SHERMAN THEATR • THEATRE

tilt
tilt-theatre.co.uk



A Sherman Theatre and Tilt co-production

BALLOON GIRL

Written and directed by *Hannah McPake*

School Resource Pack

About the play

Written by Hannah McPake, Balloon Girl is a co-production between Sherman Theatre and Tilt, inspired by the true Cardiff story of 14-year-old Louisa Maud Evans 130 years ago.

This wild, fantastical new play celebrates the legacy and bravery of a rebellious girl who became a folk hero, and the city that pooled its resources to honour her. Spanning 2,000 years of Welsh history, from Roman invaders and Viking raiders to Victorian Cardiffians and beyond, it will also shed light on humanity's capacity for performing extraordinary feats, often at the expense of ordinary people.

Hannah McPake said: "The political shifts in the 1890s – from women's suffrage to LGBTQ+ awareness, from workers' rights to children's labour laws – were seismic. And as history has shown time and again, those shifts were borne from the casualties of some of our greatest industrial, technological, and scientific achievements. I hope that Balloon Girl will show audiences young and old how history repeats itself and how alongside our limitless capacity for learning and discovery, we must ensure we take everyone with us."

The real life Balloon Girl and Cardiff's Great Exhibition

You can watch a mini-documentary about Louisa Maud Evans and the Cardiff Fine Art, Industrial and Maritime Exhibition of 1896 here. This 6-minute film, created by Chris Lloyd, provides some useful context to the history and characters featured in Balloon Girl.

Made possible with Heritage Fund

The Balloon Girl Schools Outreach Project and this education resource have been made possible thanks to a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru
Arts Council of Wales

Balloon Girl is a Sherman Theatre and Tilt co-production supported by Arts Council of Wales.

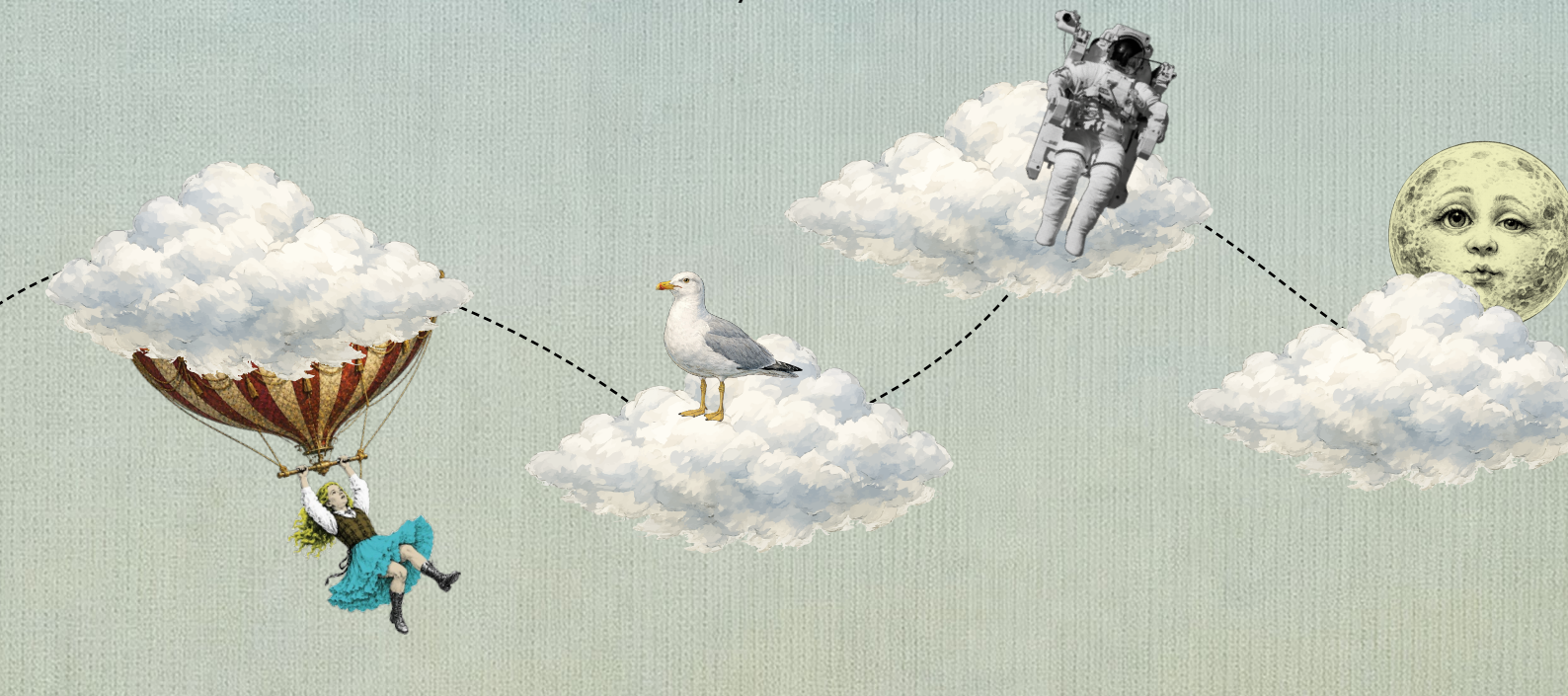
ACTIVITY 1

WATCH RECALL

Watch the mini-documentary about Louisa Maud Evans and the Cardiff Fine Art, Industrial and Maritime Exhibition of 1896. This slice of Cardiff history was the inspiration for Balloon Girl.



After watching the film, place the following events from Louisa's real life story in the correct order from beginning to end. You might like to cut out the bubbles, rearrange them, and create a timeline of Louisa Maud Evans' history.



Louisa Maud Evans is born in Bristol on the 6th of December 1881.

On the 11th of July 1896, Louisa leaves her job at Hancock's Circus and travels to Cardiff.

On the 21st of July 1896, thousands of people gather to watch Mademoiselle Albertina go up in a balloon.

Famous aeronaut Auguste Eugene Gaudron hires Louisa to perform a balloon flight at the Cardiff Exhibition under the name 'Mademoiselle Albertina'.

Crowds watch anxiously as the balloon is blown by strong winds towards Cardiff docks.

Mademoiselle Albertina jumps from the balloon, but the parachute brings her down into the Bristol Channel, where she disappears.

The Dangerous Performances Act of 1897 is passed in the Houses of Parliament, changing the law to ban children from performing dangerous acts for entertainment.

The inquest finds Louisa's death to be "accidental", but Auguste Eugene Gaudron is criticised for allowing such a young and inexperienced person to go up in his balloon.

For days, newspapers around the country report on "Young Balloon Girl Lost at Sea".

The Cardiff Fine Art, Industrial and Maritime Exhibition opens at Cathays Park on the 2nd of May 1896.

Louisa's body is taken to Saint Mary's Church in Nash and an inquest is held in the pub opposite.

Louisa Maud Evans is buried in Cathays Cemetery on the 29th of July 1896.

The people of Cardiff raise money for Louisa's funeral and memorial.

On the 24th of July 1896, fifteen-year-old Mary Waggett finds the body of a young woman washed up at Nash Point, near Newport.

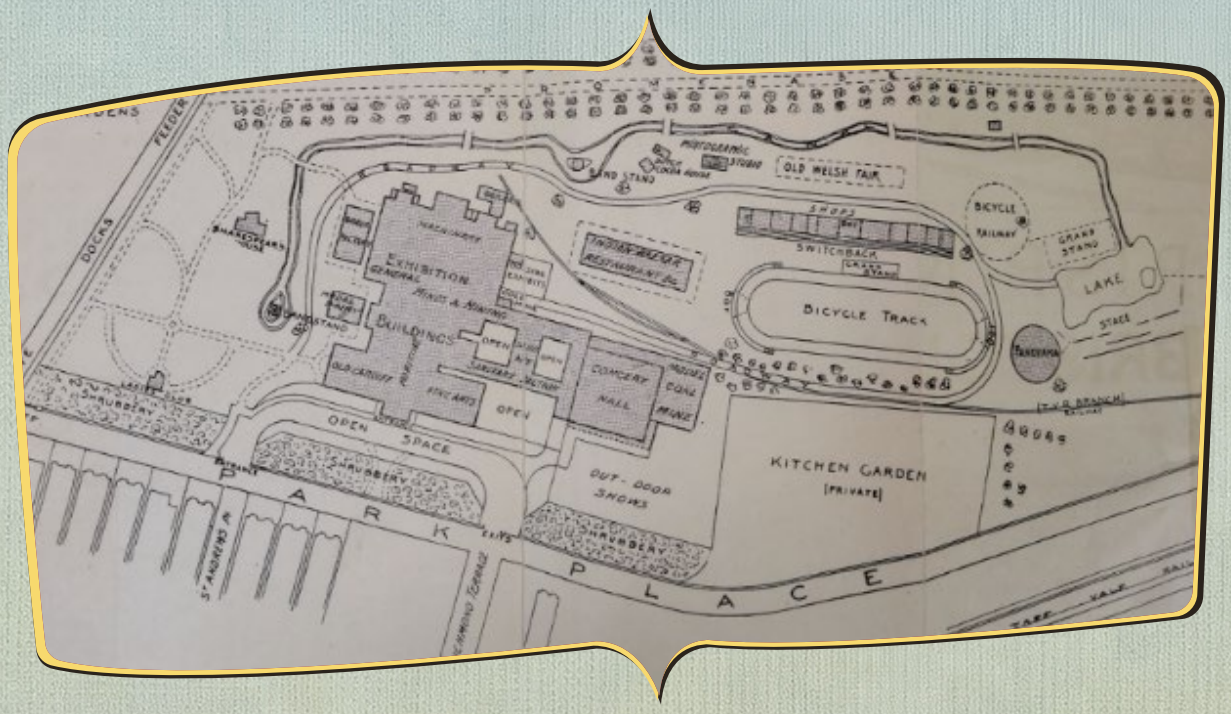
ACTIVITY 2

DESIGN
DRAW
IMAGINE

The historical events that inspired Balloon Girl happened during the Cardiff Fine Art, Industrial and Maritime Exhibition of 1896. This was a large event that took place at Cathays Park and ran from May to November of that year. Visited by almost a million people, it was planned to celebrate Cardiff as an important industrial and cultural centre, with innovative exhibitions and attractions designed to educate and entertain.

Among the attractions at the Cardiff Exhibition were: a walkthrough model of Cardiff during the Tudor period; a replica coal mine and gold mine; displays of ships and industrial machinery; a concert hall; art galleries; a full-scale reproduction of Shakespeare's Birthplace; an Indian Bazaar; a Welsh Fair featuring maze of mirrors, haunted swing, aerial railway, galloping horses; a jungle with lions, tigers and crocodiles; an electric railway; a photographic studio; and a lake with grandstand that housed an epic water show called 'Santiago'.

Below is a map of the Cardiff Fine Art, Industrial and Maritime Exhibition site:



Design a Great Exhibition for Cardiff today. What would it celebrate, and what would visitors see and do there?

What will your exhibition be called?

What is its main theme?

Where in Cardiff will everything be located?

What exhibitions, performances and attractions will it include?

You could include ideas connected to:

Arts and culture
Science and technology
Inventions and innovation
Industry
History and heritage
Language and traditions
Media and performance

The Cardiff Exhibition of 1896 was created to educate and entertain visitors while celebrating the achievements and ideas of its time. What would a Great Exhibition say about Cardiff today?

Choose your activity:

Create an exhibition map

Draw and label a map showing where visitors can find your exhibitions and attractions. Add a short description of each one.

Design an exhibition poster

Create a poster that advertises your Great Exhibition. Include its name, location, date and some of its main attractions.



ACTIVITY 3

READ
DRAW

Balloon Girl is set during the late Victorian period, specifically 1896. At the time, cameras and photography were less common than they are today. As a result, newspapers often used artist's impressions, or drawings, to give the readers a visual idea of the story.

Using the description below from 21 July 1896, draw your own artist's impression of 14-year-old Louisa as she may have looked on the day of her balloon flight. You will need to use your imagination to fill in the gaps!

You will need some paper and pens. Boark!



> "In the presence of a big crowd, she took her place in the balloon. She was dressed in a sailor costume, with hat, blouse and knickerbockers. Looking very young and diminutive, with bright blue eyes, she seemed cheery and confident."

WHAT ABOUT "DIMINUTIVE"?

Use a dictionary to look it up!

WHAT ON EARTH ARE "KNICKERBOCKERS"?

They are short, baggy trousers that fit tightly below the knee.

ACTIVITY 4

PERFORM
MOVE
IMPROVISE

The balloon ascent of Louisa Maud Evans, performing under the name Mademoiselle Albertina, was a popular event during the Cardiff Exhibition of 1896. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people gathered to watch this young woman take to the skies in a balloon.

Using the script on the next page as a starting point, with prompts on the following page, bring this exciting moment of Cardiff history to life in your classroom.



This is your Correspondent, reporting from the cycle track at Cardiff Fine Art, Industrial and Maritime Exhibition. It is almost half past seven on Tuesday evening, the twenty first of July. As I look out, there are large crowds of people as far as the eye can see, all gathered to witness a most extraordinary spectacle.

(CHEERS / APPLAUSE)

And here she is! The mysterious Mademoiselle Albertina. Appearing in front of the crowd for the very first time. The wind has certainly picked up now, as thousands of men, women and children crane and push to catch a glimpse of the lady aeronaut. And I can exclusively report that she is dressed in the costume of a sailor. Yes, a sailor! With hat, blouse and some rather fetching knickerbockers.

(A SUDDEN HUSH)

The crowd descends into an expectant hush as the famous Professor Auguste Eugene Gaudron escorts Mademoiselle Albertina to the large waiting balloon where she takes her place. Is that a flash of nerves across the young woman's face, or just the childish innocence of youth?

(BEAT OF TENSION)

[LOUISA: "Release the balloon!"]

(HUGE CHEERS / APPLAUSE)

And there she goes! Up, up and away! The balloon rising into the Cardiff sky. Listen to those crowds! They are delighted to be here to witness this exciting event.

Higher and higher Mademoiselle Albertina goes... over the chimney pots... over the factories... carried quickly by the strong wind.

As the balloon continues to climb, it becomes smaller and smaller to the eye. Now, the size of a football... now, a golf ball... now the tiniest full stop as she disappears completely from view...

1. GROUP STILL PICTURES:

Each group takes a line or section of the script and creates a still picture or tableau of that moment.

Then expand it into a series of three still pictures that show a sequence of events.

2. CLASS STILL PICTURE:

Start a still picture with one person, then each pupil to add themselves into the image until the whole class is a part of it.

3. GROUP SOUNDSCAPE:

In groups or as a class, bring the sounds of the script to life, playing with variety and volume.

Then nominate someone to be the Correspondent and read the text alongside your soundscape (you might want to split the lines up and have multiple reporters).

4. GROUP PERFORMANCE:

Now that you have the sound of the scene, bring it to life physically using your still pictures as inspiration.

Think about movement, individually and as a group, as well as playing with speed, height and scale.

3. IMPROVISE:

Put yourselves in the shoes of the crowds as they watch Louisa fly up, up and away until she disappears from view.

Improvise a scene between these spectators as they react to the events that unfold:

- What do they see?
- How do they feel?
- What do they think will happen to the Balloon Girl?

ACTIVITY 5

READ
EVALUATE



After the events of 21 July 1896, there was much reporting on the story in newspapers. Journalists relied heavily on eyewitness accounts to build a picture of what happened to Louisa on that fateful day. However, these reports varied widely, and many questions were raised as to their reliability.

Read the following eyewitness account of Louisa's flight:

"I was standing in front of the Pierhead Building at Bute Docks when I saw her jump from the balloon. The clock on the building read a quarter to eight in the evening. The wind had certainly picked up because the flags on the ships were blowing. When the parachute opened, the girl started to drift down, but something did not seem right. I believe she was being blown off course.

When I realised that she was drifting out towards the sea, I took out a pair of binoculars from my bag. Binoculars are a tool for seeing things that are far away, and I use mine often despite their poor quality.

She hit the water on her back, and there was a tremendous splash. It looked like it was about 300 or 400 yards from the shore, but it is hard to tell as I was a fair distance away. After a few seconds, she disappeared under the water with the parachute, and I could not see any boats near enough to pick her up. I am sorry to say that, in my view, nobody rescued the unfortunate lady as it was getting dark and the sea was a bit choppy.

This all happened in Cardiff on July the 21st. I came to tell you because I would like to see my words printed in the newspaper."

1. Using the columns below, separate the information into fact and opinion.

FACTS	OPINIONS	NOT SURE

2. How reliable is this eyewitness? Why do you think that?

ACTIVITY 6

RESEARCH
DISCUSS
REFLECT

Alongside Louisa Maud Evans, Balloon Girl features three other real women from history. In the play, they are part of a fictional group called 'The Navigators', but in their real lives they were trailblazers who achieved remarkable things.



Sophie Blanchard
(1778–1819)



Amelia Earhart
(1897–1937)



Judith Resnik
(1949–1986)

1. Using the research tools available to you (tablet, laptop etc), choose one of these women from history and learn more about them.

- Who were they?
- What did they achieve?
- How are they remembered?

2. Share your newfound information with the class, then discuss the following:

– What similarities are there between the lives and achievements of Sophie Blanchard, Amelia Earhart and Judith Resnik?
– How do their stories compare to Louisa Maud Evans' story?



WRITE
DRAW
CREATE

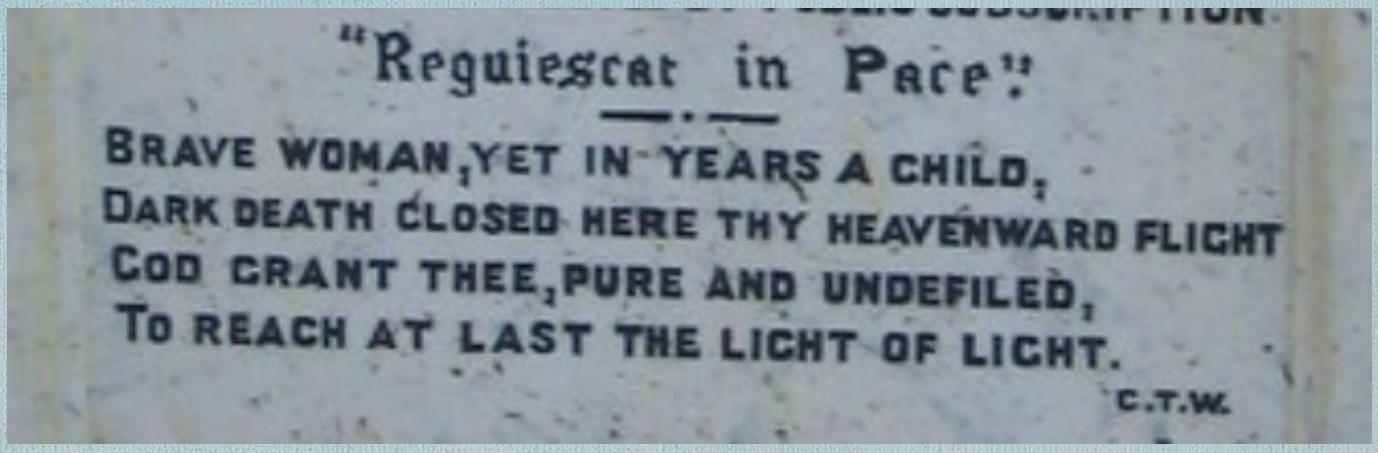
If you are inspired by these women from history, you might like to reflect on their lives in a creative way. Write a poem or a short story, draw a comic strip, or make a piece of art.



ACTIVITY 7

WRITE
REFLECT

Following the death of Louisa Maud Evans, the people of Cardiff came together to raise money for a funeral and memorial to honour and remember her. She was buried in Cathays Cemetery, and at the bottom of her gravestone is a poem:


"Requiescat in Pace."

BRAVE WOMAN, YET IN YEARS A CHILD,
DARK DEATH CLOSED HERE THY HEAVENWARD FLIGHT
GOD GRANT THEE, PURE AND UNDEFILED,
TO REACH AT LAST THE LIGHT OF LIGHT.

C.T.W.

Using the information you have learnt about Louisa, write a poem to tell her story and share her memory. (Remember, there is a handy mini-documentary available to view here, or jog your memory with Activity 1.)

You might like to use the form of an acrostic poem, where the first letter of each line reads 'Louisa' or 'Balloon Girl' down the page.

L

O

U

I

S

A

M

A

U

D

E

V

A

N

S

B

A

L

L

O

O

N

G

I

R

L

ACTIVITY 8

DISCUSS
REFLECT

The character of Thora Gronberg in Balloon Girl is inspired by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. She is famous for campaigning for change on environmental and social issues.

> I have learned that you are never too small to make a difference.
>
> GRETA THUNBERG



In groups or as a class, discuss and reflect on some or all of the conversation starters below:

- What do you think needs changing in the world?
- How would you go about making that change?
- What do you think will be different in the future compared to today?
- What kind of future would you like to see?