

DRAMA LESSON PLAN: THE BIRTH OF THE NHS

InteractiveHistory&RoleplayWorkshop | KeyStage2 - 3(Ages9–12)

TARGET AUDIENCE

Key Stage 2-3 (Years 4-7)

TOTAL DURATION

60 Minutes

CORE LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Explore Pre-NHS Healthcare
& Build Empathy

Historical Context Facts (Read Aloud Before Activity)

Gather students in a circle to transport them back to 1948:

- ▶ **The Big Day (July 5th, 1948):** Imagine waking up on Monday, 5th July 1948. This was the exact day the National Health Service was born. Before this morning, the NHS did not exist.
- ▶ **No Money, No Doctor:** Before this day, if you fell off your bike, got a terrible fever, or needed medicine, your parents had to pay cash to see a doctor. If your family had no money, you simply could not see one.
- ▶ **Heartbreaking Choices:** Parents often had to choose between buying food for the week or paying a doctor for a sick child. Many tried home remedies like brown paper and vinegar on bruises, or hoped for the best.
- ▶ **The Great Change:** On 5th July 1948, hospitals, doctors, nurses, dentists, and specialists joined together. Healthcare became free for everyone—rich or poor. It didn't matter if you had a million pounds or zero pennies!

Workshop Activities Breakdown

1. Warm-Up: "The Cost of a Doctor"

10 mins

Set-up: Clear the hall. Set up three designated zones using cones or mats: "*Wealthy Area*", "*Working Class Area*", and "*The Slums*".

Action: Children move freely. When the teacher calls out a symptom (e.g., "*Broken leg!*", "*Bad cough!*", "*High fever!*"), students must run to an area.

The Twist: Teacher acts as a strict Pre-1948 Doctor:

- **Wealthy Area:** Doctor bows, treats instantly, and takes a pretend gold coin.
- **Working Class Area:** Doctor says, "*That will cost a week's wages. Doctor or food?*"
- **The Slums:** Doctor waves them away: "*No money, no medicine. Try a herbal remedy!*"

Discussion: Ask students how it felt to be turned away simply because they lacked coins.



2. Freeze Frames: "A Visit to the Doctor"

15 mins

Set-up: Divide class into small groups.

Scenarios:

- **Scenario A:** A mother trying to treat her sick child with old home remedies (like brown paper and vinegar) because she cannot afford a doctor.
- **Scenario B:** A family handing over their final family heirloom or clock to a doctor to pay for medicine.
- **Scenario C:** The wife of a wealthy man has a high temperature and a rash.
- **Scenario D:** A factory worker hiding an injury from their boss because getting fired means no money for the family.
- **Scenario E:** A pregnant woman dreading a dangerous home delivery with no doctor or midwife.

Action: Pairs improvise a short scene and freeze into a still 3D "living picture".

Thought Tracking: Teacher taps frozen characters on the shoulder to speak one sentence in character aloud (e.g., "I hope this soup cures him, I have no money left" or "I feel guilty taking their last penny, but I have to pay my rent too!").

3. Conscience Alley: "The Difficult Choice"

15 mins

Set-up: Students form two parallel lines facing each other to create a narrow walkway.

Character: Teacher/student plays "Arthur", a poor 1935 father whose daughter has scarlet fever. He has money for either food OR the doctor's fee, but not both.

Action: As Arthur walks slowly down the alley, the **Left Side** whispers arguments to spend money on the doctor, while the **Right Side** urges saving money for food to prevent family starvation. Arthur voices his decision at the end.

4. Main Roleplay: "The Dawn of July 5th, 1948"

15 mins

Teacher-in-Role: Teacher puts on a jacket/clipboard as Aneurin (Nye) Bevan (Minister for Health) and announces: "Healthcare will now be a right, not a luxury. Free for everyone!"

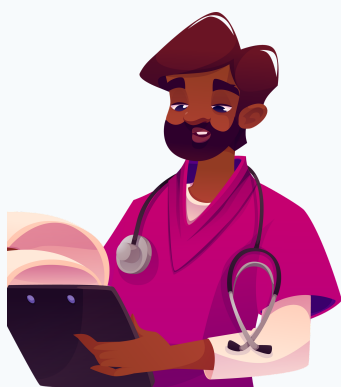
Task: Small groups use the printable character cards to improvise a 1-minute scene of visiting a clinic on day one of the NHS. Focus on parental hesitation, the relief when told it's free, and total transformation of care.

5. Reflection & Cool Down

5 mins

Return to a circle to ground emotions and discuss:

- How did the creation of the NHS change everyday life for ordinary families?
- What key words describe healthcare **before 1948** versus **healthcare today**?





PRINTABLE ROLE CARDS FOR ACTIVITY 4

Instructions for Teacher: Print these pages, cut along the dotted lines, and hand out one card set per group.



GROUP 1: THE WEAVER FAMILY (Working-Class Family)

✂ Cut along dotted lines

Martha Weaver

MOTHER

YOUR SITUATION:

Your youngest child has had a severe, rattling cough for months. You've used honey and warm cloths because you couldn't afford the doctor's 10-shilling fee.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Incredibly anxious. Standing in the clinic clutching your purse, terrified the doctor will demand money you don't have.

Thomas Weaver

FATHER

YOUR SITUATION:

You work long hours at the textile mill. You injured your shoulder 2 years ago but hid it from your boss to avoid losing your job. It hurts daily.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Skeptical. You keep telling Martha: *"Nothing in this world is truly free. There must be a catch."*

Dr. Evans

NEW NHS GP

YOUR SITUATION:

Yesterday you ran a private cash practice. Today you are an NHS doctor. Your waiting room is packed with people who could never afford care before.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Exhausted but deeply proud. Gently convince the Weavers to put money away and explain treatment is 100% free.



GROUP 2: THE SMITH FAMILY (The Shopkeepers)

✂ Cut along dotted lines

Arthur Smith

FATHER / GROCER

YOUR SITUATION:

You run a small grocery shop. In the past, you let sick poor customers pay later or traded food with the local doctor in exchange for medicine.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Amazed that a system exists where people don't have to bargain or trade possessions just to stay alive.

Lily Smith

10-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER

YOUR SITUATION:

You need eyeglasses. For two years you've struggled to read the school blackboard, giving you terrible daily headaches.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Excited and curious! You heard rumors that the government is giving out free spectacles to children and can't wait to see clearly.

Nurse Higgins

CLINIC NURSE

YOUR SITUATION:

You are setting up the very first NHS eye-testing clinic in the local town hall.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Highly organized and warm. Guide Lily through her first-ever eye test and explain to her father that the glasses cost absolutely nothing.



GROUP 3: THE REYNOLDS HOUSEHOLD (The Wealthy Viewpoint)

✂ Cut along dotted lines

Lady Eleanor

WEALTHY LANDOWNER

YOUR SITUATION:

You always paid for top private doctors at your mansion. Your doctor is busy, so you are sitting in a public clinic for the first time.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Annoyed and snobbish. You dislike waiting next to ordinary workers and think the NHS is a complete waste of tax money.

George Reynolds

TEENAGE SON

YOUR SITUATION:

Came with your mother to get a minor football injury checked out.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Disagree with your mother. You see how relieved everyone looks in the waiting room and feel a strong sense of national fairness.

Dr. Harrison

CLINIC DOCTOR

YOUR SITUATION:

Treating Lady Reynolds and her son right after seeing a destitute family from the slums.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Treat everyone equally. Politely but firmly remind Lady Reynolds that everyone in this building is equal under the law now.



GROUP 4: THE MILESTONE FAMILY (The Expectant Parents)

✂ Cut along dotted lines

Clara Milestone

PREGNANT MOTHER

YOUR SITUATION:

Heavily pregnant with your 2nd child. Three years ago, your 1st child's birth wiped out all your savings, leaving no money for coal.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Overwhelmed with relief. Visiting the maternity clinic today to get checked over before the birth.

Albert Milestone

GRANDFATHER

YOUR SITUATION:

Lived through the 1920s & 30s. Remember friends dying of simple infections because they were too poor for a doctor.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Deeply emotional. Tell Clara how lucky this new baby is to be born into a world where healthcare is a right, not a luxury.

Midwife Collins

LOCAL MIDWIFE

YOUR SITUATION:

Delivered town babies for 20 years. Used to hate demanding fees from poor mothers who couldn't afford it.

YOUR ATTITUDE:

Joyful and relieved! Welcome Clara, explain care and delivery are free, and give her a voucher for free baby vitamins.