officer: Join up now. Don't get left behind!

Narrator 3: ...the same speech...

Recruiting officer: Sign up today and you'll be in uniform by next week!

Narrator 4: ...the same words...

Recruiting officer: Your country needs you!

Narrator 5: ...and the same cheering crowds...

Recruiting officer: Your country needs you now!

The cast erupts. Cheering and flag waving.

Song: 'Your King and country want you' (sung twice)

AUDIO RESOURCE 5: backing track for song

Oh, we don't want to lose you but we think you ought to go
For your King and your country both need you so.
We shall want you and miss you but with all our might and main
We shall cheer you, thank you, kiss you
When you come back again.

During the song half the ensemble become soldiers and the other half become the families of the new recruits. The soldiers are 'signed' for audience by putting on a khaki neck scarf. As the first part of the song comes to an end the soldiers and the family members are standing in two groups facing each other.

Archie: Will you have to go in the army, father? Will you have to go to war?

Father: No-one has to go to war, Archie. Only people who want to. People who volunteer.

Archie: Oh.

Father: Anyway they wouldn't want me. I'm 36. Far too old.

Archie: I sure Walter will join. I'm sure he'll volunteer.

Mother: I'm sure he won't. His mother'll never let him. I know my sister. She'll never let him go.

Walter appears and starts to put on a khaki scarf.

Walter's mother: You're not joining up Walter and that's final.

Walter: I am, Ma. I've made up my mind. All my life I've been waiting for something exciting to happen and this is it. My adventure.

Walter's mother: Walter, you are not joining. There's nothing more to be said.

Walter: Don't you want me to go and fight for my country?

Walter's mother: No I don't. I want you here at home.

Walter: Well it's too late. I've joined. Signed up this morning.

Walter goes to join the ranks of the soldiers.

Walter: Sorry, Ma.

Songs: 'It's a long way to Tipperary' and 'Pack up your troubles'

AUDIO RESOURCE 6: song backing track for marching

The soldiers turn their backs on the audience and retreat upstage where they march on the spot in time to the music. The families face the audience and wave flags and white handkerchiefs. Archie and Mabel come to the centre of the stage.

Archie: Bye, Walter. Write me a letter. Tell me how you're getting on. (Pause)
Wish I was going. Wish I was going with Walter. He's going to have such an adventure.

Mabel: Don't be stupid, Archie. War's not an adventure.

Archie: How do you know? Might be.

Mabel: Oh grow up, Archie.

AUDIO RESOURCE 6: continues with backing track for songs

A parade of marching, waving and singing. Finally the soldiers march off stage and the singing slowly gets quieter as they march into the distance. The families slowly exit leaving Archie alone on the stage with the narrators as the music ends. The narrators all stare at Archie.

Narrator 1: England.

Narrator 2: Summer.

Narrator 3: 1914.

Narrator 4: This is it Archie.

Narrator 5: It's started.

Narrator 6: Are you ready?

Scene 1

Narrator 1: Autumn 1914.

Narrator 2: Archie waits for a letter.

Narrator 3: A letter from his cousin Walter.

Archie: So are we winning father?

Father: What?

Archie: These battles, Mons and Ypres. Did we win them?

Father: Well no. Not exactly.

Archie: So did we lose?

Father: Well no. Not really.

Archie: Well somebody must have won.

Father: It's complicated.

Pause. Archie is thinking.

Archie: So was it a draw?

Father: This is a war, Archie. It's not a football match.

AUDIO RESOURCE 7: FX - exploding shells

The ensemble as soldiers starts to enter in twos and threes. They are all miming the writing of letters. Throughout this passage there are loud explosions. At each explosion the soldiers duck but keep on writing.

Letter writer 1: Dear Mother. Just a note to let you know that I am fit and well and quite safe. No need to worry about me because everything is very quiet here at the moment.

Letter writer 2: Dear Father. Just a couple of lines to let you know that I am all right. We have been stuck in this trench for days now. We are quite near the front line but nothing much is happening.

Letter writer 3: My dearest Ethel. I am missing you and the children very much, but I'm sure this will all be over soon and I'll be home for Christmas. Please do not worry about me. I am fit and well. And in no danger.

Walter: Dear Archie...

Archie: A letter! I've got a letter from Walter!

Mother: That's nice dear. What's he say?

Archie: (Looks down at letter) He says not to worry about him. (Looks down again) Says he's fit and well and nothing much is happening...

Mother: Oh. Good. That's nice.

Song: 'Stuck in the middle'

AUDIO RESOURCE 8: FX - shell explodes, followed by backing track for song

In verse 1 the ensemble forms a line and sway in time to the music. They perform hand movements together (e.g. palm of hand over eyes for 'admire the view' and hands held to heart for 'think of you'.)

Stuck, stuck in the middle
 Stuck, stuck in the mud
 Hard as I try
 To admire the view
 All I do
 Is think of you.
 Stuck, stuck in the middle
 Just can't sleep
 Not a peep
 All there is for a lullaby,
 Is whizz, bang, thud.

In verse 2 some members of the ensemble move away from the line to show soldiers in the trench doing everyday trench activities...

Stuck, stuck in the middle
Stuck, stuck in the mire
Backwards and forwards
We shove and push
Waiting for
The whizz, bang, whoosh.
Stuck, stuck, in the middle
What a game
Such a shame –
Home is trenches and bags of sand
And old, barbed wire.

In verse 3 other members of the ensemble join into pairs to dance the 'whizz bang' waltz...

Stuck, stuck in the middle
Stuck, stuck here in France
Helmet and shovel
And bayonet –
Mustn't grumble
Mustn't fret.
Stuck, stuck in the middle
Feel the beat
Lift those feet
Waltz our way off to Kingdom Come...
The whizz-bang dance.

Scene Two

The ensemble stands facing the audience. They mime knitting and make clicking mouth sounds.

Narrator 1: All across the country...

Narrator 2: ...people are doing their bit to help the war.

Narrator 3: Helping in hospitals...

Narrator 4: ...working on farms...

Narrator 5: ...making food parcels for the troops...

Narrator 6: ...and knitting.

Mabel: I am not knitting!

The ensemble freezes. They all stare at Mabel.

Mother: Oh come on, Mabel. It's fun.

Knitting and clicking sounds resume.

Mabel: How can knitting be fun? Anyway what's it for? What's the point?

Mother: We're knitting socks for soldiers.

Mabel: Socks?

Mother: And scarves. It's going to be cold out there this winter. We've all got to do our bit to help. We're all in this together, Mabel.

Mabel: I'm not. I'm not 'in it together'. Wasn't my idea to have a war.

Archie: Mother's right, Mabel. You ought to do your bit.

Mabel: And you ought to mind your own business, Archie Dobson. Everybody says they'll all be home by Christmas. No-one's ever going to wear those socks. You're all wasting your time.

Archie: Will it really be over by Christmas, mother?

Mother: Yes. I'm sure it will, dear. Everybody says so.

Scene Three

As the narrators speak the ensemble splits into two groups and moves to opposite ends of the space. Half wear grey scarves; the other half wears khaki scarves. They sit on the floor and start to hum the tune of 'Silent Night' very quietly at first but slowly getting louder during the narration.

Narrator 1: But everybody's wrong.

Narrator 2: The war isn't over.

Narrator 3: And on Christmas Eve, 1914...

Narrator 4: ...thousands of soldiers...

Narrator 5: ...are sitting in cold, dark trenches...

Narrator 6: ...and thinking of home.

Archie: What will happen, father? Will they stop the war for Christmas or will they carry on fighting?

Father: They'll carry on I expect. Wars don't stop for Christmas.

Narrator 1: But this one did.

Narrator 2: Just once.

Narrator 3: On Christmas Eve, 1914...

Narrator 4: ...the guns fall silent...

Narrator 5: ...and the soldiers hear...

Narrator 6: ...a different sound...

A solo voice singing 'Stille Nacht' in German. As they hear the singing soldiers from both sides, grey and khaki, get to their feet and listen.

British soldier: We know that tune. We sing that one at home.

Song: 'Silent Night'

AUDIO RESOURCE 9: backing track for song

Soldiers in grey sing in German; those in khaki in English, alternating a line each.

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

Silent night, Holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin, mother and child
Holy infant so, tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Narrator 1: Next morning...

Narrator 2: British and German troops come out of their trenches...

AUDIO RESOURCE 9: instrumental of 'Silent Night' continues under and fades

The soldiers from both sides move towards each other in slow motion – each soldier moving towards a specific soldier from the other side. When they meet in the middle they reach out to shake hands, turning slowly on the spot as they do so, until they are on opposite sides.

Narrator 3: They slowly walk towards each other...

Narrator 4: They meet in the middle of no man's land...

Narrator 5: They look at each other...

Narrator 6: And then...for a few hours...it's Christmas.

The two sides are shaking hands and the movement is no longer in slow motion.

British soldier: Happy Christmas, Fritz!

German soldier: Happy Christmas, Tommy!

The soldiers mime the exchange of presents.

British: Christmas pudding!

German: Danke. Sausage!

British: Thanks, mate. Here have some cake!

German: Biscuits!

British: Whiskey!

German: Schnapps!

British: Photograph!

The two sides group closely together and pose for a picture.

German: Futball!

They start to play football in slow motion with a mimed ball.

AUDIO RESOURCE 10: FX - referee's whistle, followed by instrumental of 'Silent Night' under

At the sound of the whistle they all freeze. Then each soldier repeats the handshake and slow turn on the spot before returning to their starting positions. We hear the end of the carol: 'Sleep in heavenly peace.'

Scene 4

Narrator 1: The war rumbles on into 1915...

Narrator 2: ...as more and more men volunteer to join the army...

Narrator 3: ...Claxton's Jam Factory is struggling.

The ensemble becomes factory workers miming their work and making the factory sound effects. One of the workers comes forward. He's wearing an apron. Takes off his apron and puts on a khaki scarf.

Worker 1: Sorry, Mr Dobson.

Father: You're not leaving are you?

Worker 1: I've joined up, Mr Dobson. Got to report for training at the weekend.

More workers come forward putting on their khaki scarves.

Worker 2: Me too, Mr Dobson.

Worker 3: And me, sir.

Archie: What's the matter, father? You look worried?

Father: All my workers are leaving to join the army, Archie.

Worker 4: Bye, Mr Dobson.

Worker 5: Sorry, sir.

Father: This is hopeless. How am I supposed to make jam without workers?

Woman: There's more important things than jam Mr Dobson. There's a war going on in case you hadn't noticed.

The remaining factory workers stop what they're doing and stare.

Father: But people still need food. They'll always need food. Half the jam we make here goes straight to the army.

Woman: Maybe that's where you should go too, Mr Dobson.

Father: What do you mean?

Woman: Maybe it's time you joined up yourself.

Father: I can't join up. I've got a factory to run and anyway...

She puts something in his hand.

Father: What's this?

Archie: What is it, father? What's she given you?

Mabel: She's given him a white feather, Archie.

Archie: Why? Why did she give him that? What does it mean?

Mabel: It means she thinks he's a coward. They give white feathers to men who they say are too scared to join up.

Archie: My father's not a coward!

Mabel: I never said he was. But that's what they think. That's what they all think. Look at them.

Archie looks at the factory workers and the soon-to-be soldiers. One by one they hold up white feathers. Archie turns and looks at his father.

Scene 5

Narrator 1: Spring 1916. Another Christmas has come and gone...

Narrator 2: And the war rumbles on far away in the distance...

Narrator 3: ...far away from Archie's safe and comfortable life in Glaveston.

Narrator 4: Then one night...

Narrator 5: ...for a few minutes the war comes to Glaveston.

Narrator 6: And Archie sees it with his very own eyes.

Father runs on downstage centre. He stares up at the sky.

AUDIO RESOURCE 11: FX - the sound of the Zeppelin getting closer, then with artillery fire

Father: Quick! Mabel, Archie! Out of bed!

Archie and Mabel run to where their father is, rubbing their eyes.

Archie: What's happening?

Mabel: What time is it?

Father: Look! It's all lit up in a searchlight.

The ensemble gathers round. They all peer up at the sky. Artillery fire can be heard.

Archie: What is it?

Father: Zeppelin. German airship. Heading for London.

Archie: It's going to pass right over our house.

Mabel: Is it going to bomb London, father?

Father: Yes. Unless our guns can shoot it down first.

Archie: Look! It's turning...

Father: Yes. Trying to turn away. Maybe it's been hit.

Archie: What's it doing now?

Father: It's...it's getting rid of its bombs. Quick. Everybody get inside.

The watching crowd panic and run for cover.

AUDIO RESOURCE 12: FX - huge explosions

The explosions are followed by silence.

Narrator 1: The bomb lands in a field just outside the town.

Narrator 2: Nobody is hurt but the people of Glaveston have heard the sound of war.

Narrator 3: Their windows have rattled.

Narrator 4: The ground has shuddered under their feet.

Narrator 5: And suddenly it doesn't feel safe and comfortable in Glaveston any more.

Narrator 6: The next day Archie gets some exciting news.

Narrator 1: His cousin Walter is coming home on leave.

Walter appears.

Archie: So what's it like, Walter? Is it really exciting? Have you been in loads of battles?

Walter: Let's talk about something else shall we?

Archie: All right. (Pause while Archie thinks of something to say)
We saw a Zeppelin.

Walter: Did you?

Archie: Yeah. Passed right over our house.

Walter: Right.

Archie: So...how many Germans have you actually killed?

Walter: I said I don't want to talk about it. Alright?

Walter turns to leave.

Archie: Where are you going?

Walter: Billy Mason's house.

Archie: Who's Billy Mason?

Walter: My best pal. We were at school together. Joined up together.

Archie: Has Billy come home on leave too?

Walter: Billy's dead. I'm going to talk to his Mum.

Archie: What'll you say to her?

Walter: I'll tell her it was quick. I'll tell her that one minute he was standing there talking to me and the next minute...bang. Gone. I'll tell her Billy didn't feel a thing.

Archie: Is that how it really happened?

Walter: No.

Archie: So you're going to tell Billy's mum a lie.

Walter: I got to go.

AUDIO RESOURCE 13: drum beats as before

The ensemble march on the spot, the footsteps getting louder during the following narration.

Narrator 1: The war rages on.

Narrator 2: More battles...

Narrator 3: ...in more places Archie's never heard of.

The ensemble continues to stamp their feet as they chant. They mime buying newspapers as before.

The ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Conscription coming.

The ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Army needs more men. Call up letters going out.

The ensemble: Read all about it. Read...

Archie: Stop!

The ensemble freezes.

Archie: What does 'conscription' mean?

Mabel: Means they're running out of volunteers. From now on if you get called up you've got to go.

Father comes forward. He's holding a letter.

Archie: Father? What is it?

Father: Got my letter this morning. I've been conscripted. Called up. I've got to join the army.

Archie: But you said you were too old.

Father: They've changed the rules. I'm not too old any more. Looks like it's my turn.

Archie: I don't want you to go. I want you to stay here with us.

Father: Don't worry, Archie. I'll be all right. And anyway it won't last much longer now. Probably be over by the time I get there.

Archie: Don't say that, father! Don't say things like that. I'm not a child any more!

The ensemble resumes their marching.

The ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Heavy fighting on the Somme!

The ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Enemy offering stubborn resistance!

The cast: Read all about it...

Archie: Stop it!

The ensemble freezes. During the following narration Archie's father takes off his cap and puts on a khaki scarf. He hugs Archie's mother and then Mabel.

Narrator 1: This is it, Archie.

Narrator 2: Get ready to say goodbye.

Narrator 3: Had to happen.

Narrator 4: Sooner or later.

Narrator 5: Be brave, Archie.

Narrator 6: You're not a child any more.

Father faces Archie and holds out his hand. Slowly Archie takes his father's hand and they shake. The ensemble waves in slow motion and sings or hums 'We don't want to lose you' as Father slowly walks away.

Scene 1

Narrator 1: January 1917.

Narrator 2: Three Christmases have now passed...

Narrator 3: ...since the whole thing started and...

Narrator 4: ...Archie is wondering if this war...

Narrator 5: ...will last forever.

Narrator 6: Archie's mother's still doing her bit for the war.

Archie: She's given up the knitting. Now she's a volunteer at the new military hospital. She helps look after wounded soldiers.

During the next passage nurses blindfold six soldiers with white bandages.

Archie: What do you actually do up at the hospital mother? You're not a nurse or a doctor.

Mother: There's all sorts of jobs to be done at the hospital, Archie. Making tea, helping in the stores, talking to the men, reading to them, writing letters for them.

Archie: Why do you need to read to the patients and write their letters?

Mother: Think about it Archie. Work it out for yourself.

Archie: You should come along too, Mabel. They need all the help they can get.

Mabel: No, thank you. I don't like ill people.

Archie: Are some of them blind? Is that why you have to write their letters?

Mother: Yes, some of them are blind.

Archie: Because they've been shot?

Mabel: Shot...or gassed. They're using poisoned gas now Archie. Makes you go blind. Burns your...

Mother: That's enough, Mabel. I'll see you both this evening.

Song: 'When this lousy war is over' and 'We're here because we're here'

AUDIO RESOURCE 14: backing track for songs

When this lousy war is over
No more soldiering for me,
When I get my civvy clothes on,
Oh how happy I shall be.

We're here because we're here
Because we're here because we're here
We're here because we're here
Because we're here because we're here.

During the singing the blindfolded soldiers form a line each with a hand on the shoulder of the man in front. A nurse slowly leads them across the stage.

Scene 2

The ensemble as soldiers stands to attention. Father is among them. He's writing a letter.

Father: Dear Agnes, Mabel and Archie. Just a note to tell you that all is well.

Narrator 1: Thank you, men. Stand at ease.

Soldiers stand at ease and listen to the officer's words read by the narrators as he passes among them.

Narrator 2: I just want to say a few words about the big push tomorrow.

Father: The weather is very mild and it's starting to feel like summer.

Narrator 3: When you hear the whistle you will climb up out of the trench and start walking towards enemy lines.

Father: At the moment I am standing in a trench and I can hear birds singing.

Narrator 4: You are to stick together and follow your sergeants.

Father: At the edge of the field poppies and marigolds are growing.

Narrator 5: You are not to run. You must walk together at a steady pace.

Father: Thank you for the parcel you sent.

Narrator 6: We do not expect any trouble from the enemy tomorrow...

Father: I have already eaten most of the chocolate and have shared the cake with some pals.

Narrator 1: ...because our guns have been shelling their lines for the last three days and we think most of them have run away.

Father: They all said the cake was very nice.

Narrator 2: Try to get some sleep tonight, men. Tomorrow's going to be a busy day.

Father: I've got to go and get some sleep now.

Narrator 3: Good luck.

Father: All for now. I am thinking of you. Sometimes Glaveston seems a very long way away.

Narrator 4: I'll see you all on the other side of no man's land tomorrow.

Father: Your loving husband and father.

AUDIO RESOURCE 15: FX - whistle and gunfire, followed by instrumental verses of 'Stuck, stuck in the middle'

A whistle blows. The soldiers mime climbing a ladder and then in slow motion start to walk towards the audience in silence. A burst of machine gun fire followed by a huge explosion. Soldiers freeze tracks and hum the tune of the song. One by one lie down till the whole troop is on the floor. Finally there is just one soldier left, who joins in to sing the last couplet:

Soldier: Waltz our way off to Kingdom Come / The whizz-bang dance.

The song fades.

Scene 3

The soldiers remain lying down during this passage.

Narrator 1: 1916. It's early September...

Narrator 2: ...when the news arrives in Glaveston.

Narrator 3: Bad news.

Narrator 4: Archie can tell.

Narrator 5: He can tell it's bad news...

Narrator 6: ...by looking at his mother's face.

Archie: What's happened? Mother, tell me. What's happened? Is it Father?

Mother: It's Walter. Walter's dead.

Archie: No he can't be. Walter can't be dead.

Mother: I'm sorry, Archie. Your Auntie Kathleen's had a letter.

Archie: What happened?

Mother: The letter said it was very quick. One minute he was standing talking to his pals and the next minute...bang...gone.

Archie: Didn't feel a thing.

Mother: That's right.

Archie: It's not true!

Mother: Archie!

Archie: It's what they tell everyone. It isn't true!

Mother: Archie, stop it!

Archie: Everything's been a lie in this war. It wasn't over by Christmas, father wasn't too old to join up, it's not a great big adventure and when you get killed it's not bang...gone...didn't feel a thing. I bet sometimes when you get killed it hurts...a lot.

Mother: Archie! I said stop it! You're being very childish.

Mother walks away. Mabel comes forward and takes Archie's hand.

Mabel: I think we should go to Aunt Kathleen tomorrow. Maybe she'll let us take Walter's dog for a walk. What do you think Archie? Would you like to do that?

Archie: Yes. Yes I'd like that.

Mabel: Right. Then that's what we'll do. (Pause) I don't think you're being childish, Archie. Not any more.

Scene 4

The ensemble gets to their feet. They start to chant 'over there...over there' - whispers at first but slowly getting louder.

Narrator 1: Something is happening.

Narrator 2: German submarines have been sinking American ships.

Narrator 3: The American people are angry.

Narrator 4: And in 1917...

Narrator 5: America declares war on Germany.

Narrator 6: The Americans are coming over.

Archie and Mabel join the ensemble as they strain and jostle for a better view. We imagine the approaching US troops as the crowds wave handkerchiefs and 'Stars and Stripes' flags. We hear the intro to the song...

Song: 'Over there'

AUDIO RESOURCE 16: backing track for song

As they sing the ensemble start to march on the spot and slowly they become American troops.

Over there, over there
Send the word, send the word over there
That the Yanks are coming
The Yanks are coming
The drums rum-tumming everywhere!

So prepare, say a prayer
Send the word, send the word to beware
We'll be over,
We're coming over
And we won't be back till it's over, over there!

US sergeant: Company...halt!

Marching stops.

Archie: So will we win the war now, Mabel? Now the Americans are here?

Mabel: I don't know. Maybe.

Archie: But we've been fighting for three years. Why didn't they come before?

Mabel: Don't know, Archie. But they're here now. Better late than never, eh?

Scene 5.

The ensemble starts to march again moving as they have done before.

Narrator 1: Autumn 1918.

Narrator 2: And the tide begins to turn.

Ensembl Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Allied forces advance again! German troops on the retreat!

Ensemble: Read all about it! Read all about it!

Paper seller: Huge German losses on The Marne! German troops deserting!

Narrator 3: And then finally...

Narrator 4: ...in November...

Stamping feet stops. Silence.

AUDIO RESOURCE 17: a lone bugle plays the 'Last Post'

Narrator 5: ...on the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day of the eleventh month...

Narrator 6: The armistice is signed and the fighting ends.

Archie: Is that it mother? Is it really finished?

Mother: Yes, Archie. It's finished.

AUDIO RESOURCE 18: music for the celebration

Narrator 1: In every town and village in Great Britain people spill out onto the streets.

Narrator 2: In London the bells of Big Ben ring out for the first time in four years.

Narrator 3: Bonfires are lit in Trafalgar Square...

Narrator 4: ...and across the nation...

Narrator 5: ...there is laughing and singing...

Narrator 6: ...and dancing.

The music continues and the cast dance in pairs and in small groups. Archie and Mabel stand and watch the dancing. The music stops very suddenly and the dancers turn to look at Archie. He's staring at something and they turn their heads to see what he has seen. Father approaches, perhaps through the audience. Nobody moves. He looks at his family then takes off his khaki scarf. Mother comes forward and hands him his cap. He puts it on. He hugs mother and Mabel then walks towards Archie. Archie holds his hand out offering to shake but father takes him in his arms and hugs him.

Scene 6.

The ensemble turn to face the audience.

Song: 'Can you, can you remember?'

AUDIO RESOURCE 19: backing track for song, followed by instrumental version with a tolling bell

Can you, can you remember
 A time, a time of wheatfields?
 Think back, to skylarks singing,
 To when the bells were ringing...

And ask the questions – who, what, how and why,
And where, and when so many had to die.

Can you, can you remember
A time, a time of anger?
Think back, to pain and fear
Young lives cut short each year...

And ask the questions – who, what, how and why,
And where, and when so many had to die.

Can you, can you remember
A time, a time of friendship?
Thinking to help recover...
Thinking to help each other...

And ask the questions – who, what, how and why,
And where, and when so many had to die.

Can you, can you remember
Across the generations?
Think back, and share each memory
Reach hands across a century...
And ask the questions – who, what, how and why,
And where, and when so many had to die.

Can you, can you remember..?

The ensemble spreads very slowly through the space as they sing. Once they are spread evenly they raise their arms slowly (to make the shape of crosses in a war cemetery) or bow their heads slightly. Then they move slowly into groups of about six and make the shape of village war memorials.

As the singing stops the instrumental music continues and a bell begins to toll. As each narrator speaks someone comes forward and lays a poppy on the floor down stage centre.

Narrator 1: From 1914 to 1918 across the world at least nine million soldiers, sailors and airmen were killed.

Narrator 2: Russia: 1.7 million.

Narrator 3: France: 1.3 million.

Narrator 4: Germany: 1.8 million.

Narrator 5: Austria: 1.2 million.

Narrator 6: Great Britain: 743,000.

Archie: The town of Glaveston: 46

Narrator 1: [Insert here the name of the city, town or village where the performance is taking place followed by a number. Productions could also have cast members calling out names from their own local war memorial.]

The bell stops tolling. Silence. Stillness. Curtain/black.