

**Bush
Theatre**
Parliament
Square

by James Fritz



PARLIAMENT SQUARE

Cross-Curricular: Drama and Theatre Studies, Art & Design, Music, English Language, English Literature, Politics and PSHE

Key Stages 4 & 5

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Introduction

Parliament Square is a powerful examination of the consequences of being alienated from a political system. What does it take to provoke change? Will our quest to change society take us to dark places?

These are questions that the winner of the Judges' Award in the 2015 Bruntwood Prize, James Fritz explores in *Parliament Square*. The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance your understanding of *Parliament Square* 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 new play.

This includes political context, production photography, discussion points and exercises that have been devised to unpack the play's themes and stylistic devices. In line with the national curriculum, *Parliament Square* would be a suitable live theatre production for analysis. It will also provide an invaluable resource for students who are focusing on new writing and theatre productions based on politics and activism.

The play will provoke students to ask pertinent questions, think critically, and develop perspective and judgement. If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to get in touch with Holly Smith on 020 8743 3584 or at hollismith@bushtheatre.co.uk



Esther Smith (Kat). Photo: Helen Murray

PARLIAMENT SQUARE

A young woman called Kat leaves her family behind one day, and travels to London to commit a dramatic and selfless act of protest in Parliament Square. Moved to take a stand by the state of the world and all that she has seen in the news, Kat decides to take drastic personal action and set herself on fire, as a scream against the injustices of the world. The play explores Kat's internal struggle in deciding to commit this act and then the repercussions of her decision on both herself and those around her.

The wider themes of the show provoke audiences to consider what acts of protest are and what they mean. What can one individual do to effect change? And where do we choose to draw the line between absolute commitment and dangerous obsession?

CAST (in order of appearance)

Voice/Jo	Lois Chimimba
Kat	Esther Smith
Tommy	Damola Adelaja
Doctor/ Announcer/ Friend/ Stranger/Taxi Driver)	Jamie Zubairi
Physio/Colleague/ Ticket Woman/Friend)	Kelly Hotten
Mum	Joanne Howarth
Catherine	Seraphina Beh

CREATIVES & CREW

Playwright	James Fritz
Director	Jude Christian
Designer	Fly Davis
Lighting Designer	Jack Knowles
Sound Designers	Ben and Max Ringham
Movement Director	Jennifer Jackson
Assistant Director	Amy Hailwood
Casting Directors	Jerry Knight-Smith CDG & Vicky Richardson
Stage Manager	Sophie Tetlow
Deputy Stage Manager	Hannah Phillips



Joanne Howarth (Mum). Photo: Helen Murray

**“The world’s crying
out for someone to do
this”**

Catherine, Parliament Square



Jamie Zubairi (Doctor) and Esther Smith (Kat)



Damola Adelaja (Tommy) and Esther Smith (Kat)

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 and staging
- Directing
- Costume
- Music and Sound
- Acting
- Themes of the play

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.



classroom exercise #2

Building New Worlds

Curriculum Links: Drama, History, English Literature and Politics

Time: 1 hour session

Resources: Pens, flip chart, paper and Classroom Space.

Use this exercise to get students thinking about political systems, historical acts of protest and develop their debating and public speaking skills.

Parliament Square presents us with a world in which things 'get worse'. Kat wants to make a change, but her action changes little but her own life. So how does change actually come about?

Various governments, nation states and countries have established laws and norms in society. Usually, the foundational basis of these norms is rooted in constitutions or manifestos.

For example, the American Constitution which was written in 1788 included 7 articles including the right to bear arms. But governments and countries are not the only entities that produce manifestos or constitutions. In 1972, the Native American community produced treaty asserting their rights, beliefs and contentions which they presented to the Minnesota state government in the United States.

Session 1: Manifestos

Begin by discussing with your class the term 'manifesto'.

A manifesto is a statement where you can share your:

- **Intentions** (what you intend to do).
- **Opinions** (what you believe, your stance on a particular topic).
- **Vision** (the type of world that you dream about and wish to create).

Discuss what issues are facing your students or their families in their local area? It might be employment, housing, living conditions, education or any other issues. Ask for some examples of what would go into their manifesto for the area.

Now put the students into groups of 4 or 5 and give them each a piece of flip chart paper and a pen.

Give each group 20 minutes to write a manifesto of change for their local area and a name for their political party.

Have the groups present their manifesto to each other, and then ask the groups to vote for which political party they most agree with.

You can extend this exercise by creating a Classroom manifesto which define the rules and expectations of the classroom experience.

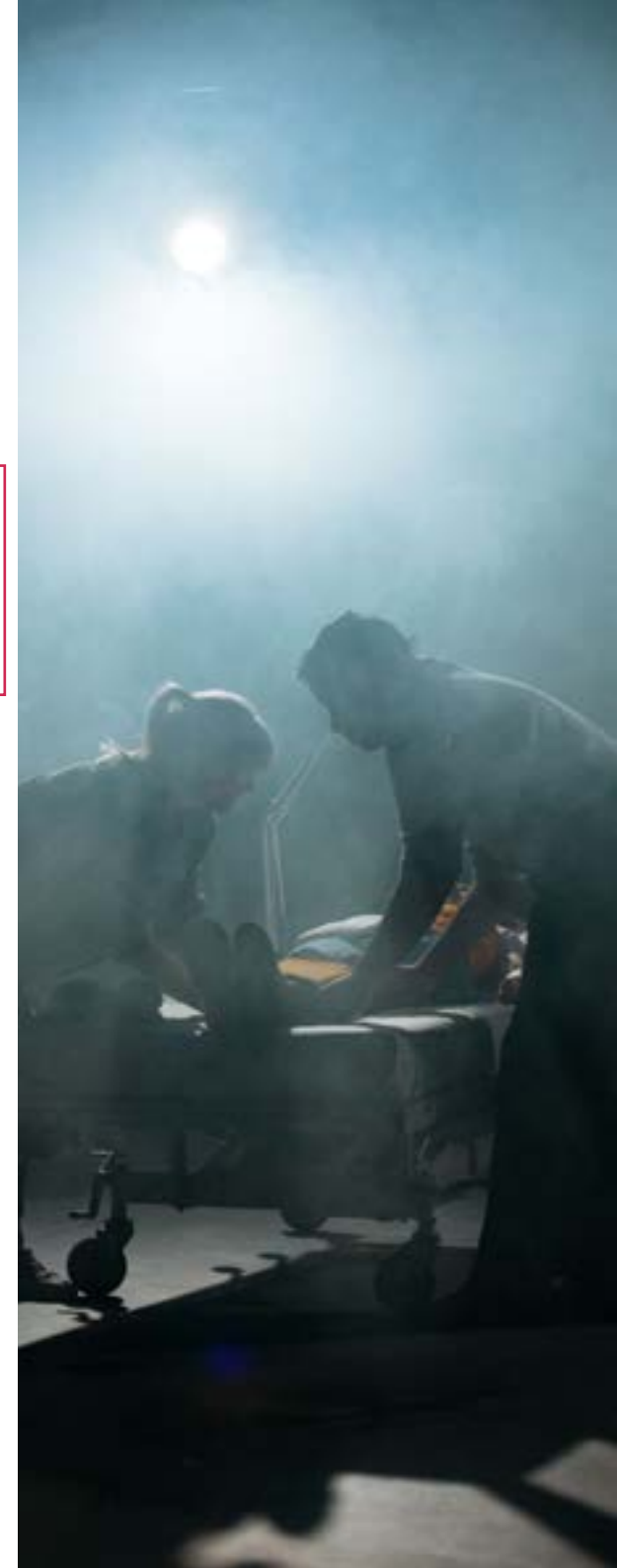
As a starting point, students can begin by completing the following three statements:

We intend to...
We believe that...
The change we want to make is...
In the future we hope to see...

Tips for students:

Your primary goal is to make your audience "feel" something.

Hope. Frustration. Excitement. Curiosity. Whatever "feeling" you want to convey.



Performing Protest

Curriculum Links: English Literature: Creative Writing

Time: Two 1 hour sessions

Resources: Open space, computers/internet and pens/paper

Use this exercise to develop students creative writing skills and to interact with texts in a new way.

The arts have had a huge role to play in social change and social movements across the world. Often, theatre, music and poetry are sites of the frustrations of marginalised peoples and become the songs we enjoy, the plays we discuss and even the movies we watch. In the U.S, UK and indeed across the world, Hip Hop is a musical genre which is steeped in protest. Hip Hop has its origin in the project (social housing) of the Bronx, New York, and took as its subject for social change, the appalling poverty that many black communities were living in in 1970's New York.

Facilitate a discussion on some of the concerns your students have about their local area, the country or the world at large. Use this exercise to explore the political concerns of your students and help develop their creative writing skills.

Session 1: Found Poetry

Ask students to read the following extract from *Parliament Square*:

CATHERINE:

“Because I’m here now doing this and maybe me doing this is the thing that will change the world. Or maybe I’ll just change one of those people watching. Change that girl over there that man over there that woman there and maybe they’ll be the ones who change something or maybe nothing has to change and it’s enough me being a fiery little asterisk proving there was someone out there that said no to all this. That should have been you. All those years ago. They stole that from you. I stole that from you and I’m so sorry.

The world’s crying out for someone to do this again. Maybe if I do this then more people will listen they’ll realise that they can’t just stand by anymore. My face will go around my name will ring out. Maybe people will see me on fire and they’ll think if that woman can do that then I can do something to stop the rot. I can do something to stop the rot. Maybe a hundred more will set themselves on fire, person after person after person going up in flames until the world gets better until the world gets better imagine that just imagine that.”

Ask the students what a poem looks like. Show them a way of patch working a poem together using the extract from *Parliament Square*. For example:

The World is

Crying

and

I’m a fiery little asterisk

See me on fire, a women

Stop the rot.

And the world gets better. Imagine that.

Just imagine that.”

Ask students to devise their own stanzas or short poems using Catherine’s monologue above. They can remove as many lines as they want, play with form and turn the narrative’s meaning upside down. Students can share some of their pieces once finished.

Session 2: Performing Protest

Based off the last session, ask students to take one concept from the patch-worked poems they’ve written to produce their own original writing.

One of the common refrains used in the play which anchors the central theme is; “And the world gets worse.” Ask the students to construct their own original poems, using this line as their stimuli. These can take any form and style. They could use rhyme or not, write a rap or a haiku, be serious or more tongue in cheek. Encourage students to be imaginative and creative in producing these poems and then share them with the group.



interview with the director

Meet Jude Christian

What compels you as a director?

Complexity, ugliness and messiness shows which make me confused about how to think or feel. But also up-close moments of tender humanity. And confetti explosions.

What attracted you to the script of *Parliament Square*?

I think my first experience of reading the script was the same as most people's - it grabs you on page one and doesn't let go until it spits you out the other side feeling exhilarated, furious and shell-shocked. I loved its form and the genuine heart in it.

What was your starting point for directing the play? How did you approach it?

When we workshopped it we spent a lot of time thinking about how to tell the story physically - what the audience would be seeing as they heard the words, and whether they should feel inside or outside of the action at different moments.

What does your process of rehearsals look like?

Lots of tea and cake and me going, "I don't have a clue, let's try this thing" and brilliant actors and collaborators

coming up with brilliant things to try, until we all get to somewhere that feels coherent. Tech week is mostly just cake.

What change do you want to see in the world? Is there power in protest?

A thorough, humane dismantling of capitalism and the patriarchy would be a nice start. Wouldn't mind losing the monarchy while we're at it. There is immense power in protest but it can't be a part time thing; we've got to be willing to make personal sacrifices for the things we believe in.

Who is *Esther's* character Kat for you? Tell me a little about her.

She's an ordinary person who comes to believe that she should give her all in order to make much-needed change.

What songs would you put on a *Parliament Square* playlist?

Maybe *Where is the Love* by the Black-Eyed Peas but mainly because it's such a good BLM march song. All of *The Hope Six Demolition Project* by PJ Harvey, probably. I listened to *I'll Be Seeing You* by Abbey Lincoln a lot during the design process.



Jude Christian. Photo: Manuel Harlan





Types of change

Curriculum Links: Politics, Drama, History, English Literature.

Time: 1 hour session

Resources: Open space, computers, internet, flipchart paper, pens

One of the key questions posed in *Parliament Square* is exploring the question of change. Who has the power to effect meaningful societal change?

Session 1: Discussion

Read with the group the following extracts from *Parliament Square* and facilitate a discussion on the two opposing perspectives.

Different protagonists in *Parliament Square* express different perspectives about change and how it can be initiated. Kat is frustrated with the social order and is convinced that the conventional routes of protest are futile. Her Mum meanwhile is convinced that change happens slowly and incrementally.

Facilitate a discussion with the class on the extract with prompting questions:

- What sides do the two perspectives represent?
- What are their key arguments?
- Who do you think the characters of Mum and Kat represent?
- Any one that you recognize in public life?
- Can you think of a time you wanted

to make a change? What happened?

MUM:

Listen to me. I want you to really listen to me because I'm only going to say this once. I'm angry about what's going on too. Of course I am. It's horrible. I've fought against things like this since before you were born. But you know the thing about all those times? I wasn't by myself. We fought together. And we lost. Over and over again we lost. Oh boy. But we did it together. No-one ever changed the world alone. Not in this country. We're not wired that way. You've got to believe in other people. When someone does something like this we don't see a hero. We see a lunatic. I'm sorry to say it but that's just the way it is.

Kat (Inner Voice):

They've tried Other ways. They tried with their anger. Their articles. Their marches. Their speeches you saw them. Thousands of on the streets and then what happened? Nothing changes. There's nothing else. A speech? From you? Sure thing. I'm sure everybody would be queuing up to hear that one. Who's gonna listen to what you've got to say? You're nothing. No-one.

- Put your class into pairs and assign each pair the perspectives of 'Kat' or 'Mum'
- Give the students 20 minutes to create their own characters and short scenes which represents the two sides of the argument, but in a new scenario.
- Ask the groups to share their scenes with each other.

Parliament Square explores what happens when people are disenfranchised from the system. It explores the familiar feeling of alienation when the world is facing disaster and there is little hope. One of the key questions of the play is: what does change look like?

What is social change? What is activism?

Social change is the altering of the social order of society. Society is defined by certain norms. Norms are things which are considered 'normal.' For example, it was normal at one point in British history for women not to have the vote. This was once considered 'normal' in society before activists in the shape of the suffragettes in the 19th and early 20th century started a movement to change this. Norms and the social order of society come from histories of the past rooted in everything from colonialism to capitalism.

Today, there are plenty of things which are problematic with the social order of society which is where activists come into the picture.

Activism is simply taking action to effect social change. This social change might be big or small. An easy way of thinking about activism is to think about power. Who has power? Activism might also be the act of addressing an injustice or abuse of that power.

Just like social change, activism can take different forms and could be made up of big or small actions. Activism could be writing blogs, attending marches or raising awareness. It could also be spending time with an elderly neighbour, starting a petition online or writing a letter to your local MP.

Political Systems

In order to get a grasp of what traditional forms of change are dominated by political systems. The system in the United Kingdom is a parliamentary democracy. This is where the government is voted into power by the people to act in the interests of the people. The UK is also, however, a constitutional monarchy. It is the monarch who is the head of state, not the Prime Minister.

This is why the UK Government is known as 'Her Majesty's Government'. The UK monarch will not get involved in politics and the role is now a symbolic one. The UK Parliament is composed of two houses; the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Members of the House of Lords are unelected and known as 'Peers.' Peers are appointed by the Queen and nominated by the Prime Minister.

Movements and Campaigns

Parliament is not the only place where change happens. In fact, most social change, historically, is initiated by people protesting on the frontlines.

The Civil Rights Movement in America (1954-1968), a decade and half long battle to end racial segregation is characterised by leaders like Angela Davis, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. There were also hundreds and thousands of others who bolstered these movements with their support, solidarity and even their own lives. An example of change in the British context was the Bristol Bus Boycott of 1963. The dispute arose over the Bristol Omnibus Company's refusal to employ black or Asian drivers or bus crews. Local youth worker, Paul Stephenson helped launch the boycott of buses inspired by Rosa Parks in the United States. The young West Indian activists were successful, as a few months later, it was announced that there would be no more discrimination in employing Black and ethnic minority bus crews. The Bristol Bus Boycott was said to have been influential in the passing of the Race Relations Act of 1965.

These movements and campaigns are not a thing of the past. Today, issues from gentrification in London, police violence, housing issues, the migrant crisis and the rise of far right nationalism underline the kinds of issues the world faces. Movements like Black Lives Matter and campaigns in the UK are responding to these many issues in new and creative ways.



Meet James Fritz

James Fritz is the playwright behind *Parliament Square*. James first full-length play, *Four Minutes Twelve Seconds* premiered at Hampstead Theatre downstairs in 2014 and was nominated for an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre before transferring to Trafalgar Studios in 2015. It then won him the “Most Promising Playwright” prize at the Critics Circle Theatre Awards 2015.

Why did you write *Parliament Square*?

When I started writing it a couple of years ago it felt like the time to be thinking about the place of protest in our society, as well as the conflict between our responsibility to our families and our responsibility to the wider world.

What change do you want to see in the world? Is there power in protest?

I think there can definitely be massive power in protest. It can also be completely powerless. It's one of the main questions that the play poses: can a protest that doesn't technically achieve something concrete still have been worth it?

Who did you write this play for?

Weirdly, I don't think too hard about who my plays are written for. I think that's much more of a question for the rehearsal room. My instinct is to write something that excites a director and their team, so that together we can make a piece of theatre and think about who our audience is going to be and how we are going to communicate with them.

What reactions do you hope to evoke?

Lots and lots of different ones. I think that the play is very ambiguous both about why Kat does what she does and whether what she does is the right course of action. I'm excited by the fact that there seem to be lot of different interpretations of what the play is saying. I hope it continues.

Why did you choose to give Kat's inner self a characterised voice?

I think one of the big questions I had writing the play was how anyone could ever get themselves mentally prepared to do something like that. It took me a while to crack it, but the choice to give her inner self a voice in the first act allowed me to explore that drive from the inside out.

It felt important to present both the hope and excitement of the act as well as

the painful fallout. The inner voice allowed me to do that.

What are the themes of the play?

Belief. Family. Responsibility. And the power of the individual vs. the power of the collective.

Reading the play, we were reminded of Mohamed Bouazizzi (who set himself on fire in protest). Did the play draw from the contemporary issues facing people across the world?

Yes, absolutely. I knew early on that I didn't want to be specific about Kat's 'cause' in the text, as that would instantly make the play be as much about whatever that cause was as about her actions. But in order

Mohamed Bouazizzi is an incredible examples of how this sort of individual action can have a ripple effect that builds into a tsunami. But I came across other examples – such as a man called Graham Bamford who set himself on fire in Parliament Square in the early nineties – where people had self-immolated with very little impact on anyone other than themselves and their families.

The tension between the two potential outcomes is what drives the play I think.

What advice would you give to someone (young people) wanting to be a playwright(s)?

Keep practicing. Write as much as you can. Don't be afraid to throw things away and start again. See as much theatre as you can. Read as many plays as you can. Steal from writers.



References and Links

The Autobiography of Malcolm X – Malcolm X (book)

The Battle of Algiers (film)

Take Back The City (manifesto)

Dave – Question Time (music)

The Open Veins of Latin America – Eduardo Galeano (book)

Lowkey – Soundtrack to the Struggle (music)

Mos Def – Black on Both Sides (music)

Behind the 1st English Parliament (video)

Benjamin Zephaniah – Propa Propaganda (poetry anthology)

“One of the most experienced prospectors of raw talent in Europe.”

– The Independent

“When it comes to plays that capture the detail of ordinary lives and the still, sad and often wonderfully comic music of humanity, the Bush is in a class of its own.”

– Daily Telegraph

“In terms of number of seats to impact on the ecology of British theatre, there is no more influential theatre in the country than the Bush.”

– Mark Shenton, Theatre Critic

“I was no longer an outsider coming from a demographic that often believes itself to be marginalised, a source of ridicule knocking on a big middle class door: I was a writer being allowed a voice, being allowed to collaborate. I was seriously at home, and honestly, it was the best thing ever.”

– Georgia Fitch, Writer

“Right from the start something about the Bush got under the reviewers’ skin, and I don’t know who doesn’t look forward to going there.”

– Michael Coveney, Theatre Critic

“The Bush reeks of fertility -- its commitment to new work, its new play know-how, its engaged and vibrant audience -- all of these make it one of the most exciting places I’ve been in my creative life. There is no other way to put it: I adore the Bush.”

– Ayad Akhtar, Writer, *Disgraced*

“It’s hard to define what would be lost to British culture if the Bush had never been. A certain crystallization of talent... A panoply of plays which, viewed as a whole, form a body of work that is not only a cultural panorama, but an alternative history of Britain.”

– Terry Johnson, Dramatist and Director

“The Bush understands new writing and new writers, their passion and their peculiarities. I started working there in the 1980s and I’m still involved now – because what’s never changed is the commitment to the people who write the plays and that’s why writers love the Bush.”

– Catherine Johnston, Writer

“I have been privileged to see some of the most thrilling and significant drama imaginable. It is simply the best theatre in the world.”

– Mike Bradwell, Artistic Director
1996-2007