

***Plough and the Stars* by Seán O'Casey**

Lesson activities

Starter activity: Teachers could ask students questions that prompt discussion around life for working class people in Dublin in 1916. For instance, what type of housing do you think working class people lived in? What do you think would have been the attitude of working class people to the Easter Rising? Would students expect those living in poverty to have supported or opposed the Easter Rising?

Object study (suitable for ordinary level): Students could read the opening of Act 1 of the play, where O'Casey gives a detailed description of a tenement dwelling in Dublin in the early 20th century and describes some of the characters in the play.

- Using information provided in the stage directions, students could draw and label a picture of the home of the Clitheroes.
- Students could read the description of the character, Fluther Good. Students could respond to the following questions: Describe Fluther's appearance in your own words. What does Fluther's appearance suggest to you about the type of life he has lived?

Object study (suitable for higher level): Students could work in small groups and read from the opening of Act 2, where the character 'Voice of a Man' is overheard giving a speech as Rosie Redmond, a prostitute, is chatting to the barman. The 'Voice of a Man' represents Patrick Pearse, as he quotes extracts from Pearse's writings. The characters Fluther Good and Peter Flynn enter the bar and are full of nationalist fervour having listened to the speech.

- Students could read the extract from Pearse's speeches and answer the following questions: What do you think Pearse means when he says 'it is a glorious thing to see arms in the hands of Irishmen'? (prompt students to think of contemporary events like the formation of the Irish Volunteers and the outbreak of World War 1) What surprises you about the type of language used by Pearse?
- Students could discuss the conversation between Fluther and Peter as they enter the bar. How would you describe the mood of the men as they enter the bar? Do you think these characters would likely support or oppose the Easter Rising? Explain your answer. Do you think that these men would likely get involved in the fighting during the Easter Rising?

The Plough and the Stars was first performed ten years after the Easter Rising and audiences in the Abbey Theatre rioted during the early performances. Based on your study of this extract, why do you think audiences were offended by O'Casey's play?

Follow-on activity: Students could read the entry for Seán O'Casey in the **Dictionary of Irish Biography**, <http://dib.cambridge.org/home.do> accessible free of charge through the Schools' Broadband Network. Students could find out more about the riots at the early performances of *The Plough and the Stars* through the **Abbey Theatre website** at <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/110moments/the-plough-and-the-stars/>

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