

National Theatre

Gone Too Far!: Teachers' Educational Resource Pack

Archive Resource Pack

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This resource pack contain themes and details that might be challenging, emotionally activating or triggering. It is not our intention to cause distress or harm but to support your understanding of the play and its creative and historical contexts.

Please contact the National Theatre Archive (archive@nationaltheatre.org.uk) for any questions, enquiries, or feedback about the material within this resource.

Introduction

Gone too Far! is a witty comedy revolving around two Nigerian brothers on a south London estate who have to navigate friendship, conflict and cultural identity clashes when tasked with buying milk by their mother. Yemi, the younger of the two brothers, is born in London and finds the arrival of his older brother from Nigeria a hindrance when he wants to tag along to the shops, a short distance away. Yemi, who wants to appear cool and gain street cred, finds his exuberant and lively culturally secure older brother Ikudayisi bold, curious and out of touch with the local estate culture.

The playwright – Bola Agbaje

Bola Agbaje is an award-winning British playwright and screen writer of Nigerian descent who was raised on the North Peckham estate in southeast London, an area of London with a diverse and vibrant community. Agbaje began her career as an actress at the Identity School of Acting, founded by Olufemi Ogunsanwo OBE, but transitioned to playwriting due to what she perceived as the lack of complex, multi-layered roles for Black actors in Britain.

Her debut play, *Gone Too Far!*, premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2007 as part of its Young Writers Festival and won the Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre in 2008. Agbaje's work often explores themes of belonging and culture, and the experiences of young Black Britons both in England and across the diaspora, looking at tensions that can arise when there are conflicts between racial and cultural identities. She has also written *Off the Endz*, which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2010, delving into issues of responsibility and choice within urban life.

Original performance

Gone Too Far! was written as part of the Royal Court Young Writers programme and was originally performed at the Royal Court Upstairs in 2007. The production went on to win the prestigious Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Affiliate Theatre in 2008 and the play has been recently revived in 2023 by the National Youth Theatre. The play is now a set text for Edexcel GCSE drama.

Please note: the play contains strong language. The age recommendation is 12+.

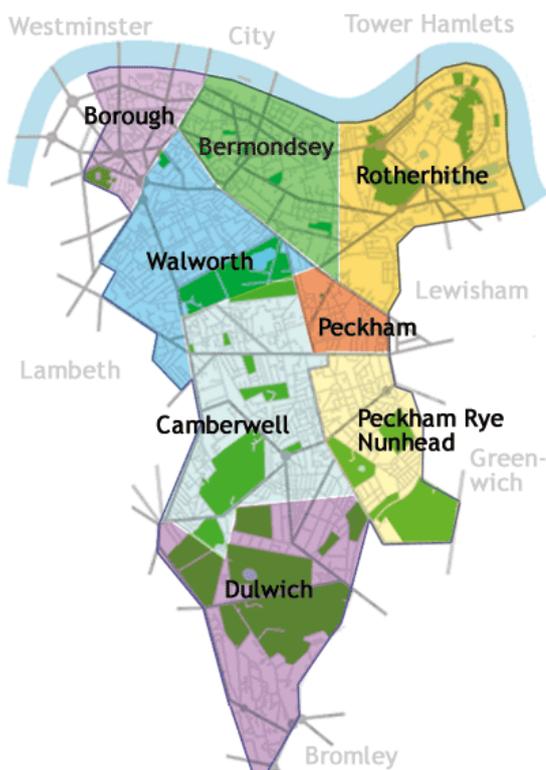
Context of the play

Gone Too Far! is a comedy set in Peckham, a multicultural area of southeast London, and portrays the lives of young people navigating the complexities of identity, heritage and acceptance. The play focuses on two Nigerian brothers, Yemi (Yem-ee) and Ikudayisi, (Ik-a-dy-see) who embark on a seemingly simple task set by their mother of going to buy milk. The trip escalates into a series of confrontations, highlighting cultural clashes and societal prejudices.

The narrative addresses tensions between the African and Caribbean communities, as well as the challenges faced by first and second-generation immigrants in Britain. The play's setting on a London housing estate reflects the socio-economic backdrop that influences the characters' experiences and interactions.

Peckham

Peckham, in southeast London, has a rich and diverse cultural history shaped by waves of migration and urban transformation. Originally a rural area known for agriculture in the 18th and early 19th centuries, Peckham rapidly urbanised during the Victorian era. In the post-war period, Peckham became home to a large Afro-Caribbean community, many of whom arrived in the UK as part of the Windrush generation. Over time, Peckham also saw the arrival of immigrants from Nigeria, Ghana, Vietnam, and more recently Eastern Europe. This mix has contributed to Peckham's vibrant cultural heritage, and it has become a hub for Black British identity, African traditions and multicultural influences. Despite historical challenges, such as social inequality and underinvestment, Peckham has evolved into a symbol of resilience and creativity. The area has a thriving arts scene, strong community networks, and a growing reputation for cultural innovation and youth expression.



According to the 2011 Census, the population of Peckham was 14,720 and was made up as follows:

- 50.4% Black/African/Caribbean
- 29.2% White
- 9.1% Asian
- 7.1% Mixed/multiple ethnic group
- 4.3% Other ethnic group

Peckham – Wikipedia
Southwark London Map

Nigeria

Nigeria is located in West Africa and is the most populous country on the continent. Nigeria has a rich cultural heritage with over 250 ethnic groups and some 257 different languages. The country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960.

In *Gone Too Far!*, the character Ikudayisi arrives in London from Nigeria, bringing with him cultural practices and perspectives that contrast with those of his British-born younger brother, Yemi. This dynamic explores the diasporic experience and the complexities of integrating traditional Nigerian values within a Western context including Yemi's views on popular culture, language and friendship.



"Nigeria English Wikivoyage regions map" by Burmesedays, SelfieCity is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.



"Locator map of Nigeria in Africa" by Shosholoza is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

Themes of the play

Cultural Identity: The play explores how Yemi, who was born in Britain, relates to his brother, Ikudayisi, and his Nigerian heritage. This dynamic drives the narrative, along with how the brothers interact with their surroundings and the urban culture of London to navigate the play's events.

Assimilation vs Heritage: Throughout the play the characters of Yemi and Armani try to assimilate to British culture while rejecting their own backgrounds. This conflict sees the roots of colourism, cultural identity and belonging come into play. Ikudayisi, Blazer, and Prais meanwhile, proudly resist this and stay true to their heritage and customs.

Belonging and Acceptance: Each character, in their own way, is looking for acceptance – either in the streets, in friendship circles, or in family. Razer and Flamer use violence and power to seek acceptance while Ikudayisi insists on being himself.

Play Structure

Agbaje's structure is a snapshot of contemporary urban life, highlighting the challenges of cultural integration and the search for identity within the Black British community over the span of a day. The play has 11 scenes and employs:

Linear Narrative: The story is chronological (going from beginning to end). It travels through the events of one day without flashbacks or non-linear storytelling.

Single Setting: Set entirely on a Peckham estate, the play uses various neighbourhood hotspots, such as the corner shop and local streets, to reflect the characters' environment.

Character-Driven Plot: The storyline is propelled by the interactions between characters, namely the contrasting worldviews of Yemi, who is London-born, and Ikudayisi, who has arrived that morning from Nigeria. Their contrasting views on identity and belonging catapult the plot forward as they encounter various other characters in the play, like Armani, Blazer, Flamer, and Razer.

Real-Time Progression: The events unfold in real time, enhancing the immediacy of the brother's experiences and the urgency of the themes addressed.

Black British identity

Black British identity encompasses the diverse experiences of Black individuals in the UK, often shaped by a blend of African or Caribbean heritage and British culture. *Gone Too Far!* delves into this multifaceted identity, examining how characters navigate societal expectations, cultural heritage, and personal self-perception.

The play highlights issues such as colourism, cultural pride, and the struggle for acceptance within both the Black community and the broader British society. Through the interactions between Yemi, who is eager to assimilate, and Ikudayisi, who embraces his African roots, the play portrays the internal and external conflicts inherent in forming one's identity.

Urban slang

Urban slang in *Gone Too Far!* serves as a linguistic representation of the characters' environment and social identities. The use of colloquial language, including terms from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Caribbean Patois, and London street slang, reflects the multicultural influences present in urban London settings. This vernacular not only adds authenticity to the dialogue but also underscores themes of belonging and cultural expression.

For example, Ikudayisi's use of an American accent upon arriving in London signifies his attempt to fit into a new cultural landscape, while Yemi's speech reflects his desire to distance himself from his African heritage.

Gang violence in Britain

Gang violence in Britain has been a persistent issue, particularly in urban areas like London. Factors contributing to gang involvement include socio-economic deprivation, lack of opportunities, and the search for identity and belonging. In *Gone Too Far!*, the presence of local gang leaders and the allure of gang culture are depicted as realities that the characters must navigate. The play portrays how young people can be drawn into gang affiliations as a means of seeking respect and protection, while also highlighting the detrimental impact of such involvement on individuals and communities. Through its narrative, the play encourages discussions on the root causes of gang violence and the importance of community support in addressing these challenges.

Characters

YEMI

Yemi is a British-born Nigerian teenager who cares a lot about how others see him. He's defensive, self-conscious, and wants to look cool and fit in. He often feels embarrassed by his Nigerian background, especially when his brother Ikudayisi shows it openly. He cannot speak Yoruba. He is often in conflict with other kids on the estate as well as authority figures, like his mother. Yemi believes that being outspoken will make people listen to him, but this often gets him in trouble.

IKUDAYISI

Ikudayisi (pronounced Ik-a-dy-see) is new to Britain and comes from Nigeria. He is confident, smart and proud of his culture, but also a bit awkward. He occasionally speaks Yoruba, as well as in an American accent. Ikudayisi doesn't fully understand British street life. He is thoughtful and considers the consequences of his actions. He wants to bond with his brother and show who he is as a Nigerian. He proudly accepts his roots, which causes tension with Yemi, who tries to hide his. Ikudayisi shows how being true to yourself and your background can be a strength.

ARMANI

Armani is stylish and cares a lot about looks and popularity. She is light-skinned, having a white mother and a Jamaican father. Armani lives with her mother. She is good friends with Paris, another girl on the estate. She is dating Razer. Armani wants to be seen with people who seem cool. She often judges others based on their appearance and doesn't like traditional African culture. Her character shows the pressure to fit in and to look a certain way, and how some young people feel ashamed of their cultural roots.

PARIS

Paris is Armani's friend and lives on the estate. She is of Caribbean ancestry. Unlike Armani, Paris is comfortable and proud of her cultural heritage. She has a small crush on Yemi. Paris remarks that Armani relies on her to fit in, as Paris first showed Armani how to style her afro hair as well as introducing her to Caribbean cuisine.

BLAZER

Blazer is distant and well respected on the estate. He is head of a local gang. He has various kids doing different jobs for him, including Razer and Flamer. He is of Nigerian ancestry and is very proud of his cultural heritage. Blazer speaks Yoruba. Blazer encourages Yemi to take pride in his Nigerian heritage.

RAZER

Razer is friends with Flamer and lives on the estate. He is of Caribbean ancestry and is dating Armani. Razer mentions that he has previously gotten in trouble but wants to put his past behind him. He carries a knife. Razer shows how peer pressure can affect young people and how easy it is to follow others, even when they do bad things.

FLAMER

Flamer is Razer's friend and is also of Caribbean ancestry. Like Razer, Flamer carries a knife. He does not like being told what to do, especially by Blazer. Flamer believes that being tough will make people respect him. His character shows how some young people think respect comes from power and violence.

MUM

Mum is off stage but referenced. She is traditional and believes strongly in her Nigerian culture. She wants her sons to respect their Nigerian roots. She represents the older generation trying to pass on their values. Her character shows the struggle of keeping cultural identity while living in a new country.

Other characters in the play include Shopkeeper (scene two), Old Lady (scene four), Police Officer 1 and Police Officer 2 (scene seven).

KS3 Drama activities

The following exercises are designed for Key Stage 3 students:

Role Play and Improvisation

Explore the motivations of the following characters: Yemi and Ikudayisi, Armani and Paris and Razer and Blazer. In pairs, have students improvise a scene between the two characters, exploring the differences between either their cultural backgrounds or beliefs.

Hot-Seating

Ask students to take turns sitting in the 'hot seat' as Yemi, Ikudayisi, Flamer and Armani. The class should ask questions about their self-image, values, and relationships to other characters in the play.

Extension: explore how the characters respond differently to the pressures of fitting in as young people.

Forum Theatre – Yemi's acceptance

Stage the moment at the end of the play where Yemi accepts his Nigerian heritage, wearing a traditional Nigerian hat. Encourage the class to step in with alternative lines or choices, exploring what Yemi might say or do.

Exploring Urban Slang

Compile a list of slang terms used in the play and discuss their meanings and origins. Students can then create short scenes incorporating these terms, enhancing their appreciation of the play's linguistic landscape.

Extended KS4 Drama Exploration

Duologue rehearsal – Yemi and Ikudayisi

Script excerpt (scene two):

Yemi: What are you doing with my trainers on?

Ikudayisi: I'm borrowing them. Don't you think it looks nice on me?

Yemi: No, it don't suit you.

Ikudayisi: You know I look fine, fine.

Yemi: Look, yeah, what have I told you bout taking my stuff?

Ikudayisi: What's your problem? You can have it back when we get home.

Practical task:

- Perform and explore vocal emphasis on words and phrases like 'my trainers', 'borrowing' and 'fine, fine'.
- Discuss how costume might inform the performance of both characters. What is Ikudayisi wearing in addition to his brothers trainers? What is Yemi wearing in addition to his hoodie? Reflect on how the character's conflicting internal identities might be expressed externally and they might move because of this.

Directing task:

This activity works in groups of three or four, with one student acting as a director.

- Rehearse the scene, focusing on physicality and gesture (Yemi pointing the finger, Ikudayisi standing proud).
- Compare and contrast this moment with another moment in the play (scene four or scene seven). How does this affect the way Yemi and Ikudayisi move?

Monologue work

Armani: I don't care, I don't care. I wasn't even talking to you in the first place. I know all history I need to know, you ain't got to teach me anything new. All I need to know is, I'm from yard! (scene five)

Practical task:

- Deliver the monologue with different tones (defensive, angry, reflective).
- Explore Armani's motivations – why does she reject her African roots?

Design task:

- Design costume for Armani, looking at the specifics of her costume in relation to urban British youth culture. Justify choices for this moment in this extract looking at fabric choices, patterns and style.

Hot-Seating

Students can hot-seat Razer and Blazer to explore power dynamics, urban masculinity and peer pressure.

Task set-up:

- In pairs, one student plays Razer, the other Blazer.
- The rest of the class asks questions: 'Why do you act like that?' 'What do you want from people?'
- Blazer should stay calm and self-assured with swagger. Razer might echo or support Blazer but occasionally glance to him for approval.

Extension: Ask students to improvise a short scene where Razer stands up to Blazer. What can be learned about the dynamic between them?

Design task:

- Get students to select three sound effects associated with Razer and his character, as well as moments of tension or stress.
- Students should then highlight three songs that they think reflect the characteristics of two main characters, linking to British music icons of the 2000s. Present ideas back to the group with justifications.

Thought-Tracking – Inner Conflict

Use to track internal vs spoken thoughts.

Task:

- One student performs Yemi's lines aloud
- A second student stands behind and voices Yemi's internal thoughts: 'Why do I care what they think?' 'Why does his shirt embarrass me?'
- Explore changes in posture, pace and eye contact to show vulnerability.

Performance style link:

- Introduce Frantic Assembly's physicality or Kneehigh-style ensemble work to physically express the internal/external conflict.

Written task:

- Ask students to describe Yemi's vocal skills in terms of tone, pace, pitch and pause in this scene.
- They should outline his use of vocal skills, quoting the extract with reasons for each suggestion.

Moments to explore in devised drama

Character	Source of conflict	Theme explored	Scene
1) Yemi	Yemi tries to enter the shop with his hood up	Cultural identity, stereotypes, and acceptance	Scene two
2) Ikudayisi	Flamer robs Ikudayisi	Assimilation and cultural identity	Scene nine
3) Armani	Shares her views on the Black diaspora	Cultural heritage, shame, acceptance	Scene five

1) Yemi tries to enter the shop with his hood up (scene two)

Tension source: Conflict between stereotypes and actual appearances.

Why it is important: This moment shows how the stereotypes held by the shopkeeper and Yemi cause them to act prejudiced.

Yemi: **Don't you know nothing about human rights? You of all people should understand where I'm coming from – being Muslim and dat.**

Explanation: The shopkeeper assumes that Yemi is up to no good because he refuses to take down his hood to enter the shop. Yemi confronts the shopkeeper, insisting that the shopkeeper must also know what it's like to face looks-based prejudice because he is Muslim and playing prayer-music. Yemi then goes on to suggest that the shopkeeper is secretly a terrorist and that is the reason he is not allowed to enter. This exchange shows how Yemi's own prejudices and the shopkeeper's prejudices are based on stereotypes. This creates tension as their incorrect beliefs make them distrustful of the other. They may also think the other hasn't assimilated 'properly'.

2) Flamer robs Ikudayisi, stealing Yemi's shoes

Tension source: Assimilation versus cultural norms and self-image.

Why is it important: This moment highlights the ideological rift between Yemi and Ikudayisi. After Flamer steals the shoes Ikudayisi is wearing (which belong to Yemi), Ikudayisi is confronted by Yemi. Yemi asks why Ikudayisi didn't fight back, even though Flamer had a knife.

Ikudayisi: **You are running around to go and prove a point, but you don't know what point you are making.**

Explanation: Ikudayisi doesn't see the value in fighting when there is a tangible risk to harm, whereas Yemi views fighting as a cultural norm and something worth doing, especially if it can elevate his status and credibility. This shows Yemi's inflated self-image as a 'tough guy', the opposite to Ikudayisi, who views himself in a more realistic way. This also shows the differences between the two brothers and how their cultural backgrounds impact their actions.

3) Armani discusses her views on cultural heritage (scene five)

Tension source: Internalised conflict between people of Caribbean and African ancestry

Why is it important: This moment highlights Armani's misunderstanding of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. She gives false equivalence to the involvement of people of African ancestry, as if they are not also affected by racism like people of Caribbean ancestry.

<p>Armani: We are all slaves, all of us from the West Indies. Dat why I don't like African cos they sold us off to da white man [...]</p>
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Explanation: Armani blames people of African ancestry for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and holds prejudiced views of them. However, like people of Caribbean ancestry, people of African ancestry are also discriminated against and share a common struggle. Armani's attitude is ludicrous to Razer, Flamer and Paris.

Useful Links

Bola Agbaje on Gone Too Far! - YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NbfwLF2QE0>

Drama and Theatre Magazine - A Guide to Representation in the Drama Curriculum

https://www.dramaandtheatre.co.uk/media/4uwhjytn/guide-to-representation-in-the-drama-curriculum.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Set Text Guide (Pearson Edexcel)

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/Drama/2016/teaching-and-learning-materials/GCSE-Drama-Gone-Too-Far-guide-issue-1.pdf>

Thank you

This guide to Teachers' Educational Resource Pack was written by
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