

THE LAST WORD

One Act Play

Christina Castling

Characters

W (also R in Epilogue)	Reporter
O	King
R	Robber 1
D (also Y in epilogue)	Robber 2
S	Cashier
Storyteller 1 (S1)	Police 1
Storyteller 2 (S2)	Police 2
Prof	Granny Vera
Wordkeeper	Granny Flo
Jake	Judge
Sadia	Jury Member
Mum	Guard 1
Dad	Guard 2

Minimum cast of 26

All named characters are to be played by individual performers, with W and D playing different letters in the Epilogue (R and Y respectively). Robbers, Police, Cashier, Grannies, Judge and Jury member to take on roles as props/set (e.g. word-producing machine, doorframe, palace doors, pictures and table).

Maximum cast of 40

For a larger cast, different performers may take the roles of the letters in the Prologue and Epilogue. The Storyteller lines may also be split between more than two people. Extra performers may take on roles as other townspeople (e.g. those reciting words before bed and crowd members during the speeches) as well as becoming props/set (e.g. word-producing machine, doorframe, palace doors, pictures and table).

A note about staging the play

Whilst *The Last Word* is split into 10 scenes, this is primarily to aid the rehearsal process, not necessarily to mark changes of time or place. Such changes are described by the Storytellers (who remain onstage throughout the play, watching and commenting on the action). As a result, blackouts are not needed and a minimal set is appropriate:

- a raised platform for the broadcasts and palace balcony.
- an area with seats and table for the family meal and Wordkeeper's desk.
- blocks to be used as seating if necessary in other scenes (the Storytellers may sit on these during the action of the play).

Props

Certain props/parts of set (e.g. word-producing machine, doorframe, palace doors, pictures and table) are to be devised by the performers during the rehearsals. This is an opportunity for the cast to enjoy deciding what they feel these objects should look/move/sound like.

Some material props are also needed:

- Clipboard (Sc. 1)
- Notebook (Sc. 1)
- Net (Sc. 1, 9, 10)
- Cardboard words – 'Nice', 'Snot', 'Spit', 'Underpants', 'Puke' (Sc. 1)
- Plates and glasses (Sc. 2)
- Bag of sweets (Sc. 3)
- Map (Sc. 4)
- Bank notes (Sc. 4)
- Softmints (Sc. 4)
- Big book of words (Sc. 7)
- Box, with 'P' on outside, containing small vials of powder (Sc. 7, 8)
- Boxes of words (Sc. 9)
- Large vial of powder (Sc. 9, 10)
- Suitcase (Epilogue)

With a larger cast

Alterations may be made to the script to give opportunities for members of a larger cast, e.g.:

- Scene 1: Performers may invent names to match the part of the word machine which they have created. Performers may also say their names and describe the machine's action instead of the Wordkeeper.
- Scene 2: Words can be added to the list and spoken by additional performers.

Specific costumes

W, O, R, D, S and S, O, R, R, Y are to have their letters marked clearly on their fronts.

Prologue

W, O, R, D, S enter and face the back in a line across the stage. Each letter turns to face the audience as it is announced, revealing the letter on their front.

All A – B – C – D – E – F – G – H – I – J – K – L – M – N – O – P – Q – R – S – T – U – V –
 W – X – Y – Z

D There are over a quarter of a million different words.

W&O WOW!

R, D, S turn to face back. W starts stage right of O and then runs to the other side of O in an attempt to spell 'wow'.

S Words like 'sow'

S stands next to O to spell 'sow'.

R Or 'rods'

They rearrange to spell 'rods'.

D Or even 'sword'

They all rearrange to spell 'sword'.

S There are nouns,

W Pronouns,

O Verbs,

R Adverbs,

D Adjectives.

S There are just so (*O moves next to S to spell 'so', everyone else turns around*) many different words to choose from.

All face the back. They turn round one by one, going back into 'words' order as they say their line.

W Apparently, men use seven thousand words in a day

O But women use twenty thousand.

R One of the longest words in the dictionary is 'antidisestablishmentarianism'.

W and O clap in approval.

D 'Racecar' is spelt the same backwards and forwards

S And 'rhythm' is the longest word without any vowels.

All Ah, words!

W But what would you do if you had no words,

O Not one,

R Not even a little one.

D If one day they all disappeared;

S Just like that.

S clicks his fingers. All turn to face the back. Silence.

Storytellers enter.

S1 Well that's exactly what happened, one day, in the Land of Dowsr.

D, O, W, S and R turn round and rearrange into that order.

S2 Dowsr? That's ridiculous! It's not even a word.

D Yes it is! *(Indicates along the line)* 'Dowsr'

S2 *(To Storyteller1)* They've just moved round a bit. It's not even...

S1 coughs and gestures towards the audience.

S2 Ah, right. Apologies. *(Smiles)* So, in the land of 'Dowsr' it was just a normal Wednesday.

S1 Flowers were singing, tails were chasing their cats and Prof was hard at work.

(W, O, R, D, S exit. Storytellers stay onstage watching the action.)

Scene 1

Prof's house. Wednesday afternoon. Noise of an explosion offstage, smoke. Prof enters looking a little startled and spluttering. Wordkeeper follows closely behind holding a clipboard.

W.keeper Professor, are you alright?

Prof Absolutely fine. Couldn't be better. Nothing like an explosion to start the day with a bang. Where did I put my notebook? *(Finds it in her pocket)* Ah, excellent. Now, where were we?

W.keeper The whirling whizzer.

Prof Thank you. Yes, it appears that if we whiz the whirler too much it does, in fact, explode. This is not ideal. We want the whirler to whiz at the same time as the tizzer twirls and then, pop, we've got a new word. A sparkly, beautiful, never-been-heard-before word.

W.keeper The machine hasn't worked since yesterday.

Prof You're quite right. Quite right. This baby has been marvellous since I designed her 12 years ago but we all get tired, don't we? She's created thousands of new words and now just wants a bit of TLC. I don't blame her. Right, let's recap and we'll try again.

W.keeper First, there's the on/off switch, then we have the whizzer and the tizzer, then the rising rosters and the expanding exons. Next are the rotators, the screets and the letter-loops. These link to the polisher and the double-checker, then it's the chute and finally, the net.

Performers enter, one at a time, and use their bodies to make the different parts of the word-producing machine, taking up their positions as the name of their part is read out by Wordkeeper. Each performer must be linked physically with another section of the machine, have a sound effect and know its function within the machine.

The machine ends with someone holding a net (prop).

Prof Excellent. Let's try it again shall we. Stand back and I'll press the button. Come on you word-producing marvel, do your work.

Wordkeeper stands back, holding the clipboard as a shield and Prof presses the switch. The machine bursts into life and a word is produced at the end – a sheet of cardboard with 'Nice' written on it is placed in the net. Prof turns off the machine and Wordkeeper excitedly runs to collect the word.

Prof What does it say?

W.keeper 'Nice' (*holds up the cardboard*)

Prof 'Nice'? That's not a new word! That's an old, old word. It's a boring word. It's anurgh...word. (*Pause. She goes to stroke the machine*) Maybe she's just tired and wants a rest. Nothing unusual about that. If only the King didn't insist on having a brand new word every day, life would be so much easier. We could have a rest too. I could go on holiday, take up a hobby, learn to play an instrument perhaps. I've always wanted to play the jellied eel.

Jake enters, running.