



## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GYPSY/TRAVELLER?

This worksheet accompanies Davey Anderson's play for TAG, Liar. Below are ideas for practical drama activities and questions to provoke discussion about Gypsy /Traveller families and their lives. We hope you enjoy using this material, before or after having seen the show.

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## WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT GYPSY/TRAVELLER PEOPLE?

- Are there other names for Gypsy/Traveller people? (Romanies / didcoys / tinkers). What do you think they look like? How do they live? What kinds of things do they do? Where have you got this information from?

Gypsies and Romanies have lived in different parts of the **United Kingdom** for many hundreds of years. They were originally believed to be Egyptians, which is where the name 'Gypsy' comes from. The idea that they came from Egypt was probably due to their dark complexion, exotic and colourful clothing and the fact that many groups arrived in Europe from the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. They brought with them a rich tradition of dance, music, craftwork and storytelling. These elements are still important to the different cultures to be found amongst Travellers.

In **Scotland** the phrase Gypsy/Traveller or Scottish Traveller is currently used by many people, including the Scottish Government. The name 'tinker' is now sometimes used as a term of abuse.

When you write 'Traveller' with a capital 'T' it means someone belonging to one or other of the groups described overleaf. A 'traveller' is any other person who just goes on a journey from one place to another. Traveller people call other people 'settled'.

Gypsy/Traveller or Scottish Traveller people are one of the four main groups that make up Scotland's Travelling communities. Each different Traveller group has its own history, culture and lifestyle.



## THE MAIN GROUPS IN SCOTLAND ARE:

- **SCOTTISH TRAVELLERS – GYPSIES/TRAVELLERS** - these families make up Scotland's oldest indigenous ethnic minority Travellers - see more information overleaf.
- **OCCUPATIONAL TRAVELLERS** - these families make up a business community that bring the shows and fair grounds to Scottish towns. They include circus families who also travel about Scotland.
- Since the widening of the European Community other **ETHNIC MINORITY TRAVELLERS** from Eastern Europe have come to live in Scotland - called 'Roma' these families live mainly in Glasgow. Some Roma came to live in Scotland in the early 20th century too.
- **NEW TRAVELLERS** - or New Age Travellers as they used to be called - are non-Gypsy Travellers and don't belong to show or fairground families either. They choose to live in groups that share political or environmental views that make them want to live separately from other people.

**Travellers also visit Scotland from other parts of Britain or Europe.** These might include Romanies or Gypsies from eastern or southern Europe, English Romanies, Welsh Kale or Irish Travellers.

All of these communities are sometimes called - incorrectly - Gypsies. This name conjures up a stereotype - what does the word 'stereotype' mean?



## **THIS WORKSHEET FOCUSES MAINLY ON THE LIFESTYLES OF GYPSY/TRAVELLER PEOPLE IN SCOTLAND.**

There have been Travelling people living in Scotland for over 500 years. Many people are reluctant to identify themselves as Gypsy/Travellers for fear of prejudice. Some Gypsy/Travellers feel that if they guard their identity they might find it easier to carry on living in their traditional way.

*“Nowadays you have to hide who you are to have a peaceful harmonious life because over the years you get sick to the back teeth of being treated like an outcast.”*

Patsy Hilton, Gypsy/Traveller (age 64) talking on [www.comelookatus.org](http://www.comelookatus.org)

*Jeannie: Aye, we get cried a lot of things. Not all of them complimentary. Some folk call us the mist people because of the way we come and go...like the mist.*

*Lizzie: What's a 'tinker'?*

*Stevie: You know, like, a gypsy.*

*Jo: Lizzie's eyes light up*

*Stevie: My ma telt me tae stay well away fae her cos she'll steal yer pocket money without blinking.*

*Lizzie: Really?*

*Stevie: Oh, aye, ye cannae trust folk like her. Ye ken whit they're like...*

There are thought to be about 20,000 Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland. In the census for 2011, people from these communities will be able to self-identify as a Gypsy/Traveller.

You might like to go to the Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP) website for more information: [www.scottishtravellered.net](http://www.scottishtravellered.net).



## WHY LIVE IN A HOUSE?

Many Gypsy/Traveller families choose to be mobile - this means not wanting to stay in one place for long.

*Lizzie: See if you could go anywhere you wanted, like anywhere in the world... where would you go?*

Many Gypsy/Traveller families **live in houses**. Others may live in a caravan that they call a trailer. Some families move around a lot, while others live for extended periods, and sometimes permanently on a site with other Gypsy/Traveller families. The local council runs some sites, and others are privately owned; these campsites are similar to those that settled people might go to on holiday

What does 'Home' mean to you?

- **As a whole class, in groups or individually brainstorm all the words associated with the word 'Home'. This could be feelings, images, objects, people.**
- **Is it the place, belongings or the people that are most significant?**

Travelling or Settled?

- **In two big groups brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of**
  - a) living in a caravan or trailer and travelling from place to place all the time**
  - b) living in a house and staying in just one place**

Here are two slightly different points of view from young Gypsy/Travellers:

*"I really love traveling and meeting up with other Gypsy/Travellers...I get so depressed when I have to go back to the house"*

Joe Townsley, Gypsy/Traveller talking on [www.comelookatus.org](http://www.comelookatus.org)

*"Whenever I started a new school I felt pressured when any of the children even asked me where I lived. When I told them I lived in a caravan they'd ask why, so I'd tell them it was because I was a Gypsy and they'd go on asking questions like 'were my family witches?' and other such daft things, like 'did I kill and eat hedgehogs?'"*

From BBC Devon Community Life - On the road as a Romany Gypsy



## WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TOMORROW?

In pairs discuss:

- What do you pretty much *know* you'll be doing tomorrow?
- Imagine if you had no restrictions and could decide what to do and where to go – what would you choose to do in that case?
- Suppose where you went and what you did had to cost *no* money? What then?
- Suppose where you went and what you did had to lead to something that could *earn* some money? What then?
- How much freedom do you feel you have now?

Gypsies/Travellers don't like the idea of being tied down to one employer and in one place of work. Freedom to move on is very important but they always have to think about making a living. Most Gypsy/Travellers are self employed, working short term seasonal contracts. This means having to travel to wherever the work is. Traditionally Gypsies/Travellers did work such as fruit picking, harvesting as well as selling things door to door that they had made or bought.

*Lizzie: Where are you going?*

*Jeannie: Oh, I dinna ken. Mibbae up tae Blairgowrie for the strawberry picking season. Or up by Strathtay for the pearl fishing.*

Nowadays there is less of this traditional work available and many Gypsy/Traveller families make a living dealing in cars, electrical goods or scrap metal, by laying Tarmac or monoblocking areas around garages.

*"In the past you could pull your trailer almost anywhere. You could put your kids to school without any worry of taking them out for the summer. You could go round the doors hawking (selling), looking for a living without a hassle. But now you need a license or you'll be harassed. I truly miss all the old ways of the Travellers."*

Patsy Hilton, Gypsy/Traveller (age 38) talking on [www.comelookatus.org](http://www.comelookatus.org)

- How prepared would you be to travel to wherever the work was?



## WHY GO TO SCHOOL TO LEARN?

Many mobile families will choose not to move during term time because they value school education. Because some families move from place to place, some young Gypsies/Travellers have interrupted education.

*Jeannie: D'ye like the school?*

*Lizzie: S'pose*

.....

*Jeannie: Couldnae drag me near they things. They give me the heebie-jeebies.*

Some Gypsy/Traveller children will only be in the local school when their family is working in a particular area - that could be for weeks, months, or several years - before moving on. Some Gypsy/Traveller families will be on the move all summer but return to the same school for the winter months.

- **How would you feel about this situation if it happened to you?**
- **What would be the best and worst things?**

Here a Gypsy/Traveller girl shares her experience of having to move from school to school:

*"I often used to walk around the playground by myself, playing imaginary games instead of playing Tag or some such game with the rest of the children as when it came to teams I was always one of the last to be picked. At one school the bullying got so bad that I used to make myself physically sick just to go home early. So, at the age of 11, I left school completely."*

From BBC Devon Community Life - On the road as a Romany Gypsy

Gypsy/Travellers have a strong belief in the importance of family and being involved with their wider family. Young Gypsy/Travellers learn from their family many of the practical life skills they need.

*Jeannie: If you ask me there's nothing you canna learn jist as well by living.*

- **Get into pairs. Each of you is to teach the other something practical that you know how to do –*show* your partner how to do it.**
- **What did you like about this way of learning?**
- **What kinds of things can you *not* learn about in this way?**
- **What was it like being taught one to one?**
- **Imagine you hardly ever went to school but learnt practical skills from your family and extended family. What would be the best and worst things about that?**
- **What if your interests were different from those of your family?**



## **DO YOU REALLY NEED THAT?**

Because they need to be able to move around, Gypsies/Travellers can't have lots of material objects - it's just not practical.

However, 21<sup>st</sup> century Gypsy/Traveller young people like to have the same kinds of toys and electronic gadgets as 'settled' children, but may swap them frequently.

- **List the objects you own which are really important to you. Which is the most important?**
- **Do you really *need* it in order to live or do you just like having it?**
- **How would you feel if you were expected to give it away?**

Gypsy/Traveller people distinguish between material things in two ways:

- objects that are commodities that can be easily bought and sold, such as a trailer, a van or animals.
- objects that have strong sentimental value such as the china and dishes that are passed on from one generation to the next. These kinds of objects, along with photographs, are invested with meaning and carry the family's history and culture.

Gypsies/Travellers feel that if you do not *need* something to live then one of the best things you can do is to give it away, without jealousy. Traditionally, Gypsies/Travellers believe that if you care about someone you should be able to give them something you don't *need*, even though it might be something you really like.

## **INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS**

Scottish Gypsies/Travellers speak a non-standard Scots called 'cant', which uses many words of their own. Some of these words have much in common with Romany words from European Gypsies and Travellers and also contain Gaelic and old Scots words.

- **Do you use local dialect words yourself? What are some of your favourite dialect words?**
- **If you have already seen *Liar*, what differences were there between the way Jeannie spoke and the way you speak?**
- **Cant is sometimes used as a way to make sure other people don't know what Gypsies/Travellers are saying to each other. Is this a good idea or not?**
- **Gypsies/Travellers like to think of themselves as separate and different to settled people. What is good about being part of a separate group in society? What's not good?**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If you would like any more information about any of this please contact:

Scottish Traveller Education Programme (STEP):  
The website of young Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland:

[www.scottishtravellered.net](http://www.scottishtravellered.net)  
[www.comelookatus.org](http://www.comelookatus.org)

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## LIAR

Liar by Davey Anderson, premiered at the Citizens' Theatre on 27 May 2008, played for two weeks at the theatre before touring schools and venues across Scotland.

## TAG

TAG is a professional Scottish theatre company producing work for children and young people, enjoyed by all ages. TAG is part of the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow and regularly tours high quality theatre productions to venues and schools, along with a diverse range of creative learning projects. Our work is designed to fire imaginations and ignite learning. TAG works in the UK and abroad.

## LINKS

For more information on Liar or TAG's extensive range of projects and productions visit:  
[www.tag-theatre.co.uk](http://www.tag-theatre.co.uk)

For information about the Citizens' Theatre visit:  
[www.citz.co.uk](http://www.citz.co.uk)

For behind the scenes information, news, pictures, videos and gossip read our blogs:  
[www.tagtheatre.blogspot.com](http://www.tagtheatre.blogspot.com)  
[www.citizenstheatre.blogspot.com](http://www.citizenstheatre.blogspot.com)

TAG supports Young Audiences Scotland.  
[www.youngaudiencescotland.com](http://www.youngaudiencescotland.com) - the megaphone for the vibrancy and variety of theatre for children, young people and families in Scotland.