

National Theatre

Princess & The Hustler: 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

Set during the Bristol bus boycott of 1963 *Princess & The Hustler* explores family dynamics, class politics, colourism, racism, and holding on to your sense of self and your dreams. The play is set over nine months and begins as the James family's plans for Christmas day 1962 are interrupted by unexpected guests. We follow the characters' difficult journey through what it means to survive in 1960s Britain. Each character is marginalised by stereotyping and societal ideology. Each character resists through holding self-worth and sharing joy. This is a story about people and family, trying to live and follow their dreams.

Princess & The Hustler asks us to understand the entirety of our histories – national and global – to connect and value one another, and to celebrate each other's dreams. Racism is an unavoidable part of life for all Black and global majority people living in the UK. This is skilfully captured and communicated in *Princess & The Hustler*.

For Black and global majority citizens, the Bristol bus boycott was a pivotal moment in the history of civil rights in England. *Princess & The Hustler* is part of a necessary movement to prevent the erasure of Black and global majority histories in British culture and education. Both the writer, Chinonyerem Odimba, and original director, Dawn Walton, highlight the absence of knowledge and awareness of Black artists and history from theatres and education. After not having access to the diaspora of African writers and artists in Britain through GCSE and A level Drama, this is where I found myself in my final year of university. I had taken the option to study African American playwrights but there were no modules on Black British writers, nor performance artists or theatre companies. My dissertation on the evolution of Black British theatre (from the 1950s through to the 90s) opened up a world that should have been available to me from early childhood.

Dawn Walton founded Eclipse Theatre. Through Eclipse's subsequent work, Walton addresses the exclusion of Black history and artists, particularly outside of London. Chinonyerem Odimba's *Princess & The Hustler* was commissioned through Revolution Mix, a way to platform new writing whilst celebrating Black history. Creating space and bringing people through is central to Walton's directing and advocacy work and a provocation she continues to ask the institutions with which she works.

As Artistic Director of tiata fahodzi, Odimba creates space, provides support and platforms the work of African diasporic, Black British and global majority artists. This space is critical in enabling theatre-makers to create work without having to navigate racial politics within the arts: being stereotyped and pigeon-holed. These spaces enable artists to explore their creativity and document Black stories from a place of celebration and joy. The place that we find ourselves with *Princess* at the end of play.

- mezze eade, 2025

Historical context

Creating a hostile environment: 17th to 19th century

Bristol's wealth was built on the enslavement of African people and the products from plantations in the Caribbean (West Indies) and America, such as sugar, rum, tobacco, cotton and indigo, and wood from South America. There are records of Africans in Bristol dating from the late 1600s, when white plantation owners brought enslaved Black people from the Caribbean to England. Such as sugar plantation owner John Pinney who took Pero, an enslaved Black man, to Bristol in 1784. Black men, women and children were described in Wills as 'goods' and 'chattels' to be inherited by the wives and children of plantation owners and enslavers, and advertised for sale in the auction lists of art dealers and in newspapers. Sales took place in the pubs and coffee houses of Bristol, as well as privately between wealthy families.

The status of Black people was not defined by the law and whether enslaved, 'employed' or 'free', they could be sent back to the Caribbean at any time. Infrequently people like Dinah Black could win temporary victories, but the rights to freedom and to remain were always in jeopardy. Employed Black adults in Glasgow, London, Liverpool and Bristol worked as household servants and stable hands, whilst a small number of Black children were kept as fashionable accessories. They were often treated worse than pets and sold when they became too old.

Upper class white women flaunted their opulence and assumed beauty by using Black pages. As in real life, Black children were included in paintings to provide a startling or amusing contrast to the white women. The purpose of these depictions was to emphasise the authority, beauty and purity of the white woman.



Louise de Kérouaille by Pierre Minard (1682) and *The Secret of England's Greatness* by Thomas Jones Barker (1862-3).

20th century

Over 15,000 men from the Caribbean and over 150,000 men from the African continent served as British soldiers during the First World War. The men from the Caribbean travelled to England voluntarily, using their own money, to enlist and fight. Many settled in England after the war but were blamed by white people for the shortage of jobs. White men vandalised Black people's homes and attacked Black people in the streets. This violence was sanctioned and used as an excuse by the government to send Black people 'back home'.

Government sanctioned restrictions prevented Black people from getting jobs and housing. The 1925 Special Restrictions (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order gave the police the power to stop and arrest Black and global majority sailors who failed to provide proof of nationality. Before the Second World War approximately one third of crews working on British merchant ships were Black. They were paid less than half the wage of white British seamen.

During the Second World War Black American soldiers were stationed in Bristol and Weston-Super-Mare. During this time Black GIs were welcome in many pubs, cafes and shops but many white English people supported the segregation enforced by white American military police and GIs. In *Black and British* David Olusoga writes about a Mrs May from Worle, a village near Weston-Super-Mare, who drew up a code limiting contact between white women and Black soldiers (p480–481).

After a colour bar, which prohibited people from the global majority from enlisting in the British military during the Second World War, was removed, approximately 16,000 men and women from the Caribbean voluntarily joined the RAF and Army, and eventually the Royal Navy. The Royal Navy initially refused to enlist Black people.



Amelia King was initially excluded from volunteering to help with the war effort.

After demobilisation, some Black former members of the armed forces chose to live in Britain. Other people chose to leave economic instability in the Caribbean and move to Britain, to help rebuild the 'mother country'. Some news reports presented Black immigration as a problem and despite the 1948 British Nationality Act giving people in British colonies the right to enter and settle in Britain, policies created or sanctioned by the British government were introduced to try to keep 'coloured' people out of Britain.

'In the discussion of postwar racism, the role of the state is often ignored or treated as insignificant...

... the state took a major role in constructing Black immigration as a 'problem' and in so doing reinforced a conception of Britishness grounded in colour and culture (as expressive of colour). Racist policies and practices were an integral part of this construction.'

(The 1951 – 1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration – Bob Carter, Clive Harris, and Shirley Joshi)

Named after HMT *Empire Windrush*, which arrived at Tilbury docks in 1948, the phrase Windrush generation represents the people who migrated to the UK from a Commonwealth country from the 1940s up to 1971. These people made significant contributions to the 'rebuilding' of Britain, working in manufacturing, healthcare and transportation. Black immigrants experienced racism and discrimination in every aspect of their daily lives – they were refused housing and employment and received lower wages and limited access to education and healthcare. Systemic racism persisted because there was no anti-discrimination legislation.



Newspaper coverage of the Bristol Bus Boycott in 'Evening Post', 1963

In 1955 the Bristol branch of the Transport and General Workers' Union passed a resolution to ban 'coloured' people from working as bus drivers and conductors in Bristol. The national union did nothing to prevent this from happening and the local council supported the ban. In April 1963, four men – Roy Hackett, Owen Henry, Audley Evans and Prince Brown – formed an action group called the West Indian Development Council.

They worked with Paul Stephenson to challenge the colour bar and in May 1963 announced in a press conference that the West Indian and African community in Bristol would boycott the buses. University students and white members of the local community supported the boycott and joined protests. In August 1963 the Transport and General Workers' Union promised to change the policy.

Beauty pageants

Beauty contests began to be established in seaside towns around Britain after the Second World War. Beauty contests provided holiday entertainment and were aimed at families, instilling dreams in girls to one day enter and win; encouraging mums to pick their favourite and criticise anyone who was not and for men of all ages to enjoy watching young women in swimsuits. It was entertainment packaged as 'for the family', which functioned to validate the male gaze – re-enforcing the idea of the female body as an object – and white European notions of femininity and beauty. Contests or pageants took place in many coastal towns including Blackpool, Cleethorpes, Great Yarmouth, Southport and Weston-Super-Mare and Morecombe, which hosted Miss Great Britain from 1945 to 1990.



Contestants from the 1955 Miss Great Britain Final

Post-war prosperity meant that increasing numbers of families could afford to take a holiday on the coast. Beauty contests were viewed as an important part of advertising and attracting people to visit these coastal towns. As contests became more popular with participants and visitors, the prizes and prize money for the winner increased.

The Weston-Super-Mare's lido was built in 1937. The Art Deco design included a diving stage with several platforms and diving boards. As well as beauty contests, summer entertainment included diving shows and water polo.

Beauty pageants are symbolic spaces that shape, create and reinforce dominant cultural ideology. Therefore, whilst performing acts of support and celebration, beauty pageants reflect the social realities of oppression and exclusion.

'The journalist and activist Joan Smith was sent to cover local beauty pageants in Lancashire in the early 70s while working as a junior reporter. "I thought it was pure anachronism, even then," she says. "These pageants

directly exploit the idea that appearances are the most important thing for women.” Despite their socially conscious rebranding, she still believes they are a deeply damaging presence. “Pageants feed on the perpetual anxieties of young women and their longevity only proves that there’s always money to be made from exploiting women,” she says. “They promote a very old-fashioned standard of beauty – with most winners being white or blond.”

*([‘Why are more women that ever applying to be Miss England in the age of Instagram?’](#) – Ammar Kalia, *Guardian*, 8 August 2019)*

- ◇ What stereotypes about beauty and femininity impact the way some women dress and behave?
- ◇ How have these stereotypes influenced the way Margot dresses and behaves in the play?

Characters

PHYLLIS 'PRINCESS' JAMES

Princess is a ten-year-old girl, living with her mother Mavis and brother Wendell Junior in St Agnes, Bristol. Her father, Wendell, left home when she was a baby. Princess attends a local Bristol primary school. Princess loves beauty pageants and dreams of winning the Weston-Super-Mare Beauties of the West Contest.

MAVIS JAMES

Mavis is a 38-year-old Jamaican woman. Mavis travelled from Jamaica to England in 1945, with her husband Wendell. To earn money Mavis makes curtains and dresses. She is a resilient woman who understands herself and self-worth.

WENDELL 'JUNIOR' JAMES

Wendell Junior is a 17-year-old boy. His father, Wendell, left home when he was eight years old. Wendell Junior works at Leon's father's shop. He is learning to be a photographer. Wendell Junior is an important part of documenting the Bristol boycott, Black history and 1960s life in Bristol.

WENDELL 'THE HUSTLER' JAMES

Wendell is a 40-year-old Jamaican man. He served as a second lieutenant in the army, during the Second World War. After being discharged from the army Wendell was promised work and with Mavis, travelled to England. Fighting in the war, the circumstances of his discharge and the discrimination he experiences in England impact Wendell's sense of self and self-worth.

LORNA JAMES

Lorna is a nine-year-old girl. Her father is Wendell and her mother is a white Liverpoolian woman. Lorna has been living with her mother and Wendell in Liverpool. Wendell decides to bring Lorna to Bristol when her mother is taken into hospital.

MARGOT

Margot is a 42-year-old white woman. Margot is single and lives in a bedsit in the same building as Mavis, Wendell Junior and Princess. Margot enjoys life and socialising with other people. She is Mavis' friend and helps her by looking after Princess.

LEON

Leon is a young man, aged 19 years old. He is a supportive friend to Wendell Junior. Leon is a photographer. Like Wendell Junior, Leon is politically aware and active in addressing inequality, racism and oppression.



Wendell (Seun Shote), Lorna (Emily Burnett), Mavis (Donna Berlin), Wendell Junior (Fode Simbo), and Princess (Kudzai Sitima) in Princess & The Hustler at Bristol Old Vic Theatre, 2019. Photograph by Richard Lakos.

Timeline

25 DECEMBER 1962, MAVIS' HOME (ACT ONE, SCENES ONE TO FIVE)

Princess is playing in the cupboard she has decorated with posters and photos, she imagines she wins the Weston-Super-Mare beauty pageant. Mavis is preparing dinner and tries to get the children to help her. An unexpected guest arrives and Mavis refuses to let him in. The family finally eat dinner, including the unexpected guests. Mavis agrees that Lorna can stay for a few days, but Wendell must find somewhere else for him and Lorna to live.

28 DECEMBER 1962, BRISTOL DOCKS (ACT ONE, SCENE SIX)

Princess and Lorna are waiting for Wendell, who has been playing cards with dock workers to make money. Wendell Junior and Leon find the girls after Wendell leaves them alone for a second time. Leon takes the girls home. Junior and Wendell fight.

JANUARY 1963, MAVIS' HOME (ACT ONE, SCENE SEVEN)

Margot is watching Princess and Lorna. Wendell is struggling to find a job and somewhere to stay, and has come to Mavis' flat to warm up. Wendell Junior and Leon arrive and Margot leaves the flat. Wendell Junior and Leon talk about the plans for the boycott. Leon leaves the flat. Wendell Junior tells Wendell how difficult it was growing up without a father. Wendell tries to explain why he left and tells Junior about Lorna's mother. Princess convinces Mavis to allow Wendell to stay.

MAY 1963 (ACT TWO, SCENE ONE)

Lorna is invited to Barbara's party. Princess is upset because she is not invited. Wendell tries to seduce Mavis. They are interrupted when Wendell Junior returns home. Wendell gives Junior a present – equipment for his camera. Wendell Junior tells them that the bus boycott is officially happening.

JUNE 1963 (ACT TWO, SCENE TWO)

Princess is in a cupboard. She is no longer certain that she can win the beauty pageant because of what the other children at school have said about her. Mavis, Wendell and Margot have been out dancing. Wendell and Margot discuss the colour bar, Margot reveals her prejudice and ignorance.

JUNE 1963 (ACT TWO, SCENE THREE)

Wendell reads articles and comments about the boycott in the newspaper to Mavis. Junior is beaten up after participating in the student protest. Princess is worried that they will all be beaten up. Lorna insists she is not like Princess, that she is not Black.



Princess (Kudzai Sitima) and Lorna (Emily Burnett) in Princess & The Hustler at Bristol Old Vic Theatre, 2019. Photograph by Richard Lakos.

JULY 1963 (ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR)

Mavis tells Margot about meeting Wendell and coming to England. How the decisions of the British Army and government have impacted Wendell. Mavis chooses Wendell, despite Margot's attempts to get Mavis to leave him.

JULY 1963 (ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE AND ACT THREE, SCENES ONE to TWO)

Wendell Junior, using the money he has saved, tries to bribe Wendell to leave. (£20

= approx. £800 today). Wendell Junior is trying to protect his mother and is worried that Wendell will hurt her again. Wendell Junior leaves the flat. Then Wendell leaves the flat. Princess, who is lying on the sofa and is supposed to be asleep, witnesses everything. Princess destroys her pageant dresses, pictures and crown in the cupboard. Princess disappears. Margot finds Princess in her bedsit. Princess has tried to cut off her hair.

25 AUGUST 1963 (ACT THREE, SCENE THREE)

Margot takes Princess home. Mavis and Margot repair their friendship.



Wendell (Seun Shote) in Princess & The Hustler at Bristol Old Vic Theatre, 2019. Photograph by Richard Lakos.

28 AUGUST 1963 (ACT THREE, SCENES FOUR TO FIVE)

Wendell has been out drinking for two days. Wendell Junior accuses Wendell of taking his money and spending it on alcohol, instead of finding a home for him and Lorna. Margot returns the money. Princess admits taking it when she wanted to run away. Wendell proposes to Mavis. Mavis helps Princess to understand that she is beautiful. The family go out to celebrate the end of the colour bar.

SEPTEMBER 1963 (ACT THREE, SCENE SIX)

Wendell joins Princess' pageant. The pageant comes alive with a parade of beautiful Black women.

UK Civil Rights Timeline – Progress and Challenges	
Year	Event
1908	Princess Dinubolu, despite being told 'not to enter', becomes the first Black person to enter a beauty pageant in England. Princess Dinubolu enters the pageant at Kursaal amusement park, Southend-on-Sea.
1919	Between January and August race riots take place in Cardiff, Glasgow and Liverpool, and several other cities. The end of the first world war meant the demobilisation of around two million soldiers. Black men who had filled labour shortages during the war are being pushed to be dismissed by their white co-workers, who now refuse to work with them, and the returning soldiers, sailors and airmen. These Black men, alongside Caribbean and African men who had volunteered to fight in the war are regularly hunted down, attacked and sometimes killed by white men who blame them for the lack of available work and jobs.
1931	Dr Harold Moody calls a meeting of prominent UK civil rights activists, on Tottenham Court Road, London. The League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) is formed, with four main aims: to promote and protect the social, education, economic and political interests; to interest members in the welfare of coloured peoples in all parts of the world; to improve relations between the races and to cooperate and affiliate with organisations sympathetic to coloured people. A fifth aim was added in 1937: 'to render financial assistance to coloured people in distress as lies within our capacity.' Members include lawyer Stella Thomas, writer CLR James and broadcaster Una Marson.
1944	A small riot in Park Street, Bristol breaks out when African American GIs refuse to return to their military base.
1945	The fifth annual Pan-African National Congress is held in Manchester. This meeting calls for equality and for racial discrimination to become a criminal offence. Since the first congress, held in London in 1900, the mission is to create a world free from exploitation and racism.
1958	In August a Black man is assaulted in Nottingham. Riots erupt and continue intermittently for two weeks. During the end of August and beginning of September race riots break out in Notting Hill, London. Caribbean migrants in this area are often refused employment and excluded from pubs. Landlords refuse to rent to Black families or charge over-priced rents for overcrowded accommodation. White hostility is fuelled by fascist organisations such as the White Defence League and individuals such as Oswald Mosley.
1959	Claudia Jones founds the <i>West Indian Gazette</i> . In 1959, after the murder of Kelso Cochrane, Jones and members of the <i>West Indian Gazette</i> organise an indoor carnival, the origin of the Notting Hill carnival.
1962	The Commonwealth Immigrants Act is passed. The purpose of the act is to regulate the number of Commonwealth immigrants settling in the UK

	and it gives courts the power to recommend deportations. It is intended to apply equally to all countries in the Commonwealth.
1963	Teacher and activist Paul Stephenson and the West Indian Development Council (WIDC) organise a 60-day boycott of the buses. The Bristol Bus boycott brings about the end of the colour bar – the ban on Caribbean, African and Asian people from working as bus drivers and conductors.
1964	Paul Stephenson is arrested for refusing to leave a pub after the landlord refuses to serve him because he is Black.
1965	The Race Relations Act is the first piece of legislation to address racial discrimination, making it unlawful in public places. The Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS) is formed. The society works to guarantee the human rights of Black people and to strengthen connections between African and Caribbean communities – uniting to fight for freedom and dignity.
1968	The addition of the Race Relations Act makes it illegal to refuse housing and employment to people on the basis of colour, race or ethnic origins.

Themes

Racism

Racism is rooted in ideas and beliefs created to enable the exploitation of global majority people. These ideas and beliefs are accepted as facts or truths rather than being questioned and interrogated – who created them and why, what evidence is used to support these ideas and is the evidence truthful and accurate? Racist ideology in Western nations has enabled the acquisition and accumulation of wealth and has established a framework of social and political power that benefits people who are racialised as white.

The history of the creation of racist ideology is driven by an ingrained need to prove that Black and global majority people are inferior to people who are racialised as white: intellectually, culturally and morally. Since the 16th century, Africans and those of the African diaspora have been presented as sub-human, primitive and uncivilised, and described in increasing contradictory ways to establish and maintain 'white' superiority.

Although ideas and theories about racial groups have been disproved notions of racial difference are still embedded in white British beliefs and behaviours. Racial ideology is based on physical attributes and skin colour, and proximity to whiteness.

Colourism is prejudice and discrimination based on skin tone. Those who have lighter skin often receive preferential treatment, while those who have darker skin are penalised. Preferential treatment of lighter skinned people is often based on the assumption that their ethnicity includes a white parent or ancestry.

Mixed or multi-ethnicity people can find it difficult to bridge their different parent cultures and can sometimes be excluded or cut off from one. Where one parent is racialised as white, a multi-ethnicity person can experience racism from members of their own family. They may not understand their experiences of racism and/or preferential treatment.

Beliefs are a part of the process of socialisation every person goes through as they transition from baby to child and from child to adult. Beliefs help people navigate the cultural environments into which they are born and grow up. Beliefs learnt from parents and adults in a position of influence are generally accepted as truths. Beliefs are not the same as knowledge.

Beliefs are often value-based, placing the subject of the belief into a binary good vs bad, normal vs ab or subnormal, deficient vs acceptable or perfect etc... The development of racist beliefs (stereotypes and stigma) has situated people of the African diaspora in a system that enables the continuation of harmful, discriminatory and exclusionary behaviours: in a cycle of oppression and self-oppression. Racism impacts a person's education, employment, housing, health provision, social and romantic relationships, and their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

- ◇ What examples of systemic and everyday racism can you find in the play? eg Mavis knows that the teachers at Princess' school think that Princess is less intelligent than the white children because she is Black.

Family

In the 1950s, as Britain rebuilt its infrastructure and homes after the Second World Wars, there perpetuated an ideal family structure of the nuclear family: mother, father and two or three children. The mother stays at home, the father goes out to work and the children go to school, where they learn to be responsible citizens. Whilst this is true of many families it is not a true representation of family history. Cohabitation without marriage and single parent families have existed for centuries, as has reliance on extended family and friends.

Unless they were part of the aristocracy or the upper class, British women have always worked to support their families. Black women have worked in white societies since the beginning of the enslavement of African people. Women and men have raised families as single parents for centuries. There is no 'normal' family structure, rather family is what you make for the people with which you live and the people you choose to be in your life.

Mavis and Wendell tried to build a life and family and to fit in when they move to England. However, they face barriers to work and housing that place additional pressures on their relationship. Maintaining a sense of themselves and a connection through love becomes difficult when they are worn down by financial restraints and discrimination.

Mavis maintains the family through love and determination, rooted in the desire for her children to not suffer in the way that she has suffered. She respects Wendell Junior and Princess and supports their dreams. Although Wendell Junior is her child, she understands how he has supported her in maintaining their family unit.

Margot finds acceptance in her relationship with Mavis. Margot finds it difficult to connect to her own family because she does not conform to socialised notions of what a woman should be. Margot enjoys being single and socialising. However, she values the deeper connection and sense of kinship she gains from spending time with Mavis, Wendell Junior and Princess.

Wendell Junior's friendship with Leon is a close friendship. Wendell Junior looks up to Leon like an older brother and Leon's father has provided guidance and support to Wendell Junior as if he were responsible for Junior as an extended family member.

Understanding another person's motivations and challenges are key to creating family, a creating a sense of belonging. Lorna stops asking for her mother and is at the beginning of this process at the end of the play.

- ◇ How does Wendell navigate the pressure of the idea that 'a man should be the head of the house' when he is not able to get work? How does the final scene show that Wendell has broken free of these limitations?
- ◇ How do Mavis and Margot represent feminist ideas? How do Mavis and Margot embody the differences between Black feminism and white feminism?

Interviews

Princess & The Hustler 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: Can you describe *Princess & The Hustler* in your own words?

Chinonyerem Odimba (CO): *Princess & The Hustler* is a story about a ten-year-old girl living in Bristol in 1963, and it's a story about her family's battle with the bigger issues of racism at that time, in Bristol and the UK. But it's also a story about her battle as a young girl to find her sense of beauty in a world that tells us that she's not beautiful.

Q: So, how did *Princess & The Hustler* come about?

CO: The play came about when I was approached by Eclipse Theatre to write something that was reflective of Black British history. And as I lived in Bristol, the Bristol Bus Boycott was one of the first stories that I'd heard when I first moved to the city almost 20 years ago. But I felt it was a story that hadn't really ever been told in a comprehensive way. So, when Eclipse commissioned me, we talked a lot about the Bristol Bus Boycott being one of those moments in Black British history that felt really important to explore. And initially, I was reluctant to take it on because it felt like such a such a big and important story. But then actually, when went I back to look at the story, and to look at the various versions of the story that had been told, it just felt like we weren't connecting the dots between that big political moment and the everyday lives of Black people in the city, particularly at that time. And so that's how the story came about, and the character of Princess, for me, was just one of those very difficult things to explain, as a writer, where a character presents themselves to you and almost forces you to tell the story. She felt very real to me in both the writing of her story but also in my own experiences as a Black woman growing up in this country. And Princess' story also felt important because I think so much of the time, when we talk about racism, we forget how early on in our lives. It begins, how early on for most Black people you start to have an awareness that there are certain messages the world is sending out to you that you start to have to find a way to either have to start to fight or internalise, both of which are not responses that many white people have to feel against a world at such a young age.

Q: You sort of started to touch on this. Can I ask why did you decide to approach this moment in history via this particular story?

CO: Like I said, you know, it was really just feeling that it was a version of the story I'd never heard. I also was really interested in the fact that when I started to look at the history of the area, Weston-Super-Mare came up as this centre of like beauty pageants, and Weston-Super-Mare is so close to Bristol. And, yeah, I don't think anything we experience as Black people ever sits outside of racism, certainly in this context. You know, your sense of beauty is somehow influenced and distorted

sometimes by it. And I just really wanted for audiences to, yes, see the political ramifications of racism and to see such a moment being made clear on stage. But also, to see the smaller, more nuanced, conversations about race and racism in this country. And I wanted people to see and want to protect young dreams and young lives like Princess', even today. So it felt really important for me to tell the story in that way, and to let Princess really really live in all of her Black joy, you know, in her little girl dreams, in her world in which she could and would win a beauty pageant. And I wanted that joy to shine through as well because when you write about moments of history like this, there's always a sense that you have to be earnest. And there's so much joy in Blackness as well that we rarely get to see and that's what Princess represents for me.

Q: *Princess & The Hustler* deals with a real-life historical event, the Bristol Bus Boycott in 1963, which helped pave the way for government legislation against discrimination. You said earlier it was something you learned about when you first moved to Bristol – did you need to do much research for the play?

CO: Yes, wow, yes! It was a very research heavy project. Partly because, I suppose I wanted to get the stories and the insight into that time that wasn't being reported in the newspapers and one of the ways I did that was I got to know Paul Stephenson, who was one of the original campaigners in the boycott. And so, I spent time with Paul and his wife at their home, talking to him about that moment. He shared with me his archives of press clippings and, you know, pictures and some of the stuff, both the good and the bad stuff, what the media was saying about the boycott. And we really talked about what those days were like for him, both as a young man putting his – in a way – sticking his head about the parapet, but also what it was like on a very personal level. How they felt in their homes and the threats that they used to receive because of the action. So, you know, it felt like the research was about really getting under the skin of some of those characters who were actually there during the time of it.

I knew a little bit about beauty pageants, and because they have such a bad reputation in our modern contemporary imagination, I didn't know enough. And so, there was a lot of, there was a lot of research done about the beauty pageants that used to take place in places like Weston-Super-Mare and how those were part of why those seaside towns flourished. It was really hard in terms of research to not just keep going. There is an endless amount of information out there that really felt important to the story. And as a storyteller, you always have to choose and discern which bits of that research you want to use for the story. It took me two years to write the play, and there were just months and months of that which were just researching the world of Bristol in 1963. Those really important people, who took part in the Bristol Bus Boycott, and also what it was to be a young girl, a young Black girl, at the time. So there's references to the way teachers spoke to you, there's references to the living conditions, there's references to even the geography, in terms of socio-economic factors in the city, and all of that was stuff that needed to be researched quite thoroughly in order for me, as the writer, and for the audiences to really feel and see the play.

From The NHB Playgroup Q&A Podcast: *Princess & The Hustler* by Chinonyerem

Odimba, 22 Apr 2020: <https://soundcloud.com/nickhernbooks/the-nhb-playgroup-qa-podcast-princess-the-hustler-by-chinonyerem-odimba>

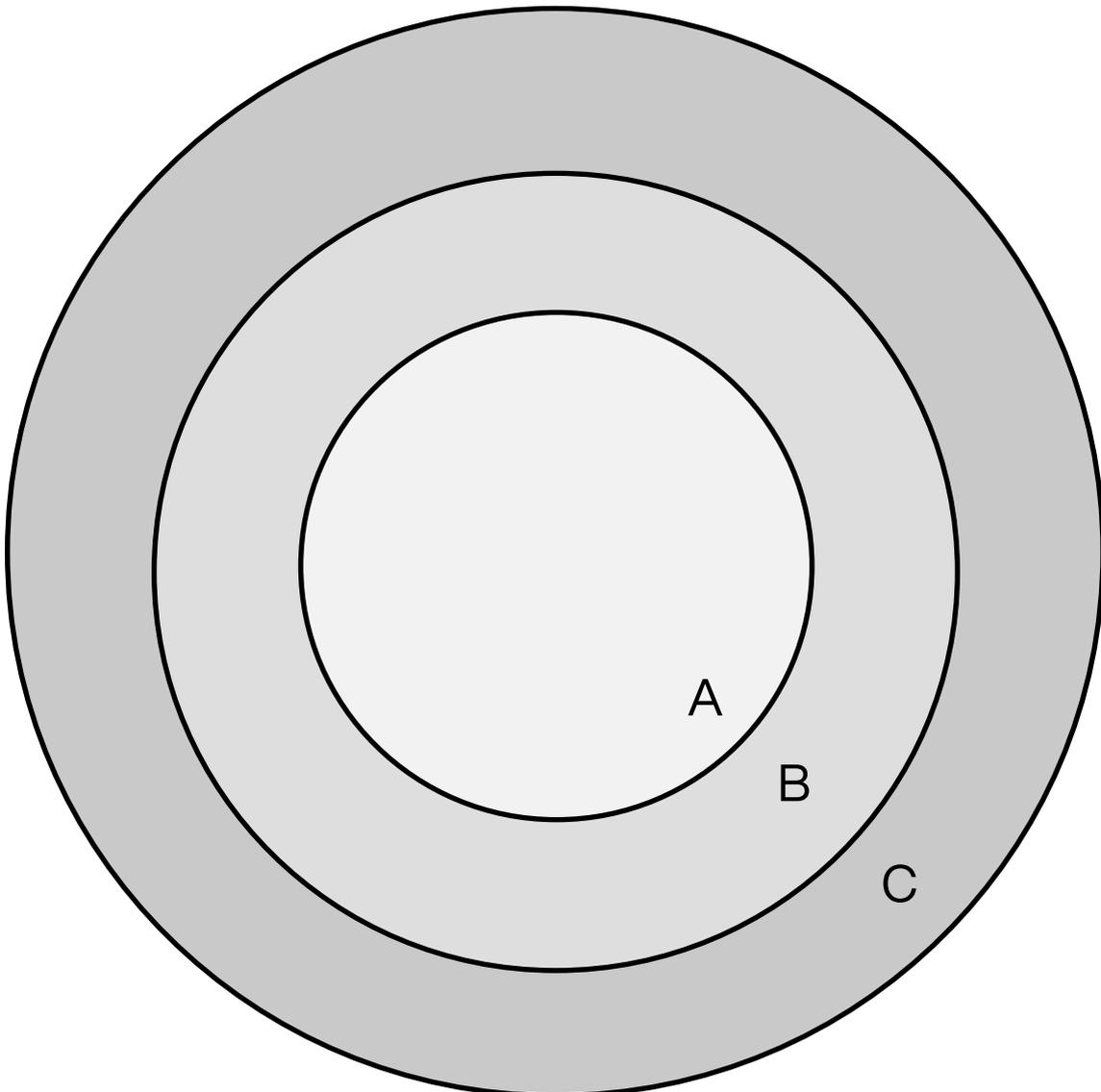
Exercises

Character Collage

You will need a large piece of paper (at least A3). Draw a large, medium and small circle on the paper. Choose a character from the play. In the centre circle (A) draw pictures, stick images and write words that represent the personal identity of the character. In the middle ring (B) draw pictures, stick images and write words that represent the character's community (family, friends, neighbourhood etc). In the outer ring (C) draw pictures, stick images and write words that represent the country (Britain/England in 1963).

Discuss the different collages you have created:

1. What do they tell you about different perceptions and understanding of history and British identity?
2. How do personal, community, and national identity interact?
3. If the characters existed now, what would be similar or different in the representations?



Timelines Extension

Develop the civil rights timeline by researching UK history and adding Black protest, activism and new legislation from 1968 to the present.

Discussion

Discuss how Margot represents and replicates the racist ideas cited in the quote below from Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi's essay *The 1951 – 1955 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration*.

Black migration, it was alleged, would create problems which were insoluble precisely because their provenance was 'racial' and not political. Black people were unemployed not because of discrimination, but because of their 'irresponsibility, quarrelsomeness and lack of discipline'. Black people lived in slums not because of discrimination and the unwillingness of government and local authorities to tackle the housing shortage but because they knew no better. Indeed, their very 'nature' was held to predispose them towards criminality.

Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader, edited by Kwesi Owusu

Objectives

1. Identify what each character wants at the beginning of the play (eg Princess wants to visit the Weston-Super-Mare beauty contest. Junior wants to be a photographer).
2. How does the character try to achieve their objective in the scene?
3. Do they achieve their objective?
4. Who or what helps them to achieve their objective?
5. Who or what prevents them from achieving their objective?
6. Does their objective change by the end of the play?
7. What or who changes their objective?

Write a monologue

Choose either the character Leon or Margot. Read through the play and write down information about your chosen character (you can use Stanislavski's principle of 'Given Circumstances' to help you: descriptions in the stage directions, what the characters say about themselves and what other characters say about them). Any information you don't know, try to create a question that will help you find an answer either through writing the monologue or wider research. Read through the play and collect information about what your chosen character thinks about the James family. Free write a monologue (don't worry about spelling and punctuation and don't cross anything out, you can edit the monologue after you have finished

writing) for:

- ◇ Leon at the shop talking to his father after Wendell Junior has left.
- ◇ Margot talking to a date (think about how Margot would speak to someone who is racialised white or someone who is Black).

Read the monologue out loud or ask someone to read it for you. Ask for feedback and make notes on what needs to change. What wider research do you need to do to understand the character better. Use the feedback, notes and research to help you edit the monologue. Use the following questions to further shape and edit the monologue: what is the character trying to communicate to the listener (Leon's father or Margot's date)? What is the character trying to do to the audience?

Write a duologue

Choose a civil rights event from your local area (town/city or region) and write a scene which includes at least one character that experiences racism and one character who is racialised as white. At least one character is involved or associated with the event. Before writing your scene decide:

- ◇ on a location for the characters (kitchen, café, classroom etc)
- ◇ if they know each other, how?
- ◇ if they don't know each other, why are they in the same place?

This exercise can be used to improvise a scene between two people.

Useful Links

Nick Hern Books: AQA English Literature Resources

<https://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/princess-and-the-hustler-study-guide-further-resources>

How the Bristol Bus Boycott Changed Civil Rights

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2020/aug/26/revisited-how-the-bristol-bus-boycott-changed-uk-civil-rights-podcast>

The Bristol Bus Boycott of 1963

<https://www.Blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/civil-rights-movement/the-bristol-bus-boycott-of-1963/>

Bristol Bus Boycott

<https://bristolbusboycott.uk/archive/>

Paul Stephenson

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/oct/01/paul-stephenson-the-hero-who-refused-to-leave-a-pub-and-helped-desegregate-britain>

Fifth Pan-African Congress

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcDkqfoo5c0>

Empire Windrush: Life for Migrants in the 1940s and 50s

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-empire-windrush/empire-windrush-life-for-migrants-in-the-1940s-and-50s/>

Unravelling the Windrush Myth: the confidential government communications that reveal authorities did not want Caribbean migrants to come to Britain

<https://theconversation.com/unravelling-the-windrush-myth-the-confidential-government-communications-that-reveal-authorities-did-not-want-caribbean-migrants-to-come-to-britain-206225>

Why did Caribbeans come to the UK after the Second World War?

<https://www.ibhm-uk.org/post/why-did-caribbeans-come-to-the-uk-after-the-2nd-world-war>

Soldiers of the Caribbean: Britain's forgotten war heroes by Claire Brennan

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32703753>

Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery

<https://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/slavery/>

Mixed Museum

<https://mixedmuseum.org.uk/amri-exhibition/1913-john-archer/>

**National
Theatre**

Thank you

This Teachers Educational Resource Pack was written by
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