Byline: Terry Grimley

A new play opening on the main stage of [Birmingham Repertory Theatre](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Birmingham%2BRepertory%2BTheatre) **Birmingham Repertory Theatre** (commonly called **Birmingham Rep** or just **The Rep**) is a theatre and theatre company based on Centenary Square in Birmingham, England. It is one of the most influential companies in the history of the English Stage.  today is making a small but significant piece of theatrical history.

The Shooky has been commissioned by more than 250 children and their teachers from Birmingham schools as part of a groundbreaking collaboration between Creative Partnerships - the initiative for introducing professional artists into schools - and the Rep. The play - which will have daytime performances over the next ten days while the community musical Ridin' the Number 8 continues in the evenings - has been written by Peter Wynne-Willson, former artistic director of Big Brum theatre-in-education company, in collaboration with groups of 5-7 year-old children. It is being performed by a cast of six professional actors directed by Toby [Frow](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/frow) frow
*n.*
Variant of froe. , who was responsible for last year's acclaimed production of [A View from the Bridge](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/A%2BView%2Bfrom%2Bthe%2BBridge) ***A View from the Bridge*** is a play by Arthur Miller originally produced as a one-act verse drama on Broadway in 1955. It was based upon an unproduced screenplay that Miller developed with Elia Kazan in the early 1950s, entitled The Hook, dealing with corruption on the Brooklyn  on this stage. It has been produced by a team of ten teachers who took part in a job-swap with members of staff at the Rep, and have been responsible for hiring the author, director and set designer.

'They hired me in February, so it was fairly short notice,' says Wynne-Willson. 'My job was to write a play based on the children's ideas, with six professional actors and a proper budget.

'I absolutely loved it. It seemed to combine two things I spend most of my time doing, writing a play and working with young people. It could have been a token thing, but I took it very seriously and I think that's paid dividends for me.'

A little ingenuity is required to get the children's ideas flowing, he found, but after that it's a question of keeping up with them.

'I've got this old box, and we would find something new in the box each time and make up a story about it. It's most akin to playing with them.'

Funnily enough, Wynne-Willson thinks there may be a precedent for a professional author collaborating with children in this way in his own family history. He is distantly related to the [Llewelyn Davies](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Llewelyn%2BDavies) **Llewelyn Davies** is the surname of the family that inspired J.M. Barrie to write his classic, *Peter Pan*:

Llewelyn Davies, Michael, main inspiration for title character Llewelyn Davies, Peter, title character named after him

 orphans, the so-called 'Lost Boys' whose guardian J M Barrie became and inspired him to write Peter Pan. 'They were my grandmother's cousins,' he explains. 'My grandfather resented Barrie because they wanted to adopt them.

'The usual story is that he was this writer with a wonderful childlike imagination, but my belief is that a lot of the best ideas would have come from the kids. You get this mixture of pirates and cowboys and indians all mixed up, and that's the form of a child's imagination. 'I think the play I've written is riddled with that kind of imagination.There are some things that kids are better at and imagining is one of them. At 5 and 7 they have no qualms. They're being chased by a tiger and they run into the toilets at Pizza Hut and they're safe because there are only pictures of a boy and girl on the door, not a tiger.

'They don't have any problems mixing up tigers and Pizza Hut. But if they're a bit older they start regurgitating Harry Potter or Pokemon.'

The 'Shooky' - the word is a made-up one selected from a long list of children's suggestions - is a city park where children should be able to play. But the [park ranger](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Park%2Branger) A **park ranger** is a person charged with protecting and preserving protected parklands, forests (then called a **forest ranger**), wilderness areas, as well as other natural resources and protected cultural resources.  is obsessed with safety and the children are not allowed to do anything.

This sense of children being over-protected in the modern world is something which they raised during the sessions, says WynneWillson: 'One phrase that came up was they said they wanted 'A world without coats'.'

The only aspect of the children's imagination which is not fully reflected in the finished play is its violence. So out went the [zombies](http://financial-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Zombies) Zombies

Companies that continue to operate even though they are insolvent. Also known as living dead.

Notes:
It's advisable to avoid investing in zombies at all costs their life expectancies are highly unpredictable.  pulling people's heads off.

'It's still a bit strong at times, but that's been true about children's stories through history,' says Wynne-Willson, who adds that the project has been a steep learning curve for the actors.

'The children are very confident in their role as artists. They are not in awe of the actors or intimidated at all. If the actors mess it up they will be in trouble.

'If the play has bottled what was happening in the classroom and gives it out to the audience I'll be really happy, because the energy in the classroom was really fantastic.'

The Shooky is being performed during the day (various times) until July 17. Further details from the Box Office (0121 236 4455) or at www.birmingham-rep.co.uk. The schools taking part in the project are Heathlands Primary, Handsworth Grammar, Brays School, Paget Primary, St George's CE Primary, Dame [Ellen Pinsent](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Ellen%2BPinsent) Dame **Ellen Pinsent** DBE (26 March 1866-1949) was a British mental health worker.

She was the daughter of the Rev. Richard Parker and his second wife, Elizabeth Coffin. She married Hume Chancellor Pinsent (a descendant of the philosopher David Hume).  Special School, Anderton Park Primary and [James Brindley](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/James%2BBrindley) **James Brindley** (1716 – 30 September 1772) was an English engineer. He was born in Tunstead, Derbyshire, and lived much of his life in Leek, Staffordshire, becoming one of the most notable engineers of the 18th century.  Hospital School.

CAPTION(S):

Peter Wynne-Willson talks to children at Heathlands Primary School, Castle Bromwich, where the pupils have been helping him write The; Shooky

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