

Victoria Park Primary School in Bristol booked Travelling Light's autumn tour **POBBY & DINGAN**. The Head loved it so much that he contacted us to see whether we could produce a play in a week with 150 pupils from Years 3 & 4. The audience would be parents, and the venue would be the local secondary school. We'd already been mulling over the idea of producing *The School Play* and the Head was more than willing for his school to be a guinea pig.



## Inspiring practice no. 1: Travelling Light's school play



Our planning and delivery heavily involved the class teachers, teaching assistants and lifesaving army of students on placement with us from the University of Bristol. Wonderfully for us as visitors to the school, the teachers told us early on “we’ll make sure the children are okay pastorally, you just get on and make the play.”

The inspiration for the project was the topic of study that term: the ancient Greeks. Very rich material indeed for some theatre! To manage the numbers we decided to produce two plays and let the children choose what they wanted to do: be in the cast for either play; be a dancer or a musician, designer or stage manager; be in the marketing or box office team. We added to the challenge by deciding to stage the shows in traverse.

Six weeks or so before the week, each class pitched what they thought the plays could be about. Professional playwright Mike Akers took their ideas and turned them into two short, witty outline scripts: *Gods & Monsters* (a battle between Mount Olympus and the Underworld, framed through a competition: *Ancient Greece Has Talent*) and *The Olympic Quest* (a journey to find the Minotaur's horn, the reward of which was the promise of the first Olympic Games). The scripts had minimal dialogue, plenty of opportunities for songs or dance routines, puppets and big designs, and they were only 15 minutes/five pages long, making them feel really achievable in our short time frame.



There were also lots of chances to improvise dialogue and set-piece scenes, write music or songs, and to dance. The team of stage managers provided an excellent support structure throughout and the marketing and front of house managers devised a wonderful environment for the audience.

This, combined with the fact that the stories had come straight from the young people, encouraged high levels of real engagement and empowerment.

The Head wants to book us again and he wants to encourage others to do the same thing. He is a brilliant advocate because he paid for the project from the school's budget. No grants, no fundraising drives, just investment in the arts from existing sources. We'll see what the children say once we spend some time debriefing with them but the fact that they came to school each day, that they were on time, that they remembered their lines, their moves or their responsibilities highlights that for them this was more than just a school play.

