

DRAMA WORKSHEET



KARA TOINTON

David Pugh & Cunard present the Royal Shakespeare Company Production

THE
CONSTANT WIFE

BY LAURA WADE BASED ON THE COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
DIRECTED BY TAMARA HARVEY

DRAMA WORKSHEET: EXPLORING LAURA WADE'S THE CONSTANT WIFE

ACT 1 - SCENE 2

Worksheet 1

KS3 – KS5 Classroom Resource

These extracts from Laura Wade's *The Constant Wife* present a charged and emotional moment between Constance and Bentley. Constance has just discovered her husband's apparent infidelity, and Bentley - her servant - becomes both confidant and mirror to her inner turmoil. The dialogue moves between control and collapse, secrecy and revelation, and explores how appearances shape relationships in a domestic world full of quiet betrayals.

WARM-UP: BUILDING TENSION AND SUBTEXT

Game 1: "The Secret" (10 minutes)

1. Divide into pairs.
2. Each student receives a slip of paper: one has a "secret" written on it (e.g., "You know your friend's partner is cheating on them.").
3. The other partner must try to discover the secret without asking directly. They can only ask general questions ("Are you okay?", "What's going on?").
4. The "secret holder" must avoid telling the truth but allow emotion and tension to build in their tone, body, and focus.

Reflection: Discuss how subtext - what is not said - drives emotion. How do silence, pauses, and hesitation create drama?

Game 2: "Status Switch" (10 minutes)

- 1 Label one side of the room "High Status" and the other "Low Status."
2. As you move across the room, adjust your physicality, tone, and pace to reflect shifting power.
3. Add lines from the script such as "You can trust me, madam" or "I feel sick, I feel...".
4. Experiment with how the same line can express power, weakness, manipulation, or compassion depending on status.

Reflection: How does Constance's emotional vulnerability shift her status in the scene? Does Bentley gain confidence, or does he remain subordinate?

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TEXT TASK 1: ACTING THROUGH SUBTEXT

Objective: Explore emotional honesty and class tension through close performance work.

Resources: Extract (Bentley and Constance, pages 26-29).

Step 1: Read Aloud

In groups of three (Constance, Bentley, and a director), read the extract from "Stay a moment, could you?" to "Then I leave him, don't I?" Focus first on clarity - don't act, just read.

Step 2: Layering Emotion

Repeat the scene with a focus on subtext. Directors should pause and ask actors:

- What is your character really thinking right now?
- What are you afraid to say?
- What do you want from the other person?

Encourage actors to use micro-behaviours (breathing, stillness, small gestures) to show internal struggle.

Step 3: Add Silence

Play the scene again but insert deliberate pauses after emotionally charged lines.

Example: "I feel sick, I feel..." (Pause - let her sit in that moment before continuing.)

Reflection: How do the pauses make the audience respond differently? Does Bentley's calmness help or unsettle Constance?

TEXT TASK 2: POWER AND CONFESSION

Objective: Experiment with tone, proximity, and honesty to explore the play's power dynamics.

Step 1: Rehearse the exchange

From "Madam, it isn't my mother that I go to see on my nights away." to "Thank you for trusting me with yours. I'll keep it safe."

Step 2: Play with proximity

Rehearse the scene three times:

1. Formal distance - actors stay several steps apart.
2. Emotional proximity - actors move closer as the truth emerges.
3. Power inversion - Constance sits while Bentley stands - who holds the emotional power now?

Step 3: Add inner monologues

Between lines, insert whispered or silent thoughts (e.g., Bentley thinking "If she knew the truth...").

Reflection Questions:

- Who has more control in this scene?
- How do you show empathy without losing status?
- How might an audience's sympathy shift during Bentley's confession?

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KEY THEMES AND DISCUSSION

1. Secrets and Self-Control

The script brims with secrets - emotional, romantic, and social. Characters conceal truths to preserve stability, yet each secret corrodes their relationships.

- Why might Constance choose to pretend she didn't see the affair?
- How does Bentley's own confession mirror her situation?
- What does Wade suggest about honesty and emotional repression?

2. Gender and Power

Set within a middle-class domestic world, *The Constant Wife* examines how women's economic dependence shapes emotional survival.

- How does class and gender limit Constance's choices?
- What is Wade saying about women's freedom, both emotional and financial?

3. Appearance vs. Reality

Throughout the play, characters maintain appearances — civility, loyalty, composure — while chaos brews underneath.

- How do politeness and restraint heighten tension rather than relieve it?
- Can truth ever be told safely in this household?

4. Trust and Betrayal

Bentley's loyalty, Constance's composure, and John's infidelity all circle around betrayal — not just of others, but of the self.

- Does Bentley's revelation make him trustworthy or vulnerable?
- How does Constance navigate betrayal while preserving dignity?

CREATIVE EXTENSION (OPTIONAL HOMEWORK)

Write a Monologue:

Imagine Constance later that evening, after Bentley and Mrs Culver have left.

- What does she think about her marriage now?
- Is she planning revenge, escape, or forgiveness?

Write 200–300 words in her voice. Consider tone, pace, and rhythm - is she calm, furious, broken, or strangely serene?

Performance Option:

Perform your monologue with a focus on stillness and eye contact. Use silence to communicate what cannot be said aloud.

Learning Outcomes

By completing this workshop, students will:

- Develop performance skills that explore subtext, tension, and status.
- Analyse how Laura Wade's dialogue reveals emotional truth beneath politeness.
- Understand key themes including gender, secrecy, and class.
- Reflect on how restraint and silence can be as powerful

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DRAMA WORKSHEET: SCENE 2 - EXPLORING LAURA WADE'S THE CONSTANT WIFE

Worksheet 2

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, students will:

- Analyse key themes and relationships within *The Constant Wife*.
- Develop performance and interpretive skills through voice, movement, and improvisation.
- Explore subtext, irony, and tone in Wade's dialogue.
- Reflect on how modern adaptation connects with period style and social commentary.

Warm-Up: "Constant Reactions" (10 minutes)

Purpose: To loosen up physically and mentally, and to introduce ideas about reaction and restraint — both central to Constance's character.

1. Circle Up: Students stand in a circle. One person calls out an emotion (e.g. shock, embarrassment, amusement, suspicion).
2. React Physically, Not Verbally: Everyone responds instantly with a gesture, posture, or facial expression.
3. Freeze: Discuss what physical choices felt "truthful" versus exaggerated.
4. Now Add Text: Read the line "So in fact you knew all along?" (John's line) - try saying it while maintaining your emotion.
5. Reflection: How does emotion colour meaning? How might subtlety or restraint make a reaction more powerful on stage?

Context and Discussion (10 minutes)

Laura Wade's *The Constant Wife* is a modern reworking of Somerset Maugham's 1926 play. It deals with marriage, female independence, betrayal, and appearances - but through Wade's witty, contemporary lens.

In this Act Two scene, the truth about John's affair with Marie-Louise has surfaced. Constance's calm reaction shocks everyone. Instead of rage, she demonstrates composure and ironic humour — unsettling the others.

Discussion Prompts:

- What expectations do we (and the other characters) have for how Constance should behave?
- How does her calmness subvert those expectations?
- What does this reveal about power, self-control, and emotional intelligence?

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Close Reading: Subtext and Tone (15 minutes)

TEXT TASK 1: READING THE SCENE ALOUD

In small groups of 4–6, assign roles: Constance, Martha, John, Bernard, Mrs Culver, and a narrator (to read stage directions). Read through pages 43–47 of the extract.

While reading, note:

- Which lines are played for humour? Which for tension?
- When does the atmosphere shift from polite to confrontational?
- How does Wade use pauses and interruptions to create realism?

TEXT TASK 2: SUBTEXT ANALYSIS

Choose two exchanges and discuss what the characters really mean:

Example 1:

JOHN: "So in fact you knew all along?"
CONSTANCE: "Yes dear. I knew all along. Would you like a little time to piece it together?"
- What is Constance implying through her tone?
- How does politeness become a form of power?

Example 2:

MARTHA: "Don't thank me, I'm furious at you."
CONSTANCE: "What for?"
MARTHA: "For putting up with it alone."
- Who holds moral authority here - Constance or Martha?
- How does Wade use dialogue rhythm to show emotional conflict?

Practical Performance Task: "Stillness as Strength" (20 minutes)

Objective: Explore how minimal movement and controlled delivery can convey inner power.

1. Choose a moment where Constance addresses the group - e.g., her long monologue starting "You found out a year ago..."
2. Perform it twice:
 - Version A: Expressive, emotional, reactive - Constance showing pain.
 - Version B: Controlled, composed, detached - Constance masking her feelings.
3. Reflection:
 - Which version feels more uncomfortable or powerful for the audience?
 - What does Constance gain by holding back emotion?
 - How might an actor use micro-expressions, silence, or pacing to show subtext?

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Character and Motivation: Hot Seating (10 minutes)

One student volunteers to be Constance. The rest of the class interviews her in character.

Possible Questions:

- "Why didn't you confront John when you first found out?"
- "Do you still love him?"
- "Why did you tell Bentley and not your sister?"
- "Do you feel superior to the others — or just tired of them?"

Creative Extension: Rewriting from Another Viewpoint (10 minutes)

Rewrite a short section (5–8 lines) of dialogue from Martha's perspective. Imagine her confiding in someone after this scene - perhaps writing a letter or leaving a voicemail.

- How does she interpret Constance's calm reaction?
- Does she admire her sister, or resent her emotional restraint?
- Use Wade's tone: sharp, articulate, slightly ironic.

Group Reflection and Discussion (10 minutes)

Questions for the group:

1. What does Wade seem to be saying about appearance versus reality in relationships?
2. How does this scene critique gender roles or emotional expectations?
3. Why might Wade have chosen to make Constance so rational - rather than dramatic - in response to betrayal?
4. How might staging, costume, or lighting enhance Constance's control or isolation?

OPTIONAL EXTENSION OR HOMEWORK

Design Task: Create a simple set or costume concept for this scene.

- What colours, textures, or props could reflect the tension between decorum and deceit?
- How would you signal that this is a modern reimagining of a 1920s play?

Writing Task:

Write a short reflection (300 words) titled "The Power of Composure". Discuss how Constance uses wit, restraint, and civility as weapons - and how this might feel empowering or unsettling on stage.

Teacher's Notes:

- Age range: KS3–KS5 (adapt difficulty as needed).
- Themes: gender, marriage, composure, power, deception, irony.
- Skills developed: textual analysis, subtext exploration, vocal control, interpretation, empathy.
- Cross-curricular links: English Literature (modern drama, adaptation), PSHE (relationships and communication).

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DRAMA & LITERATURE WORKSHEET: EXPLORING THE ENDING OF LAURA WADE'S THE CONSTANT WIFE

Worksheet 3

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, students will:

- Analyse the transformation of Constance's character and her assertion of independence.
- Explore the play's tone, irony, and emotional resolution through practical performance.
- Reflect on how Wade's reworking of Maugham's play challenges modern gender expectations.
- Develop solo, pair, and group performance techniques for interpreting subtext and staging the ending.

Warm-Up: "Controlled Chaos" (10 minutes)

Purpose: To explore contrast between calm surface and emotional turbulence - central to Constance's final scenes.

1. Students walk freely around the space. The teacher calls out emotional states (e.g. *anger, relief, sarcasm, freedom*).
2. Students respond with only pace and posture, not facial expression.
3. When "Freeze" is called, they speak one line from the extract - e.g.
"I want to know that I'm eloquent and witty when I'm dead silent."
4. Repeat using opposite emotional choices (e.g. say it joyfully instead of bitterly).

Reflection: How can physical control convey power or irony? How might Constance's composure be her final act of rebellion?

Context & Discussion (10 minutes)

In the final scenes, Constance rejects the roles expected of her - dutiful wife, moral victim, emotional dependent. Instead, she redefines marriage on her own terms, stating she wants "*to live my life with a husband who's free to go his way, and I'm free to go mine.*"

Discussion Prompts:

- How does this ending differ from a traditional "restoration" of marriage or moral order?
- Is Constance's final speech liberating or ironic?
- How does Wade balance humour and heartbreak here?

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Solo Task: Constance's Final Monologue (15 minutes)

(Pages 70–71: “I want to know that I’m eloquent and witty when I’m dead silent...”)

Task:

Perform Constance's monologue three times, exploring different interpretations:

1. Irony & Poise: Deliver the speech as if Constance has emotionally detached herself - polished, witty, unfazed.
2. Defiance: Speak with a simmering anger beneath composure - the speech as a form of protest.
3. Liberation: Deliver with lightness and humour - a woman stepping into her freedom.

Reflect:

- Which interpretation feels truest to Wade's tone?
- How might your physicality (stillness, gesture, eye contact) change the audience's sympathy?
- Does Constance “win” by the end, or simply redefine the game?

Pair Task: The Constance–John Confrontation (15 minutes)

(Pages 71–73)

Work in pairs as **Constance and John**.

Focus on the shifting power dynamic: John begins apologetic, even remorseful, but Constance calmly dismantles his emotional control.

Exercise Steps:

1. Perform once naturally, following the rhythm of the dialogue.
2. Swap roles - each actor must now perform as the opposite energy (John calm, Constance volatile).
3. Discuss:
 - o How does emotional control shift audience sympathy?
 - o What tone do you think Wade intended — tragic, comedic, or both?
 - o How does the modern feminist lens affect how we judge Constance's choices?

Extension:

Add physical blocking - where do these two stand? Who sits? Who moves closer or further away? How can proximity and stillness underline their emotional distance?

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Group Task: Re-Staging the Ending (20 minutes)

Form groups of 4–6. You'll stage a short version (3–5 minutes) of the final act, including Constance, John, Mrs Culver, and Bentley.

Step 1 – Choose a Style:

- Naturalistic: realistic dialogue, domestic setting.
- Stylised: symbolic lighting, repeated movement motifs.
- Satirical: highlight the absurdity of social expectations, perhaps breaking the fourth wall.

Step 2 – Focus Questions:

- How does each character respond to Constance's decision?
- Is the ending empowering, lonely, or comic?
- How might sound, lighting, or costume reinforce Constance's independence?

Step 3 – Perform and Reflect:

After each group performs, discuss:

- What version felt most authentic or effective?
- How did tone (serious vs playful) change the audience's understanding of Constance's final choice?

Textual Analysis (English Literature Focus) (15 minutes)

1. Close Reading Prompt:

"It's quite simple, mother. I want to live my life with a husband who's free to go his way, and I'm free to go mine."

- How does Wade use plain, clear language to convey radical independence?
- Compare this to an earlier line (Act Two, Scene One): "Would you like a little time to piece it together?" — how has Constance's tone evolved?

2. Symbolism & Irony:

- The "cigarette case" and "parasol" become symbols of deceit and polite civility. How do these props encapsulate the theme of appearances?
- Does Wade's Constance achieve true freedom, or is her "freedom" still defined by social performance?

3. Comparative Task:

Compare Wade's Constance to another literary or dramatic heroine who defies societal norms (e.g., Nora in *A Doll's House*, Lizzy Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, or Hedda Gabler).

- How do these women use intellect, wit, or composure to claim control?

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Plenary & Reflection (10 minutes)

Class Discussion:

- What final image or emotion should the audience leave with?
- How might a director choose to stage Constance's exit - triumphant, ironic, or quietly devastating?
- Does Wade offer resolution or ambiguity?

Individual Written Task:

Write a 200-word reflection titled "*The Cost of Freedom*".

Explain what Constance sacrifices and gains by rejecting conventional marriage. Use quotations from the extract to support your view.

Teacher's Notes

- **Age Range:** KS3–KS5 (tasks can be scaled by complexity).
- **Focus Areas:** Feminism, performance analysis, irony, relationships, self-determination.
- **Skills Developed:** Voice and movement work, text interpretation, empathy, comparative analysis.
- **Cross-Curricular Links:** English Literature (modern drama, gender), PSHE (identity and independence), Theatre Studies.

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