

EDUCATION PACK



Cross-curricular: Drama and Theatre Studies, English Literature, Economics, Politics, Sociology, Art & Design

Key Stages 4 & 5

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introduction

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance your understanding of *Islands* by Caroline Horton and to provide you with the materials to assist students in both the practical study of this text and in gaining a deeper understanding of this exciting new play. This includes context (both political and theatrical), a secondary source, production photographs and exercises that have been devised to unpack the play's themes and stylistic devices.

In line with the national curriculum, *Islands* would be a suitable live theatre production for analysis. It will also provide an invaluable resource for students' devised work as a piece of theatre that has been improvised by its ensemble cast and then written into a script.

Islands tackles the challenges of researching, presenting and understanding social and political issues in an accessible and creative way. The play will provoke students to ask pertinent questions, think critically, and develop perspective and judgement.



Islands in Research and Development

If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to get in touch with Amanda Castro on 0208 743 3584 or at amandacastro@bushtheatre.co.uk

about *Islands*

The rules are important.

Our job is to maximize the size of the “cherry” pie.

Yours is to be quiet. Shhh. DON’T SCRATCH.

Islands is an ink black comedy about tax havens, enormous greed, and the few who have it all. Join Olivier Award-nominated Caroline Horton and her filthy ensemble on Haven, a bizarre and monstrous world where no-one has to pay... for anything.

Devised in consultation with experts on offshore finance, *Islands* sounds a warning siren—we ignore the tax practices of wealthy individuals and multinational companies at our peril.

Oxfam estimate that there is \$18.5 trillion siphoned out of the world economy into tax havens by wealthy individuals alone. Christian Aid has calculated that 1,000 children die every day as a result of tax evasion. This is not just a political or social challenge; this is a matter of human rights.

“As you know, I have made fighting the scourge of tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance a priority...”

David Cameron

We thought Dave might need a hand.

Islands sees multi award-winning and Olivier nominated Caroline Horton (*Mess, You’re Not Like The Other Girls Chrissy*) re-united with Bush Theatre Associate Director, Omar Elerian (*The Mill – City of Dreams*, Bradford, Yorkshire; *You’re Not Like The Other Girls Chrissy*).

Presented by the Bush Theatre and Caroline Horton & Co with China Plate. Commissioned by Warwick Arts Centre and Harlow Playhouse. *Islands* has been developed in consultation with specialist economic advisers including John Christensen of The Tax Justice Network. Funded by Arts Council England and kindly supported by the Unity Theatre Trust and developed with the support of Oxford Playhouse, the Peggy Ramsey Foundation, National Theatre Studio and South Street Arts Centre. Developed through Fuel’s Jerwood Residencies at Cove Park which are supported by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation.

classroom exercise 1

Reflecting on the production

Curriculum links: Drama, Art & Design, Music

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper and pens

Use this exercise to get your students responding to work that they have seen onstage. This tool enables students to respond to any piece or dance, theatre or live performance that they have seen.

Organise the class into groups of 4 or 5 and give each group a large sheet of paper and some pens. Write the name of the production on the whiteboard, then assign each group an area of the production to explore including:

- The set
- Directing
- Costume
- Music and Sound

Each group should write their chosen area of the production as a heading on their flip chart paper. Each group then has five minutes to brainstorm thoughts and comments around their assigned area of the production, noting them in a spider diagram on their flip chart paper. After five minutes each group must pass their paper onto the next group and repeat this process until every group has commented on all areas of the production listed by the class.

These sheets can then be photocopied and handed out. You could also put the sheets up in the classroom for inspiration when discussing the production.

What is a tax haven?

Tax havens – also known as ‘secrecy jurisdictions’ or ‘offshore’ – provide any of the following:

- Escape from tax (of course)
- Secrecy, in various forms
- Avoidance of financial regulations
- Avoidance of criminal laws
- Escape from other rules of society, such as inheritance or corporate governance rules

Tax havens can be whole countries, dependencies of bigger countries, or even areas within countries.

The City of London is a whopping tax haven, for example.

Who knew?

10 reasons why some people think tax havens are damaging:

1. Tax havens help rich people hide money that should be spent on schools, hospitals, roads and other public services
2. Tax havens force poor people to pay the taxes of the rich
3. Tax havens help criminals hide their loot
4. Tax havens help dictators and their cronies plunder the resources of developing countries
5. Tax havens allow banks to dodge financial rules and regulations
6. Tax havens corrupt markets, concealing insider dealing and supporting aggressive tax dodging by multinational companies
7. Tax havens create a private world of secrecy, impunity and power for rich elites
8. Tax havens widen the gap between rich and poor people
9. Tax havens make laws in secret which affect us all
10. Tax havens degrade our faith in democracy

Source: tackletaxhavens.com

secondary source

BBC Article, published 12 May 2014

Tax avoidance: What are the rules?

By Brian Milligan Personal Finance Reporter, BBC News

Gary Barlow and some of his band members will now have a very large tax bill dropping through their letter boxes.

But as far as the law is concerned, they have not done anything wrong in a criminal sense.

Yet even though tax avoidance is normally legal, it can quite easily turn into tax evasion.

And tax evasion - a deliberate plan to cheat the taxman - is most definitely an offence.

So what is the difference between avoidance and evasion, and how can you still go wrong with avoidance? While the judge in this case took 147 pages to explain what these men had done wrong, there are some simple rules to follow.

Avoidance

Of course everyone is allowed to avoid paying tax if they possibly can. It is perfectly legitimate - indeed the government encourages us - to save in a tax-free Individual Savings Account (Isa), for example.

That means you do not pay any income tax on the interest you receive, or capital gains tax when you come to sell.

There are also tax-saving advantages to putting money into a pension scheme, donating to charity via the gift aid scheme, or claiming capital allowances on things used for business purposes.

But tax reliefs and rules are open to abuse.

"Tax avoidance is bending the rules of the tax system to gain a tax advantage that Parliament never intended," said a spokesman for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

"It often involves contrived, artificial transactions that serve little or no purpose other than to produce a tax advantage. It involves operating within the letter - but not the spirit - of the law," he said.

Tax avoidance currently costs the taxpayer £4bn a year, according to the latest figures from HMRC.

That is very nearly as much as illegal tax evasion, which costs £5.1bn.

Together, they account for about a quarter of the £35bn that is lost to the Treasury every year, otherwise known as the "tax gap".

Aggressive

In typical cases, those involved in tax avoidance will pay others to help minimise their tax bills.

If HMRC disagrees with your tax return, you can take them to a tax tribunal, as happened in Gary Barlow's case.

But the judge rejected his claim that the business was making actual losses.

In essence, the court will be looking to decide whether there is any real business going on in such cases, or whether the business is just a means to make a loss, and so reduce a tax bill.

"Don't be taken in by someone trying to interest you in a tax avoidance scheme which promises a result that sounds too good to be true," advises HMRC.

If you do get involved in such "aggressive" tax avoidance schemes, you may end up in a protracted dispute with HMRC, and if you lose, you risk having to pay the tax, the interest and penalties as well.

In some cases, avoidance can quickly turn into evasion. If you conceal facts, or lie about them, you can be judged to be breaking the law, which could result in a fine, or even a prison sentence

classroom exercise 2

Exploring difficult subjects through theatre

Curriculum links: Physics, philosophy, politics, economics – any subject!

Time: 2 sessions of 45 minutes each

Materials: library resources, access to the internet

“I was interested in trying to make a show where we told a big story – translating the concept of offshore to the realms of gods - I didn’t set out to explain the mechanisms and schemes through which offshore operates. I wanted to see if we could connect audiences with offshore and tax evasion beyond an intellectual recognition that it is unjust. I wanted to see if the underbelly of it could horrify us.”

Caroline Horton, taken from the foreword to */slands*

/slands takes as its subject matter a topic that for many people is difficult to grasp – tax havens, how they function and what they mean for social equality. Artists often use theatre as a way of exploring and highlighting tricky concepts or situations, posing questions to the audience without necessarily answering them.

In groups:

1. Pick a difficult concept or subject to take as your inspiration (ideally, pick a subject you don't already know much about yourself).
2. Research the topic and find out as much as possible about it.
3. As a group, use the knowledge you have gained to devise and present a fictional scene to perform for the other students in your class. This scene needs to use performance methods and characterisation to explore what this topic is and introduce it to your audience.
4. Following your performances, ask your audience to feed back to you what they have understood about the subject.

classroom exercise 2

Class discussion/evaluation: what methods were more effective for exploring these topics? What didn't work? Were the performances entertaining? What are the opportunities and pitfalls in creating this type of work?

Examples of topics you could explore include:

- The large Hadron collider
- The political system in the UK
- Climate change
- Evolution
- The financial crisis
- The theory of relativity

Additional research question: what other examples can you find of theatre productions that explore tricky or complicated subjects and what was their approach?

classroom exercise 3

Exploring theatre design

Curriculum links: Art & Design

Time: 2 sessions of 45 minutes each

Materials: pen, paper (and if creating model boxed) cardboard boxes, cardboard glue, scissors and scraps of paper fabric

Stage directions from *Islands*:

"On the edge of the world the landscape is desolate, something like an abandoned pool or abattoir. Junk including an old toilet and some plants. In one corner an old diving platform (signs read 'Don't Climb', 'Keep Off'). Walls covered in plastic sheeting. Audience seats arranged on four sides around a central, tiled pit with sluices and drains visible."

The design for Islands was a collaborative effort between designer Oliver Townsend, writer Caroline Horton and director Omar Elerian, with input from the entire cast and creative team.

The concept was to create a space as large as possible that would look like a landscape "on the edge of the world" which, through the course of the production, could suggest many different landscapes; an abandoned swimming pool, an abattoir, a sewer, a pier...

How would you respond to the ideas and character in *Islands* through your own set design?

Go back to the notes made on set design and costume during the "reflecting on the production" exercise earlier. How did the design affect your experience as a member of the audience? What design choices do you feel were more or less effective and why? How might a different design provoke a different response in the audience?

classroom exercise 3

The design process

A stage designer works very closely with the director, creative team and production manager to realise an aesthetic vision to create the world of the play.

After meetings with the director discussing research and drawings, the designer will create a white card model and present this to the creative and production staff. This is an exact model of the set made on a scale of 1:25. It provides everyone with a clear idea of the designer's vision and acts as a blueprint of the set. From here, the production staff can begin to cost up and plan for the realisation of the design and discuss any potential problems before the final design is created.

Exercise: draw or create your own model box for an alternative version of *Islands*. How would you envision the world of the play and what would the setting be? Would you design something naturalistic or abstract? Where would you place the audience and why? How would the characters move through your design?

Present your design to the rest of the class – discuss the choices you made as a designer and why.



The white card model box for *Islands*



classroom exercise 4

Devising theatre

Time: 15 - 30 minutes each

Materials: none needed

"Islands like other shows I've made has been made through devising, though I realized relatively early on, with this subject matter I was going to need to write much earlier in the process than I usually would...so after some short bursts in a devising room, I went away and wrote a great sprawling draft that we then used as a jumping off point for further improvisation."

Caroline Horton, taken from the foreword to Islands

These classic exercises will enable you to see how a collaborative team might begin to devise scenes or play with scenes already written.

Jumping In

Ask the group to get into a circle. Ask two people to step into the middle and create a tableau (frozen image). This image can be about anything.

Another person from the group must then step in and tap one of the people in the middle on the shoulder. The person that was tapped must leave and join the circle, with the new person replacing them. They must assume a new position, creating a new image with the person in the middle.

This continues until everyone has stepped in at least once.

Extension exercise: ask each student to create an improvised scene rather than a tableau. When a new student wants to join the scene, they must clap their hands. The two people in the middle must freeze when they hear this and stay in position until the new person takes the place of someone in the frozen image and begins a new scene.

Further extension exercise: ask the students to respond to a particular theme for each of the scenes (for example power, or tragedy).

classroom exercise 4

Hot-Seating

In small groups, ask someone in the group to assume the role of one of the characters from Islands. The other people in the group must ask this character questions to which the person answers in character (the answers should be inspired by the character they have seen in the play but the person can use their imagination or make things up to develop the character further). Through the game, you will be able to develop a character's backstory, motivation and relationship to other characters.

Ask each person in the group to do this with a different character.

Game: Playing with tension

Jacques Lecoq developed an approach to acting using seven levels of tension. These levels are:

Catatonic/exhausted – no tension in the body at all.

Relaxed/Californian – hardly any tension, laid back.

Neutral/ economic – totally present and aware, a state of tension before anything happens.

Alert – some tension in the body. Fidgety, curious, indecisive.

Suspense – tension in the body, suspicious, wary.

Passionate – emotions are fully released, extreme and difficult to control; a frenzy of movement.

Tragic- the body is full of tension to the point of immobility, rigid and petrified.

Walking through the room, explore each of these different states and how they have an effect on the body. How does your posture/walking style change from level 1 to level 7? How does this affect your outlook on the world?

In small groups pick a simple scene and improvise it (for example, going shopping, or having a dinner party).

Take this scene and perform it again through the seven levels of tension. How does this change the scene each time? What worked and what didn't work? Did anything unexpected happen? What were the most successful levels of tension for each scene?

context

“We’ve drawn from a grotesque, physical form – bouffon - that I studied at Ecole Philippe Gaulier. These creatures, society’s outcasts, come to mock and rabble-rouse. We’ve of course, just taken what was useful to us from the bouffon world - this is by no means a study in form. Something really valuable was offered in the bouffon spirit however - their ability to be wickedly funny and foul, yet also epic and deeply political.”

Caroline Horton, taken from the foreword to Islands

What is bouffon?

Bouffon is a specialised form of clowning, which includes elements of dark comedy, grotesque, parody and mockery.

The word itself derives from the latin verb “buffare” which means to puff up one’s cheeks and the term comes from ancient Roman theatre, in which performers would satirise prominent figures of the day. It was re-introduced through Jacques Lecoq who taught bouffon at the school he founded, L’Ecole Internationale de Theatre in Paris. Bouffon could be described as the darker side of clown.

“The difference between the clown and the bouffon is that while the clown is alone, the bouffon is part of a gang; while we make fun of the clown, the bouffon makes fun of us. At the heart of the bouffon is mockery pushed to the point of parody. Bouffons amuse themselves by reproducing the life of man in their own way, through games and pranks.”

Jacques Lecoq Theatre of Movement and Gesture 2006 (Trans. David Bradbury)

Bouffons mock everything and everyone – nothing is considered off-limits. They represent elements of society in an amplified, distorted, exaggerated way in order to provoke laughter and repulsion and in doing so satirise societal norms and institutions.

A key element of the bouffon is their physicality – they alter they own physicality through stuffing their clothing to contort their bodies into interesting shapes, to influence their movement and to give them an alternative posture.

classroom exercise 5

Bouffon

Curriculum links: politics, sociology

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: anything that can be used to stuff or pad clothing

Exercise: create your own bouffon character! Ask students to use materials to pad out their clothes to distort their posture and body. Ask students to note how different positioning of the padding and the distortion of their clothes can make them move in different ways and can cover or highlight different parts of the body.

Once they have found their characters, ask them to improvise normal situations as their bouffon characters.

The intention is to mock or parody the characters they are playing and the situation. Examples include:

- A dinner party
- Children in a classroom
- People at an art gallery
- Two people on a romantic date
- Prime Minister's Questions

Follow these experiments with group discussion – how did the bouffon approach work in each of these situations? Was it easy or difficult to mock and satirise? What was funny and what wasn't? How might this approach be used to tackle bigger and more weightier targets?

production photographs



Photos by Ed Collier

production photographs



Photos by Ed Collier