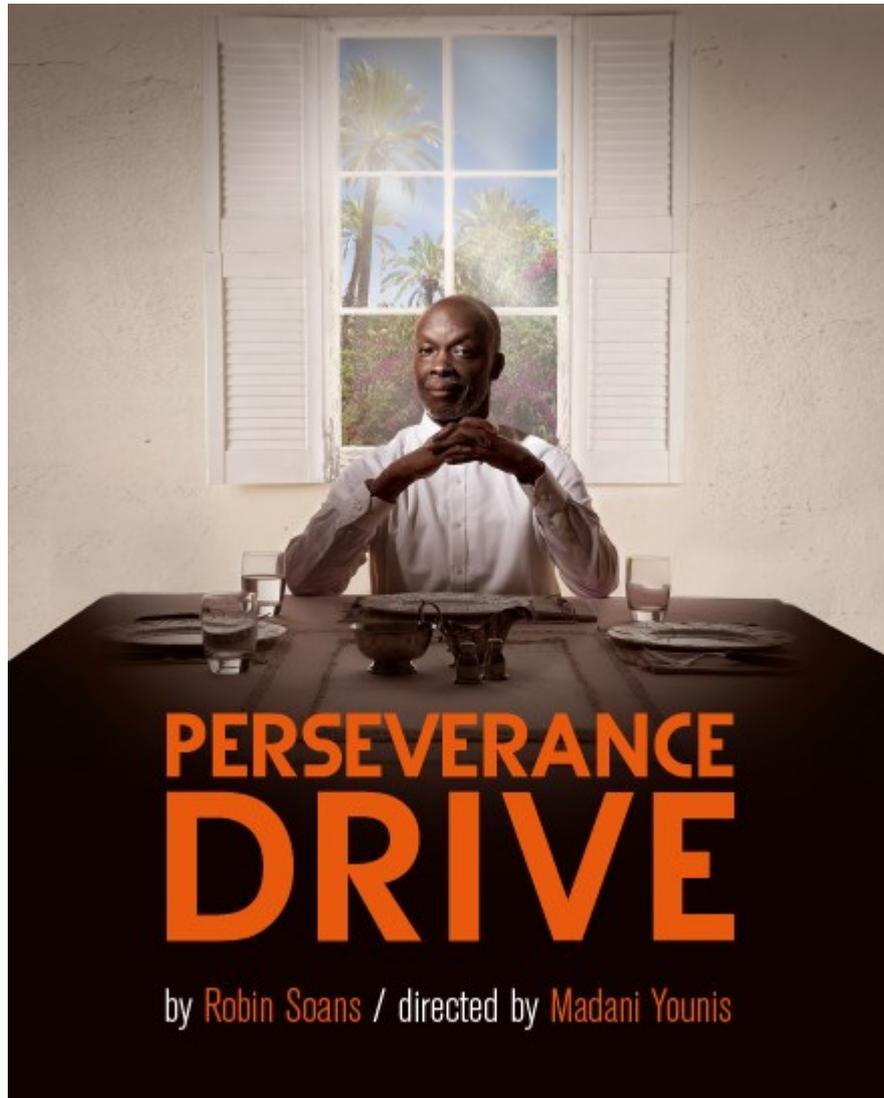


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# EDUCATION PACK



Cross-curricular: Drama and Theatre Studies, English Literature, History, PSHE, Religious Education

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 *Perseverance Drive* 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 historical context, secondary sources, interviews with the writer and director of the play and exercises and essay questions that have been devised to unpack the play's themes and stylistic devices.

In line with the national curriculum, *Perseverance Drive* would be a suitable live theatre production for analysis and would also provide an invaluable resource for students' devised work in its discussion of character, collaboration and the challenge of finding appropriate form to reflect content.

The play will provoke students to ask pertinent questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments and develop perspective and judgement. It will offer a valuable source for discussion around historical context and the interrogation of biased sources.



If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to get in touch with Amanda Castro on [0208 743 3584](tel:02087433584) or at [amandacastro@bushtheatre.co.uk](mailto:amandacastro@bushtheatre.co.uk)

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# characters & synopsis

## Cast of Characters

ELI GILLARD. 70. A Pastor in the Pentecostal Church

NATHAN GILLARD. 48. Eli's eldest son, a minister, but also a trainee and then Bishop in the Pentecostal Church.

RUTH GILLARD. 38. Nathan's wife, trainee and then minister in the Pentecostal Church.

JOSHUA GILLARD. 44. Eli's middle son.

ZECHARIAH (Zek) GILLARD. 42. Eli's youngest son, a minister and founder of The Sword, a roving Pentecostal ministry.

JOYLENE GILLARD. 35. Wife to Zechariah, a minister in The Sword.

MARVIN CLARKE. 65. Bishop in the Bajan Pentecostal Church.

ERROL CLARKE. 33. Marvin's son, a pastor in the Pentecostal Church.

## Plot Synopsis

The plot of *Perseverance Drive* centres around the Gillard family who are gathering in Barbados following the unexpected death of their mother Grace. Grace and her husband Eli moved to London around the time of the Windrush and raised their three sons, Nathan, Zek and Josh in Leytonstone. Grace and Eli were on holiday at their family home on Perseverance Drive in Barbados when Grace unexpectedly fell ill and passed away.

The first half of the play is set in Barbados and the action centres around funeral arrangements for Grace. We learn that the family are Pentecostal Christians. Eli and Nathan talk about whether their brother Josh will show up. He was excommunicated from the family six years ago after a former partner outed him as being gay. Josh does arrive and with some reluctance is allowed to stay for the funeral. It is revealed in Grace's will she has left the home on Perseverance Drive to Josh, which makes Eli furious. The first act ends as the funeral for Grace descends into chaos as the family argue with each other.

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## synopsis continued

The second half of the play is set in Leytonstone four years later. Eli has taken a tumble and Josh has come to look after him as all the other members of the family are busy with their churches. Over this act Josh moves in with Eli and cares for him as he loses his strength. They come to an understanding that while Eli will never be able to accept that Josh is gay, he does accept the unconditional love and empathy that Josh has shown him.

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# classroom exercise

## 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
- Acting
- Lighting
- 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 the 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.

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# historical context

## Caribbean immigration to Britain

Along with many other Caribbean nations, Barbados was once part of the British Empire. Between 1627 and 1966 the Island was under British rule, and it still retains a very 'British' identity today, much more so than surrounding nations in the Caribbean. Barbados is often referred to as 'Little England' by both its inhabitants and its neighbours. Leading on from British colonial rule in Barbados, one of the island nation's most popular pastimes is playing cricket (a sport introduced by the British). The result of the close bond between the two nations is that the UK proves the most popular destination for Barbadian immigrants who have often found it easier to settle into British society than many other English and non-English speaking immigrant groups.

The history of immigration between the Caribbean and Britain stretches back to the 16th century as a result of the Atlantic Slave trade. It wasn't until World War One when this process became greatly accelerated, with Caribbean presence in the British military leading to approximately 15,000 migrants arriving in the North-West of England to work in munitions factories.

This trend continued as a result of losses during Second World War, when the British government began to encourage mass immigration from the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth to fill shortages in the labour market. The 1948 British Nationality Act gave British citizenship to all people living in Commonwealth countries, and full rights of entry and settlement in Britain. The arrival of the SS Empire Windrush in 1948 not only marked the beginning of Post War commonwealth mass immigration, but became a synecdoche for the entire movement, with immigrants becoming dubbed the 'windrush generation.'

A decade later and in response to continued labour shortages following the Second World War, London Transport had to look way beyond Britain's capital to keep London moving. At the invitation of the Barbados Government, it began a recruitment drive in the Caribbean in February 1956. As a result, many thousands of people made the decision to emigrate from the Caribbean to Britain and begin a new life working on London's public transport system.

# historical context

The direct recruits from Barbados were met on arrival and taken to temporary accommodation close to their workplace in London. Some Caribbean men and women had served in Britain in the armed forces during the Second World War and so knew what to expect. Younger immigrants though were not prepared for the climatic and cultural differences they found. Many recruits found London a cold and unwelcoming place, with the additional difficulty in many cases of adjusting from rural to city life. Some found it hard to find accommodation, and others were disappointed that they had to accept basic jobs in spite of their skills and education.



Recruitment poster, Come and Join Us, artist unknown, 1953  
LTM 1983/4/6633

*'The accommodation was heartbreaking at times... it deflated you. Word of mouth got you into places... It was the first time I encountered prejudice. The word came up in a conversation on a bus and I looked it up.'* – Vince Leacock, recruited in Barbados.

Caribbean immigrants soon founded their own communities. Newcomers to London joined local churches or established new congregations. Clubs and 'blues dances' were popular meeting places for some while others found friendship and support through their work, social and sports activities.

However in the 1970s and 1980s, a period of deep recession and widespread unemployment began, which seriously affected the economically less prosperous African-Caribbean community. Societal racism, discrimination, poverty, powerlessness and oppressive policing sparked a series of riots in areas with substantial African-Caribbean populations. These took place in St Pauls, Brixton, Notting Hill Gate, Brixton and Tottenham.

# classroom exercise

## Developing character in improvisation

Curriculum links: Drama

Time: 30 mins

Materials: nothing

In *Perseverance Drive*, one central character – Grace Gillard, the matriarch of the family - has a powerful influence on the action of the play and the relationships between characters, despite the fact she is not physically present in any scene.

In small groups, take turns hot-seating Grace, building her character through the questions you ask her. Then, improvise the following scenes to discover how they may have been affected by Grace's presence:

- Josh coming out as gay
- Zek starting his relationship with Joylene and leaving Eli's church
- A dinner, with all members of the family present



The cast of *Perseverance Drive* discuss their characters in a part of the rehearsal period called 'table work'.

## The Pentecostal Church

Religion plays a significant role in life in Barbados. Up to 95% of the populace identifies itself as "Christian" (whether practising or otherwise), and with its long British ties, the Anglican Church comprises the largest segment of the population.

The characters in Perseverance Drive are Pentecostal, which is not a church in itself but a movement that includes many different and diverse churches (which is evidenced by the different churches, with their differing beliefs, that the characters in the play are part of).

Pentecostalism is often said to be rooted in experience rather than theology, emphasising the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. A person who has been baptised in the Pentecostal Church is believed to have the Holy Spirit within them to empower and guide them for the rest of their life.

Much Pentecostal worship is designed to bring about an experience of God's presence, and to this end the atmosphere, worship-leading and music encourage openness to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal worship is less formal and more emotionally expressive than that of other Christian traditions. There is a great deal of active congregational involvement: the worshippers may dance and clap, personal testimonies may be given, and services can incorporate healings, trances and speaking in tongues, which is a defining characteristic of Pentecostalism and understood as a direct communication between the soul and God.

Pentecostalism began among the poor and disadvantaged in North America and now has particular popularity within developing countries in South America and Africa, where its growth is partly rooted in continuing anger at widespread poverty and inequality. Pentecostalism approaches the predicaments of the poor very practically; churches work as 'mutual aid communities' to deal with poverty and sickness.

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# classroom exercise

## Discussion/debate

Curriculum links: PSHE and Citizenship, Drama

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: An open space

At either end of the room place signs stating “AGREE” and “DISAGREE”. Get one person to read the following statements out loud. Everyone in the group must then place themselves at a point between these two signs to signify how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement (e.g. the closer they stand to the “agree” sign, the more strongly they agree with the statement). Each person will then be asked to explain their reaction to the statement.

The aim will be to encourage debate and discussion over the text and the issues presented within it.

Statements:

- Religion stops the characters from being their true selves.
- It is always most important to tell the truth, even if the truth hurts other people.
- Religion gives the Gillard family a strength and sense of community that they are not able to get from each other.
- NATHAN: “Dad, there’s no sign of repentance...he’s put himself outside forgiveness. You must not be tempted to remember what he was but only what he has become.” There are some deeds that are beyond forgiveness.
- MARVIN: “The only religions that have sustained any moral authority in this world are those where the standards are unwavering and where the adherents are not free to pick and choose to suit themselves.”
- It is Eli’s fault that his family are so fractured now.
- Theatre is an appropriate format to explore religion and its place in society today.

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# interview with the playwright

## Robin Soans talks his inspiration for writing *Perseverance Drive*

About five years ago, when I was researching another play in Mississippi, I went to a church service on a Sunday morning in Jackson. There was a lot to eat and there was fantastic singing and a huge choir and sermons but something struck me. All of them seemed to say to me, Put up and shut up. Don't rock the boat, don't question the establishment. It's God given.

Now, there is still an enormous amount of division between the white population and the African-American population in Mississippi and I thought, Surely the black church should be a firebrand of political vibrancy to push these peoples' cause forward? I was rather appalled by this; on the other hand, I was swept away by the fantastic well of enthusiasm, faith and inspiration that the congregation got from the service.

A few years later, I was writing a play called *One Turbulent Ambassador*. We did a performance and this guy called Tim said, 'Can I just say, I enjoyed that very much. What else are you thinking of writing about?' And I said, 'Somewhere, at the back of my mind is writing something about the black church.' He said, 'Oh, my dad's been ultra-religious all his life, my elder brother's a bishop, my younger is a minister and our whole family's been fractured by religion.' And I said, 'Can I take you out to supper and love you forever and talk to you for a hundred years?' And he said, 'Yeah, okay.' [Laughs] So, we did. He told me about his family and we formed a very good friendship. Suddenly all those ideas I'd formed in my mind in Mississippi were encapsulated in a family situation and that seemed to be the way forward.



Writer Robin Soans in rehearsal

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# classroom exercise

## Writing and performing rhetoric

Curriculum links: Drama, English

Time: 40 minutes

Materials: Pen and paper

Rhetoric: the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the exploitation of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.

In *Perseverance Drive* the characters are often in conflict with each other, and use rhetorical devices to persuade the other characters that they are right. This is especially heightened given that all of the characters have lots of experience of preaching, which uses similar devices to create strong, inspiring sermons.

### Exercise One:

Look at the following dialogue from Act One, in which Zek interrupts his mother's funeral in order to protest against what he sees as injustices within the family.

Identify a) what devices he is attempting in order to persuade the others and b) what effect these devices have on his argument.

ZEK: *(Moving to the front)* She's trying to ascend. I see her struggling...there's a stickiness on her wings...she's having trouble because she's not being listened to.

NATHAN: Sit down.

ZEK: You're not the person who should be speaking.

MARVIN: You must sit down. You're spoiling it for everyone.

JOYLENE: *(Standing)* Not for his mum.

RUTH: Please Joylene...

JOYLENE: The balance is shifting, Ruth. 'God is not mocked.'

RUTH: Nathan! Do something!

ZEK: *(In command)* Tell us dad, before this congregation, in this church, before your God and the struggling spirit of your late wife, was it Nathan who told you and mum not to come to our wedding?

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# classroom exercise

- ELI: 'Dogs have compassed me'.
- NATHAN: You're disgracing the family. You are disgracing yourself. You are disgracing your God.
- ZEK: Tell us dad, in front of this congregation, in this church, before your God and the struggling spirit of your late wife, when she has written a clear letter saying she wants Josh to have the house, why have you put it on the market?
- ELI: 'I am poured out like water.'
- ZEK: Josh agrees with me on this.
- JOSH: No. I want you to sit down and shut up.
- ZEK: Dishonesty on every side... it's dishonesty that's putting mum's ascension in peril.
- JOYLENE: Clipping her wings.
- ZEK: There's a light coming down...banishing the darkness...
- ELI: 'My heart is like wax'
- ZEK: Showing so clear Nathan does not have God's authority to lead this family.
- NATHAN: You are speaking in blindness and sin.
- ZEK: Showing I'm the one who's been chosen to clear her path to the throne. And I'm the one taking you past grieving. The time has come for rejoicing. I shall lead this congregation into that rejoicing.
- NATHAN: You will not take this congregation anywhere.
- MARVIN: Minister, you will return to your seat.
- NATHAN: But I've only just begun.
- MARVIN: You have lost control. I call upon Zechariah Gillard to finish his testimony, and to be mindful there are others waiting to speak.
- ZEK: I see her nearing The Lord. If your faith was pure you would see this too. Datonis covolaboda covolaboda minicavasa parting the way, clearing the path rimbala sinilameno ferain.
- JOYLENE: I'm understanding him, I'm understanding what he's saying.
- ELI: 'My strength is dried up'
- ZEK: The tongues of fire are flickering on her head, on her hair; the radiance of The Lord is glimmering on her forehead. Gravispan hiling holan fire in tongua tongua shaxo shaxo fengira tuto jusquino jeste jeste Jesu.
- JOYLENE: He's saying 'In Jesus' name how can you not see what he is seeing?'

# classroom exercise

## Exercise Two:

Write your own persuasive monologue, putting yourself in the place of any of the characters from Perseverance Drive and using rhetorical devices to put forward an argument.

## Example rhetorical devices:

**Irony:** used in rhetoric to convey to the audience an incongruity that is often used as a tool of humour in order to deprecate or ridicule an idea or course of action.

**Metaphor:** Used in rhetoric to convey to the audience a new idea or meaning by linking it to an existing idea or meaning with which the audience is already familiar.

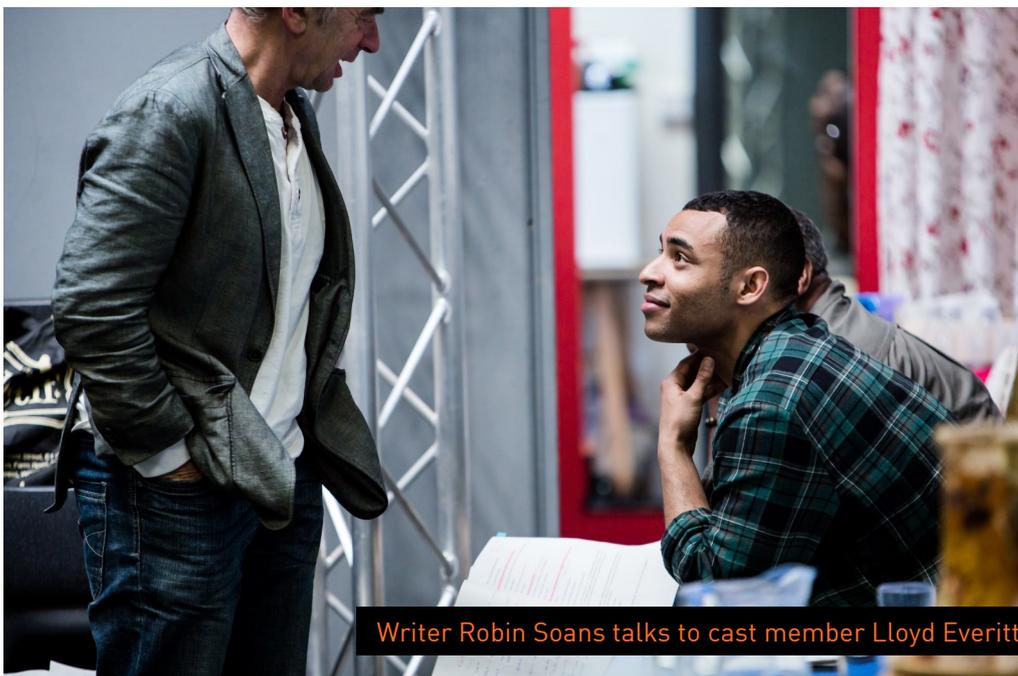
**Alliteration:** the use of a stream of words with the same first letter for emphasis

**Assonance:** the repetition of a similar set of vowel sounds

**Cacophony:** the use of words with harsh consonants, usually at the beginning of a word.

**Onomatopoeia:** the use of words that attempt to emulate a sound (e.g. flip flop or kaboom)

**Simile:** using "as" or "like" to compare something to something else



# classroom exercise

## Gospel music and hymns

Curriculum links: Drama, Dance, Music

Time: 25 minutes

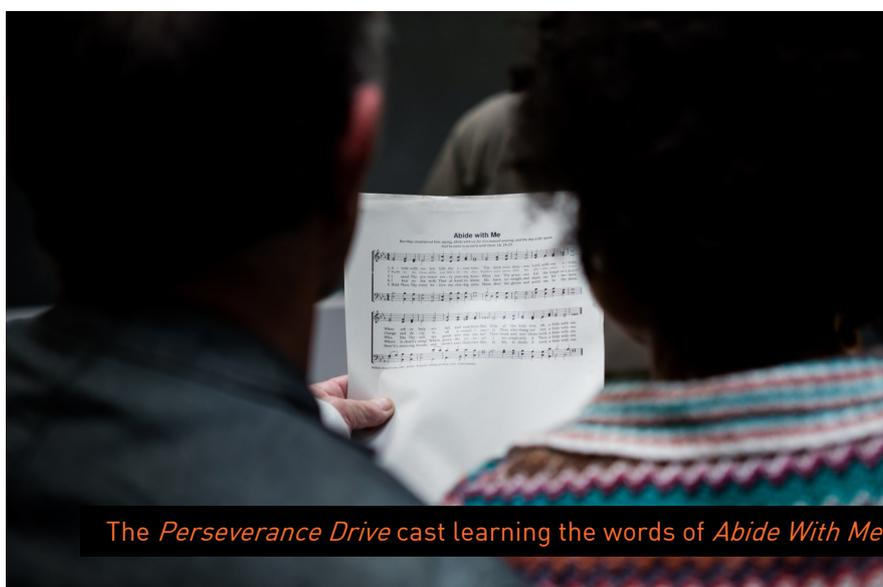
Materials: An open space

In this Bush Theatre video, music is described as an “adhesive that brings the script together”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9TgXWzT2b8>

Hymns and music also have a vital part to play in Pentecostal mass, bringing the congregation together in harmony and relating important church teachings and messages.

In small groups, look at the following extracts from three hymns that are sung in the play and:

- Analyse the meaning behind each hymn
- Match each hymn up to a character at a specific moment in the play, where the message behind the hymn would be most relevant to them
- Perform the scene, inserting these lyrics within the scene as spoken text



*The Perseverance Drive cast learning the words of Abide With Me*

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# classroom exercise

## **ABIDE WITH ME**

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

## **AMAZING GRACE**

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear.  
And Grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

## **THE OLD RUGGED CROSS**

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suff'ring and shame;  
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it some day for a crown.

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# essay questions

Curriculum links: Drama, History, Politics, PSHE, English, Religious Education

## Question One

NATHAN: You seem to have acquired a streak of stubborn pride...just like my brothers...but you will not defy me. And when we get back to England, you will spend some time in Prayer and Fasting.

RUTH: I look forward to it...while you look after the kids, get their breakfast, clean their shoes, wash their clothes, take them to nursery school, run the church kitchen...

Explore what position women have in *Perseverance Drive*, both within their religions and their families.

## Question Two

*Perseverance Drive* focuses on a families who are all part of different churches within the Christian faith, and their struggles to reconcile their different faiths. Theatre initially evolved from religious rituals - examine how the concept of faith has been explored in theatre from its inception up to the present day.

## Question Three

*Perseverance Drive* features and all-black cast, something that is still quite rarely seen on British stages. Explore the history of black actors in British theatre and compare and contrast *Perseverance Drive* with other all-black productions.

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# essay questions

## Question Four

ELI: “When we arrived in this country your mother and I went to our local Anglican church. After the service the priest said we were not to come back the next Sunday. His white congregation did not want to share the communion cup with people like us.”

The UK is one of the most popular destinations for Barbadian immigrant and is home to the second largest Barbadian-born migrant population. Using the Gillard family as a starting point, explore the experience of Caribbean immigrants coming to the UK and how their experiences highlight evolving British attitudes to race, from the fifties to the present day.

## Question Five

ELI: “I know we have a certain amount of dirty laundry in this family, but is it really necessary to keep on washing it so publicly?”

*Perseverance Drive* follows in a long tradition of family dramas in the theatre. Using examples from different eras, explore the genre of the family drama in theatre and how it has evolved over the years.