

## Ideas for drama classes, exploring the experience of internment in prison camps in the Far East during World War II...

### Dramatisation of Sumatran internment

Over the years, the experiences of the Sumatran internees have spawned a television series, Lavinia Warner’s acclaimed *Tenko* (1981-85) which was one of the most popular drama series of the 1980s and first brought the story of women’s wartime internment in the Far East to a global audience; the 1997 feature film *Paradise Road* (1997) directed by Bruce Beresford, which centred on the vocal orchestra story; and a play, Eleanor and Ray Harder’s *Song of Survival*, based on the book of the same name by survivor Helen Colijn, which again concentrates on the vocal orchestra story and uses the music created by Norah Chambers and Margaret Dryburgh. *Tenko* and *Paradise Road* are available on DVD (follow link at the foot of this page) while *Song of Survival*, which is written for a cast of 14 female speaking parts, can be purchased here: <http://bit.ly/15op1a0>

### Write and perform a short play

Performing *Song of Survival* may be too much for schools to take on whereas the writing and performance of a shorter piece might be more realistic.

#### *Setting the scene/Background*

We would advise showing your class some *Tenko* (episodes 3 to 5 of the first series set the scene of internment very well) or *Paradise Road* to acquaint them with the subject matter, or alternatively have them read extracts from *Women Beyond the Wire*, *White Coolies* or *Song of Survival*. Failing that, the material on this website could serve as background reading.

#### *Scenarios*

The short play could cover one of the following scenarios: arrival in the camp; the creation of the vocal orchestra to unite the camp; a first makeshift Christmas in the camp; a meeting at which prisoners decide how to work together more, pooling their skills, in order to improve morale.

#### *Characters*

Characters could include: a leader concerned about morale; a doctor concerned about the sick; a former teacher; a selfish person who does not want to pitch in; an older woman terrified of her new surroundings; a trouble-maker who doesn’t believe in keeping the captors happy; a pregnant woman; a profoundly religious woman; a very quiet woman afraid to speak up; a hysterical woman who sees death as just around the corner; a kind-hearted woman who wants to help everyone. Pupils should be encouraged to think how each character would react to the chosen scenario, perhaps discussing this in groups, before scripting the piece.

#### *Themes*

Themes that discussion and writing of the piece should bring out include: unexpected friendships, determination to survive, homesickness, optimism and pessimism, camaraderie, ingenuity, grief.

### Written Resources

There are many references to relevant books, films and television programmes to supplement your class teaching on the Singing to Survive website: <http://singingtosurvive.com/links/>