***Dr Who***



**Series 8 Episode 8 Mummy on the Orient Express**

This episode is about matters of life and death

**Synopsis**

The Doctor and his companion Clara have agreed to part company, so the Doctor takes Clara to the Orient Express for one ‘last hurrah’. Despite the opulence of the train, which is flying through space, all is not well. An elderly woman, more than a hundred years old, sees a mummy coming towards her. No one else can see the creature, but when it reaches her, she dies. Shortly afterwards, a young chef experiences the same thing.

The Doctor senses something is wrong. He talks to one of the other passengers who is an expert on ‘The Foretold’ a mythical creature which acts like the mummy does. If you see the mummy, you die 66 seconds later. The Doctor wonders why the other passengers seem to have been chosen for their knowledge of the creature, or their scientific prowess. He is therefore unsurprised when the train turns into a laboratory.

A voice belonging to ‘Gus’ announces that the scientists and experts have been gathered together and given tools to discover what The Foretold is and what it does. Their task is to work it out and contain it so that ‘Gus’ can use it in some way. As punishment for the Doctor talking to Clara on the phone, the kitchen staff are killed. The Doctor tells those around him that ‘Gus’ intends for them to die and to study the mummy as each is killed.

The Doctor begins to think about the mummy and its behaviour. How does it choose its victims? He realises that it is picking off the weak, - frailty or illness or psychiatric problems. The mythology expert is next and the Doctor asks him to give him details about it, to make his death count, not to waste his last moments and to fight superstition. But the expert says it’s his life and his death and maybe he can reason with it or bargain for his life. He dies. As the mummy comes for the train conductor who suffers PTSD, he tries to describe what is happening so that the Doctor can learn from it, in particular that the mummy can reach right through the Doctor like a ghost. The Doctor realises that the mummy leaches all the energy from a person, moving the energy out of phase.

Now the Doctor works out that Maisie, a passenger who is with Clara, is the next victim. He tells Clara to cheat her or lie to her to get her to come to the ‘laboratory’ and that he can save her. Clara does so, telling Maisie that the Doctor is a ‘good man’ (the central theme of the series). When Maisie arrives, the mummy comes for her, but the Doctor siphons off her mental disturbances – guilt and hatred, and the mummy comes for him instead.

In the 66 seconds, the Doctor works out that the mummy is a soldier suffering from malfunctioning tech and manages to stand it down, whereupon it disintegrates. The Doctor reveals that he has been approached to join the train before and Clara accuses him of taking up the invitation to have the chance to do something risky and dangerous rather than take her out for dinner. She accuses him of deceit.

‘Gus’ then announces that survivors are not required and proceeds to remove the air. The Doctor attempts to use the tech belonging to the mummy to save them all.

Clara, wrapped in a blanket, awakens on a beach. The Doctor says that he managed to save everyone, but that he had had to pretend that he could do so when he didn’t know if he could. He points out that when all the choices are bad ones you still have to choose. Clara says that she realises that he can’t give up living his life like this, filled with danger and risk and unknowing. After speaking to Danny, her boyfriend, she changes her mind and tells the Doctor she wants to go on travelling with him.

**Issues for discussion**

* What would you do if you knew you only had seconds left to live? Would you try to save yourself by any means possible, or would you use the time to help others?
* Is there a good or heroic way to die? What is it that gives meaning to death?
* What does this episode tell us about salvation? Was Clara right to trust the Doctor and to tell Maisie that he is a ‘good man’?
* The Doctor showed himself ready to sacrifice himself when he diverted the mummy from Maisie. Why do you think he did that?
* What do you make of the idea that when all the choices are bad ones, you still have to choose. To what sort of situations in life might these words be relevant?
* What do you make of Clara’s choice at the end about staying with the Doctor? What role do trust and being saved come into that decision? What does Danny’s love have to do with it?
* Another theme of the series is war and being a soldier. What do you make of the deaths of the soldiers which caused the conductor’s post-traumatic stress, and the mummy’s own endless mission? Do you think the Doctor has come to bring peace?
* What’s the difference between ‘Gus’ and the Doctor’s desire to gain knowledge?