National Theatre

Leave Taking: Teachers' Educational Resource Pack

Archive Resource Pack

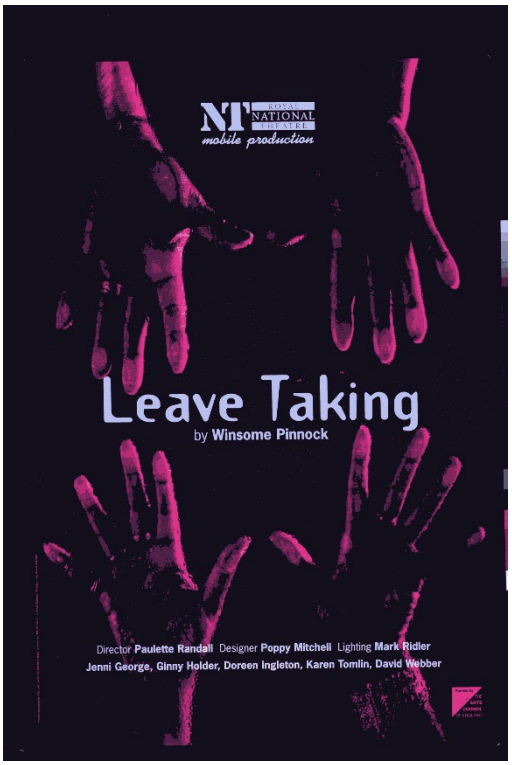
Contents

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

Leave Taking was written by playwright Winsome Pinnock and was first performed at Liverpool Playhouse Studio in 1987. During the 1980s it seemed that Black British theatre and Black artists were becoming a significant part of the British theatre scene: with investment from the Greater London Council, the founding of companies such as Black Theatre Co-operative, Theatre of Black Women and Talawa and the success of artists like Carmen Munroe, Caryl Phillips, Paulette Randall and Derek Walcott. However, with funding cuts and decreasing support and opportunities from established British theatres it is both disappointing and gratifying that the 1994 production of *Leave Taking* was the first play by a Black British woman to be produced at the National Theatre.



Poster for Leave Taking (1994), staged at the National Theatre.

The play introduces us to the experiences of a Jamaican immigrant family living in London; what surviving actually means in a society that doesn't see or value you as an equal person; the difficulty of bridging two cultures; the struggle of making or taking up the legacy of creating a place and sense of self in the complexity of these contexts. The play's themes are still relevant today whether second or fifth generation – what does it mean to be a Black British person? What is the cost (emotional, psychological, physical as well as financial) of remaining and living in the UK? And how can each generation equip the next to endure the never-ending exclusion, humiliation and discrimination? The 2018 production of *Leave Taking* at the Bush Theatre spoke directly to the Windrush scandal – the destruction of migrants' arrival cards and identity records, and the detrimental impact of decades of wrongful arrest and deportation and denial of access to housing, healthcare and basic human rights.

When writing the play at the end of the 1980s Winsome Pinnock was part of the Royal Court's Young Writers Group. Pinnock wanted to see black women like her, and her friends and family on stage and she took inspiration from the lives of her family and friends. Pinnock wrote the play when she was 23 and has said that *Leave Taking* is not autobiographical. As a young, Black feminist, she gave power to all of the characters through her understanding that '…personal lives were inextricable from bigger political issues'.

Black women's experiences and voices lead us through this story. Pinnock's expertly written dialogue brings empathy to the human experiences of growing up, growing old and grieving – how individuals disconnect and connect as families and individuals are shaped by family and reshape themselves. Her writing also brings clarity to what this means when you are invisible and hyper-visible at the same time.

Enid Matthews has never been given or found the language to express the force and effect of this paradoxical oppression. Her daughters being brought up in the society that is the cause and instrument of this oppression are determined to talk and be heard, to find a different way through the systemic oppression.

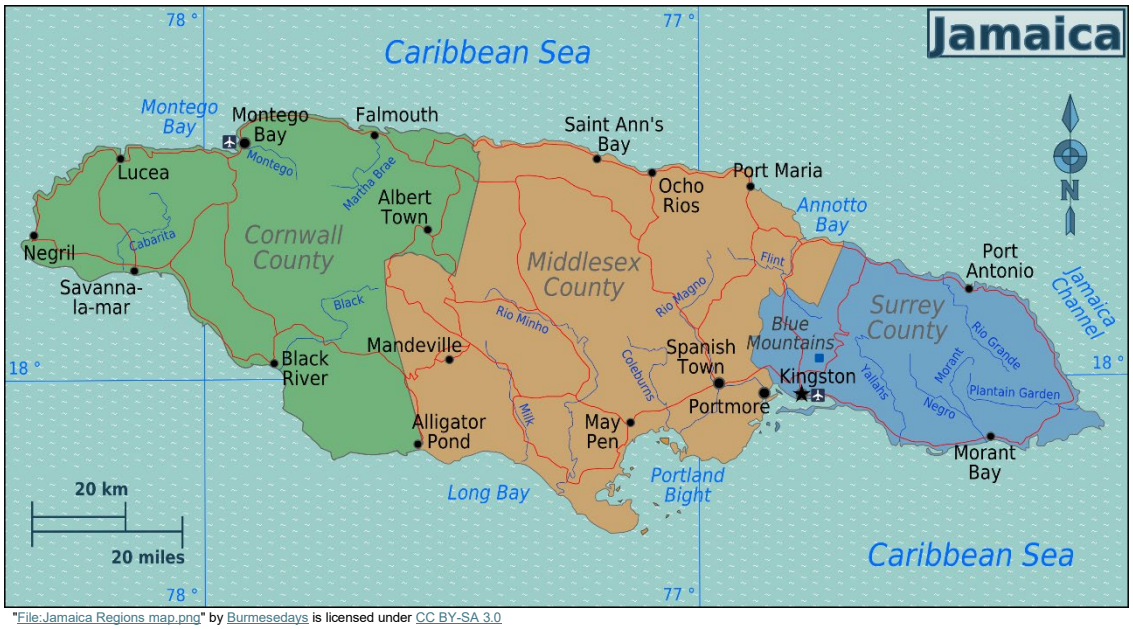
As a playwright Pinnock has given voice to many silenced identities and experiences. Each time I read, listen to or watch one her plays I am struck by the power of the words that she gives to her characters. I feel the attention and time that has gone into my experience (the audiences experience of the world of the play) which means that the concepts and characters stay with me for a long time; giving me questions, ideas and language that help me to navigate the contexts of our world.

- mezze eade, 2025

Historical Context

Jamaica before the 1940s – A Summary

Before the Spanish claimed Jamaica in 1494, the island was inhabited by the Taíno (part of the Arawak people). The Spanish enslaved many Taíno people as they established settlements and used the island as a military base and a supply base for food. By the 17th century, the Taíno people were almost wiped out by diseases brought by the Spanish, and the killing of their people through enslavement or genocide. The Spanish had brought some enslaved African people to Jamaica but at this point, the population was very small. Britain began attacking Spanish colonies in the West Indies in 1654 and took possession of Jamaica in 1655. When the Spanish colonists left Jamaica, some of the Africans they had enslaved created small communities in the interior of Jamaica and lived relatively freely. This independent group of Africans were known as the Maroons.



As Britain established itself in what was then called the West Indies, pirates and merchants settled in Jamaica and established sugar plantations. Enslaved Africans were brought in as free labour and prisoners from Britain and Irish immigrants worked as indentured servants on the plantations. Throughout the 18th century the British attacked the Maroons, which resulted in wars in 1730 and 1795. The Maroons were a symbol of freedom and although they had agreed to not hide 'run-away' enslaved people, this did sometimes happen. During the end of the 18th century enslaved Africans began to resist the tyranny of the plantation owners and indentured workers and several revolts happened on plantations across Jamaica.

The British continued to enslave African people, even after the abolition of the slave trade in 1808. The transition to freedom was slow for Black Jamaicans and the ending of slavery in 1834 did not end the cruelty of the plantation systems and its owners, who were focused on product and profit. Plantation owners initially brought indentured workers from India and China to maintain the sugar plantations, but these declined with the combined impact of famines, hurricanes and various wars. Many Chinese and Indian workers became merchants and shopkeepers whilst the Crown

Land Settlements Scheme allowed Black Jamaicans to buy small plots of land in the 1890s and they survived in small farming communities. However, Black Jamaicans were kept in poverty by low crop prices and the hurricanes and droughts. By the end of the 19th century some of the remaining British plantations had stopped growing sugar cane and now grew bananas. At the beginning of the 20th century Jamaica's banana industry and exports were controlled by American companies such as the United Fruit Company, who owned large amounts of land and transportation networks across South and North America.

The Great Depression (a global financial depression caused by the Wall Street crash) in 1929 led to economic stagnation and impacted the already low wages, unemployment and poor living conditions of many Jamaicans, the result of unequal distribution of land and discriminatory attitudes of the white and light skinned land and business owners. Poor working and living conditions continued throughout the 1930s and led to labour strikes and riots in 1938. Workers began to unionise and after a British government investigation wages slightly increased in the early 1940s. But there remained little improvement to working conditions and the cost of living for Black Jamaicans.

Windrush Migration

Thousands of men from Jamaica fought for Britain in the First and Second World Wars and hundreds of women supported the British military during the second world war. Representing the 'mother country' was a source of pride for many Jamaicans. However, the Jamaicans who settled in England after each war occupied a void of being a British subject with limited rights and no legal protections against the discrimination they faced. African diasporic people in England were rarely recognised as people deserving the same human rights as white British people.

How nationality was defined, and what it meant to be British, had evolved. After the Second World War Britain, along with many other countries, sought to clarify its citizenship laws. The introduction of the British Nationality Act 1948 preserved the rights of 'Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies' – those born, naturalised or registered as citizens within the UK or its colonies. As Commonwealth Citizens, Jamaicans could live and work in the UK without a visa.

At the end of the 1940s many Jamaicans moved to England – to the 'mother country' – to find work and a better quality of life. On arrival Jamaicans (and most Black people) were refused the jobs they were qualified to do, forced to take jobs for which they were overqualified and were paid less than their white co-workers. White people refused to rent accommodation to Black people, and shops, pubs and cafes refused to serve them. Many Caribbeans were responding to the call to help rebuild the country and some Jamaicans were specifically recruited to work in the NHS. Senior staff travelled to the Caribbean to recruit hospital auxiliary staff, nurses and trainee nurses. For decades African diasporic people continued to provide cheap labour to meet staff shortages in the NHS, even though many white patients refused to be treated by a Black person.

Changes in legislation in 1962 began to restrict migration from Commonwealth

countries. The introduction of the Immigration Act 1971 and the British Nationality Act of 1981, which repealed the 1948 act and created new categories of citizenship, meant that many Black people who had settled in the UK were no longer recognised as citizens. The British government introduced a system of citizenship by registration which should have enabled migrants from the Caribbean to retain citizenship and their rights. However, a time limit was placed on the right to register and Black people were actively discouraged from registering.

British Nationality Act 1948: Automatically granted if born in the UK or the colonies. Granted to all Citizens of the UK and Colonies and Commonwealth citizens.

British Nationality Act 1981: Restricted to those with a British parent. Restricted to citizens with strong UK ties.

Migrant Experiences in Britain

People from the West Indies settled in Bath, Birmingham, Cambridge, Cardiff, Derby, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford, Wolverhampton and London. The optimism of migrants in the late 1940s and early 1950s soon changed.

- Listen to Lord Kitchener's *London is the Place for Me*. What does it tell you about the expectation of Caribbean migrants?

Left: Lord Kitchner HBM DA, a Trinidadian Calypsonian
Right: The ship, HMT Empire Windrush, which arrived at Tilbury Dock on June 22, 1948

Continual discriminatory practices led to great disappointment. Black people suffered the everyday prejudice of white people who did not recognise their skills and value and were denied the help given to white European Voluntary Workers. 'Inter-racial'

or 'mixed' relationships were opposed and incited a scale of response from concern for the children, to subjecting one or both partners to psychological and physical violence.

In the 1960s African diasporic immigrants were, again, deliberately blamed for housing and job shortages and described, in newspapers and by politicians, as a 'lesser breed', 'inferior' and 'savages'. These racial stereotypes were part of maintaining the myth of white superiority. Whether educated in Britain or Jamaica, Jamaicans were subject to the British education system. These narratives also downplayed the realities of Caribbean migrants' contributions to the British economy as carpenters, building workers, nurses, doctors, factory and transportation workers. It was widely understood but rarely admitted that withdrawal of Black workers from transport, factories and hospital services would be detrimental to the British economy. Employers used quota systems to limit the number of Black employees and employment agencies would not submit applications from Black people to organisations with job vacancies.

- Read Enoch Powell's *River's of Blood* speech, given in 1968.

  What does this tell you about some white people's beliefs about Black people at that time?

  OR

  How does Powell sanction discrimination and violence towards African (and Asian, South Asian and South-East Asian) diasporic people?

Despite the discrimination and challenges experienced by migrants, many Black people created and found joy and solidarity in their lives: Black-owned houses and businesses, Black activism, Black theatre, Black studies…

- Read *Windrush: Stories of a Hackney Generation*

◊ How did West Indian people in the UK find resilience and joy, and resist discrimination?

Geographical Context

Obeah

Obeah can be described as a practice which includes medicinal knowledge of local plants, elements of the supernatural and political resistance. The practice of *Obeah* emerged across the Caribbean and South America in the 18th century and specific beliefs and practices vary from island to island and place to place. There are two main characteristics shared by all variations of *Obeah*: the use of objects and spells to manipulate supernatural forces and divination to obtain knowledge about a person or object. All practices were used to bring good fortune, heal or protect, although some people used *Obeah* to do harm. The negative assumptions and implications of causing harm were historically overemphasised by white plantation owners. White plantation owners sought to demonise enslaved Africans who practised or consulted *Obeah*, who were trying to protect themselves and others from the extreme labour and violence (rape, torture and degradation) they were forced to endure.

The medical practices of *Obeah* were used to find the cause and a cure for ailments and diseases and required specialist knowledge of local plants – this included treatment for injuries and lacerations from working on the plantations and from being whipped. The spiritual practices seek to identify the sources of fear, psychological states and unhappiness. An *Obeah* person prepares phials, charms or amulets to protect against illness or harm, or to bring good luck or to prevent theft of a person or belongings.

Enid (Jenni George) and Mai (Doreen Ingleton) in Leave Taking at the National Theatre, 1994. Photo by Richard H Smith.

During the 18th and 19th centuries *Obeah* was a positive social and political practice which helped to fortify and unify enslaved Black people. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries laws were introduced in Jamaica to supress the practice of *Obeah*. The 1898 Obeah Act enabled white people to convict and imprison or whip anyone who practised *Obeah*.

Obeah believe that a person has two souls: one that passes on to the afterlife and the earthly soul or *duppy*. If a family doesn't observe 'nine night' in some way then the earthly spirit stays to cause upset or harm, in human or animal form. Nine night requires the family or friends of someone who has died to drink, eat and tell stories about the person for nine nights or on the ninth night after their death, to prevent the spirit from escaping. Some people believe that the *duppy* is the spirit of an ancestor that watches and looks after the family (this connects to West African beliefs). Some people believe that *duppies* are mischievous or malevolent.

Duppies can appear in many different forms – in Jamaica they are said to roam uninhabited spaces, such as woodland or quiet roads. A rolling calf is a *duppy* that roams around the countryside or a town and appears in whimsical form with chains around its neck.

Music

Jamaica Music Timeline	
Decade	Type of music
1800s	Music of the Maroons West African Jamaican folk mento
1950s	Mento
1960s	Ska Rocksteady Roots reggae
1970s	Reggae Dub Lovers rock
1980s	Dancehall Ragga

- ➢ Research the instruments and music genres, from around the world, which influenced the creation of each type of Jamaican music.
- ◊ To which type of music would Enid, Brod and Mai have danced when they were young?
- ◊ To which type of Jamaican and/or English music would Viv be listening and dancing?

Characters

MAI

Mai is an *Obeah* woman. Mai enigmatic and candid, she expresses love and humour in her own way. Mai has an undisclosed illness, which increasingly impacts her physically. She is a widow and is estranged from her son. Mai recognises similarities between Del and her son. Mai believes that Del has the gift of *Obeah*; she is strict with Del but likes her and believes she's special.

ENID MATTHEWS

Enid is a Jamaican woman in her 40s. Enid wanted to work for the post office but didn't pass the post-mistress exam. Now she works as a hospital cleaner. She has two daughters, Del and Viv. Enid left her husband to protect Del and Viv when they were very young. It has been five years since she visited Jamaica, where her mother and sister, Cynthia, live. Enid is a Christian and believes in *Obeah*.

DEL MATTHEWS

Del is Enid's eldest daughter, aged 18. She has left school and was working in a fast-food shop. She is also pregnant. Del is possibly dyslexic but hasn't been diagnosed – is very likely to have been labelled as lazy and disruptive by some of her teachers. Del struggles to find a place and sense of identity. Del is viewed as rebellious and destructive by her mother. She is drawn to the practice of *Obeah*. Del allows Mai to manage and help her, to an extent.

Viv (Ginny Holder) and Del (Karen Tomlin) in Leave Taking at the National Theatre, 1994. Photo by Richard H Smith.

VIV MATTHEWS

Viv is Enid's youngest daughter, aged 17. Viv is in her final year at school and is preparing to take exams. Viv enjoys studying but is uncertain about going to university. Like Del she has a lot of questions about her identity about her family history.

BRODERICK

Broderick (Brod) is Enid's friend, a Jamaican man in his late 40s/early. Brod knew Enid when they were children in Jamaica. Brod was married but his wife took their children back to Jamaica. Brod does not have a job and regularly drinks alcohol.

Broderick (David Webber) and Enid (Jenni George) in Leave Taking at the National Theatre, 1994. Photo by Richard H Smith.

Scenes

Scene one

Mai's bedsit. Deptford, South London.

It is a bank holiday in May. Enid takes her daughters to see Mai, who is an *Obeah*. Enid wants Mai to do palm or card readings to discover the answers to things that are worrying her. Del pretends that she does not believe in *Obeah* but her interactions with the objects in the flat and what Mai says affect her in an unexpected way.

Scene two

Enid's flat. North London.

Enid is cleaning and getting ready for the Pastor and his wife to visit and bless the flat. Enid wants to present a respectable family and has asked Brod to be there to signify 'traditional' patriarchal values. Viv has convinced Del to come home, and she tries to prevent Enid from arguing with Del. Del tries to explain what has happened and show she feels but ends up humiliating Enid.

Scene three

Enid's flat, later the same day.

Despite Del and Viv not being present for the Pastor's visit, Enid seems happy. Brod and Enid talk honestly. They reminisce and dance together. Viv returns to the flat and pretends that she does not see them dancing. Enid receives a phone call from Jamaica – her mother has died.

Scene four

Enid's flat, that night.

Enid is unable to sleep and has been drinking. Viv sits with Enid, who begins to talk about her mother and Jamaica, and her husband. Enid decides to give Viv the money she has saved, money that was meant to bring her mother to England.

Scene five

Mai's bedsit, a few weeks later.

Del is now living with Mai. Del is drawn to the practice of *Obeah* but will not admit it. She wears oversized clothing and is pregnant. Del realises that Mai is unwell. Viv visits Del hoping to help with the baby. The death of their grandmother and Del leaving home have disrupted Viv's life – she is missing an exam. Del does not want Viv to mess up her life.

Scene six

Mai's bedsit, evening the same day.

Enid visits Mai to find out what happened to Del. Mai helps Enid to mourn the loss of her mother and to express the feelings she has been supressing for a long time.

Scene seven

Mai's bedsit, early the next morning.

Brod, after a heavy drinking session the night before ends up at Mai's. Brod tries to convince Del to speak to Enid and tells Del about how her father used to beat Enid. Del does not want to believe him.

Scene eight

Mai's bedsit, a few weeks later.

Mai tests Del's knowledge and ability in *Obeah*. Enid returns expecting to see Mai.

Themes

Communication

The ability to communicate our experiences, feelings and needs, to express concern or care for another person, and to disagree without causing harm are dependent on how we are socialised by our family and the contexts of the society in which we grow up. The intergenerational rules and social norms of what can be shared privately and publicly, in relation to a person's ethnicity, class and gender create the patterns of open or closed communication between people. The sharing of intimate and personal information and political expression can be scary because we worry about finding the words that accurately represent what we want to say, and because we are afraid of being judged, ridiculed or punished, or of hurting the other person. But sometimes our bodies – physical expression and behaviour – will communicate what we are trying to hide and avoid, or what we find difficult to express in words.

- ◊ How does Enid openly express love for her children when they are young?
- ◊ How is Enid's working, saving and controlling the behaviour of her daughters as they grow up an expression of love? Consider how Enid consulting an *Obeah* and having the flat blessed could be seen as expressions of her fears – not being able to protect her daughters and save her mother.

Enid's determination to protect her children from the poverty she experienced in Jamaica and the physical abuse she experienced from her husband is expressed through her actions. Not having positive conversations with either her mother or husband and the exclusion and racism she has experienced in England has shut down Enid's voice. Enid is unable to express her motivations to Del and Viv. By hiding information, she perpetuates the distress caused by her inability to communicate. This creates a barrier for her children to understand her and themselves.

- ➢ Read through the play and find examples of when Enid's protective behaviour creates a barrier between her and Del. Find examples of how Viv tries to bridge the gap between her mother and sister.

Enid's experiences are too painful for her to voice. Del voices Enid's pain not to hurt her but to try to make Enid see that she and Viv understand, they too have experienced humiliation and exclusion. Despite her own experiences and what she will have witnessed, Enid holds on to the idea that her daughters are British, and will therefore be treated better than she was. In doing so, she suppresses the truth of their situation and reality of racism in Britain.

- ➢ Read through the play and find examples of the ways in which the Windrush generation was silenced.

Enid (Jenni George), Viv (Ginny Holder) and Del (Karen Tomlin) in Leave Taking at the National Theatre, 1994. Photo by Richard H Smith.

Brod tries to address the silences for Del and Viv. As a source of information about Jamaican life and culture and of Enid's past life and personality, he tries to bridge the gap between Enid and her daughters. Brod is also more ready to acknowledge the social and political difficulties of their time (1950s to 1980s) in Britain.

- ➢ Research political events that happened to black people in London in the 1980s.
- ◊ How do Brod's experiences enable him to speak truthfully to Enid, Del and Viv?

Del and Viv are fighting to find words to describe their experiences, address the lack of knowledge about their history and express their identity.

- ◊ What does Viv mean when she tells Del?

Viv: Me and those teachers don't speak the same lingo. Things I feel they haven't got words for. I need another language to express myself. (scene five)

- ➢ After you have read the section on identity, reflect on how Viv is trying to communicate her lack of a sense of identity.
  - ◊ How does Viv's desire reflect her need to retrieve her history? How might this enable Viv (and other Black people) to talk about the repression and erasure they experience?
  - ◊ How could music provide a way for the two generations to connect?

Identity

We form our sense of personal identity initially from our immediate families or people we experience in our childhood home and then from our extended family, friends and wider community (school, local groups and activities). Our families usually pass on elements of culture – language, food, spiritual practices, music, storytelling – which help to shape how we view and navigate the world. How people respond to us and how we are taught to interpret these responses also shape how we view and navigate the world. All these beliefs and interactions shape our image of who we are and our sense of place in the world.

◊ How does music help Del to create a sense of self?

Multiple cultural heritages can be joyful for African diasporic people. However, as with Del and Viv, dependent on context this can also be complex and confusing. They are disconnected from their extended family and the lands of their ancestors. Growing up in a society that views and explicitly communicates your difference as a negative and unwelcome state of being without a strong connection to a parent's culture and history can cause a schism in a person's identity.

➢ Research WEB Debois and Franz Fanon writings about 'double consciousness'.

◊ How does this term apply to each character's sense of identity? How is this term manifested in each character's language and/or behaviour?

Mai It not easy to turn you back on one country and start fresh in foreign. It mash up you life. Things happen you wouldn't imagine. When I see them children on the TV, so angry and betrayed… Whuh! (scene six)

◊ Why is it important for Del and Viv to understand the fullness of their history? West African histories, the enslavement of Africans in Jamaica, Black Jamaican culture – what else can they find out about?

◊ How do Del and Viv's ideas of what it means to be Black and British differ from Enid's ideas?

After endless contributions to British history, society and infrastructure going unrecognised or discarded, paying £50 to obtain nationality papers to become a citizen adds further insult to injury. It is another form of erasure and oppression of Black people.

◊ Does this impact Enid, Mai's and Brod's sense of identity and belonging?

Viv Kick us out? Where would me and Del go? (scene two)

◊ How does this impact Viv and Del's sense of identity and belonging?

Del (Karen Tomlin), Mai (Doreen Ingleton) and Broderick (David Webber) in Leave Taking at the National Theatre, 1994. Photo by Richard H Smith.

Belonging

The poem that Viv quotes in scene two – 'The Soldier' by Rupert Brooke – speaks of the idea that to be English is to be willing to fight and die for the country.

◊ Why might Brod and West Indians who fought in the First and Second World Wars feel betrayed by this idea?

Like many immigrants from Commonwealth countries, Brod, Enid and Mai are disappointed by being rejected by the 'mother country'. Multiple and repeated societal rejections have led them to become isolated. White British people viewed them as outsiders not to be included, thus despite all attempts to assimilate and behave according to British social norms Brod, Enid and Mai are unable to develop a sense of belonging for themselves.

Del But what you give us that we can use out there? You don't see the police vans hunting us down, or the managers who treat us like we're the lowest of the low. You're too busy bowing and scraping to your beloved England. And where's it got you? (scene two)

Enid tries to change this for Del and Viv. However, Del and Viv grow up caught between two worlds, without strong roots in either. They are disconnected from their Jamaican heritage and family and are not accepted as British. They live in the reality of rejection and the struggle to control their futures.

How they are perceived by white people has more power over their lives. Black people are made hyper visible in the constant surveillance and punishment of white society. Black people are also made invisible by not being accepted as being the same (human), by being excluded (from housing, workplaces, social environments) and erased from history books.

Del He talks to me as if I can't speak English. (scene two)

Viv Oh, I knew all the answers. Pat me on the head and they all come tumbling out, say exactly what the examiners want to hear. But no matter how hard I search for myself in them books, I'm never there. (scene five)

◊ How have Del's experiences at work and Viv's experiences at school impacted their sense of belonging to England?

Brod An' he was always correcting people. 'Don't say wartar, man. Say wortur.' One mornin Gullyman wake up to find him lovely car covered in shit an a message on him door read 'wogs out'. Gullyman heart brock, him mind crack, and now he can hardly talk broken English. (scene two)

Del How can you love yourself when you're always bottom of the pile? (scene six)

◊ How are what Brod and Del say examples of self-oppression in Gullyman and Enid?

➢ Research the impacts of racism and find examples in the play of self-oppression for each character.

◊ How does self-oppression impact each character's sense of belonging?

Poverty and Opportunity

Brod And you know why they ain't going to university? Because they too poor. An' why they poor? Because a colonialism. Imperialism. Vampirism. They suck the blood outta the island, suck them dry. (scene two)

In Jamaica and Britain, deliberate barriers have been created to prevent black people from making money and creating financial stability. Historical racist tropes about unreliability, a lack of intelligence and laziness have galvanised some white people's beliefs that Black people are not capable, or deserving, of doing certain types of work. The legacy of the enslavement of African people has instilled the idea that Black people can endure more physical pain and deserve to only do manual and semi-skilled work. African diasporic people have repeatedly shown that these stereotypes are false, and unjust, and they still have to work two or three times harder to prove their ability and worth.

Low wages affect the type of housing a person can afford and unsecure housing affects a person's job prospects. Limited expectation of educational attainment affects qualifications which in turn affect a person's job prospects. These factors and

the refusal of banks to loan money to Black people are the context within which Enid and Brod have tried to find work and live in London. Enid's experiences of poverty drive her to try to ensure that Del and Viv do not have the same experiences.

Enid I'm used to sitting in the dark. You think me mother could afford electricity? Hot an' cold running water? Flush toilet? We shower in waterfall. (scene four)

Enid Not that little nibbling English lunchtime hunger. I talking 'bout the sort that roar in your belly day and night till you think you going mad with the thought a food. You think is easy living off the land? The land fail you, you might as well be dead. (scene four)

- ◊ Why might Enid's experiences of poverty in Jamaica and London cause her to feel shame?
- ◊ How would you describe Brod's financial situation?
- ◊ What do Mai's living conditions tell us about her financial situation?
- ◊ Will Viv's qualifications increase access to well-paid work and opportunities to improve her quality of life? And decrease the likelihood of Viv experiencing discrimination?

Interviews

Leave Taking is published by Nick Hern Books. This interview first appeared on the Nick Hern Books (NHB) Playgroup Q&A Podcast in April 2020. The following is an extract of the interview.

Q: What was the inspiration behind the story?

Winsome Pinnock (WP): Many things. Some of it was my own life, but in a... Oh, it's quite tricky to describe that in many ways, because when I say that, people then think it's autobiographical.

But for a writer, it can only be autobiographical in a kind of superficial way. So there are characters who are similar to people I knew. So, for example, Enid was inspired in many ways by my own mother, although she's nothing like my mother.

People assume that I was writing about her, but no, I was writing about women like her, women of her generation, her friends. It was inspired by her because she gave me a lot of information. I used her a lot for my research, you know, because I was born in this country, but all of the information about life in Jamaica, which I didn't really know then when I wrote it, all of that came from talking to her.

She was very generous in giving me all that information. And also from my observations of her life and the lives of women who are like her.

Brod tells the daughters stories about their mother's past that they hadn't heard before. He warns Enid that the girls are going to forget where they come from. Why did Enid keep these stories from them and do you think she was right to do so?

WP: Well, this is very truthful. That generation, the Windrush generation, for some reason didn't really speak very much about their past lives. I've come across this time and time again. They just wouldn't do it. I've wondered why this was many, many times. I've kind of concluded that it might be because some of their experiences here in the late 50s might have been very painful.

I mean, it's well documented that a lot of that generation were very loyal to the idea of Britishness and very much saw themselves as British citizens or subjects. And then when they came here, there was this incredible betrayal when they faced this awful racism, and were made to feel like outsiders. Which they hadn't expected at all because they'd been brainwashed, really, into thinking of themselves as British. So many of them just wouldn't talk about it. And that aspect of the play is something that I've come across time and again, that they just wanted their children to get on with life in England, forge a new life.

I guess I can understand it to some extent, but I'm part of a generation that talks about everything. You ask me something and I'll tell you. We don't keep secrets so much. So from my point of view, I think they should know about their past, about

who they were. Perhaps for Enid, because she was so poor, she comes from such a poor family, perhaps she feels some shame in that. And to some degree I can understand that, because I come from a very poor background. So, yes, I think that she just feels she doesn't want to own up to the pressures that pushed her into that journey and to the UK, and that's quite a complex thing I suppose.

In your introduction to the play, you mentioned that ahead of the premiere at the Liverpool Playhouse Studio, you had to restructure and rewrite the play due to financial requirements and cut it down to five characters and two sets. Is there anything you were particularly sad to lose in that redraft?

WP: I have absolutely no recollection of that draft, of the other characters. And I think that cutting it down like that must have been a good thing. It's always good. That's the difference between playwrights and novelists. Novelists are always writing more and more and more and more. Playwrights cut. And what playwrights know is that because we write for space, we write for bodies in space, we write for actors, we know that what we cut will be embodied by the actor. It's a really interesting thing.

I've heard playwrights talk about when they cut a line, it remains somewhere, like a trace of it remains in the text. And that is really true when the actor gets up to speak a line. The line you've cut is somewhere inside them, in their mind, in their heart.

So we're given to cutting a lot, even characters. And playwrights become so adept at doing that, quite ruthless, actually. We just get so used to it. What starts off as a sort of financial requirement becomes a sort of essential element of our craft, I think, to refine things, to simplify things. When you look at a page of text, a script, and it can seem so simple, that's what you hope for in many ways.

And you know the work that's gone into making it that simple, that clear. And I like, with plays, I like the fact that you can deal with very complex ideas that make them accessible, because you're trying to, you're dramatising concepts and themes and issues and things. You're making them live or seem real.

From The NHB Playgroup Q&A Podcast: Leave Taking by Winsome Pinnock, 22 Apr 2020: https://soundcloud.com/nickhernbooks/nhbplaygroup-leavetaking-winsomepinnock

Designer Rosanna Vize on designing a set for *Leave Taking*, 25 May 2018: https://www.whatsonstage.com/news/acknowledging-a-history-of-movement-creating-the-set-for-winsome-pinnocks-windrush-play_46679/

Exercises

Write or improvise a monologue

Imagine you are Enid, Brod or Mai. You are from Jamaica and have lived in 1960s London for about one year. You talk honestly about your hopes before coming to England and the realities of your experience so far. Identify to whom your character is speaking, as this will help you to decide what information they share, eg Enid trying to explain her situation to her sister Cynthia or Enid comparing experiences with another Jamaican colleague at the hospital.

If you are improvising record your monologue as you speak so that you can listen to it. If you are writing, try to free write: do not reread or edit any sentences as you are writing.

Listen to or read your monologue:

- Do you need to fact check any information?
- Are there any words that can be changed to communicate your character's experience more effectively?
- What can be deleted or condensed?

Ask someone to listen to or read your monologue:

- Do they understand what your character is trying to communicate?
- What questions do they have about your character and their situation?

*If you are from another cultural heritage, do not 'put on' a Jamaican accent when speaking or reading the monologue aloud, unless this is your natural accent.

Write or improvise a duologue

Imagine that Del and Viv are now in their 50s and their mother Enid has just died. Write a scene, set in their mother's flat as they are sorting through their mother's belongings. How might they remember Enid and Brod and talk about the events that take place in *Leave Taking*?

Imagine Del's child is now in their late teens or early 20s, they are talking to a white friend about the challenges they have faced and discrimination they have experienced growing up. They have grown up in the same area of England that you grew up in or are now living.

◊ What research do you need to do before you begin writing or improvising?

◊ Is Del's child/grandchild multi-ethnicity?

◊ Does the white friend understand/ what is their journey to understanding or denying Del's child/ grandchild's experiences?

Improvisations

Working in pairs or if you are working in a group of three, the third person should transcribe the improvisation and give feedback.

➢ Read scene one and then improvise a conversation between Del and Viv about what happened at Mai's flat. The conversation happens on the evening of the same day or the next morning.

Think about:

- the language each sister uses: the similarities and differences
- how they feel emotionally and intellectually about *Obeah*
- how the visit influences their feelings about and attitude towards Enid

➢ Discuss the improvised conversation. Reread scene one and note any information that is useful to include in your scene. Begin to create a script for the conversation between Del and Viv.

Think about:

- where the conversation takes place
- does Del tell Viv about her conversation with Mai/what happened after Viv and Enid left?
- do the sisters share any other information/talk about Del's job or Viv going to university?
- is the conversation interrupted by Enid or Brod?
- how does the conversation end – with agreement or disagreement?

Continue working on the script until you have at least three to five minutes of dialogue.

Working in pairs or if you are working in a group of three, the third person should transcribe the improvisation and give feedback.

1. Improvise the moment when Del returns to Mai's flat.

Think about:

- does Del knock on the door or manage to enter the flat without Mai knowing?
- does Del tell Mai she is pregnant?
- does Mai tell Del that she can stay or does Del ask?

2. Discuss the improvised conversation. Read the whole script and note what Del and Mai say about themselves, and what other characters say about them. Use this to inform the dynamics of the conversation: the pace of the

conversation, who pauses and when and how they move about the space in relation to each other and the objects in the room.

Think about:

- when in the timeline of the play this conversation happens
- what time of day it happens
- what Mai and Del were doing before the conversations happens
- what is Del's objective at the beginning of the scene, does she achieve it, and/or does it change by the end of the scene?
- what is Mai's objective at the beginning of the scene, does she achieve it, and/or does it change?

3. Continue working on the script until you have at least three to five minutes of dialogue

4. Actioning. Once you have created a script divide the dialogue into thoughts and choose a verb for each thought. Each verb should reflect what one character is trying to do to the other character by the end of the scene?

Example using dialogue from Scene 1:

CHARACTER	**SENTENCE / THOUGHT**	**VERB**
Del	I'm going	I **reject** you
Mai	All right	I **accept** you
Del	You might fool the old lady, but you can't fool me.	I **resist** you
Del (cont.)	I know your game.	I **provoke** you
Mai	You do?	I **invite** you/ **acknowledge**
Del	Duppies and evil spirits. Give us a break	I **undermine** you
Mai	And I know your game…	I **confront** you
Mai (cont.)	The charm, please.	I **outwit** you

Discussions

Research political events that happened to Black people in England from the 1980s to now.

1. Discuss how these events might be interpreted by people who are racialised as white?

2. Discuss how these events influence what it means to be Black and British in today's society?

Useful Links

AQA Meet the Author – Winsome Pinnock
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzV8TmOBBfo

Nick Hern Books: AQA English Literature Resources
https://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/leave-taking-study-guide-further-resources

Black British Voices Project
https://www.bbvp.org

Empire Windrush National Archives
https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-empire-windrush-passenger-list/

Interview with Madani Younis
https://wordsofcolour.co.uk/videos/interview-with-madani-younis-artistic-director-bush-theatre/

Jamaica History – Timeline of Key Events
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-18784730

Windrush Generation
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43782241

Windrush Scandal
https://jcwi.org.uk/reportsbriefings/windrush-scandal-explained/

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/apr/17/home-office-destroyed-windrush-landing-cards-says-ex-staffer

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2024-02-15/how-the-u-k-punished-black-britons-who-helped-rebuild-a-nation

Windrush: Stories of a Hackney Generation
https://www.syha.co.uk/toolkit/theme09diversityandinclusion/Stories/2B.%20Connect%20Hackney%20%20Windrush,%20Stories%20of%20%20a%20Hackney%20Generation.pdf

West Indian Music
https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/16/lord-kitchener-empire-windrush

Policing Black British language speakers in schools
https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/is-it-that-deep-the-impact-of-policing-black-british-language-speakers-in-british-schools

Thank you

This Teachers' Educational Resource Pack was written by mezze eade, 2025.