

EDUCATION PACK

BUSH THEATRE

WE ARE PROUD TO PRESENT A PRESENTATION ABOUT THE HERERO OF NAMIBIA, FORMERLY KNOWN AS SOUTHWEST AFRICA, FROM THE GERMAN SUDWESTAFRIKA, BETWEEN THE YEARS 1884 — 1915

by Jackie Sibbles Drury / directed by Gbolahan Obisesan
28 February - 12 April 2014
A Bush Theatre Production

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

Key Stages 4 & 5

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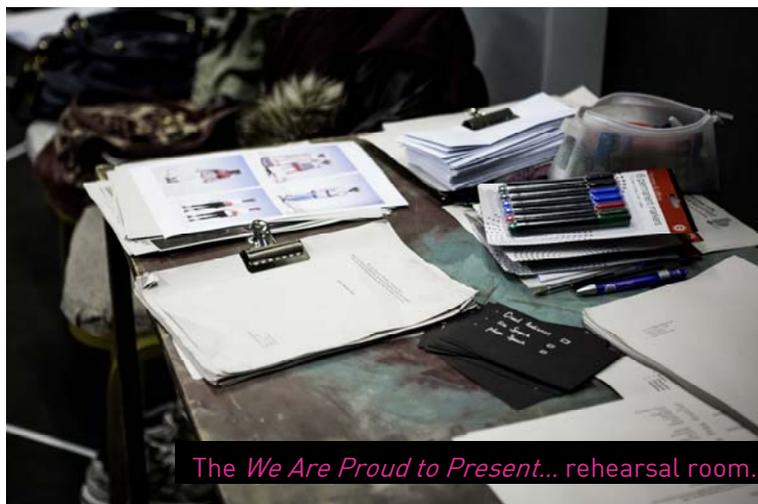
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introduction

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance your understanding of *We Are Proud to Present...* 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, *We Are Proud to Present...* 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.

We Are Proud to Present... also tackles the challenges of researching, presenting and understanding history in an accessible and creative way. 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.



The *We Are Proud to Present...* rehearsal room.

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

synopsis

The plot of *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 18 84-1915* centres on six actors, three black, three white, who have decided to make a play about the late nineteenth / early twentieth-century German genocide of the Herero people. When the play begins, the actors are trying to give their audience a quick overview of the history of German imperialism in Southwest Africa, the confiscation of land belonging to the Herero and Nama people to build a railroad, and the German “Extermination Order” laid upon the Herero who tried to survive.

However the actors in *We Are Proud to Present...* never getting to the play that they want to stage. Instead, the audience watches the actors rehearse. Sharply funny portraits of a naive young theatre company give way to arguments over the only primary historical source they’ve decided to use: letters sent home by German soldiers to their wives and girlfriends. They agonise over whether they can stage a play about a people who left few archival traces, and whether they, as black and white British people, can authentically play Germans and Africans.

We Are Proud to Present... had its New York premiere at the Soho Rep in Autumn 2012 after a praised run at Chicago’s Victory Gardens. Glowingly reviewed by *The New Yorker*, *We Are Proud to Present...* is a play about empathy, acting, and the representation of history.



The *We Are Proud to Present...* cast and company.

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
- Video and projection
- 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.

historical context

The Little Known First Genocide of the 20th Century

Every Herero on German territory, with or without rifles, with or without cattle, will be shot. I'm not taking in any more women and children, drive them back to their people or have them shot.

Order issued by General Lothar von Trotha on October 2, 1904

On January 12, 1904, the Herero people under Samuel Maharero rose in rebellion against German colonial rule in Southwest Africa. In response, the German military commander, General Lothar von Trotha, ordered the Herero people to leave Namibia or be killed. In August, German general Lothar von Trotha defeated the Herero in the Battle of Waterberg and drove them into the desert of Omaheke, where most died of thirst. In October, the Nama also took up arms against the Germans and were dealt with in a similar fashion. Herero were massacred with machine guns, their wells poisoned and then driven into the desert to die. In total, between 24,000 and 65,000 Herero (all values are estimated as being 50% to 70% of the total Herero population), and 10,000 Nama (50% of the total Nama population) perished. Two characteristics of the genocide were death by starvation and the poisoning of wells used by the Herero and Nama populations that were trapped in the Namibian Desert.

Survivors, the majority of whom were women and children, were eventually put in concentration camps, such as that at Shark Island, where the German authorities forced them to work as slave labourers for German military and settlers, all prisoners were categorised into groups fit and unfit for work, and pre-printed death certificates indicating "death by exhaustion following privation" were issued.

Many Herero died later of disease, overwork and malnutrition. Camps, such as that in Windhoek, showed mortality rates as high as 61%. Food in the camps was extremely scarce, consisting of rice with no additions. As the prisoners lacked pots, the rice they received was uncooked and indigestible; horses and oxen that died in the camp were later distributed to the inmates as food.

historical context

As a result, dysentery and lung disease spread. Yet, despite those conditions, the Herero were taken outside the camp every day for labour under harsh treatment by the German guards, while the sick were left without any medical assistance or nursing care.

Shootings, hangings and beatings were common. An article published on 28 September 1905, in the South African newspaper Cape Argus detailed some of the abuse, with the heading: 'In German S. W. Africa: Further Startling Allegations: Horrible Cruelty'. In an interview with Percival Griffith, 'an accountant of profession, who owing to hard times, took up on transport work at Angra Pequena, Lüderitz', related his experiences:

There are hundreds of them, mostly women and children and a few old men ... when they fall they are sjamboked by the soldiers in charge of the gang, with full force, until they get up ... On one occasion I saw a woman carrying a child of under a year old slung at her back, and with a heavy sack of grain on her head ... she fell. The corporal sjamboked her for certainly more than four minutes and sjamboked the baby as well ... the woman struggled slowly to her feet, and went on with her load. She did not utter a sound the whole time, but the baby cried very hard.*

*The sjambok or litupa is the official heavy leather whip of South Africa, sometimes seen as synonymous with apartheid but actually much older and still used outside the official judiciary.

classroom exercise

Performing history

Curriculum links: Drama, History, PSHE & Citizenship

Time: 40 minutes

Materials: An open space

In *We Are Proud to Present...* the characters attempt to tell the story of the Herero tribe through three different styles:

- Lecture
- Presentation
- Improvisation

In small groups, pick a significant moment in history and attempt to tell the story of that event through 5 minutes scenes in each of these different styles. What kind of different techniques does each style use? How does that affect the relationship with the audience and the story you are telling?



The cast of *We Are Proud to Present...* in their first week of rehearsal sitting down to do some research.

apologising for the past

Many modern historians believe the Herero were the first ethnic group to be subjected to genocide in the 20th century. According to the 1985 United Nations' Whitaker Report, 80% of the total Herero population (some 65,000 Herero), and 50% of the total Nama population (10,000 Nama) were killed by Germans between 1904 and 1907.

In 1998, German President Roman Herzog visited Namibia and met Herero leaders. Chief Munjuku Nguvauva demanded a public apology and compensation from Germany. Herzog expressed regret but stopped short of an apology. He also pointed out that reparations were out of the question.

On the 100th anniversary of the start of the genocide, 16 August 2004, Germany offered its first formal apology for the colonial-era genocide in Namibia (see the BBC article below). However this apology was later dismissed as a purely personal remark, not representing government policy.

Germany argues that international laws to protect civilians were not in force at the time of the conflict.

Here is a BBC Article on Germany's apology from 2004 (source: [news.bbc.co.uk](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-2004-08-16))

Germany admits Namibia genocide

Saturday, 14 August, 2004, 19:40 GMT 20:40 UK

Germany has offered its first formal apology for the colonial-era massacre of some 65,000 members of the Herero tribe by German troops in Namibia.

German minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul told a commemorative ceremony that the brutal crushing of the Herero uprising 100 years ago was genocide.

But the German government has ruled out compensation for victims' descendants.

A group of Herero has filed a case against Germany in the United States demanding \$4bn in compensation.

"We Germans accept our historic and moral responsibility," Ms Wieczorek-Zeul, Germany's Development Aid Minister, told a crowd of some 1,000 at the ceremony in Okokarara.

"Germany has learnt the bitter lessons of the past."

But after the minister's speech, the crowd repeated calls for an apology.

"Everything I said in my speech was an apology for crimes committed under German colonial rule," she replied.

The Herero rebelled in 1904 against German soldiers and settlers who were colonising south-west Africa.

Driven into desert

In response, the German military commander, General Lothar von Trotha, ordered the Herero people to

leave Namibia or be killed.

Herero were massacred with machine guns, their wells poisoned and then driven into the desert to die.

Ms Wieczorek-Zeul repeated that there would be no compensation, but she promised continued economic aid for Namibia which currently amounts to \$14m a year.

Germany argues that international laws to protect civilians were not in force at the time of the conflict.

Herero chief Kuaima Riruako said the apology was appreciated but added: "We still have the right to take the German government to court."

However, correspondents say the lawsuit filed in the US three years ago against the German government and two German companies is seen as having a limited chance of success.

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:

- ACTOR 2: “Black people can understand what black people have been through”. The white characters in the play can not fully appreciate the plight of the Herero tribe because they are not black.
- The characters in the play should have focused more on the Herero tribe and not on the German soldiers.
- The two white male characters in the play are not racist; they are just committed to their roles.
- ACTOR 6 is criticised for taking over too much. When working as an ensemble, it is always necessary to have one leader taking control of the group.
- Theatre is an important way of exploring forgotten moments in history.
- Black people are still presented in stereotypical ways in film, TV and theatre.
- In Jackie Sibblies Drury’s text, the relationship between the six actors becomes more significant than the story they are attempting to tell.

interview with the playwright

Where did your inspiration for We Are Proud to Present... come from?

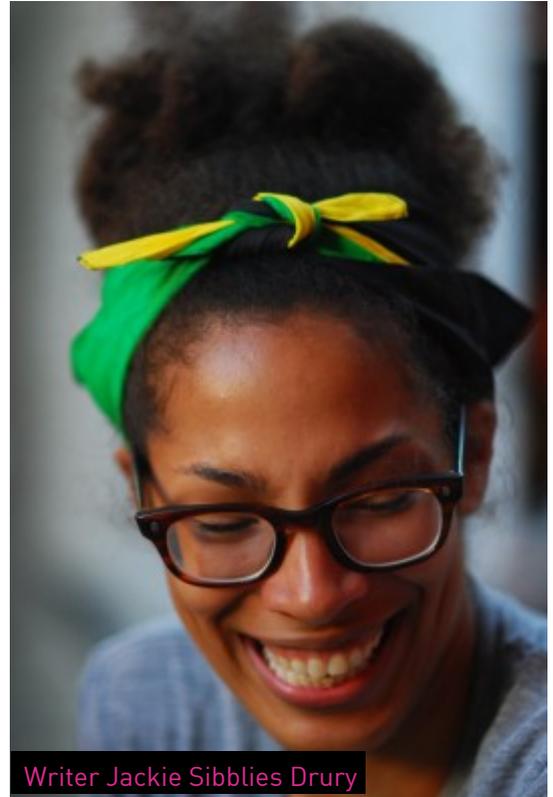
The simple version is I was researching a different play about an actor who was German, but the son of a Black American soldier and a German woman. I think I just googled 'black people' and 'Germany' for some more information, and found this mention of this genocide that I'd never heard of at all. I became really fixated on that.

Why do you think the Herero Genocide is unknown?

I'm not sure... I think its placement in history and Germany's position in it makes it pale in comparison to the Holocaust. Because it happened before the First World War and because Germany perpetrated it, it is in the shadow of the Holocaust in a lot of ways... People don't learn that much about African history in America, but then also some people in Germany don't know about it either...

In representing a disaster that you don't have immediate access to can you be authentic in representing it?

I know that there isn't very much that I think is denotatively authentic in the play... I think that the authenticity in the letters [from German soldiers in German South West Africa to their wives at home] is the absolute lack of thinking about telling the story from the experience from the people who are being colonised and I think that's really common.



interview with the playwright

What were you trying to achieve by writing this play?

I think that I was trying to shine light on a particularly brutal piece of history that I think not a lot of people know about. But I also was hoping to write a play about race that didn't make me want to die!

I think there are lots of plays about race where you are allowed to leave the theatre and congratulate yourself for not being racist – I think that is pointless. So I wanted to create a play that hopefully allowed the people participating in it to talk about it without falling into politically correct extremities... and also think about theatre.

These extracts of a transcript are from a video of Jackie Sibblies Drury in conversation with her graduate school teacher Erik Ehn and audience members as part of Soho Rep's FEED Humanities Series. It appears here with the kind permission of the Soho Rep Theatre.



classroom exercise

Text & Character

Curriculum links: Creative Writing, English, Drama

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Pen and Paper

The characters in *We Are Proud to Present...* are able to develop their performance and discover more about the German soldiers through letters they have been able to obtain from the library. They also use the letter format in their improvisations to further develop their understanding of these characters.

Write a monologue in the style of a letter written by one of the following characters:

- A German soldier
- A member of the Herero tribe
- One of the actors

In small groups, ask the students to hot seat the characters they have chosen at the point at which they posted their letter, exploring further their characters thoughts, feelings and background.



The cast of *We Are Proud to Present...* in their first week of rehearsals.

interview with the director

What is We Are Proud to Present... about?

It's about a group of actors in their mid-20s attempting to accurately depict the events of German colonial rule in Southwest Africa (now called Namibia) in the early 20th Century. Through this they discover things about themselves and each other.



What does the play mean to you?

Firstly, the play offers an opportunity to expose an obscure but extremely important tragedy from recent history for a contemporary audience. Secondly, it's about the actors' egos and also the frailties of all humanity in challenging circumstances. Thirdly, the play for me (as a director) offers up the potential to explore theatrical form with committed actors.

What is the question at the heart of the play?

It's a complex play with that asks many difficult questions. However at its heart, I believe the play is asking: to what extent do we in the West appropriate information based on latent self-interest and social ideology.

How did the play come into your hands?

I had previously been in contact with the writer's agent and would occasionally get newsletters when I saw the title for Jackie's play. I was immediately intrigued and sent a polite email to acquire a copy to read. Upon reading it I was struck by its honesty, playfulness and bravery.

interview with the director

Can you tell us a little about the rehearsal process?

We will be approaching the play with a lot of care, respect and playfulness. We'll be intricately mapping out moments throughout the play in order to uncover the truths of those moments. We will have to play around with various scenes to find out what they need from each actor as well as what feels accurate theatrically. We will make decisions we might need to be flexible enough to change if needs dictate.

What is a director's role?

The director's role is to realize a united vision for the project. In order to do this, the director initiates enthusiasm from the creative team and often facilitates intellectual, practical and creative ideas from the script. The director takes responsibility for what is delivered and how it's received by both our audiences and our critics.



Actors Ayesha Antoine and Kirsty Oswald discuss the play.

classroom exercise

Ensemble Work

Curriculum links: Drama, Dance

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: An open space

The actors in *We Are Proud to Present...* (both the characters in the play and the real actors in the Bush Theatre production) work as an ensemble. These simple exercises use focus and concentration to encourage a group to work as an ensemble.

Counting

Ask the students to lie down on the floor with their eyes closed. Their task is to count from 1 to 20, one person saying one number at a time. Anybody can start the count. Then a different person says the next number – there should not be an established pattern or non-verbal communication about who should say a number next. If two or more people happen to speak at the same time, counting must start again from the beginning. It is possible to get to twenty if everybody really concentrates - but try and be relaxed as well.

Group stop and start

Ask the students to walk around the room, staying very aware of one another. Without giving any signals, and with no single person taking the lead, the group must find a common moment to stop. Try to come to a complete stop, rather than

gradually slowing. Then, once stationary, the group must find a common moment to begin walking again. This may happen after a few seconds or several minutes, that does not matter. The important thing is that the group responds as one and makes choices together without communication or leadership.



essay questions

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

Question 1

ACTOR 2

Well, it's a presentation, it's not theatre

ACTOR 1

But it's a presentation in a theatre.

ACTOR 2

Right.

ACTOR 1

So it's theatre.

ACTOR 4

Well I don't know what it is (...) I don't know if it's theatre just because it's in a theatre.

What defines theatre? Drawing upon a range of different perspectives, what distinguishes theatre from other art forms and how has our definition of theatre changed through history?

Question 2

ACTOR 1: "We shouldn't be pretending, we shouldn't be making things up, we shouldn't be doing anything other than what's real".

Do you agree with this statement? Artists are often criticised for distorting the truth when attempting to portray historical events. In what ways is it possible to portray an event from the past authentically on stage and what techniques can artists use when portraying real historical events?

essay questions

Question 3

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" - using recent examples, discuss the ways in which the arts can help people learn about and understand historical events.

Question 4

In *We Are Proud to Present...* the only character named is Sarah. All the other characters are numbered and described by their gender and race. Explore the affect this has on the play and how audiences relate to the characters on stage.

Question 5

The Equalities Act came into force in the UK 2010, ensuring equal opportunities for all regardless of age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Analyse the impact that this legislation has had on British life, taking into account instances where discrimination is still thought to be prevalent.

Question 6

We Are Proud to Present... is one of a number of recent plays and films that explore the concept of race and colonisation through a modern perspective. Using examples from culture and in current affairs, how have attitudes towards colonisation changed in recent years?