

Anti-Racism Resource Pack For Drama Educators

This resource has been designed by Stratford East's Learning & Participation Team for secondary drama teachers seeking to further their understanding of race, racism and anti-racist practice in the classroom. The resource pack details how to develop anti-racist practice in your drama department, how to facilitate conversations around race and racism with your students and provides practical tools to use in the classroom.

As you read this resource pack, consider the following questions:

- Does your drama department celebrate inclusivity in all its forms?
- Where can you create opportunities for your students to discuss race, racism and anti-racism in a safe environment?
- How can you embed these conversations into your drama teaching more broadly?

If you do not have experience of talking about racism, or have never experienced racism yourself, you may feel uncertain about how to talk about race and racism with your students. To ensure you have the confidence to discuss this topic and to support your students, we recommend thoroughly exploring the issue yourself first. There is a list of resources and a glossary at the end of this pack to assist you.

We acknowledge that anti-racism is an ever-evolving practice, and the terms that are understood and used today may change in the future. As such, this resource will develop over time to best reflect the world we live in.

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ABOUT STRATFORD EAST

Theatre Royal Stratford East is a producing theatre, built in 1884, in the heart of East London. We have a proud history and an exciting future.

Many leading actors, writers and directors have been part of the Stratford East family including Meera Syal, Barbara Windsor, Don Warrington, Sheila Hancock, Indhu Rubasingham, Tanika Gupta, Roy Williams and Cynthia Erivo.

We represent our culturally and socially diverse community in Newham through the stories we tell on stage, the people we employ, our audiences, and the participants that get involved in our work. Led by Artistic Director, Nadia Fall, we tell stories that are current, political and representative of London. You can find out more about the history of the theatre [here](#).



Photo by The Other Richard

LANGUAGE

Global Majority

This term is widely adopted in the arts industry, in place of reductive acronyms such as 'BAME', which lump people from African, East and South East Asian and historically minoritised ethnic backgrounds into one seemingly homogenous group.

'Global majority' is a collective term that speaks to and encourages those who have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities', to counter a narrative that seeks to devalue and disempower. To think of themselves as belonging to a majority who are entitled to human rights. The term also acknowledges the differences between and within ethnic groups.

Reframing how students, from these backgrounds, see themselves in this wider context can help to embolden and empower young people to think critically about their personal, cultural and ethnic identity.

In acknowledging the differences between and within global majority ethnicities, the term encourages people who are racialised as white to sensitively find out and use the specific term(s) used by an individual to describe their ethnicity.

Race

It's important to remind students that the term 'race' is a social construct that was invented by colonial powers to define perceived hierarchical differences between ethnic groups. Race categories were created to dehumanise and devalue groups of people around the world for the benefit of 'white' European pre-colonial and colonial powers. Racial stereotypes have historically been and continue to be used as a tool for oppression and control.

Racism

Following on from the social construction of race, 'racism' is discrimination and prejudice based along 'racial' and/or ethnic lines, which positions 'whiteness' as the social norm.

Racism is any form of language or behaviour intentionally and unintentionally directed at an individual. It is important that your students understand that racism is both overt and covert, physical and psychological.

It's important to acknowledge the difference between *racism* and discrimination. Racism takes into account the everyday and institutional discrimination that people of the global majority experience when accessing services like education, health care, justice and housing, etc.

Anti-Racism

The commitment to and work dedicated to ensuring that racism does not happen; understanding why and how it exists and how to change personal beliefs and behaviours. This work includes education and the commitment to actively opposing racism.

ANTI-RACISM IN DRAMA

As with other subjects, it's important to ensure that global majority voices are included in the teaching of drama, to reflect the contributions of African, East and South East Asian and other ethnically diverse playwrights, practitioners and directors.

Consider:

- Do your schemes of work centre white western theatre as the benchmark of global excellence in theatre? If so, why?
- Does your teaching of drama reflect the global history of theatre?
- Which texts written by global majority writers do you teach?

It's important that students from all ethnic backgrounds see themselves represented both in the texts they are studying and the educational materials (video clips, play text extracts, visual resources, etc) used to support their learning.

Consider points in your schemes of work in which you can create opportunities for your students to discuss or explore race and ethnicity in the classroom. For instance, in devising, students could have the opportunity to explore their experiences of the world as part of developing their theatre-making skills.



Photo by The Other Richard

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE

Preparation

It's important to have the confidence to talk to young people about race and ethnicity, to raise topics and to be able to respond to questions.

Creating a responsible and caring space

setting up an accountable space for students will enable them to discuss race and ethnicity, ask questions, reflect, and learn from the experience. These sorts of conversations, held compassionately, will promote the development of empathy and confidence in young people. *See below for further guidance on setting up a responsible and caring and accountable space.*

Objectives

As noted above, understandings of race and ethnicity are ever evolving. As such, there is no 'end goal' in these conversations. Instead, the objectives are to develop students' sense of compassion and confidence in discussing race and in promoting anti-racist practice.

SETTING UP THE SPACE

Before having conversations about race and ethnicity, or topics that may be sensitive for students, it's important to set up a responsible and accountable space.

A responsible and caring space allows young people to ask questions and discuss race and ethnicity, while also permitting them to safely make mistakes and learn from them. A responsible and caring space promotes active listening and empathy, whilst acknowledging that these conversations can, at times, feel uncomfortable.

An *accountable* space means that everyone participating in the conversation understands that they are responsible for ensuring they show kindness and compassion. For instance, being mindful of the power of language. An accountable space empowers young people to create their own anti-racist environment.

Setting the parameters for a constructive conversation will help preserve the dignity and sense of belonging for students from the global majority and promote the understanding of anti-racist practice for all young people involved.



CHECK-IN EXERCISE

This exercise can be used to bookend the beginning and end of class when difficult discussions are planned, to check in on how students are feeling without students feeling 'exposed'.

Set Up

At the beginning of class and at the end of class, invite students to stand in a large circle.

Activity

Going round the circle, ask each student to share:

- Their name
- Their pronouns
- An object that describes how they are feeling that day (for instance, types of transport, items of clothing, type of snack)
- (Optional) Why that object reflects their current mood (e.g. "a can of Coke that has gone flat, because I am feeling tired and a bit slow but I am excited about XYZ").

As their teacher, you should participate in this and take the first turn, so you can model to the students how the exercise works.

Students don't necessarily have to explain why they've picked their object/item if they don't want to share.

When you repeat the exercise at the end of the class, use the same category of items/objects and notice which students are feeling the same and those who are feeling differently by the end of class.

EXPLORING RACE AND RACISM WITH STUDENTS

It's useful to remind students of the social invention of 'race', when discussions arise. Setting the context for the conversation and asking young people to reflect critically on the meanings of race, racism and anti-racism can help guide a productive exchange.



Photo by Nina Robinson

Some guidance on how to navigate conversations about race and racism.

- Always positively acknowledge questions about race and racism, encouraging students to be confident enough to raise questions.
- If a student shares a negative comment, it's important to safely explore and unpack this. Ask them where this comment came from and what impact it might have on other people.
- Be intentional and honest about the limitations of your own knowledge. It is OK to note down questions to explore later after some further investigation – this is positive role modelling and demonstrates your commitment to developing your own knowledge
- Remember to promote an environment of active listening throughout, where young people listen and reflect on what others share.



ACTIVE LISTENING WARM-UP EXERCISE

This could be used as a warm-up activity to focus students before a drama class.

Set Up

Split the group into pairs and ask students to label themselves Person A & Person B

Activity

For 2 minutes, Person A talks about a favourite cultural holiday, festival or celebration (this may be a religious holiday, a wedding event or something else). The story must be short. Person B listens carefully.

Building upon this, for the next 2 minutes, Person A retells the story and adds in up to 3 simple gestures representing certain parts of their story. These gestures could be as simple as placing a hand on their shoulder or covering their eyes.

Person B must memorise the story and the 3 gestures as closely as possible.

Person A and B switch and then repeat the exercise for the next 4 minutes. Allow an extra minute for each person to

rehearse their partner's story and gestures.

Bring the whole group back together in a large circle. Invite each pair to introduce their partners and perform their story/gestures to the rest of the group.

If the students are shy, this exercise can be anonymised by asking students to stand anywhere in the space (away from their partner). Students wait to be tapped on the shoulder by the teacher. When they are tapped, they perform the story without identifying who their partner was.

Development

To develop this further, students must avoid using clichés or stereotypical gestures in their movement work. Instruct students to think dynamically and imaginatively to create gestures that authentically represent them and the holiday/celebration they are sharing.

Learning outcomes

Students learn about their peers' experiences of different cultural occasions and develop their active listening skills.

YOUNG PEOPLE CAN PRACTICE ANTI-RACISM BY:

- Supporting and actively listening to friends who share their experiences of racism.
- Accepting that they may not understand what racism feels like but that they can try to understand and build empathy. Theatre is a powerful way of using imagination and creative skills to develop empathy.
- Telling a teacher or adult when they witness or experience racism.
- Using the power of their own voice to invoke others to listen to the voices of their global majority peers.
- If a student is racialised as white, remembering not to make an instance of racism about their feelings, especially if it does not involve them, rather to keep the focus on supporting their friend.
- Considering how a friend who has been subject to racism may feel and how they could support that friend's wellbeing.



Photo by Nina Robinson

GLOBAL MAJORITY STORIES ON STAGE

Since much of the GCSE and A-Level Drama syllabi feature incredibly limited theatre texts written by African, East and South East Asian and historically ethnically minoritised playwrights, and because many set texts tend to neglect global majority stories, it's especially important to promote global majority stories where possible, and to approach them with care and authenticity.

[See the Representation in Drama list of 150 texts written by global majority playwrights.]

This is particularly important when staging a global majority story with students. For the sake of authenticity, it's important to recognise when a role requires an actor to be of a specific ethnicity (or other protected characteristic) for the sake of authentic storytelling. The same can be applied to creative roles, like writers, directors and designers. This challenges the idea of 'colour-blind' casting, which often leads to racial stereotyping and inauthentic or lazy representation.

Additionally, a director may make the artistic choice to deliberately abandon the sense of naturalism that underlies most casting choices. For instance, a director may imagine a non-literal British Victorian world, in which Black and Asian characters make up the ruling class. Nonetheless, this is still a colour-conscious casting choice, as opposed to a 'colour-blind' casting process.

We would recommend having open discussions with students about colour-conscious casting for roles.



Photo by The Other Richard

When exploring and directing plays that feature global majority stories with students:

DO:

- Ensure, as the educator, you have the tools to research the text(s) you have chosen to explore, including but not limited to historical, writer and performance contexts.
- Define key language terms.
- Facilitate discussions about what these stories mean to students.
- Encourage students to think about race as a social construct rather than something biological.
- Encourage students to think about ethnicity and culture and authenticity in performance.
- Support students to understand how to develop ideas that are rooted in cultural or religious practice and ritual, with sensitivity and respect without limiting their creativity.
- Allow space for students to respond in ways that work for them. For instance, a group agreement that students can call 'time out' on conversations that may have the potential to cause harm.

DON'T:

- Pressure students to relive an experience that may have been traumatic.
- Allow students to become responsible for educating their peer(s). This is not the responsibility of a young person.
- Create roles that perpetuate racial stereotypes.



Photo by Nina Robinson



SOCIAL POLITICS DEBATE EXERCISE

This task may be used as an end of class exercise, where students can practically apply their learnings about race and social politics in an interactive and critically engaged way.

Materials

Large sheets of paper and pens

Set Up

Give the students the debate provocation: *"Theatre Directors should discuss social and political issues through their plays"*.

Divide the class into 2 groups, assigning each group either 'For' or 'Against' the provocation.

Activity

Give each group 15 minutes to prepare 2 main arguments, using a large sheet of paper and pens.

If the students need it, give them a few themes to help guide their planning. For instance:

- Social justice
- Power
- Why do we make and watch theatre?

The groups must decide who will deliver their arguments.

After 15 minutes, each group will present their 2 main arguments.

Give each group a further 10 minutes to prepare their rebuttals against the opposing group, and to decide who will present the rebuttals.

The debate will then continue for a further 5-10 minutes before the group with the most convincing argument is chosen.

When the debate has closed, a short group discussion should be held for 15 minutes, for the students to reflect on their experience. Invite the students to explore the value of being able to debate with people who hold different and opposing opinions, as well as the importance of listening and working out *why* we hold the beliefs we have.

Development

If students are aged 16+ we recommend that they listen to Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's 2022 Reath Lectures, which are available [here](#).

Learning Outcomes

Students develop their team working skills and public speaking, as well as their ability to critically engage with social politics and race within the context of theatre.

ENRICHING YOUR STUDENTS LEARNING

There are many theatres in London that produce and stage work written by writers from the global majority. Taking students to see productions in which they see themselves and/or their communities represented will both enhance their understanding of drama and develop their cultural capital.

Theatres that often programme such productions include:

- Theatre Royal Stratford East
- Young Vic
- Bush Theatre
- Brixton House
- Theatre Peckham
- Tamasha
- Kali Theatre Company
- Soho Theatre
- Royal Court Theatre
- Arcola Theatre
- Kiln Theatre
- Yard Theatre
- TARA Theatre
- New Earth Theatre (The Albany Deptford)

GLOSSARY

Anti-Racism

The commitment to and work dedicated to ensuring that racism is prevented. This work includes education and the commitment to actively challenging racism when it occurs.

Colonisation

A form of violent invasion, dispossession and subjugation of, usually, indigenous communities and entire countries using political, military and economic force.

Historically, the spread of Christianity via religious missionaries has played a central role in colonisation.

Equity

'Equity', rather than 'equality', recognises that individuals have distinct circumstances, and therefore, different allocations of resources and opportunities are needed to reach a state of 'equality'.

Global Majority

This term is widely adopted in the arts industry, in place of reductive acronyms such as 'BAME', which lump people from African, East and South East Asian and other ethnically minoritised backgrounds into one seemingly homogenous group.

'Global majority' is a collective term that speaks to and encourages those who have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities', to think of themselves as belonging to the majority. The term acknowledges the differences between and within ethnic groups and encourages specificity when referring to individuals or more than one person sharing the same ethnicity.

Othering / The Other

A social phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are defined and treated as 'different', centring whiteness as the social norm. Othering allows individuals and groups to be devalued or their basic human rights to be viewed as less significant.

On an individual level, othering leads to racial microaggression and discrimination. On a macro level, it invokes an 'us' and 'them' relationship, playing a role in systemic oppression of entire groups of people.

Race

Race is a social construct invented by 'white' European colonial powers to define perceived hierarchical differences between ethnic groups. Racial stereotypes about ethnic groups have historically been used as a tool for oppression and control.

Racism

Following on from the social construction of race, 'racism' is discrimination based on 'racial' and/or ethnic lines, which positions whiteness as the social norm.

It's important to acknowledge the difference between *racism* and discrimination. Racism takes into account the everyday and systemic discrimination that people from the global majority experience in employment, education, health care, justice and housing, etc.

Representation

In the context of anti-racism, representation can be understood as the description or portrayal of an individual, a community or an ethnic group.

To achieve authentic representation, one must consider *how* well the person(s) are being represented. Does the portrayal include harmful stereotypes or tropes? Does it consider nuances and intersections within these identities?

Slurs

Slurs that have been reclaimed by historically marginalised communities are not available to be used by people from outside of those communities. When used by people outside of these communities, these words are slurs – racist terminology.

It's important to make students aware that using slurs has no place in discussions around anti-racism (nor its intersections with sexuality, disability, race, etc.). Language has the capacity to do harm and can trigger intergenerational pain.



Photo by The Other Richard

RESOURCES

Inc Arts - #BAMEOver The Statement	https://incarts.uk/%23bameover-the-statement
IncArts – Culture Needs Diversity	https://incarts.uk/%23cultureneedsdiversity
Red Cross - Talking with children and young people about race and racism	https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/talking-with-children-and-young-people-about-race-and-racism
The Guardian – The Guardian view on colour-conscious casting	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jan/30/the-guardian-view-on-colour-conscious-casting-mixing-it-up-can-be-a-good-thing
The Guardian - “It’s dangerous not to see race’: is colour-blind casting all it’s cracked up to be?”	https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/aug/11/its-dangerous-not-to-see-race-is-colour-blind-casting-all-its-cracked-up-to-be
Representation In Drama List of Set Texts	https://www.donmarwarehouse.com/representation-in-drama/
Arts Work – ‘Embedding Anti-Racist and Representative Practices in your Arts Curriculum’	https://artswork.org.uk/resources/embedding-anti-racist-and-representative-practices-in-your-arts-curriculum/
Arts Work – Developing a Representative Drama Curriculum	https://artswork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Developing-a-representative-drama-curriculum.pdf
Black Lives Matter – Racism Resources	https://blacklivesmatter.uk/talk-racism-resources-tools/
The Anti-Racist Educator	https://www.theantiracisteducator.com/recommendations
BBC Radio 4 - The Reith Lectures	https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001fmtz