

# Developing a representative drama curriculum

## Introduction - Why We Did This

At the time of writing (June 2020), the four main exam boards in England offer 27 set texts between them for students studying GCSE Drama.

Only one of these 27 plays is by a Black author. 26 of them are not. Of the four exam boards, three of them have no Black, Asian or ethnically diverse representation through set texts at GCSE level.

At the time of writing, the four main exam boards in England offer 61 set texts between them for students studying AS/A Level Drama and Theatre.

Only two of these 61 plays are by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse authors. 59 of them are not. Of the four boards, two of them have no Black, Asian or ethnically diverse representation through set texts at AS/A Level.

This got us thinking.

We are, of course, aware that theatre and its history hasn't always been equal. Especially when it comes to underrepresented groups, like Black, Asian or ethnically diverse communities, women and D/deaf or Disabled people.

We aren't here to take issue with the exam boards. We wanted to think about what we could do as classroom/theatre practitioners, as Drama teachers.

We are in a privileged position. We can make decisions about what we teach and how and can easily adapt our curriculum to be more representative and include more Black, Asian and ethnically diverse authors. Teachers are – as we have seen – crying out for this information.

Here are, then, some ideas and suggestions for what you might do in terms of assessing your own curriculum. Does it represent the world that we live in? There are also suggestions of some brilliant plays by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse authors to help further.

This isn't an answer to a question, and it isn't the end of a conversation. We hope that it might help to provide ideas and a starting point.

Let's keep the conversation going and remember that equal representation isn't a fad or a political issue.

These plays should be accessible and part of our everyday education within Drama departments and youth theatres everywhere.

Carolyn Bradley (Twitter: [@ourcarolyn](#))

Matthew Nichols (Twitter: [@matthew\\_drama](#))

## Special thanks

We would like to extend our warmest thanks to the following professionals who we consulted to produce this document:

[Emteaz Hussain](#) – Playwright

[Dr Diedre Osborne](#) – Reader in English Literature and Drama at Goldsmith's University; co-convenes the MA in Black British Writing

[Esther Richardson](#) – Artistic Director of Pilot Theatre

[Alex Wheatle, MBE](#) – Author

[Roy Williams, OBE](#) – Playwright

[Matthew Xia](#) – Artistic Director of Actors Touring Company

## Endorsements

*"I would not be the writer I am, without drama taking me to other worlds to explore and showing the world I was living in in all of its complexity. To be seen for who you are, understood for who you are makes it that much harder for others to dismiss someone and others who may look like them. This is an experience young people should not miss out on. The curriculum in this country needs a proper shake up."*

Roy Williams

*"When you consider the fact that there is only 1 non-white dramatist out of 27 recommended texts for GCSE, and only 2 out of 61 plays at A/AS levels it is jaw dropping. I mean seriously in 2020!? Especially when, like me, you're aware of the vast array of work over decades from people of colour artists and how they've been the touchstone, inspiration and companionship for my own work and art. So, with fortitude and a desire to address this gross imbalance this document/proposal has been forged to rightly centre the diversity of the world we live in and bring these brilliant plays to the attention our next generation. I am proud to support this."*

Emteaz Hussain

*"All children and young people should be enabled to understand the richness, complexity and diversity of the country they are growing up in -the facts of its history, and the lived experiences of different communities. There is no better tool than drama to build compassion and to explore who we are, who we have been, and who we can be in the future if we choose to be open and brave."*

Esther Richardson

## Audit your Drama Department

Consider how representative your drama department currently is by asking yourself these starting ten questions:

1. Do your schemes of work place European Theatre as the pinnacle of theatre globally? If so, why?
2. Do you teach any texts which are written by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers?
3. Do you allow for opportunities to discuss race and racism in your schemes of work?
4. In devising, do students have the opportunity to explore the world around them and the conflicts that exist, in a safe and educational space?
5. In text work, are students exposed to a rich, inclusive and socio-culturally relevant range of texts that support their learning and understanding about the world we live in?
6. Do your students understand the concept of [non-ethnically specific casting](#), and the need for more equality and representation in the entertainment industry?
7. Do your displays, YouTube clips for learning, play extracts or visual resources used allow students of all backgrounds to see themselves in the learning?
8. Do your schemes of work reflect the *global* history of drama?
9. Does your department celebrate inclusion in theatre and performance?
10. Are your students aware of progress which has been made but the work that still needs to be done?

*For example: do your students know that Ira Aldridge was the first Black actor to play Othello in the West End in 1833? Or that Elmina's Kitchen by Kwame Kwei-Armah was the first play by a Black British writer to appear in the West End, as late as 2003? Or that Winsome Pinnock was the first Black British female writer to have a play produced by the Royal National Theatre? Are your students aware of companies such as Graeae and Ramps on the Moon who champion inclusivity by "normalising the presence of D/deaf and disabled people both on and off stage?"*

## Essential reading

[Why Black Lives Matter in Education and Beyond – Chartered College of Teaching blog](#)

## Resources to educate and inspire

[Raising the Bar: 100 Years of Black British Theatre and Screen – a fascinating educational podcast series presented by Lenny Henry, vital learning for teachers and students](#)

[The National Theatre’s Black Plays Archive - an online catalogue of the first professional production of every African, Caribbean, and Black British play produced in the U.K.](#)

[National Theatre Collection online – \*Small Island\* and \*Les Blancs\* are both available here](#)

[\*Elmina’s Kitchen\* Resource Pack from the National Theatre](#)

[An article explaining non-ethnically specific casting, with examples and opinions](#)

[Playwright Lolita Chakrabarti discussing Ira Aldridge, and her play about him, \*Red Velvet\*](#)

[Education Pack for Pilot Theatre company’s 2020 production of \*Crongton Knights\*, adapted by Emteaz Hussain from the novel by Alex Wheatle](#)

[Education Pack for the RSC production of \*Noughts and Crosses\*, adapted by Dominic Cooke from the novel by Malorie Blackman](#)

[Education Pack for Pilot Theatre company’s production of \*Noughts and Crosses\*, adapted by Sabrina Mahfouz, from the novel by Malorie Blackman](#)

[Interview with Emteaz Hussain about her play, \*Blood\*](#)

[Decolonising History – a digital project from Tamasha Theatre Company in collaboration with SOAS, which explored British colonial history, resulting in five thrilling audio dramas. All five audio plays can be listened to on SoundCloud.](#)

## Principles for teaching

- Carefully consider the visual resources you use for teaching to ensure representation and visibility of people from all ethnic backgrounds. Be ambitious and brave with theatre productions you book as trips, to ensure your students can experience a representative and relevant range of productions, by writers from all races and genders, as well as a diverse cast. As Naila Missous states:

“If you don’t see yourself in the learning you are acquiring; if you don’t ever get your name pronounced properly, and if you are treated as though you are no different to anyone else, then hereby lies a problem.”

[Why Black Lives Matter in Education and Beyond, Chartered College, 2020](#)

- Have open discussions about non-ethnically specific casting and non-gender specific casting with students and why this is important for equality and diversity in recruitment in the entertainment industry.
- Consider changing the set texts you teach, and the plays you use for scripted performance units – not all students have to study a scene from the same play. Offer texts which are more relevant to your students’ lived experience, of course, but seek to push their boundaries so that they encounter plays which explore different and contrasting world and life experiences. *Do what’s right, not what’s easy.*
- In some texts by Black and Asian playwrights, the ethnicity of the characters is integral to the plot. Where the ethnicity of the characters is stated in the text, we must respect this in our casting in the classroom. If you are unable to cast texts appropriately, endeavour to find more ways to increase access to diverse texts which aren’t limited to ‘acting out.’ See below for practical suggestions for teaching.

## Practical suggestions for teaching

- Install and promote a Drama lending library featuring play texts by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers – encourage students to borrow them to read
- Set up an extracurricular ‘theatre studies’ group to read and discuss a wider range of play texts outside of curriculum time
- Create displays which promote seminal texts by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers and chart global theatre history

- Plan and implement a World Theatre unit for KS3, where every lesson looks at theatre influences from a different culture.
- Consider switching set texts at GCSE or A Level – we know this leap can be scary, but it can be refreshing to change, and a more representative text can be more inclusive for your students. For example, *Noughts and Crosses* on the AQA GCSE Drama specification is a fantastic text for exploring race, prejudice and colonisation – and in light of current events, students are bound to have a lot of questions about this.
- Dedicate one Drama lesson a month at KS4 and KS5 to “theatre appreciation” – use a flip learning model so students take home and read a play you have selected and spend one lesson discussing the text. Use this model to extend the texts your students have access to and include a range of plays by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers. Even if you excluded months such as December, March and April which are busy with exam prep or school productions – your students could still read an amazing six extra plays a year through this model.
- If you are struggling for curriculum ‘time’ to cover a wider range of texts, create supercurricular projects for your most able learners to undertake independent study tasks on plays by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse playwrights or the history of Black and Asian theatre in Britain. See the supercurricular guide on page 8 for more ideas.
- When preparing students for the live theatre section of the exam, seek out productions which are inclusive in their casting or written by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse playwrights. As an example – the NT’s production of [Small Island is currently available for free as part of the National Theatre Collection](#) *Small Island* is adapted from the book by Andrea Levy, and explores interconnected journeys from Jamaica to Britain after World War Two.
- [Les Blancs by Lorraine Hansberry](#) is available online as part of the National Theatre Collection, and whilst some specifications might make using recorded theatre difficult for the ‘Live’ Theatre exam, it’s still a dynamic production which students can use for ‘practice’ essays or just for widening their theatre knowledge.
- *Wise Children* and *Malory Towers*, directed by Emma Rice and produced by [Wise Children](#), both featured non-ethnically specific and non-gender specific casting. [Wise Children is currently available on BBC iPlayer as part of the Culture in Quarantine season.](#)
- Use plays, poems, novels or non-fiction books by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers as starting points and stimuli for devising. For example, read a novel from [Alex Wheatle](#)’s fabulous *Liccle Bit* series for young adults, and use the themes from this as stimuli for devising. *Crongton Knights*, (which

was produced in 2020 by Pilot and therefore there are lots of [resources online](#) for this production) explores themes of friendship, sex and relationships, crime, poverty, and journeys.

- When studying Shakespeare, seek out more contemporary and culturally diverse interpretations of the text. Many productions are now available on DVD, such as the RSC's 2016/2018 production of [Hamlet](#) with Paapa Essiedu as Hamlet, which could also be used for the live theatre exam.

## Supercurricular project ideas

Many schools offer an EPQ qualification at A Level or teach the Arts Award as an additional arts qualification. With the new OFSTED framework, many schools offer super-curricular projects or activities which go beyond the school curriculum to challenge and extend students' learning and develop cultural capital. Consider the following inquiry questions or tasks to set for your supercurricular projects:

- How does representation of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse artists in the theatre industry need to change?
- Discuss the impact *Elmina's Kitchen* and *Barber Shop Chronicles* have had on the British theatre scene.
- Daniel York Loh writes that British East Asian playwrights have been 'sided-lined in any debate on diversity in theatre' – why is this? Explore a range of plays by British East Asian playwrights.
- Research the work of Tamasha Theatre Company, who are "foregrounding emerging and established artists from culturally diverse backgrounds."
- Explore the career and works of Winsome Pinnock.
- Emteaz Hussain adapted the story of *Blood Wedding* by Lorca for her play *Blood*, commissioned by Tamasha Theatre Company. Adapt a classic text for a contemporary audience, transposing the text to a different cultural setting.
- Write your own radio play inspired by Tamasha Theatre Company's [Decolonising History project](#).



## Further Reading

Osborne, Deirdre (ed). *Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Literature (1945-2010)*

Brewer, Mary., Goddard, Lynette., Osborne, Deirdre. (eds) *Modern and Contemporary Black British Theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

Chambers, Colin. *Black and Asian Theatre in Britain: A History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011)

Goddard, Lynette. *Staging Black Feminisms: Identity, Politics, Performance* (Hampshire, GB and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Griffin, Gabriele. *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003.

Hingorani, Dominic. *British Asian Theatre: Dramaturgy, Process and Performance* (London: Palgrave, 2010)

## Recommended Texts

We haven't tried to cover every play ever written here. Nor is this a list of The Greatest Plays Ever Written by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers. This is a list of plays – and a few musicals – which we have picked out to try and inspire teachers and their students. Our only rule was: no more than two plays by any one writer.

We've recommended whether we think they're best suited to KS4, KS5 or both, and – occasionally – some for Key Stage 3. Ultimately, that decision lies with you; you'll know your students best.

We haven't given a breakdown of characters or roles or the number of male and female parts. We want you to discover these brilliant plays based on their artistic worth, and then think about how you might integrate them into your curriculum.

If you don't think these plays will work for you in the classroom, then how about getting copies for the department library, and letting students discover them for themselves?

We hope that there are plays here which you can get excited about.

Carolyn and Matthew

## Plays

### Gone Too Far by Bola Agbaje

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** A portrait of contemporary London, rife with tensions. Yemi is a tough south London teenager who is permanently at war with his older brother, Ikudayisi, newly arrived from Nigeria. They may share a bedroom, but beyond that, their shared city streets are tough places to be.

**Why:** Agbaje's writing is tough, unflinching and uncompromising. It combines all the swagger and posturing of youth but also looks to ask about how to define yourself in a modern society. A raft of great roles and hugely accessible too.



### Immune by Oladipo Agboluaje

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** A flexible and playful text, this piece of science-fiction is a vision of a looming apocalypse, seen through the eyes of teenagers in a school, forced to fight for their survival, and starting to think about what their existence might actually mean.

**Why:** Agboluaje's play is bound to become a favourite of anyone who picks it up. There is so much potential in terms of staging approaches, and this play manages to work as a piece of genre theatre whilst also nailing how teenagers think, feel and speak.



### Fit by Rikki Beadle-Blair

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** Ryan is a proper lad. Lee is straight, but everyone thinks he's gay. Meanwhile, Karmel is into fashion and make-up, but also likes girls. When a secret crush comes to light, it appears that not everyone is quite what they seem.

**Why:** Beadle-Blair's play is a funny and really sympathetic look at sexuality in a modern British secondary school. Lots of really cracking scenes of dialogue, and the play dovetails neatly with PSHE/Citizenship lessons as well.



## Red Velvet by Lolita Chakrabarti

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** A fascinating portrayal of the pioneering African-American actor Ira Aldridge, this play examines what happened to a major non-white stage performer after his London debut in 1833.

**Why:** A wonderful play about plays, Chakrabarti fuses historical fact with fiction to deliver an entertaining look at theatre then and theatre now. If you enjoy *Our Country's Good* then this an absolute must. An essential look at a chapter of Black theatre history.



## The Free Nine by In-Sook Chappell

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** Nine teenagers have fled North Korea, with hope and dreams of a new life together in the South. Escaping was actually the easy part, as their perilous journey appears to be fraught and constantly monitored by The Big Brother.

**Why:** A genuinely underrated National Theatre Connections play, Chappell uses the basic facts of the tragic and true story of the 'Laos Nine' and prompts thought-provoking ideas of hope, freedom and cultural clashes. This could even work well with Key Stage 3 but should definitely find its way into your classroom.



## Chewing Gum Dreams by Michaela Coel

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** Tracey Gordon is 14. In this stunning monologue, she leads us through her life: best friend Candice, boys, school, contraceptives, tampons and Connor Jones.

**Why:** Before there was Fleabag, there was Michaela Coel. This hilarious and furious monologue is a dazzling and bracing insight into modern Britain as seen through the eyes of its Black protagonist. Coel is a serious talent and this is a brilliant piece of writing.



## Homegrown by Omar El-Khairy and Nadia Latif

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** Written as a site-specific and promenade piece, this play is a searing examination of the phenomenon of young people who are prepared to leave Britain to join Islamic State.

**Why:** A troubled production history meant that this National Youth Theatre commission was pulled before its debut. A few years on, the script reveals that it's a deeply serious play coupled to a playful format. It's a brave and ambitious piece which deserves a wider following.



## Barber Shop Chronicles by Inua Ellams

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** The barbershop is a male environment, and generations of African men gather in them every day to chat. Politics, football, the banter, and the barbers – they're all here.

**Why:** A recent NT At Home screening might well have boosted awareness of Ellams' joyous celebration of a play, but it deserves to find the widest audience possible. Here's a really accessible play which truly celebrates diversity and is as uplifting as it's thought-provoking.



## Cape by Inua Ellams

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** Bruce's mum has been mugged. She's shaken but he's angry. So, Bruce grabs his hoodie, his uniform and his cape and sets out to find who mugged his Mum.

**Why:** A smart and funny play, this has a lot to say about carving out your own identity and standing up for what you believe in. Ellams' writing really is fantastic, and this play is accessible, punchy and fun.



## Sweet Like Chocolate Boy by Tristan Fynn-Aiduenu

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** In contemporary London, Mars is about to propose to the girl of his dreams. In 1990s London, Bounty is finding his place in a politically-charged world.

**Why:** Bursting with garage and jungle, this play goes down an absolute storm with even the most unruly of classes. Fynn-Aiduenu knows exactly how to coat his message about the problems with London's estate culture, packaged as a sure fire hit.



## Nine Night by Natasha Gordon

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** The Jamaican ritual of a 'nine night' is brought to life in a funny and moving story of family, food, music and mourning. For Gloria's children, her passing marks the start of nine nights of sharing stories and being reminded of the power – and frustrations – of family.

**Why:** This recent West End hit is Gordon's debut play, but definitely won't be her last. She has a knack for tackling massive themes through some seriously funny dialogue. The character of Aunt Maggie is one of the best theatre creations of the last decade.



## The Empress by Tanika Gupta

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** Set around Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, Rani and Abdul arrive in London after their long sea-crossing from India. Whilst one has to battle a society who view her as a second rate citizen, the other has an even more astonishing future ahead.

**Why:** Gupta's examination of colonisation incorporates song and cultural traditions into a joyous, epic sweep of a play. Unafraid to look away from uncomfortable truths, but bursting with heart, this is set to become a modern-day classic.



## White Boy by Tanika Gupta

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** Ricky goes to a regular London state school. His mates come from all over the world. But when tensions and rivalries threaten the unity of the group, Ricky has to think about where his real loyalties lie.

**Why:** Gupta's play, a brilliant commission by National Youth Theatre, shows secondary school life in all its swagger. Swearing, bluster and banter is all here, but Gupta is really interested in getting into the psyche of disaffected male teenagers. A fantastic play.



## The Mountaintop by Katori Hall

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** A fictional account of a conversation between Martin Luther King Jr and a maid, Camae, in his hotel room on the eve of his assassination in 1968. The early flirtation and flashes of humour soon give way to something much more unexpected.

**Why:** Hall was the first Black female winner of the Olivier Award for Best New Play with this triumphant effort in 2010, and there were still murmurings at the time. Think of it as the Olivier jury doing the right thing and bringing this wonderful fusion of fact and fiction to a wider audience.



## A Raisin in The Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

**Who For:** GCSE /A Level

**Plot:** A massive insurance pay-out changes the lives of the Younger family, living in poverty on Chicago's south side. Whilst limousine driver Walter has big designs for the money and dreams of becoming wealthy, his mother Lena dreams of a better life in a quieter neighbourhood.

**Why:** Hansberry's masterpiece is one of the truly great twentieth century American dramas. A bittersweet family epic, it still packs enormous power; its ending is both inspirational and moving. Think of it as the African-American dream in all its glory.



## Les Blancs by Lorraine Hansberry

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** A family and an African nation both start to collapse under pressure. As racial tensions escalate, Tshembe, returning from his father's funeral in England, finds himself the focus of attention.

**Why:** Considered by many to be a 'lost' masterpiece, this is an explosive drama which sublimely blends the personal and political. In Hansberry's final play, her use of the dance and music of African cultures was ground-breaking.



## Slave Play by Jeremy O Harris

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** A bruising play where three interracial couples take part in therapy because the Black partners no longer feel any attraction to their white partners.

**Why:** Original, magnificent and unafraid to try and take on some big themes and probe them with big questions. This is an undeniable masterpiece, perhaps one for the most mature of students, but a play which pulses and pushes at the boundaries of theatrical possibility.



## Blood by Emteaz Hussain

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** When Sully meets Caneze in their college canteen, neither of them expected to feel quite so smitten quite so quickly. But neither of them banked on the lengths that Caneze's brother would go to in order to keep them apart.

**Why:** This is a smash hit for students waiting to happen. Hussain captures the first rush of teenage love, and also grafts on a funny and heartfelt look at the modern British Asian community.





## An Octoroon by Branden Jacobs Jenkins

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** In 1859, the white Irish playwright Dion Boucicault wrote a hit play about America. In modern-day America, a Black playwright tries to do the same thing.

**Why:** One of the best plays of the last decade, this is hilarious, terrifying and genuinely shocking in places. A dazzling melodrama reimaged as a modern performance piece this is exhilarating and bound to provoke debate with students.



## Cuttin' It by Charlene James

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** Muna and Iqra have lots in common. They get the same school bus. They were both born in Somalia. But they also have something else in common, too.

**Why:** James' writing makes teenage banter look effortless. It starts funny and bouncing with energy, but this play swerves to examine the realities of FGM in contemporary society. Thought-provoking and brilliant.



## Chiaroscuro by Jackie Kay

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** Four women – Opal, Beth, Yomi and Aisha – use live music and spoken word to explore their past and define who they are in their own right.

**Why:** For all those crying out for some abstract/non-naturalistic work, this exciting and heady fusion of poetry, prose and music is an essential exploration of modern women and their ancestral past.



## Misty by Arinze Kene

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** Written as a pulsating monologue and a fusion of music, poetry and prose, this is a personal and kaleidoscopic portrait of contemporary London, seen through the eyes of Kene.

**Why:** One of Britain's most exciting actors, Kene's exuberant and crowd-pleasing hit galloped from the fringe to the West End. It's inspirational and brilliantly constructed, leaving us in no doubt that Kene is the real deal.



## East Is East by Ayub Khan Din

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** In 1970s Salford, Pakistani George Khan and his British-born wife Ella are constantly locked in a battle as to how best to raise their six children. Should it be with traditional Pakistani Muslim values, or as proud British patriots?

**Why:** A much-loved film version boosted the popularity of this much-loved play. Now it's pretty much a period piece, but its central dilemma remains pertinent, and it's full of salty language, quotable dialogue and enormous heart.



## Elmina's Kitchen by Kwame Kwei-Armah

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** Restaurant owner Deli, tries to look out for his son Ashley, an impressionable and easily influenced teenager who is swayed by the gangster culture of Hackney's Murder Mile.

**Why:** Arguably Kwei-Armah's breakthrough play, this is a heartfelt distillation of a time and a place. It is specific; about a Black London community in the early years of this century, but its poignant family saga remains stirring and easily relatable.



## Seven Methods Of Killing Kylie Jenner by Jasmine Lee-Jones

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** Cleo has created uproar on Twitter. She's imagining all the ways in which she might kill the TV reality star. She explains to her best friend Kara just Why she wants Kylie Jenner to die.

**Why:** This is a bang up-to-date look at social media, celebrity, race, slavery and white supremacy. The play zings with brilliant dialogue and, in her debut play, Lee-Jones has announced herself as an original and important voice.



## Wig Out! by Tarell Alvin McCraney

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** Set in the fictitious, legendary House of Light, the competitive drag queens sashay for their lives. But when Nina falls for Eric, can happiness emerge from different walks of life and gender confusion? Strike a pose, indeed.

**Why:** Think *Paris Is Burning* meets TV's *Pose* but with lashings of theatricality and killer dialogue. McCraney's hilarious play reimagines drag as a pugilist arena, and has something serious to say about dressing up, gender and pretending.



## Emilia by Morgan Lloyd Malcolm

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** Four hundred years ago, Emilia Bassano wanted her voice to be heard. It wasn't. Was she, perhaps, the 'Dark Lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets? This roof-raising play looks back through history to try to find out.

**Why:** This is, frankly, a set text waiting to happen. Lloyd Malcolm's writing is angry, informed, hilarious and full of wit. This is one of the best plays of the last five years, and the closing speech is worth the price of a copy on its own. Unmissable. Seriously.



## The Far Side by Courttia Newland

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** Set after the murder of a Black youth by a white youth, the action takes place in a Kangaroo Court where the perpetrator is visited by the ghost of his victim.

**Why:** A genre-defying play from acclaimed playwright and author Newland, which is at times absurdist and dream-like and at times courtroom drama. Characters have names such as Black Youth, White Youth, Youth Worker - giving the play an Epic theatre feel and challenging us to question concepts of justice, revenge and morals.



## Clybourne Park by Bruce Norris

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** A dazzling counter-piece to *A Raisin In The Sun*, this play takes place over fifty years looking at how the same Chicago neighbourhood moved from being predominantly white to all-black and gentrifying.

**Why:** One of only two plays here by white authors, this Pulitzer Prize winner is a landmark play, looking at the gentrification of Black urban neighbourhoods. It is also rich in social and historical detail, and full of the most wonderful dialogue.



## Intimate Apparel by Lynn Nottage

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** 1905. Esther, a lonely seamstress, stitches corsets and negligees in her bedroom. One day, a letter arrives, and Esther starts to dream of a life beyond the boarding-house walls.

**Why:** Nottage is one of America's most important contemporary playwrights, and this rich and beautiful play is bursting with poetry and ideas. A delicate and heart-breaking look back at a world of previously hidden stories.



## Princess and The Hustler by Chinoyerem Odimba

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** In 1963, 10 year-old Princess dreams of winning the Weston-Super-Mare Beauty Contest. Princess thought that getting her photo taken was going to be the challenging part. But as the Black British civil rights movement takes to the streets of Bristol, Princess is going to find out the true meaning of beauty.

**Why:** A glorious and heart-warming celebration of the spirit of activism and the Windrush generation. The play's lens of Princess is irresistible and this confident and funny play deftly explores an often-overlooked part of British history with the very lightest of touches.



## Can You Keep A Secret? by Winsome Pinnock

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** An early National Connections play. Two girls wait for their boyfriends. As the boys start to fight, only a few hundred yards away, the consequences will change everyone's lives forever.

**Why:** What a treat! One of Britain's foremost Black playwrights delivers the goods in this taut and witty large-cast play. Perfect for GCSE, and possibly Key Stage 3, this tackles real issues in an accessible but meaningful way.



## Leave Taking by Winsome Pinnock

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** Enid, a hard-working Mum, born in Jamaica but living in London, has her hands full trying to bring up her two teenage daughters, Viv and Del. Enid's visit to a clairvoyant, however, means that she will have to confront her past whilst coping with her family's future.

**Why:** Pinnock's body of work is staggering in its reach and range. It's about the changing attitudes and expectations of generations of Black Britons and is a lovingly crafted look at the realities, hopes and dreams of immigrant life. Pinnock's work really does belong on a pedestal.



## Fairview by Jackie Sibblies Drury

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** Happy birthday, Grandma! The Frasier family have gathered together to celebrate. Beverly just wants everything to go according to plan, but Grandma has locked herself in the bathroom, and trouble looks to be brewing.

**Why:** A recent smash-hit at the Young Vic, this is a funny and tense play which asks some serious questions and has some jaw-dropping revelations. Highly original, and written with real flair, hopefully this play will have a life for years to come. Unmissable.



## ear for eye by debbie tucker green

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** This staggering and ambitious play takes place in three acts and looks at political activism, academia, high-school shootings, and the gut-wrenching home truths about segregation and slave codes.

**Why:** One of Britain's best living dramatists, tucker green manages to look at past and present with a sense of fury and burning injustice. This is a massive, meaty play that its bound to provoke debate and discussion. Don't let it pass you by.



## hang by debbie tucker green

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** The near future. A pair of officials meet a woman in an ambiguous space. The officials are there to help the woman decide the punishment for the person who has harmed her family.

**Why:** This intense and brutal one-act play offers three superb roles, especially that of Three, the protagonist. tucker green's trademark forensic attention to detail here wrings every ounce of drama out of a compelling and intriguing setup.



## 'Low Dat by Jess Walters

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** A comedy about teenage love and when to 'low dat. Missy is a teenage girl with heaps of attitude and a lot of front. All the boys like her, but she only has eyes for Panda, an older boy with more experience.

**Why:** This is a really accessible, bouncy and vividly drawn play. It's perhaps a little dated in terms of teenagers before smartphones, but Walters superbly captures how the characters talk and behave with one another.



## Days Of Significance by Roy Williams

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** The night before they are called away to serve in Iraq, two young soldiers gather with their mates in an English market town for one last get-together.

**Why:** Written as a response to *Much Ado About Nothing*, Williams' play is as funny as it is terrifying. Its portrait of modern Britain and the ideas of nationalism are explored with Williams' trademark wit and insight. A gem of a play.



## Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads by Roy Williams

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** An English pub. The year 2000. An England vs Germany World Cup qualifying match is about to start. What could possibly go wrong?

**Why:** Every inch a modern classic, Williams expertly looks at what it means to be Black, white and British. Shot through with very strong language and gallows humour, this is a powerful play which instantly captures the imagination of students.



## The Fu Manchu Complex by Daniel York Loh

**Who For:** A Level

**Plot:** A 'deliberately creaky' murder mystery with a twist. East Asian actors 'white up' to act out this Victorian shlocker. It's a melodrama, but not as we know it. Expect parody, pastiche and gags galore.

**Why:** Subtle? Absolutely not, and gloriously so. York Loh's response to a lack of authentic roles for East Asian performers is to take aim at the worst excesses of a moribund West End. Underneath the jokes, this play has something serious to say about how we view other cultures.



## Ma Rainey's Black Bottom by August Wilson

**Who For:** GCSE/A Level

**Plot:** In a recording studio in the 1920s, Ma Rainey's band gathers to record a new album of her songs. As they wait for her, tensions start to grow as their own ambitions and jealousies start to emerge.

**Why:** Part of Wilson's landmark ten-play Pittsburgh Cycle (*Fences* comes from the same anthology), this is a hugely enjoyable play with superb dialogue, beautifully defined characters and an immaculate sense of time and place. Deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as *The Crucible* or *A View From The Bridge*.



## Refugee Boy by Benjamin Zephaniah/Lemn Sissay

**Who For:** GCSE

**Plot:** Alem, an Ethiopian-Eritrean teenager, struggles as he is forced to navigate the British education and care systems. Can his humour and courage help him as he struggles to find his place in the world and find a place to call home?

**Why:** Sissay's adaptation of Zephaniah's semi-autobiographical novel might seem heavy-going at first glance. It's nothing of the sort. This is funny, warm and compassionately written. A fantastic play, possibly even suitable for Key Stage 3.





## Musicals

Whether you're thinking of what to stage as your next school production, or thinking about theatre trips, these song-and-dance shows are all worthy of your time.

### **Caroline, or Change**

A recent West End revival with Sharon D Clarke has cemented the popularity of this moving show about a Black maid working for a white family in 1963.



### **The Color Purple**

Alice Walker's modern classic novel is given the Broadway treatment in this heart breaking story of self-discovery as we follow our heroine Celie through tragedy and triumph.



### **Fela!**

The biography of real-life Nigerian singer and activist Fela Kuti uses his own music to recreate his life story. Hugely uplifting, almost unbearably moving.



### **Hamilton**

The global smash continues to inspire jaws to drop wherever it plays. What's left to be said? Lin-Manuel Miranda's biography of American founding father Alexander Hamilton uses rap, hip-hop, blues, pop and soul to reclaim his story. Arguably one of the greatest pieces of theatre ever created.



## The Scottsboro Boys

The creators are arguably better known for *Cabaret* and *Chicago*, but this masterpiece uses the conventions of a minstrel show to recreate the titular characters' courtroom trial. Audacious and moving, this is one for the heart and the brain.



## Tina – The Tina Turner Musical

All the hits are present and correct, but it's Katori Hall's book which gives the show some bite. A reminder of just how hard the real-life Turner had to work to be taken seriously in the music business.



## The Wiz

*The Wizard Of Oz* is re-told as a modern soul-pop adventure, using musical theatre originals which sound like timeless Motown standards. Infectious and durable.



## Further Reading

These anthologies are worthy additions to any Drama department library and represent excellent value for money.

**British East Asian Plays – Edited by Cheryl Robson, Dr Amanda Rogers and Dr Ashley Thorpe.**

*Includes plays by Yang-May Ooi, Jeremy Tiang, Stephen Hoo, Amy Ng, Lucy Chau Lai-Tuen, Joel Tan and Daniel York Loh.*

**Hidden Gems: Contemporary Black British Plays - Six Experimental New Plays by Black British Writers**

*Includes B is for Black by Courttia Newland; Moj of the Antarctic by Mojisola Adebayo; The Sons of Charlie Paora by Lennie James; Brown Girl in the Ring by Valerie Mason-John; Something Dark by Lemn Sissay; 35 Cents by Paul Anthony Morris.*

**Hidden Gems Volume 2: Contemporary Black British Plays - Six Experimental New Plays by Black British Writers**

*Includes A Bitter Herb by Kwame Kwei-Armah; The Far Side by Courttia Newland; Identity by Paul Antony Morris; Mary Seacole by SuAndi; Absolution by Malika Booker; and Urban Afro-Saxons by Patricia Elcock and Kofi Agyemang.*

**The Methuen Drama Book of Plays by Black British Writers**

*Includes Welcome Home Jacko by Mustapha Matura; Chiaroscuro by Jackie Kay; Talking in Tongues by Winsome Pinnock; Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads by Roy Williams; Fix Up by Kwame Kwei-Armah; Gone Too Far! by Bola Agbaje.*