

## U3A PLAY READING NEWSLETTER

The Grange over Sands Play Reading group began simultaneously with the formation of the U3A in the Town in June 2000. A few interested members gathered together to decide how the group would operate and develop.

In the early days, the group met in one of the member's houses and read a variety of one act plays from a Compendium. In addition, two members wrote several short plays which the group thoroughly enjoyed reading. Another member discovered an abridged version of several of Shakespeare's plays which extended our repertoire.

Latterly, the play sets have been provided by the County Library. Research is undertaken to ascertain what length of play would be suitable for the group and, indeed, what plays are available. This is not always easily arranged as, at times, only a few copies of the play set may be in the Library's collection (and sharing between members can be difficult) or another drama group has booked the chosen play.

Whenever we can, at the end of a meeting members are given a copy of the next play to read through prior to the next session. However, this is not always possible and on occasions plays have to be distributed at the start of a meeting and read blind.

Our sessions are held once at a month at a local Hotel in the Town and usually last for 2 ½ hours: refreshments are provided by our Host and a small charge levied. At the end of the reading, time permitting, members discuss and share their views and take away a copy of the next play. Play sets are collected and returned to the Library.

The Play Reading group is not, and is not intended to be, a Drama group: plays are read with members comfortably seated. Wherever possible, members engage with their characters and try out the appropriate accents etc which adds to the fun and enjoyment.

"Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" by Tennessee Williams was our latest play (January 2015): it is the story of a Southern family in crisis, especially Brick (Husband) and Margaret (Wife), and their interaction with Brick's family over the course of an evening gathering at the family estate in Mississippi. The play features several recurring motifs such as social mores, superficiality, mendacity, decay, repression and death. The dialogue draws upon accents of the American Deep South which the group enjoyed exploring but had difficulty in maintaining for the duration. The play was adapted as a motion picture in 1958 starring Elizabeth Taylor and Paul Newman.

In contrast, our play to be read next month is "The Balcony" by Jean Genet. This is set in an unnamed city that is experiencing a revolutionary uprising in the streets, with most of the action taking place in an upmarket brothel that functions as a microcosm of the regime of the establishment under threat outside.

Genet is said to have re-invented modern theatre and Jacques Lacon, a psychoanalyst, described the play as 'the rebirth of the spirit of the classical Athenian comic playwright Aristophanes.' Martin Esslin has called "The Balcony" one of the masterpieces of our time and the Grange group awaits the reading of the play with eager enthusiasm.

Ann Anderson, January 2015