

# **FLASH LANGUAGE – 1860 to 1862**

## **York Police Occurrence Book**

### **IMPROVISATION / PLAYBUILDING**

**Suitable years: 5 to 12**

**Number of Students: as many as required**

#### **Venue:**

These improvisation pieces could be performed in the cells, kitchen, exercise or stable yard or the 1874 courtroom of the York Courthouse Complex.

#### **Synopsis:**

In the back pages of the York Police Occurrence book for 1860 – 1862 someone has compiled a list of the 'flash' or 'cant' (slang) language commonly used by the convict charges. The following table has been adapted from the original text. The order of the words has been changed and some explanations have been added.

#### **Suggested Activities:**

- You are a prisoner in the York Gaol. Make up some sentences that might help you to talk to other prisoners in gaol without the warders or police understanding what you are talking about. Use your sentences to have a conversation with another 'prisoner'.
- You are young convicts in York Gaol. You might be awaiting trial for absconding (leaving) your position as a servant or for stealing from your employer. You were originally sent to the Swan River Colony after being found guilty of pick pocketing, shoplifting or robbery. Using the Flash Language, improvise a short scene, telling another about your past.



## FLASH LANGUAGE – 1860 to 1862

### York Police Occurrence Book

The York police recorded their daily activities in the Occurrence Book. Each entry was carefully hand written using pen and ink.

In 1860 the police would have been dealing with convicts in work parties as well as the Ticket of Leave convicts who found themselves in trouble again. Many of these convicts had been transported to the Swan River Colony for crimes of burglary, pick pocketing, shoplifting and robbery.

In the back pages of the York Police Occurrence book for 1860 – 62 someone has compiled a list of the ‘flash’ or ‘cant’ (slang) language commonly used by the convict charges. The following table has been adapted from the original text. The order of the words has been changed and some explanations have been added.

#### ***From the York Police Occurrence Book (1860 –62)***

*“I shall add the flash or cant language used and known by every thief and itinerant beggar in the Kingdom and collected down to the present period. I had in custody a short time ago, an old cadger who had been in almost all the gaols throughout England and who furnished me, for a trifling fee, with the same. I have since compared it with my own and with others, and made what alterations I thought proper; that is in leaving out what was old and now not in use.”*

<b>TERM</b>	<b>FLASH LANGUAGE</b>
thieves	family men
thieving	on the cross
thieving (another word)	on the game
a thief	a cross cove
to rob	case
rob a gentleman	to case a bloak
to thieve	to prig
to hustle or rob	to flimp
shop lifting	shop bouncing
shoplifting in pairs	palming
stolen property	swag
a shop	a chovey
a shop dealer who buys stolen property	a swag chovey bloak
buyers of stolen property	fences
a share of the stolen goods	a regular

companions	mobs
to pick pockets	to buzz
an accomplice	a stalsman
a fancy gentleman	a bloak
person who teaches boys to steal	kidsman
a lookout (for policemen)	a crow
watching (a pickpocket target)	marking
a well dressed person	a swell
a person	a pig
a policeman	a fly
to mark out a person for robbery	to plant
to run away	to speel
to inform	to split
to pay	to tip
to snatch	to snam
to talk	to patter
stealing	nailing
don't say a word: be quiet	mum
to be cunning or sly	fight coakum
caught, taken or disposed of	booked
to hand on the booty to a girl or friend	to copbusy
to run away with stolen property	to speel the drum
to inform	to come it
giving up thieving	tied up togging
going without shoes	gadding the hoof
a purse	a skin
a pair of scissors	a pair of snips
outside coat pocket	hip outside
inside coat pocket	hip inside
to alter a maker's name in a watch	to christen a yack
to have the works of a watch put in another case	to curch a yack
a pocket book (wallet)	a dummy
a silk handkerchief (silk was an expensive fabric)	a billy
yellow silk handkerchief	yellow man

blue silk handkerchief	waterman
soap	slippery
snuffbox – (little container, perhaps silver, containing snuff powder)	a sneezer
gold	redge
silver	wedge
silver spoon	wedge feeder
a ring	a fawny
clothes	togs or toggery
a pair of britches (trousers)	kicksters
gift of clothes	cant of togs
a coach or carriage	a drag
old rags	tats.
bolt of irish linen (expensive hand made cloth)	roll of snow
one who cuts suitcases off carriages	a dragsman
snatching articles from a carriage (grabbing them as they carriage goes past)	culling
house	crib
house breakers	cracksmen/pampmen
to break into a house	to crack a crib
house breaking implements	screws
to catch (something that is thrown out of a window by a fellow thief)	to grab
breaking a window with a fist or taking out a square of glass	spanking the glaze
breaking a window by breaking the corner with a rock	starring the glaze
to open a window	to fly a window
tramps lodging house	a padding ken
a horse	a prad
to steal a horse	to free a prad
bacon	sawney
poultry stealer	beaker hunter
catching geese by bait	snagging
fake doctors (quacks)	crocusses

fortune telling	dookin
beggar	cadger
beggars	croakers
fellows who go about half naked begging for clothes	shallow coves
begging letter	fake meat
embezzling	bilking
bad money (fake or stolen)	schofel
a passer of bad money	a smasher
makers of fake coins	bit makers
drunken	lushy
gin – (cheap strong alcohol, popular at the time)	blue vein
to deceive a cheat	to gammon
the broth (soup) served as a meal in prisons	skilly
prison allowance of meat	a ball
to be transported (as a convict)	to be lagged